

## Lucky the dog lives up to his name after chance reunion



By

Josh Bradshaw / Times staff Travis Hasten plays with his dog, Lucky, at the Happy Tails dog park in Pekin Friday.

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By Ed McMenam  
Pekin Daily Times  
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PEKIN, Ill. -

Travis Hasten thought his dog, Lucky, was gone forever when he returned home from 25 weeks of Army training last February.

Hasten, 22, had adopted the dog from a PetSmart store some time in 2006.

While he was away, his mom had moved to Florida and left the Newfoundland mix with a friend of her hairdresser's in Eureka, with instructions that if they couldn't take care of the pet, they should contact Hasten's family.

"When you're in basic (training) you don't get many phone calls, and I think it was one of those first phone calls she told me," Hasten said. "I was kind of upset with her."

He said that when he got back from training, he didn't have any information on where the dog went.

After window shopping at PAWS in Peoria on Thursday, Hasten drove to the Tazewell County Animal Protective Society no-kill shelter on a whim.

"I don't know why," he said. "I wasn't even really looking for a dog."

When he mentioned that he used to have a Newfy, workers at the shelter told him they had just gotten one a few weeks back.

"I had a gut feeling — it hit me," he said. "I was like 'Oh my God, this can't be happening.'"

"I looked at the cage and he had the same collar that we bought. It's a green cloverleaf collar we got for him because we knew he was Lucky, and we're Irish. It's like a miracle or something."

Hasten went outside to find his dog, who was getting some exercise.

"He just responded to me," he said. "He looked at me like 'Oh s—!'"

He said TAPS paperwork confirmed that the dog was, in fact, Lucky. TAPS workers told Hasten that when Lucky was brought to them on Feb. 3, the dog's fur was matted and that he looked "terrible."

"It's the happiest I've seen this dog since he came in," said TAPS worker Beth Locascil. "We are all so excited for both the owner and the dog."

"I think this is going to be one of the best stories we've had here."

Locascil said that big dogs often don't get as much attention from prospective adopters, even when they are well-behaved ones like Lucky, who weighs over 100 lbs.

"We've always said we don't understand why Lucky hadn't gone home," she said. "This is why he hasn't gone home."

Hasten said he is lucky that his dog ended up at a no-kill shelter like TAPS.

"TAPS is amazing," he said. "The cat rooms they have and everything — I don't even know if cats want to leave that place, they got it made."

Hasten said he won't have to shell out \$1,000 for a Newfy puppy to bring home to the apartment he shares with his fiance and another roommate in Peoria Heights.

"It must have been fate," he said.

Contact Ed McMenamin at [emcmenamin@pekintimes.com](mailto:emcmenamin@pekintimes.com).

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hmeritt

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Just wanted to let everyone know that our family is very happy to have Lucky back with us. Lucky was not given away because we didnt want him. After being laid off for a year, I made the decision to move to Florida for work and we kept him until the actual moving van was packed. My hairdresser was going to board him for us but she found a home with people whose Newfy had died. They were given all our numbers and email addresses in case it didnt work out. Travis went off to training and my daughter moved to Chicago. I didnt think Lucky would be happy in the Florida heat and have agonized over this for the past year. This reunion was more welcomed than anyone can imagine. We love the BIG BOY! Thank you for printing our story and thanks to TAPS for believing in us. Holly Meritt  
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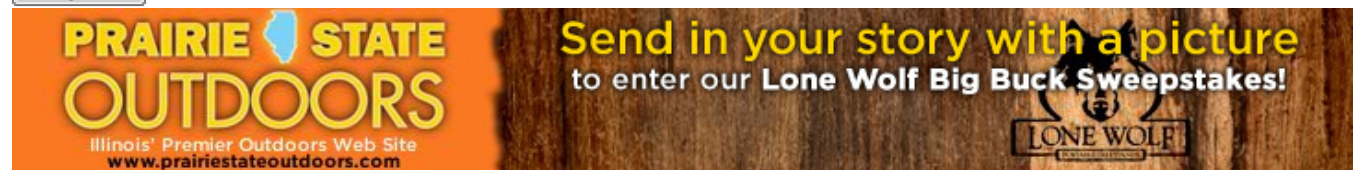
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