

Taz's Great Escape

and subsequent reunification



Background

While on a walk, Taz found himself on the opposite side of a pole, yanking the leash and allowing him to back out of a soft sided harness. This spooked Taz and he ran off. Taz was in Ballard, 4 miles from his home.

Taz ultimately was found the following morning, almost 24 hours after he had gone missing. The dogsitter and her boyfriend found Taz while out walking handing out flyers and another couple walking their dog spotted Taz across the street.

Impact

- Two extra flights, a canceled AirBnB reservation (About \$2k all said and done.)
- Steph and Rowan missed the wedding of a close friend.
- Increased anxiety for everyone involved.
- Fear for Taz's safety

What Went Well

- The dogsitter called Steph immediately.
- Mass activation of help. Social media allowed us to find folks on the ground who were willing and able to go look for Taz. Facebook groups, group chats, work mailing lists, and individual phone calls all helped rally a large search group for Taz. Dozens of people were out looking for him.
- Flyers everywhere. A friend created flyers and got them up ASAP. Lots of local businesses offer to hang flyers and recommend locations for other flyers.
- Community Facebook groups, especially Lost Dogs of King County, offered lots of specific and actionable advice.
- In-flight wifi allowed Steph to continue to coordinate while in the air.
- Haley was a morning person and went to search for Taz early in the morning. She was able to spot Taz around 6:00 am, but wasn't able to get him to come to her or see exactly where he ran next.
- Haley secured some bacon while Steph was driving back from the airport to give to Taz as high value treats are important to try to lure scared dogs into trusting strangers.
- Many trusted folks offered to step in to help with childcare so Steph could go look for Taz.

What Went Poorly

- Taz doesn't really bark, but he does cry/whine, often pretty loudly, especially when separated from Steph. Taz opted to stay silent while on his adventure, making him more difficult to find.
- There were 0 sightings of Taz for the first 22 hours.
- One scammer contacted the number on flyers claiming they had Taz and demanding codes before sending pictures of Taz.
- Steph was a 4.5 hour flight away in Tennessee to attend a wedding when Taz escaped, and she had just landed ~12 hours before. She was already exhausted from the travel and was unable to help search for Taz until Taz had already been missing for 10 hours.
- Taz is a "velcro" dog that is very attached to Steph. While they had come a long way, he still needed some work on separation anxiety. Taz was adopted just over 3 months before he went missing. The [3-3-3 rule of adopted dogs](#) means he was just settling in and building a routine/trust when he disappeared. This was probably the precisely wrong time for a trip away from him.
- Taz is usually excellent on leash. The design of his harness had some stretch in it though, and when he was spooked, it was easier for him to slip out of it.
- We probably needed a central command of communication of who was showing up to help and where they had already searched. After the number of groups grew, it was becoming harder to keep up with updates.

Where We Got Lucky

- When we met Taz's foster mom at the end of the previous summer, she let him outside while on video, with her unfenced yard next to a busy road. Taz knew to stay away from the road and had excellent recall. Though he did cross one busy street in his initial panic, we think he knew not to try to cross back. Taz was found only 6 blocks from where he went missing.
- It was raining in Seattle the majority of the day that Taz was lost. Taz despises being wet. We think the rain encouraged him to hide and stay put until the morning.
- The next busiest street would have required Taz to go up an extremely steep hill. Though he's a good walker, there is no way he would have kept running uphill after being so scared. He would have gotten tired and stopped.
- We originally thought Taz had no visible ID on him. A picture that the sitter took prior to their walk later revealed he did have his collar on in addition to the harness he slipped out of.

Lessons Learned

- Lost dogs are most likely to turn up in the early twilight hours of the morning. If you can, go to sleep and get up early to resume searching then.
- Flashlights are helpful when looking for dogs who might be hiding to be able to catch the glint of their eyes in the dark.
- High visibility clothes/lights make folks more reassured when you turn up and ask to search their yard.
- Take some laundry that smells like you and leave it in places the dog is likely to find it.
- Leave some of the dog's things outside of the home. We left Taz's bed, food, and water out with one of Steph's worn hoodies.
- Don't loudly call the dog. This can make the dog think it's in trouble and further perpetuate the Flight Response.
- If a dog is hiding, sing their name or play a video of your voice. The important thing is to keep the tone light and friendly. Singing may allow you to keep the fear/anxiety/anger out of your tone and make the dog more likely to respond.
- Don't chase the dog for the same reason. Chasing a scared dog can also force it into a street or a more dangerous situation. Instead if you spot the dog, sit down, offer treats, and make sure you're non-intimidating.
- Leave gates open if possible and ask neighbors to do the same. A scared dog that's contained in the yard is much easier and safer to catch than one on the run.
- People are far more good than they are evil. We had dozens and dozens of people, often strangers, who were willing to let searchers check their yards, under their deck/steps, or in their garage. We had very few folks turn us away, and only one person try to take advantage of the situation to scam Steph (unsuccessfully). Strangers from neighborhood groups offered reusable neon signs.

- Local businesses were more than helpful. We requested to signal boost on social media or post flyers at local eateries/breweries.
 - Shout out to Lucky Envelope that allowed us to park there after hours when we were searching late at night.
- 93% of lost dogs are found alive. 20% return on their own.

Action Items

- ☒ ~~Taz gets an updated harness that's harder to get out of. Wonder Walker was recommended by our local pet store.~~
- ☒ ~~Before leaving Taz behind on a trip again, he's taken on a very, very long walk to tire him out before being dropped off.~~
- ☒ ~~Taz got a Fi collar, which hasn't been needed since.~~

Timeline

Steph drops off Taz with the sitter, a very close family friend.

Taz cries for Steph, eventually does go to sleep.

Taz goes for a morning walk with the sitter. Taz and the sitter wind up on opposite sides of a pole, and Taz manages to back out of his harness. Startled by the collision, he takes off.

Resources

<https://www.3retrievers.com/calming-signals.html>

<https://www.missinganimalresponse.com/dont-call-dog/>

<https://nextdoor.com/p/JBkD9fCT3btc?view=detail>