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## Pets

# Home for the holidays: A shaggy dog story

## Microchip reunites dog found in Sonoma Valley with its Marysville owner

Marty Olmstead  
 Sonoma Valley Sun

No one knows where Max has been for the past year and a half. And he's not talking.

The last time Krissy Van Doorn had seen her dog, a Great Pyrenees, was the day in March 2004 when Max and his female companion, Skylar, disappeared from the family ranch in Marysville.

"I got Max from a breeder back East when he was 8 weeks old. He's a livestock dog. He was bred to watch over our herd of sheep.

"We knew there was no way he and Skylar would just wander off. (Herding) is their job."

The entire Van Doorn family – including kids now aged 13, 10, 5 and 2 – went in search of their dogs. "We called them. We looked at the local shelter, at the vets, and we told everybody. We even read the newspaper, looking for ads for 'Great Pyrenees puppies' just in case someone had stolen them for breeding purposes.

"They are beautiful dogs, like big, fluffy, white teddy bears. They're so gentle," Van Doorn said. "Max was about a year and a half old when he disappeared. Skylar was a little older. I wished there were more I could do for my dogs."

But Van Doorn had already done the best thing anyone can do for pets: She had them implanted with microchips, inexpensive devices that help trace found animals back to their owners, no matter where they are. In Max's case, that's exactly what happened.

On Monday night, John Cerles of Glen Ellen was heading home from his job in Petaluma, following his regular route along Stage Gulch Road, when he saw a large white dog on the side of the road just west of the county dump. Cerles could tell immediately that the animal wasn't from around here. "He obviously didn't know the lay of the land," Cerles said. "He was between the guard rail and the traffic, trying to cross over," Cerles recalled. "He was lunging into traffic and cars were swerving to miss him. It was very



Ryan Iely/Sonoma Valley Sun  
 Max, a Great Pyrenees, is reunited with his owners, Krissy Van Doorn and daughter Arianna, after having been missing for a year-and-a-half.

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dangerous for him to be where he was.

"I thought, 'Oh, my god, I have to get this dog off the road.'

"There's only one turnout around there and I pulled into it. I got out of my pickup and called to the dog. He walked right over. He had slobber all over his mouth. Obviously he'd been running for a while."

Nonetheless, the dog looked beautiful. "I must say, I was overtaken by his majestic-ness," said Cerles, who had lost two similarly-sized dogs of his own not so long ago (to cancer, not dognappers). "It tugged at my heart strings just thinking about having a dog. I knew that someone was missing their pet."

The big white animal's size – about 80 or 90 pounds – made Ceres hesitate to put him in the front of the truck. As luck would have it, though, there was a rope and a center hitch in the back.

"He let me pick him up. I put a towel down in the back of the truck and he sat on it, and I drove to Arroyo" (the veterinary hospital in Boyes Hot Springs).

The staff at Arroyo scanned the found dog for a microchip and quickly discovered his owner's name and contact number. By Tuesday morning, the clinic's co-owner, Rich Lee, was on the phone to a very surprised Krissy Van Doorn.

"I was floored when I got that phone call today," Van Doorn said Tuesday, talking on her cell phone while she drove from Marysville to Sonoma. "I was shocked. I am so thankful about that microchip.

"My 5-year-old is coming with me. We're so excited," she said. "But I'm nervous. What if Max doesn't recognize me?"

She needn't have worried. When Van Doorn and her 5-year-old daughter, Arianna, arrived at the Arroyo Veterinary Hospital, Rich Lee brought Max into the waiting room for a tender reunion with his old family. By then, the staff had spent hours grooming the dog, who stood patiently while they pulled burr after burr from his shaggy white coat.

"Look how beautiful he is!" cried Van Doorn, as Max gently wagged his tail and submitted to enthusiastic hugs.

By now, the happy and healthy Great Pyrenees is safe at home, just in time to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner with a grateful family.