

AGAINST ALL ODDS  
An Amazing Story of Rescue and Resolve

I am the proud co-founder of Golden Treasures Golden Retriever Rescue, based in the Cleveland, Ohio area. An event has taken place within our rescue that I just can't let go untold. So, here goes:

In May 2011 our rescue got a call from a local humane society. Seems that a backyard breeder, someone whom they had helped a couple years back, was at it again, breeding golden retrievers. The humane society knew because the litter of 9 puppies were unsocialized, living in a lean-to shed in the backyard, the chances of them getting adopted through their shelter were slim. So, they asked us to help. We took in the litter and mom. The humane society took dad because he was social. All puppies were vetted, along with mom, and everyone went into foster homes for socialization and the beginning of training. After several weeks the puppies made great progress with socialization. They were placed in forever homes.

One of those forever homes was a couple that lived in MI right on Lake Huron. Although we don't place dogs out of the state of Ohio on a regular basis, we do make exceptions when the homes meet our standards and we feel we have a good match. Based on that, the family made the trip here to Ohio, bringing their other dog with them to meet Skidder. Everyone seemed to agree this was a good match and Skidder went to his new home in MI. As the family pulled into the driveway at the end of their 4+-hour drive, they opened the door and Skidder bolted out. That was in June. 2011.

**Once our rescue learned that Skidder was missing, this amazing story began.**

Two of our members made the drive up to MI in an effort to locate the dog. His new family had been putting food out and had gotten glimpses of him now and then, so we knew he was still in the area.

We first contacted the dog warden to alert them of Skidder's escape. We then brought Skidder's mother to the area in an attempt to lure him to us. Skidder was staying in an area between two ravines. We referred to them as the 'Big Ravine' and the 'Small Ravine'. We spent two days walking the area with his mother. We only caught a brief glimpse of him in one of the ravines. We went home unsuccessful and trying to figure out what to do next.

We were able to rent a property next to the "Big Ravine". There were no accommodations on this property so we bought a tent and some camping supplies. The area was rural and most houses were used as weekend homes. We bought a live trap and traveled to Michigan every five days staying for 3-4 days at a time. We did this for the next 4 weeks so we could set the live trap. We quickly discovered Skidder only came out at night. So our days were spent knocking on the doors of all the houses within

two miles of where he had escaped and walking the beach and ravines looking for signs he was still in the area. Our nights were spent in the tent listening for the jingle of the tags on Skidder's collar and the door of the live trap closing. We heard the jingle of Skidder's collar several nights but he never went into the live trap. The only thing we caught were raccoons and possums-- lucky for us no skunks. Once again we went home unsuccessful and trying to figure out what to do next.

Then we had a special portable dog pen constructed. It had a one-way door. We again brought Skidder's mother (Roxy) and also one of his brothers (Benson) to Michigan with us. We thought the familiar scent of the only family he knew would draw him out. . It was mid July by this time and there were swarms of biting flies, along with temperatures during the day in the 80's. We were all miserable. But our thoughts were, "I hope Skidder is somehow able to find relief from the heat and the flies." During the morning we walked Roxy and Benson throughout the area. In the afternoon when the flies and temps became too much we found relief in the Lake. At night the cool breeze from the Lake cooled things down into the mid 60's. We put Roxy and Benson in the dog pen in the evenings, hoping skidder would come by and go through that one-way door to reunite with his family. The pen was within ten feet of our tent so we could hear when Skidder, we hoped, would come by. Sure enough the jingle of the tags on Skidder's collar alerted us to his presence. His mother and brother began to whine. We froze still with excitement that this just might work. Two nights Skidder came, but never entered the pen. After four days we went home unsuccessful and trying to figure out what to do next.

We talked to several dog behaviorists, other rescuers and vets to get advice, opinions, and ideas. We did a mass mailing, enclosing a "LOST" poster with Skidder's picture and a posted reward of \$1,000 to all nearby residents and local veterinarians. Unfortunately the relationship with Skidder's adoptive family became strained and they chose to return ownership of Skidder back to the rescue and discontinue any assistance with our efforts to capture Skidder.

We continued to drive back and forth to MI whenever our work schedules and home lives would allow, each time searching during the day and sitting up at night listening for signs of Skidder. We kept using the dog pen and live trap, putting strong smelling canned food inside for bait. We started putting out stuffed toys with his littermates scent on them. It was now August and we needed something more, but what?

An Internet search turned up a device used to catch large animals with no harm done. The device was a net launcher. We called the manufacturer of the net launcher. We told them our story of Skidder and they told us it would work. They directed us to a YouTube link showing the device being used to catch a domestic dog. This looked promising. But we needed to be within 30 ft of Skidder and have fairly good aim. Advanced Weapons Technology gave us a discount after hearing our story. We ordered the launcher, did some practice shots on a very large stuffed dog and off to Michigan we went with renewed

hope. We spent 5 nights sitting in various locations waiting to hear the jingle of Skidders collar, hoping we were near a path he traveled. It was so dark at night, the saying "I couldn't see my hand in front of my face" couldn't have been truer. On our last night, we finally saw a ghostly figure move across the top of the bluff. We could faintly make out the shape of a dog and the faint glow of Skidder's blonde fur. Briget aimed the net launcher and waited for him to come closer. He stopped 20 ft from her, eating the food we put out. She shot the net and hit the target. But--yes there is a but--the net did not completely capture Skidder. He was able to stumble away. We could hear him stumbling but in the darkness we couldn't locate him. We had flashlights but where to point them? By the time we zeroed in on him, he escaped from the net and all we were left with was a tangled and torn net. We suddenly realized that we had never heard the jingle of his collar. Skidder could now travel around silently. Again we went home unsuccessful trying to figure out what to do next.

A friend suggested wildlife cameras. He had 3 cameras we could borrow. We immediately drove to MI to set up the cameras. We located them around the property of a sympathetic retired couple who were willing to help us. It was from those cameras that we were able to establish a pattern of Skidder's travels. We spent the rest of August and part of September sitting up at night with the net launcher, hoping for another chance. We spent our days walking the area and trying to keep from thinking of all the "What Ifs". That chance never came. What do we do now?

It was now the end of September and summer was coming to an end. A sense of urgency overwhelmed us. Could Skidder survive the winter out here, living in the wooded ravines next to Lake Huron? It became harder to ignore the "What Ifs". We continued our efforts to capture Skidder with the dog pen and the net launcher. In late October, it became too cold to sleep in the tent and sit out all night. We thought we had lost. But remember the sympathetic retired couple that had allowed us to use their property? They now offered us a warm bed to sleep in so we could continue our efforts to bring Skidder home. We were able to sit outside for 3-4 hours at a time, each of us with 6+ hand warmers strategically placed under our many layers of cold weather clothing. We continued our search until late November.

In late November we had to temporarily suspend our efforts to capture skidder. The retired couple offered to put food out for him every night. We felt a small sense of relief knowing he would have a food source. We left 80 lbs of dry dog food and 3 cases of canned food for the retired couple to put out for Skidder.

November through January we made day trips to Michigan to view the pictures from the wildlife cameras. Although we did not say anything out loud, as we drove the main road, we looked for Skidder's body along the roadside and, as we walked the area between the little ravine and big ravine, we did the

same. As long as we had at least one picture of Skidder, we knew he was potentially still alive. We could still have hope.

We continued to search for new ideas on keeping tabs on Skidders activities and how to safely capture him. In mid January, we went to Michigan with a new idea. It was still too cold to sit out at night and the day trips to check the Wildlife cameras were costly and time consuming. We went to ask permission of the retired couple to install cameras on their property. The cameras could be viewed live over the Internet. They also were equipped with night vision and motion sensors. They were all for it. They wanted Skidder to be captured as badly as we did. With this new technology we watched Skidder make the same trek across the retired couples' property every night. We could breathe easier knowing he was still alive and we hadn't missed our chance to bring him home.

It's March and we have logged Skidder's nightly activities for the last two months. It had been 10 months since Skidder escaped. Thankfully, a warmer winter had its advantages. As the spring was nearing, we knew we had to come up with SOMETHING! In speaking with another rescuer in OH, we found out about a humane trap that was designed specifically for canines. And one of our network vets had one! It's called a Collarum and he let us borrow it.

We left for Michigan the on March 17<sup>th</sup>. We set the Collarum in the direct path Skidder traveled nightly. We had only one night. We sat in the warmth of the retired couples' house, watching the cameras on the computer. Would he take the bait? At 2:15 a.m., Skidder was on his usually path. He headed straight for the Collarum. He immediately picked up the scent of the bait. We watched live on the computer as he tentatively approached the bait. Our hearts were beating so loud we could barely hear. Then, he suddenly turned and walked away. He did not return that night. We went home heartbroken.

Two weeks later we tried again. It was April 1<sup>st</sup>, yes April Fools Day. Would Skidder make fools of us again? This time we had two nights. The Collarum was set. The first night we did not see him. We worried that something had happened. The "What If's" pestered us all day until night fell again. It was 2:30 a.m. and still we did not see him. We were overcome with failure. A few minutes later we saw him appear and approach the bait. This time he was not as tentative. He pulled at the bait. WE HAD HIM!! We sprinted down to the beach. He did not growl, bark or whine. Nothing. He just stopped and turned into a big marshmallow in our grasp. Not wanting to take a chance of him getting away, we carried a crate down to the beach. Skidder willingly went into the crate. We carried the crate up the sandy bluff and loaded him into the car. Skidder was captured on April 3, 2012 at 2:37am.

Yes, Skidder is worth all this effort. They all are.

Unbelievably, after 10 months of 600 mile round trips, thousands of dollars spent on capture equipment, a tent, sleeping bags, cameras, custom-made pen, not to mention gas and oil for the vehicle, WE FINALLY GOT SKIDDER BACK! Remarkably, his weight was not terrible. He had some fleas and ticks. He was filthy and matted, but he was alive. Here are a few of the odds he beat:

- He didn't get hit by a car, even though he was living on a narrow strip of land between Lake Huron and a heavily traveled highway
- He didn't get attacked by coyotes, which we observed on our wildlife cameras
- He didn't let hypothermia take him
- He didn't venture onto the thin ice and fall through into the lake
- He didn't starve
- He didn't get sick

“Awesome” was the general reaction from everyone who knew what we had been trying to do.

“Unbelievable” was another word used to describe his capture.

But, when you stop to think of it, this story is not just a story of a remarkable dog. It's also a story of the remarkable resolve of a group of volunteers in general and of two women in particular, who never gave up.

And because of Golden Treasures Rescue, Skidder has beaten the odds. After a few days in quarantine, he's currently in his permanent home, getting on with his life. We gave the \$1,000 reward to the retired couple. Without their kindness we may have lost the opportunity to capture Skidder. But we had one more surprise. The retired couple returned the reward to the rescue. They said it was reward enough knowing Skidder had been saved.