**Veteran dog accidentally euthanized**

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**Veteran dog accidentally euthanized**

Jake Tormohlen goes through explosives detection training with Gino while in Iraq. Here, Gino has found some explosives. Gino was living with Jake's wife Bonnie in the White Mountains when he got out and was euthanized. A scanner that would have picked up Gino's microchip malfunctioned, leaving the Tormohlens without their 10-year-old Black Lab.

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Bonnie Tormohlen's dog Gino served an honorable career as an explosives detection dog in the Middle East. The way his life ended was anything but honorable.

Gino, a nearly 10-year-old black Labrador retriever, was mistakenly euthanized Oct. 12 while in the custody of the Navajo County Animal Control at the Show Low Police animal shelter.

Tormohlen, a vet tech student and volunteer at Alta Sierra Veterinary Hospital, said Gino spent half of his life overseas, the last few years as her husband Jake's partner. Gino had been living with Bonnie since June after having been retired from service.

Bonnie said Jake served 14 years as a K-9 sergeant in California before going to work DynCorp International, a Department of Defense contractor. In 2008 he was sent to the Middle East. She said he spent the first year training officers before he decided he would much rather work with dogs, becoming a K-9 trainer and handler for DynCorp.

DynCorp, Bonnie said, purchased Gino from a kennel in Indiana. Gino had been in Iraq before becoming Jake's partner. Gino was initially in Baghdad and Erbil before retiring. Jake came home for a vacation last May, but left Gino with Bonnie before heading back to Iraq in June.

The sequence of events that led to Gino's death began Oct. 6.

Bonnie said she left work and got to her home on Bourdon Ranch Road around 5:30 p.m., coming across the aftermath of what she guessed was a fight between her dogs and another.

"When I stepped out of the truck, my two female dogs (a Great Dane and a Pit Bull) came out from under a tree and my great Dane was bleeding," she said.

Bonnie said she wasted no time in letting her dogs inside her home, where a third dog, two cats and her ferret shelter with Northern Arizona Ferret Alliance and Rescue reside. She said her Pit Bull was so scared it ran through the screen door to try and get into the house. She said she then went to fix her screen door when she looked down her driveway and saw a husky in her yard marking everything, before she ran it off.

Bonnie said she figures another dog got into her yard, flipping a latch on the gate from the outside since it was locked on the inside.

After Bonnie finished fixing the screen door and tending to her dogs' injuries, she said she noticed Gino was nowhere to be seen. She said she thought nothing of it, as Gino usually came back when it was time to eat. After nightfall and Gino still had not returned, she said she grabbed a flashlight and began searching for him.

"I was out until midnight that night looking for him," she said.

Bonnie noted Gino was wearing a brown leather collar. She said he had a rabies tag attached to a choke chain, but the chain was hanging on the fence at the time.

The next day Bonnie initiated a search for Gino. She made fliers alerting people of her lost dog, drove around the neighborhood and began calling the various animal shelters and animal control agencies. She said she first called Navajo County Animal Control on Oct. 8, after being instructed to do so by the Humane Society of the White Mountains. She said when she called animal control, she was told to call back Monday, as the officer would not be in until then.

On Oct. 10, Bonnie spoke with Navajo County Animal Control Program Manager Bernard Huser, according to a county time line of events. She said she was told the county did not think any Black Labs had been picked up and Huser took her information, while also suggesting she call the local shelters and put up fliers.

On Oct. 12, she said she got a call from an employee at Alta Sierra, who told her a client had seen Gino in her carport. She said the client fed Gino and played with him. Based on hearing that Gino was wet, she said she believed he had been seen either Oct. 6 or Oct. 7, when the area received rain and some snow.

A week after Gino's disappearance, on Oct. 13, Bonnie said she received a voice mail message from one of her neighbors, who told her Gino had shown up "a couple days ago" on her porch and she had called animal control to have him picked up. She said she called the neighbor back and she was berated about Gino getting out.

According to the Navajo County time line, that call from the neighbor to pick up Gino was Oct. 6 sometime in the afternoon. County animal control officer Josh Smith, Huser said, did not find any tags and scanned Gino for a microchip, which was not found. It was later discovered, Huser said, that that particular chip scanner was malfunctioning.

After talking with her neighbor, Bonnie said she called the county animal control again. This time, she said she was told by the dispatcher that no one had called in a Black Lab.

"She continued to tell me there had been no dogs picked up from that location," she said.

It was later, Bonnie said, that she found out that dogs picked up by the county are not taken to the Humane Society, but to one of a few city pounds: Show Low, Snowflake or Holbrook. She said she called Show Low Police and spoke with animal control officer Doug Brinkerhoff, who told her he was not aware of any Black Labs in his facility and he would check, but he would wait until Monday because he was 30 minutes over his shift.

"I wasn't satisfied with that response," Bonnie said.

Bonnie spoke again with Huser on Oct. 14, who told her an officer was going to the facility to look for her dog. Later that day, Huser called her again and gave her the bad news - Gino had been put down.

According to the county, Gino was euthanized on Oct. 12 after meeting with Brinkerhoff. According to Brinkerhoff's report with Show Low Police, the reason Gino was not familiar to him was because his microchip was not found. When Bonnie called him asking if Show Low Police had her dog, it was the day after he had been put down.

Bonnie, however, did not know why Gino's microchip was not found and sought answers. Crying as she recalled the events of that day, she said she got a call from Show Low Police Cmdr. Brad Provost, who told her he would look into it. At around 3 p.m., he called her back.

"He said it appears there were some mistakes made," she said.

The main mistake, Bonnie said, was the county's malfunctioning chip scanner, which she learned about through her conversation with Provost. However, she said that was only the beginning.

"Show Low took that (missing chip) at face value and didn't bother re-scanning (Gino)," she said.

Bonnie said she did eventually get Gino's body back from the city Oct. 28. She said she talked with her husband on Oct. 14 to let him know of Gino's fate. She said the troubling thing was when she heard her dog was picked up, she felt she would be able to get him back safe and sound.

"My husband is devastated," she said. "He has spent more time with that dog in the past three years than he has with me."

Bonnie said animal control does not even sedate their animals before putting them down. However, in Brinkerhoff's report, he said Gino and the other dogs euthanized that day were given an anesthetic before being put down.

Bonnie said Gino's story is not yet over, however. She said she has asked the city and the county for Gino's records and animal control policies.

"I want to see where the system failed," she said. "I want to make sure this doesn't happen to another pet owner again."

*Note: see part two of this story, where the City of Show Low and Navajo County respond, in a future issue.*

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