

# Pair Destined to be Together

By Linda Harrington

(UPDATE ON River: who was on the run for over a Year).

It was a year ago when a Christmas miracle happened for River, a dog who had been on the run for a year. To update River's current story, we will revisit the original story from Last December.

Christmas came early for Kim Hillier of Great Village back in 2021 when she saw a photo of a dog on her trail cam at 4 AM. This wasn't just any dog! This dog was named River, on the run for almost a year and Kim had spent countless hours trying to catch her.

River was adopted in October, 2020 by Michelle MacLean, of Dartmouth from a rescue in Texas. A friend was looking after her dog in Portau-pique last December. River got lost and continued on the run for over a year.

Kim Hillier was involved in another local search a few years ago for a dog named Annie and since that time she has learned everything she could about assisting with the recovery of missing dogs, even taking an online course to become qualified as a Missing Animal Response Technician. When you say Kim looks for lost dogs, this is a huge understatement. Kim will do whatever it takes to locate and capture a missing canine friend.

The first thing Kim suggests a person should do if their dog is missing is to post a picture on NS Lost Dog Network facebook page and then put-up posters with a large photo of the dog and a phone number to call for sightings. "Do not put the dog's name on the poster," she insists, "You do not want a bunch of people roaring around yelling the dogs name and scaring them off." This is exactly what Kim did for River. There were posters everywhere in the community asking people to keep a look out for her.

It took three weeks before anyone reported a sighting of River and at first it was just paw prints in the snow, followed shortly by a sighting on the marsh in Portau-pique and then she disappeared again for three weeks. "River went missing not close to any place she considered home but she was still in the area," says Kim, who suggests dogs will most often go to water or open trails when they first run off. "They will circle back to where they were last seen and it is important to lay a scent trail outside

such as blankets, a jacket or the dog's bed."

One day in the middle of a snowstorm Kim received a call from Peter Christensen saying he had seen River up the old Castlereagh Road in Bass River. Kim immediately launched into action, excited to have fresh tracks to following in the new fallen snow. She followed the tracks for three kilometers until the road turned into a snowmobile trail. The tracks stopped near a camp and Kim sat down to have some food. Twenty minutes later River popped her head out, so Kim started quietly singing to her, making no eye contact. River stayed for awhile but then was gone, so Kim left food and set up a trail cam. River was seen multiples times on the trail cam and Kim went up everyday to take her food and patiently sit, hoping to gain trust. A "missy trap" and a box trap were set-up, but no matter what food was used for bait, River would not go inside. After two months, River disappeared again, eventually showing up on March 21st on Station Road, Great Village.

Kim lives along the main road in Great Village, and it is interesting to note River showed up in her yard on April 17th and again on May 2nd. Did she track her down by scent?

The next sighting of River was on May 28th in Wallace, 65km from Portau-pique but her next destination was even more unbelievable. River was found on June 2nd in Pictou, another 70 km from Wallace and over 100km from where she went missing. It is expected she travelled the old rail bed, but we will never know.

Kim spent five days over in Pictou, staying up all night, trying to lure River closer. She did come close to her truck on the second night for treats but eventually Kim had to give up and return home.

On July 5th, River was once again spotted back in Bass River and then on July 7th she made another visit to Kim's yard, this time she stayed for 45 minutes.

Kim received a call from Charlene Fletcher on July 28th saying River had been spotted up at the salt shed in Londonderry and when she went to check it out there was River sitting looking at her. Kim set up and baited the traps again. "I received a lot of help from Millie Hanlan, of Station Road and we kept trying to lure her into the trap with a trail of

food. For awhile we only had a few panels of the trap set up, then we added the side panels but no door. River is very visual, she would go in and out of the pen with the door off but would not go in with the door on."

River proved to be one smart and evasive dog. Kim and Millie would put the food on a paper plate just inside the door to the cage and she would pull the plate out through the door to eat.

Two weeks before being caught, River was finally going in and out of the trap (without the door being set). One night a bear showed up on the camera inside the trap, with River showing up on camera an hour later. Kim was afraid for River and decided it was time to set the trap door.

"I left teddy bears outside the door and she took the bears and then came back for food. I bought the biggest bone I could find and tied it to the door trigger and I stayed up all night for two nights. All she would do was stand right at the door, without going inside."

The third night, Kim decided to try and get some sleep at home, staying dressed and ready to go and keeping her phone near if any photos were triggered. At 4AM on Dec. 2nd, a photo came through of River at the trap and Kim jumped in her truck and on the way another photo came through of River inside the trap. When she arrived, there was River sitting calmly inside the trap.

Kim was elated, after all the hours of searching, over 10,000 km in mileage and lots of money spent on gas and food, there was River! She sat down outside the trap and sang "You are My Sunshine" to her for about an hour. Millie came up and sat with her, too and then Kim went inside the trap and sat with her awhile longer. "There was no growling, no jumping and she was amazingly calm. We set up a crate, put on a slip lead and walked her around a bit and then she went into the crate and laid down."

Kim called the owner Michelle MacLean at 5AM and let her know the good news. Michelle drove up later in the day and they took River to be checked out at the vet.

River stayed with Kim for a few days to decompress after being in the wild so many months. She followed Kim around everywhere and the pair enjoyed some quiet time



River, the dog.

together. Kim hated to say goodbye to River but she knew it wasn't her dog to keep.

The months passed and Kim was kept busy, often looking for other missing dogs but she never forgot River. Then one day in early October 2022, she was shocked to see a picture on Facebook of a dog looking for a new home and she couldn't believe her eyes...the dog was River.

She decided fate had stepped in again and made the trip to New Brunswick, where River was in foster care, to bring her home.

This was a huge commitment for Kim. River suffers from extreme anxieties after being on the run so long. The first few days she couldn't get her off the coach. With patience, Kim coaxed her along and when she finally moved off the coach, a comfy dog bed was placed on the floor and the coach filled with pillows to block her return.

Day after day, Kim made small steps to get her outside. River is especially nervous outside and requires continual reassurance. Eventually she would leave her bed to get her harness on to go out and she began to follow Kim around but the rest of the day she spends relaxing on her dog bed.

Friends and family are thrilled to have River now part of Kim's life. "Her nannie Patsy Hillier is spoiling her, also. I bought a camera for inside the house so I can watch her when I'm out and my mom babysits while I'm gone out," says Kim. "She has had many visitors; she is nervous when they come in but when offered a few treats she is happy

to take them. She will come out of this with time and patience."

With River in Kim's care for the foreseeable future, it seems like this story was meant to have this happy ending.

"One saying we always say is the dog will circle back around. She did and I couldn't be happier," says Kim. "She's a beautiful, quirky, funny girl and I wouldn't have it any other way. I love her to the moon and back. She deserves the world, and I will give her all I can for the remainder of her life."

Lost dog stories do not always have such a happy ending. Without the dedication and persistence of a compassionate volunteer such as Kim,

they would keep on running until something terrible happened.

Looking for lost dogs takes an enormous amount of personal time and the costs can really add up for things like gas, bait food and trail cams plus cell service fees.

Kim would like to once again remind readers- if you see a dog running lose DO NOT APPROACH, DO NOT YELL and let the dog come to you. "Dogs can turn feral in just a few hours or a few days. Sitting down, not making eye contact and pretending to eat has a much better chance of getting a dog to come to you then yelling and waving your arms."



**Colchester**  
be centred here.

Presentation Meeting  
Tuesday, January 3 @ 6pm

Council Committee Meeting  
Thursday, January 12 @ 6pm

Council Meeting  
Thursday, January 26 @ 6pm

Municipality of Colchester, 1 Church Street, Truro  
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