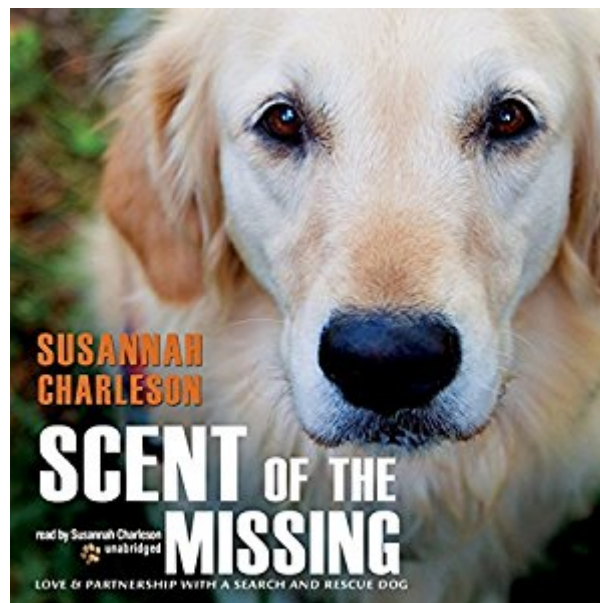




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Scent Of The Missing: Love And Partnership With A Search-and-Rescue Dog



Synopsis

After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, Susannah Charleson was so impressed by the newspaper photo of an exhausted handler and his search-and-rescue dog that she decided to train a dog of her own. A dog lover and pilot with search experience herself, Charleson got Puzzle, a strong, bright Golden Retriever, who from the start, exhibited a unique aptitude for search-and-rescue work. But the puppy's willfulness challenged even Susannah, who had raised dogs for years. Scent of the Missing is the story of Susannah's and Puzzle's adventures and the complex relationship they forge as they help in the pursuit and recovery of people who have fallen prey to crime, misadventure, or catastrophe: a missing teenager, an Alzheimer's patient wandering in the cold, the debris of the space shuttle Columbia disaster. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Susannah Charleson has been working for years as a volunteer assistant at a search and rescue dog unit when she decided to train her won dog, Puzzle. The book tells a lot about the difficulties of the work, the contact with the other volunteers and of course also something about the work with the dogs. But there, I have to admit, there are a lot of shortcomings too. For instance, when they have to search for pieces of the space shuttle Columbia, one hears a lot about the endless wait before to get into action, and how that affects the people. About the dogs, far less. One learns a lot about Puzzle as a pet (pretty stubborn animal) and about the other dogs she had, but far less about

Puzzle as a search dog, except for the fact that she loves her work and is capable to commute what she is smelling. For instance, people and dogs have to learn to rappel, and I know that Susannah found that very scary the first time. But Puzzle? No idea. The book is well written, but somehow, I missed the click to really bond with dog or owner. What I also find frustrating, is that many search stories end after the search, and you never hear what eventually happened. In a murder case, for instance, it would be nice to know whether the killer ever got apprehended. So yes, it is an interesting book, but don't expect to learn too much about search and rescue dogs or read really moving stories. One good thing: Puzzle won't die, although it is not a complete all's well that ends well.

This book is incredible. The author has a way of describing the most minute details in such glorious, exacting, 3 dimensional prose that your mind is filled with images so strong, it's as if you are physically, mentally, and emotionally experiencing them yourself. She is able to dissect and vividly describe every move, every facial expression, every instance of body language, and no small amount of pure clairvoyance that is the relationship between her and her search and rescue (SAR) dog, Puzzle, and what makes them such a successful search and rescue team. Additionally, if you are an animal lover and have ever had a very special, close relationship with an animal that is not just your pet, but more a member of your family and the whole of your heart, you will read along, nodding your head, smiling, laughing, and crying as you recognize her descriptions of all the sweet, beautiful little things that are so remarkable about that kind of unconditional love and bond between human and animal ~ things that you have experienced yourself, but have never been able to put into words. You also realize right from the get-go that this is an extraordinarily intelligent, multi-talented, strong, determined, sensitive woman, who not only volunteers her SAR efforts, but who is also a pilot, pilot instructor, and now, a beautiful writer. During search and rescue missions, she is there in whatever capacity that is needed. When her beeper goes off and she hits the road in a well practiced, precise 20 minutes, bringing Puzzle with her and expecting to use her search and rescue skills on the ground with her dog, but when she is requested instead to pilot around the area for hours on end, she doesn't hesitate to accommodate. She is sensitive to the missing victims and their families in her writing and goes into just enough detail that you get the heart wrenching gist of the tragedy, but she does not sensationalize the tragedy to the point of exploitation. In some of the other reviews I've read, people wanted more of the gory details of each tragedy and count it against her that she did not give them those details. That's not the kind of book this is. It's more about the monumental, Herculean efforts these people and their dogs go through from training, testing, and then working a

mission in order to offer a service to those most unfortunate among us. It's about learning how to communicate against unspeakable conditions with your dog in order to save a life, or find the missing. It's about trust, love, and unbreakable bonds with your canine partner. And, for me, the best parts of this book were her detailed observations about her dog: from the quizzical raised eyebrow and what it means; the furrowed eyebrow and what message that conveys; the relaxed trotting around compared to the stiffened stance, nose in the air indicating a find - to the prancing Alpha dog play time between Puzzle and her other dogs and cats; the clearly exhibited frustration of Puzzle when her human partner wasn't catching on quickly enough to what Puzzle was trying to tell her; the things Puzzle was never taught but was smart enough to figure out on her own to the surprise and amazement of her human partner; the many things Puzzle taught her human partner; and the most enjoyable of all: the laugh out loud moments when the author would describe her dog's expression and interpret it in words so that we readers could get the full story from Puzzle's point of view. I loved this book. I read it from cover to cover, and I frequently read certain passages over and over again just for the sheer high it gave me. I fell completely in love with Puzzle, her fellow Pomeranians, Maddie the cat, and all the other SAR dogs. I cried when some of them passed. I developed enormous respect for these wonderful dogs and their dedicated human partners. Despite the tragedies - both of the hapless victims and the author's own devastations, this was still a feel-good book in the end. You realize that as long as there are these dogs and these people doing what they do best out of their own selfless convictions, it makes the world a little less dark.

I opened this book hoping it wouldn't be the typical dog book with the sad ending: that is, "I learned a big lesson and now my dog is dead." It wasn't. *Scent of the Missing* is really about the love and partnership between a woman and a dog. I expected stories about training and about searches and they are here. But I didn't expect them to be as beautifully written and powerful as they are, especially the searches. Some of them are more powerful because they don't have a final resolution. The author writes that sometimes they search and never find out the answers to what happened and she passes that "ache" (her word, Chapter 1) on to the reader. The book answers many questions I had about these dogs and how they are chosen and trained - and how they do the work - without being a textbook. I appreciated what seems to be a realistic look into the working life of a dog team where some conclusions are happy, some are very sad, and some may never resolve at all. I also like that the author tries to imagine what the dogs are thinking about things, but in this book the dogs don't seem like humans. The people working here with the dogs also seem to be real people. For example the handler whose voice shakes after his search dog is nearly mauled by

another dog. If you expect this book to be a roller coaster ride with a big drama at the end and all the questions wrapped up neatly, go to the movies. I think this book is more like the work it describes. A journey with a good dog into unfamiliar places, where good things and bad can happen.

Written in an intimate and highly readable style, S. Charleson invites us into her world of the working Search and Rescue Dog (SAR). She skillfully balances the technical aspects of the SAR process with engaging and loving interactions with her Golden Retriever, Puzzle. She takes us from pesky puppy-hood to Puzzle's certification, a journey that is a wonderful story of the emotional growth of both dog and handler. Charleson is amazingly adept at blending in highly technical Search and Rescue information in a very readable way, so that by the end of the book, the reader is informed, engaged and impressed by the needed knowledge base and training of SAR dogs and their handlers. We leave the book grateful for these first responders and their amazing canine partners. As a big, fat bonus, this is a good, loving dog story, filled with intimate and bright conversation between the author and her SAR dog Puzzle. A really good, satisfying read, warm as a soft blanket..... and educational to boot.

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