

# Dog Gone!

PEPPER, AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD GOLDEN RETRIEVER, went missing from his Atlanta home two Christmases ago, when a firecracker made him bolt. His owner, Liz Carter, eventually gave him up for lost, even adopting a new golden, naming him Dougal. Then, last September, Pepper reappeared, hungry and filthy, in Florida. A vet scanned his microchip and he was reunited with the Carters. But where *was* Pepper for those nine months? We hired Tim Link, a Cumming-based animal communicator, to meet with Pepper at the dog's home in Buckhead. This is Pepper's journey, as relayed through Link and interpreted (loosely) by **Steve Fennessy**.

The first thing you should know is I had a plan. A dog without a plan is a dumb dog, and I am not dumb. Okay, maybe I underestimated how long it would take, but it's important to remember *I had a plan*.

I'm going to tell you this again, because Tim understands me and doesn't seem to mind if I ignore him while I'm talking. I'm concentrating on this bone. I'm told it's not a real bone, that it's synthetic or something, which I can believe, because I swear it's coated in crack. I can't stop chewing on the damn thing. It's just so good. God!

Where was I? Right, so it's just before Christmas, and my parents tell me they're going on vacation, and they bring me to the dog-sitter's house like usual. I love that woman. Really. A saint. But I love my family more, and so when I heard this incredibly loud noise, like a gunshot, I took off. I'm not stupid. I know cause and effect. One minute I'm about to get into her van, and the next

second—*bam!* So if I go back, can you guarantee another shot won't go off? No, I didn't think so. So I ran.

Here was my logic: My family's on vacation, our vacation home is in Florida, so I must head south. An older couple spots me right away. They load me into their car. They ignore my tags, which makes me suspicious. Then they introduce me to their family, like I should be all grateful. I lick a few hands, eat their food, and within a few days I take off again. Back on the road. Well, not *on* the road, but close to it. I knew this was the route my family had taken.

Weeks go by. I meet some other dogs and we travel together. I was always pretty laid-back about food, but real hunger makes you do things, so I start elbowing other dogs out of the way when we find food.

But it's exhausting out there. You have no idea. I'm dodging cars, scrounging for food, but always moving south. By September I was tired. And a mess. Fleas. Dirty. Disgusting, really. Even though I was in Florida, I was done running. Tim says dogs can read people's energies. It's true. I'm outside a travel agency in a strip mall in St. Petersburg and I just knew the guy inside liked goldens. I was right. He'd just adopted one. I went home with him. He fed me, cleaned me, brought me to a vet. The microchip gave them my family's information, and then, a few days later, my mom came to get me. Turns out they never even went to Florida that Christmas! They went to Mexico! No thanks. I don't speak Spanish. Four hundred miles I ran—for nothing! Well, at least I lost a few pounds.

Dougal, get away from my crack bone.

