

Vivi: A Pet Detective's Toughest Case

Pet detective Karen Goin shares her experience in the search for a missing show dog in New York.

Denise Flaim

Karin Goin of Goin's Pet Detectives Inc. (www.petdetectivesinc.com) can sum up her most memorable case with one four-letter word: Vivi.

"She comes up every time I talk to a reporter or do a TV interview," says Goin, referring to the champion Whippet who made headlines when she escaped her crate at John F. Kennedy International Airport after competing at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York. "It was my first big media case, and I learned a lot."

Responding to pleas from Vivi searchers, Goin had to pass up a request to search for B.B. King's lost dog in Houston, and drove three days to New York. Like Vivi, Goin was overwhelmed by the city's fast pace and whooshing traffic. While searching for Vivi during a rainstorm, two of Goin's detective dogs were shocked by electrical current transmitted through manhole covers. When her dogs tracked Vivi outside of the airport, some diehard volunteers that had all but camped there for more than two weeks initially refused to believe her dogs' indications that Vivi was on the move 15 miles to the north. Psychics weighed in, as they do in about 80 percent of Goin's cases. And the search -- which ended unsuccessfully, as Goin had to return back west to meet previous commitments -- earned her the very few pieces of hate mail she has ever received.

Goin hears occasionally from the Vivi searchers, who continue to track the elusive Whippet all around the borough of Queens, keeping awareness up with posters and fliers. "There are lots of dogs in Vivi's situation -- she exemplifies the roaming dog, the dog at large," Goin says. And she is one of only a handful of missing dogs that Goin has never gained closure on -- the pet detective's version of Moby Dick.

Indeed, Vivi has inspired Goin's latest project: training a detective dog that will alert only on a "hot scent" -- that is, if the missing dog is within very close range, such as 100 feet. "That way, I can track the dog all day long," preferably while riding a scooter or cart, her dog in her arms rather than at her side. "A Chihuahua probably," muses Goin, who travels everywhere with a 5-pound "cheerleader" named Paco.

Denise Flaim is a freelance writer and the pets columnist at Newsday.