



Barley is slowly coming out of his shell in his new digs; right, the intrepid Suggitts with sister Sadie



A Year on the Loose

Why Deanna and Denny Suggitt devoted themselves to capturing someone else's pet

DEANNA SUGGITT: I'm a real animal person, so I am on a lot of local lost and found sites. In May 2023, I saw a posting from Barley's owners that he had gone missing at a campground about 70 miles from us.

Denny Suggitt: He was a mixed-breed pup, and the family had only had him for about six months. He'd been a rescue from a bad situation, so he was very anxious and skittish. Apparently, when they put him in the car to go home, he jumped out an open window and took off. The owners drove back to the campsite multiple times to look for him, but it was over 10 hours round trip for them, and they couldn't keep it up.

Deanna: He kept getting spotted closer and closer to us. When we got word that he was hanging around a certain house about 12 miles away, we started driving to put out food twice a day—rain, shine or snowstorm.

Denny: You must understand that Deanna was cooking him warm meals—liver and hot dogs over kibble.

Deanna: Just one look at that face and I was a goner. He was so innocent. He started to wait for us and come out when we were there, though he always stayed at least a few feet away. One property owner and I put out a coyote trap, and we also tried a special skittish-dog trap and a snare. But he was too smart; he wouldn't go near any of them.

Denny: This went on for a year.

People raised money to pay for a dog trapper and tracker to travel up here, but even she couldn't catch him.

Deanna: During blizzards, I prayed I would make it to Barley to feed him before I ran off the road. I couldn't stand the thought of him out there waiting for me and me not coming.

Denny: Another trapper contacted us; she was a retired Army vet tech, but she wouldn't take money.

Deanna: She finally caught him last July; he wrecked that trap trying to get out. We were so excited to let the owners know. They had never given up on Barley, but they told us we'd worked so hard to save him that we should keep him.

Denny: The vet couldn't believe what good shape he was in. With all that food, he had gained 30 pounds!

Deanna: Barley adores our other dog, Sadie. With humans, he's still in survival mode. But he'll allow us to pet him, and he just started wagging his tail—after nearly a year.

Denny: He is learning to be a dog.

Deanna: So many people helped us. They still stop by, email, call and text to see how he is doing. Barley brought a little community together. To me, that says a lot about a lot of people. We all believed that if you have someone counting on you, you cannot give up. —As told to Beth Levine

Lake Superior State University retirees Deanna Suggitt, 67, and husband Denny, 70, live in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Deanna is an administrator for the Mackinac, Chippewa and Luce County MI Lost and Found Pets Facebook group.