

When All is Lost but Faith

When U.S. soldiers come home from abroad, they often have to leave their adopted mascots behind—but Mark Feffer just couldn't part with a furry piece of his heart

BY ALEXANDRA KLEINKOPF

When a puppy named Cinnamon went MIA en route to the U.S. from Afghanistan, Christine Sullivan ran to the bathroom and retched. The harrowing events of the following seven weeks are documented in her debut work, *44 Days Out of Kandahar: The Amazing Journey of a Missing Military Puppy and the Desperate Search to Find Her*.

Sullivan's brother, Mark Feffer, was posted in Kandahar and had raised the stray puppy from 2006, when she'd foraged her way to his U.S. military base. But when it came time for him to rotate out of the region, Feffer refused to leave Cinnamon behind, and resolved to send her home to his wife in Maryland.

Cinnamon was in for a longer journey than expected—the man entrusted to bring her home instead abandoned her at the airport in Kyrgyzstan. So began Sullivan's and Feffer's extraordinary search for the dog, which spanned a few countries and several long weeks. But the seemingly hopeless situation had a truly miraculous ending.

While Sullivan's and her brother's efforts were unusual, such missions are becoming more common. "There are more and more stories ... about men and women who have served that have

befriended animals and are wanting to bring them home," says Sullivan. "These dogs—and in some cases, cats—are providing a lot of comfort to the troops over there."

Sullivan says that despite military policies against it, some soldiers overseas actively look for stray "mascots," who tend to boost morale and help relieve stress. Other pups like Cinnamon wander their way into these unauthorized "adoptions." Many of the animals are injured and malnourished, but get nursed back to health by U.S. troops.

Sullivan says she wrote the book to bring "inspiration to situations where things can look very bleak." She feels that telling Cinnamon's story and putting a face on the international dilemma of strays can encourage people to adopt. "To think about ... millions of animals needing our help, I think it's very overwhelming," she says. "It's easier to turn away from the millions, because you can't save a million animals at one time, as one individual."

But whether you're on a wild pooch chase for one lost pet or just a few good homes, Sullivan shares her philosophy: "Hope isn't really based on what you see in front of you or around you; hope is what you bring to a situation."

44 Days Out of Kandahar (\$24.95; 240 pages) is available from major retailers and online. AS



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