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Easton woman reunited with dog taken during Baltimore car theft

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Amy Gaffney embraces JoJo after their reunion. (Courtesy of the Maryland SPCA / August 20, 2009)

After a harrowing brush with thieves who took her dog and truck in West Baltimore, a woman was reunited with her fluff ball of a pup Thursday morning in what shelter workers are calling "an impossible reunion."

Amy Gaffney was driving circles around West Baltimore on Tuesday evening, lost and trying to find a Western Union. The 46-year-old from Easton rolled her window down around Fulton Street to ask directions of a couple of young men walking along the street.

"The next thing I know, his arm is in my car and he unlocks the door," Gaffney said. "I was so stunned, I didn't know what was going on." One of the boys grabbed Gaffney's dog from her lap,

an 11-pound, 1-year-old Lhasa Apso/poodle mix named Jojo. With the car still on, she jumped out, screaming for them to give back the dog.

"I just ran and tried to chase them down. I couldn't keep up with them," she said. "I was just screaming and begging anybody to call 911."

When she turned back around, her black Ford pickup was gone.

"They could have killed me. I didn't care. I wanted my little baby back."

Gaffney filed a police report and got a ride back to Easton. She couldn't stop thinking about Jojo and what might be happening to him. "You just don't know the sadness," she said.

Police said they have not found the vehicle, and because no weapons were involved, the incident is classified as car theft.

Meanwhile, about 2 a.m. the next night, Melissa Garland dropped off a friend at Payson and Fulton streets. She noticed a dog running right up the middle of the road. He stopped in front of her car.

"He kept looking at me with these sad eyes, like help me," Garland said. "He was soaking wet."

Fearing the dog would get hit by a car, she and her friend tried to pick him up, but he scooted under a car. They tried for about 10 minutes to get him out and gave up. Garland walked back to her car, thought about the wet, little dog and decided to go back.

It took a half-hour to coax the dog out from under the car. She drove home with him, stopping at a 7-Eleven to get him food and a cardboard box. Exhausted, the dog fell asleep in the box in Garland's garage.

The next morning Garland got up early to check on him. He was playful and she started thinking about keeping him. But in the light of day, she noticed he had tags and decided to drive him to the Maryland SPCA to see if they could clean him up and find his owner. If no one came forward, she wanted to keep him.

Ian Gilmore took Garland's report. "I could tell someone was going to be missing him, just by looking at him," he said.

Almost lost in all the black fur, Gilmore saw the dog had a name tag that said "Jojo" with an address but no phone number. When Garland left, he played with the dog in the office a bit. "He was just the sweetest thing in the world. We were all petting on him in the office. And I said, 'We're going to find your parents, Jojo.'"

Gilmore's colleague's head popped up. "Did you just say Jojo?" she asked, "I just took a report on the dog."

Gaffney had called the SPCA that morning to file a missing dog report. They were able to put two and two together, and by this morning, Gaffney was waiting for the Falls Road shelter to open so she could claim her pup.

"We had said, 'Oh my gosh, she's never going to see that dog again,'" Gilmore said. "We were so happy at what seemed like an impossible reunion."

Shelter workers brought Jojo out to Gaffney today, and placed him into her eager arms.

"His tail was wagging like crazy and he was kissing me," Gaffney says. "I was crying and so happy."

She had brought Jojo's favorite treat -- mint-flavored Tic Tacs -- and planned to bring him home for a warm bath and a lot of love.

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