

Returned to Shelter Four Times, 'Unmanageable' Dog Becomes Real-Life Hero

Source: [Mother Nature Network](#)

by [Mary Jo DiLonardo](#)

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Ruby had an awful lot of energy. Her original owner surrendered her to the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RISPCA) because of her generally “unmanageable” personality. The cute pup was quickly adopted and then returned – four times. Things were looking pretty grim for the border collie/Australian shepherd mix.

But Joseph Warzycha, RISPCA’s humane law enforcement special agent, was smitten with the 8-month-old puppy and thought she had potential. The key was to figure out how to harness all that energy.

“After being returned the fourth time, the [shelter] director felt there was too much liability in placing her again and the decision had been made to euthanize her,” Warzycha tells MNN.

Not comfortable with that decision, he asked for more time to come up with a plan.

“I spent a lot of time with Ruby while at the shelter,” Warzycha says. “She was smart, agile and demonstrated very high play drive, all of which are desirable qualities for a search and rescue dog.”

 Ruby was returned several times before she found her calling with the police department. (Photo: Lucy Bean Films/SEARCHDOG)

Warzycha contacted his friend and colleague, Matthew Zarrella, a Rhode Island State Police sergeant who rehabilitates “unadoptable” shelter dogs and transforms them into search and rescue dogs. Not long after, Trooper Daniel O’Neil got a call about the pup who would potentially become his new partner.

O’Neil took Ruby home with plans for K9 training, even though his life was quite chaotic at the time. He told [Today](#) that he had a toddler, his wife was pregnant and he already had another dog. Ruby ran right into his house and left him a big, smelly present in the living room.

Things were off to a rocky start. But the patient trooper and the rambunctious canine spent six months training with Zarrella.


Ruby turned out to be a natural.

‘She brings a little humility to a very negative environment’

Not only is Ruby really good at her job, she loves every second of it.

“She keeps me motivated to come to work,” O’Neil tells [People](#).

“She wants to jump in the cruiser so bad. She brings a little humility to a very negative environment. When you have a dog that has that emotion of pure love, it is really tough to be in a bad mood. She just wants to be with you.”

 Ruby is a Rhode Island State Police K-9 and proudly wears her badge.
(Photo: Joseph Warzycha/Rhode Island State Police)

Now nearly seven years into her job as a police K9, Ruby is being celebrated for her accomplishments. She is one of the

finalists for [American Humane's Hero Dog Awards](#). Ruby and O'Neil helped track down a teenage boy who had gone missing from his house and was found unconscious in the woods. Ironically, the mother of the boy was Patricia Inman, a volunteer at the animal shelter who tried to rehabilitate Ruby each time she was returned after a failed adoption.

"You can think what you may, but I believe that was Ruby's way of saying thank you to Ms. Inman for taking care of her during her rough beginning," said O'Neil, on nominating Ruby for the award. "Ruby was given a chance at life and ended up saving a life."

Ruby is one of several dogs featured in "[Searchdog](#)," an award-winning documentary about search and rescue specialists and their K9s. A film crew was shadowing Zarrella to feature his work and they captured Ruby's transformation from unmanageable to heroic.

"Searchdog" was made by Rhode Island filmmaker Mary Healey Jamiel, who told [WJAR](#): "I think Ruby exemplifies the story of someone who was unwanted and discarded and, like a lot of us, we all just need a second chance."

About **Mary Jo DiLonardo**

[Mary Jo DiLonardo](#) writes about everything from health to parenting – and anything that helps explain why her dog does what he does.