

An Unlikely Tale of a Helpful Husky...

Story by Lt. Eric Olsen and Megan A. Peters

In the early evening hours of June 20, 2018, Alaska State Troopers received a report of an injured hiker along the Crow Creek Trail. The hiker was reported to be an adult female with blond hair and was hearing-impaired. HELO-3 launched from Anchorage a short time later with Pilot Tab Burnett and the commander of the DPS aircraft section, Lt. Eric Olsen.

Just before 7:00 pm, HELO-3 arrived at the headwaters of Eagle River in the Chugach State Park, 26 miles east of Anchorage, AK. All that could be seen from the air was a sleeping bag and a dog near the bank of the river, surrounded by snow-capped mountains.

Amelia Milling, 21, was inside of the sleeping bag, wet, dazed and a bit scraped up. Due to Milling's hearing impairment, communication was accomplished by writing in a notebook. Milling told rescuers quite the tale. During the first four miles of the trail, her trekking poles broke and she fell down a snow covered part of the mountain side for approximately 300 feet, before colliding with a large boulder. The impact threw her about 30 feet sideways and sent her the rest of the way down the mountain, another 300 to 400 feet.

At the bottom of the slide, Milling found a white Alaska Husky that, oddly enough, came to her aid and guided her back to the Crow Pass Trail. Milling, now with the dog as a companion, continued hiking the trail until she reached the Eagle River crossing. The current was too strong for Milling and she fell into the water. Milling told rescuers that the dog then saved her life by pulling her out of the river. Milling, at this point, started becoming hypothermic and she activated her SPOT device for help.

The rescuers helped pack up Milling's belongings and loaded her and the dog into HELO-3. While flying back to Anchorage, the crew realized the husky was wearing a tag. The tag asked to return the dog back to an address in Girdwood, a phone number was also listed. After landing in Anchorage, Milling was looked over by EMS medics before getting picked up by friends.

With the search and rescue mission now completed, Lt. Olsen turned his attention to the husky and called the phone number on dog tag. Scott Swift, 44, answered. Yes, he was the owner of the wandering white Husky. The dog's name, Lt. Olsen learned, was Nookie.

After everything Nookie had done for Milling, Lt. Olsen decided doggie jail wasn't an appropriate place for Nookie to be until he could be collected by his owner. Lt. Olsen loaded the furry hero into his



DPS Pilot Tab Burnett spots Milling's makeshift campsite along Eagle River following the activation of a SPOT Beacon.



Milling hugs Nookie after they were on both safely transported to Anchorage.

vehicle and drove to Girdwood to bring Nookie home.

In Girdwood, Lt. Olsen met with Swift, who told of other wandering adventures Nookie has had. The seven-year-old dog lives with his family at the base of Crow Pass Trail in Girdwood. Swift said Nookie loves to follow people on the trail in the wintertime and in the summertime. Nookie hikes the Crow Pass Trail at least 10 times a summer with hikers he wanders across. At one point, Swift said the family made a dog tag for Nookie that read, "I love to ski, I love to play, please bring me back home at the end of the day". That tag was eventually lost and replaced with the current tags asking people to return him to the address.

Swift also told Lt. Olsen this wasn't the first time Nookie has saved a life. Approximately two years ago, a family was hiking the Crow Pass Trail. While attempting to cross the river, a little girl in the group fell just as Milling had. Nookie got ahold of the girl and brought her safely to shore. The family credited Nookie with saving the little girl from drowning.

Dropping Nookie off with his owner was the conclusion of 24 hours of daunting tasks for the Helo-3 crew. The crew assisted with three separate search and rescue operations during that time. The first two ended in tragedy, with the people involved being found deceased. This last search and rescue provided the crew with the ability to bring someone home safely, along with a great story of an amazing dog named Nookie.



Nookie with his owner, Scott Swift, in Girdwood.



Milling snapped a photo of where she fell and slammed into a rock along Crow Creek Trail.