



The Awareness Center, Inc.

P.O. Box 65273, Baltimore, MD 20209

www.theawarenesscenter.org

(443) 857-5560

Shoshie's Story

© (2005) By Vicki Polin, MA, ATR, LCPC

One of my favorite things to do is to be in nature. Running The Awareness Center makes doing that almost impossible. Recently I've been committed to going somewhere that is breathtakingly beautiful at least once or twice a week. Its my way of dealing with the stress of working in the trauma field.

Because my time schedule is often different than most peoples, I've been borrowing a friend's dog to go with me when I walk in various local forest preserve.

Shoshie is a great walking partner. I think she enjoys the walks as much as I do. Sometimes during our walks we past horse farms, other times we walk by babbling brooks, with small water falls. There was one time when I went there was a herd of deers that ran right past us. It was an incredible experience.

Just imagine in the middle of a week day taking an hour or two off just to go to the middle of no where -- meaning no telephones or Internet. Its the break most of us can only dream of taking.

My friend got Shoshie at a local animal rescue. Shoshie is a relatively young dog. I think she's about two-years-old. When my friend picked her out, she was told that the animal rescue found her in the middle of a highway, and she was frightened.

On an absolutely beautiful spring day, I was walking with Shoshie. Everything was blooming, so many brilliant colors all round us. We heard birds chirping, the brook was babbling -- and then all of a sudden something very odd happened.

Shoshie and I had already walked just about 2 miles on a trail when all of a sudden she just stopped in her tracks. She wouldn't go any further. She was terrified. There was nothing ahead of us, and nothing behind us, yet she was like a deer in

headlights.

I remember my friend telling me that Shoshie had a terrible fear of cars, especially trucks, yet there were none near us. Then I realized we were near the end of the trail, not far from the parking lot where my car was parked. I got very quiet and heard the sound of a few cars and trucks very faintly in the distance.

I had to ask myself why is this day any different than the other days we went walking? I knew she had the fear, yet she was always fine on the paths, and also going to and from the parking lot.

Then it dawned on me, we were on a different stretch of the path than I've taken her to before. Was there something that was familiar to Shoshie that was "freaking her out"? You have to realize that Shoshie had been traumatized. She has PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Yes, animals can react similarly to humans.

I had a serious problem on my hands. There was no way for me to pull Shoshie all the way to my car. She was wearing a harness and was known to pull out of it when she was frightened. So I decided I would try to carry her. I reached down to do so, yet she was like a young child not wanting to budge. I tried to pick her up and she became "dead weight." I thought she weighted about sixty pounds, yet later learned she weighted ninety. I need to point out that if Shoshie stood on two feet, she is almost the same height as I am (Looking back, this could have turned out to be some sort of comedy routine).

Somehow I was able to lift her, and could walk about five feet before I had to put her down to catch my breath. I repeated this several times until I got to a place where there was a picnic bench. I thought if I could get her to rest, maybe she would fall asleep? When she woke up she wouldn't be so afraid, and I could get her the rest of the way to the car.

Shoshie was too afraid, too hyper-vigilant to be able to relax. There was no way I was going to get her to take a nap.

I was dying of thirst and knew she was too. All my water bottles were in my car. I thought about leaving Shoshie tied to the picnic table bench, yet knew she would get frightened if I left and my fear was she would get out of the harness. I was stuck. I didn't want the challenge of chasing a frightened dog in a forest preserve.

About 10 minutes later a woman came by. She walked over to tell me how beautiful Shoshie was. We started chatting, and I explained my problem to her. I forgot to mention that when the woman came by, Shoshie hid behind me. After a few minutes Shoshie's fear of the woman subsided, and they became friends. The woman offered to hold Shoshie's leash while I ran to get the water bottles, yet when I attempted to do that Shoshie started to panic. Again I was afraid she would get out of the harness, so I asked the woman if she could go to my car to get the water. When the woman returned Shoshie was too afraid to drink, and the woman went on her way.

About an hour had passed since Shoshie started having abreaction's. I realized there was no way to get Shoshie out of her panic state. I realized I had no other option other than trying to pick her up and carrying her the distance of about another block to my car.

I proceeded to pick up the dead weight, ninety pound dog. I would carry her as far as I could, put her down, rest, and start all over again. About another 20 minutes went by, when all of a sudden Shoshie looked at me, looked around where she was at, and just walked about a half a block straight over to my car.

I was stunned, and extremely happy Shoshie did that. I realized she was able to come back to reality. Her abreaction's to her childhood traumas subsided. Shoshie was able to re-orientate herself to time and place.

Shoshie did not have the vocabulary to tell me what was wrong, she wasn't able to talk through her fears. All Shoshie could do was tell me she was frightened. She trusted me enough not to run away, yet there was no way for her to communicate with

me, except by refusing to move.

Shoshie's behavior is not that different than many survivors of childhood abuse, prior to getting the help they need, so they could learn to identify, process and verbalize what happened to them.

