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Memphis was an odd bird. Belligerent, but needy. Jolly, but neurotic. A loner, but a joiner. The poor little guy was a little mixed up.

He was a resource guarder, but what he considered treasures was a little....random? He'd drag a sock, a scrap of paper or a piece of pillow stuffing into his kennel and growl horrifically at anyone who came near.

But he loved to join the group howl. Three or four times a day, our pack — led by our wolfhound Finn — broke into a thunderous round of howling, yipping, barking and baying.

Over time I came to understand that this was the song of their people. It was their way of saying, I'm here, I matter, I belong....And neurotic little Memphis joyfully belted out the yips and yowls along with the rest of them.

The little white-and-tan pit bull mix lived with us for a year while my daughter, fresh out of college, was between jobs and trying to get on her feet.

We already had Finn, a deerhound and another dog we'd rescued from my daughter, when she moved back into our little house with Memphis and two other rescues. We were packed to the rafters with people and dogs. Sometimes things got a little tense, especially in winter when outings were restricted. And when Memphis claimed, say, me, and got in my lap and growled at anyone else who came near.

On a bitter January day after a snowstorm, Memphis escaped. He just bolted out the door while I was putting the other dogs in the backyard. This was uncharacteristic of Memphis because he was a stay-at-home kind of guy. He clung to the security of his kennel. But that day, off he went. Maybe he just needed a vacation?

Memphis skittered across the yard and up into the snowy woods next door. The wilderness begins there, ten miles of mountains and deep valleys between us and the next mountain town. It was full of ravines, sinkholes and all sorts of critters. I figured he'd come skittering home soon, his ears back and his tail tucked. He did not.

I tramped up the hill through the snow calling his name. Dead silence. Then two large deer bolted out of the woods and down the slope. But no Memphis. So I began slowly driving the roads nearby, hoping the little guy would come darting out, wanting to be taken home. I knew he was scared by now.

So was I. The sun was going low in the sky and the cold was gathering. Why on earth wouldn't he come home? Because he was alone and scared, I realized. He was hunkered down in the trees in some snowy hollow up there and he was too frightened to budge. And I knew he'd die that night if I couldn't find him. If the cold didn't get him, the coyotes would.

Ultimately, it was Finn who saved Memphis. I had an idea. I took Finn into the backyard and then the others one by one. In the house, they all avoided Memphis. He was too unstable. But they all knew he was gone. They all felt the cold. I was out of ideas so I relied on them.

After standing at the fence for a moment, Finn reared back his head and cut loose with a soulful, baritone howl that echoed off the mountain. Startled, the other dogs leapt right in. Dogs across the neighborhood added to the cacophony. Then Finn cut it off and silence fell again...

And I heard four little feet spattering through the slush on the street out front. Memphis ran up, grinning wildly.

The song of his people. He knew he was wanted. He

followed it home. And knowing he belonged was what it took to get there.