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## Trucker reunited with his best friend

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*The Journal News*

EAST FISHKILL - Maybe someone will sing this story someday, a twangy lament with a happy ending: Trucker loses dog, trucker pines for dog, trucker finds dog.

That's the tale of Sato, a 2-year-old dog who left his owner with nothing more than an empty collar and some memories more than a week ago. But yesterday afternoon, they were reunited in the same spot where life went wrong.

Alen Nelson of Denver climbed out of the blue cab of his Freightliner at the Interstate 84 rest stop as the rain poured down.

Fox-sized Sato, a shiba inu, waited in the back seat of a Ford F-350 pickup. The only thing missing was some whisky or a cheatin' wife.

"Where have you been?," Nelson said to his dog. "I've been looking for you."

With that, the trucker scooped up his damp pet in a hug.

Sato, a reddish-brown dog, responded with high-pitched, throaty whimpers.

That, in turn, produced tears of joy and relief from volunteers who had spent days searching for him.

"This is all we wanted, just to get him back to you," volunteer Michele Dugan of Southeast told the trucker.

Nelson said he hadn't seen Sato since Jan. 2, when they pulled into the rest stop, on westbound I-84, not far from the Putnam County line and Sato slipped his collar. Since then, local animal lovers have searched for the dog.

The trucker speculated that his furry friend, who will turn 3 next month, had gotten confused by the new truck in which they were riding. Sato and Nelson have rolled across the country together since the dog was 8 weeks old.

"He just disappeared among all those cars," Nelson recalled yesterday. "I didn't see him after that."

Faced with losing his job, Nelson had to give up the search and hit the road. A load of frozen bread sat in his trailer and Atlanta beckoned. Later, he had to head west before he could turn his truck back to where his heart was.

"When he walks, he just gets his little feet going so fast," Nelson said, from somewhere in Pennsylvania, as he was heading this way about 9 a.m. yesterday. "I just want my dog back."

Nelson knew then that Sato -spotted two hours earlier -was back at the rest stop. And that's where the skittish dog stayed, as Kathy Hamilton of Kent, Dugan and others spent the morning enticing him

with kibble. Hamilton, who is the Kent animal-control officer, volunteered her own time in the search for Sato.

Around 1 p.m., Rob Morrison of Mahopac was able to grab Sato and slide a leash over his head - then into Hamilton's pickup the dog went.

About 30 minutes later, Nelson blew two blasts on his air horn as he climbed the hill across from the rest area, heading east.

The next stop was his dog.

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