

## Bella

The first thing I remember is being all curled up in a bed that probably wasn't really big enough for all of us. When we were small, we shared with mum. Sharing with mum kept us warm all through the winter. When we were older; mum would leave us during the day and go out with the mistress on the mountains. We would stay nice and warm in the cabin by the log fire. Back then, people would come in during the day to get warm. They always wanted to stroke us or pick us up, which wasn't that bad until one day someone nearly dropped me! Mum was furious when she found out, so much so that the following day she stayed with us and would tell people off for touching us. We were happy there until one day strangers started to collect us. One by one we left. I was nervous when it was my turn, but the minute she picked me up and held me tight to her and said, "I'm going to call you Bella," I felt safe with her.

My mistress started training me, well she said it was training, I just saw it as a game. We started off with just the basics, like when she said "sit" I would sit, or I'd come to her when she called my name. It was so much fun! After I had mastered the basics, we moved on to finding things. My mistress would hide things all around the cabin where we lived and all I had to do was find them. Most of the time she would hide my toy and when I brought it back to her, I would drop it on the floor in front of her and get a treat. Occasionally, she would hide treats, but that didn't happen very often. When I mastered that, we moved on to finding things in the mountains. All I had to do was find the thing and bark as loud as I could until my mistress came running. When she came, I would get a treat. From there we moved on to finding people. This was like a massive game of hide and seek. Someone would hide somewhere and all I had to do was sniff them out and when I found them, bark until the mistress came.

The first time we went out on a proper call out was in the middle of December. The snow was almost head high on me up on the highest peaks. The call came in the middle of the night. I heard the phone ring and the next thing I know my mistress is calling my name. She put the phone down she turned to me and said, "Time to go, Bella." Go, I thought, go where? At the front door my mistress put on my warm, fluffy jumper, high-viz coat and my tracking device. Then, she opened the door. The cold hit me instantly and I was wet in minutes. She turned to me and said, "Bella, there's been an accident and it is your job to find them. Can you smell someone on the wind?" My job, I thought! My job! Why was it my job? But I did as I was told. I took in a long sniff and then caught the scent of something or someone immediately. I started to follow the smell with my mistress following closely behind. We found them eventually, but not before we were cold and wet through. The people looked immensely relieved to see me. Why were they there? Why not inside in the warm? Why would anyone want to play hide and seek to the point they would end up nearly waist deep in snow?

This went on for many years. I always found whoever was hiding up in the mountains. After years of doing it, I was awarded a medal for playing hide and seek. I would've rather had treats or a toy to play with. I was awarded the PDSA Order of Merit, but it's not a toy. This is great though; I get a medal for playing hide and seek for all those years!