

A Canine Christmas Spirit *by Cheryl Dinger Dec. 20, 2012*

Spirit. Something we carry in our heart and mind, and sometimes in our hand. Her name was Tina Maria. A little spirit. A young girl who lived and died over 30 years ago. Her spirit was carried in my heart and hand on a recent holiday shopping trip. Wanting to create a thoughtful Christmas gift for my sisters, I took the tiny photo of Tina to the stores to help me find just the right sized frame for the beloved picture of our childhood chihuahua pet. The only photo of it's kind on this earth. I know this gift would bring a smile to the faces of my siblings. Finding the special, tiny frame proved to be a bit daunting, but I didn't give up hope. I visited several stores from Macy's to the dollar stores, where no frames small enough could be found. At least the kind of frame I was searching for; a simple, quality frame that she deserved without decoration, for I wanted Tina and her memorable spirit to be the focus of the gift. While my feet still hurt, I marched on and landed at Kmart. There, I walked and searched. Then, I finally held out the tiny photo of Tina for an employee to see, and asked if there is a small enough frame in the store? As she gazed at the picture of Tina, she told me how much she misses her lost chihuahua, named Chong. She went on to share with me how he got lost in Kalkaska before Thanksgiving, and how Christmas won't be the same this year without him. I felt her pain. We shared the joys of dog ownership and how much they give us as she led me to another section of the store. I asked her if she posted Chong on the Lost and Found pets on Craigslist? She said no, because she didn't have Internet. She had posted flyers all over her neighborhood and checks the animal shelters. I offered to post an ad for her when I got home. She happily agreed and wrote down pertinent information about little Chong. No frame was found at Kmart. However, I left with the spirit of Christmas in my heart and Tina in my hand. Finally, I went to Michael's craft store and found a shiny, silver Christmas Tree shaped ornament-style frame the photo would fit. It wasn't exactly the type of frame I was searching for, but it is a Christmas gift after all, so a pine tree shape will suffice. Task accomplished. I head home, greeted by my two loving chihuahuas, we settle in with my feet up, and get on-line with that child-like hope of getting Chong home for Christmas for a lady, named Sue, of whom I just met. I posted the ad on Craigslist without a picture....Lost male chihuahua with brown spots....greatly missed...please help bring Chong home for Christmas. I thought again about Tina Maria and smiled at that old picture. Come Monday, I received an email from a young mother, Roberta, who lives in South Boardman. She said she may have Chong, and that he has been loved and well cared for. I replied immediately. Then contacted Sue with the hopeful news. Then they connected. All the while still no picture of Chong yet. Next thing I knew, Sue and Chong are reunited after two months of separation. I heard the spirit of joy and gratitude in Sue's voice over the phone. A miracle? Perhaps Tina Maria and her loving spirit was enough to bring Chong home in time for Christmas.