

MOHICANVILLE — "Today I got the news I've been waiting on for five months," Mark Krichbaum posted on Facebook Dec. 21.

His beloved silver labrador, who vanished in July in Mohican, had finally been found — in Huron.

In what friends commented was a "Christmas miracle," Krichbaum and Lucy, now about 10 months old, were reunited thanks to the social media website.

When Lucy disappeared July 27, she was still fairly new to Krichbaum's 80-acre family farm. Krichbaum, 55, had bought his silver lab, a rare breed, in the spring from Debra Yarger in Nova.

That summer day, Lucy was playing with Krichbaum's sister's boxer, Plank, while Krichbaum, maintenance coordinator at the Ashland YMCA, repaired a sawmill on his property near Mohicanville.

The dogs eventually wandered down to a neighbor's yard, unbeknownst to Krichbaum.

"I heard a couple gunshots," Krichbaum said. "My sister's dog came back, and he was terrified. At that point, I hollered for Lucy and she never came back."

Krichbaum spent days searching for his puppy in creeks and ditches for miles with no luck.

Talking with the neighbors, he determined she was last seen playing with their young daughter. But the family didn't know who Lucy belonged to, and they assumed since she was wearing a collar, she'd find her way back home.

"At least at that point, I knew she wasn't shot and she was still alive," Krichbaum said.

As the days turned into weeks, Krichbaum made missing posters, putting up the signs for miles and distributing them to the area animal shelters and veterinarians.

He also posted photo after photo of Lucy on Facebook, hoping someone might recognize her. Many reached back and shared his posts, but no one had seen Lucy.

"My biggest fear was she was stuck in an Amish puppy mill or something like that," Krichbaum said. "Not knowing was just the hardest thing — not knowing her condition or where she was."

Summer turned to fall and winter, and the trail remained cold.

"My friends were trying to console me and say, 'Well, you know, she's probably not going to come back and you may have to get a different dog,'" Krichbaum said. "And I was just getting used to the fact that maybe in the spring I would get another dog."

Then, on Dec. 21, Krichbaum got a random text.

"I have your sweet girl, Lucy," the text said.

"My response was, 'I sure hope you're serious — I'll come and get her right now,'" Krichbaum said.

The message came from Lauren Ashley Prater, a veterinary technician in Huron.

Krichbaum spoke with Prater on the phone, and he asked if the dog responded to the name Lucy.

"I said, 'She does,' which I was totally shocked about," Prater said. "Her head tilted, her ears perked up, and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is really it.'"

Prater sent him photos of the silver labrador. He could tell by the way she was sitting that this was his Lucy.

Prater and a friend had come to Mohican that Saturday in July to camp out for the weekend when she found Lucy.

As the owner of a silver lab herself, Prater knew this was a special dog standing in the road.

"I was just like, 'Oh my gosh, this is crazy,'" Prater said. "Because you really don't see much about silver labs as it is."

She opened up the car door, and Lucy jumped right in.

Prater spent the rest of the day trying to track down the lost dog's owner, going from house to house.

"I really don't know how far away from my house she got," Krichbaum said. "If she had been a couple of miles away, nobody knew I had that dog. She was just a pup."

Prater contacted local animal rescue groups, but at that point, no one had reported a missing silver lab.

She ended up skipping the camping trip and taking Lucy back to Huron, where the puppy made herself right at home.

Prater's silver lab, Bo, loved his new companion, and the pair enjoyed visiting the dog parks and making new friends, Prater said.

Though Prater searched Facebook, she didn't come across any posts about the missing lab initially.

Prater figured if she couldn't track down the owner, she could keep the lab she was calling simply "Doggo."

But on Dec. 21, something told her to search Facebook again. This time, she hit pay dirt.

"I found several posts from the Mohican area and Ashland of a missing dog, and I was like freaking out because I was so excited," Prater said. "I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is totally her.'"

But before Krichbaum and Lucy could be reunited, Prater needed a couple of hours.

Lucy was busy having her photo taken with Santa Claus.

Around 3 p.m., Krichbaum met Prater in a dog park in Huron.

"I saw her and I said, 'Hey, Lucy' " Krichbaum said. "And she came running across the parking lot, jumped on me and started licking my face. You see that all the time, and it was just great to have that experience."

"He had tears in his eyes, and it was really sweet," Prater said. "I wanted to try and get a video of them reuniting, but I was holding back my tears too."

Now that Lucy was back home, Krichbaum needed to restock on supplies.

Being so close to the holidays, his funds were short, so he headed to Walmart to use a couple of gift cards. While he was standing in line with a new pillow for her cage, a blanket and a collar, Krichbaum met a man ahead of him.

After the stranger paid for his own items, he gestured to Krichbaum and told the cashier, "Ma'am, I've got this guy's stuff," Krichbaum said.

"If I didn't feel blessed enough already to get my dog back — I just didn't know what to say," Krichbaum said, choking up. "It's been a real blessing to get her back. It was a gift from God, I'm sure of that."

Lucy now sports a pink collar with a matching tag, complete with her name, phone number and address.

She's thrilled to be back home and enjoys riding through the woods with Krichbaum's father on his UTV.

"Just the outpouring of prayers and everything, when your dog comes up missing, the support from everybody is great," Krichbaum said.