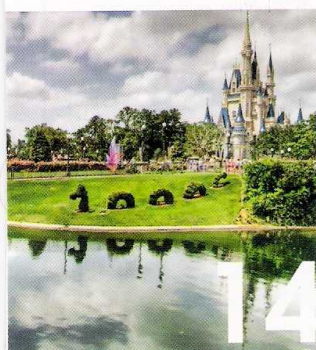


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## Oh "Deer," It's

One recent Monday morning, the lives of Beverly Woodworth, along with Beverly's greyhound, Lightning and Beverly's neighbor, Sally Uffelman, took an unexpected turn as they became surrogate moms to a little lost fawn.

The day started out like any other. "The gardeners and lawn mowers were out, so it was a busy, noisy morning," Beverly said. "Sally was working in her yard, and a baby deer walked across the street. She stuck her head in the hedge as though hiding, even though her body was in plain sight. It was just like a little kid playing 'I can't see you so you can't see me!'"

Beverly and Sally live in Celebration's South Village, at opposite ends of Central Bark, a wooded park area that connects with preserve land. They have seen some wildlife in the neighborhood, such as wild turkeys, but never before had they encountered a deer so close to home.

The little animal was obviously a fawn, and Sally was concerned because Mama Deer was nowhere in sight. She brought her over to Beverly's house, and Beverly chuckled, "My plans for the day were thrown out, and I knew an adventure was starting!"

They dubbed the waif Annie, as in "Little Orphan Annie," due to the reddish hue of her coat and the fact that her parent was missing. Beverly said, "She was beautiful, with white tufts that stood out and a little black wishbone mark around her nose." They brought the fawn back to the park in hopes that her mother would return, but there were no signs of Mama and the baby was making whimpering sounds. To comfort her, Beverly had the bright idea of introducing Annie to her greyhound, Lightning.

Since slim, fawn-colored Lightning has been mistaken for a deer herself, she hoped that the good-natured dog wouldn't mind taking on some temporary motherly duties.

Sure enough, the fawn took to Lightning immediately, and the dog accepted her role with grace. She allowed Annie to snuggle with her on the couch and laid there patiently for an hour while the little deer happily bonded with her canine babysitter.

The neighbors called Animal Control and were told that no one was in the area but that someone would respond later. In the meantime, Beverly and Sally made some more calls and found out that Mayfair Animal Clinic in St. Cloud could help, so they headed off with Annie in tow.

The fawn weighed in at 4 pound, 6 ounces, and the doctor said that she was no more than three days old. The clinic didn't work with deer, but they were able to advise the Good Samaritans that they should feed her goat's milk.

Their next stop was Tractor Supply to pick up the milk and nipples. The cashier there was a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, and she offered to take Annie if the mother didn't turn up. She reassured the ladies that it's just an old wives' tale that a mother animal will reject its young because of human scent. If Annie's errant parent could be found, it was virtually certain that she would reclaim her baby.

As Beverly and Sally drove back to Celebration, passing drivers did a double take at the sight of a woman cradling a fawn. Beverly said that red lights had suddenly become fun as they watched the reactions of the disbelieving motorists around them.



Still, they couldn't help but worry about Annie's future. They were glad to know that the rehabilitator would take her if necessary, but they were still praying diligently for a family reunion with Mother Deer.

Annie bunked at Beverly's house for the night. Beverly laughed, "It was just like the movie 'Bambi'. When she tried to walk on the hardwood floors, she looked like Bambi on ice." Concerned for the fawn's safety, she confined her to the couch, with motherly Lightning providing comfort. Sally and Beverly took turns with feeding duty; little Annie was so young that they had to teach her to suckle from the bottle.

At midnight, Beverly took Annie for a walk in the park. At first, all was silent save for the cry of an owl. Then suddenly she said, "I heard a sound that I'd never heard before. It was like the bellowing of a small moose." She hoped that it was the mama deer, although Annie didn't seem to react.

# Little Orphan Annie

By: Barbara Nefer

At a tree across from Sally's house, Annie laid down as though she knew the spot and was supposed to be there. Beverly slipped off the leash and waited across the street for half an hour, but no mama appeared. Finally Beverly told the missing mother, "If you want your baby, you have to do more than bellow!" She took Annie back home for a feeding and nap.

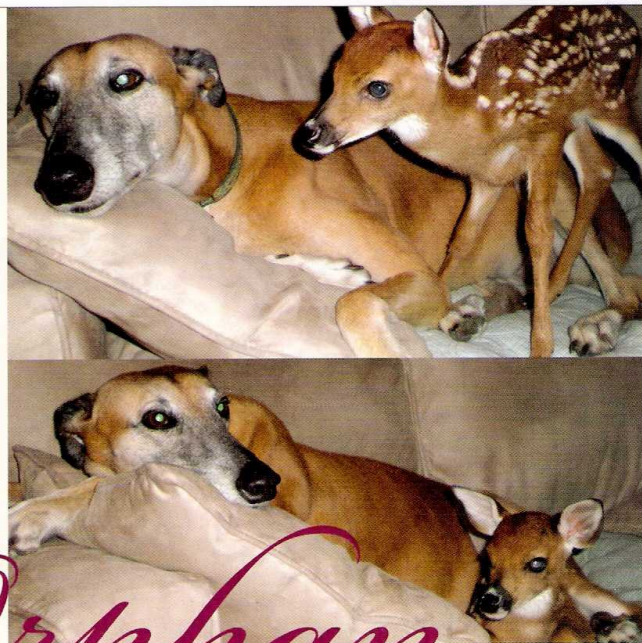
At 4:30 in the morning, she awoke to drive her husband to the airport, praying as she dressed that Annie's mother would finally show herself. She quietly opened the door, and it looked as though a deer was standing at the spot where Annie had been lying! Beverly said, "I was afraid that it was just wishful thinking, but as I walked toward the tree, I saw that it really was a deer."

Carefully, she brought Annie out and put her as close as possible to the deer without frightening it away. Then she slipped across the street and watched breathlessly as the deer approached the little fawn. She backed up so she wouldn't disturb them and watched as they touched noses and Annie began rooting at the big deer's udder. It was definitely her missing mother!

They headed toward the woods, but Annie stopped for a moment and looked back in a silent goodbye to her human helper. Then her dear mama came back for her, and they both disappeared into their forest home.

Beverly said, "I feel like this was a gift from God. It was a real blessing to have this experience, and an answer to my prayers that we were able to reunite Annie with her mother." ■

Barbara Nefer is a free-lance writer in Celebration, Florida, and a member of the Celebration Writers Group.



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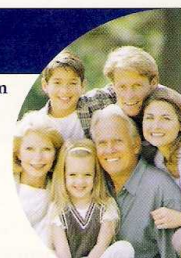
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