

THE DAY THE LITTLE MERMAID WAS FOUND

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The phone call came at about 8:45am on Wednesday April 7, 2010. It was from Laura Jones, Salt Lake City Police Department. She handles the "Tips for Cash" program for the Department. She and I had set up a meeting with Detective Kim Steed, SLPD for later that afternoon at Detective Steed's office. Detective Steed works out of the Pioneer Precinct right here in the Poplar Grove neighborhood. The three of us and my wife, Ila Rose, and daughter Charlotte were going to meet to make a reward flyer for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the criminals who stole the statue.

But Laura's phone call was not about the meeting. Her first words; "Fred, the Little Mermaid has been found!"

I jumped up from the dining room table as she said "yes, she was found in the Peace Gardens and the Crime Scene investigators are going there now." She told me to call the news reporters and go over there, but not mention her name.

It was a most exhilarating feeling as I walked back and forth around the dining room during that phone conversation.

I called the media as she suggested. First to KTVX ABC4, for reporter Jessica, who interviewed me on April 1st for the first story about our

“Reward/Recovery/Replacement” fund. I then called Sheena McFarland, Salt Lake Tribune reporter who interviewed me for a similar story on April 5th, and who also did a story on March 10th about the theft of the statue.

Then I, my wife and cousin Frank went to the Peace Gardens. We got there at the same time that the crime scene investigators got there. I met Detective Steed for the first time (after talking with her several times on the phone) and Sergeant Steven Wooldridge who deals with these type crimes. And Antonio, the SL Parks Dept volunteer/employee – the hero of the day – who discovered the Little Mermaid hidden in dense shrubbery not far from her home.

We stood clear of the officers as they did their work at the scene, took several photographs, thanked Detective Steed and Sergeant Wooldridge and then headed for the greenhouse where we were told Antonio had taken the statue when he found her.

Charlene allowed us into the greenhouse. And there she was on the floor in front of a sofa with a crocheted afghan on the seat behind her. It was a comfortable feeling – as if a missing child had been returned safely home. A ray of sunshine illuminated the little statue’s back, showing only minor dings and scratches. She appeared as if tired and relieved from her ordeal. Where had she been since late February? That is a month and a half! The mystery remains since there were no answers from the crime scene investigation.

So now the Reward/Recovery fund had a new purpose. The statue had aged over some 50+ years in addition to the minor injuries from this latest ordeal. It needed repairs and restoration.

Later that day, I learned from Val Pope, Salt Lake City Parks Department, that the Salt Lake Arts Council had a grant of funds to do certain specific work in the Peace Gardens. He said Roni Thomas of the Arts Council had contacted him and told him that work on the Little Mermaid statue was not a part of their grant application but that they could still help with the restoration cost.

She also asked Val how to contact me to see if the Reward/Recovery fund might also be available for help with this cost.

Later it was assigned to Kevin Maag, president of Metal Arts Foundry in Lehi, Utah, to do the repairs and restoration for a fee of \$2450. When Roni informed me about the fee, I told her I would ask for pledges to cover up to half of the fee, \$1225. (To date, \$832 has been collected from the pledges.)

Glen Richards from the Arts Council and I delivered the statue to the foundry where the restoration work was completed and when it was returned to the Parks Department Val Pope invited me to come and see to take some additional pictures. The statue and mounting was done beautifully by Kevin and his crew

The rededication of the Little Mermaid statue will be on August 21, 2010, during the annual Peace Garden Festival.

There is speculation that the Danish Ambassador will be in attendance. It will be a very special occasion.