



BLACKIE, THE SQUIRREL

A Tale from the Past

Way back in September 1993, before Second Chance was Second Chance, I received a call from a citizen in Rockville, MD. She and her family were long-time squirrel feeders and knew each animal on sight. They were particularly fond of a year old black male squirrel named, appropriately, Blackie. On returning from a vacation, Blackie, his left front foot and leg grotesquely swollen, appeared for a hand-out. The citizen, Lois Wall, wanted to know if I could help the squirrel if they could catch him. Without seeing the animal, I could only promise to do my best.



The Wall's set a live trap and, after about a week of catching and releasing several healthy specimens, Blackie, battered and forlorn, finally entered the trap. He was delivered to me immediately. As horribly swollen as the foot was on arrival, Mrs. Wall assured me it had looked worse. The lower leg was nearly hairless and was 3 to 4 times normal size, the toes appearing as little buds. Numerous wounds peppered the leg and foot. I administered an antibiotic and arranged to have him seen by Dr. Piety at Wheaton Animal Hospital as soon as possible.

X-rays confirmed that all the toes were crushed. Blackie had probably been caught in a trap and may have bitten at his own leg and foot in an effort to free himself. The toes were a lost cause and had to be amputated. Blackie was returned to my care with instructions to continue the antibiotic and to soak and re-wrap the leg daily. Fully conscious, an adult squirrel, even injured, will not allow that kind of treatment so Blackie was sedated each day and the leg was gently soaked and re-banded. As time passed, the swelling decreased and the wounds healed.

Finally, the daily sedation and soaking was no longer necessary but the antibiotic injections were required for several more days. On the last scheduled antibiotic day, I netted Blackie, as usual, gave him the shot and asked a volunteer to keep him on the floor, under the net, while I quickly cleaned his cage. Just as I was ready to return him to his "home", he shoved his nose under the net and was off like a shot. Now, my animal room was cramped and cluttered with any number of nooks and crannies for a frightened animal to hid in but Blackie headed straight for the one corner where a hole had been chewed through the paneling by a previous escapee groundhog. My efforts to net my "friend", and I use the term loosely, resulted in him squeezing through the hole.

As I pondered how I would ever recapture Blackie, I also wondered how I would explain to Mrs. Wall that her nearly recovered squirrel was fine but was somewhere in the walls of my home. All day, I could hear Blackie frantically gnawing away. Could he actually chew through to the outside and escape? I tried tapping on the outside wall hoping to scare him back into the room but he was too smart. I left the room for several hours hoping he would feel safe enough to leave his haven. No luck! That evening, with no sign of the squirrel, I set a live trap in front of the hole and went to bed with my fingers crossed. Next morning, to my delight, Blackie was in the trap. I returned him to his cage, breathed a sigh of relief and promptly nailed a board over the hole.

That afternoon, a young boy and his mother arrived with an injured bird. As I examined it, I heard a gnawing sound from the corner of the room and tried to think what animal was being housed in that area that would be chewing. As I turned to look, I was horrified to notice the door to Blackie's cage standing wide open. I quickly confined my "bird in the hand" and spotted Blackie chewing frantically at the patch over the hole. I grabbed a net and, as the boy watched with great glee and the mother shrieked in terror, I went after my ungrateful patient. After several races around the room, I finally caught the dear creature, returned him to his cage and wired the door securely shut. I also decided Blackie was fit for release!

I arranged for a final vet check and, on October 22, 1993, I bid a fond farewell to Blackie as he rode away in the Wall's car. A few days later, I received the following note "from Blackie."

Dear Chris:

Just a note to thank you and let you know how much I appreciate all you did to care for my crushed toes and broken bones.

I know I was mean and nasty at times. Especially when you snatched and stabbed me so many times with all those needles!

I'm sorry I was such a nuisance leading you a merry chase around your hospital, but I sort'a enjoyed it and thought it fun (cages aren't much fun, you know). I had to do somethin' cause I got bored and wanted to prove to you that I was getting well and strong again.

I was really angry and nervous after being admired and welcomed back to Rockville. The fresh air, sunshine and grass beneath my feet again felt so good! I ran like a dart up trees and out of sight and haven't been back to Mom and Pop Wall's yard since.

I know they're all looking for me and have goodies for me too, but I'm proving my independence after 7 weeks of confinement. I'll think about them later. Right now I'm enjoying life again, thanks to you.

Love and scratches,

"Blackie" XO

A subsequent Christmas card from the Wall's assured me all was well. Blackie was a regular visitor, once again. An enclosed photo showed a fat and sassy squirrel managing nicely despite his disability. I thought that would be the end of the story and I filed Blackie away in the back of my mind.

Then, out of the blue, I received a note from the Wall's around Easter of this year.

Dear Chris:

Don't know if you remember me or not, but I'm the one that brought you "Blackie", a black squirrel about two and a half years ago (I think!). He had to have all his toes removed from his left front foot due to a trap. Upon being returned to our neighborhood he disappeared (as you thought he would) for several months. Then, he was back to being a regular backdoor visitor daily for about a year.

All of a sudden, he stopped coming. No sight of him anywhere in the neighborhood. Neighbors hadn't seen him either. Everyone on the look-out for him. We gave up hope as days, weeks & months passed. We assumed traffic (although we never saw him as "road pizza") or a predator had gotten him since he could not defend himself as well as the others.

Well, you probably guessed...he appeared in our backyard today healthy & strong! I observed his foot via binoculars. Went outside with peanuts, called him by name...he listened, looked around and came running right to me for those peanuts!

My husband shared in my excitement & pleasure! We were so happy to see him again after probably more than a year. Sure would love to know where he's been all this time! I immediately thought of you -- the lady who gave him a second chance at life!

Who would appreciate my story of finding my long-lost friend again but someone who loves God's creatures as much as I do! It makes my Easter and my Spring a bit more joyful!

After such a severe winter, and feeding 14 of his cousins daily through the blizzard, etc. you'd think we'd have seen him then. (He probably found someone else with a supply of peanuts.) He's aging gracefully!

Thanks again for all you did for him. Hope all is well with you and your family.

Happy Spring!

Love, Lois Wall

Thank you, Mrs. Wall, for making my Easter and Spring a bit more joyful, too, and for allowing me to publish your lovely letters. When people ask me if all the effort to rehab an animal works or is worth it, I know how I'll answer..."Let me tell you about Blackie!"

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