



A BLESSED EVENT AT SECOND CHANCE

Mid-June 1996, the Gaithersburg Animal Control van pulls up in front of Second Chance. The officer is apologetic as she presents a nearly comatose squirrel. The animal had been hit by a car. She was going to take it in to be euthanized but it was a "yard pet." The citizen was so distressed about the animal's injury that the officer decided to give it a "second chance."

The squirrel was clearly well-fed but was no match for a car. Essentially unresponsive, it was bleeding heavily from the nose and mouth. The prognosis for recovery was grim but we did our best to make it comfortable.

For the next several days, the large female remained extremely lethargic neither eating or drinking. She was given fluids by mouth several times a day; her fat reserves would have to keep her going until she felt like eating. By July 1st, the squirrel was much improved. Although still walking in circles, she was eating and drinking on her own. Whether she would ever fully regain normal movement was still a big question.

By late July, the squirrel seemed to be spending most of her time in her nest box making it difficult to observe her movements. Because she made very little mess, her cage was only cleaned every couple of days reducing stress to the animal and volunteers. On July 31, we felt her cage and, especially, her nest box were due for a good cleaning. To the squirrel's great irritation, the box and cage tray were removed leaving her hanging indignantly to the side of the cage. As a volunteer began changing the papers and bedding in the tray, I took the nest box over to the trash can to empty the accumulated shells and left over food. As I pulled the cloth out of the box, my jaw dropped open in amazement. There, among the shells and debris, were two tiny baby squirrels no more than a day or two old. The adult must have become pregnant just before being hit by the car. I quickly returned the cloth to the box, helped finish cleaning the tray and replaced everything in the cage. I was concerned that the mother might injure or kill her babies due to the stress of the cleaning. Mom immediately scrambled back into the nest box and we listened for any sounds that might indicate the babies were in distress. After several minutes, all was quiet and we breathed a collective sigh of relief.



During the following weeks, Mom did a fine job caring for her little ones. As they grew, we were less concerned about Mom's reaction to our cage cleaning duties. When the babies were about three weeks old, they were removed briefly so the box could be cleaned. Mom had produced two perfect little males. Now, the only problem was how to release them. It seemed likely that, given the chance, Mom would race off to freedom leaving her youngsters behind. The only solution was to hold all of them until the babies were old enough to keep up with her.

On September 22, the family was transferred to a home care volunteer and placed in her outdoor squirrel cage. About two weeks later, the cage door was opened and the squirrels returned to their rightful home in the wild. All I have to figure out now is how to record on my annual report to the Department of Natural Resources how I admitted one squirrel but released three!

Reprinted from "Second Thoughts" newsletter – Winter 1997.
Copyright 1997 - Second Chance Wildlife Center, Inc.