



AMANDA



It was late afternoon, November 30, 1998, when Amanda called Second Chance. The young girl had just seen a squirrel walk over to a man. The man had picked up the squirrel, slammed it against a tree, and walked off. Although the squirrel was not moving, the girl was sure it was still alive and needed help. Amanda was home alone and had no way to get the squirrel to us. She lived in old town Gaithersburg so we told her we would call Gaithersburg Animal Control and ask them to pick up the animal. The animal control officers for the City of Gaithersburg have always been very responsive and helpful and we felt sure they would arrive soon with the injured squirrel.

About two hours later, near 6:00 PM, the phone rang. It was Amanda, in great distress. Animal Control had still not shown up and she did not know what to do to help the squirrel. Although we were short-handed, the season was slow and the young girl lived not far from our Center. Mira Millar, Clinic Supervisor, could not turn a deaf ear to the girl's pleas; she jumped in her car and hurried to the scene. The girl, only 10 or 12 years old, met Mira at the door holding the small squirrel in a towel; the animal was nearly comatose.

Once back at the Center, we examined the squirrel, immediately dubbed Amanda after her young rescuer. She was probably 8 weeks old but weighed next to nothing. In addition to being critically emaciated and dehydrated, the top of her head was badly swollen due to an accumulation of blood beneath the skin. We carefully inserted a needle into the swollen area and drew off some of the blood to try to relieve the pressure on the brain. We could feel a slight indentation in the skull and knew there was little we could do to help. We administered an anti-inflammatory drug, gave her some fluids by injection to help correct the dehydration and placed her in a heated container. We could do nothing more except wait and hope.

Next morning, we were surprised to find little Amanda still alive. Although there was not much improvement, she was certainly no worse. We offered her some diluted formula and she willingly swallowed. Every four hours, Amanda was given more formula and each feeding was less and less diluted. Finally, she was taking full-strength formula and gaining some weight. We placed some pieces of apple in her container and she eagerly attempted to nibble on them. Her coordination was very poor; head injuries often cause animals to walk in circles and Amanda was nearly doing laps around her container. Every time her circling brought her in reach of the apple, she took a few nibbles before continuing her circuitous route.

Each day, we carefully removed Amanda from her cage to bottle feed her. Her improvement was excruciatingly slow, but, it was there. By late February, her behavior was almost normal and she was eating on her own. She had plenty of time to recover because it was our slow season. Fewer animals are admitted during the winter months, so we had plenty of space to accommodate a young squirrel. Finally, in early April, the weather began to warm. It was time to get Amanda into an outdoor cage where she could complete her recovery.

Watching Amanda scamper around her cage, it was hard to believe that, less than six months earlier, she had been near death. She appeared normal in every way with no hint of neurological damage. On April 22, the door to her cage was opened and she was allowed her freedom. If she suffered any unseen handicap, we could have returned her to her cage but she quickly became undistinguishable from the many other Second Chance squirrels.

Each year, we receive a few calls concerning squirrels running up peoples' legs or trying to get into a house or office. Invariably, the squirrels are juveniles, teenagers, and have probably been orphaned. Although they have been weaned, they are unable to defend a food source from other adult squirrels. The adults, being highly territorial, will drive the youngster away and will attack and injure, or even kill, any youngster that tries to fight. We suspect that young squirrels that approach people seeking food may have been taken, by Mom, to a kindly citizen who routinely fed squirrels. The youngsters connect people with food and, when faced with starvation, will approach seeking help. They, generally, seem friendly until they have full bellies and people may think they were hand-raised or that they must have rabies! We want to believe that the man who smashed Amanda against the tree thought she was sick and that he was putting her out of her misery. The truth is, squirrels (and other rodents) rarely contract rabies. Although a speedy death is certainly better than slow starvation, giving the animal a Second Chance is even better.

Reprinted from "Second Thoughts" newsletter-Spring 1999
Copyright 1999 - Second Chance Wildlife Center, Inc.