



SIZZLE, THE SQUIRREL

Mid-January the call came from a teenage boy about a squirrel that had been found in his basement. He didn't know how it had gotten into the house or what had happened to it, but it was clearly in trouble. He had the animal in a cat carrier and was given directions to get to the Center.

Our first thought was that the squirrel had bitten through an electric cord and electrocuted itself. On closer examination, however, it did not have the distinctive wounds common to electrocution. When electricity enters a body, there is an obvious burn. In this case, we would have expected burn marks around the mouth and they really weren't present. In addition, electricity ultimately exits the body resulting in a large exit wound. There were no wounds on this animal. Instead, it appeared that the squirrel had been burned. The bottoms of all four feet were burned, especially the rear feet; the last inch of the tail was charred, all the fur and whiskers were singed and, of most concern, the eyes were heavily clouded. Somehow, this unfortunate animal must have wound up in the furnace. Her feet were cleansed and a soothing ointment applied. The rear feet were bandaged to provide some protection to the raw tissue. She was given an anti-inflammatory, an injectable antibiotic to guard against infection, a pain reliever to make her more comfortable and some rehydration fluids. An antibiotic ointment was applied to her eyes and she was settled into a cage. A medication log was written to continue the injectable antibiotic and the eye ointment, and we all crossed our fingers.

As the days passed, Sizzle became more difficult to handle. Her bandages had to be changed every couple of days and she had to be medicated twice each day. Her eyes remained clouded and we felt she must have been caught in super heated air to have suffered that sort of injury. She must have exerted incredible effort to save herself from being burned alive.

By the end of January, she was beginning to show marked improvement. Her bandages were removed and we decided her back feet had healed enough to be left uncovered. Amazingly enough, her eyes had almost completely cleared. She also seemed to be gaining a lot of weight. Sure enough, when her cage was cleaned on February 16, we discovered four tiny, newborn baby squirrels. The cage cleaning was quickly completed and we crossed our fingers that she would not hurt her babies due to stress. We were thankful that the daily wound treatment had ended before the blessed event as the constant handling might have caused her to kill her babies.

For the next several weeks, we practiced a benign neglect of Sizzle. She was fed and given fresh water but was, otherwise, left alone. We always use a full sized sheet in squirrel cages and Sizzle had dragged pretty much the entire sheet into her box. It was impossible to see how her babies were progressing. We have actually had births at the Center before and usually see the babies after four or five weeks. These little ones did not show themselves for eight to ten weeks. We knew they were alive and well, but Momma Sizzle kept them well protected and out of sight.

By May 15, Mom appeared to be in perfect shape except for the loss of the tip of her tail. She and her babies were transferred to an outdoor cage to prepare for release. On May 30, the young man who had originally rescued Sizzle, took her and her family back to release in his yard. The teenager, in fact, became a volunteer at Second Chance and showed up weekly during the summer to help care for our other patients.

We hope Mom teaches her babies to stay out of houses and, especially, furnaces!

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