



AN UNLIKELY SURVIVAL

It was early November 2002 when the officer from Rockville City Community Services arrived with a young, male opossum. The officer indicated that the animal appeared to be in pretty bad shape and may have to be put to sleep but he really wanted to give it a second chance.

When I examined "Stubby," I felt the officer was right. The young 'possum had damage to its right eye that probably was irreparable, a broken front leg, a deep wound near the tip of its tail, and a tongue that was cut so deeply it was nearly severed. Large blood clots filled its mouth making it difficult, initially, to assess the extent of the injury. We did not know what had caused these wounds, so we cleaned the mouth out as best we could and started antibiotics; further treatment would have to wait until the next day when our vet was scheduled to work.

When Dr. Klein arrived the following morning, her first patient was Mr. 'Possum. The most critical injury was the lacerated tongue since it was nearly impossible for the 'possum to close its mouth, let alone eat, with the tip of its tongue dangling. A little skilled stitchery and the tongue was made whole. Nothing much could be done for the damaged eye, and the broken leg and injured tail would have to wait.

By the following day, Stubby was feeling much better and was beginning to eat soft food. Over the next week or so, harder food was added until he was eating a normal 'possum diet. The next problem to attend to was the broken leg.

With x-rays displayed, Dr. Klein started the delicate process of inserting a metal pin through the two pieces of bone to bring them back together. Once again, the 'possum took a couple of days to fully recover from the ordeal. The tail injury was minor and could wait until Stubby was at full strength.

By January, we decided it was time to repair the damaged tail. The deep laceration had resulted in the death of the tip of the tail and it had to be removed. A 'possum without a tail is seriously handicapped and probably cannot survive in the wild but Stubby only needed an inch or so removed. Once healed, he had a good chance for a normal life. The surgery was uneventful and he was again made comfortable and given time to recover from this final ordeal.

By the time all the surgeries had been completed, we were deep into a severe winter. Our young 'possum spent the cold months in the lap of luxury dining on the finest cuisine and snoozing on the softest bedding available.

Finally, early April brought moderate weather and a chance to release our slightly Stubby 'possum. After six months, he was returned to his home in the wild. This is one of the cases that gladdens the hearts of even long time Second Chance staff and volunteers. When he first arrived, many of us wondered if it would be kinder to put him out of his misery; however, we try to give every animal a second chance. In this case, the efforts of Dr. Klein were richly rewarded and part of nature was returned to its home.

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