



MIRACLE BUNNY

By Chris Montuori

Mid-April the call came in: a cat had brought home a baby rabbit. It appeared unharmed, its eyes were open and it was well-furred. Because it was so small, I suggested it be released where it came from in the hope it would reunite with its mother. Although weaned, young bunnies rely on Mom as an early warning system. Mom also helps attract the attention of predators and can lead them away from her babies. The citizen was also given the option of bringing the baby to me or to keep it herself until it got a bit older. The citizen, a regular “customer,” knew how bust I was and decided to keep it herself, following my directions. I told her what foods to offer it, wished her good luck and encouraged her to call me of problems developed.

Several days later, the citizen, nearly hysterical, contacted me again. After an evening out, she returned home to discover the babysitter had left the bathroom door open. In the bathroom, in an open box, was the bunny. Her other cat had grabbed the bunny and seriously injured it. The citizen was devastated. She had tried so hard to do the right thing only to have the unthinkable happen. I told her to bring the bunny to me and I would do the best I could for it. On April 17, 1994, the bunny arrived. The citizen was so upset she could not watch as I examined the pitiful little creature. A large swath of fur and skin was been torn from its back and left hip, leaving muscle exposed. My first inclination was to quickly end its suffering; bunnies simply do not survive this kind of injury. However, the woman was so stricken with guilt and grief, I promised I would try.

I cleaned the wound as best I could, applied an antibacterial ointment and covered the raw area with a type of artificial skin, I started a course of oral antibiotics and hope for the best. Each morning I expected to find the bunny dead in its cage and each morning it surprised me. Twice a day, every day, the citizen called for a status report. When told the bunny was still alive, she would drop by with fresh clover and enough cut-up fresh fruit and vegetables to feed not only “her” bunny but every other fruit eating creature in residence.

On April 24, I attended a talk by a respected wildlife veterinarian. Among other things, he showed slides of bunnies with injuries similar to our little miracle bunny and reconfirmed that euthanasia was in order. I wished I had had the foresight to take before and after pictures. By the end of April, I removed the artificial skin. A nice protective scab had formed and the bunny was eating and growing. As it grew, the size of the injury in relation to body area decreased. Finally, the scab began flaking off to reveal well-healed, normal looking skin. On May 11, almost one month after admission, the bunny got a ride to the country (Dickerson, MD) and was released. The size of the scar was insignificant and the bunny took off like a shot. The morning of May 12, I had the great pleasure of telling the citizen that her fresh clover was no longer needed.

This is just one of the many case histories that make the decision to euthanize so difficult. Though most cases like this do not have happy endings, you really have to give each animal that second chance.

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