

Anything's Possumable!

Nancy Meier

Photography: Clarann Vanderveen

Our love affair with opossums started a number of years ago, but of the many orphaned and injured we have cared for, this particular opossum needed to have her story told as she is one of the few to survive a car “attack”.

On Thursday, May 25th I received a call from WINC telling me there was a HBV (hit by vehicle) opossum with babies being brought into the center. It was unknown how many babies – did we have space for some. Of course as opossum parents there's always room for more and the answer was yes. When we got to WINC that night, imagine our surprise to see “mom” with a pouch full of babies. No one had mentioned that “mom” had survived the car “attack”. She was in pretty rough shape with a broken jaw, popped out eye and a cut on the side of her chest. We got her set up at home, still not knowing how many babies she had as she was very protective and they continually moved around, in and out of her pouch.

Two days later she still wasn't eating or drinking much, her eye had popped out again and her side was showing signs of infection so we started her on antibiotics. It became obvious her eye was not going to remain in the socket and would need to be removed. Dr. John Cheslak, a veterinarian at Merton Veterinary Clinic, who graciously performs surgeries at the center on his own time and at no cost to WINC, agreed to look at her and remove the eye. On Memorial Day, Dr. John performed the surgery that saved “mom”. He not only removed and sutured shut her eye, but wired her jaw together to help it heal (it was broken lengthwise). The wound on her side had developed a large amount of dead/dying tissue so he removed what he safely could without damaging any nerves, put in a drainage tube, and stitched it up. Now it was all up to her.

Before her surgery we also had to make the difficult decision to remove her babies from her as she was going to need all her strength to heal. We found she had a total of 12 little ones who were all big enough to be hand raised and all were released wild, happy, and healthy a few months later.



Opossum “mom” looking much improved after weeks of tender care.

Opossums are very slow healers so we knew she had a long, slow road to travel. She took about a week to get her appetite back, and with the broken jaw, she could only eat soft foods. Finally, she began to regain her strength. A week later we removed her drainage tube and her stitches were removed a few days after that. We continued to fight infection with antibiotics for another month and she continued to grow and get stronger. Her jaw also healed enough that she could again eat harder foods. By mid July she was healed enough to move to larger outdoor caging. There, against all odds, she regained her wildness, enjoying climbing both the cage sides, as well as the logs available to her. All her injuries continued to heal and as possums are known to have poor eyesight, having only one eye never slowed her down. Her nose found all the foods we ‘hid’ in her cage and her somewhat crooked jaw ate everything. As you can see by her picture, her story ended happily when we released her back to the wild on August 27th.