

It All Began With Eve



By Karen Zach, Around the County

Thursday, October 31, 2019 4:00 AM

This week I'm featuring a most interesting local gal who loves to travel, especially to the Tennessee Mountains but can't go anywhere much because of all her babies. She sleeps very little ... because of her babies. Although she has two grown, tame ones of her own, these babies are wild ones. In fact, she is a certified Wildlife Rehabilitator.

Having grown up in the country, she was always around animals of all kinds and forever had a fascination and love for them. People would ask her as a youngster about what to do in a certain situation in regards to their animals. Definitely, she's a natural, plus has studied and read about them since back in childhood days. That's not her only interest in reading, though, as she loves Nicholas Sparks, an occasional mystery as long as it's not scary and some history such as the Holocaust. Plus animals, of course!

Just this year she has cared for, nurtured, fed, nursed and set out to reenter the wild about 120 animals. She does mammals, so coons, skunks, squirrels, groundhogs, chipmunks, and rabbits, basically. No coyotes, fox or deer because of the amount of space they take. She has three volunteer assistants, one who comes from Carmel, this one studying to become a rehabber. Freely, she admits that it is hard to keep good volunteers as mainly the concept is that it's so fun to cuddle the cute little baby squirrel, or rabbit. Then reality sets in – time to clean the cages!

When she first started this trip (over 30 years ago) it began with something more exotic than mentioned above, a ball Python named Eve. The plan was to get something that wouldn't some day eat her children. Eve is sweet, she says and never made an advance to do any such thing. Of course, a snake isn't a particularly good pet for all plus they take a lot of work. Eve and she used to go on a lot of school visits when they were both younger. Too many strict regulations now for that.

All her "babies" take a lot of work. They need fed about every two hours, cages cleaned daily, shots or other care. Each raccoon costs about \$200 in the rehab process mainly because she chooses to vaccinate them. Many rehabbers do not vaccinate because of the cost. Her thoughts on that are, "When I spend all the money, time and love on them, then send them out to the wild, I want to make sure they have the best percentage of a chance to live."

It is much harder to tackle rehabbing nowadays because there is so much paperwork, money needed, and then there's that test. She says even though she knows so much the test is very hard, and she studies for it in great detail. I can relate! Born two days after Christmas, she is a Southmont graduate. Knew her husband when they were younger. After high school, they reconnected and that was 31 years ago plus two children. Meet Noel Richardson (hubby Paul who got a bad double ear infection thus I didn't get to interview him but known him for years – he coached a couple of our grandsons). Noel says that Paul is her cage builder (she wasn't sure how many they had but guesstimated 40) and basically moral support. He also works at Laticrete International (make grout for tile) as head of Corporate Maintenance. Daughter Tiffany who is a dog groomer in Lafayette (they also have son Jake who lives in Evansville and is a field technician for Crown Lift) is also on her license so she helps with transportation, releases and such.

Noel loves other babies as well and taught in a preschool plus worked at Waveland Elementary school for ten years. Definitely a nurturer!

Names. Yep, they name each and every one and she encourages the people bringing them in to come up with a name. Then she puts the progress on FB. "Many of them start out on death's door." One little three year old brought in a skunk so she asked what the name should be. "Call him Bunny," so Bunny it was for a skunk.

Noel loves to teach her babies to fish, hunt (berries, grubs). She is quite interested in opossums (they eat 5,000 ticks each year so yep, they're odd little creatures but they do so much good). She rarely goes a day without someone checking with her and can get up to ten calls a day. One lady recently brought in an animal and said, "I was here 10 years ago!"

The funniest was a call to come and get a raccoon that had been hit by a car. She rushed to get it but it was nowhere to be found. "Well, how do you know it was hit by a car?" Lady: "I saw it, then I called 911!" Not exactly a 911 call, there!

Donations are essential in Noel's business, hobby, love -- baby toys (no batteries), foods, fruits, veggies, baby and pet foods (dry or wet), receiving blankets (even with stains, the babies won't care), towels, bleach, laundry detergent, Lysol and baby wipes. I was hoping to top this article off with a picture of Noel and Lazarus but she scrolled through her thousands of pictures on her phone and saw none of her and the animals, not a one. Well, there was a hand here and there as she held one up and snapped the photo with the other hands, but overall, just the animal. Lazarus is a squirrel (her favorite to watch and work with) and he can't stand but a short time then falls over.

Completely blind, he has no balance really. Some rehabbers would have euthanized Lazarus but she adores him and he's getting along just fine! I so admire this lady for saving so much of our area wildlife (released with permission of property owners of course) in her little domain they lovingly call "Critter Corner!"



Karen Zach is the editor of Montgomery Memories, our monthly magazine all about Montgomery County. Her column, Around the County, appears each Thursday in The Paper of Montgomery County.