

Kayak's Story

By P.J. Mattus



A young man stood at our front door, “I’m Zak and I’m here to video a hedgehog”. While he proceeded to bring in his equipment and set it up, I thought back over the events of the past year. How our lives were changed by a special little guy named Kayak.

One year ago, I was contacted by a man. He said that his hedgehog had babies, and one of them was very sick and couldn’t stand. He wasn’t able to take care of the baby and was going to have it put to sleep. I asked him to bring the baby to me. I immediately made an appointment with our vet for the next morning.

It was a very cold, rainy October night. My husband and I met the man at a gas station. He pulled out a small fish tank with wood chips and a pitiable creature inside. I reached in, scooped him up and placed him inside a warm hedgehog cuddle bag, leaving everything else behind.

When we got home, we started by making sure he was warm enough. I had a heating pad on my lap and we warmed a towel in the dryer. We could tell he was very small and was unable to stand on his own. We syringe fed him Pedialyte and Hills A/D. Once he tasted the Hills A/D, he gobbled up as much as we would let him have. We didn’t want to shock his body by giving him too much at one time, so we fed him small amounts every few hours, throughout the night.

The next morning, when we uncovered him on the examination table, our wonderful vet Dr. Hawley couldn’t help but utter a heartfelt “Awwwe” and scoop him up into her arms. I’ve never loved a vet more than at that moment. He weighed only 64 grams – and that’s after being fed. She prescribed antibiotics, gave him subcutaneous fluids, and changed the name on his chart from “baby hedgehog” to “Kayak”.

For the next several days, we continued to feed Kayak every few hours and give him subcutaneous fluids. Two days later, we brought him back to Dr. Hawley, 20 grams heavier and with a shine of hope in his eyes. Although he still couldn't stand on his own, we could all tell that he was improving. He was fighting, and so were we. She prescribed more antibiotics and an anti-inflammatory. Thankfully, I no longer had to give him fluids subcutaneously.

About this time, we started giving him mealworms, the recently shed ones that were soft and white. He was hooked and would lunge for them with great gusto! We discovered that he could walk a little now, if he was supported. So we would do a sort of physical therapy, where he would walk while we held him, hand over hand over hand. Twelve days after coming to us, we felt he had improved enough for his first Carolina Storm Bucket Wheel. It has become his favorite thing in the world.

And now, one year later, a young man is in my living room asking me questions about this amazing little hedgehog. What has he taught us? Why do we rescue? Then I take him to meet his very first hedgehog. Kayak wakes up very grumpy. He's gotten used to the easy life of a hedgehog. Sleeping all day, cuddles and snacks with Mom and Dad, then running every night. I think it's the running he likes best.

Zak takes the video of Kayak doing what Kayak does best – being adorable. He runs around the living room floor. We take him outside in the grass. He proudly wears his orange "Super Kayak" cape and shows off his skills – running in his wheel, playing with his skateboard, tubing. Watching him, I wonder if he even remembers being sick.

Kayak finishes the video shoot with a bath and cuddles with a new friend. As Zak packs up to leave, I think to myself, "What HAS he taught us-all of us? Why DO we rescue?" And then I smile – because I know...

