



Mama Coyote

It started out as a usual Arizona day with overcast skies and intermittent rain. After dropping the boys off at school, I headed home to do some reading for my veterinary residency. Just one pit stop at Geri's to pick up the sunglasses I left at Southwest Wildlife the day before. Geri met me in the driveway and seemed very distressed. She had just received a phone call regarding an injured coyote and no one was available to help. I weighed the options. Coyote tracking sounded much more exciting than reading. Besides, it was only 9am and how long could it take? With the truck packed with poles, darts, nets, blankets, and crates, we set off on our conquest.

The coyote was located in a relatively urban area. The citizen who called said the coyote was bleeding from a mangled front leg and had not moved. She was not sure if the coyote was still alive. Once on location, we followed the blood trail into the bushes and approached cautiously. The coyote took one look at us, armed with all our gear, and bolted. She was astoundingly agile. She leaped out from under the bushes, ran across the cul-de-sac, and scaled a 6-foot block wall—on 3 legs! She continued along the wall and went into a neighboring back yard. That neighbor allowed us to pass through his house and into the yard where, to our dismay, the coyote leaped over a picket fence into a vacant lot.

Concern began to set in because our worthy opponent was on an adrenaline high and loosing a significant amount of blood. Reluctantly, Geri and I packed up the truck and drove down the adjoining street. Stopping at the vacant lot, we could see the neighbor peering over his fence and pointing. We knew the coyote was near. I was able to spot her lying between a chain link fence surrounding the back yard of another neighborhood house and a block wall.

Scanning the vacant lot we saw several piles of cement blocks and 2 trailers surrounded by a large chain-link fence. We formulated a plan: we would climb over the fence and use the cement blocks and trailer as cover. I slipped over the fence. Geri handed over the supplies and pondered how to get over. She pointed out that she was not as young as I and did not have the advantage of pointed boots. After a few words of encouragement, she proceeded to investigate the length of the fence. Not finding another way in, she climbed over. It wasn't the most graceful attempt, but it was successful.

With the darts loaded, we proceeded toward the coyote's position. The element of surprise was vital to our endeavor. But our positions were soon given away. A couple of very large, barking dogs emerged like lightening from that neighboring house. I was feverishly praying there were no breaks in that chain link fence. The dogs eventually became aware of the coyote wedged between their fence and the block wall. This actually worked to our advantage. The dogs inadvertently cornered the coyote, took the focus off us, and enabled me to engage the blow dart.

One small problem—we had to make sure that the dart didn't ricochet and end up in the dogs' back yard! A foreign body surgery was not part of the plan and I wasn't thrilled at the prospect of explaining the situation to the dogs' owners: "We're very sorry, but we were attempting to dart a coyote with a mangled leg and your dog ate the dart."

As the sedative took effect, Geri and I juggled monitoring the coyote and heading off possible coyote escape routes. Finally, sedation overtook the coyote. Relieved, we gathered up the coyote, our gear, and resolve, and headed back over the fence, thankful we were on our way to Sonora Veterinary Specialists with only one critter.

In the end, that mangled front leg had to be amputated. Because animals carry most of their weight on their front legs, she was not a good release candidate. However, because she was wild-born and -raised, she was an excellent candidate for an important job at Southwest Wildlife. She will be a "foster mother" to coyote pup orphans, teaching them the coyote skills they will need when they are mature enough to be released.

Plus, more than one life was saved that day, as she had pups a few weeks later! It made the adventure and effort well worth it. Never let any fence prevent you from attaining your goals, no matter how impossible it may seem.