I suppose it was fate that I ran out of coffee that morning. I went out to get a cup, and on the drive home, something darted into the street. It was a dog—skin and bones with no collar. I raced home and returned with a leash, collar, and treats. It took me about an hour to catch her.

That was two years ago, and Moops is now a happy girl who loves hiking and camping. I love the way she flops over for belly rubs even when I just look at her from across the room.

I took this picture one fall afternoon when we were burning sticks in the fire pit. Moops was lying in the grass and chewing a stick. She looked so vibrant and happy.

— Amy Susney, Hampton, New Jersey
IN 2013, I FOUND A TINY, loudly crying mouse stuck on a glue trap at a local retail store. I spent an hour trying to inconspicuously free him. I finally brought him home, where vegetable oil did the trick. The poor little guy was exhausted. He had lost fur and had blood around his nose, raw pads, and an injured right arm. My husband and I were unsure if he would survive the night.

Our veterinarian cleared him for parasites, mites, and fleas—and we gave him the moniker Marty Mouse. Although we believe in rehabilitating wildlife for release back into the wild, by the time Marty healed, he trusted us completely, which meant he was too unafraid of humans for release. He eats out of our hands, enjoys being petted, and knows his name. He loves life, and we love him!

Before this experience, I was very naive about glue traps. My husband and I are now working on a book about Marty to help spread the word about humane treatment of wildlife. We hope this will make people realize that there are nonlethal ways of dealing with rodents in homes and businesses.

— Teresa Smith, Waterloo, Illinois

WIELDING MY WEED EATER ONE DAY as I helped clean the grounds of the historic 100-year-old English Settlement School near Oakland, Ore., I noticed a ball of gray fluff near my foot. I picked it up and was surprised when I saw two large owl eyes staring at me.

Thinking he was orphaned, I called the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and was told he was a young screech owl who had probably fallen to the ground during his branching phase—when young owls glide from the nest to a perch and rest until mature enough to fly. They instructed me to place him on a nearby branch so his mother could return that night to feed and care for her baby. I went back the next day, and he was nowhere to be seen. I hoped that meant the mother had come, fed him, and urged him to fly away with her.

I can still feel that fluffy little warm body in my hand. I will be 80 years old next month, and this experience will remain one of the most special of my lifetime.

— Lois Christiansen Eagleton, Umpqua, Oregon
I FELL IN LOVE the minute I saw him—a buckskin Clydesdale mix who towered over the other rescued equines at his foster home. Sir had been seized from a cruelty situation, and one of his legs was badly swollen. Even so, his sweet disposition was obvious.

After I brought him to the 5-acre ranch near my home, I put Sir in a pen so the other animals could get to know him. My miniature donkeys kept vigil beside the pen, and when Sir would peer over the railing, they would look up and touch his nose.

Now Sir spends most of his time with his donkey friends. When they start braying, he’ll run over and check on them. Sometimes they all take off running in a game of chase. At night, Sir puts himself up in his stall, and the donkeys go in there with him.

This picture captures the life Sir now has: happy, having fun, and knowing that he is loved.

— Lisa Matthews, College Station, Texas

RISING TO A CHALLENGE

IT WAS THE FIRST WARM NIGHT of spring, about 50 degrees. My partner and I had scrambled through thornbushes and brambles to document the spotted salamanders at a vernal pool.

At the time, I was working with the Ohio Environmental Council, monitoring these seasonal wetlands that fill in the spring and drain in the summer. They’re teeming with life—salamanders, frogs, water scorpions, phantom midges, and fairy shrimp.

As we crept through the dark, I spotted this tiny spring peeper and shined my flashlight on him. I was struck by his determination to venture out in this still frosty landscape to begin his loud peeping call. This little fellow navigated icy waters, predators, and cold temperatures to find a mate and continue the cycle of life.

On that night, I witnessed the universe all wrapped up in a frog. As soon as I snapped my shot, he jumped into the darkness.

— David Celebrezze, Columbus, Ohio

LOOKING OUT FOR FRIENDS
AS I SAT ON THE STEPS one spring day watching my kids and their friends play, I noticed this dragonfly perched on the bricks by the door. I called over the kids, who were completely enchanted. We got up close and noted the amazing patterns in his wings and pearliness of his head. The kids stayed perfectly still as I took this picture. Then they decided they wanted to draw dragonflies, so I brought out paper and crayons and our porch became an impromptu art studio. We later learned it was likely a Darner dragonfly, and my son was thrilled to discover that dragonflies eat mosquitoes.

I was thankful for the bit of beauty the experience brought to my day and for the sweet fascination of my children.
— Kristen Allen, Orem, Utah

THE SUMMER AFTER I graduated high school, my grandparents took me on a three-week trip to Africa. We spent a lot of time riding on a bus because we wanted to see as much as we could. During a bathroom break at a gift shop, I was enjoying the outdoor scenery when this cat walked up to me. Her fur was dirty, but she had the most beautiful eyes. She meowed a few times and then let me and a few others pet her.

She inspires me because even though she was a stray, she still had high spirits. She didn’t care that it was muddy outside and hot. This picture will always remind me of how fortunate I am to have everything I have and help me to remember that even when times are rough, I have to make the best of it.
— Heather Mogul, Castaic, California
IN 2007, I SPENT TIME EXPLORING Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Tetons. As I was kayaking on the Snake River one evening, I heard rustling in the willows of a small island nearby. A moose emerged from the willows, walked to the water’s edge, and hesitated, looking at me as if to say, “Oh, you’re here. I was hoping to go into the water.”

As a Christian, I believe God cares profoundly about his creation. And I believe that those of us who love animals have a greater awareness of what the animals we encounter are trying to communicate. I said to the moose: “You want to come out here, so I will let you.” Then I paddled backwards to let him drink in peace.

— James Burkett, Arvada, Colorado

THE FIRST TIME I saw Pepper was the day I met up with someone selling a bicycle on Craigslist. She was only 2 months old and huddled in the corner, looking scared and not well cared for. I asked to hold her, and when she put her little head on my shoulder, I knew I had to take her home.

She’s now 4 years old and so smart and loving. This photo was taken at a local dog beach. People were laughing as Pepper flew over the waves, running back and forth from blanket to ocean and retrieving her ball. We love how curious and brave she can be for such a little dog. She makes us smile every day!

— Klaudia Seidl, Huntington Beach, California