

Story of Mama Dog – Part One

Here is the story of Mama dog (actually named Makwa - but only gets called that when she's naughty 😈).

In February 2023, a Facebook post was desperately shared trying to find a rescue who could take a three-legged pregnant dog, who also happened to be wild. She had been being fed by a caring member of the Red Lake reservation community for several years, however had always outwitted human attempts to capture her. While rescues scrambled, and all of us prayed someone would step up, Mama delivered 7 puppies outside, without much shelter, temperatures well below zero, and a blizzard rapidly developing.

As soon as I heard she had delivered her puppies, I knew my decision now had become clear. We were taking on this little wildling and her seven puppies.



But then the discussion became HOW???

She was located a four hour drive from us in normal weather, and attempting the drive in a subzero degree blizzard was really dangerous (not that I didn't contemplate it!).

Thankfully, a more local rescue was able to coordinate straw bales to get onsite to where she was being fed, and where she had her puppies (we think under a deck). The kind man built a straw house for her and her pups, so she could be insulated against the cold - hopefully keeping her and her pups safe until weather would allow us to come and get her.

She was an awesome Mama, and while she still could not be touched or trapped, she allowed her caretaker to move her pups into the straw shelter. And she was so very smart to leave the pups there, and care for them in the straw hut. During the days of the blizzard like conditions - I spoke with the caretaker 3 or more times a day. Making sure the pups were warm, and bellies were full. The pups always seemed happy, warm, and healthy. So we waited for a break in the weather.

It took a few days before it was safe to drive. Which truly was heart wrenching. Once I'd arrive, we would have to figure out how to get the Mama and her pups captured. We knew from the caretakers experience, that as soon as he would disturb her, she would bolt and run off. So we would have to be careful and not mess up our likely one chance to capture her.

Mama Dog – Part Two

When I arrived to the location where the Mama and her pups were being sheltered, the sun was shining, but it was still a cruel 20 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

I started out observing the area, met a few of the other dogs being fed there (as I was asked to transport back as many dogs as I could fit in my vehicle - who would then be fostered at a boarding facility local to me, until a rescue was found), and hoped that the Mama dog was inside her straw structure with her babies, and did not leave upon the arrival of a strange new vehicle.

I spoke with the caretaker for a while, and we tried to hash out a plan. As the Mama dog was our top priority - we felt we should try to capture her first, just in case she heard us wrangling the other young dogs, and would run away due to the potential commotion. He informed me that usually she would stay in the straw shelter, but as soon as he would enter - she would run out and away.

So plan number one became to block the door with a wire crate. Thankfully we were just gifted a larger crate that had a large "side" door that worked almost like a flap. Because of this design, we could completely cover the hole in the straw house, but also use the door to prevent the Mama from jumping out and over the crate. And the door could be shut quickly as soon as she was inside, without having to move the crate to allow for a swinging door. Thank goodness for small blessings like this, that just fit in perfectly to our needs!

We confirmed Mama was inside, and proceeded to block the opening while having the caretaker ready to climb inside the straw shelter as he had been for days to check on the pups. At least we had a realistic expectation of what the reaction would be, and tried to plan for any new variables as well.

With the only exit now leading right into the crate, the caretaker climbed farther in, and Mama didn't try to bolt out as fast as she had previously, giving us a little time to make the situation more appealing to her. We had the caretaker start placing the pups into the kennel, before trying to push Mama out and into it. Everything went very well, and Mama only raced out into

the kennel, and back into the straw shelter once. But seemed to have that incredible intelligence that we were there to help her and her pups.

Once all the pups were in their cozy blanket in the crate, her caretaker encouraged her to move out of the shelter, and into the crate. She took just a little encouragement, but truly it wasn't all that bad. Once the door was shut, we quickly carried the carrier into my warm car, and then went on to catch two more youngsters and place them into the rest of the space available in my vehicle.

Mama laid down with her pups, and while you could tell she was pretty frozen and fearful, she never offered to bite and always continued to care for her pups.



I checked on everyone a few times during the 4 hour drive back home, and tried to coordinate with the boarding facility to get the other two dogs dropped off since we would arrive back after their closing time. Thankfully things seemed to fall mostly into place. The boarding facility wanted the dogs vaccinated before arrival, and I do not carry vaccinations at my practice any longer. So my son ran to a friends vet clinic (also closing before I'd arrive home) - and picked up the vaccines for me. Ramie had been working on preparing a heated horse stall for Mama and puppies while I had been driving as well. This seemed the best possible set up for a dog who only knew the outdoors, and had never been on a leash in her life.

We could keep her somewhat confined in the stall, but still offer places to pee and poop if she was not willing to go on a leash quite yet (they rarely will for the first few days, they are far too

worried about the leash than the fact that they have to eliminate!). It was a quiet corner of the barn as well, so offered a bit more privacy than a busy home with other animals (who for sure would be crazy curious about new puppies to sniff!)

The first night, we basically just carried the crate right into the heated stall, opened the door so she had access to food, water, rugs, a kids pool with blankets, other blankets, and a spot to pee and poop. Mama was obviously fearful - mostly resulting in her being "frozen" and not moving. She would hide her head away from us, but still allow us to handle and examine the pups, and even touch and handle her. She is such a good Mama dog.

Never have I experienced a Momma Dog and a litter such as this.

There is so much instinct. Such an insane drive to care for and teach her pups. Watching the pack dynamics is just fascinating. Kuda is the baby female that surely is selected to be the next head of the pack in Momma's eyes. Momma will steal her away from the rest of the pups and try to teach her how to hunt, how to dig a den, and it is quite a different relationship than with the rest of the puppies. A passing of the torch I guess.

When the pups were obviously weaned and Momma started reprimanding them for trying to nurse. We tried to give Momma more away time from the pups. Which she enjoys, however she has very strict schedules that she has to ensure she cares for her pups. She would be frantic at times. Crying and carrying around toys. She even chewed at the door to bring her prizes to her pups. So we figured out that she had to watch the pups eat breakfast and dinner, supervising it directly. And then she could rest for the day knowing her pups had been fed. She also will throw up her meals for her puppies if given the chance. So we have to feed the pups first, showing her they are fed. And then she can go have her breakfast or dinner.



She is the most human-like dog in terms of emotions that I've ever met. She clearly knows each and every one of her pups as we would know our own children. And seems to question who, what, when, where and why in relation to them. She's okay if they go on individual adventures as long as she is told.

Flint is the pup who Ramie adopted. And Momma clearly understands that he stays with Ramie and her dog Aleu. But returns for babysitting. Momma seemed to understand that Aleu is his big sister and they clearly had some sort of dog communication, passing that baby into Aleu's care. I know it may sound far fetched. But I can assure you. This Momma is thinking and processing every

single part of what is going on around her and with her babes.

In her previous wild state. She would have cared for the pups for many months. Showing them how to hunt and exist. There would be no magical 8 weeks old, and a puppy disappearing act. Momma most certainly does NOT act like any domesticated momma I've ever seen wean pups or interact with them later. She knows her job. She understands the assignment. Her ancient genetics are completely amazing and mind blowing.

Mama Dog Playfulness – December 2023

Prior to coming to Beyond Sanctuary, Mama Dog was not socialized with people and she really didn't know what to think about them. Having her with us has allowed that socialization of her to progress quite nicely and she knows how to trust us as her people providing care for her.

Before we left for vacation, we had my wedding ring repaired that had been smashed and then cut off by the EMTs following my horse accident. Ever since our return from vacation, Mama has turned an interesting corner. She jumps into bed with me almost each morning (as long as Winston is gone). And plays with me like I'm one of her pups. She is especially focused on my ring and tries to take it off my hand. I feel completely honored to share this behavior with her. Even though she occasionally squeezes a bit too hard. It shows how far she's come to be able to trust a human being.

I work on gentle corrections with her, and what is most successful is when I make a dog sound of "that hurts" if she squeezes too hard. She instantly looks at me and stops. Between her realizing her humans will return from a vacation, and the fact that her stump pain is no longer there following her surgery last month, she has reached a whole new level of playfulness.



Beyond Sanctuary Inc is a 501c3 charitable organization located in Minnesota. Started by Holistic Veterinarian Melissa Shelton – our goal is to provide Sanctuary for all species of animals and education for all in Holistic Animal Care. **Visit our website:** BeyondSanctuary.org • **Find us on facebook:** Beyond Sanctuary
Email: BeyondSanctuaryMN@gmail.com