

Hey everyone, my name is Michelle and I'm the wildlife rehabilitator here at the Emerald Coast Wildlife Refuge. And today we have one of our animal ambassadors, Riley, and she is a striped skunk. So Riley's story starts with being raised as an orphan skunk, but unfortunately the people had kept her far too long and had her as a pet. So where she belongs is out in the wild, but due to how she was raised, that means that she has to be kept here as one of our permanent animals to receive the care that she needs for the rest of her life. Some interesting things about striped skunks is that they are a mammal, of course, and there are two different types of skunks that we see here in Florida. We can see these striped skunks, such as Riley, but we can also see another one called a spotted skunk. So the things about skunks is that they are mammals and there are five main characteristics of mammals. First and foremost is that they of course have fur, so that's a pretty important one there. Also warm blooded, so they are similar to you and I. They are born alive, and they suckle from their Mom's milk. And last but not least, they can breathe air, just like you and I.

Today I'll be reading a few chapters from A Boy Called BAT, which is written by Elana K. Arnold, with pictures by Charles Santoso.

### **Chapter Three: No Vanilla Yogurt**

Mom was supposed to be home by 5:00 o'clock, but five o'clock came and Mom did not arrive. By 5:15 BAT wanted to call the police.

That's what we're supposed to do in case of emergency, he said to Janie. She was watching TV.

This isn't an emergency, BAT.

How do you know? It might be an emergency. You don't know for sure that it isn't an emergency.

BAT, call Mom's phone if you're so worried.

BAT didn't want to call Mom's phone. What if she was driving, and she answered when he called, and then she crashed the car?

I don't want to cause an emergency, he said.

If you had any friends to play with, Janie said, you could hang out with them on Tuesdays and Thursdays instead of being a pain in my neck.

BAT thought this was unfair, and also mean, considering that he was so worried. But before he could say anything, he heard Mom's car turn into the driveway. A warm rush of relief flooded over him. He left Janie in front of the TV and ran outside.

Mom, he said, You're late.

Easy BAT, Mom said, climbing out of the car, No need to be angry.

BAT wasn't angry. Not really, he was relieved. But instead of explaining this BAT asked, Did you go to the grocery store and get more vanilla yogurt?

I didn't have time, Mom said.

That was the last straw. Mom was late and BAT didn't have any yogurt. No vanilla yogurt. BAT felt a ball of anger rising up in his chest, hot and hard and loud, wanting to escape through his mouth in a yell. His eyes squinted together, and his hands drew up tight against the sides of his body. Mom put her hand on his shoulder and knelt down, so she could look right into BAT's eyes. But BAT didn't want to look at her eyes. He didn't want her looking at him.

Calm down, BAT, Mom said in her soothing voice, the one she saved for when BAT was getting really upset. It's OK, I had a good reason for not going to the grocery store. If you can calm yourself down, I can tell you what it is.

BAT didn't care what Mom's reason was. She should have gone to the store. She knew how much he liked vanilla yogurt, and it was her job to buy it for him. BAT didn't have any money or a car. If Mom didn't buy him yogurt, there would be no yogurt. But then Mom said it was because of an animal, a baby animal.

#### **Chapter Four: Is it a...?**

What kind of animal, asked BAT?

You'll see. Mom answered. She walked around to the back of the station wagon and opened the door.

Is it a puppy? asked BAT.

You'll see, Mom answered, taking out a Cardboard box with air holes poked into the top.

Is it a kitten? BAT asked, as he followed her to the front door.

You'll see, Mom answered.

Is it a duckling? BAT asked, as he bounced up and down, hands flapping excitedly.

You'll see, Mom answered. Open the front door for me, OK?

BAT pushed open the front door.

Is it a Hoglet? Mom laughed. Where would I get a baby hedgehog?

I don't know, BAT said, then he had an awful thought.

Is it a baby human? Mom walked into the living room, Janie still watching the TV, called out, Hey, you're late.

I know, Mom said to Janie, and then she said to BAT, BAT honey, I wouldn't put a baby human in a Cardboard box. And anyway, would a baby human be so bad?

Yes, said BAT firmly.

Well, it's not a baby human, said Mom.

Now Janie was interested. She got up to have a closer look.

What's in the box, she asked.

Mom brought home a baby animal, BAT yelled in a rush, trying to be the one to tell Janie, and that way she'd know that he had known about it first.

Jeez, BAT, don't scream in my face. 12 inches. Remember?

BAT was supposed to stay at least 12 inches away from Janie when he talked to her. She didn't like it when he got too close. There were lots of rules when it came to Janie.

How did you do on the math test? Mom asked Janie. Did the chart we made help?

BAT bounced up and down on the balls of his feet, pulling the collar of his shirt into his mouth and sucking on the fabric. They were going to talk about a math test? Now?

Mom, he groaned.

OK, OK. she said, we can talk about math later. Come on, let's go into the kitchen. There is someone I want you to meet.

### **Chapter Five: A Tiny Pink Nose**

Mom set the box on the kitchen table.

Is it sleeping? BAT asked his voice a whisper.

Probably, Mom said. Babies sleep most of the time.

What is it? Janie asked.

BAT, do you want to open the lid?

BAT didn't answer. He was too excited. Very carefully he lifted the lid of the box and peered inside. Janie stood behind him, breathing on his ear.

You're breathing on my ear, BAT said. Janie ignored him.

It's just a bunch of rags, she said. Mom walked around to the far side of the round table and reached into the box. She scooped up the pile of material and sat down.

Look! BAT watched as Mom shifted the towel in her arms. A nose peaked out, a tiny pink nose, and then two slanted, closed eyes, a forehead covered in downy fuzz, little ears still curled tight against its head.

Janie began, Is that a...?

It's a kit, BAT said, enchanted by the tiny creature wanting so badly to hold it, a baby skunk.

Oh Mom, Janie said, I can't believe you brought home a skunk.

I had to, Mom said, rubbing the skunk's little forehead with her thumb. He's an orphan.

Oh! breathed Janie. She leaned in closer, blocking BAT's view. How old is he?

You're in my way, BAT said loudly, and he pushed Janie's arm to make room for himself.

BAT, Mom said, you need to stay calm around the skunk kit, OK? You don't want to scare him.

BAT did not want to scare the skunk kit. He wanted to hold the skunk kit. Maybe even feed and care for the skunk kit, but his sister was standing in his way.

Move Janie, he hissed at her as quietly as he could hiss.

Why don't you both sit down? Mom said, I'll tell you all about him.

Jenny plopped down into the chair on Mom's right. So BAT went around to her other side and sat in the chair on her left. He scooted the chair as close to Mom's as he could. The kit was still tucked into the towel, only his little face visible. Eyes closed, he opened his mouth and yawned, his tiny pink tongue arching out.

Mom said, BAT do you remember when we smelled that skunk on the way to school this morning?

BAT did remember. They had smelled it just after they pulled off their street, Plumb Lane, and onto Anderson Road. He had smelled it, and Mom had smelled it too. BAT had craned his neck looking out each window carefully. He'd seen lots of people on bicycles. They lived near a college, and the students mostly rode bikes to class, and he'd seen other cars and some people on foot. It was the beginning of spring, but it was still cold, so he had seen lots of hats and scarves. He'd seen an American flag on a flagpole in front of the Post Office. He'd seen a red bus. He had seen a sign that read, Welcome to Quincy, Bike-Friendly Town. But he had not seen a skunk.

BAT nodded, I remember, he said.

Well, unfortunately the skunk we smelled but didn't see was the Momma skunk, a car hit her and a couple of college students brought her to my office in the basket of a bike. She was there waiting for me after I dropped you off at school, injured and very pregnant.

Is she OK? Janie asked.

I wish I could say she is, Mom answered. I wasn't able to save the mother or the other baby kits, only this one survived. I was able to check the mother for diseases though, and she luckily wasn't sick, which is a good sign. The kit isn't sick either.

That's awesome, BAT said.

BAT, said Janie, loud and sharp. The kit twitched and shifted scared by Janie's voice. How can you say it's awesome? The Mom died. The other babies died.

BAT didn't mean that it was awesome that the other skunks had died. Of course, that wasn't awesome. He meant that it was awesome that this kit had lived. But it wasn't worth it to try to explain to Janie what he'd meant. She usually misunderstood BAT. Most everyone did.

Can I? BAT reached out for the kit, wanting so badly to hold him that his fingers twitched.

We can't keep him, Mom warned. There's a wild animal rescue center that we can give him too in about a month, but they're too busy to take him just yet, so we can help him get bigger and stronger before we hand him over to the experts. They'll raise him until he's ready to be released into the wild, when he's about five months old. Then she passed the tiny kit, wrapped in towels, into BAT's arms. The kit was so small that BAT couldn't even tell he was in the towel except for the tiny face that peaked out. He cradled the bundle in his arms. He felt his face stretch into a wide smile, so wide it made his cheeks sore.

So my interest in animal care came from when I was in high school. I was originally from New York, but my family moved us down to the Great state of Florida when I was in high school, because my dad got a job over at SeaWorld in Orlando. It was so interesting to be able to visit the parks multiple times a year and see all of the different marine mammals and other animals they had in their care, and I knew, time after time, that I wanted to work with animals one day. So after high school, I ended up going to college and getting a degree in Marine Science, where I wanted to pursue working with marine mammals. I round up getting an internship where I worked really closely with dolphins and seals and sea lions. After my internship, I knew that I wanted to help animals more in just the way than I already was. I wanted to help them on the medical side of things, so I ended up becoming a veterinary technician and helping the animals under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. After several years, I wanted to help more than just cats and dogs. I wanted to help wildlife, like Riley, so I started volunteering at my local wildlife rescue center, here at the Emerald Coast Wildlife Refuge. And it turns out that I ended up getting a job here, where I turned into their chief wildlife rehabilitator. So now I spend my days rehabilitating the animals, anything that's injured or orphaned, raising them to a point where they can be released back into the wild and going home where they belong.