

Window on the West

BY LORA J. FINNEGAN



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The bear lady of Boise

■ “The two little ones are running me ragged,” Sally Maughan says, grabbing a baby bottle. Maughan sounds like any tired new mom. Then she throws a heavy blanket over her shoulder—a shield against baby’s claws—and bottle-feeds a squirming, fluffy black bear cub.

A decade ago, Idaho wildlife officials first began bringing orphan cubs to this soft-spoken woman because she had—well, the bear necessities: the skills and licensing for such wildlife rehabilitation, the time to volunteer, and acres of space at her Boise home. Now president of Idaho Black Bear Rehab, Maughan is hailed around town—and, increasingly, around the nation—as “the bear lady.”

Each spring, Maughan gets a new crop of orphans. “Cubs grow through stages like kids—only faster,” she observes. “They start small and cute, then by the end of the year, they’re independent and very impulsive, like teenagers.” She’s raised 36 bears to “successful release,” as officials say, or as Maughan puts it, “They took their place in the wild without becoming a nuisance to humans.”

As winter nears and these two cubs grow larger, Maughan knows it will soon be time to return them to the wild. It’s tough to let go of bears she’s grown fond of, but it’s the whole point of her work. Why does she do it? “I can’t imagine a world without bears,” she says, “and I wouldn’t want to live in one.” ♦