

Rescued by an Angel

BY CHERYL BEESON
PHOTOS BY MONTE STILES

"THE END OF FEBRUARY OUR YOUNGEST BABY YET ARRIVED. JUST 3-4 WEEKS OLD, EYES STILL CLOSED, AND THE MOST PRECIOUS BUNDLE OF BLACK FUR YOU CAN IMAGINE. Shenandoah Bright will remain with us until December." These are the words Sally Maughn wrote after receiving one of her most memorable babies. Shenandoah Bright is not a puppy, or an abandoned kitten, Shenandoah Bright is an abandoned black bear. Not Sally's first and certainly not her last, but most definitely one of Sally's favorites.

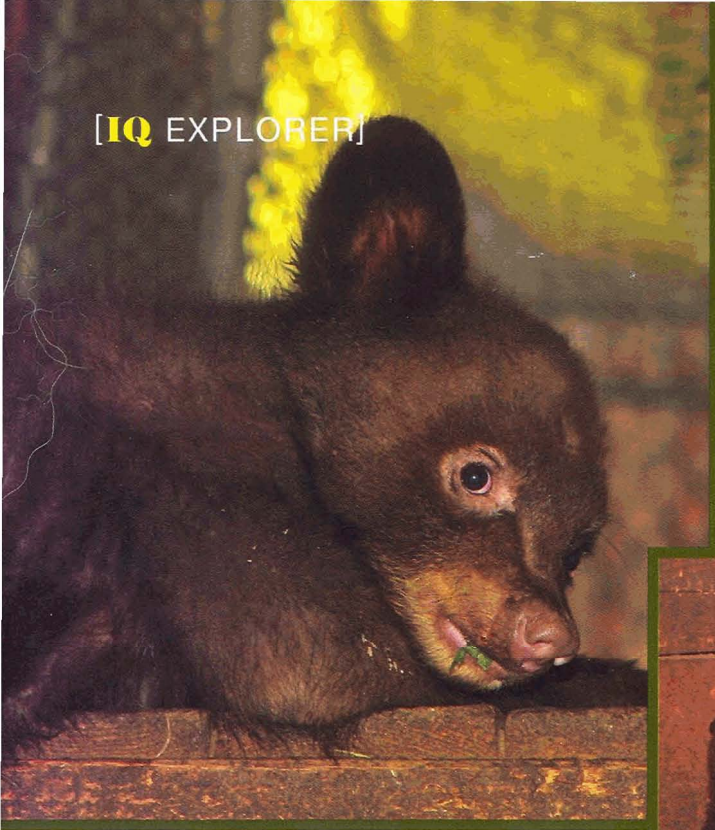
"Shenandoah Bright was born approximately February 2, 2004 in the state of Washington. Her mother abandoned the den site when a truck knocked down the tree where she was hibernating with her new cub. Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife brought her to IBBR (Idaho Black Bear Rehabilitation Center) on February 20th. She was approximately three weeks old, eyes still closed, weighing 2.8 pounds, 14 ½ inches long."

Since then many cubs have come and many have been returned back into the wild and if it were not for Sally, many would have died. Just babies left to fend for themselves defenseless in a very big world. Sally is truly an angel to the rescue.

Don't think this story is about a lady who lobbies to end hunting; Sally is not a PETA extremist. She understands and has actually grown up around hunting and fishing and understands the law of nature. She is just a lady who has taken several hundred babies, wildlife babies including bear cubs, under her wing until they are old enough to brave the wilds. Sally laughs when asked if she is an animal rights activist, and says "my parents used to own Redfish Lake in Stanley. I grew up around hunting and fishing. Although," Sally adds, "the older I get the more I hate the thought of it, but this is Idaho. Idahoans hunt."

No one would ever believe that in the middle of Boise, set back on a very inconspicuous piece of property, are 13 wild bears. In a front section of the property is the "nursery." A building that is





When asked why bear cubs, Sally responds that “perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from these cubs. Like children, they are innocent, not yet touched by the trials of the world around them. The

slightly open to the elements of the weather, but enclosed enough to allow the baby bears to be protected. At the back of the property, Sally has built a much larger enclosure that holds the older bears that are scheduled to be returned to the wild.

On a cool day in May, Sally and I toured her rescue mission, who at the time had four bouncing babies, three brown and one black bear and nine yearlings who were scheduled to be released in June. One of the older cubs was rescued from a tornado stricken area in Idaho last spring.

Appropriately named Twister, a young black bear was rescued when she was found wandering alone after a tornado struck Bear, Idaho. She was weak and starving weighing in at about 7 pounds. Twister and four other Black Bears joined the more than 140 cubs that have been successfully raised and released back into the wild by Sally. Thanks to Sally’s unique bear cub rehabilitation and release program, Twister and other orphaned cubs have a second chance at life. Fitted with a satellite radio collar that will fall off after several months, Twister’s progress will be tracked by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and shared with Sally.

“We do not treat them as pets,” Sally explains. “It is important that they have very little human contact so they remain as wild as possible. You may see them as very passive behind the wire of the cages, but let them out of that cage and they adapt right back to their wild state.”

Now Sally will continue to focus on triplet cubs that were brought to her from South Eastern Idaho after their mother was killed this spring. Sally has spent most of her adult life caring for the bears, mostly on her own dime. No money comes from any government agencies; however Sally does receive assistance from the World Society for the Protection of Animals. Neither Fish and Game nor any other government agencies provide any funding for the bears’ rehabilitation.

bears never ask more than I can give, but they certainly give more than I could ever ask. They never judge, they never seek revenge, they never turn away, they never threaten, they never ask you to be anything but what you are. Isn’t that what we as humans should be doing with each other?

Can you imagine how it feels to be in the depths of sadness and have one of these constantly active bears come and sit next to me for an hour, never moving, just sharing that moment in time, just understanding the need? It speaks volumes. I’ve received more empathy from these bears during those moments than sometimes exists in the world around me. Isn’t that what we as humans should be doing with each other?

They are bears and there is no life force more knowing about who they are and what they are about than bears. They expect to be accepted as they are. They share who they are with me. They invite me into their world to see through their eyes. They don’t ask me to be a bear, but they show me what it is to be a bear. They know who they are and they know who I am, yet we somehow manage to share a world and be the better for it. As cubs, they play, they love, they express, they trust, they give, they laugh, they share, they feel joy, they feel pain, they feel sadness, they seek comfort, and each bear respects the individuality of the other. Isn’t that what we as humans should be doing with each other?

What I give the bears is minuscule in light of what they give me. Is there a greater gift than to be accepted as one of them even though I’m not? Isn’t that what we as humans should be doing with each other?”

As for Shenandoah Bright, she was the star of a training film in 2004. She was then returned to Washington to finish hibernation in a den in the Washington wilderness which is where she started her young life. In the spring she came out of hibernation a free bear to take charge of her own life. 