



# FEBRUARY 2019 NEWSLETTER

"Working together to improve the welfare of reservation dogs and cats"

"Diné Bikéyah bikáá'góó, ahít neilnishgo lééchqá'í dóó mósí baa' ádahwilyáago"

This is a special edition featuring the story of the rescuing of Wiley, the blind dog and his loyal friend, by Colleen Brennen, a Blackhat foster.

## LOVE IS BLIND

I don't remember when I first noticed the dog living in the arroyo, but once I did, I couldn't help but look for him every day. I'd ride past in the mornings on my way to work and scan the sometimes dry, sometimes wet, and increasingly snow and ice filled stream bed looking for him. Most days he would be there, sitting in the same spot, and my heart would simultaneously rejoice and sink with the affirmation of his presence. On days he was not there, I would worry over his absence and invent hopeful scenarios to counter my less comforting thoughts.

As the weather became increasingly cold, plunging into single digits and well below zero some nights, I mentioned the dog living in the arroyo to one of Blackhat's board members, Linda Robinson. After some discussion, Linda encouraged me to develop more of a relationship with this dog, so we could get a better sense of whether or not to attempt a rescue. The next day, I climbed down into the arroyo with some food and water and was quickly, but as expected, somewhat reluctantly approached. The dog finished half the bowl of food, drank some water, and showed his gratitude by allowing me to pet his head. However, as my hand moved towards his body, he quickly jumped back, and it was then I noticed his eyes.

Something was very wrong with this dog's eyes. It was almost as if he didn't have any. Seeing this, my heart ached for him even more. But then, as he would do in the days and weeks that followed, he adeptly wandered off, navigating his surroundings with an uncanny ease, somehow knowing not to venture into the roads or railroad crossing bordering what had become his home. Seeing his abilities almost made me doubt my conclusion. Most seeing dogs couldn't do what this dog could! Maybe he could see? But I knew

there was something not right about his eyes. I updated Linda on his condition, and thankfully she mirrored my reaction. "We have to rescue this dog!" she confirmed.

Backed by a Blackhat board member's green light, and a commitment from a Durango volunteer to meet later that week with a live animal trap, I continued feeding and getting to know the dog living in the arroyo, confident that in a few days he would be trapped and welcomed into a loving foster's, and eventually forever home. Word began getting out, and the rescue community quickly organized behind "the blind dog living in a ditch." After receiving more than a couple of suggestions to reach out to Tootsie's Vision, an organization in Albuquerque with the mission of rescuing and providing treatment for blind dogs, I contacted its founder. He responded with heartfelt urgency, perhaps in part fueled by the pictures I had sent in an email. We quickly came to the agreement that if Blackhat could rescue this dog, Tootsie's Vision would provide a foster and arrange for his medical care.

The day of the live trap finally arrived, as did Justin, the volunteer from Durango. Justin came well stocked with all sorts of enticing, seemingly hard to resist dog temptations including McDonald's hamburgers, sausage McMuffins, and cans of deliciously stinky fish. It's hard to imagine any dog living in such conditions resisting the lure of these delicacies, yet this particular dog somehow did. But another factor was also at play. A seemingly minor canine character who had been contributing to the story all along, but who had chosen to remain largely in shadows, decided to risk his anonymity and insert himself into this rescue attempt. This dog would later be known as "Migo."



As I learned over the course of my daily visits, the dog in the arroyo had a friend. Some days when I would come bearing food and water, I'd catch the two of them playfully romping like any two young dogs are prone to do. It made me happy to see them this way, but as soon as the other dog would sense my presence, he'd immediately seek refuge by jumping into a nearby culvert and disappearing into its darkness. Occasionally, he'd return and poke his head out to see if the coast was clear, but would only fully emerge once I was a comfortable distance away.

On the day of our planned rescue, this dog, who his foster immediately named Amigo (friend of the blind dog), and shortened to "Migo," was the one who bravely took the smorgasbord of bait, and as a result, wound up being trapped. After sensing what had happened to his friend, and one can only imagine fearing for the unknown, the blind dog proceeded to steer clear of Justin and his live trap. After a couple hours of successful evasion, Justin sensibly admitted defeat and decided to return to Durango, vowing to come back another day. Migo departed as well, off to a foster awaiting in Colorado

Capturing Migo was not part of the original plan, but wound up being the best scenario. The blind dog would stay another week or so, deploying a slew of impressive "wiles" to guard against his immediate capture, and in this time earn the fitting name of "Wiley." Also during this time, he'd give me a master class in patience and trust, and in so doing, indelibly secure his mark in my memory.

Twice a day I would go down to the arroyo to visit, feed, and try to catch Wiley. My own dogs and my Blackhat foster surely felt a bit abandoned during this time, but each day the bond between Wiley and me grew stronger, and it was harder and harder to leave him alone and in the snow and cold at the end of each day. There were many days I felt a bit defeated and wondered whether I had what it would take to rescue this dog. On a couple visits, I didn't even bother bringing a leash because so many of my efforts had already been thwarted. On one afternoon, a man screamed at me that what I was doing, "TRYING TO LEASH THAT DOG AND TAKE HIM FROM HERE" was WRONG! The man said Wiley "belonged there," and frustrated, threw a jug



of water down at my feet that burst upon impact. Feeling somewhat frustrated myself, instead of trying to trap him, now when I visited Wiley, I began to just be with him more.

When I would appear at the top of the arroyo, Wiley would look in my direction and oftentimes run to greet me. He'd whimper and whine with excitement, brush up against me, and even initiate bouts of play. We'd run around the arroyo for a bit, like he and Amigo used to do, and then Wiley would let me sit next to him, rub his ears, and even pet his side. It was during these times together that I'd often ask, "When are you coming home with me?" Ever the gentleman, at the end of these visits Wiley would escort me out of the arroyo, but almost as if there was an invisible fence he couldn't bring himself to cross, turn around as soon as we approached the road and my truck. On New Year's Eve, I sat under a graffitied overpass with him until evening approached, and I knew I would have to leave. Despite not going home with him once again, I felt optimistic that the morning would provide another opportunity for Wiley's rescue. The morning of New Year's Day started out on a hopeful note, with Wiley following me out of the arroyo and nearly to my truck. But the spell was quickly broken when we were intercepted by a group of homeless men still ringing in the New Year. Thinking their unsolicited assistance surely warranted a cash reward or at least a little vodka, the men created a degree of chaos and unpredictability that was not conducive to further risk. Mutually aware of the uncertainty of the situation, Wiley and I disbanded. This was not characteristic of the bulk of my interactions with the local homeless community, who also

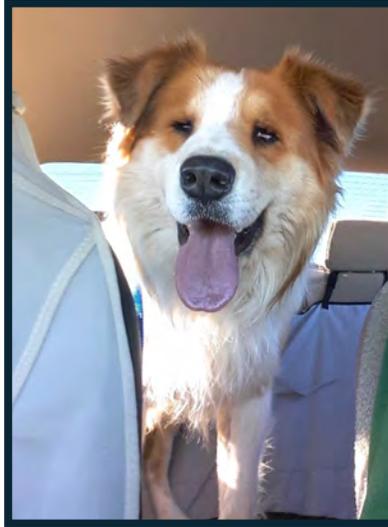
frequented the same general area as Wiley did. In fact, many people in this local community had not only befriended him, they had also been feeding Wiley for what was likely close to two years. But neither Wiley nor I thought it was a good idea to engage with these particular men, at this particular time. There was always the afternoon when we would see each other again. So I headed back to my truck, while Wiley instinctively returned to the arroyo.

Our afternoon visit started off in its customary way, with an excited playful greeting that led into my

feeding Wiley and sitting with him as he ate. As I had done before, but up until this point unsuccessfully, I placed a slip leash around Wiley's dog bowl. In the past, I was able to get a slip leash around Wiley using this method, but somehow he had always managed to flick it off his head, or more problematically, flick it around his body and become entangled. In these instances, the challenge then became freeing Wiley from a leash wrapped around his torso or leg, and not allowing these failed attempts to sever the trust that had built between us. So on this most auspicious day, the first day of a new year, while sitting watching Wiley eat his dinner of Alpo Tender Chunks in Gravy, I once again flipped the slip leash around his dog bowl and over his head. Immediately, Wiley responded by abandoning his food, leaping into the air, and signaling the intention of an all-out run. In response, I grabbed the leash and held on tight, causing it to cinch securely around his neck. I had finally managed to properly get a leash around Wiley, but it was clear he was not yet ready to surrender to this sudden change in our dynamic.

What followed seemed traumatic for him, and I can say with utmost certainty, was definitely a bit of a physical and emotional struggle for me. But believing Wiley would never trust me again after what I had done, I resolved not let go of that leash. I knew if I did, it would likely be a long time before Wiley would let his guard down again. He proceeded to flip around violently, trying to break free, becoming tangled in the leash, stopping, baring his teeth, and then growling at me. It felt like I was tethered to some dangerous, predatory animal, and I remembered the words a horse trainer had spoken to me a few days earlier, "Once you get that leash around him, he's probably going to bite you out of fear. Be prepared for that." Suddenly feeling a little afraid, but at the same time, strangely centered, I formulated a plan. In between Wiley's understandable attempts to break free, when he would stop his flailing and pant to catch his breath, I broke into a run, and pulled Wiley behind me.

Through a series of these starts and stops, the two of us managed to reach the top of the arroyo. But as we crested its banks, two homeless men witnessing our interaction became enraged with what they perceived to be "animal cruelty." The men began yelling at me to stop! To stop being so cruel! To stop abusing this animal! Knowing I had no choice but to face the oncoming situation head on, I responded by telling the men to calm down and talk to me. Not requiring an invitation, the men



were suddenly in my space, yelling the same accusations. Perhaps sensing the volatility of the situation, Wiley sat behind me and patiently waited for whatever to unfold. Somehow, in the midst of the screaming, I asked that we not yell at each other and managed to get across that Wiley needed medical attention for his eyes, and that his being taken was an attempt to provide this care. One of the men addressed the other, "Yo, look at his eyes dude. They're worse," and in a way I have never experienced before, the tension between us immediately dissipated.

In an instant, we were apologizing for our misunderstanding and introducing ourselves. I asked them if they would help me get Wiley into my truck, and at first they told me I didn't need their help, and that Wiley's intermittent growling was really a call to play. "Really?" I responded, "I don't think he wants to play with me." They laughed and then, with no more negotiation, helped me get him across the street and to my truck. Once at my truck, one of the men wrapped a spare leash around Wiley's muzzle, and the three of us lifted him into the back. Even though I was still unsure of how Wiley was taking all of this, and how he might react when it came time for me to get him out of my truck, I asked the men to please unwrap the leash from around his muzzle. One of the men did, and immediately the struggle that had ensued between Wiley and me ceased. As Wiley accepted his capture, a calm fell over the entire scene, and for the first time, he completely let his guard down. The rest of our time together, before Wiley was transferred to a foster in Albuquerque, was a time filled with mutual frequent displays of love and gratitude. All rescues are special, but I had never experienced a feeling of absolute elation quite like this. It's hard to put into words, but I knew I had done right by Wiley. He didn't belong in that arroyo. He, like all the animals we rescue, of course deserved more.

Shortly after their rescues, Wiley and Migo were adopted: Migo by a loving couple in Arizona, and Wiley by his foster in

Albuquerque who couldn't help but fall in love with him. I like to think this was his plan all along. By evading his initial capture, Wiley managed to change the course of Migo's life, and by allowing me to spend more time with him, provided me with an unforgettable lesson in patience, trust, and forgiveness.

– Colleen Brennan

## Animal Art Works returns with 'Beauties and Beasties'



Filly Eye by Laura Branca



Nesting Hummingbird by  
Laura Hamilton

Animal Art Works, an exhibit by local artists benefitting Blackhat Humane and the Cortez-based rescue For Pets' Sake, returns to the **Farm Bistro in Cortez** **Saturday, Feb. 9, from 5 to 7 p.m.**

Local artist and rescue kitty owner Sonja Horoshko, who is organizing the third annual show, said animal-themed art is pouring in and prospective buyers will have a wide variety of paintings, ink drawings and other media to choose from.

The \$10 admission can be applied to a piece of art. There will be hors d'oeuvres, live music by Swanny and Pea (BHS Volunteers), and a cash bar.

All the juried pieces will focus on animal themes, and 50 percent of the proceeds will be split between Blackhat Humane Society and For Pets' Sake, with the artists keeping the rest. Prices for art pieces are \$90 to \$250, to make sure artists get a good cut but the pieces remain affordable, Horoshko explained. "Everyone always wins at Animal Art Works," said Horoshko.

Last year the event raised \$1,100 each for the two charities, which save animals on the Navajo Nation and in the Cortez, Colorado, area, respectively.



Blue Jay by Frances Wisner

## The Numbers

For the year  
**2018**

Blackhat  
Humane Society  
found homes for  
**220 dogs** and  
**9 cats.**

Blackhat  
Humane Society  
transported **91**  
dogs and **25** cats  
to other rescues

Blackhat  
Humane Society  
spent  
**\$52,712.00** on  
veterinary  
services and  
medicine.

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