

TYSON'S STORY..

Today is Saturday, 9th January 2010. It's a very special day for my juvenile brushtail possum. Today is the day we've been working towards since he came into care. Today he's being released into the wild, to take his place in the big wide world, where he belongs. It's been a long hard road, with lots of ups and downs along the way. It's been the hardest, yet the most rewarding journey I've undertaken...

My life is so uncomplicated. I'm safe and snug inside my mummy's pouch, it's so warm and moist, and I have a constant supply of delicious milk. The gentle movement as my mummy jumps along lulls me into a deep sleep, knowing she will keep me safe from any harm. All of sudden my mummy stops, the jerk startles me awake. I'm not expecting the BIG BANG. My mummy seems to stumble and then my mummy isn't moving any more.

Something's wrong. I'm starting to get cold, and my mummy has stayed very still for longer than usual. I hear a noise and somehow there is light invading my pouch. A gentle hand is holding me, but I can't let go of my mummy, her teat is still attached to my mouth.

My milk supply is suddenly cut off. I'm taken out of my mummy's perfect pouch, and put into another type of pouch. This one feels very different, there's no moisture and it's scratchy on my skin when I move around. I'm feeling so scared and confused. Where is my mummy?

Then I hear it. A very soft voice whispering to me through my new pouch, reassuring me I will be fine. I hear another voice, a man. He's saying I only weigh 38 grams. I'm too small, I'll never make it. My eyes are still shut, my ears are still attached to my head, my mouth is still fused at the sides. He wants to put me to sleep with my mummy. Then I hear the other voice again. The soft voice saying I deserve a chance, she's willing to fight for me, she won't let him put me to sleep. The man sounds mad. The pouch moves again, and now I can hear a heart beating. It's not my mummy, but it reassures me. Again I sleep. No one thinks I have a chance of survival. I'm too small. But no one knows how strong I am. I am a fighter. I am Tyson.

When I wake up I'm very hungry, but no matter how hard I suck there is no milk. I spit out my teat, and start rooting around for another one. The gentle hand picks me up, snuggles me in close to her heart and drips milk into my mouth from a syringe. I don't like the taste of it, but I swallow until my belly's full. The gentle hand helps me go to the toilet, then the soft reassuring voice lulls me to sleep, tucked up next to the same beating heart.

This routine continues for the next 10 days. Every 2 hours I am woken up, snuggled in to be fed, toileted and lulled to sleep next to the beating heart. After 10 days I still weigh 38 grams. I'm feeling weaker, but I'm still a fighter. I now know the gentle hand, the soft voice, the beating heart. They all belong to my new mummy, and she loves me. She gives me lots of kisses and cuddles, and whispers reassuring words. Inside her shirt, next to her heart, has become my new pouch.

My new mummy takes me to see a different man. She calls him "The Vet". He weighs me, and says I only weigh 38 grams. I'm very small, he doesn't think I'll make it. Then he tells my mummy that I'm very active, and he can't bring himself to put me to sleep. He makes some phone calls, and asks my mummy to take me to see a special lady for a second opinion. When we get there the special lady tells my mummy she doesn't think she'll have good news, but she would like to see me.

My mummy very gently takes me out and hands me to the special lady. I don't like being out of my pouch and wriggle around to show my displeasure. This special lady weighs me, then another lady weighs me too. Nothing has changed, I'm still only 38 grams. She tells my mummy I'm very active, a little fighter. I deserve a chance, but it's going to be very difficult. As well as being fed every 2 hours and toileted every 4 hours, I also need a special ointment rubbed into my skin twice a day.

The special lady shows my mummy how to feed me with a tiny catheter, which slides easily into my little mouth. I'm dehydrated, so I go back to The Vet. He has spoken to the special lady, and is willing to help me along. He pricks my skin, and pushes a cold liquid into my leg. This is to rehydrate me. He then pricks my other leg, more cold liquid. This is an antibiotic. On the way home my mummy gets the ointment we need. When we get home, she takes me out for a feed then rubs ointment into my skin. It's a bit cold, but it feels ever so nice.

Every day for the next 5 days I visit The Vet for an antibiotic injection, and one more fluid injection. After five days of being catheter fed, it's my last antibiotic injection. The Vet weighs me again. I wriggle around all over the place. I now weigh 53.7 grams. Everyone is very happy with how fat I'm getting! My mummy gives me extra cuddles and kisses today.

5 days later, I'm having about 12ml of milk spread over 7 feeds every day. My skin is nice and moist from the ointment. My ears have both detached and popped up, it's much easier to hear now! My mummy has been getting lots of advice and help from the special lady. It's time for my mummy to take me back to The Vet. I now weigh 64.6 grams! He reminds my mummy to slowly increase my milk intake with my weight gain.

The next day my right eye opens! The first thing I see is my new mummy's face. I love her so much! She cries when I look at her for the first time. 8 hours later my left eye opens too. Now I can hear and see, I really become a rascal! I've never learnt to like the taste of my new milk, and every feed my mummy has to pry my jaws open with her nails. The bigger I get, the stronger I get, the harder it is for mummy to open my mouth! I was born stubborn, and I have remained stubborn. Everyone says that's what kept me alive from the start.

At 70 grams, I'm now having 12.5ml of milk over 6 feeds per day. I love sitting inside my mummy's shirt, close to her heart. I cry when she puts me in the heat box. I know she'll come back and get me. She doesn't like to hear me cry, and will whisper loving words into my ears before putting me back in her shirt. I have been everywhere with her since she became my mummy, and she is my world now. She is still rubbing ointment into my skin twice a day, and I wriggle around in her hand. It feels so nice!

11 days have passed. I now weigh 91.7 grams. I have decided to go on a hunger strike. My mummy is trying everything to make me drink my milk. First there is a soft teat in place of the catheter, but I refuse to put it in my mouth. Then it's back to the catheter, but now there is sticky sweet stuff on the end of it. Again, I refuse to put it in my mouth. My mummy is getting anxious, and I'm getting kind of hungry. I lick the milk off my mummy's fingers. Eventually mummy pries my jaws open enough to put the catheter in, and I drink till I'm full. This continues every feed until I start lapping for myself. Everyone calls me a lockjaw possum.

Finally I hit 100 grams! My mummy says I should have a little possum party! I'm now having 20ml of milk over 5 feeds a day. I still won't open my mouth, but my mummy persists.

She doesn't want me to have any more injections. She keeps asking me when I'm going to get fur. I look like a little pink jumping jack! I love exploring, but never let go of my mummy! I've already lost one mummy, I don't want to lose another one.

Today my mummy is very excited. She said my skin is finally getting dark, and very soon my fur will come through. She says it's about time! I weigh 133 grams. She calls me her little nude nut! I still love staying next to my mummy's heart, but I'm starting to get used to my heat box for short periods of time.

Finally the time has come! I have a soft covering of very fine fur all over my back and head although I'm still a nude nut on my tummy! I now weigh 151 grams and have been with my new mummy for about 4 months. My mummy decides she's not fighting to open my mouth any more. She pours my milk into a little cup and puts it in front of my face. The first time I'm not sure what to do. I try to sniff it, but my whole head goes under. I come up sneezing milk! From now on I lap all my milk. My mummy says I'm very clever to be lapping at such a young age.

Two days later I wake up with a sore eye. My mummy takes me back to The Vet. He is surprised at how big I am! He says I have an infection in my eye, probably from the milk splashing while I'm feeding. I do make quite a mess! He gives my mummy special cream which she puts in my eye 3 times a day for 5 days. My eye is all better now. I'm getting much braver, and love exploring with my mummy. She takes me outside to smell the leaves and flowers. We play on the grass. She laughs at me a lot!

At 174 grams I gum my first gum leaf tip. I mangle it with my little teeth, but then spit it out! Now at every feed I taste different leaves and flowers. Eventually I start eating them. I especially love bottle brush! I'm also eating lots of different fruit and vegetables, but mango and apple are my all time favourites! My pouch is now in a little cage in the lounge room. Every day I just sleep and sleep, but night time is play time! I love climbing, and jumping! I chase my mummy all around the house!

Before I know it I weigh a very healthy 377 grams. My mummy starts taking me to a small outdoor cage, under the pergola. Soon, I move in here. My mummy still comes and plays with me every night, but I can now go to the toilet by myself, and can also eat and drink on my own. My cage is right at the back door, and when I cry my mummy comes and gives me kisses and cuddles until I'm ready to go back and play.

At 627 grams I start going to visit the big outdoor aviary, right up the backyard. After 2 weeks, I spend my first night in the big aviary. It's full of branches and ropes to climb on, a hollow log to hide in, and lots of fresh water, foliage, fruit and vegetables. I don't have milk any more. I'm a big boy! I'm having so much fun. I still love my mummy and can't wait for her to visit me every afternoon.

It's December. I love all my foliage, but bottle brush is still my favourite. I don't have as much fruit and vegetables as I used to, but that's okay. My mummy doesn't play with me anymore, but I keep myself amused. I spend lots of time every night practicing jumping, running and climbing.

Today is a very big day for me. Mummy came out and woke me up. It was day light, my sleep time. She put me into a big pouch. I wasn't sure what was happening.

Mummy took me to The Vet for a final check up. I bit The Vet, just to show him I'm now the boss. The Vet said I was very healthy, and very ready to be taken to my release site. I now weigh just under 1.5 kilos. Mummy also stopped so I could say goodbye to the special lady. She was also surprised at how big I was. Everyone says I'm gorgeous and different from other brushtails. I have a pure white tummy and a white tip on my tail!

I spent my last night in my outdoor aviary last night.

Today is Saturday, 9th January 2010. This afternoon, my mummy takes me in my possum box to a big property where the owner says I can be released, and they will keep an eye on me. My box is placed high in a large mango tree – my favourite! I poke my head out and see my mummy in the distance watching me. I climb out and sit on top of my box staring at her for a couple of minutes. Then I put all my practice into good use and run all the way to the top of the tree, out of sight. I haven't returned to my possum box, I'm much happier out on my own. Soon I will find some gorgeous girlfriends, and make beautiful possum babies. Although I will never see my mummy again, I know I will always carry a small part of her in my heart. But now I'm back where I belong and ready to take my place in the big wild world.

Kym Mulraney & Tyson the Brushtail Possum



Above Tyson - 38 grams

Left Tyson 1340 grams