

# Accent

## A keeper: fishing couple net pup

Emaciated mutt rescued after nearly being hit on rural road

By Kimberly Matas

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Che was nearly roadkill a couple years ago when he crawled out of a deep pothole in the middle of a rural road on the White Mountain Apache Reservation.

Luck was on his side, though. Kathy Miller and her husband, Tucson veterinarian Chris Miller, were on a fishing trip and narrowly missed mowing down the sick dog.

“Kathy was going to run him over,” Chris said.

“I didn’t even see him,” Kathy said. “My husband said, ‘Don’t hit that dog,’ and I didn’t even see him and I looked and there was this pothole in the road and this thing crawled out of the pothole. He was emaciated and had almost no hair, just a stripe down his back.”

Then 5 months old, the mutt — likely a border collie mix — weighed only 15 pounds, half of what a dog of his breed and age should have weighed, Chris said.

The couple took the dog to a nearby vet clinic to begin treatment while they finished their fishing trip. The dog had two kinds of mange, hence the extreme hair loss; a variety of intestinal parasites; tick fever; and oozing sores all over his body. His total recovery took three months, Chris said.

“His stomach was bloated because he was so full of parasites,” Kathy said.

He was named after the Cuban revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

“My husband named him Che because he’s a fighter,” Kathy said. “He fought to live.”

After their vacation, the Millers picked up Che at the White Mountain vet clinic.

“We had to haul him back to Tucson, and he stank so bad,” Kathy said.

Though he was very sick and severely neglected, Che was friendly toward people, leading the Millers to believe his previous owner had dumped him in the middle of the reservation.

“We were really surprised because he’d been so abused, but he loves children and people,” Kathy said.



“My husband named him Che because he’s a fighter,” says Kathy Miller, right, with her husband, Chris, and the once-ailing, abandoned dog they found while on a fishing trip.

Chris is a veterinarian with a special interest in minimally invasive procedures that he performs through his practice, Pet Sounds Mobile Ultra Sound. Because he is a vet, Chris could provide Che with medical care, but the couple still had to pay several thousand dollars out of pocket for medicines, supplies, anesthesia and lab work for the dog.

In addition to the life-threatening problems Che had when the Millers found him, the dog has what Chris calls “distemper teeth,” indicating that Che had a high fever at some point, and the dog’s hind end is covered with scars where he’s been bitten by other dogs.

“Originally we were going to find a home for him, but people would look at him and go, ‘Ooh.’ He looked so terrible,” Kathy said.

“It’s not that we couldn’t find a home for him,” Chris said, “but his treatment was so prolonged that we got attached. Kathy is quite a believer in fate or destiny. If a dog comes along that needs treatment and we can provide that . . . it all fell into place.”

Now, two and a half years later, the black dog with a white chest and speckled toes is healthy, neutered and micro-chipped.

He lives with the Millers, their elderly pug Missy, their special-needs cat Alicia and four chickens. When he’s not busy guarding his flock of poultry, Che enjoys chasing tennis balls, chewing on plush squeaky toys and getting belly rubs.

“Life is really good for him,” Kathy said.

Che isn’t the only reservation dog Chris has helped. Last week he took his mobile ultrasound clinic to the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation in eastern Arizona as part of a trip organized by the Humane Society of the United States. Veterinarians, animal welfare workers and vet students spent a week spaying, neutering and providing medical care for animals owned by reservation residents. Last year Chris accompanied the group to the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico.

“I enjoy volunteer work in general,” he said. “It’s an opportunity for a different experience in veterinary medicine and spending time in a different culture and working with vet students.

“I get a lot out of it, and I think the communities we work with get a lot out of it, and the students get surgical experience.”

*Send suggestions for pet stories to reporter Kimberly Matas at [kmatas@azstarnet.com](mailto:kmatas@azstarnet.com) or call 807-8431.*

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