

So what makes a fairly normal person get involved with the lives and ways of Amazon parrots? For me it started with my husband's transfer to Fairbanks, Alaska. Back then there were no cell phones and when you made a long distance call you were charged by the minute. I knew no one when we moved up there and when it is below zero, you do not want to go outside. I was lonely and wanted a pet. I remembered that one of my neighbors in Portland, Oregon had an amazing and delightful Blue Fronted Amazon as a pet. I had looked at birds when we were in Portland but none of them really made that "click" that I was looking for.

I walked into a small mall in Fairbanks, Alaska and saw a long line going from the mall to the pet store. I wanted to see what so many people were waiting in line to see. It was a Blue Fronted Amazon. He was talking to everyone that would come up and visit with him. It was love at first sight on my part. I had to have him. I asked what price they were asking for him. \$1,000. I was shocked as I knew Blue Fronted Amazons were being sold for as low as \$200. My husband asked me if I really wanted the bird and I said, "Yes". Without hesitating he said, "Buy it". So began my adventure with my best friend Pepper.

The pet store did not want to sell him as he brought so many people to the store. They told me they would not sell him to me if I had young children as he had tried to attack a sleeping infant. Also he was being sold to me as a dangerous bird as he had hurt several people. I thought, "How much damage could a small parrot do." I had worked training horses for many years and our farm had several stallions. These could be dangerous animals.....but a parrot?

I had gotten him as the store was closing so I put his cage in a quiet room when I got home. The next morning I turned on the radio, ate breakfast, and went to check on the bird. He looked good and friendly so I took him out of his cage and put him on my shoulder as I went about cleaning his cage. The song "My guy" was playing on the radio and I began to sing along with it. Pepper did not like my singing and he lunged at my face, missing my eye by a fraction of an inch, and removing a nice chunk from my face. Forty years later I still have the scar.

After biting my face he flew to the floor. I had to get him back into his cage. He saw me coming and flipped over to his back. He was a dead bird. He could see I wasn't falling for that so he ran under my coffee table where it would be hard for me to grab him. Finally he stopped trying to get away from me, faced me, and looking me straight in the eye said a few choice words of profanity.

Pepper had an old fashion type cage that you had to pull the top from the bottom in order to change the paper at the bottom of the cage. Every day I would take him out of the cage so I could clean it. Every day for many months he would attack and bite me. He would force me to the floor as I tried to protect my face and would literally pull chunks of flesh from my scalp. Shortly after biting near my eye, he bit clear through my lip with his beak hitting my teeth. I had to back his beak out of my lip so it wouldn't be torn worse. People wondered if I had been in an accident as the bite by my eye turned my eye black and blue, my lip was all swollen from his biting through my lip and my scalp was scabbed and bruised from flying attacks. I knew people would never believe that my parrot did this to me. They probably thought my husband was abusing me.

Why would anyone keep a bird that bit them every day? He was very funny and especially after attacking me. After biting I would tell myself, "Just one more day and if he doesn't behave himself he is leaving." At times I was stunned and couldn't believe his actions and talking. This bird was far more intelligent than I had imagined.

I had Pepper out of his cage and I was in the kitchen straightening my kitchen sacks. Pepper got very excited and kept saying, "Put the bird in a sack. Put the bird in a sack." I called up his previous owner and she said he liked to be put in a paper sack and then she would rock him in it and sing to him. Knowing this, it became part of our morning routine. One morning I was in a hurry and Pepper was sitting on the fireplace hearth while I was cleaning his cage. "Put the bird in a sack", he called out. He kept repeating it and I kept telling I would do it later. Suddenly Pepper came off the hearth and bit me in my leg going through heavy jeans, long johns and heavy socks leaving a bloody bite. As he was biting down with his beak clenched he muttered, "Put the bird in a sack!"

He bit me daily for about 18 months. After biting me he would run to the hall closet where our coats were kept and tell me, "Good by". He wanted to live elsewhere. Slowly and gradually we became friends and he bit me less and less. He changed from a "dangerous" bird to my top performing bird that knew over 50 tricks and would speak on cue. I have done performances where only he did performing for an hour and then had members of the audience hold him. He had as many as 250 people hold him after a single performance.

Pepper filled me with awe and appreciation of Amazon parrots. While in Alaska I purchased several more Amazons to study and learn more about them. Though none matched my closeness that Pepper and I had, they taught me so much about Amazon parrots. Living in Alaska gave me the solitude and time I needed to do my experiments and studies of these wonderful birds. I wrote for many bird publications, wrote 4 books, lectured, and had 5 of my parrots do performances while living in Alaska. I called this performing group The Amazing Amazons.

When I left Alaska these 5 birds came with me. My youngest bird is now in his 30's and since I had his mother and father, he has been with me since he was an egg. My performing birds are now enjoying retirement with me. What of Pepper? He lived with me for 35 years and was an adult when I got him. I feel he was at least 45 years old. He died a couple of years ago and received many notes, cards and pictures from his fans....both adult and children. His death left a deep hole in my heart and greatly affected the other four Amazons. His bad behavior when I first got him as a 'dangerous' bird vanished and was replaced with a delightful bird that allowed children as young as 2 years old to hold him as well as those with physical handicaps. He taught me patience and understanding and left me with many memories to fill the hole in my heart.



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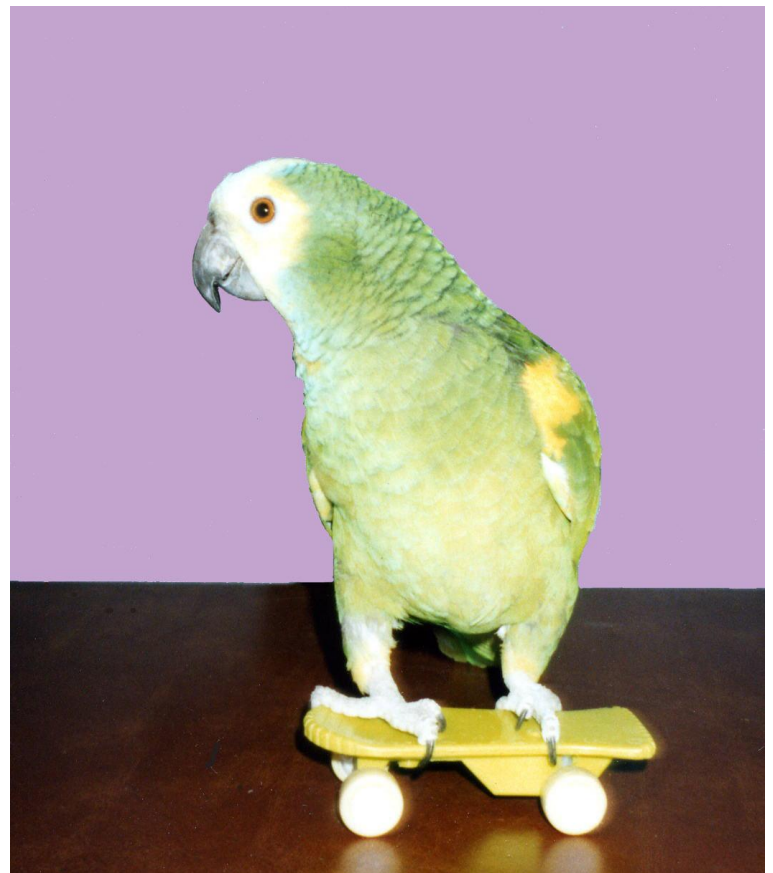
Pepper delighting with his talking

top right:

Maggie was my best model for showing clothes I designed for the birds

bottom:

Kodiak skateboarding.





Pepper and Me. I am tickling Pepper's feet.

TJ showing number concepts with a puzzle board

