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Urgent Pigeon Rescue

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Injured pigeon grounded in the Oakland Airport parking lot

It was 5:15 and I had just finished up a presentation about pigeons to a youth group at the Marin Humane Society. I checked my email before heading to my next appointment (a care consult for a self-rescuing pigeon named Snezhok) and read this:

"Hi Patricia - thought to reach out to you as you are a close-by bird friend. I'm about to board an airplane out of Oakland airport and came across an injured pigeon in the parking lot. WildCare in San Rafael will take him but he needs to be picked up and held overnight as they only accept during business hours. Think you might be able to get him tonight? If not I am flying back tomorrow and will look for him. I just thought to reach out in case bc I feel bad for the guy. Please text me if so. :) thank you and hope I'm not coming across as a crazy person. Marla"

Patricia, a fellow bird rescuer and a Budgie Coordinator for Mickaboo, had forwarded this to me an hour earlier. My heart sunk at the low probability of being able to mobilize a successful rescue for this bird but I had to try. I sent out some emails and posted to social media in hopes of finding someone willing to fight rush hour traffic and search an airport parking lot for an injured pigeon.

I went on to my next appointment and afterwards, with no one yet looking for the pigeon, started making phone calls to give it one last try. When I reached Josette (another dual Mickaboo and Palomacy volunteer) at 8:26 PM, she immediately said yes, she'd go. All the information I had to offer was: *"It is in the daily parking lot across from post E4, under the monorail track. There is a huge black pickup truck sticking out, he is there...alert, just appears to have injured legs."* And the heartbreaking photo.

I didn't hear back from Josette until 10:22. (I was about ready to send out a rescue party for her.) After more than half an hour of searching, she had against all odds found the injured pigeon. The bird had dragged herself (using her wings) yards away and was crouched under the curve of a car's tire. My heart soared! Josette had made the impossible happen. She had dropped everything and headed out into the night to try and help an injured bird. And she had found her! I couldn't believe that we had actually pulled it off and been able to save this poor, stranded pigeon.

Josie, as this miracle bird is now named, is a one-year-old survivor of the cruel "sport" of pigeon racing. At least we are hoping she will survive. She was brought here to the Bay Area, hundreds of miles from her home in Reno, NV, and "tossed" with thousands of other racing pigeons to try and find her way home fast enough to win. (Learn more about [pigeon racing](#).)

Instead she was severely injured, likely from colliding with a high tension wire, and has spinal trauma and impaired motor control, a large open wound exposing most of her keel and breast muscle, a broken leg, is emaciated, septic and shocky. Dr. Sanders of Wildwood Veterinary took her home with him to provide the care she needs through the weekend. We have seen badly injured birds make incredible recoveries. ([See Ava's amazing recovery](#).) We are not going to give up on Josie. She's alert, eating and clearly thankful to

be safe and more comfortable. Pigeons are so smart. I can't imagine how miserable she must have felt grounded and helpless in that parking lot with no hope in sight. No matter what happens, I am so grateful to be a part of a community that was able to rescue this fellow being from such a terrible fate and to give her the chance to live.

I have since learned more about Josie's story from Marla, the person who initially found Josie. She writes,

"To shed some light on the story - I thought she was a feral pigeon. I actually still know nothing about pigeons, so am assuming a racing pigeon is different than a wild one? Anyway, I spotted her on the ground as I was driving around looking for a parking spot and immediately decided I would check it out after I parked. I was really devastated when I saw her, and especially because I couldn't take her home myself... I had a business flight which I absolutely couldn't miss. First I gave her some food, which you see in the picture (I work for an organic food company, so had one of our apple carrot chickpea bars in my purse).

After I stayed with her for about 10 mins, when I walked away she totally scooted after me which tugged my heart strings for sure!

I first looked on the MickaCoo/Palomacy website actually (I used to volunteer with Mickaboo so knew about MickaCoo) but read in the FAQs that they only accept domestic pigeons. Thinking she was wild, I saw the reference to WildCare so called. Normally they have volunteers that can do onsite rescue - however, they told me the volunteers weren't available that afternoon. I then called a few friends and asked for their help and they weren't available. Finally, and by then totally distraught sitting on the plane, I emailed Patricia who I knew from Mickaboo, who forwarded everything to you. From my perspective, it was unbelievable that after my flight landed I got a call from Josette, telling me she was going to get the bird! So incredible. After I gave her directions, she even called me from the parking lot and I was able to talk her to where Josie was previously. And of course, just amazing that she found her across the lane from where originally spotted!"



Josie grateful to be helped

STORY UPDATE: I'm very sorry to report that after initially showing a little improvement, Josie died, despite the best efforts of Dr. Sanders and all involved in trying to save her. She didn't die alone in that parking lot though. Thank you for all that you are doing to help birds.

You empower this work. Thank you for your support. Thank you for your compassion.