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Anza & Irving: an Adoption Journey

By Bret Winter

(Editor's Note: This article was written by Anza and Irving's adoptive parent.)



We had been rescue parents of a lost parakeet and a cockatiel, discovered two years apart by my partner, Susan, on the outdoor grounds of the preschool where she works. The adopted birds became honorary classmates of the children and would return from the preschool to our home each night. When we visited my family in England, the birds were entrusted to a family whose children attended Susan's preschool. It was a sad call to receive when we returned, to learn the budgie was found unresponsive one morning. He was later buried by the saddened family members. He had been a little clown who entertained by "dancing" with his mirror and had also enjoyed chasing the cockatiel, "Powder", around the living room. Budgies have so much spunk!

About this time we learned of Mickaboo and were delighted to see there was a resource for rescued companion birds such as ours. Often we would peruse the "[See Our Birds](#)" pages, reading each biography aloud as we considered finding a partner for Powder. After looking at all the species on the [Mickaboo](#) site, I noticed the "[Telegraph Hill Conures](#)" link, and discovered that the lovable cherryheads from the movie "Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill" were not only now rescued and cared for by Mickaboo, but actually available for adoption.

We looked through photos of the birds, amused by the fact they are all given San Francisco street names. Some had passed on, found in severe condition and kept comfortable until the end, whereas others were victims of a neurological disorder linked to a parasite. There were a few whose only misfortune was being orphaned too early, as were Anza and Irving. Both were found abandoned outside of their nests but otherwise in good health. Their profile photo of them preening each other grabbed our hearts most of all.

About two years later Powder passed away. Our heartache made us hesitate to consider adopting birds again. Eventually we realized the rescued flock of Mickaboo really needed help, and that it made us happy to care for birds and watch their antics. Also, we thought helping San Francisco's wild flock orphans would be especially rewarding, as part of our City's diverse and colorful heritage, and, in the spirit of Saint Francis.



Soon we were re-visiting the Mickaboo website to view the potential adoptees. We checked the calendar for a Mickaboo [Bird Care class](#), and attended soon after. Diane was the volunteer who gave the presentation, and there was a lot of new information on birds, especially about lighting and diet. She provided a copy of an article on Avian Lighting which summarized the needs of birds, and listed resources we would later use to order lighting and bulbs. She also made sure to determine each attendees' breed or breeds of interest, so she could then give specific advice.

While the Mickaboo website featured many heartwarming stories and images of the rescued flock, ultimately we really felt that "the Dickens Twins", as they were nicknamed, were the ones for us. It was surprising to see them still available for adoption after such a long time had passed. I contacted Mickaboo, and Chloe, a volunteer, arranged a visit with Anza and Irving and their foster "parronts", Jody and Dan.

It was a long drive, and when we arrived we were greeted with a chorus of animal sounds, from both Jody and Dan's adopted dogs and their sizable foster flock. They are truly dedicated foster parronts, hosting a variety of rescued birds. Most of the birds were perched in the open air of the living room.

Anza and Irving were in their cage in a side room. When Dan opened the cage, they flew for the living room and claimed a stylish perch with feeding stations, adjacent to the Macaw and the Sun Conure. I made a point to get close to the Twins, without bugging them, just to see how afraid of people they were. Dan said they were target trained at one point, and had actually been adopted, then surrendered back to Mickaboo. Their colors are so brilliant in person. While I had seen the film, "Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill", and seen Flock members from a distance in areas of the City, this was the first time we could see how the feathers shimmer and shine in the light from close range. They preened each other a bit, then nibbled a snack from their dish while we watched, careful not to stray too close to the Macaw, who leaned forward and eyed us suspiciously from his cage. I could have stayed and watched the Dickens Twins for hours, but we eventually said goodbye.

Scheduling our home visit was next. A Mickaboo volunteer looked over my apartment for any issues that could pose a danger to birds. We had covered many safety topics at the Bird Care class. We learned more during the visit, such as certain kinds of gas stoves can give off toxic fumes through the ignition system, and that most space heaters' heating elements use Teflon, also a toxic fume hazard much like Teflon-coated cookware. Since we had cared for birds before, we had already done "bird proofing" to minimize the chances of our curious cockatiel injuring herself. With the home visit completed, it was time to research cages, and Mickaboo provided many helpful [links](#) on their website.

Two weeks later, a freight company called to arrange delivery of the cage. With the cage delivered and assembled, it was time to coordinate with Jody and Dan to pick up the Twins, and bring them to their new home. We marked the calendar for the agreed-upon date and grew anxious to fill our "empty nest".

We arrived at Jody and Dan's house, and were again greeted by a cacaphony of pet sounds. Entering the living room, we saw Anza and Irving perched atop a cage, and Jody and Dan were saying their goodbyes. The Twins weren't especially tame, and rounding them up proved challenging. Once Irving was coaxed into the carrier, Anza had to follow as they were (and are) inseparable. I had second thoughts about taking them out of this fun-filled home of avian neighbors, but I was assured by Chloe they would like being "only" birds, since they generally just squawked at and chased birds of other species anyway. We bid our farewells and loaded Anza and Irving into the car for the long journey to their new home.

The Twins were huddled in a corner of their travel cage as we started across the Bay Bridge, and the lights glittered in their scared, wary eyes. We welcomed them back to San Francisco, their birthplace, and it seemed as though they knew they were home at last, glancing out the windows inquisitively. We arrived home, excited to see how the Twins would respond to their new environment, and if they would appreciate their new, larger cage. Jody and Dan had left us a few almonds to use as treats, and also gave us a small sample of their usual bird food, so that we could recreate their diet on our own. After a bit of confused hesitation at the door of their carrier, Anza and Irving flapped to the cage top and looked around. There they settled in nicely and began calling out. It seemed as if they were not used to the quiet, coming from a home so full of critters, and they wondered where everybody was. We spent a short time getting acquainted, but

it was well past their bed time so we soon tucked them in and wished them sweet birdy dreams.

It has been nearly two years since we brought Anza and Irving home. They have been such a joy to have around. They have become a lot tamer, re-learning their target training, though it seems Irving will never really trust a hand enough to step up on it. Anza was the first to step up for us. Irving can now be called onto the shoulder from across the room (after a moment of thoughtful consideration), and he will also climb up the front of my shirt to get to his treat, often faster than Anza!

We have added perching stations and manzanita playstands, and have made toys from sisal rope and manzanita coins. Shredding toys are kept on hand, and, there's nothing the Twins enjoy more than shredding! Of all the toys we have given them, they really have the best time hiding inside a paper bag and shredding it from the inside.

One thing about adopting birds - something my mother used to say: "birds are messy eaters". It isn't really difficult to minimize the effects of pellet-shattering, nut-cracking, hungry beak action! I have a boundless supply of brown packaging paper, with which we cover all under-perch areas to simplify clean up.

We have the Twins out-and-about whenever we are home. They are, as Mark Bittner said, more like little monkeys to us, and we look forward to years of their adorable antics and loving companionship. Anyone who has the means and the desire should consider adopting from Mickaboo. There are so many rescued birds, of many species, all with love to give in return for a safe, caring "forever home".