A FEW YEARS ago, when I was living in Honolulu, my neighbors had to move, and I agreed to take in their cockatiel, Charlie. I’d never had a bird before, but he was really sweet—he’d wolf whistle at me when I walked by. Then I read about parrotlets, these little birds from Mexico, Central America, and South America. I couldn’t believe how cute they were, yet I read that people often abandon them when they realize how much work and expense they require. These small creatures may be delicate one-ounce bundles, but they need a tremendous amount of attention and care.

I decided I wanted to take in parrotlets that needed homes, so after I moved to California, I got in touch with the rescue organization Mickaboo. Now I have four—Bertie, Kai, Daisy, and Bella—and I’m fostering one more, Ace.

Parrotlets don’t realize how small they are. They have big personalities—funny, inquisitive, territorial. They can also be nervous and excitable, like Jack Russell terriers. My day job can be emotionally and intellectually intense—I’m responsible for a department that runs clinical trials to help save the hearts and brains of people who’ve suffered medical emergencies or trauma. But when I look at my parrotlets, I instantly feel better. They love to burrow in pockets or snuggle inside shirt collars. Bertie will try to stick his head under my hair to get cozy when he’s sleepy. When they’re relaxed, they grind their beaks, and it makes a distinctive raspy noise. It’s a sign of pure contentment. They’ll cuddle up and chirp, and shake their tails when they’re happy. Bertie also loves to come in the shower with me for a “sauna.” I put him down on the glass shelf inside, and he immediately walks to his corner and closes his eyes, waiting for the hot water. Then he gets in meditation mode. Sometimes he falls asleep. When I see his teeny puffs of breath against the glass, it brings me such joy.

Parrotlets are like inhaling sunshine. After all, life can be hard. There are all sorts of hurts out there: big, small, serious, not so serious. But I can have a relationship with this beautiful little being, and that helps me let everything else go.

—Renée Kochevar, PhD, San Jose

These tiny parrotlets are proof! Hope really is the thing with feathers.
Meet Cute
One happy couple owes it all to Bennie the cat.

ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO I started volunteering with an animal group in New York called Anjellicle Cats Rescue. Two years in, we rescues. After my years of volunteering, I know there’s a person out there for every cat, and a cat for every person. —Astrid Hanenkamp, New York City

In August 2014, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The doctor told me I needed 16 to 20 weeks of chemotherapy, which I started that October. By the second infusion, I’d lost all my hair. It was cold, and I was bald, and I felt so crappy. Since Portia was a kitten, she always slept at the foot of the bed at night, though she’d never been particularly snuggly. If I tried to pick her up, she squirmed away. But after I lost my hair, I’d wake up in the morning and find her lying on my pillow, curled up just above my head. When chemo was over and my hair grew in, Portia moved back down again.

I can’t imagine trying to get through an experience like that without my cat. Pets know when you’re hurting, and they want to love you as much as you love them. I was feeling so awful, and I think Portia knew that I’d lost my “fur.” She was just trying to send more body heat my way.

—Abby Veil, Washington, D.C.

When her owner was struggling through chemotherapy, Portia had the situation covered.

Warm & Fuzzy
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Rescue Me
Macy is a quick-thinking Boston terrier who could give a certain heroic collar a run for her money.

WE PICKED UP MACY when her previous family failed, and she’d been slipping into a coma. If Macy hadn’t woken her up, the vet doctors didn’t know what would have happened. But her recovery has gone well, and I think it’s because she feels so protected—and she has Macy’s unconditional love.

—Susie Thompson, Simpsonville, South Carolina

One happy couple owes it all to Bennie the cat.

I’D ALWAYS BEEN interested in agriculture, so five years ago I interned on a goat farm in North Carolina—milking goats, making cheese, shoveling poop. I’d never met a dairy goat before, and once I did, I just fell in love. They’re intelligent, loyal, loving, emotionally high-strung, and stubborn, of course—like a concentrated version of my own personality. The terrible part was the goats were regularly sold for meat, and when the buyer loaded them on the truck to be slaughtered, I’d watch with burning hot tears running down my face.

Then one day when my partner, Brent, and I had just come back from vacation, a neighbor told us he’d seen a goat with its leg stuck in the fence, crying. She’d been there for three days. We went to help her, and she cried even louder and tried to scramble away. She was so scared. We finally got her out, and for two days we massaged her leg and soaked it in Epsom salts. But my boss told us to put her back in the herd headed for slaughter because it was a waste of time and money to do anything more.

I knew this goat might die from her injuries, but I couldn’t give up, so I bought her for $50. We took her in, fed her, and doted on her. Her leg had to be amputated, but she recovered and we named her Tripped. Eventually, we bought a acre of land in Colorado and took her there, along with 15 other goats we’d saved from slaughter. Tripped was the inspiration for our no-kill dairy, Broken Shovels Farm. Now when we call her name, she runs over for animal crackers and love as fast as her three little legs will carry her. We say that if she hadn’t lost a limb, she would’ve lost her life. I’m so grateful she survived. Without her, we wouldn’t be here.

—Andrea Davis, Commerce City, Colorado

Home Free
Tripped is spending her golden years on the farm she helped create.

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—Andrea Davis, Commerce City, Colorado
Peety’s protective instinct kicked in when her owner needed it most.

M
Y CHESTNUT MARE, Phoebe, and I have been together for 14 years, and we’re always in a dialogue, whether we’re taking a walk through the woods or riding in a show. It’s a constant exchange, an energy that matches, a rhythm that gives back to mine. We can communicate through touch—if I scratch her itchy spot, she snuggles on my feet (or throw my back) and slow my breath. When I’m in the saddle, I can almost always predict what movement she’s about to make.

Five years ago, we were in a competition where nothing was going right. The weather was lousy, I’d forgotten my show jacket, and where nothing was going right: The weather was lousy, I’d forgotten my show jacket, and when she hesitated, I flew over the wall leaning forward to prepare for her leap—

I stood and went straight to Phoebe. She was shaking but somehow completely unharmed, except for a cut on her leg. I let her know I was all right—she’d done her job. Instead, we have more years together, oneness with Phoebe. If I’d died that day, her know I was all right—she’d done her job.

When you’re riding, you’re completely in sync with your horse. I never lost that oneness with Phoebe. If I’d died that day, I think part of her would have died, too. Instead, we have more years together, with plenty of time left to play.

—Kimberly Stargatt, Wilmington, Delaware

When I met Peety, she had been living in a shelter for 15 years—and my medical expenses were creeping up to about $800 a month for cholesterol, blood pressure, and diabetes medications. I knew I’d die if I didn’t do something. So I hired a nutritionist, who, to my surprise, told me to adopt a dog because that meant I’d have to go outside and exercise.

Initially, Peety was suspicious—in the shelter he gave me a sidelong look that said “really?” But I took him home, and we decided to keep each other. We went for walks twice a day, and in less than a year I had lost 140 pounds and my health problems were gone. Peety dropped all his extra bulk, too. Eventually we started running. Then I began training for marathons.

And the transformation wasn’t purely physical. For the first time in my life, I had someone to take care of them—me. Peety was the greatest human being in the world, and I wanted to be the kind of person he thought I was. My mantra became What would Peety want me to do? My world—and my heart—opened up. I started volunteering at a shelter and gained more confidence in my job. I’m a sales rep, which wasn’t such a great fit for a guy who was too obese to travel, but last year I took a great new position. And after being invisible for so long, I met a woman, whom I married in May.

This past March, doctors discovered a large tumor on Peety’s spleen. There was nothing to be done, so we brought him home. I slept next to him at night because he was too afraid to be alone; he’d whimper when we turned out the lights. A few days later, I knew the end was near. I got down on the floor, and he quietly died by my side.

The bond that Peety and I shared was stronger than any I’d had with another being. And while I’m happy I found the dog that needed me most, I wish we could have had more than six years together. But they made all the difference. Today, my life is one I could only have dreamed of having. As it turns out, I wasn’t taking care of Peety; he was taking care of me.

—Eric O’Grey, Seattle

SOCRATES IS A 15-year-old umbrella cockatoo. Some birds want to tear things up but he’s more of a puzzle parrot. Those linkable alphabet letters for little kids? Soc can sit with those for hours, putting them together and taking them apart. He’s smart and likes to periscopically scratch the feathers on his chin—hence his name. My wife and I brought him home 14 years ago, and we’ve been together ever since. He was even in our wedding as the ring bearer. He’ve included.

Socrates sees my wife and daughter as playmates—he fits his head back until they can’t see his eyes, then throws it forward and squawks, “Peekaboo!” But I’m his partner in crime. I even got a tattoo of his feet on my left shoulder because he’s made it clear that his turf. We take walks in the park— I have a little leash that fits around his body. We dine outside at our favorite Italian restaurant, and the chef always brings Soc a little bite of zucchini. When I take a nap, he snuggles on my feet, and we coast up to watch TV together at night. When it’s time to put him back into his cage for bed, he always wants to jump on my back. “I love you”—which might just be a way to guilt me into letting him stay up. And when he senses we’re stressed, he’ll call out, “Come, come—— give us a kiss.”

Parrots are flock animals that are able to form deep connections with people. To us, Socrates is just another member of the family. My wife and I even drafted a section in our will to designate someone who’s going to take care of him (our daughter is first in line, with close friends as backups). He might actually survive us—parrots can live for up to 70 years. But my sincere hope is that we’ll turn him into a pet for senior citizens together. By the time Socrates is old enough to get cranky, I’ll be deaf enough not to hear him.

—Matt Limon, San Francisco Bay Area

Socrates the cockatoo is one fly dude.

Pet Project — Matt Linton, San Francisco Bay Area

Wing Man

Socrates is a very social bird. He enjoys going outside and exercise.

Pet Project

AP: Pet Trust allows you to set aside funds for the care of your animals if you become unable to care for them. Jennifer Scarlett, JVM and San Francisco SPCA copresident. You need to name a trustee (to handle the trust) and a caregiver (who’s provided TLC). Laws vary from state to state, so consult with an estate planning attorney.

When I met Peety, six years ago at the Humane Society Silicon Valley, I’d been in the shelter longer than any other dog. In fact, it was the second time he’d been abandoned. He was 7 years old and about 25 pounds overweight—the one nobody wanted. Except me. I’d asked for a middle-aged, obese dog because I thought we should have something in common.

I was 51 years old with a 52-inch waist, and I weighed more than 320 pounds. My social life was practically nonexistent—I hadn’t been on a date in more than 15 years—and my medical expenses were creeping up to about $800 a month for cholesterol, blood pressure, and diabetes medications. I knew I’d die if I didn’t do something. So I hired a nutritionist, who, to my surprise, told me to adopt a dog because that meant I’d have to go outside and exercise.

Peety found his true calling—as a trainer.

New Leash on Life

After he was finally rescued, Peety found his true calling—as a trainer.

WHAT WOULD PEETY WANT ME TO DO? My world—and my heart—opened up. I started volunteering at a shelter and gained more confidence in my job. I’m a sales rep, which wasn’t such a great fit for a guy who was too obese to travel, but last year I took a great new position. And after being invisible for so long, I met a woman, whom I married in May.

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—Eric O’Grey, Seattle

Leap of Faith

Peety’s protective instinct kicked in when her owner needed it most.