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## Pearl's Story

By Cynthia Bardouka, Guest Author and Palomacy volunteer

My name is Cynthia and I am a volunteer for Palomacy, a small nonprofit project that saves the lives of at-risk domestic pigeons and doves, educates the public, and finds homes for rescued birds 365 days a year. This is the story of a little girl, a little bird, and how our family got involved with this extraordinary organization.

We have a child whose interests tend to be narrow, but deep. At some point in the first grade, she became intrigued with pigeons. She had a knack for earning the trust of feral pigeons; she was adept at catching them and would check them for stringfoot or other injuries. Some became particular friends and would wait for her to rush home from school, drop her backpack, and scamper into the backyard to greet them. She continuously sought connection with these bright, friendly birds.

How she wanted a pet pigeon! She begged for a pigeon every day. We soon learned that there are many breeds of pigeons that can be purchased from fanciers. But I believe in the adopt-don't-shop ethic and was relieved to find Palomacy's website. Our girl spent hours looking at all the pictures of beautiful, adoptable birds in need of homes, and her talk was all about aviaries and pigeon pants. Now, to be perfectly honest, I doubted we would ever actually get a pigeon. I had steadfastly withstood the dog campaign of the previous year, after all and I expected this to pass as well. But she kept it up for a year and a half, asking every day: *Can we? Please? When??*

And then, a week before her birthday, something like a miracle happened. A big white King pigeon crash-landed – ker-plunk! – in our backyard. She swooped it up and rushed inside. The bird had clearly been used for a "wedding dove" release: the names of the bride and groom were written on her wings in bold black marker, and a big heart was drawn on her breast. She was young, hungry, and scared.



Fortunately, we knew just where to turn for help! Elizabeth Young, the founder of Palomacy, drove out to our house. She gave the bird, now named Pearl, a health check and taught us how to do the same, and while she worked she told us the probable story of Pearl's life: bred on a squab farm, taken from her parents at four weeks old, trucked to a live poultry market in a crate crammed with other frightened birds, bought by someone who wanted a pretty bird at their wedding, scribbled on, and thrown into the air. Birds like these haven't a clue about how to survive or find food. When she came to us, Pearl was still a squeaking youngster, and we felt so relieved when Elizabeth pronounced her to be in excellent health, considering how she had been treated.





Fast forward to the present: we now have a fine predator-proof aviary, built with Palomacy's guidance. Pearl is happily married to Rango, an English Carrier pigeon who was surrendered to Palomacy after a raccoon slaughtered the owner's other pigeons in an unsafe aviary. Pearl and Rango share their home with two foster King pigeons, Mirabelle and Large Marge. Our delighted child spends time with her little flock every day and finds their antics endlessly entertaining. She continues to do rescue work with feral pigeons, and to represent Palomacy at outreach events.

A few months ago, I started helping with Palomacy's Facebook help group, and while fielding requests from all over the world, I've realized just how incredibly blessed we are to have Palomacy as a local resource. In many places there is simply no one to help: no shelters that will take pigeons, no wildlife rescues willing to treat them, and often no local veterinarians who specialize in treating birds.

**No one else is doing the work Palomacy does.** Palomacy's volunteers have a wealth of knowledge and experience and share their time and resources generously. They coordinate rescues on the ground, help get pigeons from shelters to homes, aid rescuers in finding qualified vet care, and coach rescuers as they learn how to provide secure, loving homes for the birds they have saved.

But Palomacy can't do any of it without you! Our work is volunteer-run and donation-funded. Be part of this important work that helps hundreds of birds – and the people who love them! [www.PigeonRescue.org](http://www.PigeonRescue.org)

