

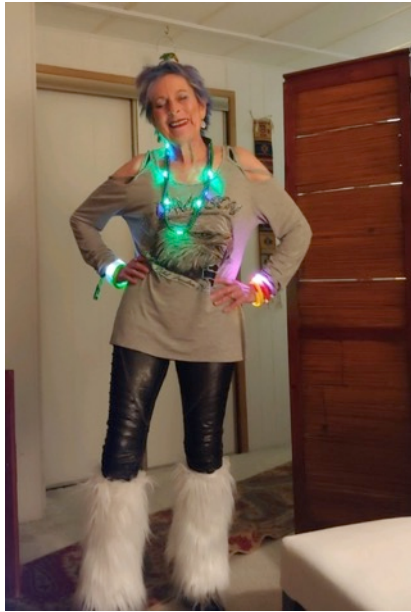
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Featured Volunteer: Louisa Jaskulski

By Shauna Hill



"My birds aren't the only ones who like to dance" - Louisa

In this article I would like to introduce you to one of our volunteers who is also a veterinary nurse, Louisa Jaskulski. She continues to share her clinical expertise with us even though she moved from California. We greatly benefit, as do our birds, from having volunteers like Louisa who share their knowledge. Mickaboo is a group that depends on our collective experience and knowledge to help all of us take good care of our feathered friends. Enjoy getting to know our dear Louisa a little better.

SH: You have been a part of the Mickaboo organization for many years. We would love to hear more about your chosen occupation and love for all creatures.

LJ: My love for critters great and small, wild and domestic, has been part of me as far back as I can remember. My parents were supportive of their tomboy daughter who was always bringing some sort of bird/mammal/reptile/amphibian home, volunteered at the local pet store, and read everything in the library I could find about animals.

I got a degree in Biology from SF State College, then went to law school and was a practicing attorney for 21 years. During that time, I finally got clean and sober from active drug addiction (which took me down horrendous paths, far from my heart to say the least). I realized I did not want to be a lawyer anymore and wanted to do something entirely different with my life.

I began to volunteer at the Oakland Zoo to be around animals again and got my first pet bird as an adult - an amazing lovebird. I volunteered doing wildlife rehabilitation, which is where I met Dr. Tina Peak.

I learned it was possible to work with critters in a clinic setting as a veterinary nurse, and that Foothill College offered a top-notch Veterinary Technician program (equivalent to an RN). It was a long drive each way, but a challenging in-depth program with an excellent reputation, so I enrolled and completed the program, then passed the National and State of California licensing exams.

I had the good fortune to work at Wildwood Veterinary Hospital with Dr. Chris Sanders and Dr. Tina Peak. Wildwood only sees birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish. It was an



Working alongside Dr. Sanders

incredible time there. Every day I learned and learned. To increase my knowledge base, I joined the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) and the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Vets (ARAV) as a Vet Tech member.



Phoenix comforting Louisa after her Dad passed away

The more I learned about birds, the more I loved them. I took in birds and reptiles to board them when owners travelled, or when they needed nursing care that owners were not comfortable providing.

My own crew of birds and reptiles also grew. I have always gravitated toward special needs birds and tricky reptiles - some of them lived long, and some died from their conditions. But each and every one owned a piece of my heart, and still do.

I have fostered many birds. Not surprisingly, I was frequently a "foster failure", especially for the difficult special needs birds; they spoke to my heart in the really profound way that fellow special needs caregivers understand, so I

adopted them. I cared for many until it was their time to depart this mortal coil - and I did everything in my power to ensure that when it was their time to go they would die in my arms, so that the last thing they would see would be my loving tear-filled eyes and would hear my words of love and reassurance.

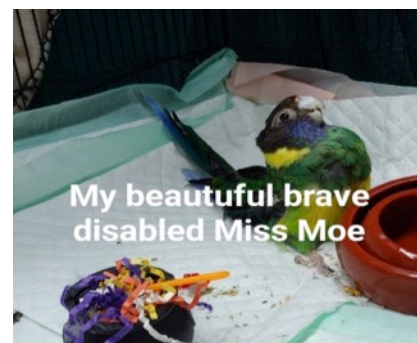
Some of the birds I adopted were not special needs but had been in foster care for years and had fallen into that "unadoptable" status. Many were Amazons, a parrot species that many folks shy away from because they can be very "alpha" - opinionated, strong sense of themselves, not prone to tolerate nonsense. I ADORE Amazons. I learned that they take their time evaluating you, but once you pass their trust test, they are profoundly loving, loyal and funny companions.

All birds are amazing. The process of winning their trust and love is frustrating at times, but parrot family birds (from the tiniest budgie to the biggest macaw) are worth the work and the wait. They teach me patience every day, to be there for them no matter what, and to not take myself too seriously. Parrot family birds love a good laugh, to sing, and to dance. When I have a bad day and am impatient with them, they understand my apology and forgive me.

I am presently owned by six Amazons, two lorikeets, a Port Lincoln Parrot, a cockatiel, two pet rescue pigeons, four finches, and a canary. And a collection of reptiles. It makes for a very busy, often messy and frequently loud household.

For me the connection to birds and reptiles goes way deep. When I look into the eyes of a parrot or finch or pigeon, or a lizard or snake or tortoise, I feel I am looking into the eyes of God across species lines.

SH: How did you hear about Mickaboo, what volunteer opportunities have you had with the organization, and what would you say to those who may be considering volunteering with us?



Miss Moe, Port Lincoln Parrot

LJ: Dr. Sanders and Dr. Peak have always been big supporters of Mickaboo from the beginning. As Mickaboo grew the relationship between Mickaboo and Wildwood Vet Hospital grew deeper as well. Because I was lucky enough to be there, I got to know some of those early volunteers (our founder Tammy Azzaro of course, and Claudia Melteff and Nancy Powell, among others). They inspired me - and I wanted to help.

The most obvious volunteer opportunity is directly with the birds. It is a wonderful experience to take in our birds, learn about them, and give them a forever home. Foster care is absolutely critical to our mission; without qualified foster homes we cannot take in the birds who need us. Know that if you are fostering bird(s), you may well be literally saving their lives. The end goal is to find and provide forever homes to the birds, and we bless and thank each of you willing to help do so.

Though it sounds romantic to "work with the birds", it is not always easy - but it is always worth it. Some of our birds have been through a lot. I promise every bird that I adopt that I am here to give them what they need to the best of my ability - they are not here to meet my expectations; I am here to care for them. I ask them to teach me what they need in their time, as they are comfortable moving toward me.

I have had a ball helping with our fundraisers and events. It has given me a chance to get to know our people, the faces and voices behind the emails. It is very costly to provide good vet care for our flock, so our fundraisers are essential. I enjoy being able to help in such a concrete way and have fun at the same time talking "shop" and trading stories and lessons about birds.

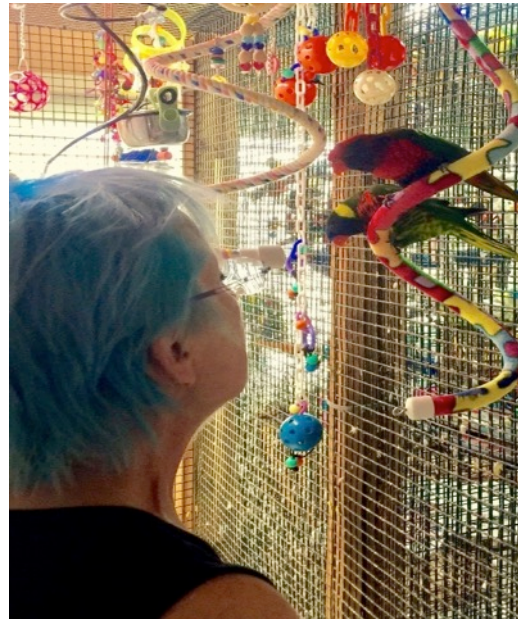
Because I am so passionate about our birds, I love teaching. I started with doing "in-person" bird care classes - then after I moved to Arizona to care for my dad, I taught the classes over the phone. Since COVID19, Mickaboo has moved into doing online classes, and I am one of the teachers for those.

Other essential volunteer functions include training for and conducting the phone screens and the home visits. Without good folks willing to do these, our adoption applicants get stalled in our process - they get frustrated, discouraged, angry at Mickaboo - and we lose them. Long-time volunteers are around to teach you how to do phone screens and home visits, so please do not be afraid to assist Mickaboo with these jobs.

I want to emphasize from the bottom of my heart that Mickaboo is a tribe of really awesome wonderful people. Though the constellation of leaders in the Mickaboo tribe has changed over time, I cannot imagine a better group of people to work with.

I respect our process. Our people put in countless hours to help our birds. We show up. I have been involved with Mickaboo for over fifteen years. There have been stressors and conflicts of course, and all of us screw up at times. But the bottom line is our volunteers and our Board of Directors consistently work their asses off to make this work FOR THE BIRDS. We find that a sense of humor and humility go a long way to helping find a solution. Mickaboo is full of folks who are GOLD. TOGETHER WE CAN DO WHAT WE COULD NEVER DO ALONE.

We can use you!!! We need you!!! to adopt, to foster, to transport cages, to help with fundraisers and events, to do phone screens and home visits, to give support to a volunteer who is struggling with a



Enjoying a moment with her lorikeets. All their food, water, bath dish, boings and other cage accessories hang from the top of their enclosure, creating a rainforest canopy

difficult bird. THIS IS A TRIBE THAT NEEDS EACH AND EVERY GIFT YOU HAVE TO OFFER - WE WELCOME YOU TO JOIN US.

SH: Although you are no longer in California you still support our phone/online classes - which is awesome considering what a busy lady you are. Can you tell us what other volunteer work you have helped with in Arizona?

LJ: I moved to Sedona in 2015 to care for my dad who had had a stroke and needed 24/7 care. It was an exhausting move - I brought all my birds and reptiles out with me. My dad had congestive heart failure and was in the last year of his life. In order to keep myself a bit sane, I needed to find animal rescue people - my tribe, my people. So, I spent a couple of years volunteering one day at week at a rescue zoo in Prescott, 1.5 hours away each way. The chief keeper assigned me to the section with the parrots and the prairie dogs; I was able to improve the diets of the macaws and conures, which was great. I fell in love with prairie dogs.



Who needs a dining room table?
This is where the pigeons live

I also volunteered at the local wildlife rehab for a period of time.

I have been a big supporter of the Oasis Parrot Sanctuary for close to twenty years. Located in remote high desert in southeast Arizona, they provide lifetime care for over 800 birds. It is a seven-hour drive, but I get out there when I can to help. I love those people; they are beyond awesome.

Now the local humane society has my phone number, and I get calls from people who need various kinds of help with their birds. I do my best. We really have no exotic vets in northern Arizona, nor any parrot rescues up here. That said, the wonderful Dr. Gary Gallerstein (an avian vet who started in this field decades ago, and wrote one of the first really good handbooks for parrot owners) retired to Sedona after he sold his practice. We have become friends, and he has been great about helping me with some of my volunteer efforts.

My beautiful pet pigeons came from a rescue in Phoenix, and I will soon be adopting two more Fantail pigeons into my flock (rescues from a horrendous dumping situation in Las Vegas). Once the quarantine is really lifted and Covid19 starts going down, I hope to do some volunteer work with the Phoenix Herpetological Society Sanctuary.

SH: Working in the veterinary field, are there things you wish all human caregivers knew (kind of like things Doctors and Nurses wish their patients knew)?

LJ: First, remember that these complex intelligent emotional wild master athletes did not ask to be locked up in cages in our homes. Almost nothing that we offer is natural for them. It is our job to be the best flock we can be, to enrich their lives.

I would ask everyone to remember that we are here to care for them, they are not here to care for us or to meet our expectations.

When things do not seem to be going well with a bird, often the best thing to do is to BACK UP. Be sure you are providing proper nutrition, toys, lighting etc. Make sure they do not need to see an avian vet to check for an underlying problem (when in doubt, make an appointment and go). But so often we are pushing them to do something they are not ready for or are comfortable doing - so BACK UP. Let the bird settle, let the bird know you respect their hesitancy, let them come to you. A good sense of humor, the ability to be flexible and not take the setbacks or bites personally, a bit of humility - all go a long way with parrots. You are never going to be "the boss". Learn to negotiate.

It's OK to admit when we feel overwhelmed, not up to the job, wondering if we should just give up. We all go there at times. Ask for help, run it by experienced Mickaboo folks, take a break - then you can re-join your flock and have fun with them.

Love them for who they are. This is hopefully going to be a lifetime relationship - it is not a contest, no need to hurry.

Love takes time, patience and work - but this is the rainbow and the pot of gold. WELCOME TO THE TRIBE!!!

SH: Thank you, Louisa, for taking the time to do this interview. It's certainly not easy trying to still lend a hand out here when you have a lot on your plate out there but we sure do miss you being here in California. Thank you for your tireless efforts and expertise that you continue to share with us!



Most of my living room is filled by a bank of 7ft x 3ft x 6ft cages