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Fostering a BIG Bird

By Melissa Lovett



Editor's note: This is the story of a volunteer foster parent who ventured beyond her comfort zone and took on the challenge of a (much) larger bird than she normally handles – to the benefit of both parties.

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The macaw coordinator was looking for a foster parent for a macaw who urgently needed to come into the Mickaboo system. No one involved in the rescue had seen the bird and no one knew his health status. I am not a big bird person but I was closest to his location. I volunteered to take him on temporarily, on an emergency basis, as macaw beaks scare me - but I knew moving him was critical. Some wildlife rescuers drove him to me; together, my new friend (Louie) and I headed straight to an avian clinic for a checkup.

Louie wasn't in bad shape physically, besides being plucked, having shredded feathers, and smelling from sitting in cigarette smoke in a dark house in a tiny cage. Emotionally he was worse. He didn't trust me to walk past his cage - he would throw his head and scream in my direction. The bird's former owner used to sit by his cage and hit the cage with a cane when he got loud. So sitting by his cage was a no-no. Forget carrying anything by his cage.

Every day I would stand next to his cage or walk by, talk to him and give him treats. As Louie trusted me more, I toughened the requirement for getting the treat. I might touch his cage, move to another side, hold my arm up, etc. I also started giving him treats for allowing me to sit next to him. And then again increased my expectations. He progressed quickly. He started talking quickly, mostly laughing, some "hello's", and maybe a "what's up" or two. Loads of beak grinding every night. Then there were the nights where his sounds almost made me cry, the voice of an older lady crying while saying ow and help...absolutely heart breaking, thinking about what she went through and how he felt about her.

He didn't come out much because he was scared and not sure how to get out. I was still too afraid to try to touch him so I steered him with treats. Two weeks ago I touched his tail; he protested a bit then allowed me to run it through my hands. I got a bit braver last week and tried to work my hand up his back. Coming at him from the front was a no-go. I got up to his neck and stopped there.

Sunday I gathered up the courage to take him to a Mickaboo adoption fair. I thought I had a brilliant idea to just throw his favorite treats into a crate and he would just walk in...um no. I was told he was stick trained...nope. He was great being toweled at the vet...not at my home. I sadly scared him with the towel and he jumped to the floor. I herded him into the crate after a half hour of work and we set off.

I had lined up a macaw-loving volunteer to babysit Louie so I could talk to adoption fair attendees about my smaller foster birds. The volunteers held him the whole event; other Mickaboo folks held him too. He was great with everyone. He had three people ask about adopting him presumably because of his personality; he is pretty scruffy-looking and naked. At the end of the

day after at least five different strangers (to him) had held him, I sat down to hold him. He let me skritch his head and work on some pinfeathers. He fluffed up and made his happy rrrrr noise, he even regurgitated for me (a birdie sign of affection). Although some Mickaboo volunteers got some macaw kisses from him, I wasn't putting my face next to that big beak!



After that fair until tonight, he hadn't let me hold him. Tonight he sat on my lap and ate his dinner. After I put him back in his cage he talked in a voice I hadn't heard before, a soft, quiet, clear, kind, older lady saying hello, whistling and finally meow. I think he is happy again.

He makes me laugh almost everyday...the meow killed me today! He was supposed to go to another volunteer foster parent this weekend; I am not ready to let him go yet. We have both made huge progress in a short two months' time.

Given my experience...please consider fostering what may seem like a difficult case. Whether it is an emotional, behavioral or physical problem all of Mickaboo's birds deserve another chance and you just may surprise yourself with what you can accomplish together. Especially when we have such a great network of people and a built in support system.

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Editor's note: to learn more about Louie and about adopting him:

- Learn about our adoption process [here](#)
- Email coordinator-macaw@mickaboo.org and put "Louie the Blue and Gold Macaw" in the subject line