

Article from "The Mickaboo Bird Rescue Companion"
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Featured Volunteer: Sandy Rizzetto

By Shauna Hill



Since Mickaboo was founded, hundreds of birds have joined the flock, and some of these have been "special needs" birds, meaning challenged by injuries, illness, or congenital problems. These birds are often overlooked for adoption and can be difficult to find foster homes for as they may require some extra care, and a special cage set-up. These special birds can go on to have very happy, fulfilling lives. Our featured volunteer, Sandy Rizzetto, shares the rewards of providing a home to these beautiful birds.

SH: Tell us about yourself, Sandy.

SR: I was raised in Valley Mar. I think that made a huge impact on who I am and so did growing up abused. I have always had a love for animals, as animals were often my only friends and confidants. I was raised with animals of ALL kinds -

salamanders, snakes, anoles, an alligator lizard, fox, ducks and everything in between, including the typical or sometimes not-so-typical cats and dogs! Valley Mar was a magical place for me. A hidden gem tucked away, Valley Mar has a creek that runs half its length, nestled between two mountainous hills and filled with wildlife galore!

I remember as early as first grade wanting to be a veterinarian or a marine biologist and reading medical books, books about sharks and marine life and anything about science. That love has followed me all my life, as has working with plants (horticulture, landscaping, herbalism and botany).

As to work - I have done everything from cashiering to running a three-bay gas/service station, working in a plant nursery, Pest Detection for San Mateo County Agriculture, to being an emergency vet assistant/tech. I have also volunteered for The Marine Mammal Center since July 1996.

As to birds, we had a few budgies growing up, and a pair of cardinals when I was really young. I had a pet pigeon who I found as a baby and who refused to leave! He stayed with me for years until he died when I was a teenager. Parrots didn't really come into my life until I was 20 years old and my first was a cockatiel who ended up hating me. I still don't know why! My next bird was a baby sun conure and she is what started my road down full-blown parronthood! I miss her every day and still cry for her loss. She was my first feathered daughter and my first major loss of a child.

I want to touch on this for a second as I think only parrot lovers could understand this. Losing a parrot you actually consider a child is just as devastating and painful as losing an actual human child. I should know for I have lost both many do not understand this.

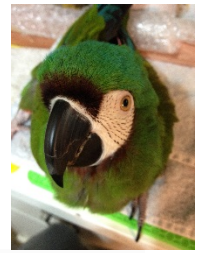
SH: Yes, we parrot lovers certainly can understand the pain of losing your feathered loved one. Very well put! How did you get involved with Mickaboo? Tell us about your flock.

SR: Bopper, my little hospice Nanday foster is who got me involved with Mickaboo. I had become friends with Louisa from Wildwood Veterinary Hospital after my severe macaw's near-fatal accident. Louisa wanted me to read an article she had written for Mickaboo and steered me to Mickaboo's [website](#).

I couldn't help but glance at the [adoptable birds](#) and scrolling through the conures. I saw Boppers' picture and profile and broke down crying! Mind you, I had seen other Nandays. I originally thought he might be my Nanday conure, Pudgy, who was stolen from me in 1993. So I went through the process of being qualified to adopt/foster. I know now Bopper is not my original Pudge, but Bopper liked the new name I gave him so he is now Pudgy, aka Pudgewidge!

My flock – we are at six right now. My flock is comprised of quite a few special-needs parrots, three being outright disabled.

First is my daughter, 14-year-old Severe Macaw Tipeeka'boo' aka Peekka. I have had Peekka since she was young. She is disabled with crushed legs after a horrific incident that nearly killed her on July 9th 2014. Peekka owes her life to Wildwood Veterinary Clinic and me. Tipeeka has the largest vocabulary of any bird I have ever met. I stopped counting when she reached 100! She often uses correct words with situations and proper phrases. I love this bird more than anything!



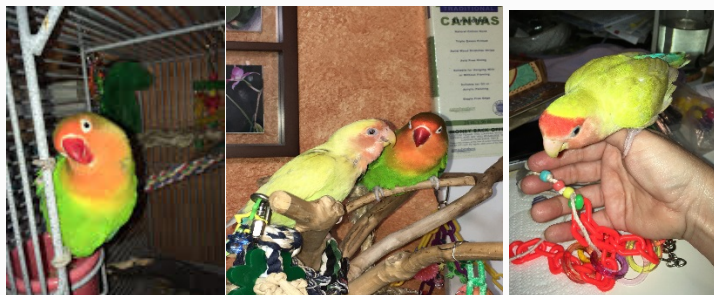
Next is Peytri, my 13-year old Maximilian Pionus. I brought her home just over a year ago, rescued from an abusive and neglectful family member. I have known Peytri all her life and am glad she is now in my care. She has severe atherosclerosis of the heart and lungs (from the neglect) causing her to have respiratory attacks. She is on heart medication and after a year we are finally stable.

Third is Pudgy aka Bopper, mentioned above. He is about 23 years old and has gout and severe arthritis. We are now having other internal issues. He is a happy bird despite his pain and has a playpen filled with toys. He has also found his voice since coming here and talks!



Next is Pichi aka LB (Little Bird), a 9-year-old Fischer's Lovebird. I recall seeing her on the Mickaboo website. I had lost my 17-year-old Dutch Blue Mysti a few years before. I had always been interested in Fischer's but never 'found' one. When I saw Pichi on the website I told myself I did not need a lovie again and scrolled on. Months later I saw Mickaboo needed homes for all the incoming lovies and decided to step up. I was given a trial run with Lil' Miss Pichi. What happened next took me by surprise. After picking her up from Wildwood Veterinary Clinic, we got home and as soon as I let her out it was an immediate bond! She loves me and I her and God forbid anyone get in the way! She will take a finger, nose, ear etc. off! I am hers! We have been through hormone issues and egg laying and egg binding scares. I am hoping her hormone implant will smooth matters out now.

Now let's talk about Cammy the Great! (Named for Chamomile the herb, not the tea!) Going on five months old as I write this, I have never met such a hyperspastic lovebird in my life. He is super smart too! Cammy is the little yellow bird who almost didn't make it. He fell or dove into a scalding hot cup of tea when he was 4 weeks old. He had second and third degree burns - and has recovered fully. He is missing part of his eyelids, he can't see well out of his left eye, he has a few unnoticeable missing feathers, some nerve damage to his left leg and wing and damage to his throat - but you would never know it when meeting this little guy! He is an amazing bundle of energy and loving feathery fluff! I hold him and Tipeeka accountable for helping me tame down other birds or show other birds' that veggies are good and how to play with toys! If "inquisitive" had a photo likeness, it would be Cammy!



Last but not least #6 – Sweet Pea, a 3-month-old peach face lovebird. Sweet Pea is new to the flock and came with her mommy and daddy, who had to be separated. She is disabled and has two deformed legs with slipped tendons in the hip and knee. She looks a lot like a mini me of Tipeeka! Sweet Pea is also battling Spirochetes and Gastric Yeast Infection. She is not hand tame but we are working on this. I have to say despite being a nervous baby she has my vote on cutes! She did not seem to know what a toy was but with careful placement of flat perches and toys she is now investigating and tentatively playing! I really can't

wait for her to be off medications and get the all clear so she can join the rest of flock and really flourish. She is becoming more curious and now calls to and imitates Cammy, including the “come here” whistle.



Sweet Pea and



Dad, Beryl



Mom, Kita

Please see more info about this lovebird family at this [link](#).

I have known about Mickaboo since about 1994. In 1993 I was looking into land and grants to put together my own parrot rescue, including plans for a facility. I was alone in this and I had no idea what I was doing, plus I was working six days a week, so the going was slow! I heard about Mickaboo through a friend and remember thinking, ‘Great there goes my plans!’ (I laugh about this now but I was pretty devastated at the time!) I had no clue it was not an actual place and felt very defeated. After this came about life happened in a big way that changed everything I ever knew.

SH: What would you say are some of the joys or challenges of working with special needs birds?

SR: I am special needs myself so we really relate. The special needs birds move at more my speed (slower). (Except for Cammy!) But really, many of these birds came from situations that have left them with anxiety and PTSD. I also suffer with this and we can really relate. It is a therapy of sorts, I help them and in turn they help me. It is a very cyclical healing. The only challenge is coming up with new and creative ways to help, be it cage or play challenges. I love a challenge and am an artist and creative so it is a challenge I love.

They really bring love and joy and much needed laughter to my life! It is amazing to see progress with a bird people have said won't make it or will never be able to do 'that', and then have them do it! Pudgy still amazes me that he is still alive; no one thought he would last more than a few months. It has been a year and a half.

Sherbert was my other Nanday hospice foster and a surprise one at that. He was 34 years old, had minor gout and disabling arthritis and heart issues including a stroke. I did not think he was going to last weeks let alone months. He lived and flourished for a year before passing last February. He amazed me so much. Here was this mostly bald, elderly curmudgeon of a bird I was asked to help with and we ended up having such a strong bond, I fell completely in love with the little guy! He would bark at everyone who got near him including the cat. But he loved me and ended up totally trusting me and I am honored to tears (yes crying right now writing this) to have known and been in his presence. He was truly a very special bird. We had him cremated and I adopted him posthumously. He will be going into the parsley plant, HIS parsley plant, by the door so he can be near and see all the birdies inside and out including his beloved jays.



Parrots can open up so many levels of trust and love for a person. Disabled or special needs birds can magnify that bond and trust a hundredfold! They are very special beings that deserve love and help.

People, including my family, often tell me I should stop doing this, or ask isn't this a lot to take on with my own disability and health issues. My answer is, while this may be a big undertaking and often exhausting it is also very rewarding and a kind of therapy. I then refer them to a New York Times article – [What Does A Parrot Know About PTSD?](#) I have been through much trauma and have suffered PTSD and depression. What we do for each other is cyclical, I help them and they in turn help and save me. Not everyone 'gets' that. When I first saw the article I had already known some of how they help and how we benefit each other but reading it gave so much more depth and insight.

I recommend people watch [Parrot Confidential](#) on YouTube too, especially people new to parrots.

SH: What have been some of your most memorable experiences since joining Mickaboo?

SR: There are quite a few!

First I have to say it amazes me how emotional I can get over another person's birds. When I say 'How emotional' I am talking about sitting here bawling my eyes out, especially when someone's bird passes, but also abuse cases or reading about abuse and neglect and death. Not to say I was not sensitive to this before, but it seems to be even more so now.

As to experiences-

I have to say fostering Sherbert the Nanday conure was pretty memorable. I never expected to take him in but even more surprising was how quickly this not-so-tame bird and I bonded. It was not just because he was old and ailing - he would draw blood from everyone else in the house! He made me laugh every day with his curmudgeon-ness and his grumpy-old-man-barking-in-a-blue-jay-voice at others if they got too close to him, his cage or me! My ex-husband would say he was like a grumpy old man yelling, "GET OFF MY LAWN, Gosh Darn Kids!!!" I fell in love with this bird and him to me. I will never forget the first time he nuzzled my cheek and gave me a kiss or how excited he got when I brought him out on my deck and he spotted the parsley plant! I have never seen a bird literally *dive* into a plant to take a bath in it! And, the second time he had fun in the parsley he had a stroke, he was so excited! The stroke and subsequent unconsciousness was followed by me doing the equivalent of birdy resuscitation and bringing him back only to realize I probably should not have done that. He was only with me a year but he made a huge impact on me and led to me taking in more foster birds.

Jazz (male severe macaw) was another memorable one and another I never expected to have here, even if it didn't last. I miss him so much. He was another one who made me laugh daily, be it with his antics or his goofy talking and crazy old lady laugh! It was also really cool to see Tipeeka and Jazz together before things went south. I think one of the most memorable moments was being violated while on the futon one night. It was funny but not so funny and an "EW" moment at the same time! He was playing right next to me and kept grabbing my hand. The next thing I know he is barfing all over and has his butt pressed up against my arm doing his 'thang'! Eek! That is one I won't be forgetting soon! I was marked as his from then on out.



Jazz and Tipeeka

SH: Thank you Sandy, it is clear how much you love your flock and that they are an important part of your life. Thank you for taking in these special birds and sharing how rewarding it has been for you and them. I know as lovebird coordinator that Pichi, Cammy, and Sweet Pea have been doing well under your care!