

## Buster's memoir

The first thing I remember is waking up in a very small space. It was all rounded and only a little light filtered through the white walls. If I moved, the space I was in seemed to move also. I had no air and I really needed to get out of there. So I tapped on the wall and nobody came so I kept tapping and eventually a crack appeared. I kept working at that crack until a piece busted out. Air! And lots and lots of space with small fluffy critters running around, some were yellow and some were blue. Others were green or white and they all had big yellow noses. I looked down at myself and I could see I was one of the green ones. There were a lot of pieces of that wall that I'd been inside all over the floor. Everybody had broken out just like I did. I looked around and I could see for a long long way but when I tried to go very far I ran into some kind of barrier. I could see through it but it kept me from going out there. I explored that barrier all the way around and discovered that I was in a box. There was light at the top of the box that made it warm in there. So we all dried off quickly. Sometime later, after everybody was out of their little shells and all dried off we saw something with wire sides come close and a great big hand reached in to our nice warm space and grabbed one of us and put him in the thing with the wire sides. He did that with all of us. It was kind of scary to be grabbed but I just wanted to be with everybody else. Once I got in that thing which I later learned was a cage, I could see that there was water and seeds to eat, as well as a nice cuttlefish bone to chew on. There was paper on the bottom of the cage that they would take out when it was getting pretty poopy and replace with new paper. Over some time, we all got bigger and people would come and put their faces right next to the cage and look at us and then the big hand would come and grab one out of the cage and put him in a cage all by himself and give it to a person. We would never see that friend again.

One time one of us came back and we learned that he had been with a family in a nice house but they had to bring him back. He said it was great and he wanted to be adopted again. I decided I wanted to be adopted.

One day a boy came and looked at us. I thought he looks nice. I want to go with him! So I went to the wire on the side nearest him and hung on with my claws and beak and looked at him. He smiled at me and said, "I want that green one." They put me in my own cage. The nice lady he referred to as Mom helped the boy get in the car and hold me and my cage. Then the car started moving and I could see the tops of trees going by. I wanted to sit on that perch that was hanging from top of my cage, but it kept swinging as we moved along and I didn't want to get thrown all over the place so I just hung on to the side of the cage.

We finally stopped and a little girl came running to me. "You got a bird! It's a green one! It's a boy bird! I can tell because I learned that parakeets have something that looks like glasses above their beaks and the ones for boy birds are blue. What's his name? Can I play with him?" "His name is Buster. No, Janet, he's my bird and you can't play with him." Then the boy's mom said that the bird needs to get used to his new home before anybody can play with him.

They took me inside and hung my cage from a hook in the wall. I always loved that room because right under my cage was the telephone bench and I could watch people talking and join in the conversation. It's also where they ate dinner which was really important and I will get to that later. The heater vent was right under my cage too so I was always nice and warm. Of course I didn't stay in my cage much after I got used to the place. I spent my days all over the house. They opened my cage door in the morning and at night I went back in my cage to sleep and they covered the cage with a cloth so it was

nice and dark. My favorite place was in the Next Room where they would watch television and read books. I love to read books. I would fly in there and sit on the top edge of the book and chew all along The Edge. It was really good for my beak and and I really felt part of the family. I never really understood how they could sharpen their beaks when they didn't chew on the book. They just looked at it. Humans are weird! They also would just sit there and look at the TV when there were so much more interesting things to do. But it kept them sitting still so I could groom them. I like to Groom the boy the best because his hair was just the right length. I would sit on his head and run little strands of hair through my beak so they would be nice and clean. I didn't do it to the dad because he didn't really have much hair. And the mom usually wouldn't sit still long enough. I tried with the girl but her hair was so curly that I would get tangled in it when I was trying to run it through my beak and then she would a Yelp and chase me out of it. But they all let me help them read their books.

My second favorite place was the table at mealtime. The boy and the girl let me get down on the table and eat off their plates. The lettuce in a sandwich was particularly good. And mashed potatoes were heavenly. Sometimes when no one was looking, the boy would let me eat out of his mouth. That was nice because he could get things all softened up for me. I liked the boy's tomato soup too. I used to sit on the edge of the soup bowl and dip my beak into the soup. But one time I leaned over too far and I fell in. Good thing the soup wasn't very hot! Mom saw what happened and she ran in and scooped me out of the soup and rinsed me off under that kitchen faucet. When I was pretty clean she ran an inch of water into the sink and I could finish taking a bath. I always liked that bathtub. Every once in awhile she would run an inch of water into the sink and I would go give myself a bath.

During the day I kept myself busy looking for the other bird in the house and having conversations with him. It was never hard to find him. If I flew into the living room or into the girl's bedroom, I would see him right away looking at me through something the family called a mirror. He was a beautiful green parakeet just like me. And he would stay and talk to me as long as I wanted. So I would fly in and sit on top of that thing they called a mirror and hang upside down. And we would talk and talk and tap our beaks together. We had such a good time. Between that other green bird and my family I was never lonely even when everyone in the family was gone somewhere. And then there was the best time of the year when Tippy Came To Stay. His real name was Tippecanoe. Tippy was a blue boy and he lived in the house next door. When his family went on vacation, Tippy came and stayed with us. When we went on vacation I went over and stayed with Tippy. We had so much fun. He brought his toys with him. I particularly liked the ferris wheel he had. Mom filled the little cars with seeds and we were supposed to sit on the ferris wheel and make it go round. But we figured something else out. We sat on the table and used our beaks to move each car to the next car so we could eat all the seeds. And I showed Tippy the other green bird so we could both talk to him. He never was quite brave enough to eat off the table though. At his house they never let us do that so I guess he figured he couldn't do it at my house either.

Sometimes I was a bad bird. People would come over to visit and if I saw them come in the front door, I would fly real fast just over their heads so they would feel my wings flapping just above them. The first time I did it to somebody that really scared them. I never really got in trouble though, mom and dad would just laugh and tell the person that it was just Buster welcoming them to our home. Probably lucky for me nobody came who had a bird phobia. Sometimes the guests would say that we should worry about Buster flying outside, but I was never tempted. I knew when I had the best deal any bird could have.

I got old eventually. Birds don't live as long as people. First I couldn't fly as fast as I used to. And then I couldn't land on the place where I talk to the other bird without slipping off. Eventually, it got to the point where I had to stay in my cage all the time. The family would come and talk to me but I just couldn't fly around anymore. As I tell this story I don't think I have much time left because it's getting harder and harder to hang on to my perch without leaning against the side of the cage. It was a good life. I love them they love me. I know they'll miss me but maybe I'll go meet up with some of my incubator mates and maybe even Tippy.