

And Then She Was Gone

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I've been a writer most of my life . . . all fourteen years of it! But, I never thought I'd be writing this true story. You see, I am by nature a careful person and so I never expected to be involved in such a horrible mistake that nearly cost us the life of our precious Alexandrine parrot.

Veda is three years old and we've had her since she was weaned. We all help taking care of our birds but Veda and I have a special closeness. Wherever I am, she finds me and although we keep her flight feathers clipped, she flies well enough to reach her favorite perch...my shoulder! She always flies straight to me and never away from me ... until this time.

It had been a hideous day at school and I arrived home exhausted. I threw myself on the couch and welcomed Veda to my shoulder. Then I realized that I left my backpack in the car. With Veda hanging on I shuffled to the garage. The thought crossed my mind that the garage door was wide open. In one of those split second conversations with myself I thought, "Should I leave Veda inside? Naaah, she always flies to me, never away from me! Besides, she'll be too scared to leave my shoulder." I decided to take the risk.

As I slammed the car door Veda launched off my shoulder and flew out of the garage heading into the field next to our house. I ran after her calling her name but the truth is I wasn't really worried. I knew she would flutter to the ground a few feet away. Besides, Veda always flies to me...never away, remember? What I hadn't counted on was her long tail and her instinct to keep flying. In a panic, I turned to yell for my sister; and then she was gone.

Within seconds my sister, parents and grandparents were calling and searching. Every tree was checked and rechecked. We looked everywhere for hours. That's when it hit me. The impossible had happened. Veda was gone (and it was my doing). As it grew dark we were forced to wait until the next day to continue our search. Mom tied the door of Veda's cage open and we vowed not to close it until she returned.

The next day we swallowed our sorrow and prepared for action. Dad started searching before dawn; we put Ricky, our Severe Macaw in a cage outside hoping his calls would guide Veda back to our house; we blared tapes of our other birds' voices; we called all the vets, the zoo keeper, the animal control officer, all the pet stores and we put a big ad in the newspaper. We decided that our best searchers would be children because they spend more time outside and would believe their eyes if they saw a tropical bird fly by, so we talked to the kids at our elementary school and posted pictures on all the doors, inside and out. We told them that if they ever dreamed of being heros, the time was now.

On the third night, I have to admit that I had lost hope of ever finding her. We drove around slowly, calling her name over and over, hoping she would make just one single sound so we could distinguish her little green body and pimento beak from the thick foliage around us. The weather had turned cold and it started hailing. We were beside ourselves with sorrow and decided to drive home. Just then, Mom's cell phone rang! For a moment my sister and I clutched each other tightly, certain Veda had been found dead. My mom got off the phone and stared at us in amazement. "She's alive!" she cried.

Veda had been spotted on the church roof almost 2 miles away, by the Boy Scouts who

had heard her squawking. As the boys tried to coax her down, she flew to the shoulder of a small red haired girl, named Amanda. We headed to the church, sobbing with happiness and relief. On our way we passed a van going in the opposite direction. In the front seat was a little boy with a bird perched on his shoulder! WAIT! It was Veda ! They were bringing her to our house. We backed up waving wildly to flag them down. Finally, the driver stopped and started rolling down his window to talk with us. “NOOOOO!”, we screamed frantically, “Close the window!” Can you imagine if she flew out of his car window and we lost her again?

I jumped out of the car and cracked open the van door just enough to reach in for Veda. Completely exhausted, she used the last of her energy to step on to my hand. I wrapped her safely in a sweatshirt and stroked her soft green back. She was limp, hungry, thirsty and tired but she was not hurt in any way. I could not believe my eyes. This 48 hour nightmare had finally ended ... and happily.

I hope that you can learn from my experience. It is true that we all take risks, sometimes we win and sometimes we lose. But why take this risk when the price of losing is so high? Now I know that given a chance, even pets birds can fly away. I had no idea how much I would miss Veda until I came so close to losing her. In the words of Antoine de Saint Exupery, “You become responsible forever, for what you have tamed.” That’s a responsibility I won’t take risks with again.