

PARENTING

Goodbye, hot rod: I'm trying to be eco-friendly



By TASHA FABELLA-JONAS
The Kansas City Star

She's gone. I will never see her metallic black sexy body ever again. I'll never sit in her soft leather seats again. I'll never hear her 340 horsepower 5.7 L Hemi V8 engine ever... again.

She gave us eight faithful years. There were never any major problems with her — a few suspension issues, a sensor or two, but other than that she ran like a smooth stallion.

She's the one that sped me to the hospital when I was in labor. She's the one that rolled carefully home with our new baby boy. She's the one that got me back safe after numerous snowstorms. She's the one that always started right up and got me to my job.

That's right. We traded in the Magnum.

I always thought we would keep her until she died, but plans change, people change, the economy changes.

I used to get head nods from fellow Dodge Magnum owners. Now when they drive next to me I don't even get half a smile. They don't know who I am, who I once was.

I'm a traitor. Maybe it's my dad's fault for teaching me that cars become part of us, part of our souls. They are symbolic of who we are: our style, our personalities and sometimes our income.

I'm a sentimental car owner. I've owned only three my entire life. I still have my first baby, a 1992 RS candy-apple red Chevy Camaro. She's not going anywhere, for now.

So, what did I trade my black beauty for? I went from a hot-rod momma to an eco-friendly mini momma.

Uh, no, not a minivan momma, a 2013 Ford Fiesta SFE momma. Metallic black, with a moon roof, of course. Brought all the way to me from Chicago.

Most people know I'm anti-minivan for various reasons. Do you really need that much room for two children? Do you buy that much stuff every day that you need a trunk the size of our spare bedroom closet? A soccer ball isn't that big.

It's about downsizing, about saving money.

A while back my husband and I decided our cozy family of three was too perfect to screw up. Bo has been more than we asked for. He's a good kid.

"Mom, I liked your other car. It had more room for my toys."

"Well, it was time for her to go. She'll get another owner who loves her as much as we did. Besides, you shouldn't be bringing so many toys into the car."

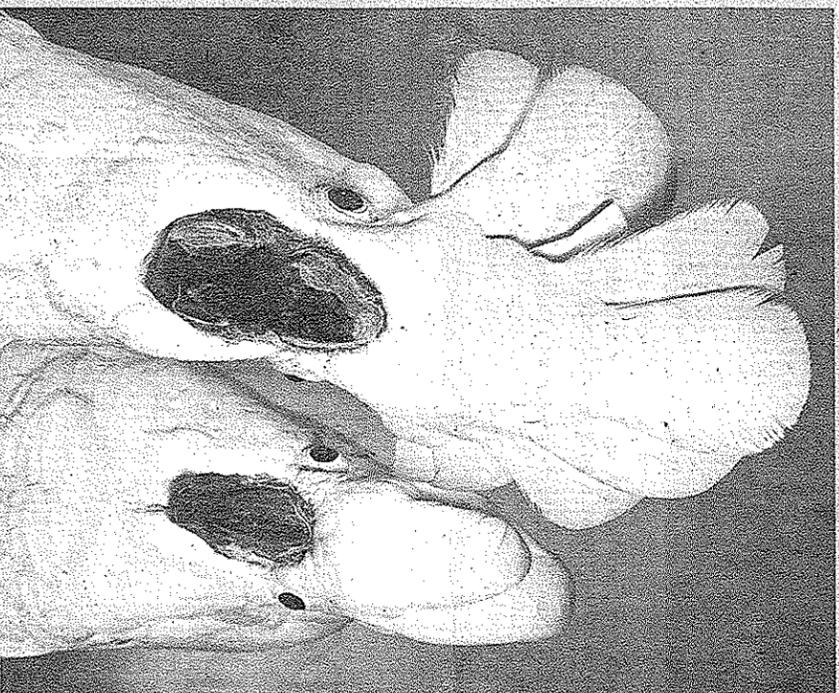
This car's backseat is mature, with no room for Transformers or large TV screens. She'll seat our 7-year-old just fine while he



PHOTOS BY ALLISON LONG / THE KANSAS CITY STAR
Marci Walters gives a little love to Chico, a green-winged macaw, one of the abused, neglected and abandoned birds that the Beak N' Wings group takes in.



FROM MARCI WALTERS
It was a two-way learning experience between Maggie, a militant military macaw, and Walters. The big bird became sociable enough to find a new home in Columbia, Mo.



Bubba (left) and Alberta pose for their closeup. These cockatoos are among the several being boarded by Walters at her Kansas City, Kan., home.



Walters plays a tree to a flock of her exotic wards, some of which she is helping to socialize so they can find good homes.

FEYI

TO THE RESCUE | A biting bird meets its match

LEARNING ON THE FLY

Unruly Maggie regained her social skills in Marci Walters' foster home, but the macaw taught some lessons of her own.

By DUGAN ARNETT
The Kansas City Star

When her friends at Beak N' Wings asked her about the possibility of taking in a 13-year-old macaw named Maggie a couple of years back, Marci Walters didn't flinch.

Walters was no stranger to the nonprofit group, which had originally formed in 1999 to provide education and advice to current or prospective bird owners before it transformed into a rescue and adoption agency for large birds. She had provided a foster home to more than a dozen of the program's birds before and had found the work highly rewarding.

Yes, she was aware of the big parrot in question, one that had developed a certain reputation. Walters had heard the stories. A particularly hard case, Maggie — a bright green military macaw — had been bouncing around the system for years, including a yearlong stint at a foster home that specializes in particularly poorly behaved birds.

It's not unheard of for a bird to remain under the care of Beak N' Wings for a while; the typical stay is around 12 months. Maggie was known to bite, to be difficult to handle, to be a general handful.

But Walters was assured by another program member that Maggie had made strides. The bird was ready for a new foster home, one that could continue to work with her and maybe, possibly, help her find a permanent nest.

OK, Walters said. How bad could it be?

■ ■ ■
Bird buyers get swept up in the romantic notion of owning an exotic bird, only to find that the work involved is more than they bargained for.

The family that had previously owned Maggie hadn't had time to give the bird the attention she needed, and so Maggie had become de-socialized — nervous, distrustful, aggressive. It's not uncommon.

"They require constant work on socialization,"

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PARROT: Foster parent forms unlikely bond with problem bird

FROM CI

says Jennifer Clair, vice president of rescue and adoption for Beak N Wings, which currently has 17 foster homes housing roughly 70 birds and has adopted out more than 1,300 birds since its inception. "Taking care of the cage and the food and all that isn't really the difficult part. It's the social needs of the bird."

Compounding matters was the fact that Walters was learning on the fly. Through a longtime bird owner, her experience involved smaller breeds: cockatiels and cockatoos. A military macaw can stand more than 2 feet tall with a nearly 4-foot wingspan.

For the first couple of weeks in her Kansas City, Kan., abode, she couldn't coax Maggie out of her cage. The bird got nervous if more than one person was in the living room, where her cage was stationed. When Maggie did eventually work up the nerve to come out of her cage, she'd refuse to go back in, remaining out all night.

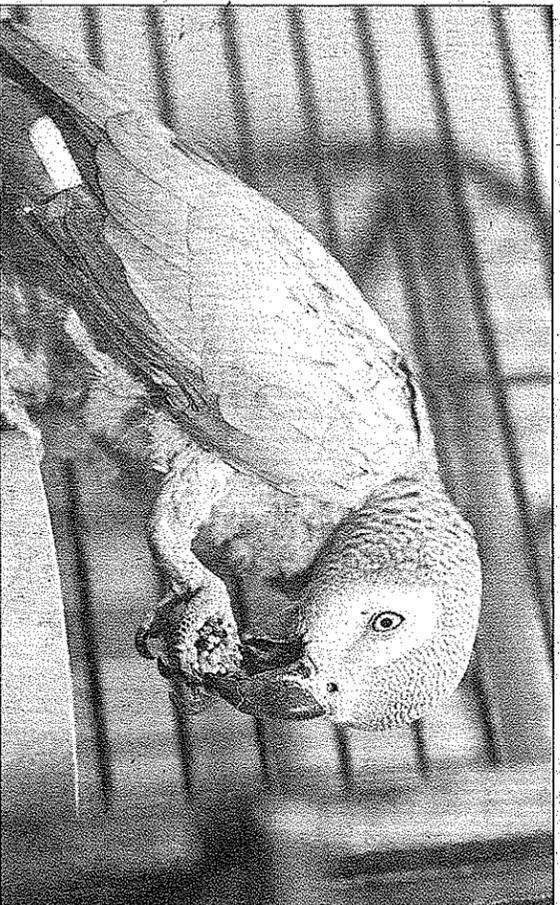
Then, of course, there was the biting.

It's a common symptom of maladjusted parrots, and Maggie didn't hold back. She got Walters in the hand, doing nerve damage: snapped her thumbnail so hard it split in two; left her keeper with a 6-inch bruise; after grabbing an arm and shaking her head violently.

Walters admits it scared her. She didn't know what to do, she'd tell fellow Beak N Wings foster care provider Larry Kloepfel, who had worked with Maggie previously.

"Just be patient with her," he told her, "because it's going to take her time to get to know you."

Sure enough, Maggie began to let down her guard. It



PHOTOS BY ALLISON LONG | KANSAS CITY STAR
Because Peggy Sue is an African gray parrot, considered one of the world's most intelligent bird species, she probably can't be talked out of her treat.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information on Beak N Wings, go to beaknwings.org or call 913-322-3398.

was a baby-step-type situation. Walters learned how to convince the bird to step up onto her arm and to get back into the cage when it was time.

"I think she finally learned that biting was not going to give her her way," Walters says.

About three months in, Walters decided to try Maggie at a Beak N Wings event. The gatherings are held a few times a month to introduce the birds to the public — and potential adopters. The more events a bird goes to, the better chance it has at adoption.

Getting her there wasn't easy; it took an hour of finagling just to get the bird in to her carrier. "Picture a cat that you're trying to put into a carrier," Walters says. "All

the claws come out."

Once they arrived at the event, the bird had to be made comfortable. Then came the not-so-pleasant chore of getting her back in her cage for the ride home.

But Maggie kept improving.

Before long, she was helping herself to the bowl of nuts Walters kept on the living room table. She was curious, so she'd pop up at random times. Sometimes, she'd scoot down from her cage and walk right on down the hallway into Walters' bedroom. Maggie learned that being put into a carrier didn't mean she was being taken to a new home, and Walters learned to be stern with her high-maintenance house guest.

The bird was developing a bond with its new owner and had become much more personable. So it shouldn't have been a total surprise that when Beak N Wings was contacted in 2012 by a woman from Columbia interested in adopting, the or-

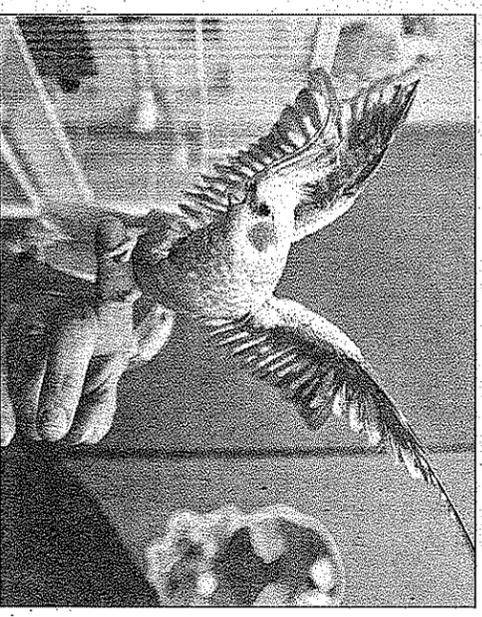
ganization thought Maggie might be a good option.

Walters insisted on doing the home study — an in-home interview conducted by a Beak N Wings representative to determine whether the home is a suitable fit for a bird — herself, and so she drove to Columbia and met with Leslie Rule. She met the other birds Rule owned, saw how they interacted with her and decided, despite the unlikely bond she'd formed with Maggie, that it was a perfect fit.

She wasn't there the day Rule picked up the bird, which is good, Walters says, because "I didn't have to cry."

But she put together a little care package for Maggie, filled with the bird's favorite toys and snacks, and sent her back into the world.

Since Maggie's arrival in Columbia, she has been a model citizen. Rule calls her a "good bird, a sweet bird." She no longer bites. She



Casey, a cockatiel, perches on Walters' finger.

likes to walk around with paper lunch sacks over her head, Rule reports, and she's also a bit of a prima donna.

"She really likes baths," Rule says.

Walters, meanwhile, has moved on as well. She's keeping nine large birds now, in addition to a smattering of smaller ones. She's comfortable with them, and a lot of the credit for that, she says, goes to Maggie.

"She's the bird," Walters says, "that gave me the confidence."

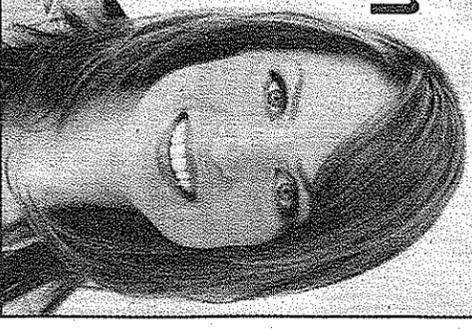
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