

A Bird's Life After Owner's Death

Birds that have been in the same home for many years should remain together as they may gain a sense of comfort from having a familiar presence after an owner passes on

By Chris Davis

Photo Courtesy Chris Parrella, California

Take steps now to ensure that your pet birds will be taken care in the chance that you pass on before they do.

I met Mary more than 15 years ago. She endured many trials in her life, physically, financially and, ultimately, mentally. Because of her worsening condition, many of Mary's pets – dogs, cats and some of her birds – had to go to new homes. Those decisions hurt her greatly but were ultimately the best for the animals. She finally settled on life with her two African grey parrots and her double yellow-headed Amazon parrot, Poquito. The downsized family was more manageable as she dealt with the increased severity of her illness.

Recently, Mary passed away. Carla, her close friend who had lovingly continued daily telephone contact with her, flew to Connecticut to take care of the birds and Mary's effects. Fortunately, Carla had groomed and cared for Mary's birds, so the birds were greatly comforted by her presence.

Poquito fell in love with Mary's future sister-in-law, who eagerly adopted her. Carla took the two African grey parrots to her home. The birds accepted the move, and Carla's husband promptly fell in love with the little grey charmers. About two weeks after they arrived, the birds fell into a state of such depression that Carla was deeply concerned for their well-being. A day or two later, they returned to normal. It was almost as if they realized their lives were forever changed, dealt with that fact, and moved forward.

Who Will Care For My Pet Birds?

Birds that have been in the same home for many years should remain together as they may gain a sense of comfort from having a familiar presence after an owner passes on. [More>>](#)

Carla and I talked about the birds and of our sorrow for Mary and the mental suffering she endured for so long. We spoke, as well, of our gratitude for her having loved her birds so much, for her time spent talking and playing with them, reinforcing their charm and intelligence and for the good manners she taught them.

Even though every other area of her life was in relative disarray, Mary had planned every aspect of how she wished her birds and estate to be handled after her death. Without her careful planning, and the documents to back it up, her birds would have been left in a state of limbo, and Carla would not have had the legal right to do what was best for them.

The best way an animal owner can repay their nonhuman family members for years of love and companionship is to make sure they are happy, healthy, emotionally well-adjusted and well-behaved and that they respond to some simple requests, including those for stepping onto the hand, remaining in their play area and going back into their cages.

Preparing for a companion bird's future care is equally important. According to current laws, if a bird's care is not clearly defined in a legal document, literally anything can happen to it. Our current legal system lists birds as property, not as beloved family members. Only those who own and love the bird can make clear decisions relating to their well-being after the owners die or are incapacitated.