

The Bird that Sounded Flat

by Ed Landry

I can't remember how old I was. Maybe ten. It was a happy moment. His name was Pecky, my first and only parakeet. I played with him every day and loved that bird. But the day that will live in infamy was about to be played out. Like a giant locomotive rumbling into the station, the inevitable was approaching.

I had put my favorite song on the record player. (They really had those things when I was a kid). The song was "The Baby Elephant Walk." Pecky did a dance when he heard music. My mother and father and I were laughing and watching the bird dance on the floor.

Then came that rumbling sound from the kitchen. It grew and grew, and we all turned to see my younger sister lumbering into the room. She was excited about something she wanted to show us and didn't notice Pecky.

Poor Pecky. One moment in the height of exhilaration, she was making us happy, and the next we were scraping her off the floor with a pancake flipper. If you look in the dictionary under the word "squash," you will find a picture of my bird.

Today I am 67, and I still remind the bird killer of what she did. We still send crazy cards and funny gifts about that bird. There were the slippers one year with feathers sewn on the bottom and sticking out all over. I really can't tell about all the creative Pecky drawings and e-mail attachments that have given us a good laugh over the years. We sure got a lot of mileage over a dead bird. Just think! If it had been a cat, it might have filled a library.

So why am I telling the story? As a reminder of the things that actually keep families apart. People spend their lives not forgiving their parents and sisters and brothers over some dumb thing done years ago. What a waste! I have a great sister. She is a riot. Wouldn't it have been tragic if I didn't know that because we weren't talking?

Unforgiveness can be a life spoiler. I have seen this one played out too many times in people's lives. Call it the Pecky Principle. People are important, the rest is squashed birds! Maybe there is a squashed bird in your past. Maybe it is time to invoke the Pecky Principle.

One such tragedy is well documented in history. It is an infamous feud between two families. This one did not begin over a bird but over a pig. What began as a family loyalty issue during the Civil War grew into a major dispute and finally escalated into the most famous all-out feud in history over a stolen pig. What should have been a simple disagreement over "little Porky" boiled over for one hundred years and cost a dozen lives in outright gun battles. The pig problem grew into land and timber disputes and deep-seated hatred which spanned generation after generation. And then one day, after a century of blowing each other's brains out, the Hatfields and the McCoys laid down their shotguns and signed a peace treaty putting an end to the madness.

Today the two families live in peace. 60 descendants decided that they did not want to be remembered the way their ancestors were and signed the reconciliation document which read in part:

"We ask by God's grace and love that we be forever remembered as those that bound together the hearts of two families to form a family of freedom in America." Today in Kentucky and West Virginia June 14th is officially Hatfield and McCoy Reconciliation Day. I met one of the actual McCoys who was part of that peace treaty and heard the story first hand. Absolutely amazing.

In the end it was just a pig. For my sister and I, it was just a bird. When my chemo began and my hair started to fall out, my sympathetic, bird-squashing sister drove from Portland to Seattle to "feel my pain." When she walked in the hospital and entered my room, she must have drawn a fair bit of attention because she and her daughter, my niece, were dressed in bird feathers with bird masks. My sister works in a large medical facility and is aware of the treatments and what they do to the treatmentee. (Is that a word?) She knew it would be a matter of only a few days before I entered the realm of the bald, the world where people don't waste all their hormones

growing hair. So how did she express her sympathy? She talked me into cutting my hair off rather than waiting for it to fall off in blotches. She told my wife how to do it.

Before she left, Sis gave me a supply of gummy organs to hand out to the doctors. I kid you not, gummy *organs*! Little green, yummy kidneys and parts I couldn't recognize. They were definitely a hit on that floor of the hospital. You should have seen those doctors munching on livers and eyeballs and bragging about what body part they were enjoying. When my sister and niece left, I could hear her laughing all the way down the hall. Two molting gooney birds meandering through the ward dropping their feathers.

Shortly afterwards my daughter, Rachel, came for a visit. She and my wife did the haircut my sister recommended. But I still don't understand something. At first they cut my hair in a Mohawk fashion and then put earrings on me and we took some "outlaw motorcycle gang-type photos." I have always suspected the whole thing was my sister's idea. I really wonder if my hair would have really fallen out.

So how is the bird thing doing these days? Well, I have been busy trying to grow a 500-pound parakeet. Why? None of your business.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," Matthew 6:12-14 (NIV).?