



Isabella's Aviary

By: Trisha Gaddis

What an honor to be writing an article for The American Federation of Aviculture, an amazing organization that has supported my daughter Isabella since first hearing her story. Isabella's Aviary Alliance, LLC was created to honor the life and dreams of my incredible daughter Isabella. Her life passion is parrots, and her dream is to help other special needs children through our parrot breeding and training efforts. This is our story.

On January 20, 2013, our world was

completely destroyed in one horrible afternoon during a visit to the neurologist. My 10 year old daughter, Isabella, was diagnosed with neurodegenerative disease, similar to Alzheimer's Disease in a child. The early weeks after diagnosis were a blur of tears, sleepless nights, and unimaginable pain. I grieved the experiences I would likely never have with my daughter: watching her start and finish college, getting married – or becoming a mother – and then there were times that I wondered whether I would get to watch her grow at all.

In early February she asked me whether her parakeets could have babies so that she could be a mommy too. With that one simple and innocent request, a new future and purpose took hold for us.

I realized that Isabella's life was being right now, and that my dark spiral of emotions had no place near the beautiful life of my daughter. I contacted my friend, Alycia Antheunisse, from Cedar Hills Birds, and asked which types of birds would breed quickly. Alycia and her husband, Eric, generously donated a pair

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of Green-cheek conures and cockatiels to support Isabella's dreams.

While driving to the airport only five days later to pick up the pairs, Isabella and I talked about what we would do with our eventual chicks. We instantly agreed that we would hand-rear our chicks to help other special

needs children. Our birds have given Belle strength, friendship, and love during her most difficult hours. She has pushed herself forward for her birds, when she would have stopped for other reasons.

Isabella wanting baby birds was no real surprise to me. She has been raised around

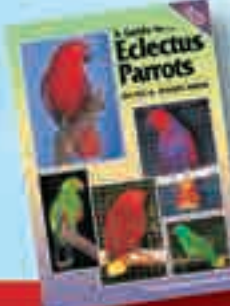
parrots big and small, and has always had a special way with them. Her passion for birds has been lifelong, and definitely inherited from me. It never occurred to me that this shared passion would also become a purpose for the both of us. Yet, that night when we put the new pairs into cages with nest boxes, I never could have guessed how quickly and beautifully our entire lives would transform within just a few months.


Isabella's Aviary Alliance, LLC was formed with ten diverse, knowledgeable and dedicated board members, to ensure the charitable goals and future direction of our organization. We opened a Facebook page to share her personal story and adventures in raising birds, and a website to accept adoption forms. Isabella and I were shocked and humbled to see hundreds, and eventually thousands, of people not only join us, but offer us their friendship, support and love. Soon we had an amazing community dedicated to making my daughter's dreams come true.

The American Federation of Aviculture stepped forward to honor Isabella's efforts and passion with a membership that she has proudly carried around since. Isabella and I plan to actively participate and attend AFA conferences in the near future so that she is



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able to understand the size and scope of this international organization she has been welcomed into, as well as promote the developing goals of our organization. Children are frequently underappreciated for their hard work, passion, and advancements within the aviculture community, so it was incredible tribute to have AFA support her efforts from the moment they heard her story.

Isabella's sponsorship from AFA has now lead to recognition and support from other sponsors within the avian community. Kaytee/SuperPet has generously agreed to sponsor and supply both our aviary and adoptive families with cages and accessories. Avian Biotech is donating DNA sexing for all of our chicks. Barbara Heidenreich of Good Bird Inc. is providing educational books and DVD's. AvianPRO has agreed to exclusively sponsor our aviary and adoptive families with their quality food and treats. Additionally, Parrot Safari Toy Factory will be donating an ongoing supply of appropriate toys!

Our dream started off small and personal, just a mom and a daughter, wanting to experience breeding our own chicks together during a time of tragedy. Now because so many organizations, businesses and individuals have joined Isabella's cause we've grown into something much greater. When I look to the future I'm not as scared and sad as I was before. Instead I feel honored to be part of this amazing and evolving journey with so many wonderful supporters beside us.

Already Isabella has benefited in unexpected and incredible ways. The previous year has been filled with a brutal decline in abilities, robbing her of skills like spelling her own name or counting to 20 on most days. Month by month we watched her get worse. From the moment the chicks were born something in her just lit up, and her heart and soul are shining again. While I can't explain why, I can say with certainty that she has regained some of her old skills. Our birds, but most especially our cockatiel chicks, have given her comfort,

love and friendship. Recently she said that the chicks make her feel safe; and in the scary powerless world of being a sick child, safety is probably the most amazing gift of all.

When I look at the future, I feel infinitely blessed for the opportunity to provide other special needs children with the companionship of birds. Not every child can have a dog or cat, and few parents ever consider a parrot because of so many negative misconceptions about their care. It is my belief that parrots are one the most intelligent, compassionate, easy to train, entertaining and fun pets that a child could own - especially a child who spends a lot of time sick at home.

Now I look at my daughter and see the future, a potential and purpose bigger than just breeding birds for a good cause. Isabella's dreams have opened the door to an entirely new market for aviculture, the disabled community. Over the course of a lifetime the rate of disability ranges from 8.4% at birth, to 70.5% in the elderly populations (f1). Though the subject of disability is not often addressed in the avian community, it is well known that many disabled individuals keep pet birds.

It is my firm and heartfelt stance that parrots should be recognized as service animals under the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA). Within my own home I have been alerted to Isabella's seizures by my eclectic. I have seen Isabella pull herself together for her cockatiel in times that she would have otherwise required dangerous medical sedation. I have seen my child cognitively and emotionally improve as a result of her relationship with her parrots. In sharing our experience with others, we have heard the similar service stories about pet parrots time after time. I know that many disabled people live in apartments and cannot bring a German Shepherd dog outside to potty every four hours. There need to be other options. Other individuals have allergies or aversions to pet hair and pet smells.

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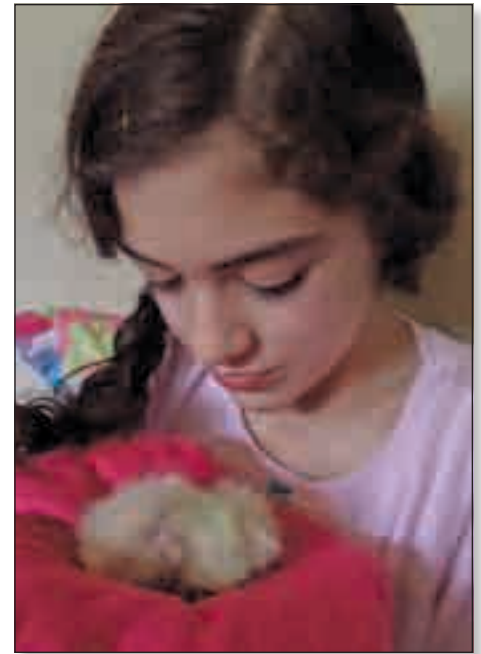
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As Isabella's Aviary Alliance, LLC moves forward with breeding and placing our hand-raised chicks with special needs children, we will also be initiating policy change in regards to the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA removed the rights of disabled Americans to certify service animals outside of dogs in March of 2011 (f2). So in tandem with our companion parrot placements for special needs children, we are officially announcing our mission to have the medical/mental health service benefits of parrots recognized by ADA federal law under "Isabella's Service Animal Act."

It is my hope that the avian communities and the disability communities that surround and support Isabella will bind together to create a united stance toward pursuing the recognition of parrots as ADA certifiable service animals. This recognition is not only important for disabled individuals, but also the avian community at large. While an exact value has not been established for the annual revenue of the service dogs industry, it is safe

to say that it represents a solid and growing area of profit within the pet industry market - a \$53 billion dollars market in the US for 2012 (f3).

The cost of a service dog is \$15,000 (f4), with an average lifespan of 12.8. Parrot training is well established, as they are both intelligent and intuitive. Given their long lifespan, and the general acceptability of birds in most living communities, it is both reasonable and cost effectiveness to promote parrots as companion birds, and represents a new and exciting market for the avian community, as well as an important support and animal service option for disabled individuals.

As Isabella's Aviary Alliance, LLC moves forward we do so with a big heart and big plans. Our primary goal is to improve the lives and enrich the hearts of special needs children and families with whom we work. We truly believe that with proper support and education, the hearts of children and parrots can come together and connect in a way that changes the lives of both for the better. We

also will be initiating policy change to ensure that all disabled individuals are given the right to choose a service animal that will best meet their unique needs related to disability.

Thank you for believing in my daughter Isabella and supporting her big dreams. We appreciate your knowledge, friendship and support as we navigate this new and special adventure in aviculture! We look forward to becoming more active in the aviculture community soon, and welcome each of you to join us on our Facebook or website pages in meanwhile!

Thank you, Trisha Gaddis
President and Mother

Isabella's Aviary Alliance, LLC

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