

"Toby's Great Adventure" A Love Story

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Toby is a Cockatiel. He marched into Cris and Ray Pfeiffer's life one day as Ray opened the door of his back porch. There Toby stood looking up at Ray; then he stepped in and made himself right at home. He instantly found a place in the Pfeiffer's heart.

Ray rushed out to buy some bird food. They named the bird Toby. He was tame and obviously someone's pet, but his wings had not been clipped, so he had escaped! No one ever claimed him, and within a few weeks he knew he had found a pair of loving parents.

Ray and Cris are in the travel business not an agency, but two private individuals who organize, book and guide historical trips to Europe, mainly concerning World War II. When they decided to retire they wanted to go to Europe and live there for six months. They never once considered leaving Toby behind for so long. As Cris and Ray like to say: "he is our child; we couldn't do that!" So they proceeded to find out what they needed to do to take Toby with them. Little did they know what they would encounter!

After a number of inquiries, Ray and Cris Pfeiffer were told to call the Department of Agriculture in Washington. They came in contact with a Dr. Hand who is the head of the veterinarian import/export services, and found him very helpful. Through him, they learned there would be a number of procedures to go through, and it was explained to them in detail.

There are two places in Florida where you may go to have a document endorsed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; one is in Miami, the other in Gainesville. Ray Pfeiffer called both and found there is total confusion regarding exactly who is

responsible for starting the procedures to export a bird. Dr. Hand in Washington has the answers, but the lower echelons in both Florida offices were not even aware of all the details in their own department's rules and regulations; possibly because they do not see such a case very often, but that is not a valid excuse. The preliminaries were done by phone, but when Ray found he would have to appear in person, he decided to go to Gainesville which is closer to his residence.

First, he was told, Toby needed some kind of identification so he could reenter the United States. An inserted micro chip would have been the easiest. But neither the U.S. Customs nor the Department of Agriculture have scanners at any airport of entry with which to read the micro chip. Most countries in Europe do, but there are none in the U.S. So the bird had to be banded which turned out to be quite stressful for him. The cost was \$37.00.

Then the health certificate had to be prepared, and that came to \$57.00. The certificate of health issued by the state of Florida is good for *only 72 hours* including travel time. You may *not* travel on a weekend or a holiday because the veterinarian services are not open. You have to present your request *in person* to the office of your choice (Miami or Gainesville). It may *not* be faxed or mailed. Furthermore since it is good for only 72 hours, Ray had to be at the Gainesville office the day before departure to ensure that the certificate would still be good upon arrival in Europe. In his own words "the Dept. of Agriculture in Gainesville was bureaucracy at its worst." The fee for the endorsement is \$4.00. But there came another hurdle: the Washington office had said the certificate would be good for

six months but when the paper was handed to Ray it was stamped "good for 30 days"! Of course that wouldn't cover six months in Europe but the employee said he had no answers for that. Ray had to call Washington again, and somehow find Dr. Hand who, as luck would have it, was available. Dr. Hand then informed the people in Gainesville of the correct procedure. This process took the whole day and a number of long distance phone calls

Furthermore, upon bringing the bird back to the U.S. there are two choices:

- 1) The bird must be quarantined for 30 days in Miami, or
- 2) You may have him quarantined at home for 30 days.

Upon arrival back in the U.S., a vet from the Dept. of Agriculture has to come to the airport to inspect the bird, and this will cost \$168.25. You are also advised that if you arrive at night, or on a weekend or a holiday, the vet has to be paid double time which would be a couple hundred dollars more. In Mr. Pfeiffer's own words "this was a typical government bureaucracy runaround!"

But Toby finally got his "passport"!

The Pfeiffers originally planned to fly at a reduced rate (benefits of being in the travel business) on Iceland Air. When they learned that Toby would have to travel in the cargo hold they booked another airline, one that would let them take Toby "their child" in the cabin...and first class, mind you. He not only would travel in comfort but would be fawned over by the flight attendants.

It was a major frustration and hassle getting all the paper work from the government. But now that it's done—what a way for a little bird to fly. ➤