

28 Years With Salty

by Lori Peters, Sherman Oaks, CA

Salty, my Panama Amazon is my roommate and my best friend. Up until three months ago we lived in Manhattan together, but now we live in sunny California.

Salty has his own little apartment in my little apartment. His cage sits atop my file cabinet and next to the TV, which he watches whenever it suits him.

Salty and I have been together now for 28 years. We grew up in Massapequa, Long Island, N.Y. When I was seven years old, my father took me to a local pet store and I saw Salty. He flirted with me calling, "Pretty Girl."

It was love at first sight. For a mere \$60, we purchased Salty and his cage—a bargain that has brought me years of enjoyment.

Being a Panama subspecies, Salty probably originated in Central America. He spoke a bit of Spanish when we got him and was, perhaps, less than a year old.

Compared to other Amazons, Salty is small but he makes up for it with a big mouth and large vocabulary.

Salty came home to meet two older brothers, my mother, sister, cats, and our St. Bernard, Barney. Soon Barney knew better than to mess with Salty or he'd get his nose nipped. Salty is still

looking for Barney, calling "Here Barney, here Barney." He doesn't realize he's outlived Barney by 16 years.

Salty had his family favorites. He would fly to my father when called (I clipped his wings only this past year to take him to bird club meetings and parties). He always knew my voice and loved to impersonate me. He would yell out my name when I approached. Salty was never completely tame and must not have been handfed. We nicknamed his alter ego Chesney McNasty. I advise friends not to stick fingers in his cage, but if they sit quietly I put him on their shoulder which he enjoys.

One day, my mother had someone come to wash the windows in the house. Salty was looking out over the balcony to the bay beyond our backyard. He started saying, "I love you" and whistling. The window washer looked around for my mother and when he saw her he winked and started giving her the eye. My mother quickly straightened out the situation and told him the amorous advances were not coming from her, but our overzealous parrot.

Salty once escaped in Long Island. He flew out the window when my parents were away. My brothers and I rode our bikes around the neighborhood frantically searching for him. We shouted his name in desperation. A few blocks away we heard some chatter coming from above. Blending in with the leaves was our cheery Amazon. My brother, Steve, had to climb the tree, coax Salty onto his arm and bring him to safety.

When I was 15 and Salty was eight,



Salty, a Panama Yellow-crowned Amazon, can be seen perched on the author's shoulder. He has been her pet for 28 years and has developed an extensive vocabulary.

Photo courtesy of the author

we moved to New York City, a big adjustment for both of us. My brothers and sister had moved out. We had two small dogs, but it was quieter for Salty. Living in the city, Salty really shone.

He would perform for all who came over. He has a great voice and loves to sing. I would play "House of the Rising Sun" on the guitar and Salty would sing the chorus, "Oh Dee Doe, Oh".

When David Letterman was first on television, Salty and I auditioned. They said we both had great voices and wanted us to appear on the show. What can I say? I was a teenager and chickened out!

Recently Salty had another audition over the phone. He sang, laughed and chatted to Marion Ramsey, who plays Hooks in "Police Academy." She is putting together a sketch comedy show in L.A., for which I am doing some writing. She said, "I want that bird! Keep him healthy." I said, "Don't worry, I've had him for 28 years, he'll outlive me."

I moved into my own apartment with Salty when I was 19. He was 12 then. This is when we really bonded. Living in such tight quarters with me, Salty became extremely possessive.

He was next to the TV and stereo. Salty laughs along with "Seinfeld," sings along with Streisand, but if I put on any music he doesn't approve of, Chesney appears and he screams until I change the tunes. It's amazing, but in 15 years, the neighbors never complained.

Salty insists on being the center of attention when company arrives. He will tell my dates "I love you, Sweetheart" way before I would. He says "Polly wants a cracker" and when given the cracker, he politely says "Thank you." When the phone rings, he yells "Mimi, Mimi," which is my sister's name. In Long Island someone would often yell for Mimi after a ringing phone since it was usually for her.

If a date lays a hand on me the Green Monster appears and Salty flies into a jealous rage. It's Chesney McNasty all over again, yelling "OOH." He screams and screams, demanding my attention, not understanding why I would prefer any partner over him.

Covering him is useless. He's too smart for that and I can't cover his ears. He is my watchbird.

Salty imitates everything. My coughing, hiccuping, sneezing, even throwing up when I am ill. He joins in our conversations with "I know it, I know it." My brother-in-law, Barry, encourages Salty to sing the Jewish favorite, "Hava Nagela" with him. Salty says "Hello" when people come over and "Bye Bye" when they leave, but when he sees me heading out he cocks his head and asks, "Where ya going?" Salty mimics my gray and white cat, Taffy, when she is crying for her food and when he sees me pop something in the microwave Salty goes beep.

Salty is a connoisseur of foods. He is spoiled and eats like a little piggy. I only wish I had his metabolism. He never seems to get fat and I just don't know where it all goes. I start to eat and the dialogue begins. "Hi Salty, Polly want a cracker?" He is not satisfied with only vegetables from my plate. He wants bread (raisin is his favorite), chicken and scrambled eggs. He enjoys spaghetti, corn on the cob, applesauce, yogurt, tuna fish, french fries, a bit of pork and goes bonkers over New York pizza.

If he feels that I'm holding out on him and eating without sharing, he'll have no fury like a Salty scorned. I have no peace until he gets his fair share. I think I'd be 10 pounds heavier without him at each meal. I get up at least three times to feed my "master." Salty thinks all his food needs to be softened and throws everything he eats into his water dish, which I need to refill and clean out constantly.

I write and occasionally perform comedy and Salty is always a willing audience. He thinks all my jokes are funny and laughs hysterically when I practice.

I recently brought home another bird, a Cockatiel that I named Flipper. I was told by the breeder that Flipper was a quiet bird and never made a peep. Not 'till he met Salty! Flipper squawked and Salty talked. Chesney McNasty appeared. His eyes dilated with excitement and he bit me when I tried to feed him. I moved Flipper to another room and Salty yelled, "Bye

Bye." It was a hopeless situation. Flipper screamed and Salty shouted even louder, their shrill voices traveling down the hall. I realized I'd made a mistake. Salty wanted a one-bird house so I gave up and returned Flipper. His breeder told me better safe than sorry as many Cockatiels have been mutilated by Greys, macaws and Amazons.

Salty's my special pal. I walk in the door and he says, "Hi Lori, Lori, Lori," letting me know how much he missed me. He gives me a kiss and tells me he loves me and all is right with the world. ➤

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