

Hambone Award Contender

Have you ever heard of the Hambone Award? It's a prize given out by Veterinary Pet Insurance, the nation's largest and oldest pet insurance company. Each month, the company selects the most unusual claims and chooses a monthly winner to vie for the yearly prize – the Hambone Award. Don't worry, all the contenders are pets who survived their ordeals. Last year's winner Ellie, a Labrador retriever from California, went to the emergency room after eating an entire beehive. She vomited large piles containing hundreds of dead bees, but Ellie was not harmed by the dead bees nor by the pesticide that killed them.

When reading suburban Chicago newspaper The Daily Herald's online headlines, the following caught my eye, "Owl Vs. Chihuahua", and that's where I read about Chico the Chihuahua's brave fight against a Great Horned Owl. Chico's owner was taking him for a walk in the wee hours of the morning, when a Great Horned Owl swooped out of nowhere (owls are silent flight birds) and picked up poor Chico, intending him for his late night snack. Chico and his owner won the tug-of-war, and Chico won the VPI 'most unusual' story for the month of January, beating out such claims as a Labrador retriever that ate a marijuana cookie, a Golden retriever that swallowed a 5-inch barbecue skewer, a mutt that got wedged between banister bars and a Boston terrier who collided with a skier. If you'd like to read the other entries and be part of the public voting in September, you can go to the [VPI Hambone Award's website](#).

Oh, and how did the Hambone Award get its name? There was a dog insured by VPI who got himself trapped in a refrigerator and ate an entire Thanksgiving ham before he was discovered. He was treated for a mild case of hypothermia whereupon he fully recovered.

A Different Sort Of Homecoming

Before I publish my vacation diary, I would like to say a few words about some unexpected feelings I encountered upon returning home. Ending a vacation is always a chore, and for an in-the-process-of-being-reformed-worrywart like me, it's easy to get caught up in dreading the negatives that accompany getting back to normal life; ie, returning to a cold climate, laundry, unpacking, etc. Thanks to my growing relationship with God, I've been learning to embrace positives more easily, and I could not be more grateful for the opportunity for such a wonderful vacation and for the fact that we made it there and back safely.

But when we did return home, the welcome committee seemed a bit small. The greetings of family members left behind (read: pets) seemed to be missing something, and the house seemed more empty than I had remembered it. Then it hit me: this was the first homecoming we've had since our family dog passed away last year.

I had noticed it on vacation, and in Florida it was actually an unexpectedly freeing feeling to not worry about a loved one left behind. Don't get me wrong; I love the pets we still have, but no one will ever take Charity's place. I used to feel such a hole in my heart when we went on vacation and left her behind that it gave me an extra motivation to hurry home. But this time, our homecoming celebration was short-lived: we greeted pets and they greeted us, and there was no one around to hold a grudge like Charity used to do when we left her behind. No one was miffed about getting left behind, in fact, I wonder if the dogs even really noticed...

It's been over a year since the last time I saw her, and I still miss her a lot.

Cutest Bunny Ever!!



Our kids had two snow days off school this week, so what better activity for a family full of animal lovers than to visit the pet store? You can see where this is going... we went looking for 1 baby rat, and we came home with 2 baby rats and a bunny. One ridiculously cute bunny as yet without a name! There have been a lot of contenders, but we just haven't found any perfect ones yet. The leading ones so far are Tigger, Snow Bunny, and Arcy. Arcy is like a feminine version of R.C. which stands for Ridiculously Cute. I really like Tigger even though we THINK she's a girl bunny, but when I tried calling her Tigger it didn't click. Here's a video, and more suggestions are welcome in the comment box below:

And the new rats:



JJ

My little parakeet JJ passed away some time during the night last night. Not much of a surprise there; he has been sick for a while, and even though he began looking well again a few weeks ago, he took a turn for the worse in the last few days. He looked so awful yesterday that I knew he wouldn't make it through the night. But there was always hope that I was wrong. He had been on what I called "death watch" before and made it through the night, so the hope was there.

I don't really know what happened – he was only about a year old, and I had had him since January, not even a year. He started showing signs of illness about 2 months ago. I gave him medicine and TLC, and he began to do better, but like I said, I guess it just wasn't enough.

He was "just a parakeet", but I loved his company. I was so excited to see what kind of bird he would become; how he would look and act as an adult and who he would be when he felt healthy, but now I won't know. Honestly, taking care of animals is one of my favorite things in the whole world, so

why do I have to be so bad at it? A few months ago, JJ was so happy when we moved his cage into the living room so he had company all day rather than living in the solitude (or was it protection?) of our bedroom upstairs. We kept him right near the Halogen lamp, could there have been a smell or the heat or something that made him sick? On the rare occasion that a bug would fly into the Halogen, yuck, what a smell that made. We tried to get rid of Teflon pans and things like that, but JJ's new home in the living room wasn't too far from the kitchen – maybe cooking smells did him in? He was a fraidy-bird, so I couldn't really take apart his cage to clean it out; maybe it got too dirty? A dozen why's and what-if's, but no more parakeet. At least he is not suffering anymore – it was getting really difficult to see him in his cage looking so miserable and worse for the wear. Poor JJ. Even if he was just a caged bird, I miss him already. Ugh, and the cold weather is back today... fitting somehow, just feels like a miserable day all around – time to make the best of it.

My Poor Little Bird

JJ, my parakeet, is very sick. I had parakeets when I was younger, and I know enough about them to know that we are lucky that he's still alive. His chirping and squawking gradually decreased until I realized the other day that he doesn't vocalize at all anymore. He is very lathargic, and sits puffed up on his perch where he loses his balance every few minutes. His tail is bobbing when he breathes, which is a sign of respiratory distress, and he has some discoloring around his cere (nose), which indicates discharge. The other day, I noticed that he was sitting on the bottom of his cage, which is a sign of imminent death in parakeets. Based upon my research (past experience, the internet, and bothering the

heck out of the local pet store), JJ seems to have a respiratory infection – something that is often fatal for small birds.

But he's hung on a few days now from when I first believed his death was imminent when he was at the bottom of his cage. After all, parakeets' instincts are to hide their illnesses. If they show any sign of being sick, wild birds will be cast out by their flock, so if captive birds allow signs of illness to show, it's often too late to save them. I got some birdie antibiotics, and I'm hoping that he is drinking his water where the meds are. He is still eating, and that's a great sign. We put a blanket over the cage, and are trying to keep him warm and calm so he can rest and get well. It's just touch and go at this point, so I'm praying for my little bird. I got so attached to the little guy! I got him right after my beloved dog passed away, and seeing my happy little bird helped me feel at least a tiny bit better. And now I'm watching him suffer; it's hard. I want to move him back upstairs where it's a little warmer and quieter, but I'm afraid of stressing him out too much, which is basically the same reason I don't want to take him to the vet. I guess I'll wait for him to improve a little more before moving him upstairs; that's the only plan I have right now.

Like I said, he does seem to be improving – the loss of balance on his perch seems to have subsided anyway. But he still does not look well, and he is not vocalizing. He is less than a year old, so maybe his youth is keeping him strong and resilient. Poor JJ! He is just a little parakeet, but he means a lot to me. If you could send out a little prayer for JJ, we'd appreciate it. And pray for my husband while you're at it; he's fighting a nasty cold. Obviously, Hubby's health is a billion times more important than JJ's, but if I wrote a blog post every time Hubby got sick... well, I wouldn't have time for that! Besides, Hubby's illness is not life-threatening. I wonder if Hubby and JJ have the same thing?

That's one thing that stinks about this time of year – all the illness! Wish I could transfer some of my super-immune system over to Hubby, who seems to get EVERY single thing that comes our way...

RIP Oreo

This post is a few weeks in the making – my daughter Sammie's favorite rat died on October 11. She took it pretty well; I was dreading having to tell her when she got off the bus that day. She got off the bus and promptly handed her younger brother and sister each a piece of her candy. 'Oh great', I'm thinking – she gets off the bus and immediately does something really nice for her siblings, and I have to tell her that her favorite rat died. But I didn't have to tell her – she asked me first if he had died. I said yes and asked her how she knew – turns out that big sis had taken it upon herself to tell Sammie on the way to the bus stop that morning. What are big sisters for? ☹️ But like I said, Sammie was ok with it, but now that just leaves us one pet rat: Buckeye. We began with 2 rats, Bobby Jack and Oreo, and then we took in 2 more from a friend who was unprepared for pets, Mater and Buckeye – 4 rats at once was a bit much, but we didn't want to see them wind up as snake food, so that gave us 4 pet rats.

Bobby was the first to pass away in June of this year, followed by Mater in August, then Oreo in October – every 2 months we lose a rat, I guess. That's the only downside to these otherwise great pets – they only have a lifespan of 1-3 years. Otherwise, they are like mini dogs: affectionate as can be and very trainable. My girls love their rats and do very well at feeding them and giving them water every day, cleaning their cage, giving them baths, and taking them for

walks. The rats would always seem depressed when my girls spend their week with Grandma in the summer, and they get really excited when the girls return. The only thing that keeps ME from getting too close to the rats is my allergy – what a bummer. I found out I am allergic to rats right after we got them as cute little babies. I would play with them and wonder why I broke out into hives on my forearms and sneezed like crazy and had itchy eyes for hours afterward. In a way, it's a good thing, otherwise I would be more sad than the girls when they die, and at this rate, we are poised to have to say goodbye to a long line of pet rats!

Best Way To Spend 88 Cents

According to JJ my parakeet, the best way to spend 88 cents is on this little number:



I saw this little bird toy at Walmart the other day, and even though I knew it would scare the heck out of my scaredy-cat parakeet, I bought it anyway. It's a piece of plastic in the shape of an upside-down T – a perch for the bird to sit on, while the part that sticks up hold millet sprays – a favorite treat for parakeets.

I adopted my little guy JJ (short for Jungle Jack Hanna named

after my favorite celeb) back in January, and he hasn't ever been interested in playing with any of the toys in his cage. My 2-year-old son used to bang on JJ's cage, and so the little bird became afraid of people, and I haven't been able to pet him in months – he flies away from me. I was so afraid that he led a miserable existence locked away safely in my bedroom – until about a month ago, when I moved him from our bedroom (where he was by himself most of the time) to the living room (the centerpiece of most of our large family's traffic patterns). JJ has been SO happy to be a part of the action! I've been happy to see him happy, but he still wasn't playing with toys – until I bought this 88 cent Walmart Wonder on a whim. At first, JJ kept his distance, and I feared I was right – he WAS afraid of everything! I had to leave the house for awhile, and when I returned, the millet was gone from the toy – I was ecstatic!

The next day, I snapped the above picture of JJ perched on his new toy, and ever since, he's been in love with his 88 cent Walmart toy! He sits next to it and preens himself, and he even gazes at it lovingly.

I reiterate – BEST 88 cents spent (on a pet) EVER!!

Look At This Idiot

He is our puppy and he's cute. But still, you've got to appreciate the idiocy of this puppy predicament – a delicious scent awaits in the baby's playpen. What is one to do? Why, get stuck in a moron's photo opp, of course...



Runaway Parrot

As you might have read in my blog previously, we have a pet Scarlet Macaw parrot. His name is Squawky, although he is more 'screamy' than he is 'squawky'. Occasionally when the weather is warm enough, we take Squawky outside – he either goes for walks with our family or he gets tied to a tree (so he doesn't fly away) to enjoy nature. A few weeks ago, we were sitting in our dining room having lunch when we saw the man from our local pet store approaching Squawky in the tree out front with a towel on his hand. "He's going to take your bird!" I said to my husband, "You have to go outside!" I guess this is where I should get it in that I didn't think it was a good idea for Squawky to be outside alone in the first place, but we had to give the kids lunch and Squawky was enjoying himself so we didn't make him come in with us. So anyway, we ran outside, and told the pet store guy that he was our bird – apparently our neighbors were unaware that we had a parrot (guess they hadn't seen him outside before; sometimes we put him in the backyard). So the neighbors called the police, who called the pet store, who sent the bird-catcher. He thought it was someone's lost bird, and he was going to "rescue" Squawky – and lose some fingers in the process. It's

not an exaggeration when they say that adult Macaw parrots can snap a broomstick handle with their super-strong beaks. Check out a few of my husband's parrot battle scars or use your imagination to see what one of those beaks can do to a fleshy finger. Luckily we got out there just in time to save the pet store guy's fingers, and he apologized profusely, as did our neighbors who had called the police. The pet store guy found it unbelievable that we could have a macaw parrot (a notoriously loud bird) and not have the whole neighborhood know about it. I told him that the neighbors on the side of the house where Squawky's room is probably know about him, but the neighbors who called the police live across the street – plus Squawky doesn't scream when he's outside.

But all's well that ends well – as much as that bird irritates me sometimes, he has been a part of our family for 8 years now, and I don't want to lose him. Well, not to have him stolen or lost anyway – getting paid the going price of an obnoxious Scarlet Macaw might be kind of nice... A joke, sort of. ☐

I looked around for a picture of Squawky in the tree, but I guess I don't have one. So here he is having a tremendous amount of fun taking a bath. He is a bit larger now because this was taken 7 years ago.



****UPDATE**** – Squawky was back in the tree tonight, so this time I made sure to get a picture of him enjoying his tree:



If only his personality was
as beautiful as his plumage

He's Not Half The Man He Used To Be...

Our little puppy Gizmo is now about 6 months old, and we've been marveling at what a handsome young man he's become. But yesterday, he had his appointment for his, um, fixing.

He handled it like a trouper, and we haven't noticed any behavior changes, positive nor negative. We're happy the little guy is ok, and he doesn't even seem to need his prescribed pain meds. I've always had girl dogs before him, and it seems to be a bigger ordeal for females since the incision is larger. Yesterday when we picked Gizmo up from the vet, he seemed happy to see us but still a little dazed:



And while we were waiting for the um, procedure to be complete, we had a few hours to kill, so we began at Meijer where the kids rode the 1¢ electronic horse. We also learned that our almost 2-year-old son knows how to say 'pop tart' since he loves the treats:

And then we went over to a nice scenic place on the Maumee River called Independence dam, but we had some unwanted excitement and had to call [our friend Mary](#) at work. Nothing bad, at least we don't think, but no one was hurt, if that's what you're thinking (Mary is a 911 dispatcher). The water level was very high due to all the rain in the area recently, and the current was swift around the falls from the dam. And we kept seeing something suspicious bobbing to the surface – some tires, some large beige objects, and a few other strange looking items that just weren't moving right. My first thought was that it was an ATV, and that someone had been 4-wheeling and went into the river. After a few more bobs, we saw that the wheels must have belonged to a full-size vehicle since we could still see the tires' rims. The kids' imaginations began working overtime, and soon they began to see heads and hands reaching out of the water. My husband and I saw nothing of the sort, but it was an odd sight, and we figured better safe than sorry so we called Mary's work number – 911 – and apologized for the non-emergency nature of the call. The officer that was sent to talk with us was very nice and completely understanding about why we had called, and as it turns out, he is head of the Sheriff's Department dive team. At first, he seemed to think that nothing was amiss, but as he watched the bobbing debris, he seemed to become increasingly interested. He told us he'd keep an eye on it, and we drove further into the park to turn around, and when we came back, there were more officers in the park. I'm curious to know what was found, if anything... perhaps our tip helped them locate a minivan that's been missing since it went down in the ice 2 years ago or something else useful. If anyone hears anything, let me know!