

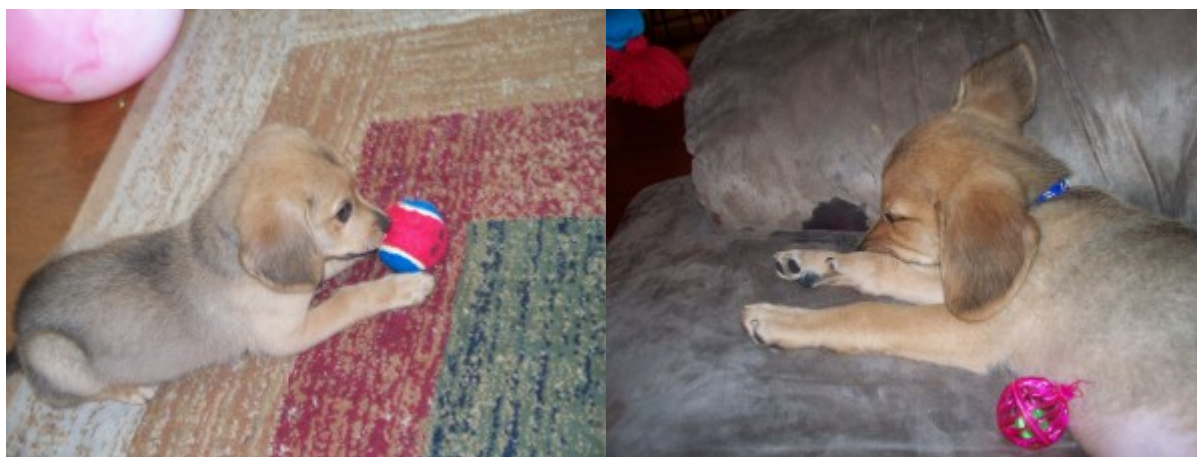
Introducing: ?

We don't know yet! We have a new addition to our family, but he doesn't have a name yet! It's hard for a family of 6 to all agree on the same name for a new puppy...

As you probably know, our beloved almost 12-year-old dog passed away a week before Christmas. If you know our family and how much we love animals, then it should come as no surprise to you that we are again a 2-dog household. It all started a few Saturdays ago when we decided to take the kids to the Humane Society, "just for fun". Yeah, right – I should have known better! How could I possibly think we'd be able to resist giving a cute homeless pet a loving home? We couldn't. We found a lab mix we all loved, and we went to lunch, talked it over, and decided to turn in an application. But another family turned in an application five minutes before us for the same dog! They said they would look over the apps and call us either Monday or Tuesday either way. Well, the entire week went by, and my husband called them every day because we had 3 anxious kids! Disney (who's 3) kept asking if we were going to take the 'vanilla dog' home; it was so cute! Finally they called on Friday to tell us that the dog had been adopted. We were disappointed but also kind of expecting it since we knew that another family wanted him. But that did it – now we officially wanted another dog. So Saturday on the way to the zoo, we stopped by another humane society and found another dog we really liked – she was a very unique looking dog, a black Lab / Basset Hound mix. She had the long, stocky body of a basset, complete with long ears, but she was all black like a lab – adorable. We didn't have our checkbook with us, so we had to come back Sunday to put down a deposit. When we came back Sunday, the dog got so excited that she nipped my husband on the mouth – twice. Uh, oh. Can't do nipping on the face with 4 small kids, whether it was intentional or not, so we were back to square one.

When we were there on Saturday, we had seen people come in with 2 teeny tiny puppies, so we decided to have a look. I was going to have to housebreak the Lab/Basset, so I figured if I was going to have to housebreak a dog, it might as well be a teeny tiny adorable puppy, right? Never mind that I'm potty training a 3-year-old, have a toddler to chase around, and two other kids to get to school. My days are so hectic, why not add to the chaos?

So here he is, how cute is this puppy?!?



He's a beagle / shepherd mix about 8 weeks old, and yes, he is as sweet as he looks! He just adores our dog Beesly, but she's not sure what to think yet – eventually they'll be friends I'm sure. Squawky the parrot was intrigued with him too, mostly because he has a little bell on his collar so we know where he is. The kids like the names Johnny and Buddy, but we're not taken with either of those. We liked the name Gizmo, especially because the kids have been into watching Gremlins lately, but the kids don't like the name. My husband and I also think the name "Hank Markdukas" is really cute – it's a reference to the movie I Love You Man. It's a funny movie, not one of our favorites or anything, but there is a funny running joke in the movie about a Hank Markdukas. We also like the name Michael Scott after the main character on our favorite show, The Office, but of course the kids aren't thrilled about any of those names. This sounds like a good poll...

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The bottom line is, our cute little guy needs a name before he starts answering to "puppy". Yesterday I was feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of adding a puppy to my already hectic lifestyle, but it went well today, and he is incredibly adorable! I love to snuggle him; he is so soft and sweet. And the responsibility involved with him is different than the kids; there is much more instant gratification. Kids whine, cry, yell and fight, while puppies wiggle and snuggle. I love our new puppy! That reminds me of an Alan Jackson song – "I'm in love with you baby, and I don't even know your name"!

:)

Wow – that last post was such a downer that I decided to write a little follow-up – I'm feeling better! I took forever in the shower, and my son is still napping! And the two girls have been playing together... funny how the house calms down when a certain little Kindergartner is at school. Coincidence or instigator? You tell me ☐

My little parakeet JJ likes the sound of running water, so my shower music today was supplied by a happy little bird – that was a mood lifter! I've been reaching into his cage as part of training to get him used to me, and he's been letting me touch him! So today I was touching his belly, and he started to close his eyes, and it occurred to me that we didn't have to just do training – I could pet him! So today, I would say that JJ became a REAL pet – he enjoyed my company, let me pet him, and he cheered me up!

And now I get to sit here at the computer for a few minutes, and I actually get to have my glass of water next to me since

there is no one to come drop things into it (one of my son's favorite activities is the put things in water, you'd think he'd appreciate his baths more than he does). And I treated myself to a piece of chocolate. Ah, a long hot shower, chocolate, and peace and quiet... what more could I want? Sorry about the grumpy post I made before ☹

Patience

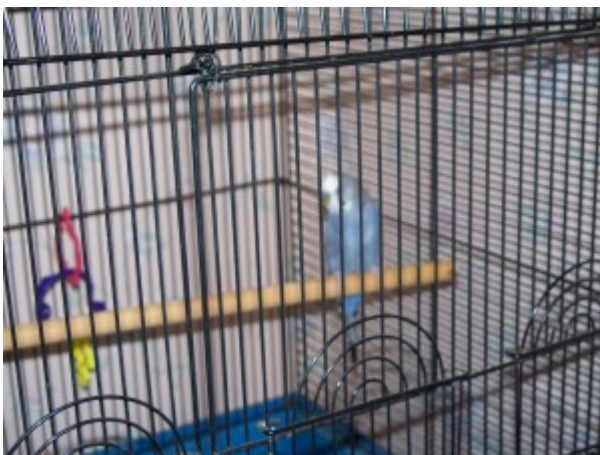
Our new bird is so cute! Not having parakeets for years has made me forget how pleasant they are to have around. JJ chirps and sings, and even when he's quiet, he's adorable to look at. My husband (who is not known for his patience anyway) mentioned the other day that he's having trouble with his temptations to reach into the cage and grab the bird to play with him. It's partly his impatience, and it's partly because he's used to just reaching out and grabbing his obnoxious parrot. But my husband knows that if he is disruptive to the training process I've chosen for JJ, there will be big trouble!

I'm having trouble being patient too, but I understand how innately nervous parakeets are. Once you build their trust, they can make wonderful interactive pets – but the key is taking it slow and being consistent. As much as I want to cuddle my baby bird, I can respect his need for space right now too. But try telling that to my excited kids. The older ones (ages 10, 5 and 3) are ok about it; for the most part, they're content to just stand there watching JJ and talking to him. But my 18 month old toddler is another story. He is fond of banging on metal cages because that's what makes the most noise, and the rats don't really mind. My poor little baby bird, on the other hand... We usually shut the door to our

bedroom since that's where JJ lives, but the other day, we forgot. I figured shutting the gate at the bottom of the stairs would keep the dog away from our bedroom, but kids opened the gate. While the dog was fine (I don't think she even realizes there is another bird in the house), I found little Beeber (that was our then-2-year-old's nickname for her baby brother) next to JJ's cage, and he hasn't been the same since. He still chirps and acts happy, but he now tries to fly around the cage whenever I come near – he used to let me put my finger right up next to him... He was doing so well with the training, we were bound to take a step backward. I still have confidence that I can train JJ to be a nice family bird, or at the very least, a little buddy bird for me. We just need to have a little patience.

Introducing... JJ!

As you might have read in an earlier blog post, I received a pet store gift certificate for Christmas from my husband. Today I spent it – I picked out the newest member of our family – JJ the parakeet!



When you adopt a pet parakeet from a pet store, the workers

have to barge into the cage full of parakeets with a towel on their hand to grab your bird, and then they put it in a cardboard box for the ride home. This might sound like a mean thing to do, but in my experience (this is my fifth pet parakeet), the bird recovers very quickly; I wouldn't even use the word recover really; they always seem just fine. And JJ handled his transition like a pro! He actually seemed immediately happy in his cage! I put my finger in there, and he let me almost touch him, just a few hours after he got home! He didn't back away or anything! I am so excited to become friends with this little guy; he is so cute! It's been about 15 years since I've had a pet parakeet, and I've forgotten about how they just exude happiness! Already JJ moves his beak like he's trying to talk and responds to my voice. Hopefully I will make the time to train this little guy to be the little buddy I've always wanted in a bird – I get jealous of my husband's relationship with his parrot. Wait, that doesn't sound quite how I meant to say it...

There's a fine line between training a bird, earning trust, and scaring him off for good. JJ seems very patient and ready to learn, and so am I – but getting to spend time with him while there is a trouble-prone toddler toddling around will be my greatest challenge, I think.

Many people have fun parakeet stories; they really are pleasant little birds. My dad and my uncle had a parakeet when they were kids named Tippy who would walk on their kitchen table. They would hold a hand of playing cards, and Tippy would walk up, choose a card, and then carry it in his beak to the edge of the table, let it go and watch it float down to the floor. I've heard that many (male) parakeets can talk, and of course they will sit on your shoulder and be your best friend. So yeah, I'm excited about this bird, and it's a nice feeling – can't say there's been a lot of that lately. Even if he isn't easily trained (defying all early indications), I've already tremendously enjoyed just looking

at him and absorbing his pleasantness, something I look forward to doing in days to come... feeling a contentment that I haven't felt for awhile...

Just for the heck of it, here is a timeline of my other pet parakeets. I was a kid when I had them, so I don't remember dates or ages – each one lived for around 5-8 years, the usual parakeet lifespan. But it bugs the heck out of me that I can't remember which of my birds liked to ring his toy bell – Tippy, I think? I named him for my dad and uncle's childhood pet... The memories of the bell ringing bird have been replaced in my brain by the obscenely loud parrot we currently own who jangles his bell-shaped toy whenever he starts to get rowdy. Parakeets are actually in the same biological family as parrots and are in fact classified as parrots. So technically, we've gotten ourselves another parrot for our house, just what we needed, right? But Squawky, the scarlet macaw (loud a**hole) parrot belongs to my husband (or my husband belongs to Squawky, depends upon who you ask), and JJ is mine – this is important since birds “mate” for life – I'm so happy to have MY bird!

So here's that rundown of parakeets past:

Spunky – he was blue and fiesty, but we were really surprised when ~~he~~ she began to lay eggs!

Tweety – the only parakeet I had who was of the green / gold variety.

Tippy – named after my dad's childhood bird; he was light blue.

Goat – my sister found him flying loose outside around her work. They took him in, and when no one claimed him, I named him “Goat” in honor of my dream pet at that time. He was pretty tame for a “wild bird”!

J.J. – dark blue, almost a gray to violet hue. And why is he

named J.J.? It's short for **Jungle Jack** Hanna, of course ☐

Faith

Well, we found a church home in March, and it's been going very well; we love it there. The month of August is filled with church opportunities for us – a few classes we're taking, a carnival for the kids, I'm volunteering in the Welcome Center, and we just went to a retreat at a beautiful Christian campground in Michigan yesterday. But this post is not about THAT type of faith – it's about a dog named Faith who was born with only a stub instead of front legs. They had to remove his stub, and his mommy and first owner rejected him. His new owner named him Faith and taught him to walk and get along without his front legs just fine. How cute is this?



Thanks to Elizabeth for sending this to me!

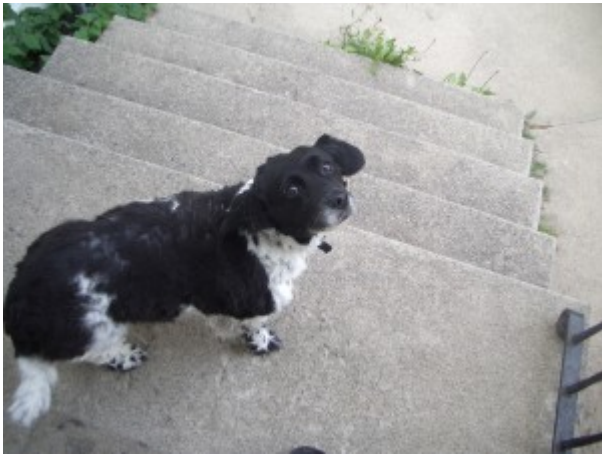
Before And After – Chapter 3 – Beesly

Our dog Beesly (named for the character Pam Beesly on the awesome NBC show The Office, which you should really watch (end of shameless plug)) can grow to be very fluffy. From people who have seen her, we've had comments ranging from "That dog is more round than she is tall!" to "there is more fur than dog there" and then there are the people who would just laugh after they saw her. She ~~is~~ was a very fluffy dog. Since it's summertime where Beesly lives, we figured it was time to shear her like a sheep, which ended up being a surprise doggie makeover because she had SO much fur. Check this out:

BEFORE:



AFTER:



After we sheared Beesly, we looked forward to showing her to our 9-year-old daughter, Taylor, who is Beesly's main caregiver. We told the kids we had a surprise for them, and we let Beesly in from the back yard and my daughter's friend cried out that the surprise was that we got a new dog. Well, thanks for giving the kids expectations about the surprise (hehe), but she **was** half-right. The surprise was a "new" dog. The kids can now pet Beesly since before the haircut you would only be petting a thick mat of fur. Beesly herself appreciates this makeover a lot too! She is much more cool when she lays outside, she is less thirsty, and she even has lots more energy! She IS like a new dog! And by the way, the kids all liked the surprise. Taylor saw Beesly and laughed and laughed; it was adorable. And as a finale to this blog post, THIS is how much fur we got off of Beesly – the pen is sitting on top of the bag to reference the volume of the fur contained inside:



I know they make clothes out of alpaca fur and sheep's wool; does anyone know about the harvesting of dog fur? And I'm not talking about Burlington Coat Factory, YUCK!

Before and Afters

As you might have read in my blog before the impromptu camping trip, we've been putting a lot of effort into a bunch of home improvement projects lately. Here are a few of the latest pictures:

Backyard, before and after the new fence:



Not from the same angle, but hopefully you get the idea. We now have a fenced-in play area for the kids, and the dogs have their own little area for their gross natural business.

Even the rats have moved on up into posh digs. Here is their new cage, where all 4 of them live together – harmoniously, I might add!

BEFORE:



AFTER:

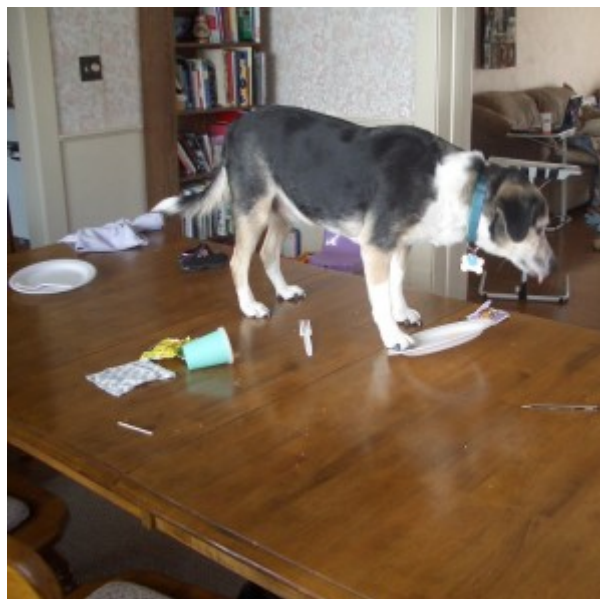


My Dog Is Not A Cat

... but she thinks she is! We used to have a cat, but she passed away last year. We got our dog as a puppy just 4 months after we got the cat as a kitten, and they lived together for 10 years, so it's no wonder my dog thinks she's a cat. Despite her old age, she will jump on the furniture, and even walk on the top of the couch – very cat-like behavior. She is also more independent like a cat, and she'll only come when called to snuggle if she wants to, like a cat.

The other day, she decided she was done waiting for the kids

to eat their lunch. We had left it out because the kids hadn't eaten well, and we thought they could come back later and have a bite – WRONG! Our dog Charity (the cat in disguise) took it upon herself to climb **UP ON** the dining room table and get their lunches. She is our spoiled rotten baby; what were we going to do, yell at the old lady? So we took a picture instead, note how she uses her feet to tip up the plates and hold them in place so they don't slide away while she's licking:



And Charity has such a personality; she hates being laughed at, so I think she learned her lesson. Besides, once the motivation to get the food was gone (eaten), she was stuck up on the table. We wrestled with the decision to help her down; she is 11 years old and I didn't want her breaking bones or worse, but in the end she got herself down successfully. First she kind of growled and grunted around up there while we giggled at her from the living room, then she used her new vantage point as a barking stool, but just as I got sick of it and went to help her down, she got down herself. She is such a jerk but what a personality that dog has... We love you Charity!

And now you need to see how cute she really is, one blue eye

and all. So here is one of my favorite pictures of her in a Chicago Cubs shirt – opening day is on Monday, so GO CUBBIES!!!



What Sets Him Off?

What sets him off? Everything under the sun and even the sun itself. I'm talking about our lovely scarlet macaw parrot. I would not recommend these things as pets for ANYONE – it's true when they say that wild animals cannot be tamed! Why we have our bird is a long story, and it's not important now because we're stuck with him. I'm not one to just "get rid" of pets unless the circumstances are extreme. It's a pet peeve (pun intended) of mine when people get animals and then discard them just because they're sick of taking responsibility for them. And in a way (though I can't dwell on this right now because I'm extremely upset with Squawky – who really lives up to his name), I love our parrot and wouldn't want to ~~curse~~ see him go to another home.

So that brings me to the point of this post – parrots scream constantly. They might be beautiful to look at, but their ear-splitting screams are beyond annoying. They're

unstoppable and headache-producing, and more than once, our parrot's screams have made our kids cry. We've adjusted our lifestyle to avoid his upsetting the kids, and for the most part that works; it seems to be me who feels the brunt of the negative parrot side effects. Thank goodness we were able to move into a bigger house a few years ago where Squawky was given his own room. Unfortunately, he shares the laundry room, and since somehow I was voted the family laundry-doer (gender?), it seems that Squawky's screaming affects me the most. I cannot do laundry during the day because I can't bring my young children in the laundry room with me. I do have a basket of toys in there, and they enjoy playing in there because there's lots of light and a nice soft carpet to lay on. But we get screamed at by the parrot. By nighttime, I'm too tired to do all the laundry, so much of the time, I'm left to worry about when to do it. Ideally, I'd do some here and there in between kids' lunches, naps, diaper changes and my errands, but then the parrot gets all riled up and screams me right out of the laundry room.

I looked to the Internet for advice, and one site suggested noting his "triggers". What sets him off and makes him scream? Making the list of his triggers hasn't helped, however. It's only made me see that getting screamed out of the laundry room seems unavoidable. Here are his triggers (if you're thinking about getting a pet parrot, use this list as reasons on why you should NOT):

the sunrise or light of any kind – it's a parrot's natural instinct to be quiet in the dark so predators won't find them. But heavy drapes and a sheet over his cage do not block out all the light during the day, and it's really difficult to do laundry at night in the dark – believe me I've tried more than once!

yelling – any yelling in the house gets him going – kids fighting, kids having fun, just raising our voices to hear each other when we're in separate parts of the house. He

especially likes it when I yell at him for yelling!

singing – if my husband is in a show and needs to practice, everyone has to leave. And not because my husband is a bad singer – he's actually very talented. But the bird will join in, and HE is a BAD singer!

talking on the phone – any time anyone is on the phone, the bird thinks we're calling out for him I guess, but he takes it upon himself to yell. So I can forget folding laundry while talking on the phone, which was a great way to pass the time while doing this boring task.

having his door open – closing his door not only muffles his screaming, but it makes him scream less for some reason

something he likes on tv – he has a tv in his room, which was put in there for me to watch while doing laundry. But I can forget about hearing anything on the tv while I'm in there, thanks to the parrot. Sometimes Animal Planet or his favorite show, The Price Is Right makes him scream along with the audience.

happiness – if he's happy, he will get rowdy and play and scream.

anger – if he's upset about not getting enough attention, he will scream.

hunger – if he's hungry, he will scream.

thirst – if he's thirsty, he will scream.

dogs barking – if our 2 dogs bark, which they do at least 4 times per day, the bird will join right in and scream.

So, I guess for now I've decided that the laundry must be a family affair. I've gotten upset several times about this same issue and came to this conclusion before, but it's never worked. My husband works during the day, and at night, we're

usually busy or the kids have their own chores or homework to do, so my getting help with the laundry has not been a consistent solution. The other thing we've thought of is to move the parrot out of the laundry room, but if you look at my list of Squawky's triggers, you'll see that he must be in a room with a door, which eliminates the other spare room we have on the first floor because it's doorless. I can't imagine that he'd do any better on the second floor closer to the bedrooms either. The laundry room is right below my bedroom so once he gets going in the morning, I can usually forget about sleeping in anyway.

Well, I guess I'm done venting for now. I have a good hour to catch up on laundry since we have a meeting tonight and we took the kids to the babysitters early, so I have to make it productive. I guess I will have to blast my ipod and leave my husband to fend for himself on his business call... Well, it is HIS bird after all!

Here's a picture of the jerk:



Don't let his cuteness fool you. This is actually a "baby" picture. He's much more obnoxious looking now!

Pets we've had in our house

I've said many times how many pets we've had in this house, but I haven't really posted any pictures of them. Here is a small sampling of the many different pets that have lived here. I am missing pictures of the guinea pigs, hamsters, bird, turtles, frogs and hedgehog. If I find any I will post them.

First up, Colin. He was my wife's "Hearing Ear Dog". Not formally trained, but he did a very good job at alerting her to sounds in the house.



Next the rabbits, the black one was Samantha, the grey was Clover, and the brown flop ear rabbit was Freddy.





And of course some of the many chinchillas we've had through the years.







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