

PET TALES

Pet remembered for love of flying

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Meet my new friend.

He's bright green with a splotch of crimson on his head. Oh, and did I forget the fella has a sleek tail?

If you guessed a colorful character from Saturday Night Live - well you got one part right.

I met this little guy last weekend at the Charlotte County Animal Shelter in Port Charlotte. Someone had found the feathery pal in their backyard and had turned it into the shelter.

For a few minutes the parrot and I eyed each other with curiosity. A moment later after I apparently checked out OK, the hook billed critter began playing with his toys that were tethered in his large cage.

He captivated me with his acrobatics and mischief as he lunged at a wooden donut. But that's parrots for you.

Many of the tropical birds can talk and even carry on a lively conversation — hey it's more than we can sometimes say about some of the human species.

It's because of these enchanting ways I cannot forget my first pet bird. It's been more than 20 years, and still the memory of Perky, a feisty little parrot, has not faded.

Perky died suddenly on an otherwise sunny April 3 in the mid-1980s after he flew into a mirror and hemorrhaged.

But that is not how this bold bird-spirit would want to be remembered.

Perky was a Halfmoon Conure, or for the less than parrot savvy, a dwarf parrot.

He was given to me and my siblings as a holiday present when we were kids, a gift that would long surpass the Atari game system and other funky toys we got while growing up.

We could watch Perky for hours and never tire. His outrageous antics and love of flying endeared us. I used to marvel at how this bright green, pint-sized bird would strut around his playpen, climbing rows of little wooden ladders effortlessly.

But our favorite thing about Perky was his devotion to being free. We would watch in awe as this tiny green being would step into form and just slip into the air. This was Perky's consummate love — a love that surpassed his favorite treats and even getting scratched on his head — a love that would ultimately take his life.

Unfortunately, my siblings and I encouraged Perky's love affair with taking to wing, against our parents wishes. We would hold out our arms and act like mobile landing pads for our intrepid flyer.

We took great joy in watching him swoop and soar, feats that in our young minds we knew we would never be able to do. So we lived though Perky's jaunts through the house.

And he was a bird watcher too.

Perky's favorite place to hang out was atop a high curtain rod in the family room. He would perch there for hours watching the wild and totally free birds outside glide along the sky. Sometimes other birds would fly over to the window and look at him, which would always freak out our domesticated little guy.

On several occasions Perky would take his flying liberties a bit too far for my dad's

taste. My father would find him sitting on top of the curtain rod and tell him it was time to go into his cage. My dad would approach Perky with his finger extended to let him perch. But instead of jumping aboard the finger express, Perky would get a glint of mischief in his little parrot eyes and take off. My father, getting visibly miffed, would walk over to wherever Perky landed and try to collect him. But once again Perky would zoom off in another direction.

Then my father would give him the look — the same look he would give us when we pushed things too far. Now Perky knew he was in the soup and would gingerly hop on top of my Dad's hand.

But all of these shenanigans came to an abrupt end when Perky one day flew into a bathroom mirror. To this day we don't know why he took that tragic flight. But we surmise he thought he saw one of his own feathered friends and wanted to say hello.

So a day after his clash with the mirror we found him bleeding and huddled up, a ball of soft green feathers on the bottom of his cage. It was too late to get him any medical help. My dad, who worked 50 miles away, raced home but by the time he got there all he could do was hold us.

We had lost our beloved Perky.

Oddly enough, Perky's favorite song was "Fame." He used to bob and sing every time it went on the radio. The lyrics said in part, "I'm going to live forever... Baby remember my name."

And though he is buried in our old childhood backyard, beneath the very window he used to love to perch above - his spirit has moved on with all of us. ■

Pets of the week

**Winona**

At 8 years old, Winona (ID# 360008) is a loving and mature domestic short-hair with a lovely gray and white coat. She is affectionate and friendly.

**Penny**

With a lovely seal point coat, 8-month-old Penny (ID# 360042) would make an ideal addition to a

family looking for a sweet and beautiful pet.

To adopt a pet

These animals are among the many available at Lee County Animal Services, 5600 Banner Drive, Fort Myers. Call 432-2083 or visit the agency's Web site at www.leelostpets.com. Adoption applications may be downloaded from the site or completed at the shelter, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday and 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday. Please use the animal's ID number when inquiring about it. The adoption fee is \$65 for dogs. During June, the adoption fee for cats has been reduced from the usual \$50 to \$30. Fees include age-appropriate vaccinations, sterilization, flea treatment, worming, testing for feline AIDS and leukemia, a county license and microchip ID. ■

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