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## FEATURE STORY: SAYING GOOD-BYE TO MARY

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When he brought her home in 2003 he could hold the little scarlet macaw in the palm of his hand. She was 4 weeks old. He named her Mary. He fed her. He loved her. He raised her. She, with her brilliant, primary colors and her alert, expressive eyes... became the center of Jim's universe. "I had had other animals... you know," he said. "But there was nothing like the bond I shared with this bird. It was like nothing I had ever had before with any other living creature on earth."

By the time Mary was a year and half old, Jim's love for her began to kindle a real concern for her future and for her life beyond his. Her road, after all, was many, many years longer than his. She trusted him. She knew, because she was his, that she would always be ok. His heart broke for her. Would she always be ok? She had fifty, sixty, eighty years ahead of her that Jim could not always be a part of.



It was in the year 2005 when Jim first contacted Foster Parrots and we began to work on Mary's Life-long care plan. Jim took out a modest life insurance policy to provide for Mary's future. We began Mary's file at the sanctuary, building it with medical records, insurance records and notes from Jim – all about Mary. None of us could have ever anticipated that, less than 5 years later, Jim would be handed a diagnosis of terminal liver cancer.

He kept Mary at home for as long as he could. He took care of her – and she took care of him. "One day when Jim was having a particularly bad day," said Jim's partner, Betsy, "he was laying on the couch. Mary began to work the blanket to pull it up over Jim. It took her almost an hour, but she finally tucked him in."

As Jim's illness progressed and his pain increased, he knew it was time to do what he had been preparing to do for so many years. The fact that he had faith in Foster Parrots and confidence in Mary's future did not make the decision any easier, Jim brought Mary to the NEEWS in early December 2011.

Sitting with Mary in the lounge at the sanctuary, Jim nuzzles her with his grizzled chin and she buries her face in his neck. She is petite for a scarlet. This has been a hard journey for Mary, who is acutely attached and in-tuned to her human companion. We are certain she understands that Jim is ill. She worries about him. Unlike so many other parrots who come into our care and are able to embrace a new phase of their lives and a new adventure, Mary's sadness has been palpable. She waits for Jim to come, and despite his pain and the long journey from Massachusetts he comes to sit with her several times each week. Little by little she has begun to engage the sanctuary staff and volunteers and to respond curiously to the other macaws. She has begun to settle into her new life. Nothing has been more important to Jim than to see her finally happy and to know that she will be ok when, finally, it is time for him to continue in his own journey, and he comes no more.

"I just wish I had more time," Jim says. His eyes are tired but they still twinkle, especially when he looks at Mary. "But nobody has enough time for their parrots. They are so long lived. We are all going to let them down, we are all going to grow old... These animals should not be pets." Jim's conviction is based in his empathy. It comes not simply from how much he loves Mary, but from how much he knows she loves and depends on him, and from his understanding of her vulnerability in an unpredictable world. A bird like Mary, despite how sweet she may be, typically faces eighty or more years of uncertainty and successions of re-homings with no guarantee that she will always be well cared for. When Jim made a commitment to that tiny baby bird who, nine years ago, he could hold in the palm of his hand, his commitment was for the rest of *her* life, not his. Mary will spend the rest of her life at the NEEWS under the care of our devoted staff and volunteers.

### Estate Planning for Feathered & Furred Family Members

Estate planning for our animals is one of the most responsible and important things we can do to safeguard their future beyond our own lives. It is particularly important for parrots, whose complex care requirements place them in a high-risk situation when they lose their human guardians. The average person cannot/will not take on the responsibility for a parrot left behind. When planning for your parrot's future, please take the following precautions:

- **Research, visit and feel confident in the sanctuary you choose**
- **Establish adequate life insurance or estate assets for the life-long care of your parrot**
- **Make your wishes known to close family and friends, and provide accessible contact information so that the needs of your bird(s) can be addressed quickly in the event of an unforeseen event.**