

From the Streets of San Francisco – Peter!
Or, The Joys of Living with a Special Needs Bird
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Peter got his start as a movie star.

Well, okay, not a movie star per se, but his flock was featured in a popular documentary released across the nation the same year Peter was born. Once he left his nest high above the vogue commerce of San Francisco, Peter spent the first few weeks of his fascinating life soaring through the salty air with the other red-masked birds in his flock. Wild and free, they flew together in harmony above the city like the Blue Angels, while Crayola-hued cars buzzed below,

spinning up and down twisty roads and between beautiful old buildings selling new ideas.

As a member of the flock, young Peter's interaction with people was likely very limited. Other than, maybe, lucking into a residential area where someone who was cleaning out their car surreptitiously threw Peter and his friends some delightfully stale movie theater popcorn, Peter and his flock probably didn't have much to do with humans. The people were just the onlookers below, marveling at the glamorous flock of parrots as they flew by.

But, as Peter would soon find out, urban wildlife isn't always as glamorous as it seems.

One day in the beginning of winter 2005, Peter's life was changed forever. It was on that day that Peter encountered an obstacle – possibly a billboard, or maybe one of those gorgeous old buildings, nobody can know for sure - and the little parrot fell to the ground unnoticed by the rest of the flock; he lay there on the ground while the rest of his flock flew further and further away.

This unexpected tragedy could have been the end of Peter's young life, but Peter's luck was about to change. Not long after Peter's accident, he was found by a woman who at first thought he was dead. Once she realized he was still alive she rushed him to a veterinarian. The severity of Peter's injuries from his collision and his fall were extensive. Peter was diagnosed with a broken back, and would have ongoing medical issues as a result.

Fortunately for Peter, the veterinarian who had given him such a bleak diagnosis was also familiar with Mickaboo Companion Bird Rescue, and made up for the seemingly hopeless prognosis by sending Peter to Mickaboo, where Peter was sure to receive the best care. Peter was no longer able to fly. He was no longer able to perch, walk, or even stand. Under careful supervision at Mickaboo, Peter adapted quickly to his new disabilities. Being constantly around people for the first time in his life, handled several times a day to be fed and given medicines, and unable to care for himself at all, Peter adapted to loving human volunteers at Mickaboo, and learned to interact with them. It was only a few months before Peter had won the heart of one Mickaboo volunteer who took Peter home to be a part of her family.



Peter's disabilities were severe, and his new human family diligently learned about the special needs and care Peter would require before bringing him home. Peter's accident had broken his back. The injury to Peter's spine caused not only issues with his legs not functioning, but caused complications with his digestive system. As a result, Peter must be given a laxative daily and is closely monitored for any signs of improper digestive functioning (which would require a trip to the vet).

Additionally, there is a risk that Peter may create an egg. When Peter was three, his gender was determined by a DNA test - it was discovered that he was actually a "she." (Old habits die hard, and Peter's family still calls her "him," pointing out that Peter has yet to object - and hey, by tradition Peter Pan is played by a female in stage plays!) Peter's disabilities mean the risk of Peter developing an egg would be extreme. Peter's family must take care to watch for egg binding. If an egg were to develop and get caught, Peter would require immediate surgery.

Peter's adopter says that even though Peter has special needs, life with Peter is not a constant struggle; on the contrary, the seven years during which Peter has been a part of her family have been incredibly rewarding. Peter loves to play. He has several toys, but his favorites are the ones that dangle and swing from the ceiling of his cage. Like most parrots, Peter also loves toys that have food inside them; unlike other parrots, Peter has his own particularly entertaining way of getting the treats out of the toys, because he must use his beak, not his feet, to manipulate the objects.



Initially, Peter's family tried alternative therapies to get mobility back into Peter's legs. Because of his broken back, it was determined that Peter's mobility could not be improved. Instead, Peter's family generates creative ways to improve Peter's quality of life, considering his limited mobility; for instance, Peter has his very own customized cage that was built to accommodate his disabilities. Rather than a typical parrot

cage, Peter lives in a modified guinea pig cage. His cage has a false bottom and is long and low. Peter has adapted to his cage, and is able to ambulate by grabbing hold of the bars in his cage with his beak, then pulling his body behind him.

In spite of requiring special care, Peter's adopter says he is surprisingly not a drain on resources. Peter's medication is inexpensive, and he only needs to go to the vet about once



every year as long as he gets his laxative daily, regular baths, and all the healthy diet and exercise that every parrot needs.

Peter has bonded very well with his adoptive family. While Peter is defensive around large crowds of people (understandable, considering the disabled parrot can't move very quickly to get away if he has to), it is clear that Peter loves people in general. Peter loves interacting with people, and shows off his intelligence when playing games like "peek-a-boo."

Peter's adoptive mother calls him a "happy little bird." He loves to snuggle with his family, who, mindful of Peter's disabilities, provide extra positive reinforcement when Peter does something like "step up" into their hands or flaps his wings: activities that are good for Peter's heart by giving him exercise, and that also help to maintain the strong bond he has with his family members.



Peter can no longer soar high above the San Francisco skyscrapers. Instead, his family members hold him a low height above a soft bed and encourage him to exercise his wings.

Peter has begun flapping his wings on his own during these sessions, and his family is excited to point out that Peter is even starting to get one or two inches of lift.

He started his life above San Francisco with an avian flock; now Peter lives in San Jose with a human family. He's disabled now, but his family says that living with a special needs bird is a blessing...and living with a family who's as caring as Peter's is the most glamorous lifestyle of all.

Editor's Note: [See and learn more](#) about the Mickaboo special needs birds available for adoption!