

Advice from the Trenches: Bird Brained

Dear C and Dr. B:

Now that COVID-19 restrictions are easing up, my wife and I want to travel again, but now we have a new problem - I can't find anyone to take care of my pet cockatiel. I never knew that pet owning could be such a ball and chain! Pet day care facilities are for dogs and cats, not birds. Pet stores offer to watch over birds but they are expensive and they all leave the pets caged.

Our cockatiel flies freely around our house and it wouldn't do well spending days on end in a cage. Prior to the pandemic, we knew some reliable bird owners with whom we could trade pet care for vacations, but since we haven't had any contact with them for two-and-a-half years, these relationships are no longer viable. I am at a loss for what to do now! Any suggestions? We have vacations looming.

- Bird Brained

Dr. B says:

All dependents pose these issues. Who will watch the kids? Who will watch my dog? Who will water my plants? The more exotic your dependent is, the more difficult pet ownership is.

It could be worse. Just try to find someone to watch your snake or Komodo dragon! You need to rebuild that network you once had. As for those looming vacations- try advertising for sitters at your town or neighborhood websites. Your church, or temple, is another good place to try. If these efforts fall through, the pet shops may be expensive and your bird may not like the cage ... but it's better than nothing.

C says:

When I was divorced, I lived alone and I had a dog, Sparky, who was the best little doggy in the whole wide world. But she posed a real problem - I sometimes had to go on tour for a week or two at a time and needed someone to watch Sparky. There was no way in hell I had the money to kennel her.

How did I handle it? Guilty admission: I sometimes went to somewhat unscrupulous lengths. For instance, if I was going out with a guy I was really sick of and ready to break it off with, I would deliberately delay the breakup speech until after I got back from a tour. Without a shred of guilt, I'd just string him along beforehand, telling him how much Sparky loved him, and how he was the only one I could trust. When I got back from tour, I'd be sweet as hell and make the guy dinner ... then I'd let him down gently, with deep regret, and tell him we'd always be friends. Sparky would wag her tail in sympathy. It was a great kiss-off act.

In the United States of America, people usually treat their pets better than they do their own children. We lavish love, special treats, and spa treatments on them and spend thousands of dollars on medical treatments even when the pets would probably prefer a quick death.

All of that is obviously overkill, but the point is - if you decide to own a pet you have to take proper care of its health and wellbeing. Pet owners who neglect their animals are subject to legal prosecution, as

well they should be. Pets don't get a choice. We chose them, so it's up to us to do the right thing.

So - suck it up! And start preparing now for the next time. A lot of us have let connections go during COVID-19. This is a good time to reconnect - your bird-owning friends will all want their freedom too. You can all help each other; community is a wonderful thing. Start networking.

- Cathren Housley

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com