

MISS PIDGE

Part 1 - by Jean Hobbs



“Well, Hi Morgan, what do you have there?” I asked. “Look what I found, it’s an injured pigeon” came the response. Little did Mike and I know that, with those words uttered about six years ago, the beginning of an unusual, mostly happy, often stressful and sometimes very sad relationship with a beautiful, white pigeon was about to commence. A pigeon who became known as Miss Pidge.

It’s wonderful to help a creature in crisis but a visit to the vet confirmed that Miss Pidge would never fly again. We didn’t want her killed but what would we do with her, where would we keep her? With four dogs running around, we would have to be very careful. So we connected three ex-pens together under a big tree against the back wall and made a nice comfy den in a large traveling kennel. During the day the kennel was in the enclosure so Miss Pidge had free access but at night she was locked inside and brought under the porch for safety. During the winter she slept in the garage and even (I’m embarrassed to admit) on extremely cold nights, in the house.

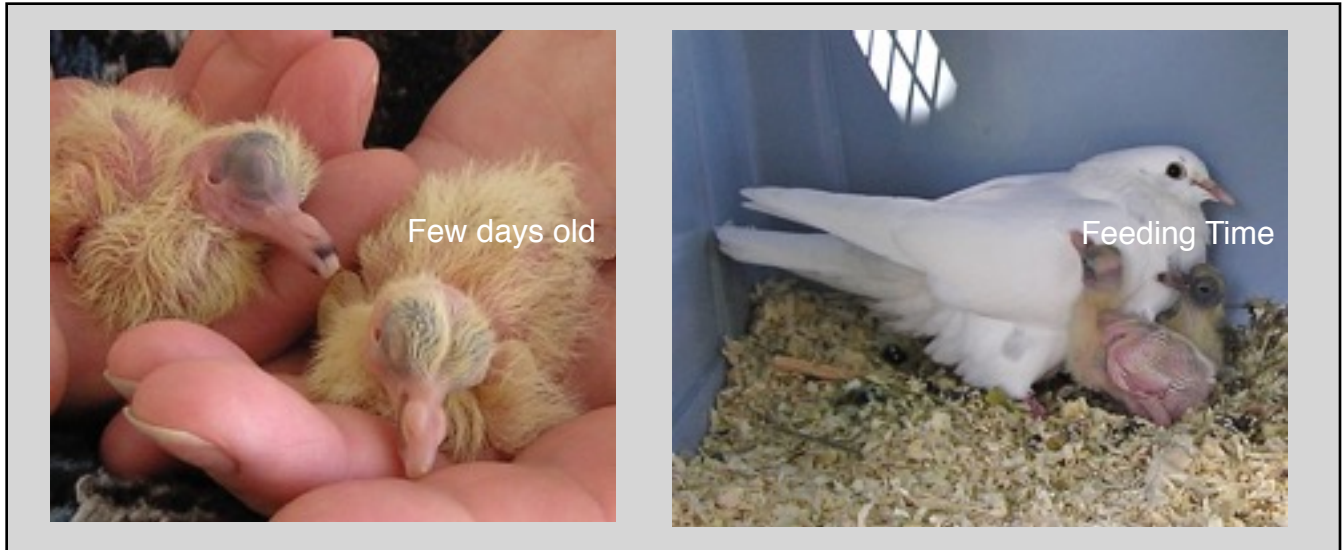
Our worries about her being lonely were quickly dispelled by visitations from the neighborhood pigeons who spied the seed, drinking water, bathing pool and other amenities being offered at Miss Pidge’s digs. It turned out in fact to be a really cool place to hang out, not only for pigeons but for other birds as well. Mike had raised racing pigeons as a teenager but, as that was way back in the dark ages, he had forgotten a lot of things, so I became an avid pigeon watcher. I did research to find out more about them and discovered that, despite having a bad reputation, they are very interesting birds with each flock member being unique.

When Spring arrived I noticed that Miss Pidge was rather promiscuous, mating with any visiting stud, and I was wild with excitement when I spied an egg in the kennel, followed by another two days later. I was really disappointed though when neither hatched, but, to my more tempered excitement, after a short while more eggs appeared and 17 days later Junior was born.

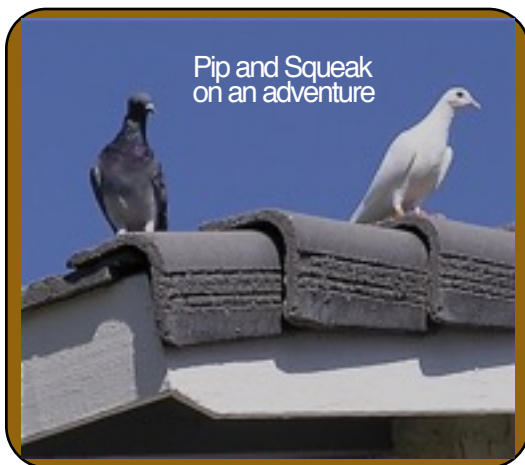


Miss Pidge’s favorite beau was a handsome macho white speckled pigeon whom we dubbed Big Daddy. In the wild, both adults share sitting and feeding duties and he was the only one who, in spite of her unusual nesting circumstances, actually helped her raise a clutch. Pigeons usually mate for life but Big Daddy eventually went astray and took up with a plain grey hussy. Miss Pidge was a bit confused about this and would watch Big Daddy with his paramour in the tree above her head. They still mated though, as was evidenced by the beautiful white babies being born.

It was fascinating watching Junior grow. He would tumble out of the kennel to mingle with the other birds, appearing very brave at first but sometimes biting off more than he could chew. We would laugh as he scurried back to safety, at first having trouble negotiating the rim of the kennel. When he started to fly up into the tree I felt sad and when he disappeared for several hours I was so worried. Then he went away for good and we never saw him again.



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After Junior's departure into the great unknown, we eagerly awaited the emergence of more eggs and Miss Pidge didn't disappoint when she laid two more a couple of weeks later. This time both of them hatched and Pip and Squeak were introduced to the pigeon world. Pip was grey and Squeak was the purest unblemished white (the result perhaps of Miss Pidge's innate propensity to mate with all of the neighborhood studs....certainly, it seems, with no color prejudice). These she raised by herself without a hitch and they eventually got to know us so well that they would fly under the porch to visit us.

I must say that Miss Pidge wasn't the friendliest of birds and at times she was positively evil when it came to protecting her babies. Pip and Squeak, perhaps because they came from different fathers, had completely contrasting natures.....Pip being very friendly but Squeak having Miss Pidge's tendency of being an 'iceberd'. We never tried to tame either Miss Pidge or her babies as we did want her offspring to fly away, which luckily they always did.

In nature, wherever there is prey, predators will not be far behind and occasionally we would find feathers and yeuky leftovers around the property which, as Mike is pretty squeamish, were left for me to clean up. We didn't think it was a cat because the dogs would keep those at bay (when they weren't snoozing in the air conditioned house, that is). Eventually though we noticed a hawk sitting in the tree and realized we had found our predator. Then one day, to my horror, I looked through the kitchen window to see the hawk outside Miss Pidge's pen, looking directly into her crate where she was sitting with two young chicks. I almost sprouted wings myself and flew out the door like a screaming banshee to frighten the thing away.

I think by this time my neighbors knew that I was a bird lover, perhaps 'lover' being substituted by 'freak' as they spied me barefoot chasing the hawk up the street, winging shoes at it or any object I could grab. How no car or house windows were ever broken I can only attribute to divine providence and good fortune. Luckily though, after a while of dodging these projectiles, the hawk would usually fly away as soon as it saw me. However, with so many fat juicy birds around, this predator was going nowhere, so eventually we had to accept its presence amongst the general winged masses.

Sometimes, when things are going along so smoothly, one gets jolted back into reality when something horrible happens. I came home one day to find Pip dead on the floor under the porch. I immediately thought that the dogs had killed him but soon realized, after seeing his outstretched shape on the kitchen window, that he must have flown into the window at top speed. Perhaps the hawk appeared, the pigeons took off in a panic and Pip flew under the porch, but still being very young, couldn't control his flight to safety.

Shortly after that sad episode Squeak decided she was ready to venture further afield and started leaving home for longer and longer periods, sometimes flying back to the porch where we had seed set out just for her. Eventually though she too disappeared for good.

Mike and I occasionally reminisce and wish we had somehow been able to keep Squeak as we realize now what a rarity she was, but of course that would have been unkind.

I'm sure she attracted lots of suitors and I hope she's now producing beautiful pure white babies somewhere out there in the wild blue yonder.

