

Betty came to the bird sanctuary about six years ago. Her owner had died peacefully in her sleep at the age of 86. Betty had been with her a long time. She still remembers the day the woman picked her out, from all the other parrots in the pet store. Crammed together in that tiny cage. Betty and the woman had been through several apartments, two marriages, and four children together. After the kids had grown and the second marriage ended, it was just Betty and the woman. Who was mostly sad by then. She spent most of her days smoking in front of the TV. Betty looked forward to that morning cigarette more than she did breakfast. That was the hardest part of coming to the sanctuary, giving up nicotine.

One day a new bird arrived, another red macaw like her. He was timid and shy. He didn't even know his own name. Most birds, if you ask them, will tell you their name. But this bird just recited lines from cop shows and mimicked a telephone ringing. The volunteers at the sanctuary decided to call him Lou.

Lou was put into a large cage and wheeled into the room where Betty lived, with all the other shy timid birds. This helped him become acclimated slowly. Lou was found in a foreclosed home with a bucket of dirty water and a bag of dog food spilled onto the floor. No one knows how long he was alone like that.

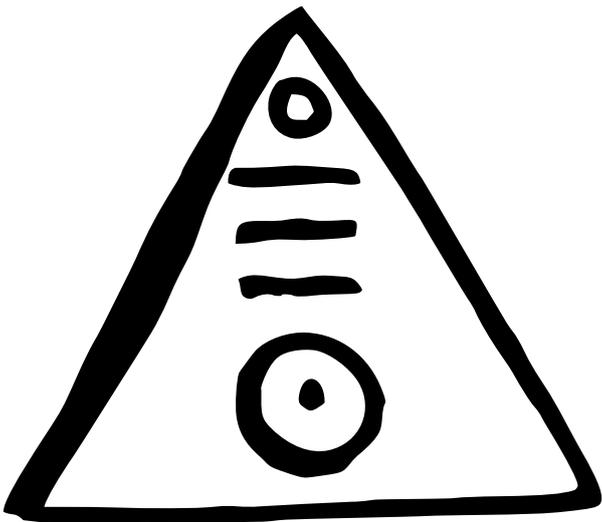
Betty watched him closely the six weeks he spent alone in his cage. Lou was timid but always kind. He didn't scream or bite the volunteers when they opened his cage to fill his food dish. He was always saying things like, "Be careful out there!" and "Who loves you, baby?" Every so often Betty would catch Lou stealing glances at her, and few times Lou caught Betty doing the same. She would always quickly look away, bashful.

The day finally came, a volunteer opened the door on Lou's cage. She left the room, letting Lou decide when he was ready to come out and join the rest of the birds. Betty waited and watched. She had fallen in love with Lou and hoped that he felt the same way. She hadn't known it, but that empty feeling she had felt her whole life could only be filled by another bird, and that bird was Lou.

After many hours, Lou finally made his way out the cage. Using his strong claws and beak, he climbed to the top. He looked around the room for a quiet spot to call his own. He flew, as far as his clipped wings would take him, to a low perch in the corner of the room. Betty hopped down from her perch and with an awkward waddle, made her way over to Lou. She stood next to him. He scooted a little closer to her, and she scooted closer to him. The feathers on his neck ruffled up, and Betty tucked her beak into the folds. Lou cooed and rested his head on top of hers. From that moment on there were never more than a few inches of space between Betty and Lou.



They Called Him Lou



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