

My Sweet Pigeon Haku has Died

From Liese Hunter, Palomacy

January 2022

My sweet pigeon Haku has died.... Haku had a very important life. He loved his wife, he loved people. He was busy all day. I believe this is true of all beings and I hope, if you have read this far, that you take the time to learn more about pigeons or maybe some other critter that you encounter that you haven't always had a good feeling about.

Haku was rescued from San Jose Animal Control by Palomacy (then MickaCoo) on January 29, 2011. He was lovingly fostered, then adopted by Cheryl Dickinson when he married her rescued lab pigeon, Gracie. On July 27th, 2012, Palomacy rescued a young King pigeon, Penelope Peanut, who also went to foster with Cheryl.

Haku, in a rare pigeon divorce, left Gracie for Peanut. Haku & Peanut became an item.



Meeting Haku at Humane Society of Silicon Valley, 5/27/15

On May 27, 2015, as part of the former partnership between Palomacy and the Humane Society of Silicon Valley, I greeted Haku & Peanut as they arrived at the HSSV to be our new lobby ambassabirds. The Lobby Pigeon program was a short but exciting program showcasing a rotating pigeon couple in the lobby of the Humane Society to raise awareness of the plight and the need for homes for domestic pigeons. During weekdays, volunteers would take the pigeons to a “meet and greet” room to socialize and have some flight time, and during the weekends, volunteers would take pigeons around to meet and educate visitors at the HSSV facility.



Meeting Haku & Peanut at HSSV 5/27/15



Meeting Haku & Peanut



Haku & Beth Ward-Haddan



Haku relaxing at HSSV



Haku & I, education day

In August, Elizabeth Young, founder of Palomacy, told me that someone was interested in adopting H&P, and I couldn't bear it. After three months spending time with these amazing birds, I couldn't imagine not having them in my life. September 12th, I brought them home on a foster to adopt basis and on October 10, 2015, I formally adopted them.



Adoption day! 9/12/15



Peanut, Haku, & millet



Haku & Lily

Haku was an amazing ambassabird. He was a working bird, and met dozens, maybe hundreds of people, at outreach events. I will include photos of Haku working his magic. Everyone who met him absolutely loved him. He was perfect in every way.



Leda Chung Hosier & Haku.



Peanut & Haku educating new pigeon people



Peanut & Haku at For Other Living Things



Haku & Faye



Haku with Naomi Cissna



Haku snoozing

In 2018, the shadow of Virulent Newcastle Disease settled over California and I opted to keep my birds at home and forego any outreach. In Southern California, entire flocks of chickens, pigeons, doves, parrots – basically any domestic birds – were being killed by officials in an attempt to eradicate the disease. I was less afraid that we would catch the disease than that we would be reported and potentially face some sort of formal visit and possible slaughter, a fear which increased when a case of VND was reported in the Bay Area. I had no way of knowing that Haku's semi-retirement would be permanent, but of course, the coronavirus pandemic eliminated the outreach gatherings that we previously attended. I think it's possible that the pigeons missed outreach as much as the humans did, but I also believe that Haku and Peanut were so firmly connected that they didn't really need any human connection at all to be happy and fulfilled.



Peanut & Haku



Sweet gift from Cheryl

Haku & Peanut lived together in my bird room with my doves Doug & Emmy Love, and an ever-changing flock of foster doves (and a couple of quail). They love “Dove TV” and share rotated out-of-cage time (doves & pigeons are very different in size, and it’s not safe to let them hang out together unsupervised) and dayviary time. (A daviary is a tiny predator-proof aviary that I have in my patio that

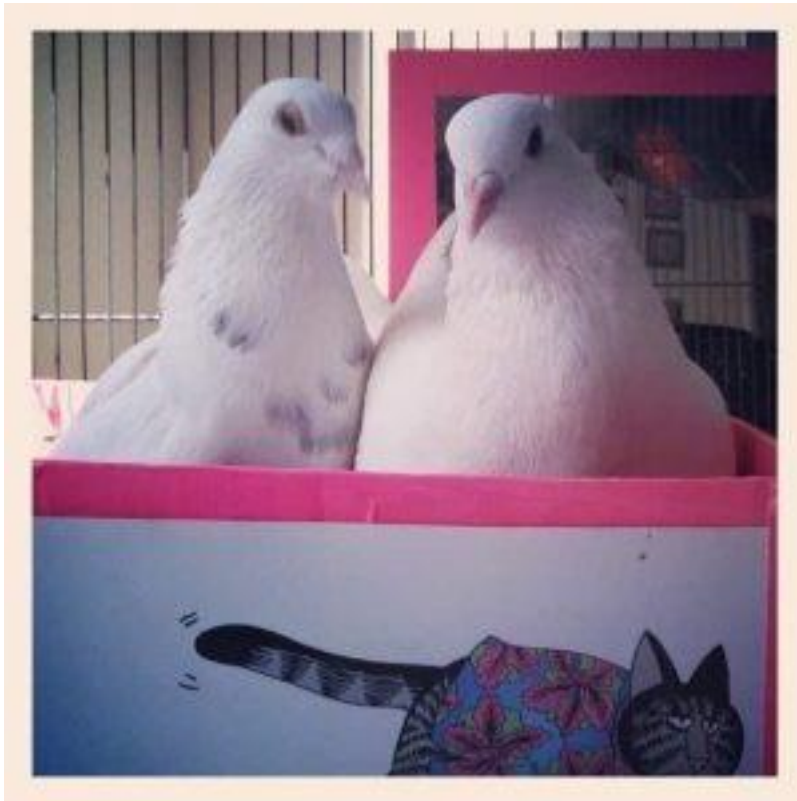
the birds can enjoy in the daytime and get some essential vitamin D and some fresh air. Unfortunately it's too small for the birds to get a lot of flight time so they get their flight time in the house.)



Blissed out Haku at home



The happy couple.



True love.



Haku.



Haku by Ashley Castaneda



Haku, Lily, & Fizzy

Last Thursday was a gorgeous day, and I carried Haku & Peanut out to the dayviary in the morning. I checked on them before I went hiking with friend and fellow volunteer Faye, around 2:15 p.m., and first thing when I got back home at 5 p.m. to bring them in before dark. I could see from the sliding glass door that something was wrong. Peanut greeted me but Haku wasn't moving, having died from natural causes while I was away. I followed the recommendation of Palomacy leadership and carried Haku up to his cage where Peanut stood vigil over him on her terms. On Sunday, she had finally stopped trying to waken him, and we buried him together. My eternal gratitude to my Sabby Jill McMurchy who helped me get through the deep grief of this unexpected loss.

Haku was not sick a single day in his life. He was a healthy weight and had no signs of any illness. I hope that his death was as quick and painless as possible, and it is a comfort to know that he was enjoying the outdoors with his wife of nearly 10 years at his side.

I've written about Haku before. Haku was a "homing" pigeon, casually bred by people and exploited for weddings and other events. Because Haku was not pure white, he was likely discarded or dumped by his breeder and was lucky enough to end up at the shelter instead of lunch. Wedding and event release dove events are cruel and unnecessary. To celebrate an event by putting another life in danger makes no sense. A white bird is incredibly visible and becomes a vulnerable target for all sorts of predators.

Pigeons have many skills, but they cannot see well at night which makes them even more vulnerable if they are left out after a release. I'm also not a supporter of birds as pets. Birds should be birds, flying free, not indoors in tiny cages. Unfortunately, Haku and Peanut and millions of other pigeons are domesticated, and bred and overbred for certain characteristics that subsequently make it impossible for them to survive in the wild. Birds like Haku and Peanut need good, non-exploitative loving homes with humans. Nine years ago I met my first pigeon, Santino, and I will never stop loving and advocating for these incredible birds.



Our happy nest.

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Fly free, my beloved Haku. Always loved. Never forgotten.

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