

TRIBUTE

What do you say on a day like this...as you fight back the emotions and memories that come to mind with each bird you hand over for euthanasia. You silently curse the unseen killer that probably blew into the cages on the hill with the winds in Southern California we call Santa Ana. You silently curse those who brought the killer across the border because of their illegal sport or their need to make money through illegal smuggling.

What do you say on a day like this...when you realize that close to 50 years of genetics are forever gone and can never be replaced. You think about how the little black birds with their big white earlobes and red spiked combs came into your life. You realize that these "little aristocrats" helped two children learn about the work and joys of raising show birds. You silently thank the folks who spent countless hours teaching, encouraging, kidding and cheering your kids on in victory and defeat.

What do you say on a day like this...as you remember the Christmas Eve the little dove flew into the garage. In a weak moment, you bought her a mate and these two gentle friends gave you years of pleasure and hundreds of babies. You silently realize how they taught you a parenting style of unconditional patience and attentiveness. You silently realize how much you relied upon the sound of their whirling wings, their crazy bathing tactics, and their gentle cooing to provide hours of calm after the hectic hours at work.

What do you say on a day like this...when your old magnificent male peafowl is caught and bound and now is gone. You silently laugh when you remember the cage being left open and helplessly watching birds fly into the neighborhood. You were thankful that one was a pet hen who would talk back to you in peafowl language and didn't care that you could pick her up when you needed to. But another flew into the holiday Christmas tree in your neighbor's yard and when you made the grab, ornaments and feathers flew in all directions as one indignant peafowl had to give up his holiday roost.

What do you say on a day like this...when the taskforce members see the "gentle giants" for the first time and can't believe there could be a chicken that big. All the hens and the pullets are victims of the horrid disease, but the males are still here in full show ready condition. You silently realize that underneath the white suits and boots are real people when one of them asks to hold your champion male because he can't believe a chicken could be that big and that beautiful.

What do you say on a day like this...you silently make a promise to pay tribute to all the feathered friends that have been an integral part of your family and life. And finally, you vow to mobilize those of us who raise birds for legal activities into actions that will help ensure that our rare breeds and years of genetics will not be lost forever.

Barbara about says it all doesn't she. This is a good reminder of the personal side of these terrible poultry diseases, and is a reminder that we should be ever careful that we do not unwittingly become a carrier of these diseases and also be on the watch for those who engage in illegal activities that may transmit these diseases.