

Peeper: A Story of Unending Love

By Kathryn King

Kathryn King, a member of United Poultry Concerns, lives in Ohio where she shares her home with several turkeys rescued from cruelty. UPC urges adopting animals from shelters, sanctuaries and rescues rather than from breeders.

My journey began with a simple desire. I had always wanted to have turkeys, so I ordered some baby turkeys from a hatchery.

When the turkeys, or poults as baby turkeys are called, arrived from the hatchery, I noticed that one of them was very weak and having a hard time. So I took the little one out of the box, and gave him medication. The next three or four nights, the young one slept in bed with me, snuggling close to my chest, as a baby chicken does with his mother hen.

Gradually, the little turkey began to eat and gain strength with each new day. One thing I did not know was happening was that we were forming a very strong bond with each other. When it came time to put him back with the other poults, I couldn't do it. I placed the little one down and it followed me everywhere I went, never more than a few feet away at any given time, even outside.

I soon started wondering if my little bird was a male or a female, and what I should name him or her. When more than a few feet away from me, it would



cry, “peep-peep.” So this new member of my family was named Peeper. This name would apply no matter what the sex of my new friend.

Next, I had to paper train Peeper. I don't have to tell anyone how hard it was to attempt this feat. It took much patience having to remind him that there was a place to go and a place not to go!

Finally, there was success, unless a visitor would come and there was excitement involved, for when excitement took over, the poult forgot about the papers.

When the third week of life came, I found out that Peeper was a male. He began to strut his stuff to me, and it was so awesome to see such a small and tiny specimen of a turkey strutting.

When I would lie on the sofa to watch TV, Peeper would fly up and get in my lap and watch with me. When I got off the sofa, he would fly down and follow me to investigate what I was doing – never far



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away from his adopted mother.

I know many people consider turkeys and chickens and all fowl to be good for nothing but food, with no emotions or feelings, but I found this to be far from the truth. These birds are creatures of love, tenderness, knowledge, and a strong awareness of their surroundings and of those who care for them.

Peeper was for the most part a house turkey, and if I could go back in time, he would have lived only in the house. I will explain myself later in the story.

Every night as he was growing up, if I got on the sofa and lay on my back, Peeper would fly up, lie on my chest, and lay his face by my face for me to pet and stroke him, and we would do this for hours. How many people would think this of a turkey?

I have a photograph of him lying on the sofa sound asleep with his head on a pillow. He would play with my tennis shoes by the hour by throwing them in the air and catching them before they hit the floor. Also my bedroom slippers were a favorite toy.

Peeper loved unsalted peanuts, blueberries, breakfast cereal, and apples. Plus his normal turkey feed and scratch were on the menu.

Every morning when we got up (he slept on the sofa), I would go to the living room to greet him. As soon as he saw me, he would put his face straight in the air to have me give him kisses up and down his soft and tender neck, and then I would give him a big hug, and he would be satisfied and start his day.

When I went to the kitchen to do dishes, he would stand intently by the sink and watch me do the dishes, he was so curious about my activity. He would get up on the sofa on cold or rainy days, and give the warning cry to me if he saw a hawk fly over. This bird that most people consider stupid would come if I called him by name, just like a dog.

I cannot express how many hours of intense joy and love he gave to me. I only wish that love in this world could have been enough, but no matter how much love we had between us, it wasn't enough to save him.

Here comes the answer to my earlier statement that I wish he had only been a house turkey.

A few months ago, Peeper began to fall ill. I took him to many veterinarians including one who was supposed to be an expert turkey vet. He had lost a lot of weight even with eating a lot. I wormed him, gave him medicine, spent hundreds of dollars on vet

bills, only to have the expert poultry vet speak to me in a way that I felt he felt I was starving Peeper. They did run tests, but not the one that needed to be run, which was X-rays of my Peeper. It turned out he had eaten a small metal wire and a shiny piece of brass that had poisoned him from inside and the metal had pierced a hole in his crop (the pillowy pouch in their upper chest where food eaten by turkeys and chickens begins its digestive journey).

We slept together the week before he passed, on the all-special sofa. A few nights before he died, he woke me at 4:30am, wanting me to straighten my legs so he could come up to my chest like he had done as a small poult nearly 3 years earlier. He snuggled so close to me that he simply could get no closer. I even said to him that's as close as you can get, Peeper. I wrapped my arms around him and fell back asleep to wake to his sweet brown eyes looking in my eyes come morning.

I was getting so desperate I called the poultry vet and took Peeper for him to run more tests. I gave Peeper kisses and hugs before they took him. I told him I loved him crying all the while.

It is my understanding that he died about two minutes after they put him in his cage, before I even left the office parking lot. It was as if our love had been the abiding force for his strength.

If I had kept him inside all his life he never would have eaten the shiny but deadly trinkets, and if I or the vet had thought to do X-rays sooner, things could have been different. But what quality of life would that be, never to eat grass or feel the sunshine?

I blame no one. I only hope that this true story will show people how great and wonderful turkeys are, and how many are abused and put to death every day just because of who they are, no one bothering to see the great treasures inside them. I try to tell everyone what magnificent birds turkeys are, in memory of my Peeper. – *Kathryn King, Scio, Ohio December 2011*

