

# Stroke fells beloved parrot

BY SCOTT HAYES  
Staff Writer

Spike, the beautiful African grey parrot that graced her pet store perch with its warning that people shouldn't try to pet her, passed away suddenly this week while receiving veterinary care. Complications from epilepsy seemingly contributed to her suffering a stroke. She was 32.

Despite her fierce bite, she still gained the love and fondness of many animal lovers and patrons of Mr. Pet's and its former incarnation as Paradise Pets. The store was where she lived – and screamed – for her entire life.

"She touched a lot of people. It's very quiet in here right now," said manager Kelly Weins, fighting tears as I was just waiting for her to scream back. It's hard to get used to. As soon as a little kid would scream, she would scream. She would see a little toddler, she would scream and they would scream back, and she would always be the loudest. Hilarious! We all just cracked up laughing. She just thought every kid should scream, or she would scream at a little kid ... and she'd call your dog. 'Come on. Come on. Come here. Come on.' And then she'd bark. And she'd meow."

Spike's animated animal nature and vocabulary were a hit on the store's many field trips to schools and daycares. Many children in this city will certainly have fond remembrances of her stately grey feathers, her piercing stare, but thankfully not the pain from her strong beak and talons.

Some rare customers were able to come in, pick her up and walk around, Weins said. Most people, however, knew to admire from a distance. She was just moody.

Weins came to be one of Spike's very few handlers for the last half of her life, a position of mutual respect that was not automatic.

She was hired to "do the room," meaning she fed, cleaned and otherwise cared for all the birds and small animals.

"I had the best job ... to put Spike to bed because she had a nighttime cage. She was tough on everybody new. At nighttime, you have to clean her perch and put her to bed. She doesn't come down just for anybody so I had to gain her trust. I did that pretty quickly. Luckily, I have never been bitten by Spike. I could pet her for the most part. She loved to give kisses."

Weins and another staff member also taught her the raspberry, something Weins came to regret. She frequently heard Spike blurt out a rude "pbbbt" if she didn't like what you were saying.

For many, this is also the first news that Spike was indeed female.

"Three years ago, we found out she was a girl. She kept saying, 'Good boy. Good boy.' Her routine was to come out of her cage, sit by the sink, and have a poop in the sink. She'd be like, 'Good poop,

Spike. Good poop, Spike.' We almost had her say 'Good girl.' She would say 'Good woo. Good woo.'

"She still screams out the old owners' names. She used to yell for Lorne and sometimes still Darryl because that was our paging system years ago."

After the news of her death was shared on the store's Facebook page, an outpouring of hundreds of condolences and many fond memories were shared by members of the community at large.

For Weins, she holds on to many of her own fond memories of the bird that few ever got to see fly. Every day, she would be the one to pick Spike up off of her tree.

"I'd ask her if she was ready, so she'd spread her wings a little bit and just kind of wiggle her wings. I'd set her up as high as I could stand and she would fly, like hanging on to my finger but she would fly. That was her exercise... and then she'd give me a kiss and I couldn't get her off my hand. I'd have to bribe her with a sunflower seed or a peanut to get her off."

Mr. Pet's has placed flowers and set up a photo of Spike on her perch along with a book of condolences for people who wish to share their own thoughts and memories. The perch isn't going anywhere, Weins said, and there are no plans for another bird to occupy it.

"I don't want another bird. We were lucky to have her. We were lucky that she was not (the kind of bird) someone could walk out the door with her. I dare someone. It wouldn't work," she laughed.

shayes@stalbert.greatwest.ca



MR. PET'S/Photo

**SAD NEWS** – Spike the Parrot, the resident celebrity at Mr. Pet's in St. Albert, passed away unexpectedly from a stroke. The sad news was shared on social media Wednesday afternoon, leaving many in the community saddened, especially staff and patrons of the pet store (and its former incarnation as Paradise Pets) where she lived for her entire life. She was 32.

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