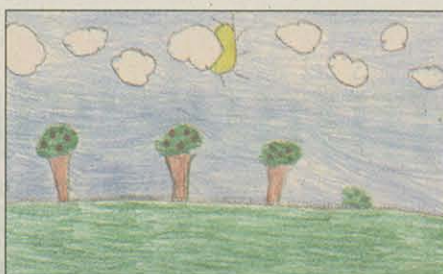


Today's weather  
picture by:  
Jeffrey Sanchez, 9,  
Vancouver,  
Chinook Elementary  
School



SUNDAY, JULY 18, 2004



DAVE BARRY

## Please, just whomp the yak

I can't shop with my wife. The problem is that she almost never has a clear objective. I ALWAYS have a clear objective. Without a clear objective, you're just wandering randomly around a store, which is NOT the point of shopping.

This is not just my opinion: This is the opinion of literally thousands of Nobel-Prize-winning scientists whose names are available upon request. These scientists have traced the origins of shopping back to prehistoric times, when "shopping" was called "hunting," and primitive man would make out his "shopping list" by drawing, on his cave wall, a picture of his objective, usually a large wad of meat in the form of, say, a yak. He would then go out into the wild, locate his objective, and make the "purchase" by whomping the yak on the head with a club.

This primitive shopper did not dilly-dally. He did not ask whether the yak was on sale. He did not try to accessorize the yak. He did not summon his primitive men friends and ask them if they thought the yak made his hips look big. No, he just WHOMPED THE YAK, and then he dragged it home, stopping only to whomp the primitive sales guys who appeared out of nowhere and tried to force him to purchase the service agreement.

This is the biological basis for shopping. And this is why, even today, most men, when they shop, are yak-whompers. They do not wander: They go straight for the kill. I know I do. When I enter a store, I have a definite, practical, no-nonsense objective in mind, which is to locate, and secure, an electronic gizmo that I already have, except the new one has more features.

For example, recently, in a surgical shopping strike so blindingly fast you would need slow-motion r-play to even see it, I located and secured a new cell phone that, in addition to being a phone, receives e-mail AND takes extremely low-quality photographs. It has changed my life. Now, when I'm not using my phone's cell-phone feature ("Hello? Hello? Hello?") I can use the camera feature to record precious moments that I can share with others. ("Here's a picture of my daughter's ballet recital. Or, the Grand Canyon.") And thanks to my phone's e-mail feature, even when I'm away from my computer, I can receive the literally hundreds of urgent messages I receive every day from people wishing to enhance my manhood.

My wife did not understand why I needed this phone. Yet every guy I show it to immediately agrees that it is a vital necessity. I have a friend named Robert who has a similar phone, and recently we discovered that, theoretically, I could "beam" my address and phone number from my phone to his phone THROUGH THE AIR. I say "theoretically" because we could not get it to actually work, although we spent a good 10 minutes standing about a foot apart, pointing our phones at each other and fruitlessly pressing buttons. Several women watched this with some amusement; they suggested that — get this — it might be quicker for me to just TELL Robert my address and phone number, which would have represented a wanton and reckless disregard on our part for the beaming

BARRY, page D3



Christopher Driggins, left, who calls himself the Birdman, revolves his life as well as his household decor around rescuing unwanted birds. This is the living room of Driggins' Orchards home, shared by his father, William, center, and 76 feathered animals, mostly medium to large parrots.

## Under his wing



Many of the birds under Driggins' care, such as this 7-year-old Eclectus parrot named Rositta, were abused or neglected by their previous owners. So Driggins has to heal psychological as well as physical wounds.

### Did you know?

■ Some common human foods can hurt or even kill birds. Those include avocado, chocolate and any dish made with MSG, found regularly in Chinese meals. Birds also shouldn't be exposed to alcohol, tobacco, oven cleaners, lead pencils, lead paint, Febreze or any kind of aerosol product, particularly spray paint.

Clark County bird lover  
dedicates life and home to caring  
for unwanted or hurt feathered animals

By BRETT OPPEGAARD  
Columbian staff writer

### Birdman.

That's how Christopher Driggins introduces himself as he welcomes first-time visitors into his Orchards home.

One stands motionless for a few moments, agog at the surroundings — a juxtaposition of African jungle, Tokyo tech and American double-wide.

A tangle of branches — some as long as 18 feet — crisscrosses the living room ceiling. A foot-tall macaw leans down to get a closer look at a guest. He's quickly joined by another large parrot, and another, and another, as blurs of bright greens and reds and blues shuffle and flutter toward the new toy.

A symphony of squawks and shrieks is being played in true surround sound. Thin bamboo strips cover the walls. Silk plants here and there. Shades drawn.

"It's like the Tiki Room at Disneyland," Driggins says, only there's a big screen television and a couch in the middle of it.

Driggins is a savior to anything with feathers in this region, doing his best to rescue exotic pets as well as native birds in need, including starlings, ducks, pigeons, geese and even an occasional stray seagull.

As a volunteer — one of the few in the Northwest — he handles the overflow at the region's animal shelters and veterinary offices. He also provides a temporary home for the unwanted with wings.

At last count, there were 76 birds, mostly the larger varieties of parrots, living in his 1,800-square-foot house. Cages are



Birds roam just about every part of Driggins' home, including the kitchen. This one is named Casey.

Photos by  
Janet L. Mathews  
of The Columbian

BIRDMAN, page D7

### your Guide:



Batter up  
at the Padres'  
new downtown  
San Diego  
stadium /D4



Will Smith  
returns to  
summer's big  
screen with sci-fi  
thriller "I, Robot"  
/D9

### Coming Monday:

Jimie Rodgers  
sings at Clark  
College /D1



## UNDER HIS WING

"I have  
a very  
hard time  
saying  
no to  
birds in  
need."

~ Christopher  
Driggins



Photos by JANET L. MATHEWS/The Columbian

Taking care of birds isn't all work for Christopher Driggins. He enjoys the companionship, playing, dancing and just goofing around with them.



Driggins shows Kevin Dearborne, 16, of Vancouver, a baby duck that he rescued from Multnomah Falls. Driggins will help any type of injured or unwanted bird in the metropolitan area, including starlings and crows.



A 1989 Chevy Suburban takes Driggins from bird rescue to bird rescue. Here, he loads the cages and Quaker parrots of Kate Reeves, after she called him because she couldn't handle having the birds anymore, particularly in a house with six cats.

## Birdman:

From page D1

crammed into his living, dining and bonus rooms as well as parts of his bedroom. He has another 18 birds staying in foster homes.

Single, with no kids, the 44-year-old's devotion leaves little time for anything else. He works as a salesman for the Nautilus Group during the day, then spends most of his hours afterward rescuing or caring for birds.

In a typical day, he gets about five hours of sleep and 10 new messages on his 360-BIRDMAN line, most often from people desperately hoping for his highly specialized help. He's placed more than 250 birds into new homes (or returned them to the wild) since he moved here from Southern California in the late 1990s.

"I have a very hard time saying no to birds in need," Driggins acknowledges, his voice deep and full, like it should have been destined for radio.

On a recent night, he comes home to 19 unanswered calls. He sits between a couple of cluttered desks, surrounded by birds in and out of cages, in what originally was a dining room. A parakeet sleeps on his Gateway notebook computer. Seeds and feathers and other bird debris cover the carpet. Driggins quickly categorizes the pleas, having to listen intently to hear over the constant clamor of the birds.

"Robin," he says after he hears the first few words of a caller. "Took care of that."

Skip.  
"Cockatiel. That's already in the back room."

Skip.  
"Here we go," he says, as a woman's voice explains how she just can't handle her pair of Quaker parrots anymore, one of which Driggins had placed with her a few months before. He calls her back and says he'll be right over to pick up the birds.

But first he swings through the kitchen, where there's a sliced apple on the counter. A swarm of fruit flies hovers over the treat. Driggins grabs a piece, through the buzzing black cloud, and pops it in his mouth. That's dinner.

Then he small talks with a few of his feathered friends. Gives the curious macaw a kiss, which involves beak nibbling on Driggins' tongue.

### Contacts:

■ **Birdman Christopher Driggins** can be reached at 360-247-3626 (360-BIRDMAN).

■ **Donations to Driggins' Northwest Bird Rescue and Adoption Orphanage** can be made to 1901 N.E. 162nd Ave., Suite D-105 - P.M.B. #301, Vancouver, WA 98684, or in Driggins' name to the West Coast Seed Company, 17825 S.E. 82nd Drive, Gladstone, OR 97207, 503-657-3473.

Makes sure the Animal Planet channel on the big screen isn't featuring predators this week. ... He's ready to go.

Driggins climbs into his 1989 Chevy Suburban Silverado that looks like it should be in a show-and-shine from the outside, with clean custom paint and chrome wheels (license plate: BRDMN2). The inside, it's a "project," he says.

A mouse recently snuck into the rig as part of a large load of donated seed. It left its mark, giving the interior a pungent and distinctive odor that Driggins tries to mitigate with a small squirt of scented oil. It doesn't help that the power windows aren't functioning and it's warm outside.

On the way, Driggins relays the situation: Besides birds, the Hazel Dell woman has ended up with two dogs, six cats, eight frogs and a couple of giant iguanas, given to her by people who no longer wanted their pets.

One of those birds escaped recently and ended up on the living room floor surrounded by the cats, almost becoming a kitty snack. She also doesn't have enough time to properly care for the birds. It's simply another case of a person with too big of a heart, not enough resources, Driggins surmises.

The former Eagle Scout collects the birds, discreetly examining the animals' droppings. He later says that it's clear from the coloring that they hadn't eaten any fruit in a while.

"I don't want to know that much," he says with a quick laugh. "But I specialize in these things, so I do."

Driggins is self-taught, he acknowledges, which is typical of the people who assist the veterinary world in this capacity, learning ornithology

through books, the Internet and discussions with vets, said Dr. Marli Lintner, founder of the Avian Medical Center in Lake Oswego, Ore. She transfers about a dozen birds a year to Driggins, also working with other local boarders.

Lintner said a combination of increased breeding and decreased demand has made exotic birds easy and cheap to obtain. Yet the intense level of care needed for these animals remains the same.

"Many people don't realize how noisy and destructive they can be," she said. "Birds are loud. They are all loud. Sometimes even the singing of a canary, for 10 hours a day, can drive a person nuts. ... They make messes. They kick seed and feather and dandruff around. Personality-wise, you can't beat a bird for a pet. They are much smarter than dogs and cats. But some people get tired of cleaning the cage every day."

Lintner said there are probably a half dozen people like Driggins scattered around the metropolitan area that help deal with unwanted or injured birds.

"People tend to use and abuse that kind of service very quickly," she said. "Chris works really hard. He's very dedicated. I feel sorry for him in a way. A lot of times it ends up that someone has a bird, doesn't want to deal with it, so they dump it on his doorstep."

"It can be a bottomless pit. Chris has had trouble with that. It can get to the point where you aren't doing

rescue anymore, you're doing warehousing," she said. "Maybe people's responsibility level has sunk to an all-time low. It's a good thing that (people like Chris are helping). Yet it's sad that we need them."

Most rescues involve a few common themes. Large birds can live 90 years or more, so often he's called when the bird outlives the owner and the family doesn't want to take care of it. Another typical situation involves family changes, such as a baby or a new significant other. Sometimes, people just don't realize how expensive a bird is to maintain or how needy they can be.

"They are extremely sensitive, hypersensitive," Driggins said. "And they have a memory like an elephant. ... If you have a dog, and you tie it up in the back yard, you have a barking dog. That's a cry for attention. If you bring that dog into the house, and give it some TLC, then you will have a great companion. Birds are the same way. They need a lot of attention."

That desire eventually can lead to severe depression, self mutilation (such as plucking feathers) and aggressive behavior, including biting.

Driggins recalls his first rescue, a Goffin's cockatoo named Caesar, that he found in 1990 in a Southern California garage, housed with a green-winged macaw and six fighting cocks. The place stunk of grease and oil. The owner said he stuck Caesar out there because the bird was too noisy, and he was too much work for his 5-year-old daughter.

"That's when I began to realize that there were all of these mentally ill birds out there, being neglected," Driggins said. "That's when I started to understand the psychological portion of their needs."

Driggins took Caesar back to his townhouse, which also had bamboo-covered walls, and the bird's personality completely changed. He became loving and cuddly, and Driggins gained a friend for life. Caesar still is with him.

Some of his other birds are nearly bald from their self plucking that occurred before Driggins found them. Because of appearance, Driggins realizes he might be caring for these pets the rest of his life. In California, he said he was known as the guy

who would take handicapped birds, many missing legs.

It's a worthwhile — yet costly — endeavor, Driggins says. "Once you've been in my house, you can see I'm not into this for the money." He says he pays \$600 a month in electricity for the various heaters, air purifiers and full-spectrum lighting, as well as \$400 a month for seed, feed and formula. From clients, he says he only accepts limited donations because he doesn't want anyone to think the money is more important to him than the service. He says he detests bird brokers.

A majority of his costs come directly out of his Nautilus paycheck. His biggest financial supporter, his sister Virginia, who donated thousands of dollars a year to the program, died about a month before his stepmother this past Christmas. His father, William, recently moved into Driggins' home, so he has been helping with the upkeep as well as the bills.

More than money, though, he says he needs more volunteers. Responsible folks to house birds. People to give needy animals a good and permanent home.

On that recent night in Hazel Dell, before he could even get the Quaker parrots back home, Driggins receives an urgent call on his cell phone. A mother and her son found an injured crow struggling on the ground in a vacant city lot. They brought it to Vancouver's Emergency Veterinary Service, which generally refers its bird cases to Driggins.

So Birdman heads directly to the facility. The crow, a female, less than a year old, has a piece of bone sticking out of its wing. Fluttering around at first, she calms quickly in Driggins' hands. He will take her home that night and clean and tape the wing.

But first he wants to let the concerned rescuers know they did a good deed. He finds them in the waiting room, where they chat a bit before he says, "You did the right thing. St. Francis is looking down on you."

"We're just so glad, so glad, that there's someone out there that cares for birds," Mona Leffer says. Her 12-year-old son, Mason, then asks, "Do you have any parrots?"

Driggins smiles just for a second, while he considers how to answer that innocently broad question. "Yeah, a few," he says. "I have a few." He leaves it at that. A crow's waiting for him.



This crow, found by a Vancouver woman and her son, suffered a compound fracture in its wing. Driggins treated the bird's infection and taped its wing, preparing it for transport to a wildlife rehabilitation facility.