

# CJ'S PRIDE - #557

BY CLIFFORD BAYNON  
(FATHER OF CJ BAYNON)

*(Editors Note: This article, in an incomplete form, ran Dec. 1. We've reprinted it in total.)*

Back in early February of 2015, we were in the midst of the breeding season, raising from eggs what would be our 2015 Racing Pigeon Young Bird team. 10 year old CJ would make his routine patrols through the breeding sections of the loft, peaking into each of the nest boxes to see how the eggs and hatchlings were doing. One day he called me into the breeder section and was holding a 7 day old hatchling in his hand. It was very different looking than its nest mate as well as both of its parents. Both its parents were solid dark color, as well as its nest mate. This bird, recently banded #557, was just beginning to grow its feather quills and had many white feathers all over. CJ immediately asked: "Dad, can I have this pigeon?"

For the past decade I have flown each racing season as partners with Tommy who breeds half of the team at his house and brings them over to settle and fly from my loft. After many successful pigeon racing years together, Tommy requested a break from racing the birds this year, and for that reason we only have a limited amount of birds bred and designated for the race team. I know that giving a bird to CJ means that he moves it over into his loft section, tames it and makes it his pet instead of being raced. When I saw how enthusiastic that CJ was about this bird, despite having only half of the usual race birds for the team this year, I told him "Of course you can have him".

CJ & Ryan have a loft section that belongs to them. They put their pet birds in that section and often spend time in there with their birds. Little brother Ryan is a master of taming birds with such tricks as teaching birds to sleep on their backs in his hand or on a flat surface. CJ often employs 8 year old Ryan to help tame his own birds in their loft section. When their friends come over, they often bring them into the loft to hold their birds. There are many times when they will bring their birds into their play fort with them or walk around the yard with them. They have even taken them into the pool with them, training them to sit on a pool float beside them. On occasion, CJ brings his pet birds into the house with him, but is not allowed to keep them indefinitely in his room despite his repeated requests.

At the start of the summer, CJ requested to be my flying partner this year knowing that I was giving it a go without Tommy. The arrangement was that he would help where he could around his school schedule. He requested that in exchange for his help that



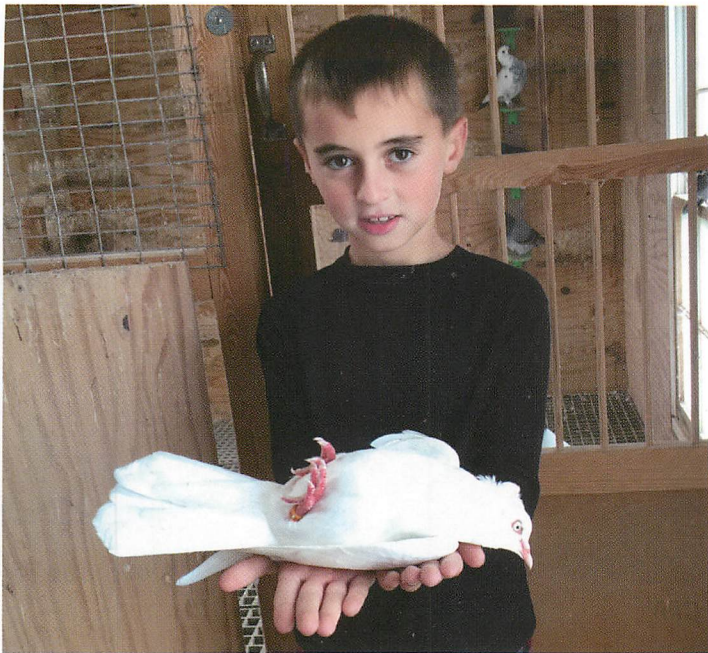
**557 Baby pic**

he share in any prizes that the birds win.

Early into the young bird training CJ approached me and asked if he could put his pet bird (#557) back on the race team. I warned him that it meant that he could risk losing him, and that his light color might be a magnet to the hungry hawks. CJ tells me that he "taught his bird evasive maneuvers and that he's too fast to get caught by a hawk."

Road training began with the birds from 1 mile to 100 miles from late spring and into the summer months. Despite having taken some losses on a couple of difficult training tosses, CJ's #557 bird trained successfully with the young bird race team.





**Ryan**

I called him the 'team mascot' because his color stood out so much from the other birds. The late August date of the 1st race approached. Knowing how much time CJ spends watching this bird and how fond he is of him, I again reminded CJ of the risk of sending his pet bird #557 to the races which will range from 150 miles out to almost 350 miles deep into the mountains of Pennsylvania. CJ again reminded me how fast his bird is going to be and told me to "Stop worrying Dad!"

For the 1st few short races (under 200 miles), CJ's bird flew well, but came home looking unchallenged. He would fly extra laps around the loft for minutes before coming down to clock in and then would strut and dance on the landing board like he didn't even fly a race.

As we moved deeper into the race season, and the big races (bigger distance and bigger prizes) were getting closer, #557 began to excel. On a race morning of a tough 235 mile race, I got a call from ex-flying-partner Tommy. The previous races this season have all been WEST wind (tail-wind) races, helping the birds home and making them relatively easier races for the birds. On this morning, the EAST winds were blowing strong. It was going to be a tough day for the race birds having to fight a head wind for 235 air miles. Tommy asked if we wanted company later to await the race birds arrival. Tommy is very good at spotting incoming birds. His distance eyesight is near that of binoculars! We welcomed him with an invite to join us.

The birds were released from Carlisle, Pennsylvania at 8:30AM. At 1:00 PM, CJ and I were sitting in the backyard scanning the horizon for any approaching birds from the race release direction. We had heard of no one up the line (in Nassau County) ahead of us reporting any birds clocked in yet. Tommy showed up at about 2:00 PM. We then got a text message with news that someone up short of us clocked a single pigeon home approximately 5 minutes ago. Of the



**C.J.**

173 birds in this race, that was the only one known to have been clocked in today so far. We would need to clock a bird within the next 20 minutes to beat that bird.

Some minutes later, Tommy yelled "BIRD!" pointing far off in the sky rapidly approaching from up high in the distance. The bird folded back his wings and began a rapid decent dive to the loft. As it got closer I could make out the color realizing there was only one bird that could be! Once down at loft roof altitude, #557 did a victory lap around the property and landed on the landing board at the loft entrance. He scanned in just shy of 6 hours in flight. CJ's #557 won 1st place in the club race with over 4 minutes lead time ahead of the next bird in the club race! Before Tommy went home, he offered CJ "a basket full of money" to buy his bird from him, but CJ declined. This was a proud day for CJ and his pet bird!

Three weeks later, having won 1st place in the 235 mile club race earlier in the season, CJ's bird was now a candidate to bond into the big Annual Lindenhurst Bond Race, where instead of just racing against local club members, it is an open race to the entire Suffolk/Nassau counties. Because of the expensive entry fees and the larger than usual \$\$\$ prizes, all participants select only their very best group of birds to enter this race. It is the longest race that our young birds fly (337 air miles from release to our loft), and it is a race to see who is the best of the best. We paid entry for just six birds. I selected our 6 best candidates for entry, CJ opted to make his bird one of our bonded entries.

As an aside, CJ has been obsessed over following news in past months of the release of the new APPLE iWatch. He has a friend at school that has one, and he has been obsessively reading about and watching information videos about this new Apple device daily. At a recent family gathering, he was intrigued that his Uncle Curtis has recently got one, and it is now at the top of his wish list. With a \$400 price tag, his now 11 year old wheels have been turning for months trying to figure out how to fund such a purchase.



On the day of the big race, the birds were liberated at 7:30AM from Somerville, PA. Unlike the tough headwind race that in which CJ's bird had excelled in the past, today's weather was a tail wind; a FAST race. It often takes a different type of bird to prevail in a tail-wind speed race than that which would prevail with a tough head-wind slow race.

At about 1:00 PM, Tommy called and asked if we wanted company again watching for the birds. I told him to wear his lucky hat again and come on over. Sitting in the yard, before Tommy arrived, CJ says: "So Dad, if we win any prize money in this big race, can I buy an Apple iWatch?"

Dad: "We will have to see how much we win, and deduct our race seasons expenses, then split what's left."

Some quiet time passes...

CJ says: "Dad, if we win the \$2,000 1st prize, then can we go tomorrow to Smith Haven Mall Apple store and buy an Apple iWatch?"

Dad: "We don't get the prize money right away, and we still need to deduct all past expenses to see what is left."

Some more silent time passes...

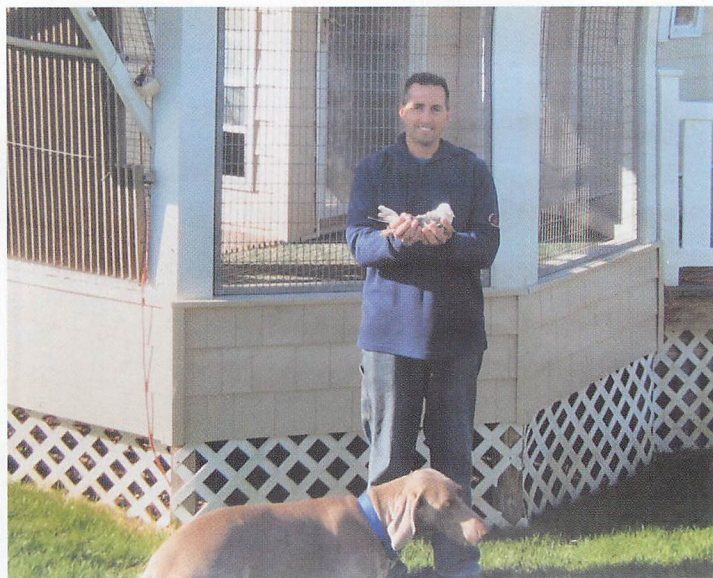
CJ: "Dad, what if MY BIRD wins the \$2,000 1st prize? Then can we get an iWatch tomorrow?"

Dad thinks for a minute and responds, "You know what, YES, if YOUR BIRD is our 1st bird home to our loft AND wins 1ST PLACE in the entire race, against all lofts that entered on Long Island, then YES, I will take you to the mall tomorrow to get your Apple iWatch".

CJ's interest level increased dramatically as his eyes hopefully scanned the horizon for his bird that he was certain was somewhere close to home by now.

Tommy soon showed up and we received the news

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*Cliff*

that someone in the ISLIP area clocked in a bird at approx. 1:47pm. We would need a bird in under 30 minutes from that time to be competitive with that bird. At 2:10pm, the heat was on. Every minute that we did not have a bird home, we were feeling the race slip away from us. Suddenly, Tommy yells "BIRD!" pointing off to the Southwest.

I could see a speck approaching in the sky from that direction. As it got closer...Tommy says "I THINK ITS CJ'S BIRD AGAIN!"...Sure enough, here comes #557 full steam towards us! I am amazed again that his bird shows up alone, well ahead of the other 5 of what I deemed to be the best birds on our 2015 young bird team that I had entered into this big BOND race!

Just as this excitement was taking our focus to the left of us, to the right up in the sky shows up a Sparrow hawk that begins hovering about 50 yards directly above the loft. They are known to dive in on the birds and if not kill them, scare them off for a while until the pigeon deems it safe to return. Normally we'd clap our hands together to make noise to spook it away, but with the approaching race bird I was holding my breath not to create a distraction that would slow his landing and scanning in as home. We released the dropper chico bird to fly to the board to lure in the race bird faster. Fortunately, the hawk did not make a dive attack on the incoming bird as they often will. CJ's #557 skid onto the landing board with an audible BEEP as his leg scanner chip registered in on the underlying clock scanner pad at the loft entrance. "2:15pm and :09 seconds". Almost a 7 hour flight, which is fast for that distance attributed to a slight tail wind today.

As the day progressed, and the text messages and telephone chain of calls went around, it seemed that of the 207 birds in this race, that CJ's #557 bird and the bird clocked in Islip were currently the best known timed in birds in the big race. Doing calculations on the estimated times clocked, it seemed the Islip bird might have us beat by a minute or so but we would not truly find out until later tonight once the clocks were downloaded and calculated. There are also often some race



participants who will not tell anyone what time they clocked, so they are wildcards that may even have a faster bird than we currently know of. I told CJ not to get his hopes up too high.

Then more bad news rolled in, it turns out that the ISLIP bird clocked was not one, but TWO birds clocked in together at the same time by Tommy M., a really nice guy who is battling cancer. CJ was upset to hear of the now likely 3rd place to Tommy M.'s birds, but happy for Tom given his circumstances.

The timer clocks were printed out and the race sheets were sent into the Lindenhurst club and by 10:00 pm they were still figuring out the race results. The race organizers gave the message that they would email the results when done which will likely be after midnight because of the amount of clocks that they have to figure out for all the participants. We went to bed. The next morning, I checked the email and did a double take when I saw the the finalized race sheet result. CJ's #557 bird had won 1st PLACE and had beat the 2 ISLIP clocked birds by 51 seconds!

Three hours later, still in disbelief that CJ's pet bird #557 actually won 1st place in the big race, we are now 45 minutes away from home & looking for a parking spot in the busy Smith Haven Mall parking lot. According to Google search and a few phone call inquiries made, this is the closest location to our house that sells the highly coveted APPLE iWatch. We were greeted at the entrance of the APPLE store by a salesman eager to make a sale. Little did he know how easy this one was going to be. He opened the iWatch drawer display case displaying a selection of about 15 colors and styles of iWatches. CJ leans in and points at one and says "THAT ONE PLEASE". The salesman asks, "Do you want to try it on or have me show you

some of its features?" CJ replies "No thank you." He asks CJ if he'd like him to do the initial setup on it for him (the salesman has no idea of the hours that CJ has spent watching unboxing videos and feature videos on this watch in the weeks leading up to this. If the salesman ran into an issue that he needed help with on this iWatch, CJ would probably be his best go to guy for help!) Again CJ replies "No thanks". Salesman looks at me in disbelief at the speed and ease of his sale...I give him the nod and tell him "we'll take it". He's probably thinking another spoiled kid getting an expensive toy...if only he knew the story behind this purchase.

The next day we got the phone call for an appointment to have the winning bird Drug tested. It is standard procedure that the race committee will often drug test the top winning birds in each race. The bird gets put into a small wooden cage with wax paper on the floor. They wait for the bird to poop, and then that gets sent off to a Laboratory for testing for banned performance enhancing substances. After 15 minutes and nothing going on in the test bird cage. The drug tester reached his hand in to move #557 so that it might stimulate some action from him; suddenly #557 bursts out of the test cage and began flying around the room!

They immediately yelled for all doors to be closed and to turn off all the lights. #557 landed on top of the test cages. When they grabbed him to put him back in the test cage, the drug tester says "Hey Look", pointing to a poop that the bird just did up on top of the test cage where he landed. They carefully collected it into a lab test bag, and he gave me 557 to take back home. This incident was funny to me because the day before when we got the phone call that the drug test was ordered for the winning bird, CJ and Ryan heard the phone call. Ryan asked me how the birds were tested and I explained how they

are put into cages and await them going to the bathroom. Ryan actually asked me if “any bird has ever escaped or broken out of the test cage?” I told him I’ve never seen it happen. Now I have this story to share with Ryan!

The next day, Bob Lutz had arranged to come over to “toss the winning bird”. They have you release the winning bird out of your loft to confirm that it bucks back in, thus proving that it in fact homed back to your specific loft location where it clocked in to win the race (and was not fraudulently clocked in at another location of shorter distance on race day). Bob Lutz is an old pal and mentor who I caringly refer to as my “Uncle Bob”. When Bob picked up CJ’s winning bird he complimented how good the bird felt. He took a photo of me holding the bird in front of the loft. I was nervous to let the bird out alone because this time of year the hawks are so bad that you could lose the bird on a single loft fly. We walked out into the yard, and I pointed #557 directly at the landing board and gently let him out of my hand intending that he fly to the landing board. Instead of landing on the landing board, the bird took to the sky with a couple of turns around the yard he gained altitude, then disappeared off into the distance heading EAST as though he were leaving a race station on race day! There were multiple hawks up in the sky today circling up high which may have put the spook into him. Ten minutes passed and the bird is still nowhere to be seen. Great, this is just my luck! If something happens to this bird now, not only will we be disqualified from the race win, but I will have lost CJ’s pride and joy pigeon while he was at school today. As Bob is scanning the sky in a 360 degree area looking for the bird, I go into the loft to get another race bird to let out to hopefully lure 557 back down. I brought another race bird that

is from within the same loft section as 557 out into the same place in the yard where 557 was released and tossed him up into the air. He immediately makes a beeline for the landing board, lands, and bucks in (exactly what 557 was supposed to do!) I went and got the same bird out again and walked him further across the yard and tossed him into the air facing in a different direction than the loft. He took to the sky this time and also disappeared EAST. I nervously looked at Bob and told him this may take a while. I asked Bob how his kids and grandkids were doing as I continued to nervously watch the sky above and around him as he spoke. Finally, after hearing updates on the successes of Bobs grandchildren, I see the 2 approaching birds. They began to circle the loft but were feeling good and looked like they were not intending to land anytime soon. I was unable to immediately lure them down with multiple attempts with the chico bird. Eventually, after approximately 60 nerve racking minutes, 557 landed and bucked back into the loft.

That afternoon, when CJ came home from school wearing his new iWatch, he informed me that a couple of his iWatch admiring friends are now trying to get permission from their parents to convert backyard sheds into pigeon lofts. When I told CJ about the loft toss with Bob Lutz earlier today, CJ made the official decision to retire 557 for the remainder of the racing season. His champion bird will no longer be put at risk of loss being sent into any more races. 557 is intended to be a stock breeder and trophy bird to reside in our loft for the rest of his days. CJ also decided that he will not sell him to anyone for a “basket full of money” either.



## “THE AVID FANCIER IS A COMPASSIONATE SAMURAI”

BY FLORANTE LIM BUNAG

Modern day fanciers are very goal oriented and not very emotionally available. They are raised in a family system and inspired by wise mentors to win, to be the best of everything, to be a true champion and often that comes at the expense of our interpersonal relationships.

The average fancier doesn’t care about keeping his commitments and the value of his word has become so cheap that he breaks it almost every day which equates to destroying trust. As a result long standing friendships dissolve in the pigeon sport.

The avid fancier is a compassionate Samurai. He means and does what he says. This type of fancier makes bold promises and keeps them. Just something to ponder.

