

An Apprentice interviews:

David Clausing

By Brandon Brashears

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Major Accomplishments of David Clausing:

South African Million Dollar Pigeon Race (SAMDPR):

- 1st Final Race 2003 “Never Say Die” AU-02-CLAUSING-300, along with over \$200,000!
“After that, we haven’t had to really worry about money since!”-Clausing
- 1997 2nd Overall Ace
- 1998 1st Hot Spot Ace
- 1999 2nd Overall Ace (*“I had a dispute with the scoring advertised, I could have claimed 1st” - Clausing*)
- 2002-2005 Most top 50 finishes in 4 year period all-time, Final Race SAMDPR
(1st, 3rd, 4th, 24th, 26th, 26th, 36th, 45th)

*Noteworthy customer success in South Africa.

- 2009 1st Overall Ace SAMDPR - Heriberto Borrotto
- 2012 1st Overall Ace SAMDPR - Fred Brough
- 9 Car Race winners
- 2005 1st Overall Ace, Hot Spot and Knock Out winner - Carlos Avilla “Sun Goddess”

Recent United States top results:

- 2018 =1st California Wine Country (300 miles) Final Race
“For the Wine Country 300 mile final race, there was a 1st drop of five birds. Three were my customer with my pigeons and one was mine!” -Clausing
- 2017 1st Average Speed, Tucson Triple Challenge
- 2017 5th U.S., “% of birds winning money in Final” OLR “The Loft Report”
- 2017 12th U.S., “% of birds with top 10% positions 200+ miles” OLR “The Loft Report”
- 2016 =1st Pacific Northwest Challenge (350 miles)
- 2015 =1st California Classic (300 miles)

- 2015 =1st Blue Bucket Stampede (300 miles)

Career brilliancies:

- 1997 =1st in 21 of 25 One Loft Races
- 1997 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th Monterey Bay Invitational OLR
- 1995 1st, 2nd, 3rd at San Francisco Bay Area Classic

Other international wins:

- 2011 Irish Country Challenge (co-winner) & National Hot Spot Ace

Customer results worth note:

Manuel Rodriguez of Gallo Loft - United States

- 2011 =1st Final Canadian International One Loft Race
- 2011 4th Final Canadian International One Loft Race
- 2011 11th Final Canadian International One Loft Race
- 2011 1st Average Speed, Canadian International One Loft
- 2009 1st Gulf Coast Classic
- 2011 8th SAMDPR Final (Sun City)
- 1st National HALL OF FAME (all distances)

Tersia Engelbrecht - South Africa

- 2013 1st Dinokeng One Loft Race
- 2013 2nd Dinokeng One Loft race
- 2011 1st Federation Champion, South Africa

Hannie Kallmeyer - Ireland

- 2015 3rd Overall Ace Pigeon, Dracula One Loft Race Series in Transylvania, Romania!
- 2010 1st Emerald Classic International One Loft race

Fred Drough - South Africa

- 2012 1st Dinokeng One Loft Race
- 2012 1st Grand Averages SAMDPR (purchased at auction by Mike Ganus)

Where it all began:

“It all started after 11 consecutive losing race seasons!” -Clousing

Apparently David Clousing got tired of losing. In the early 90's after his 4th year in Florida and without much success. David Clousing and wife Anna started to turn things around. The Clausings finally had a great year by winning more than half of his club's races and having a National Hall of Fame winner! Clousing began to develop his pre-potent line of

Houbens descended down from the original top breeder "Ziko". As most of us know the family became one of the most internationally successful in history.

"Once we started winning it all happened very fast! The one common denominator to our success was Ziko. It really started with him as a breeder" - Clausing.

"The Houbens Are Coming!" - 1/8 page advertisement from Mike Ganus, Racing Pigeon Digest:

Clausing had done his research to find a family that was at the top of the awards in Belgium. He had his mind set on birds from Houbens of Itegem.

David got a lead from a pigeon buddy and was able to acquire his first Houben pigeons from Darryl Bruckner who happened to be an old neighbor in Wisconsin. The success came immediately, especially from birds that came from a cock named he later named "Ziko".

"This amazing cock "Ziko" passed through the hands of superstars like Houben and Ganus and even Bruckner before Clausing got his hands on him. It just goes to prove that even superstars don't always know what they have." - Gene Yoes

Once at Clausing's breeding loft, he used a polygamous male breeding (bull) system to mate "Ziko" to multiple hens at once. This multiplied the odds of getting consistent performers. Soon after the "Ziko" line took the racing world by storm!

Side note on "Ziko":

The name Ziko has roots in Greek and Roman culture. Clausing named his cock "Ziko" after its own father (also named "Ziko") the grandson of Houben's foundation cock "Artist" and brother to "Young Artist". Perhaps Clausing crossed paths with "Ziko" by a stroke of fate from *Fortuna the Roman Goddess of Luck*.

Interestingly the Houbens had basically eliminated the "Ziko" side of the family through sales to Japan and Taiwan. Although Clausing recommended that Luc buy some those birds back, the Houbens never pursued it. After all, they had 42 brothers and sisters to "Young Artist". *"They said my "Ziko" was just that rare exceptional breeder." - Clausing*

More about the beginnings of the Clausing legacy:

In 1994, the tail-winds of momentum from amazing results pushed Clausing's program forward. He has unique advertising in the magazines and is glad to be selling good birds. His loft now has a new national champion hen "Anna Marie" named after wife Anna who takes care of the birds. An almost unbelievable racing season takes place.

"We won...hmmm...well to be honest, we dominated 7 out of the 10 combine races! Most of the top 10 spots in every race were Houben. The three races we didn't win were won by our customers!" - Clausing

The performance of Clausing's newfound family was so commanding that many members of the club became unfriendly. *"Honestly, it was disappointing. The fun had stopped and we no longer felt welcome. Things got to the point that we would have our 16 year old son take the birds to the club ship-out for us." -Clausing.*

Some members appeared to be jealous, other pernicious. A few even tried to get Clausings kicked out of the club with unfounded accusations of doping, clock manipulation and anything else that could be thought of. *"They came up with the strangest theories such*

as we were putting our clocks in the freezer to slow the time down. It sounds funny I know, but we were so frustrated we decided to leave the sport.”-Clausing

Talking with a legend.

A well timed and heartfelt conversation with a wise Luc Houben (son of Jeff) is credited for changing the decision to leave pigeon racing. By this time Clausing had sold a good number of pigeons with good results, which only contributed to the Houbens popularity amongst buyers. Clausing explains how his success boosted sales for the Houbens: *“Customers did so well with my “Ziko” birds that they were buying birds from Jeff, Luc and Nadia Houben. They wanted to go straight to the original source. Which makes sense because everyone thought they had the best ones. But my “Ziko” line was actually better! My birds beat the Houbens in 6 of 6 Belgian races”-Clausing*

Clausing tells Houben he is retiring:

“I’m leaving the sport... it’s no fun and I have no-where to fly anyway” explained Clausing.

Luc Houben was always very honest and generous with information and replied, *“It’s understandable how the club is not happy with you. You not just beat them but have demoralized them! Not only did you win every race, but you won with just about every bird you flew!*

The success and the potential Clausing and his “Ziko’ family did not escape Luc Houben’s keen attention. Pleading a new direction, he came with a thoughtful suggestion, *“I can answer both problems for you. You will be able to test your birds and you’ll have gratification. There are those having success in the one loft races with your birds. Stay in the sport. We will have Herbots distribute your family all over to test them. We will see which ones are better. Give the One Lofts your attention before you give up.”*

Authors Note: There is an extremely well written 40 page article by Silvio Mattacchione with more information about Clausing’s story and results. It was published in the Digest in starting in September 2013.

The lifestyle: David Clausing, professional cowboy!

“You have reached the voice message of David Clausing, professional cowboy! Sorry you missed me leave a message and I’ll get back to you...”

That’s the actual voice message I heard the first time I reached out to Mr. Clausing!

I was asked, who gave him the title of professional cowboy? Clausing admitted that it’s light hearted humor, but it’s true. Clausing grew up around cattle and learned some of his breeding practices from that experience. In the early 2000’s He invested some race winnings into a (300+ acres) central Florida cattle ranch. *“We did all of it by ourselves the whole ranch. We had horses, we rode four-wheelers to herd them up. I miss the cows to be honest.” - Clausing*

Before recently selling the ranch, Clausing was able to translate his pigeon breeding experience into livestock success. *“I line-bred a rag-tag bunch of ugly cow’s that no one would ever want into a beautiful herd using one quality bull!”-Clausing*

The foundational Ceuleman pigeons:

Von Ceuleman of Berlaar may have had the most influential family of pigeons you have never heard of!

Few dispute that the Janssens of Arendonk and Houbens of Itegem are two of the greatest middle and sprint distance families of all-time. These fast maturing and speedy families combine intelligence and physical superiority to push the front of the pack in competitive races. They also have displayed pre-potency in that they pass ideal traits on to the next generations.

It's seems like no coincidence that the Janssen and Houben families are foundationally genetically linked to Von Ceuleman's pigeons. *"It is pronounced cool-men,"-Clausing.*

The Janssen brothers foundation came from Father Janssen in 1919 from a Ceuleman cock named "Oude Vos". There is an excellent reference to this in a PIPA article. <https://www.pipa.be/newsandarticles/reports/most-famous-pigeon-fanciers-in-world-janssen-brothers-arendonk-belgium>

Tracing the branches of the Ceuleman family tree you will see the Houben strain established itself from Ceuleman bloodlines obtained by Houben grand-patriarch Edmond Belder. Eventually large success emerged from key breeders "Artist" and his son "Young Artist". Once again PIPA is an excellent reference. <https://www.pipa.be/newsandarticles/reports/houben-jef-luc-nadia-perfect-team>

Experts have said that the "pre-potent" Janssen pigeons were (or at least in part) the foundational backbone of modern powerhouse families such as Van Loon, Meuleman and Van Reet. The Janssen's influence has spread to other highly successful families like Tournier, Hofkens, Grondelaers to name a few!

Considering the hyper-modern success of Jelle Rozier's "Queen L" Houben influenced family, along with the international impact of David Clausing's "Ziko" family, it's fair to say the Houben side of the Ceuleman tree has pulled its weight in recent years.

Separating from the pack: The evolution of ideal traits, like a fast wing-flap!

It's interesting to conclude that both the Houben and Janssen family probably inherited some very important traits from the Ceuleman bloodline. These are traits that few early racing pigeons had but seems to be common in the best families of today.

Fast "Wing-Flap" and "Mental Mapping"

Fast wing-beat is perhaps the most significant adaptation (a.k.a. wing flap). During the earlier years of pigeon racing the efficient and steady "plodding" style descended from longer distance families was the norm. Although these "plodders" exert less energy during flight, they simply are not as fast. It seems the Ceuleman based pigeons have the strength and stamina to maintain that fast wing-flap, even up through the middle distances.

Mental mapping is a form of higher intelligence in which some pigeons are able to accurately forecast a route home (especially within 30 miles) and solve problems (like being off-course) using landmarks and visual cues. This is an enhancement to classic pigeon homing instinct. Finding the most accurate route home during races is a huge advantage especially at shorter distances, and an ability the Houben and Janssen pigeons seem to be excellent at.

David Gehrke has an excellent reference to this type of intelligence in his book. *Pigeon Racing Analytics: Winning With Data*

Interview with David Clausing:

Breeding:

What is important when breeding?

It's important to go with the future with any livestock. That's where breeding cattle was fun for me. I started with some bottom of the barrel cows and spent a little money on a quality bull. Then I kept line-breeding the cows back to their father, grandfather and great-grandfather until we had 7/8th good bloodlines. Now my cows are beautiful. Family is everything in genetics, one hundred percent!

How many birds do you breed from?

Right now about 20 cocks and 40 hens. I cut down from over 300 to less than 100 birds recently.

Have you experienced any problems with close in-breeding?

No! Never had any issue with close in-breeding. As I understand there has been nine birds down from my family that have been car race winners in South Africa! I noticed my family crosses very well on others probably because they are inbred. What works for many of my customers is a cross. I try to get those pigeons and add them back to my family.

How do you select your breeders?

I strictly select from performance! I don't pay attention to how a bird feels or looks. The pigeon will tell you if it's good or not with its results, or the results of its children. I don't pay attention to any other factor.

Selecting for results has apparently worked very well for you!

If I selected from how a bird looks or feels I probably would have gotten rid of half of my best breeders. Even my foundation cock "Ziko" passed through the hands of world class pigeon fanciers before I got him.

Another example is "Never Say Die" (the SAMDPR winner). An expert writer from South Africa gave me congratulations in an article. But then he proceeded to write how "Never Say Die" was not a great bird because she had "pearl eyes" and her body confirmation wasn't perfect -- she was deep handling ...etc. Which upset me, enough that I wrote him a five-page letter in response! When I was done, my wife watched me crumbled it up and throw it away. I thought to myself, if people want to listen to this guy and select from eye sign and other factors that's fine. I'll just show them by winning with my ugly birds!

What type of results does a good breeding pigeon have?

Pigeon racing is a game of numbers. I'm pretty conservative when I get good results. I'll stock those birds for breeding right away. In fact, I had a 300-mile winner in Oregon that I pulled from the final race because I didn't want to risk losing it. Also there was a pair of nest-mates down from "Ziko" named "Early Retirement" and "Blue Lightning" that I pulled from races because they won three short races in a row.

How do you decide which birds to eliminate from your breeding program?

I have a crude and unique method of elimination. I don't give new breeding pairs much of a chance to show me what they have. They need to produce good birds first year or both are pulled. Sometimes if the babies are lost in training, I'll pull them right away.

Breeders like "King David", "Dana" and "Ziko" were automatic. No matter what hen I bred to them to, they would produce good birds.

How do you stay disciplined when breeding from a results only approach?

It's not always easy to do. For example, I personally don't want pigeons with white flights because I think white feathers are softer and don't hold up as well without the best care. (Also hawks like white feathers.) I think white feathered birds need extra oil and higher fat content in the feed something they don't get in most One Loft Races. Funny thing, just about every pigeon that has been winning for me lately has white flights. If I stop breeding from those then I'm not sticking to results, I'm not following my system.

How do you breed pigeons on the polygamist system?

In my system the hen has her own space and the cock is just rotated to different hens.

Some Cocks are better for this system than others, especially if they are aggressive towards the hens. "410" was one of the nicer cocks, which was just one reason for him breeding so many hens. I have had other cocks that aren't nice to the hens so you have to watch them.

You use pumpers (foster parents) to raise the babies?

Yes. One key to being successful is to keep good records, even of the pumpers! I believe that some pumper pairs are better at producing good (disease resistant) babies than others. The milk and colostrum they produce is important to build up good immune systems and strong bodies. I've actually found that some "pumpers" produce more winners than others!

Health:

What is your thoughts on vaccination?

I didn't used to vaccinate before sending my birds to races, but I do now. I vaccinate for PMV at the least, and also try to vaccinate for Adenovirus, Circovirus or Herpes.

One year I sent 9 pigeons to South Africa and lost 6 that were not vaccinated. It can take a while for the vaccinations to kick in. By the time they get to the race it may be late, they can get sick on the first day.

I think all birds should be vaccinated twice. 14 days after the first vaccination they need a booster. I vaccinate when I wean the babies because it's the easiest time for me.

What is your feeding program?

All birds are on the same exact diet. To keep variables at a minimum, I only feed pellets (no grains), that I have custom made. Basically chicken layer pellets with flaxseed, pro-biotic and Ropa (an oregano based product) added.

What preventative products do you use?

By feeding only pellets, it saves time from adding products to the water because my pellets have Ropa-B in them which helps prevent canker and worms.

Selection process:

How do you decide which races to participate in?

It used to be trial and error, but I prefer races that the birds are well cared for. It is a lot easier with www.wincompanion.com now because you can review the losses in the archives. I like to fly and races that have a good percentage of birds returning from races. I pay attention to the condition of the birds when I get them back I want them to be healthy.

Also races that have high amount of losses may bring scrutiny from animal rights groups. So the care is important.

Which birds do you select for One Loft Races?

I do not select based on physical traits. I send both the ugly ones and the pretty ones; they can all win and breed winners.

Are there general body confirmation traits the best performers have in common?

There are horses for courses, as the saying goes. I don't select for body, I send a variety of body types to races. Birds are showing me the way to breed with the results.

I have noticed that the best birds are often medium sized. Bigger birds maybe better in cold weather with tailwinds. I prefer birds that can fly in headwind and hot weather.

How do you choose which birds to activate in races?

I don't discriminate -- I activate them all. I didn't used to activate them all. Sometimes I would only activate the ones that had siblings with recent good results. Over the years I've seen enough winning birds that weren't activated to change my mind.

In 2003 I would not have activated "Never Say Die" had I handled her. She was going through a double molt and had some flight feathers that were worn down. Luckily I missed her during basketing at SAMDPR final...and she won!

Clausing's family of pigeons:

How did you get your original family?

I did my research, the Houbens were a big name in Belgium. After 11 losing season my mind was set on the best. As it happened by chance, my old neighbor from back in Wisconsin (Darryl Bruckner) had traded with Mike Ganus for some Houben breeders. I got my first Houbens from him including my best cock "Ziko". The next year we won 6 of 10 races including average speed. The year after we won 8 of 11 combine races! The other three combine races were won by my customers!

Does your family fly best in certain climates?

I think my birds have an edge in South Africa because we have raised and flown them in the heat of Florida. They fly well in all climate and environments though.

What traits are most important in a family?

I think pigeons that do well in hot conditions with headwinds can fly well in anywhere. I have even had a bird win a race while it was snowing which shocked a lot of people considering it was raised in the Florida heat.

High quality long-distance birds can win short distance races. It's much harder for short-distance pigeons to win at longer races. I don't think that cold weather pigeons necessarily fly well in heat. Blow-home (tailwind) type pigeons don't typically do well in headwind. However, headwind type birds can win blow-home races no problem.

What is the best breeder you have ever had?

"410" has raised the most winners for me, ever. However, (as a polygamist cock) he has bred the most birds. I don't think he is my most prolific breeder.

Percentage-wise "321" (of 2005) is my recent top cock. He is the father of "12" (of 2016) who I hope will be my best new breeder.

Much of my family traces back to "Ziko" with my best breeding cocks such as "410", "Dana", "King David" down from him.

What are common traits of your best breeders?

Usually my best breeders are the more consistent pigeons, the ones that do well in multiple races. However, that was not the case for "Never Say Die". She was kind of an exception as a one race wonder only doing well in the final of South Africa. She's been an outstanding breeder.

How does your family handle?

The first thing you would notice is that my "Ziko" family handles very strong. Not loose and floppy like some other Houben birds. "Ziko" was long and a bit thin and had an intense red eye. Houbens have very nice eye sign in general. Not that I pay much attention.

Luc Houben had a saying when it came to eye sign: "Our bad birds have excellent eyes, too!"

Do you think you could have the same success with a different family?

No. I really don't think so. I researched who had the best pigeons and it was the Houben's. So I know I started with the best and I got lucky with finding a foundational breeder like "Ziko".

Which pigeons do you sell the most?

I don't breed for color, but my whites and blacks typically sell out first. The silvers with black speckles are good performers and sell fast, too!

Your silvers come from the Imbrecht "J-99" (a.k.a. "Jay") bloodlines?

I haven't had those birds in a while. I was not able to maintain the Imbrecht family because I didn't have enough breeders. When I received my Houbens from Bruckner, he gave me a pair of Imbrechts...I'm really not sure why! My son wanted silvers and reds so we flew them. They did not fly well at all pure, other than a smash race. However, when crossed to my Houben family, they did not disappoint! In fact, they may have been my best birds for a while.

Discussions:

I have to ask....why do you have a picture of a dead alligator on your website?

www.clausingdavid.com

At the time we were living in Arcadia (Florida) and we had a large pond that circled our home. I was working with my pigeons like always. Taking a break from moving 10 of my polygamist cocks with new hens while my wife fed the birds. My 70 pound pit-bull "Roxy Junior" was keeping me company as we sat in the shade next to the pond.

.... BOOM! Out of nowhere... a large alligator slammed its head out of the water and grabbed Roxy Jr.! I ran in the house grabbed my gun and shot him!

We had grand-kids smaller than Roxy Jr. running around, so I think that I really had no choice. The picture on my website is of that gator.

Were you scared?

Yes! At our last property we had seven ponds and there was a giant alligator that bit one of our poor cow's lower jaw completely off!

Do you ever see other gators?

One time I was jet skiing with my son on the Peace River near Spring Hill and we saw the most humongous alligator ever seen! It had to honestly be 18 feet long and 4 feet wide! He was sitting on the banks sunbathing, literally wider than my sons jet ski! Keep in mind when you go on those alligator safaris in Florida people see 10 foot alligators and they say they are "huge".

How did find yourself in the pigeon business?

In the beginning we sold chickens and had a supply company in which we sold incubators, cups, waterers, etc. We had some chickens that we also sold by word-of-mouth. In the chicken community word-of-mouth is your best advertising.

It's a little different with pigeons because the community doesn't share information in the same way, we're more secretive.

Wormal (a popular de-worming tablet) was being discontinued so I bought out my supplier. At first we used it as a marketing-leader to get new customers. The tablets were in such demand that soon we were close to selling out. So I kept increasing the pricing as the demand increased, eventually selling them for 10 times what we paid. This really was breakthrough because with that windfall we decided to invest into the pigeon business.

There was a point early on that we contemplated leaving pigeon racing. Luc Houben talked me out by telling me of the success flyers were having with my birds. He convinced me to fly in One Loft Races and I won \$9,000 right away. My wife was happy because she wanted to buy new furniture! Unfortunately for her I put that money back into more entry fees. Things took off from there!

How much of a business is this for you?

Now days I look at pigeon racing as more of a hobby than job. I've cut down to less than 70 breeders and only buy about 200 bands a year.

By contrast in 1996 I bred 1,300 pigeons and was selling about 1,000 a year offering 6 bird kits for \$500. Every year I cut down to the cream of the crop.

Almost every one of my birds sold went to Taiwan with (an agent/distributor) David Lin in 2005. Unfortunately, he had a health issue and passed away soon after we started working together. From 2003 to 2008 I sold about a 1,000 pigeons per year to China!

Have you been to China, if so what was it like?

China is one of the most amazing places to go in regards to pigeon racing.

I had few multi-millionaire customers. One had a large three-story house that he lived in and he owned the three story house next door, which he used for pigeons! The first level was basically a trophy room while the second level was for breeders and the third level was for his flyers.

It's crazy in China! I would visit people in a five or six story complex where the top floor was occupied by pigeons and the windows were used for the landing boards.

From my research I figured there are about 12,000 flyers in the U.S. In China there said to be five hundred thousand members of the racing association! With all the race partnerships some say there's over one million flyers!

How about Belgium, what is it like?

I have been several times. One interesting thing is all of the tiny lofts in Belgium! Actually most of the lofts are small. The Houben's brother-in-law Hubert Schroyens won ace young bird national champion twice with quite a small loft.

Where are the best pigeons in the world?

I'm prejudice because I honestly believe the best pigeons are right here in the U.S.A. The birds in America have the quality to go through tougher race conditions.

The Chinese have bought the most expensive. There is a lot of wealthy collectors in China that don't breed, sell or fly. I think some just show off their expensive birds to friends! Sad, genetically speaking, that these superstar pigeons aren't being bred from.

Most European and Belgian birds are fair-weather pigeons. What I mean is they excel in easy races with good weather and tail-winds but not necessarily tough headwind conditions. You see the young-bird races in Belgium typically fly south to north most often with tailwind.

Do you think pigeons are better or faster now days than they have ever been?

Yes, they are evolving especially when it comes to health. I think the good pigeons have been developing more and more resistance to disease. I used to be told that you can't raise pigeons in the summer heat of Florida with pox and other health issues. However, I found that after years of selection my current family does just fine.

Birds are faster in general, too. There may be more smash races though, losses are higher than ever. Who knows why, probably because of all the cell phone towers.

Are you in the Hoosier Classic this year, are you going to travel to that race?

Yes, I am in the Hoosier this year, but I won't be traveling to the race. I find waiting for the races a bit nerve-racking and I would rather enjoy myself. As a matter of fact, when "Never Say Die" won the final in South Africa, I was not at the festivities. I was out having fun. My wife knew that we won before I did because people were calling her in Florida.

Do you think South Africa is tougher to win than the Hoosier?

Yes. The Hoosier is easier only because there are less birds and we don't have to deal with the problems you get when shipping birds halfway across the world.

How much total prize money have you won during your career?

If you include partnerships I have had across the world, I would guess about two million dollars. I would estimate we have spent about 10% of that on entry fees. Nowadays I don't enter a huge number of birds in races, instead, I rely on the quality of my family.

What happened when you had your pigeons stolen?

I had over a hundred pigeons stolen including "Never Say Die"! The game warden and I became friends because he was such a great help. We had a feeling where the birds might have ended up. So we went to the local club in Miami and put out flyers in Spanish. We offered a reward of \$50,000 for information. We received a few good tips. It was interesting the sheriff would go to speak with tipsters and they would be scared for their lives. All of them decided not to talk. After the fact, I found out that one of the informants even had a knife held to his throat and a gun to his mouth.

Eventually we did find somebody willing to give up the location. Through the help of the game warden we were able to get most of our birds back! Many had the bands cut and I had to get DNA tests done. Luckily "Never Say Die" still had her band.

It was a tough experience, I slept in the barn with my gun for the next month hoping the thieves would come back, but they didn't. Since then, we no longer allow visitors.

How do you think they were stolen?

At the time we would let people visit the property because we exported birds to the South Africa. I'm sure this gave the thieves the chance to scope out the place.

Something seemed odd because about a week before the burglary, my faithful pit-bull disappeared. Looking back I think they took her so that would not have to deal with my dog. The night before, I wasn't there and my wife was working 2nd shift. I came out about 6:30 in the morning, the pen doors were open and a bunch of my birds were gone!

Looking back, what would you have done differently?

I regret being so generous in letting my family out. I think I would have held on to many more good breeders if I had to do it over again.

THE END