

6 | WEEKEND APLUS

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN, JANUARY 21-22, 2012
www.theaustralian.com.au



Jenny Mansell-Black

MANLY / QUEENSLAND

I call her and she flies to me for a snack. Gimpy is famous now because we put her on YouTube. The video shows her coming in the back door and heading for the fridge and the fresh mince

Readers' submissions are invited for My Weekend. Contributions must be original and be between 500 and 550 words in length, and be accompanied by a photograph. Submissions may be edited for clarity. Send emails to myweekend@theaustralian.com.au

WE have been adopted — by a magpie. Gimpy (gammy leg) came to us along with another female chick — BB (broken beak) — and two male magpies, Flash and Slash. Flash rode shotgun at the back, keeping a lookout for any threats, while the others were hand fed.

One day two big male bullies turned up in their territory. The magpie family could usually handle one intruder — which, when attacked, would leave — but two was too much. Gimpy arrived with blood pouring down the side of her mouth and BB was never seen again.

Knowing how attached she was to us, we feared the worst. I'd enjoyed some wonderful one-on-one conversations with BB. She would run back and forth in front of the others, wanting to be fed first. This, we presumed, was because the broken beak made it difficult for her to eat. We felt she was like a child in the Dickensian era, scrounging wherever she could to survive.

Male magpies continued to attack Gimpy. We would have been able to understand this if they had wanted to mate with her, but they would stride over and stick their beak right into her tummy or face. Screams could be heard, feathers would fly and Gimpy would be on her back. We would rush out to protect her. Whenever any male magpie appeared, Gimpy would go into freeze mode, pulling her head in while hiding behind us. Or she would hide behind the flower pot, or face the corner of the yard like a naughty child, whimpering.

As soon as the bullies had done their damage, Gimpy moved from her tree two streets away (and the protection of Flash and Slash) into the tree closest to our back door, a mango. When I hear her chattering away, I call her and she flies to me for a snack. Gimpy is famous now because we put her on YouTube. The video shows her coming in the back door and heading for the fridge and the fresh mince. She also knows the layout of the house and can sometimes be found standing quietly behind the chair in my office, watching me.

Her soft brown feathers are gradually turning black, signalling approaching adulthood. So far, the only company she has in her tree are five butcher birds, who saw what the magpies were eating and wanted a piece of the action. Momma and Poppa butcher bird and their juvenile son (Juvy) have their hands full with two new babies, who have also learned where that mince comes from.

We also have a new female magpie chick, Skinny, who stays to eat bugs and worms in the garden. Slash still comes and takes mince back to his nest, so we are expecting him to bring us his babies soon.

We hope one day Gimpy will overcome her fear of males and become a mother too. Magpies live for 30 years, which means our Gimpy should be with us for a long time.