

Experience Counts

Ken Easley – April 2018

It's been many many years since my grandpa held me up as a baby to show me two baby pigeons freshly hatched in the nest. It's one of my earliest childhood memories. I guess it stuck with me for over 58 years for reasons I didn't understand until later. I like pigeons! I think about them all the time and that elusive champion.

My early years in school caught me staring out the window thinking about my pigeons at home. Writings about my pigeons for school work. Going to the book mobile Saturday morning to see if they had any pigeon books. Lucky for me they had a couple. One was written by a renowned Englishman William H. Pensom. I read them several times and later purchased my own copy. I've spent the majority of my life being quite to others about how much I like pigeons.

As a sophomore in high school I did the unthinkable, I mentioned to Mr. Boyd my teacher that I had pigeons. He said he was friends with the weatherman Troy Dungan of the channel 8 news team in Dallas, Texas where I was born and grew up. He said they would like to do a short piece each week to add in the news. I went to a large school. It was a magnet school, the largest and first of its kind. Skyline High School had vocational classes that could be taken while attending high school that transitioned into an on the job career as a senior. You went to school until 11 am and then to start your job at noon till 8 pm. It was a 3 year program. In any case our school was of interest so these pieces

the news did were about the school but they also wanted to mix in pieces about our private lives. I was a little nervous because of the whole pigeon perspective with my peers.

I brought a team of pigeons to school to be released on the football field. My father helped me select the team and he was thoughtful to select birds with lots of white. Most were red and blue splash pied with white flights and a grizzle or two. I was introduced and asked a couple of questions about how would they find their way home. Then I released them. It was a beautiful sight for a 16 year old. Sitting on a beautiful grass practice field with my class mates cheering. My beautiful birds flying overhead circling up and away into the blue sky before they slowly disappeared into the distance. I lived about 18 miles from the school so I am sure they could see home. My family gathered around the television that night to watch the news. There were no DVD's or video cameras, not even a VHS. So that was it, a one time viewing. Only the memories left for a young man who loved pigeons.

After that I was asked quite often about my pigeons and had visitors from school that wanted to know about them and see them up close. I was surprised and happy not to be an outcast because of my feathered friends. My father was the only one who understood how much I liked them because he felt the same way about them. When we disagreed about most everything we always had pigeons would make us close again in short order. How should we mate up a pair to achieve the best results. What qualities were we trying to improve and which pair would make that possible. How could we improve the performance? We had

performance pigeons and show pigeons. Both were very helpful in learning about the whole pigeon and not just one aspect.

One year they had a large national show where there were 800 entries. I had never seen so many pigeons of one kind at a show. In the French Mondains alone they had over 300 entries. My father entered one pigeon that we decided best represented the show standard. We debated the pairings the year before finally agreeing that this pair represented our best chance to win. The mother was stocky with an overabundance of feather. A stubby one feather tail, powerful head and a strong stance but she lacked good station. A French Mondain should look like large and powerful in every way and taper down to a sharp and tight wedge at the tail. We selected a smaller cock that was a little too narrow to make a top show pigeon but from a side view he looked just like the standard. His station was incredible. His feather was a little dry and lacked the high quality feather of the hen but hers was a bit loose and his was tight and smooth. We hoped if everything went right we might get a youngster that had it all.

To our amazement we did get one such bird. A young dark check cock. He was a real horse. Stood like the father, had the width, strong head and beak and rich feather of the mother with the smoothness of the father, just a perfect specimen. I went to the show and slowly walked the isles looking at each pigeon. After a good examination I determined that there was only one pigeon in the entire group that would be a threat. I told my father we would win grand champion. He said you think so? I said yes if it's a good judge. We bathed our bird with a little 20 mule team borax in the water. Then cleaned his feet and oiled them. The toenails were cleaned. Then we were careful not to get any oil on the leg

feathers and remove the oil to leave a perfect natural and healthy looking legs and feet.

We lifted our bird then sat him back down down several times before the show started so he would be cleaned out and not have droppings during the show. It took hours to go through the classes but he won his class and went to the parade of champions. This took some time as well due to the amount of classes. At the end the judge had them lined up with our pigeon in 4th place. I was disappointed and wondering what he was doing. Then he scratched his head and moved ours into second. Then after more deliberation he switched him into 1st. Dad and I were getting pretty excited. Then at the last second he pulled 1st and 2nd the other cock I thought would give us trouble and looked them over one more time then put ours in second. We won Reserve Grand Champion. I talked to the judge afterward and he said quite frankly it could have went either way. The judge was Dr Horn who had helped in the design and adaptation of the show standard for the French Mondain so hard to debate him. My father eventually won at the Louisville National and was on the cover of the American Pigeon Journal. I having won most everything showing decided to focus on my performance birds.

Racing pigeons have a myriad of things to consider including good wet feather. This is feather that is soft, rich and with good oils. I've noticed that most racing pigeons guys don't even notice the oil on the pigeons feather. Many pigeons are far too dry feathered. Oily feather equals flexible and durable feather. If you extend the wing a pigeon with good oily feather you can see the oil lines left from the feather before it where it rubs on the next feather. Look at the videos I posted of some of my stock birds on

facebook. You will notice on the Million Dollar Kid the heavy oil lines near the end of each feather when I open his wing. This is a prime example of a pigeon with top notch feather and health. The soft oily pigeons were called “wet” back in the day. They felt almost wet when handled because of the abundance of thick and soft high quality feather.

You may ask how does that effect or have anything to do with racing pigeons. Pigeons with dry feather win all the time. This is true except for one little important fact, long races require a pigeon to be optimum in all ways which includes flexible feather. Feathers that are dry and stiff will wear the pigeon out when flying long distances. It taxes the muscles more with stiff feathers and on a long distance race it will eventually take it's toll. The shoulders / back will give out along with the inner and outer muscles of the breast. The result is landing to recover which we know is the end of the race for that entry. The bird should be buoyant and have soft flexible feather to compete at long distance, especially one day races.

Great specimens have white wattles. They must be powder white to be considered in top health. With clean nasal passages. Sometimes when they are feeding the side of the wattle with get discolored but this is different. Birds with dry mucous and gray wattles have a head cold. They can't orient or have their air sacks blow up with a head cold or the rattles. My father called it the rattles. You hold the bird up close to your ear and listen. Squeeze them gently then release. You can hear low level rattling noise. This is a respiratory problem. These birds can't race. They would struggle to fly any length of time. Doxycyline will clean this up in short order. Many pigeons that come late have one tiny thing off

about their breathing or even a slightly a strained muscle can take them out of the winners circle.

There are so many things to know about pigeons. A life time of thinking about them has given me many many endless hours of learning and thinking about how these things effect performance. I remember when I was pretty young finding naval canker on a youngster in the nest when I was banding it. There are several ways to treat canker but back then a 1/2 Spartrix for two days did the trick. Then finding it in the throat, nasal cavity, ears and even the eyes. I soon learned they can have it inside where you can't see it. Then I learned how to spot it with little visible exterior signs. Then noticing after several years that the birds get canker when it rains and is damp for several days. Eventually I understood my grandfathers unspoken teachings and why he would toss sick youngsters at a young age. My grandfather was very practical. He didn't mess around or waste time on things that wouldn't pan out. Being a teen and starting a family in the great depression teaches valuable lessons. A practice I keep to this day. Even if it is from a pair that cost a small fortune. Funny thing is I don't recall seeing canker from these top notch pairs.

I learned as a young boy how rats and mice effect our pigeons and how we must at all cost keep them away from our birds. Being a good manager and not being the cause is very important. Black tipped tongues, poor throats, crooked curtain, tiny blood veins, open hole, small and large throat cavity, the little teeth on the bottom of the curtain, The little locking teeth at the slit in the roof of the mouth, Cheesy nodules on the curtains, and many other things that effect our birds. Symptoms and signs are tools of the informed fancier.

I watched for many years and gained valuable knowledge of how different seeds effect our pigeons performance and how long it took to show up as fuel and effect distance and endurance. I competed with rollers in World and National competition for 22 years without missing a competition. I was the 8th in world to receive my master flyer award. The same year as Heine Bijker of the Netherlands. Preparing a kit for competition is as critical as proper breeding for this incredibly difficult feat. The birds must spin in a tight ball for a minimum of 10 feet spinning clean as a yo yo falling straight as a boat line and then right back to the kit. The best birds will spin like this for 40 feet plus. They must stay together as a team and at least 5 or more spin together at the same instant to be considered a break. These breaks are counted up for a score and the quality of the spin is given multipliers as well as a multiplier for the depth. In one of the nationals I managed to have the highest multipliers of a 1.8 quality and 1.8 depth. I accomplished this by being overly tough on my interpretation of the spin. It had to be tight and smooth with no wings sticking out or sloppiness throughout the spin. I enjoyed rollers but eventually knew I had reached my goal and was ready to move to the next class. I wanted to breed for pure performance and not fighting against nature. Rollers are fun but you are breeding for a fault. It really bother me when a pigeon on my team would roll to it's death unable to stop the roll until hitting a hard object. Racing pigeons are the ultimate performance pigeon, racing for many miles against the clock while using instinct, smarts and determination to get home. My breeding toward a top racing pigeon would not hurt the birds. I could not longer stomach breeding pigeons that were inferior. Pigeons with short beaks that can't even feed their own young and must be fostered actually

exist in the show breeds. Fantails standing with their head behind their chest. It's just not for me.

I decided to go back to my racing pigeons. I had some as a boy and really liked them. I would go two blocks down the street and look at the Romanian mans birds in his garage loft when I was a boy. He specialized in 500 mile old bird races. He was unbeatable for some years there on the 500. I remember his birds well. All blue and red bars. No white and no checks. I knew I wanted pigeons that could compete in one loft racing. There is a difference. Some will say no a great pigeon is a great pigeon. Yes but there are degrees of great pigeons. You can't play with the feed like you can at home for club racing. You can't out train your competitors in a one loft race. All birds get the same feed and training so the pigeon must be superior in genetics. It didn't take long for me to realize that Kannibaal had a huge impact on the pigeon world and still does because this line had the ability to win both in club and one loft racing of the highest caliber. I picked up a couple of these including an import grandson of Kannibaal.

I studied a lot and saw that Alfons Klaas, a german had won the world ace challenge that year 2006. Another man had activated the bird but that was of no interest to me. What caught my attention is a bird coming from another country and dominating local pigeons. This is a genetically superior pigeon. This is where I want to start. As high up the ladder as possible. I ordered my first Klaas pigeons in 2007 along with Quest and Alex Beiche. Alex spoke German and had spoken to Alfons and put together a large order. We spent an hour on the phone talking about the potential of these pigeons and the impact they may have on racing here. That year Alfons Klaas won not only the world cup

again but also the million dollar race in south Africa. I told my wife, the research has paid off. I have the right pigeons. The very first pair produced my first one loft race winner. I had never flown in a one loft race. I was 1st on the 250 and 300 final race and 2nd ace pigeon. Imagine only sending 2 pigeons and only one from my German Klaas crossed onto a Kannibaal and I won. That was enough to confirm everything I had been thinking.

I started making plans to visit Germany and speaking with Alfons more often. He was nice and offered that I could come and visit. Soon I purchased my tickets to go to Germany. I decided I would visit as much of Europe as possible and work in visits to other lofts as well. I spent 5 weeks going through Italy, France, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany and handled some fine pigeons along the way. It was like a dream seeing the little brick Belgian, Holland, and German houses. Walking through lofts and handling pigeons in the country of their birth. Seeing what their lofts looked like and talking about the systems they used. Most importantly were the pigeons. The best overall in my opinion were the Klaas pigeons. All lofts had some top pigeons but the Klaas family had many. I also saw that Helmut and Alfons kept a few deep brick red pigeons in the stock loft.

When I was a boy one of my mentors was Mr. Koenig, an older gentleman, also a German immigrant who was near impossible to beat in the show circuit. He taught me that ash red check was the dominant color and pattern in the pigeon world and therefore the feather was superior. Also that if the feather became too dry nothing could beat the introduction of a good wet dark brick velvet red hen. In 1967 Mr. Pensom taught me that rich feather came from birds from the north, the cold country where pigeons must

have rich thick feather to remain warm and healthy. When the richness began to decline he would bring in pigeons from the North to cross in. Living on the side of the mountain with snow and low temperatures I have well feathered pigeons. The southern states like Louisiana suffer from lack of feather. I have cock and hen lofts with open fronts on the South side that allow the birds to get the full range of cold during the winter. Their feathers are incredible thick and soft.

Pigeons take up most of my conscience thought. I spent years going to pigeon shows to show kormorner tumblers, many many years flying rollers every single morning, flying tipplers, homing pigeons, going to the shows with my father and running pigeons back and forth to the show pens at the state fair as a boy. Catching pigeons in barns and reading about them. Learning how to hold pigeons properly and carry more than one at a time in a wing lock they cannot escape from. How to put pigeons to sleep. How to cull them in seconds without pain or blood. All of it would one day become the foundation for breeding top class pigeons.

The areas of concentration have changed each year as I mature in my knowledge. What once held my attention is no longer a thought. It is just things that I know to do. I never mention these things because growing up with pigeons for a lifetime you assume everyone must know these things. An example is a friend of mine went to visit my father years ago. A fellow that had gained a good reputation for competing with rollers. A hard working guy that was as much a pigeon guy as myself. During conversations and looking at pigeons he asked my father what the reddish gravel in the bowls were. My father said that's their grit. The young man said I never give my birds grit.

My father said they have to have grit and explained the reasons. After that this man has always given grit and has been a well known flyer to this day. He has never mentioned this to anyone to my knowledge and I won't give his name but I run across things like this during my travels. I am always happy to help.

These are the kinds of things you expect everyone to know but as the years pass I hear conversations and get questions and realize not every one knows many of these basic good practices of pigeon keeping. Some guys have never seen a feather catcher. They were in abundance when I was a boy. It is a hand built wooden slot at the bottom of the loft that will naturally pull in feather until it is packed with feathers then you just pull them out to dispose of. You rarely see any of these today.

I wrote articles in the 80's and 90's about keeping pigeons all natural without using medicine. The importance of having a natural immune system and how it plays into the future of maintaining good genetics. I wrote about how cruel it is to breed pigeons with genetic deficient immune systems. Now it seems to be almost common place knowledge. I would like to believe we are heading in the right direction and away from a medicated quick victory to long term excellence. There will always be a few who will do anything for a ribbon. Another piece of paper to hang on the wall. Tell yourself the truth, is it really a great pigeon if it won 1st out of 1000 pigeons if it was given steroids or any other top of drugs to enhance it's performance? The worst lies are the ones we tell ourselves. I wouldn't give two cents for a 1st prize winner that had unnatural "help" the other pigeons didn't have. What good would it be? You raise a loft full of birds that need the

same help to be successful? What happens when they go to a one loft race and have no help? I think we all know.

For me and many others it is about the love of the pigeons. I am not big on selling pigeons. I have a company and make enough money. I will sell some, don't get me wrong here but lets be honest, I am picky about what leaves here and it takes time to go select the right pigeon, put new boxes together, add fresh pine needles, printing labels, making, printing and lamenting pedigrees, going to the post office, tracking them and worrying if the guy is happy with what he received, hoping they produce well so the purchaser is satisfied. For me it is very important that the pigeons produce well so I try my best to send the right pigeons. Sometimes it's a lot of work learning what lines the pigeon will be used with and agonizing which one is the right pigeon. Many times with instructions on the lines I and others have been successful crossing onto my lines. I have a website that I built and maintain myself. I enjoy taking the pictures and love to go look at it and admire my own pigeons. Yes, I said it, I like to look at my own pigeons! It's not about me, it's about the pigeons. I wouldn't have kept them if I wasn't impressed with them. When I built my website I built it thinking I could sell a few pigeons to help pay for feed. As time goes by I realized I enjoy it for my own pleasure. I like taking pictures of the best and looking at them. There is not enough good pigeon stuff to look at for a real pigeon fanatic.

For me I like the whole process of raising pigeons. I enjoy watching my babies grow, pairing pigeons, taking care of them, and watching them fly and interacting with them. Seeing how well they compete with other pigeons in a one loft race. I remember reading about how old top fanciers in Europe would run people

out of their yard telling them things like “you ain’t got enough to buy a feather” when kids came to buy birds. I always laugh when I think about that. Bill Richards of Birmingham England was known for it. He wouldn’t sell a pigeon and was very secretive. I can remember my father telling guys they weren’t allowed in the loft after they grabbed one of his pigeons roughly. He didn’t care if he was about to make 50 bucks. The pigeons came first. I admired that about him because he sure didn’t mind getting some extra feed money. Back in the 60’s 50 bucks was a lot for a pigeon. But he would not tolerate mishandling of his pigeons. I find I am the same way. No fireworks in the back yard or throwing footballs and baseballs near the loft.

Quite honestly I think the thing I like most about racing pigeons is admiring a champion racer. To hold that champion pigeon that flew 350 - 400 miles as young bird and beat the competition. To see what sets them apart is a true fascination for me. Some people will tell you that you cannot see or judge on the ground which pigeons are better than others. My father always told me “son never try to convince someone of something they can’t understand”. “They can’t see it and never will so you’re wasting your time.”

OK, they are entitled to their opinion. I respect that, but I have a different view. I have selected pigeons as youngsters that went on to be champions in Germany and even selected their parents later the same day as top producers from lofts I had never entered in my life. Not because I know some secret, because I have studied pigeons my entire life. Because they take up many of my waking hours of thought. I have read every book and article I could find on pigeons in my time on this earth and thousands of

articles. Hundreds of hours watching teams of pigeons fly daily for generations of the same family of birds. Pigeons are like people in some ways. The longer you are around them the more you can begin to see class and character just like you can with people. I have ran three companies in my 40 year working career and conducted many job interviews. You learn a lot during a job interview and then compare it to actual performance of the individual over time. It takes years to learn to recognize what you are seeing in an interview. You learn to see pretty quick which ones are the ones you don't want. Pigeons are no different. The ones that are hardest to recognize are the best ones. They sit back quietly not tipping their hand to their qualities unless asked point blank. The best pigeons and the best people I have had the good pleasure of working with had one thing in common. I looked at them and thought I cannot put my finger on it but need to keep them. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen this. It is now my signal that they may be something very good. My suspicion mixed with my experience and that little gut feeling have combined to be a beneficial asset in selection.

The best are calm and confident in their selves without showing it. They stand ready to do what is asked and quietly confident in their ability to complete it. How many times did I misjudge someone only to find out with time they were the best I ever had working at the company. It has been the same with pigeons and people. I misjudged many top performers in my early years. The good news is I learned from my mistakes. With pigeons and people you need time to watch them. As time passes like with any training in progress I am able to spot them more quickly. If I am allowed a while in a loft to observe and then to handle I am very likely to have your best pigeons selected. Learning to select

correctly is not just learning what makes the good ones but more so the learning of what doesn't work. The best are hiding among what is left.

Lofts are incredibly important for success in maintaining top class pigeons.

I spent many years trying by trial and error to perfect my lofts. As a boy my job was scraping and raking the loft which had dirt floors. Then I would add fresh sand to the floors and rake them out even. The dust in those old lofts was sometimes unbearable even with a bandana over my face and holding my breath. I promised myself when I grew up I would have a loft I could breath in. No more dirt floors for me, ever! I have very nice ventilated lofts now but my wife still ask me when she's helping me vaccinate, why are you not breathing? I always held my breath when catching pigeons or cleaning until I could get out to the fresh air and I guess I still do it by habit.

I wrote several articles in the early 90's on the benefits of using expanded metal floors.

My first home was in a typical suburb with a small back yard. With a 6' wooden fence typical of that time. I built small 4' x 4' x 3' pens up on legs with wire fronts and wire bottoms. The sides and back were wood siding. They were about 3 feet off the ground to the bottom and 6' off the ground to the roof. The wooden fence blocked the wind and the wire fronted lofts faced south for great sun exposure during the winter. The pens produced many youngsters with excellent health. It was great for me too. I raked underneath while standing safely out in the fresh air and put the

dried droppings back into the feed sack from which they originated. No dust, just good clean pigeons.

I attached the water fountains on the outside because I didn't want them to soil the water and it was easy to change out quickly. This was a real no brainer way to raise quality pigeons. As time passed and I was able to move into different homes with more property so did my loft designs evolve. I built some good lofts and I built some bad ones. I had learned early on what a loft facing south would do for the birds. As we get older sometimes we forget and have to relearn lessons. So it was true with me. I built a loft facing East. The wind coming in from the East during winter with an open front almost did in my whole team before I figured out what to do. I learned to close it in with windows and open the South side of the loft. I had never had respiratory on such a mass scale. Keeping it at bay was near impossible. Like everything else I played with the loft until I got it right.

My thinking has always been to try and emulate nature as stated in early articles. Pigeons don't sit in their droppings in nature. They sit high above in fresh air. Pigeons sit in the sun on cold days out of the wind. A pigeon loft should be constructed in the same way. My best lofts were facing south, well above ground with expanded metal flooring, plenty of sun, and good ventilation with no drafts and the ability to close them in with a heater during inclement weather to keep them dry.

So, pigeons need fresh air, no dust, no droppings, warm loft for babies, clean pine needles for nesting, no wind or drafts on the pigeons, no dampness, no overcrowding, clean quality variety feed, quality grit, and clean water. Pigeons don't have doctors to

try and save sick youngsters either. Weaklings are eliminated by nature. I suggest we follow suite with the smartest teacher of all time.

So you put the loft up off the ground. Expanded metal floor, water containers they cannot soil, windows that can be opened to the desired effect on three sides of the loft. Loft and windows facing south. Everything else is trouble. Some will say that cool air comes up from underneath and can make pigeons lose form or give youngsters a cold. Very true and there are many ways to solve this. You can add siding further down toward the ground on the side the prevailing wind hits the loft. I don't recommend going all the way down. Lofts with sleek steel legs keep out mice, snakes and other critters. You can also put cardboard in the hallways over the floor in the winter to cut down the amount of air entering from below. A quick trip to Costco to ask for the cardboard separators they use in the layers of goods on pallets works perfect to lay in the hallways during the winter. With the newly weaned young birds you can also add large flat plastic trays with a rim, the kind you see in the bottom of a dog kennel. The kind of steel cage with plastic bottom you would put a german shepherd in the house for the night. I add one of these in the corner filled with pine needles for the youngsters.

You can find these trays in 3' x 4' by 1" deep sizes. You can also add a radiant heater until the youngsters are flying up to the perches. This doesn't take long for healthy smart youngsters. Then the tray and heater can be removed. Make sure you have nice deep box perches so the birds have fresh air from the open front but back away from any possible drafts. The perches should sit back in a part of the loft where the air is almost still, very slowly

lifting away from the birds. In my lofts the air lifts slowly up through the floor and to the front of the loft away from the perches. This keeps the air fresh while remaining almost still around them.

You can light a cigar in the loft and sit and watch where the smoke goes. It should never flow directly over the perches but rather out in front of them and never too fast. The smoke should drift up at a reasonable rate for good ventilation but not too quick as to make a draft. A draft on young pigeons is very bad. They are better off sitting out in the open field with no roof than sitting in a loft with a draft. I know that sounds contradictory and I don't know why that is correct, but it is.

These things are paramount in producing healthy pigeons. It's rule one. You can buy the best pigeons on the planet and destroy them from poor health. Not to mention what you would do to your fellow fanciers if you didn't maintain healthy lofts. A top pigeon man can walk into a loft and within minutes tell you if your on the right track. It should smell fresh and clean, never like pigeon droppings or see dust on everything. Dust is bad for humans and pigeons. Never overcrowded. It is true you can keep pigeons healthy with too many in the loft but it's not smart to do so.

Why should you have so many pigeons? What good can come from it? It is far easier to have less pigeons. Faster to take care of. It is more affordable to give them the best care, expensive feed and minerals last longer. Easier to track the bloodlines, race results, breeding results, condition of the pigeons, and make informed decisions about who is staying and who is going. What possible good can come from overcrowding a loft? During my

years flying pigeons I quickly learned that when I overcrowded the loft the pigeons correct it for you.

Not convinced? I have a construction business. I have quite a few people working at our office. One of them is a nice young man with 5 children of varying ages. He comes to work sick many times and it goes around the office in a hurry. Everyone jokes about how he quit for a year and no one got sick until he came back. Funny but true.

I went to visit and he lives in a very small apartment with 5 children for a total of 7 people living in this small space. I was really surprised to see a dog and cat as well. It's no wonder he is sick often. The children are going to school with rooms full of children and day care every day of the work week. Dog scratching around in the yard and coming back in to bring the contents of the yard with him. I couldn't breath in there, the air was heavy with smells of others breathing. It is very similar to raising pigeons in my opinion. If I were a pigeon living in such conditions I may trap in at another loft.

I have heard stories of children coming from such homes and doing just that, leaving. Audey Murphey the WWII war hero is one of them. He was born and lived in his early years in a small crop sharing potato shack of a house. He had many siblings until he moved in with the barber and began sweeping up hair at the barbershop. They don't tell that in his biography. My grandfather told me and knew because he was there. He was born and lived in Kingston, Texas near where my grandfather and father was born in Wolfe City, Texas and raised in Hunt County. My grandpa was born in 1910 and Audey was born in 1925 so my grandpa

was a young married man getting haircuts at the local barbershop when Audey was sweeping up hair as a boy. There were 12 children total in Audey's family and at 15 years old his father overcome by his responsibilities deserted them. His mother died the next year. At 18 he enlisted in the army and became one of the most decorated members of the armed forces in WWII. He was raised in bad conditions and left but he overcame. I don't think all pigeons that leave are bad. I think the blame may lie elsewhere many times.

Most guys with over crowded lofts are one of two things, either they are salesmen and they want to have birds on the shelf to sell or they can't make a decision on who needs to go. Or maybe they haven't had time or space to get to all these potential projects they saved to breed. That can happen to the best of us. I prefer having healthy top class pigeons over anything. In fact when I get too many pigeons I get nervous because I know what's coming and I can't thin them down fast enough. If a pair doesn't produce as I thought they should they will be leaving via the creek out back.

So many things to learn about pigeons and so little time. Even the feet of pigeons can be a learning experience. Your pigeons should have clean feet. Some say warm feet are good. I won't deny that but clean feet and a clean band has been a good sign for me and I look for it. I look at everything. The feathers must lay well. I don't like it when a pigeon has the small feathers on the wing out of place. Tells me it's not a world class pigeon health wise. It is better to let it rest a year and try it again next season. Throats can tell us much about the health of a pigeon. They have air sacks that must swell with air to help make them buoyant

when flying. A breathing problem, even allergy can ruin the performance. Yes, pigeons have allergies. Some are affected more than others. I check every single pigeon before I breed them. I look at the details because that is what separates the best chance from a waste of time. It is absolutely true a perfect pair of healthy pigeons produce nothing good. In fact it's usually the case. It is also true an unhealthy pigeon can produce healthy youngsters that win. Yes, I have seen it so it's not a question but a statement. One thing is for sure you have a better chance with healthy pigeons.

I could talk about every part of the pigeon and how it effects performance in one way or another. At the end of the day it is a smart determined pigeon with great natural health and homing ability that wins. Even a pigeon with everything may not have the luck to get out front. There are hawk attacks during pigeons races. The pigeons separate and go different ways to throw off the hawk. Some may split toward the loft while others away from the loft. The best pigeon may be in the group that broke away from the straight line to the loft and come in 10 minutes later. Three races of equal distance would show the true top pigeons. I can tell after flying many years that some pigeons go down to hide during attacks and come in before dark when it's safe.