A military macaw is a difficult pet to take care of. I discovered this when one was brought to my home last year because the owner was unable to handle the responsibility of taking care of him. The macaw is a beautiful bird with distinct colorings. Each macaw and type of macaw has its own feather color. A military macaw is mostly green, excluding its nape (the part above the beak) and its tail and wing feathers, which are red, blue, and yellow. This bright coloring meant, of course, that he was male. In all birds the male's coloring is always brighter than the female's. The military macaw I had the chance to learn with became a good companion and extremely entertaining, especially when company came over. Keeping him happy and content with his surroundings was quite a chore, but it kept me on my toes.

Gonzo, my military macaw, was brought to our home by a friend of my mother. Patty didn't have the time or the patience to deal with his temperament. She told my mom that his obnoxious squawking and chattering drove her crazy. She also said that she didn't have the time to give him all the attention he demanded. My mother was happy to bring Gonzo home, knowing that I would love to care for and teach him, as much as I have all our other pets. I've always enjoyed animals and love learning with them.

The first thing that needed to be changed was his cage. We noticed that he wasn't happy in his cage and seemed very distraught all the time. To fix this problem, we designed and built what one might call a playground. The playground sat on a square mount with wheels. It was a metal box about five inches deep and about three feet long and three feet wide. The box had PVC pipe along the edge so Gonzo could walk along the edge. The center of the box consisted of several perches of different heights for him to climb on. Hanging from the perches were ropes and other toys for his pleasure. We moved him from the cage to the playground and found that he was much happier and more playful there. We fixed it so we could give him food and water in the playground and discarded the old cage.

Everyday when we fed Gonzo we talked to him and tried to get him to repeat a sound or word, giving him a peanut as a reward. This strategy advanced his speaking ability and gave us some idea of his eating habits. We tried several different kinds of seed mix before finally finding the one Gonzo liked best. We also bought some vitamins to add to his seed mix to keep him healthy. Finding that mix of food made him more playful and active during feeding time. We also found that changing his water everyday maintained his health and improved his temperament.

Talking to Gonzo during feeding time did improve his verbal ability, but it took a lot more time to bring him to the level he is at now. This was the most time consuming activity of all. Everyday my mother and I spent hours sitting by him and talking to him. Eventually, he started to pick things up and to copycat what we said. The rest of the words he picked up through other conversations around the house. If we were talking in another room, we could hear Gonzo practicing his speaking. If we didn’t go into the room near him, he would go crazy with his
squawking. We also noticed that Gonzo was picking up phone conversations. If the phone rang, Gonzo would act as if he had answered it, and he would proceed to have a one-sided conversation. Among these words, he also picked up common sounds. One of his favorite noises was a kiss; however, others included raspberries, whistles and dog barks.

The next step in our relationship with Gonzo was being able to handle him. At first Gonzo would bite anyone who came close to touching him. With a bit of coaching and tempting we were eventually able to get him off the playground and onto other inanimate objects. We discovered the only way we could handle Gonzo was to get him away from his security, his playground. After getting him away from his security, we were able to start handling him, and eventually we were able to get him on our arms. That took a lot of trust on his part, but after about six months of working with him, we were able to gain his trust completely.

Gonzo certainly turned out to be a lot of work, but for our first experience with a macaw we felt we did pretty well. Now we are happy just listening and talking to him. His vocabulary and temperament have improved immensely since he first arrived. Company especially enjoys his laughter, which he has picked up from others. All in all, I think Gonzo was a great bird to happen upon and I really enjoyed learning along with him. His temperament and spunkiness certainly kept us going. Anyone who wants a demanding but certainly lively experience with a pet should consider one of these moody yet vital animals.