

"FATE"

by

Florante Lim Bunag

It all started one gorgeous summer afternoon. I always hurry home after work to fly the pigeons for 2-3 hours before sundown. The birds were flying in a tight formation and flying with "gusto". I gladly watched their spectacular maneuvering up and beyond the loft. Satisfied with their flight, I went about finishing the chores in the loft. I was changing the water in the loft fountain with the garden hose when suddenly the winds came up, and I could see an abrupt change in the weather. The clouds darkened and little drops of rain started to fall. The birds were still flying high when a fast flying bird came and tried to join my birds in their flight. I knew that the bird was a racing pigeon flying at such speed. As the flock glided down and circled the loft to land. The stray bird was among them. All the birds went in and dove in the feeder to eat. The blue stray was still in the loft window. At that moment the rain was pouring hard.

I talked to the gorgeous blue stray encouraging her to come in and eat some corn and safflower. I told her, I would contact her owner and take her back to her home loft. To my amazement the gorgeous blue stray with a red rubber countermark went in and ate some grains and drink vigorously.

Obviously the bird was a lost race bird. I immediately got the band number. It was an NSH (Napa Solano Homing) banded bird. Since I was new to the San Francisco Racing Pigeon Club and the sport in general I had no idea where the NSH club was, so I went upstairs and took out my breeders yearbook and checked the AU (American Union) members directory. I saw the NSH club listed. I called the race secretary informing him about the gorgeous stray bird. Stan Culligan said, "Toto, give me the band number. The tone of his voice evidenced his surprise as I gave him the band number. He said, " Toto,that is my bird, I gave that bird to a friend to breed. Eventually he raced the bird and it got lost." He asked me if I could keep the bird until the weekend and he would pick it up on his way from the SFO International airport, that coming Thursday afternoon. With agony and despair, I said , "yes". I was talking to my self, "Oh no! he is going to pick up the bird. This bird must be special for him to pick up about 60 miles away from Napa, California.

As the days went by, I fell in love with this gorgeous stray blue bar hen. I also noticed in just three days her muscles came back and she was in prime condition. I could tell, she was ready for her next race.

Stan Culligan came and I did have some guest that time. They were veterinarians, Rodeo club members from the University of the Philippines (Diliman, Quezon City). Stan and I had a one on one talk in the basement. Then I showed him my small humble loft. With all the birds in the loft, He pointed out one particular blue bar cock. He said, "this one looks good", and he was right. The blue bar cock was valued \$500 by Ron Campbell, the breeder. This bird goes back to the " pig pen pair". They were excellent all distance birds from 200 miles all the way to 500 miles. He also told me that the ventilation in the loft was good. I almost wanted to beg him not to take this hen away from my loft, but I held my thoughts. Stan and I went back to the basement and talked more about that gorgeous bird. I learned that she was a "Verbruggen". I said, What? He repeated the name Verbruggen. But again, since the name was not familiar, I took a paper and pen and asked him to write the name. He said while writing on the piece of paper, "The Verbruggens were just too hot".I soon learned that they were killing the competition, especially in Northern California. (He mentioned Harold Waddell and Fr.Ed Witckzak)

I was mesmerized with the story of these Verbruggens. Before he left Stan promised that next spring he would give me a couple of young birds to try and that he had to go. It was getting late and Bobbie, his wonderful wife was patiently waiting in the car. This was the start of a wonderful friendship with Stan Culligan and his lovely wife Bobbie.

I couldn't wait for spring but the months passed by and finally "spring time". I couldn't wait to call Stan and remind him about the two youngsters that he promised. He was smiling on the other line. He told me to come by the coming weekend and bring a basket. That weekend I was in high spirits as I drove to his loft in Napa, California. I was received with warm welcome and was stunned to see the huge lofts. Stan showed me his widowhood loft and handed me two banded youngsters. I believe they were nest mates. One was a blue bar and the other one was a blue checker. I was delighted. I gave him a big thank you as I placed the youngsters in my basket.

Stan Culligan and Toto Bunag in front of Stan's widowhood loft. (Napa,California)



I thought that was it. Then he coaxed me to a corner nest box in the widowhood loft. There were two gorgeous youngsters. He said, "Toto, I forgot to band these youngsters, I do have the pedigrees. If you like them, you can have them". I nodded yes with a big smile. I was speechless with the generosity of this big burly man with a big heart. There was only one occasion that I paid for a bird from Stan. Every spring Stan Culligan would give me birds, either to fly or as a breeder. Eventually my loft was 90% Verbruggen.

Nineteen ninety-four was the year after I just got my first Verbruggens. I flew young birds, armed with four full sisters off the banded blue bar cock and Verbruggen crosses. I won SFR Overall Champion Bird, Champion Cock, Champion Hen, Champion Nominated Points and lost a few points for Average Speed against Dino D' Ercole of San Mateo, California.

sire and dam of "Champion 0751"



94SFR 0751 "Overall Champion SFR Club 94 YB" 119.70 points



In the 1996 young bird season the Verbruggens won for me SFR Overall Champion Bird, Champion Cock, Champion Hen, Champion Nominated Points flying in the worst location in the San Francisco Racing Pigeon Club and Bay Cities Combine, way out in the coast line.

Before Stan Culligan moved to Dewey, Arizona, He gave me gift birds to add to my Verbruggen family. He is just one amazing fancier with a big heart and a terrific teacher. Every spring that I visited him, Stan would let me handle all his breeders and champions. One by one he would enter his individual breeding pens which is approximately 4 'X 6 'X 6' and catch the pairs individually and handed them over to me to examine. By handling all his top breeders and racers I was able to mold them in my hands and eyes. I know now how a good Verbruggen should handle and how they should look like.

Stan Culligan and Toto (During Stan's memorable visit to his apprentice)



On one of my visits, Stan said to me, "Toto, you should have kept the gorgeous blue Verbruggen stray hen. She could have been a great foundation hen for you". I replied, "yes, she could have been my foundation hen. But I wouldn't have your friendship and look at all the birds that you have given me. "Yes, that was true", was his reply and we both had a great smile.