



MIKE POMPOCO

A Love of
wings

"Mike is one of the nicest, toughest, and bravest guys you could ever meet."

—Mick Brown

Like many young boys, Mike Pompoco had a love affair with birds of prey and the great outdoors. As Mike grew into his teens, he read an article about falconry in a magazine and decided to pursue getting his falconry license. Unfortunately, at that time he was told it wasn't legal in his state of Ohio.

As years passed, Mike went on to college and received his degree in wildlife management, putting the idea of falconry on the back burner.

Upon graduating from college, Mike's love for flight led him to join the Air Force. He served in the Gulf War flying B52 bombers. He ultimately served in the military for ten years before leaving to fly in the private sector. Mike then continued as a pilot for American Airlines for almost twenty years.

Sadly, in 1983 Mike contracted multiple sclerosis, but says it was manageable until about 2012. Through that time Mike's fascination with birds of prey continued, as did the dream of one day becoming a falconer.

Finally, in 1998 Mike would make that dream come true. He formally joined our ranks in 1998 after passing his falconry test and he proudly states he joined NAFA that same year!

"I had flown four different red-tails and was flying a red-shoulder when I almost gave up falconry, as my balance and walking ability were decreasing. That is when my buddy, Mick Brown (OFA president), suggested I fly a Harris's hawk. You don't have to chase them around as much and they are easier to work with. My sponsor, Jeff Riebe, said that he knew an education program that could use a red-shoulder and Mick knew where I could get a Harris's."

So, here he is with his Harris, named "Otaktay", a Sioux Indian Warrior name that means "One who kills many". Otaktay has proven to be the perfect bird for Mike - easy to manage with a great temperament. Mike acquired the bird as a young chamber-raised eyass with the help of his friend, Mick Brown, from a breeder in Virginia, Shelton Lee.

Mike says he originally wed his bird to feathered game and he proudly states his bird has taken about 170 head of game thus far, primarily crows. Early in his bird's falconry career, he did attempt to fly him on the ducks that frequent the pond on his property, but the first one he bound to dragged him under the water and the hawk released and came to shore. He hasn't chased ducks again.

Mike has been an officer in the OFA for years now, and is continually contributing to the sport in any way he can. (You will see his report for the OFA in the December *HawkChalk*.)

Editors Note: All of us in NAFA Thank You for your service to our country, Mike, and we are honored to have you in our great sport of Falconry. Keep flying!

