

Steve Jones  
Dayton, WY

I tried a little experiment this year. The jury is still out as to whether anything was gained by it or not, but if nothing else it was educational. I pulled two eyas prairie falcons from southern Wyoming eyries, one tiercel and one female. The plan was to fly them as a cast. They were pulled on the same day from a couple of eyries that were only a half mile apart.

The female was approximately 40 days old and bailed out of the eyrie when I peeked in. She glided to the ground 50 yards away where she was easily collected up. For fear others would bail too, her siblings were not disturbed.

# Make Hawk



*Tiercel peregrine x gyr feeding two eyas prairie falcons, photo by Steve Jones.*



*Two new eyas prairies on their way home, photo by Steve Jones.*

They were unexpectedly old for the time of year, June 14. I had expected them to be a good 10 days younger. The next eyrie contained four eyases that were the age I had expected, 28 to 30 days old. I repelled in and selected a tiercel that appeared to have a nice personality. He didn't hiss or foot much when I grabbed him and stuffed him in a backpack. We spent the night in a motel and headed home the next day.

Thanks to my seven-year-old son, Dakota by the time we got home, they had tamed down quite a bit. It still amazes me how fast eyas prairies tame down. When I walked in the house with the two eyases, my tiercel peregrine x gyr hybrid, who was perched on his shelf perch in the living room, was very interested in what I had. He is the same bird that I flew in a cast for two and a

half seasons with a female prairie falcon. That prairie died after hitting a fence at the NAFA meet last season. I suspected that the hybrid may in time adopt the eyases. I put the eyases on the couch then picked up the hybrid and hooded him. The eyases were then placed on the shelf perch and a dish of cut up quail was placed in front of them. Then, with the jesses held tightly, I held the hybrid up in front of them. The eyases stumbled forward a little and looked at him but kept quiet. I then removed the hybrid's hood. He looked at the eyases for a second, and then at the food. He had not eaten yet and was a little hungry, so he started to eat. This got the eyases excited, and they started to quietly scream. The hybrid looked up with a piece of meat in his mouth and did not swallow it. He tried to step up onto the shelf

perch, but was unable to because I was holding the jesses snugly. He persisted so I moved him away and hooded him. I then decided to take a chance and tether him on the shelf perch. As soon as I popped his hood off, he jumped down by the food and eyases. I was right there ready to intervene if things got ugly, but wondered if I would be quick enough. He started to eat the cut up quail, and the eyases started to quietly scream again. They had not eaten for several hours and were hungry. The female stepped forward and grabbed a piece of meat from the hybrid's beak before he could swallow it. He didn't seem bothered by the theft at all and simply picked up another piece. Much to my amazement instead of swallowing it he stuck it in her mouth! The tiercel prairie quickly recognized that it was feeding time



*Tiercel peregrine x gyr feeding a 35-day-old tiercel prairie, photo by Steve Jones*

and hobbled up. The hybrid went on feeding the eyases as if he had been doing it his whole life. I was flabbergasted. I had thought that there was a small chance that he would adopt then after a week or two, but never dreamed he would be eagerly feeding them only five minutes after I brought them home.

At first I let the hybrid feed them all their meals. He was an incredibly good parent and had tons of patience. The female would frequently grab big pieces and drag them into a corner where she would pick at them for a minute and then leave them. The hybrid would retrieve them and resume tearing them into bite-sized pieces and sticking them in the hungry eyases mouths. I left the hybrid with the eyases at night and off and on throughout the day. When he wasn't with them, he was in the weathering yard. The eyases were left loose on the shelf perch and drop cloths were put on the floor under the shelf perch in a futile attempt to save the carpet from stray mutes. I

interacted with the eyases frequently and started hooding them for brief periods with the braces open. After just a few days, they were incredibly tame.

On the fourth day after bringing them home, I put the hybrid in the weathering yard at first light, before he had fed the eyases. I piled some cut up quail on the lure and slid it under the couch with the string sticking out, and then put the eyases on the floor. After ten minutes or so I pulled the lure out, and drug it right under their noses. They showed little interest in eating, but I knew they were hungry. They eventually ate a few bites each, but not a real meal. I moved the lure to the shelf perch and added some more cut up meat. I then put the eyases back on the shelf perch. They snacked on the meat throughout the day. That evening I brought the hybrid in and let him feed them. When they saw him, they started food begging screams and were obviously quite hungry.

The next morning I tried them on the floor with the lure again,

and their response was about the same, poor. That evening instead of letting the hybrid feed them on the shelf perch, I put the eyases on the floor again and turned the hybrid loose in the living room with them. I tossed the lure out on the ground and the hybrid promptly jumped on it. I drug it around and made him chase it a bit. Once he caught it, the eyases headed over to beg. The hybrid stepped up to the fist and I discretely put a pile of cut up meat on the lure. The hybrid fed on the fist, and the eyases eagerly gobbled up the meat on the lure. I held the hybrid near the lure as he fed, because his presence seemed to encourage the eyases to eat.

The hybrid was put in the weathering yard at first light again the next morning, and the eyases were again put on the floor. This time when I pulled out the lure, they charged over to it and chased it across the floor. As they eagerly gobbled up the meat I wondered, had they learned from the hybrid's example from the night before? It's possible, but it easily could have



*Eyas prairie falcons watching their adopted dad, a peregrine x gyr, as he flies, photo by Laura Culley.*

been a coincidence.

That evening, I decided to see what they would do with a live quail. All three were again turned loose in the living room, and I released a quail. The hybrid caught it right away, but did not immediately kill it. The female approached him and grabbed the quail. The hybrid let go of it, and it promptly broke loose from the prairie. The hybrid quickly caught it at the far end of

the room, and this time immediately killed it. Neither of the eyases approached him, so I tossed out another quail to see if they would go for it. The hybrid flew across the room carrying the first quail, caught and killed the second quail before the eyases had a chance to move. He then drug one off into a corner, away from the eyases, and started to pluck it. It was surprising to see him being selfish. The eyases played

with the remaining quail a little but were not yet tearing their own food much yet so consequently were not getting much to eat. I pulled the lure out from under the couch (I put it there earlier) and the eyases, especially the female, started eating the meat that was piled on it. In the meantime, the hybrid was making quite a mess with the quail he had. He plucked it almost clean, and had feathers everywhere, but had

not eaten any of it. He then pulled off a piece, but did not swallow it. Instead he started chupping. The tiercel, who up to this point had not eaten much, screamed and ran over to him. The hybrid preceded to feed the tiercel most of the quail. It hadn't dawned on me until then that the hybrid wasn't being selfish. He simply wanted to prepare it first.

For the next week, I continued pretty much the same way. The

eyases were fed only twice a day, and the hybrid was usually not present during the morning feeding. That is when I did most of their lure training. In the evening, the hybrid fed them in the living room, usually on the shelf perch. I continued to hood them regularly and worked on getting them to tolerate the braces being shut.

By the end of June, just two weeks after pulling them, they were

ready for their first flights outside. I took them out to a big open field, and perched them on Laura Culley's arm. She was gracious enough to assist me on many of their early flights. They were unhooded, I backed off 10 yards and released a pigeon on a short tether. They looked around for about five minutes and showed little interest in the pigeon. I tossed out the lure, and after a few minutes of persuading, the tiercel flew to the ground and ran over to it. While the tiercel fed on the pigeon, I got the female on my fist and took her over to the pigeon. I set her on the ground next to it and killed it for her. She footed it as it died and began to feed on it. I then had the tiercel step to the fist and fed him some more there. He didn't eat all that much, but did not look like he wanted any more so I hooded him. I then perched him on my knee as I squatted down to deal with the female. She stepped up to the fist and took a good crop. The tiercel was fed more at home.

The following morning, I took them out to the same field and again perched them on Laura's arm. This time I didn't mess around with a pigeon and just tossed the lure out right away. After looking around for about a minute, the female jumped to the ground and walked the 10 yards over to the lure. I offered her the garnished fist and she stepped up. The tiercel then hopped to the ground and walked over to the lure. I left him to feed on the lure while the female fed on the fist. She took a good crop, and I hooded her and perched her on my knee so I could pick up the tiercel. He ate some more on the fist but again had to be topped off at home.

The next morning, July 1, I again perched them on Laura's arm, but instead of pulling out the lure I pulled out the hybrid. I unhooded him and cast him off. He circled a few times and the eyases watched him intently. I then called him down to the lure. As soon as he had the lure, both eyases flew the entire 10 yards over to him. I put out garnished lures for each, and they happily fed on them. The

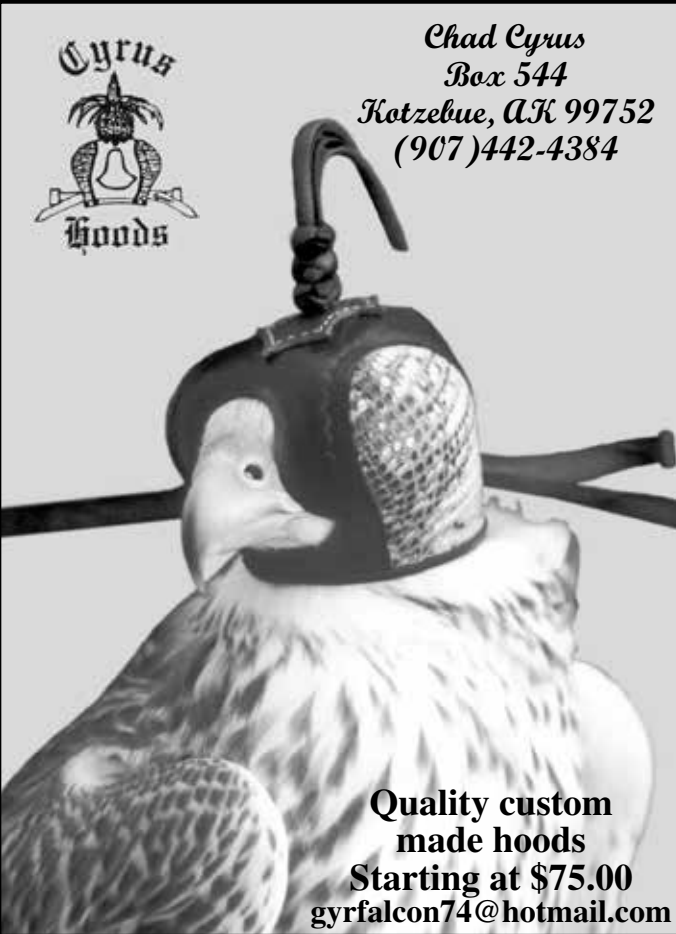
hybrid was quickly fed and hooded so I could deal with the eyases. They screamed at the hybrid frequently and mantled quite a bit while they were feeding. The previous two days in the field without him they had been silent. Both eyases finished their meals in turn on the fist, and the tiercel took a good crop for once. Both ate more ravenously with the hybrid present even though their weight was unchanged from the two previous days.

We continued each day basically the same way. I did start putting the eyases on top of my truck instead of Laura's arm because as I started flying the hybrid longer it was getting hard for her to hold them up that long. I normally don't like putting birds on the truck to start them because it's an open invitation for them to land on it later when you don't want them to do that. With my previous cast I had no trouble at all with them landing. They kept each other motivated, so I wasn't too worried about it. Each day I let the hybrid fly longer before calling him down. I also called him down farther away from the eyases so they would have to come farther. For the first week they just watched the hybrid as he

flew and only left the truck when he was on the ground with the lure in his feet. One morning the tiercel did not come right away when the hybrid caught the lure. Instead he stayed on the truck pumping his wings. The female had already come over, most of the way on foot. The tiercel launched himself into the air and flew the 20 or 30 yards over to us. It was the first real flight either of them had made. He was about 10 feet up when he got to us and apparently didn't know how to come down, so he curved around and flew back to the truck. He made a second attempt with similar results. On the third try, he

landed and started feeding on the remaining lure.

During the next week, both started making short flights while the hybrid was flying. I started giving the hybrid bagged birds to kill, mostly pigeons. The eyases would always fly over and join him on his kills. He never showed any resentment and even chucked and tried to feed them pieces. The hybrid was



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flying surprisingly well considering it was early July, and quite warm, even at first light when I flew them. He was also flying at a weight that I normally could only fly him at late in the season when he was muscled up and it was very cold. His parental instincts were in overdrive.

On June 6 both eyases flew over 100 yards to join the hybrid on the lure. His presence made them much more eager to try their wings at an early age. At this point the tiercel was about 50 days old and the female 60. They continued to scream at the hybrid in the field, especially when they joined him on the lure or a kill. At home they were

kept out of sight of him because they would scream at him if they saw him.

By the middle of July they were both trying to chase the hybrid when he was flying and would chase bagged birds when I tossed them. Once I tossed a hun and the eyases were chasing it. The hybrid stooped and knocked it down. He pitched up and made no attempt to go in on it. The eyases piled in on it. It squirted loose and took off only to get knocked down by the hybrid again. He again didn't go in on it, and this time the eyases held it. He then dutifully came down to the lure.

I had hoped that the eyases would start to follow the hybrid up while he was mounting, and thus, learn how to wait on from him. Unfortunately this never happened. They tried, but the hybrid would mount way too fast for them to be able to follow. By the time they got to 100 feet the hybrid was at 500 so they quit trying. They also started screaming at him more in the field and flew with a hunched-wing, begging posture that was not really conducive to mounting. On July 19, I decided to start flying them without the hybrid.

I was a bit nervous the first time because I felt they were coming to him, not me. Recovering them could be a problem, so I had the hybrid in the truck with transmitters on and ready to go in the event they would not come to me. I put them on top of the truck and after a minute or two they were on the wing. They circled with a good wing beat and soon were 100 feet up. I tossed out a bagged hun, and both chased it hard. The tiercel got to it first but missed. It landed. It had been a breeder, so I knew it wouldn't fly too far which is what I wanted. The female got it on the ground, and the tiercel landed on the truck. I called the tiercel to the lure and he came promptly. As I was



*A tiercel peregrine x gyr on one knee, a female prairie on the fist, and a tiercel prairie patiently waiting his turn, photo by Laura Culley.*

feeding them, I realized that they were completely silent, and they were not mantling much at all. It was kind of nice.

On July 25, I put them up, and they were flying nicely. I had started releasing them from the fist now and not putting them on the truck. When they were 150 feet up or so I got the hybrid out and released him. They instantly

started screaming and flying with their feathers loose and their wings hunched. They also started losing height quickly. My dog, who had been with us every day, flushed a small bird and the hybrid promptly caught it. The female flew over to him and he let her have it. He was just barely on the wing again when the dog put up another one. The hybrid caught this one also. It was

amazing to see the hybrid fly this aggressively at such a high weight. He let the tiercel have this one and I promptly called him in to the lure before the dog could flush anything else. After feeding the hybrid I picked up the tiercel and finished feeding him on the fist. He screamed at the hybrid the whole time. I then picked up the female and she did the same. It appeared

I wasn't going to gain anything by flying the hybrid with them at this stage in the game.

For the next few weeks, I flew them without the hybrid, and used pigeons and bagged huns to start shaping pitch. About this time, the hybrid started bating away from the eyases whenever he saw them at home. He definitely did not want to be around them. Maybe dispersal works both ways. It would make sense. Why would the eyases want to leave their parents who feed and protect them? I can see why the parents would want to disperse from their offspring. Heck, I know some humans that wish their offspring would disperse. I kept the hybrid visually separated from the eyases and he seemed happier, and it was a whole lot quieter.

By the middle of August, the eyases were mounting as high as 300 or 400 feet and flying strong. The female was becoming dominant and no longer wanting to share her kills the tiercel. She never footed at him but she mantled and squawked at him. He got the message and started giving her plenty of space. When they were mounting, the tiercel was frequently wide. I don't know if it was just his nature to do it that way or if he was giving her space then also. I kept close track of him while he was flying. I didn't want him taking off on me. The tiercel started to show that he really likes to fly, and the female that she has a lazy side.

By early September they were waiting on fairly well. The female averaged 200 to 300 feet and the tiercel was frequently going as high as 500 or more. Things were still a bit too chaotic to think about doing any real game hawking with them yet, but I occasionally put up game for them. One day, the female started buzzing my dog. I figured she was probably bored or just playing around. About then I unexpectedly flushed a young sharptail grouse. The tiercel stooped and bound to it. The female never saw it; she was too busy buzzing the dog. I called her in to the lure and, after she ate, I went to attend to the tiercel. It didn't look like he had much trou-

ble killing the grouse and was quite happily eating when I arrived. It was a young bird from a late brood, not much bigger than a hun, a perfect size for a young little tiercel, and not bad for a first kill.

They were not as aggressive toward pigeons or game as I felt they should be at this stage in the game, so I decided to drop their weight some. Also, the tiercel was mounting well but was usually four times as wide as he was high. I figured a little weight reduction should help that too. I didn't fly them on game much and concentrated on using homers. The tiercel was starting to respond to the waved glove, but still only chased pigeons halfheartedly. The female chased the pigeons hard but was starting to focus too much attention on me, the pigeon source. There were times when the tiercel finally would come overhead, and usually over 500 feet up, and the female was low and looking in the bag. I couldn't reward the tiercel without also rewarding the female, so I decided to fly them separately for a while. The tiercel had also started becoming quite possessive of food. He was afraid the female would take it, and she would if given the chance. There still had not been any crabbing, but it was obvious the tiercel didn't trust the female at all.

Flying them separately benefited both of them. With careful timing of when I tossed pigeons and by bringing her weight back up a bit, the female was again mounting nicely. Unfortunately she continued to buzz the dog regularly, and started occasionally hitting it. I started flying her without a dog to try to break her of the habit. It was not at all easy to fly upland game without a dog. She was not a high flier and a bit on the lazy side, so I decided to try thermaling her. This worked well and she frequently went up quite high. As frequently happens with birds that are thermaled, she was reluctant to go very high without thermals.

The tiercel, on the other hand, kept flying higher every day, and he didn't need thermals to do it, either. He would even go up in fair-

ly strong winds. I have never had a bird that young mount that well. He still frequently went wide to mount, but was getting very good about coming over when I waved the glove. He was still not very aggressive toward game. He loved huns and always stooped them hard. He would either completely refuse or only stoop halfway when sharptail grouse were put up under him. I can't really blame him because he is really too small for sharptail. I got to the point that I would only fly him on game if I knew for sure it was huns, otherwise I would just fly him on my homing pigeons. Pigeons easily frustrated him and he needed to catch one fairly regularly, or he would start refusing them. I tried him at a lower weight, but it didn't seem to matter. In fact he flew pretty much the same no matter what his weight.

Toward the end of September, I tried flying them together again. For the first flight, I decided to toss them a pheasant. I picked one that was pretty beat up that I knew would not fly too far. I didn't care if they caught it on the ground, I just didn't want it to go very far so I could get there quickly in the event that they started crabbing on the kill. I also figured that a pheasant would be hard enough for them to handle on the ground that they would be too busy with it to even think about crabbing. It worked as I had planed. I did not wait for them to mount but just tossed the pheasant right away. I didn't want to give them any time to crab or chase each other in the air. The female lightly feathered it while it was still flying. It landed, and the tiercel raked it on the ground. The female then bound to it, and the tiercel also came in and bound to it. I was on the scene quickly and there was no crabbing. The tiercel's hackles were up and he was squawking at the female. She did not seem concerned at all about his presence and was biting the pheasant's neck. The female stepped to the fist and I let the tiercel have the kill. He mantled a lot and tried to drag it off. After the female finished eating I hooded her and perched her on my knee



*The female prairie takes a young sage grouse, photo by Steve Jones.*

so I could deal with the tiercel. He hadn't eaten much of the pheasant; he was too preoccupied with the female being there. I had him step up to the fist. He mantled a lot but he ate.

I flew them together for the next four days, and they quickly went back to their old habits. The female was not mounting and just looking in the bag. The tiercel was mounting, but very wide and not coming over. I started wondering if they would ever work as a cast. I figured if nothing else I would fly them separately, but always keep them perched near each other at home. After a season or two they would probably pair bond and I would likely be able to fly them together then. However, there was another, more serious problem. The female was still attacking dogs in the field. Instead of getting better it was actually getting worse.

I flew them separately, and the female without dogs until we went on our annual trip to sage grouse camp. I had been flying my hybrid

daily since the first of September and he was killing regularly. He is the bird I planed to do most of the sage grouse hawking with at camp. The tiercel prairie is way too small to even think of flying at sage grouse, and the female still could not be flown with dogs. When I marked some grouse that I could fly without a dog I flew the female, and I just flew the tiercel on pigeons. The tiercel was flying better than ever and usually high enough that he was just a speck in the sky. The female was flying OK and had a few decent flights at grouse, but had not scored the first few days I was there.

Randy Johnson joined me at camp after I had been there a few days. He had a first year gyr x saker tiercel that he ballooned and had been going up really well. I told him that I was seriously considering giving the female prairie away, and he said that he may be interested. He mostly hawks ducks so the dog thing would not be a problem. We went out to fly the birds the next

morning and I suggested that he fly the female and see if he liked her. I carried a glove with me in case she objected to him picking her up. We flew a couple of other birds over points and had some good flights. About 9:30 we marked some sage grouse on which he could fly the female. It was a little late, but marked flights were rare and that's all she could be flown on so we risked it. He unhooded her and held her up. She looked over at him, but didn't show any sign of being put off by a different handler. She roused, muted and launched herself into the air.

There was a little thermal activity starting, and she quickly found one. She mounted well, but a little wide behind us, and the grouse were in front of us. We stayed put and waited for her to go up. When she was a good 500 feet up, she started coming over. We advanced toward the spot where the grouse had been marked. She was almost dead overhead, and the grouse were just ahead of us down a slight hill. A young grouse got up, and sped off down the hill. The falcon was easily 600 or 700 feet above the grouse, but just a little wide behind us. She pumped hard in a slanting stoop and was very quickly right over the fleeing grouse. She then went vertical. It was a full tuck stoop and she hit the grouse hard. She knocked it into the dirt hard enough to raise a big cloud of dust. I heard Randy holler to me, "I want this bird!" She did a quick wing over, but the resilient grouse squirted loose and headed for the horizon with the falcon on its heels. We found her about a quarter mile away in short sage eating the grouse. Randy offered her the garnished fist and she stepped up like she had known him her whole life. Randy took her with him back to southern California, and she is developing into a dine duck hawk.

At grouse camp it wasn't always easy to keep the eyas prairies and my hybrid out of sight of each other. The female screamed loudly if she saw the hybrid, and hunch over with her feathers loose in a begging posture. She would even



*Randy Johnson feeding the female prairie falcon after she bagged a young sage grouse, photo by Steve Jones.*

continue screaming for another 10 minutes after she could no longer see him. The tiercel, on the other hand, barely screamed at him at all. I even blocked them out next to each other, and the tiercel only screamed a few times. In addition to that, the hybrid showed no desire to get away. The day after I got home, I put them both in the weathering yard after they had been flown. The tiercel screamed a few times at first, but then quit. The food in his crop helped some I'm sure, but I think the main reason is he's growing up.

From then on I housed them in sight of each other, and the tiercel rarely screamed. I continued to fly the tiercel on huns when I could find them and homers when I could not. Occasionally, a sharptail would get put up under him and he would refuse them, but he was fun to fly on huns. Toward the end of October, I decided to fly him with the hybrid again, and it went off without a hitch. The tiercel was not intimidated by the hybrid like

he was the female prairie, and the hybrid never objected to his presence.

Over the last week or so I have flown them together several times, and the most recent was quite interesting. I put them up over a point. I didn't know if it was huns or sharptail, and it turned out to be a lone sharptail. The hybrid stooped and knocked it to the ground. To my surprise the tiercel had stooped also, and a hard stoop at that. The grouse had bounced back into the air, and was making a bee line over a nearby hill. As expected, the hybrid was right on its heels, but I was again surprised to see the little tiercel in hot pursuit also. I charged over the hill and found them about 200 yards from where the grouse had flushed. They were both flying back and forth over a small patch of brush. As I approached, I could see the grouse in the bush. It had a lot of blood running down its side, and was obviously injured quite badly. My hybrid knew this. He will not go up high over an injured grouse, he

knows it will not fly, and that it is all but caught. It ran through the small patch of brush, and the hybrid crashed in attempting to grab it. He missed and it ran to the far side of the bush where the tiercel tried to grab it, and almost got it. The hybrid crawled out of the brush, got back in the air, and quickly caught it. The tiercel did not immediately go in on the kill with him, but eagerly came down to the lure next to it. He then jumped on the grouse with the hybrid. It was amazing to see him so aggressive toward quarry that only days before he was completely refusing. I guess it's like a little guy that is eager to pick a fight in a bar because he has a linebacker from the football team beside him to back him up.

I don't know where things will go from here. The hybrid doesn't need a little tiercel prairie backing him up, he kills on most flights by himself, but he may have a few things he can teach his adopted son.

