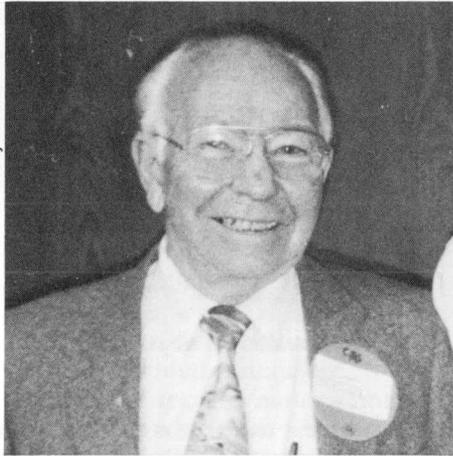


In Memory of Dr. Val Clear

by Nicole Van Der Heyden, D.V.M.
August 1992

Photo courtesy of Jonathan Fink



Val Clear, at the CITES Convention, Kyoto, Japan in early March 1992. Val and Jonathan Fink were AFA representatives.

Dr. Valorous Bernard (Val) Clear died August 21, 1992 following a stroke in Anderson, Indiana. Val was a lifelong aviculturist and member of AFA.

Val was born in 1915 in Kendallville, Indiana. He lived and taught in Lima, Peru for several years where he married his wife, Evelyn Clark. She died on Christmas day in 1981. They had three sons, Scott, Todd and Bruce. Val moved to Anderson, Indiana in 1947. He was an ordained minister and taught criminology at Anderson University for 33 years. He became head of the Sociology department before retiring in 1980. Following retirement, he went to work as coordinator of sentencing for the Madison County Unified Courts where he served as a probation officer and founded the re-entry program for exoffenders. Val also co-founded the Anderson Urban League and was the Indiana chairman of the Justice fellowship.

Val was a deeply religious and just individual who respected the rights and freedom of choice for all people regardless of their race, sex or sexual orientation. His pastor described him as the most liberal Christian he had ever met. Among the numerous awards he received during his life was a lifetime service award from the

congregation of the Park Place Church of God where he had been a member since 1947. Val cherished this award above all others he had received because it reflected who he was and not what he had done.

Val was an active member of AFA. He wrote numerous articles for the *Watchbird*, the most recent one in the Jan/Feb 1992 issue on South American Finches. Val also lectured at several AFA conventions and provided luncheon entertainment with a talk on his travels to Peru and Peruvian birds. Val was a participant in the Red Siskin project and consortium. He was also a member of the CITES committee and traveled to numerous CITES and IATA (International Air Transport Association) meetings on the behalf of AFA, most recently attending and reporting on this year's meeting in Kyoto, Japan. Val received the AFA Gold Avy award in 1977 for outstanding contributions to the field of aviculture, nationally and internationally.

Val developed an interest in birds at an early age, keeping pigeons through much of his childhood and always having some type of bird around as he traveled and went to school. When he settled down in Anderson, he began raising exotic birds as well as caring for native, wild, orphaned and injured birds. Val regularly imported, kept and bred South American softbills including siskins, Peruvian Tanagers, bananaquits, Brazilian Cardinals, Collared Warbling Finches, Parrot-billed Seedeaters, honeycreepers, leaf birds, Peking Robins and numerous hummingbirds. The hummingbirds (or hummers as he called them) were his favorites. He had an extensive collection of Peruvian hummingbirds as well as beautiful full color books, magazines and videotapes on them. Val also kept and raised two species often neglected by U.S. aviculturists, the house sparrow and European Starling.

Val wrote prolifically not only on birds but also on social, criminal and religious matters. He published eight books, five of which were on birds including the popular "Making Money with Birds." At the time of his death, he was working on yet another book with one of his sons on "non-retirement." Val also wrote articles for many bird journals, especially the American Cage Bird Magazine where he was a contributing editor for 30 years. Val also wrote exten-

sively to people, answering questions regarding aviculture to kids, novice bird breeders and aviculturists from all over the country and around the world. His love of writing would show up in even the shortest memo he would regularly send to me accompanying some sample or answering a question I had posed in a previous conversation. His style of writing always had an element of humor and personal experience in it. Shortly before retiring, Val was offered an opportunity by a publisher to spend his retirement writing books and living by the ocean, two things Val had wanted to do all of his life. Val declined, however; his love of writing was great but the thought of moving away from his lifelong friends and congregation was too much, he valued their friendship over his own interests.

I knew and worked with Val as his friend and veterinarian for seven years, a short time compared to many of his colleagues and friends. During that time, I came to admire him for all he did for aviculture and his fellow man. He always made time for me and spent hours relating the "early" days of aviculture, softbill and finch husbandry and his travels. Val loved to travel and we had planned a trip to the Manu Jungle in Peru this fall. Val kept a small but manageable collection of softbills in his house from which I learned to appreciate a segment of aviculture to which I would not have otherwise been exposed. As his veterinarian, I became proficient at surgically sexing three inch, 15 gram tanagers and diagnosing and treating two gram Hermit Hummingbirds.

Val loved his birds and aviculture and was deeply disturbed by recent trends in legislation restricting importation, regulation of captive breeding and enforcement. Even after his stroke, he never lost his concern for birds nor his sense of humor. While visiting him in the hospital, we discussed the current status of HR 5013 and the airline embargo. He also insisted that I continue with plans for our upcoming trip, joking that he would need me to carry his bags and push his wheelchair through the jungle.

I always felt a special kinship with Val. At his memorial service I learned that feeling was shared by hundreds of others as well. We, as aviculturists, have lost one of our most dedicated members. ●

Life with the Bird Man of Anderson, Indiana

by the sons of Val Clear . . .
Scott, Todd and Bruce

Val Clear, our dad, died on August 21; he was in the hospital, beginning the recovery from an earlier stroke, when he was stricken a second time, fatally.

Because he was a long-time contributor to this magazine, we, his sons, thought it appropriate to write this final column in his stead. We are helped by his good friend, Dr. Nicole Van der Heyden, a veterinarian and avian specialist, who writes his obituary.

Dad always surrounded himself with a family of birds. They were around before we came along, and they stayed with him long after we left to pursue our various careers, even after Mom died in 1981.

When he was a teenager, Dad saved the bus money his mother gave him in order to buy feed for his pet pigeons. He felt, we suppose, that a little discomfort was never much of a price to pay for the privilege of a life with birds. At the age of 77, he was still getting up at 4 a.m. every morning to spend a few hours with his birds, feeding and cleaning them, getting data to sustain his insatiable appetite for bird knowledge.

Growing up in a bird house can affect the way you see things. Most of our friends had normal pets: dogs or cats. We always had *birds!* Hundreds of them! Even the year we lived in Puerto Rico, when Dad took a sabbatical from his college teaching, we had to have birds. Dad raised parrots while we were there, and one of the first things he did was to construct a huge cage outside, put nectar in it, and rig up a wire trap to see if we could capture a wild hummingbird.

And, of course, the birds were not pets, in the normal meaning of the term. We didn't give them names, nor did we impute into them human-like personality characteristics, as most people do with their pets. We certainly did not become attached to these birds — after all, they were for sale.

So when you grow up in a house full of birds, business birds, it is like growing up on an urban farm. You don't see the animals as extensions of yourself, but as creatures in their own right, interesting not because of

how they relate to you, but because of what they are like.

I don't know how many times each of us would take a friend into *The Bird Room* for the first time, and smile with self-satisfaction at the inevitable "Wow!" "Gee!" or "Gosh!" Many of our friends would remember their visit to the bird room and mention it repeatedly, almost with a sense of admiration.

What this kind of response does to a young person is subtle, but profound. It says, "You can make your life special, different, interesting." Growing up in a town like Anderson (General Motors, Midwest, small-town self image), a houseful of birds reinforces risky choices, stretching the possibilities of life, doing something just because you want to, regardless of its eccentricity. As evidence of the effectiveness of this message, we offer the fact that our lives have taken us to Texas, New Jersey and Washington, respectively.

Some of our fondest "birdbrain-for-a-Dad" images:

- Dad trying to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to an albino parakeet that had suffocated from smoke inhalation in a small fire . . . with amazed firemen standing by, watching and stifling their laughter.

- Mom walking around the house, muttering about the way the birds seem to get first priority in everything.

- Contraptions. All manner of feeders, warmers, viewers, perchers, cagers, catchers, air purifiers, hospitalers, mediciners, and whatever else it took to keep birds alive and healthy.

- Huge, glorious, gorgeous bird books, packed with lovely, heavenly colors of wild cagebirds.

- Feathers everywhere — no matter what you try to do to keep the house clean, feathers abound. And seeds. And with this, other critters (moths, flies, ants, etc.) who appreciate the harvest.

- Many visitors we've never seen before, people not familiar to us, often unlike the church folks we mostly saw around the place.

Why does a man love birds?

There are probably several reasons. For Dad, we are certain that, at the core, there was a deep and abiding love of freedom. He believed in freedom, perhaps, more than he believed in any other thing.

When we say freedom, we do not

mean the frequently thin and vain self-aggrandizing appeals of so many self-proclaimed "patriots," who exalt freedom as reason why you should become just like them. No, Dad *really* believed in freedom.

In the days of "civil rights," he deeply felt the need for freedom, finally, to be granted to those among us descended of former slaves. More recently, as we are faced with a backlash against gay and lesbian neighbors, he felt strongly the obligation to allow every brother and sister the choice of living the personal, intimate life they would freely choose. As he felt free to practice his Christian faith, he felt committed to honoring the freedom of others to make and live their own choices, as they saw fit. In his last years, he dedicated his life to helping ex-offenders learn how to earn their freedom by living responsibly.

This is how Dad saw the world.

He saw it as a bird might: being able to go anywhere, be with anyone, sing aloud and strut the beautiful attributes gifted them at the hand of God. A person is meant to be free.

This, we learned, as children of a bird-man. ●

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