The Importance of Reading

by Linda M. O'Neill

Everett, Massachusetts

We are all told as children that reading enhances our life. I never came to find this more true than when I decided to purchase my first cockatiel. Always admiring the beauty of the cockatiel, I finally convinced my husband that I just had to have one so on our anniversary one year he led me to the pet store to choose which one I'd like.

Knowing nothing about cockatiels, I did know at least the basics of looking for a healthy bird. When I chose the most alert, attentive one there, the store clerk removed her from the cage and clipped her wings. I had never seen such a process before and was advised that this made it easier to train for a healthy bird. When I first saw her do this, she used a perch-stick. She clipped, she could still fly somewhat, that even though her wings were clipped, she could still fly somewhat, not enough to gain height, but well enough for me to have to chase her. Her perch training had begun down a long hall with all the doors shut with no where for her to go except by me. She realized that every time she flew to the floor from her perch, I was going to retrieve her and place her on the perch again. After a few of these ill-fated attempts, she gave up. Every time she did sit still she got a treat of millet spray or some loving from me.

She learned to sit so well that my husband constructed a playpen for her to sit on during the day. This was kept on my coffee table in the middle of the living room and this suited her just fine. She loved to be where the action was. She ended up becoming a regular member of the family, more so than a pet. The playpen consisted of a wooden swing, a spiral step ladder and a tall balance beam. There were cups available for special treats. She turned out to be a very healthy, happy cockatiel.

She developed a bond with me, (I spent most of my time with her and trained and tamed her alone.) We had a little deal going between us. She loved to have her head scratched, and I loved being kissed. So it always cost her a kiss for a scratch. I think that's pretty fair.

A couple of years later, she began laying eggs. She did not have a mate, nor was there another bird in the house. This got to be quite a problem because she would lay egg, after egg, after egg. This is where the reading began. I had talked to several different people in pet stores, and it seemed the more people I talked to the more confused I became. It seemed that no two people had the same answer or advice. I figured I would get my hands on everything I could concerning cockatiels. I borrowed books from the library, I subscribed to different magazines, and I sent away for mail-order books. After reading all the material I could, I then could form my own opinion on what the right treatment would be for each situation. If I had only done that first before I had purchased my cockatiel, I probably could have done things better. Not that I didn't meet with the same results, I would have just gotten there faster.

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Normal grey cockatiels at eight weeks of age. Sammi, female, at left and the male, Spanky, on the right.

her (she had since stopped laying eggs) and when she was four and the male was two, they began breeding. But this time I was ready for them! I read everything I could pertaining to the breeding of cockatiels. My husband constructed a breeding box for them which they began using within a couple of days from when it was put up. She ended up laying a clutch of six eggs. Unfortunately all were clear. She laid a second clutch of six eggs which were not fertile. I removed the breeding box to give the female a rest for a couple of months. To my surprise, they continued breeding in the cage without a box. She again laid a clutch of six eggs, and after candling them three were fertile and three were not. I let them continue their sitting right there in the corner of the cage. After approximately 19 days, the first chick hatched. The parents were very attentive in meeting this little one's needs.

Just when I thought all was well, when the little babies were three weeks old, I noticed both parents plucking out the feathers of the babies. Now I had read that as long as they were not doing any damage, they probably would stop. Not my two. It got to the point where they were being plucked constantly and to the point of a little bleeding. Sorry Mom, this is not acceptable, and off they came with me.

I removed the babies to their own cage, kept them warm (they had most of their feathers and this was summertime) and resumed handfeeding. Only now I was an expert, right? I used two separate eyedroppers, one for each, and it was the funniest thing to see. I would alternate between them (one for this one, one for that one, one for this one, etc.). But if I ever made the mistake of giving two mouthfuls to the same bird, the other would grab the dropper and try to get it in his mouth. I swear he could count! He'd do it all the time.

Well, that was a year ago in April, and I am proud to say that I have two of the most beautiful normal grey cockatiel babies as you can tell from the story, one male (Spanky) and one female (Sammi) that anyone could ask for. They enjoy their days hanging out with Mom (Pretty) and Dad (Simon) on their various perches getting plenty of exercise, love, and some of their favorite treats. All four get along great, one big happy family, after all, isn't this the year of strong family values? I think I read that somewhere!