

"My Name is Laurie" by Arlene King

"My name is Laurie, I am over 60 years old and I like cookies, pancakes, sunflower seeds and sauerkraut." That was the note attached to the cage at Scheller's bird farm in Pennsylvania that my husband and I visited from time to time. Inside the cage was a blue-fronted Amazon parrot, hunched down on the perch and babbling incoherently.

"What's the story?" I asked Mr. Scheller. He replied that two elderly ladies had just entered a nursing home, and having nobody to give their bird to, had asked him to take the bird and put it to sleep. They had been given the bird as a pet 60 years earlier and were quite upset at the thought of giving it up.

The bird was quite nasty, Mr. Scheller said, but he just didn't have the heart to put it to sleep. He was just going to let it live out its years at his bird farm.

The thought of this "old lady" having to live out her years among hundreds of other birds, after 60 years of pampered treatment by two women who loved her just didn't seem right and made me feel sad. She deserved a better end than that. Without even checking with my husband, I impulsively decided that I would like to have the "old lady" so that whatever time she had left would be happy and contented. I asked Mr. Scheller what he wanted for the bird, and cold-blooded businessman that he was, he replied, "You can have her for free if you give her a good home and take care of her." I was overjoyed, and when I told my husband, who was standing nearby, what I had just done he said, "You know, I was just thinking of

buying that bird so we could give it a good home." Two minds with a single thought!

When we got Laurie home in her new cage, we were able to see just what we had gotten ourselves into. She had asthma, arthritis of the feet, nails that probably hadn't been clipped in years, clogged nares, and a chest that was clearly visible through the feathers. Clearly, I had problems, and I decided to tackle them one at a time.

I considered fattening her up to be the number one priority and began a feeding program immediately. I started by preparing a special mix consisting of dry baby cereal, hot water, almond meal, strained baby vegetables and baby egg yolk. I would take a glob of the mixture on my finger and just plop it inside her beak. This "nasty" bird would just stand there and gobble it up. I feed her this mixture four times a day. I also give her parrot mix (which she really doesn't care for) and canned dietetic corn (without sugar or salt) which she loves. She also gets peanut butter (hang the price!) on a piece of bread and various other treats. I have not yet found the courage to give her sauerkraut!

Having established a feeding program that seemed to be working, I next turned to her other problems. I cleared out her clogged nares and having noticed that her breathing was rather heavy I decided to try "inhalation therapy." I took her into the bathroom, closed the door and turned on the hot water in the shower. In a few minutes the bathroom was filled with steam and darned if Laurie didn't start breathing easier. I did this daily for about a

week and she really started to improve.

It has been several months now since Laurie came to live with us and she is my favorite. This "nasty" bird is perfectly hand-tame and steps up on my fingers when I want to take her out of her cage. Every evening she sits on my arm or shoulder while my husband and I watch T.V. in our bedroom and she babbles away, content and happy. There is only one problem — if I leave her alone on the bed with my husband she attacks him. That's right, she lowers her head, spreads her wings and runs at him. He does not stick around to find out what she would do if she got to him, but jumps quickly out of bed. It may be that after living with two elderly ladies for over 60 years, habits are hard to change •

Photo submitted by author



*Arlene King
and Laurie,
the "old lady."*

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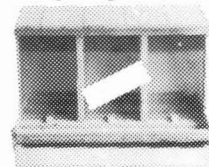
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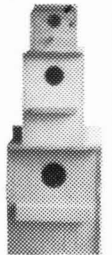
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