



Pedro, male green-cheeked Amazon.

Confessions of an Addict: (a love story)

*by Sherry Rind
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When my husband brought home my first parrot, he was not aware of my murky history. He knew I had wanted a parrot since childhood, after seeing a yellowhead in a friend's home, but he could not know his gift was feeding an old addiction. I will now confess the whole story, not to him for reasons I will reveal later, but to my fellow addicts.

When a child, I was not allowed to keep a bird, not even a chicken (I now have a dozen). My family owned and sometimes raised dogs and cats but I wanted something of my own, even if not a bird. I reached the advanced age of nine before Mother believed I would, as promised, take care of my pet. She bought me a hamster.

That is how the addiction began. With the hamster came the desire to know more. So I read books about hamsters and the books told about breeding hamsters. I bought another hamster. You can guess what happens with a judicious mixing of a male and female hamster.

Then, as is usual with an addiction, I escalated my dosage. It began innocently enough. While out running errands, we happened to pass the animal shelter. My mother knew that one way to temporarily quiet her four



Even when not actively demolishing the sunflower, Pita guards her prize.

Photos by Sherry Rind

active, argumentative children was to take us in to see the owls who lived in the shelter in a large, glassed-in aviary. We would stand still for several minutes—a long time for a child—waiting for one to move.

Fate was waiting for me that day because, along with owls, I saw guinea pigs. Unlike the owls, the guinea pigs were for sale. Mother, bless her, decided guinea pigs were cute, much cuter than hamsters. I picked out a large grey one with a white belly and dark eyes and paid what I had on me, twenty-five cents.

Hitting the books again only fed my desire for more guinea pigs and provided me with the knowledge to determine the female sex of the one I had. I embarked on a devious course, acquiring a male pig by getting my older brother hooked so that he wanted one of his own.

The grey female and black male produced one black and one white offspring, born with eyes open, floppy ears sticking straight up, a complete coat of fur, and the ability to run around right away. The utter enchantment! I had to have more! Long hair, short hair, brown, rust, calico, black, white, grey. I got the numbers up to twenty-one before my family clamped down on my habit.

My parents finally did wise up and when I acquired a pony, they made sure it was gelded.

A few years later, I embarked on a ten-year period of aberration. I started college and lived in a dormitory, then a city apartment. No pets allowed. Some vestige of my desire to multiply things must have clung to my psyche, for I felt that one degree was not enough and had to go on for another. Unfortunately, the two have yet to produce much of anything.

When I again found myself living in a house, the old addiction gradually crept back. I began watching and then feeding birds outside the kitchen window. I remarked—multiple times—that I would like to have a pet bird, just one little bird. My boyfriend bought a light green budgie for my birthday.

I really had John fooled as to my true nature. Even though I later bought a second budgie, I did not attempt to breed them, knowing that trying to sell them would be as difficult as trying to sell mongrel dogs or guinea pigs. I did read every budgie book I could find. All the signs of a building addiction were there but John did not know how to read them. He married me without knowing what was in store.

He even bought me a parrot after

multiple, wistful remarks about how much I had always wanted one. Pico, a green cheek Amazon, arrived while I was still wondering if I dared go out and get one for myself. I went after the books again, joined a bird club, joined the AFA. I began dropping into pet stores, just to look. I saw the occasional green cheek but none as good looking as mine until I saw Pedro and knew I had to have him.

I kept the two parrots on opposite ends of the house for a few months, then in cages side by side. Soon after the first time I let them out together, they were friends, sitting side by side, preening. They were happy together, good companions. I could watch them play and not worry about their being lonely when I was not home. Even my husband was happy because Pico stopped trying to call in the flock from Mexico every morning and evening. (Since Washington is a long way from Mexico, you can imagine how loud he was.)

My addiction, which had been dormant for so long, now blossomed. Not only were two parrots not enough, but also the more I learned about them, the more I believed that I had an obligation to breed them, not to mention the desire. I had them surgically sexed and discovered they were both males. I embarked on the difficult search for females while learning about breeding in a cooperative venture with Timneh African greys owned by myself and two friends.

Then I found Pita, the sweetest, gentlest wild-caught Amazon I have yet encountered. She would have made a wonderful pet but an addiction is stronger even than love. I introduced her to Pico, the gentler of the two males. Pico is slowly transferring his affections away from Pedro. He is not yet as crazy about Pita as I am but there are some promising signs, some tentative preening and cooing. Flight cage and nest box, here we come.

Pedro is now alone. Very attached to humans, he has obviously been a pet from an early age. He likes my company but I worry about him. I do not like seeing him alone. I cannot help myself, I *must* find a hen for Pedro. You see, I now know that the hamsters, guinea pigs, dogs, cats and others were only an apprenticeship. Birds are my destiny.

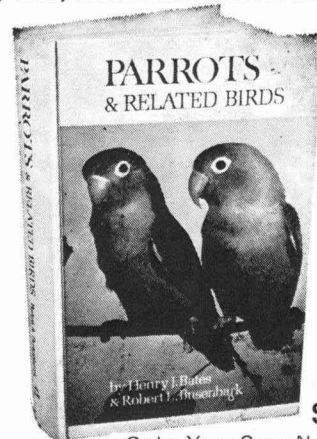
I tell my husband that I only want to breed two pairs of Amazons and keep one Timneh for a pet. The poor man believes me. He does not fully understand the escalating force of an addiction. I hope he never catches on. ●

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