

The Evolution of a Small Time Gouldian Breeder

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We had always had the pet store canary in his ten-story wicker cage from Pier I hanging in the corner of the dining room. He was all we had time to care for in those days with our jobs consuming most of the day. He sang his heart out for years until the day came when the three members of our household walked through the new mall and the new pet store. It wasn't until we arrived home that my husband asked why we hadn't considered purchasing the lovebirds while we were in the pet store. After my son and I picked ourselves up off the floor we realized that he was serious. Yes, we had looked at the birds, but mostly the tortoise shell kitten. And so began the search to find something a little less noisy than lovebirds, colorful and able to fit in the same cage.

I began by calling our local veterinarian who advised me of Dr. Frank Lavac, Jr., an avian specialist in Santa Monica. Dr. Lavac was very busy, but kind enough to give me a nutshell of information and the phone number of Charlotte Nierenberg of the West Valley Bird Society. A call to Charlotte resulted in much more information and an invitation to the meeting of West Valley the following week. In the meantime, not wanting my husband to think we didn't like his idea of getting a lovebird, my son and I went to several pet shops to see what was available. We brought home two Orange-checked Waxbills.

As luck, or fate, would have it, the first West Valley meeting I attended had as its speaker a person speaking on Gouldians... already guessed that, right? That was it! Those were the ones! They would fit together communally, look gorgeous and not drive me crazy while I worked on my in house bookkeeping jobs.

Of course, I joined the WVBS and soon learned that the cage my two finches and canary were in was all wrong. He (the canary) had lived (I thought) happily in his domain for many years. Wicker, I learned, never cleans up well and was probably teeming with bugs. So my son and I made our first trip out to the Pomona Bird Mart. It was quite overwhelming. We did give Dad the courtesy of a phone call to ask permission to buy

the 2' x 3' x 6' tall cage which filled up the back of our old wagon. The phone lines were somehow busy, though, when we needed to call Dad to say that someone was selling a male Gouldian finch. So, clutched in a small cage on my son's lap, our first Gouldian and first cage with pull-out tray rattling, we made our way home down the endless freeway.

Back at the WVBS some months later, I was introduced to Lue Mahin. She raised Gouldians. She promised me a female Gouldian as soon as she had an extra. About six months after we bought Freckles (his head wasn't quite colored out and looked freckled when we got him) we acquired Miss Piggy (her favorite place in the cage was always next to a little parakeet mirror).

Lue was a wonderful source of information. She gave freely of her time for which I can't thank her enough. She gave me the courage to put a nest box in the cage some months later and her husband even made it for me with its little porch. She suggested I put a salt ring in for them. In the five or six years I have had one in the cage, I can't see that it has caused a problem. They do use it perhaps to keep from dehydrating in our warmer weather. She showed me how to fill the nest box with shavings under a piece of burlap (washed of course) with long grasses circled on top and 1-1/2" pieces of stringed burlap in the center. She showed me what seeds they ate, how to soak some for extra protein, to give them egg shell, a piece of brown bread or corn muffin and greens. I added the vitamins sprinkled on top of the seed and a Vita-light because the cage sits in a dark corner of the dining room.

Freckles and Piggy went on to have many children. I eventually added another pair to that cage with the Orange-checked and canary. The cage sat in a corner of the room next to louvered windows by a patio. Hating to carry water dishes across the carpet every day, I figured out how to bring the drip system water that I used for the plants on the patio through the bottom louver and into a large plant saucer which sat on top of a rubbermaid storage box. I cut many

holes in the lid of the storage box so that the water would drain into the box. In the corner of the box I made a hole and attached a very long piece of tygon tubing which drained the water back out into the patio through the louvered window. After setting the timer to bring in the water twice a day, I only had to wash out the saucer and lid once a week. Life was good.

My beautiful little birds were bringing me peace with their lovely song and now just enough money to cover their bird seed! I had a new hobby. I added two Cordon Bleus to the cage and a pair of Owl Finches. Life was even better, but the cage was now too small. Back to the builders of the first cage for a new one. This one took up the entire corner of the dining room. And when needed, the old one was rolled in beside it to house the fledglings and pairs that weren't supposed to breed. We didn't have many people to dinner during those years. My little Gouldians have fared very well. People say they are very healthy looking. I did lose a couple of hens due to egg binding. I now try to get extra calcium into them.

A few years ago, Lue Mahin moved to a quieter part of the country and a new friend came into my life. Nancy Vigran has been on the other end of my phone enough hours to start our own phone company. She is as good as a walking avian encyclopedia for me. There is always something coming up with birds no matter how big or small they may be. Thank goodness "bird people" are willing to share what information they know. And thank goodness Nancy is there.

So for many years, I had the system worked out perfectly in the corner of my dining room. The trouble was that the hobby outgrew the space. This July, my husband had the patio enclosed into a sun room for me. All the birds were moved out there. I lost the babies in the nest boxes in the move. It was an awful week. I am learning how to deal with the sun overhead and the temperature changes one week at a time. I just ordered damp chaser sticks (like the ones they put under pianos) for the sides of the bird cages as there is no heat at night. The nest boxes just went back in. Only in southern homes can you put nest boxes back in in November and actually expect success. And so we move on to the next episode and adventures in the breeding of Gouldians. ●