

# "All That and a Bouquet of Flowers"

## The Story of A First Timer at the AFA Annual Convention

by Stacey Ewell, Suffolk, Virginia

I can honestly say that I have never, in all my life, attended a group gathering such as the AFA Convention 2001 and returned with such a feeling of success and jubilation. Prior to my attendance at the convention, I was concerned as I did not expect to know many people there. When I read the *Watchbird* article by Jenni Jackson of Loxahatchee, Florida, I felt totally consoled as all my anxieties had been relieved. In her article, published in Volume XXVIII, Number 3, 2001, Jenni had

"My feeling of isolation had been my own fault – it was my doing and no one else's." Jenni's remarks gave me the determination to attend the convention with an open mind and the drive that would carry me forward with a positive attitude.

It all began on Tuesday outside of the Galveston Room of the JW Marriott Hotel during a break for the AFA Board of Directors Meeting. I extended my hand, along with an introduction of myself, to Benny Gallaway, AFA President and Janis Clark, AFA Vice President. I apologized for my intrusion into their conversation and explained: "Hello, I am Stacey Ewell of Suffolk, Virginia and I am a 'first timer.' I wanted to make sure and introduce myself after having read an article published in the *a.f.a. Watchbird*. I am very interested in becoming more active in the AFA organization and hope to be working with you both at some point in the future."

Sitting here writing this short synopsis of my experiences now,

this introduction still seems more than forward on my part, but I can assure you it was welcomed and accommodated over and over again in the days that followed.

My next big adventure was to approach and introduce myself to Darryl Styles, M.S., D.V.M. I explained that in addition to being a member of AFA, I was on the Board of Directors for Bird Clubs of Virginia who will be holding their annual convention in March, 2002 at the Renaissance Hotel in Portsmouth, Virginia. I had recent-

Photos by Mona Tuomi



Jean (the African Queen) Pattison, fore and aft. Jean specializes in African Parrots – in the aviary and in the wardrobe.



Stacey Ewell, author of this article.

touched a place close to my heart with her description of her circumstances and anxieties prior to and during her attendance at the last AFA convention. She related that in a phone conversation with her husband from her hotel room, she realized

ly contacted Dr. Styles by e-mail with an invitation to speak at our convention to which he had graciously accepted. I was very happy to make his acquaintance in person and looked forward to his upcoming visit to our convention. Dr. Styles expression immediately lit up with a huge smile and a welcoming handshake.

I continued throughout the convention to greet people and introduce myself. This led to many heartwarming experiences, one after





Convention 2001 collage by M.J.Hessler and S. L. Dingle.





*L to R: For the first time in 27 years, daughter Starr Cratty and mom Laura Balderson enjoyed a reunion at the Convention. Starr lives in McMinnville TN and Laura lives in Tucson, AZ.*

the other, which built my confidence and erased my anxieties. My dream of becoming a member of the AFA family was realized! This is what AFA has become for me, a family of many different people from all walks of life, sharing common interests and goals in aviculture. Thank heavens this is a short article so "you guys," (okay, I am from the south) don't have to be subjected to the story of every introduction I made at the convention. As I am writing about my experiences now, the memories of the "gush and joyful experience" bring tears to my eyes.

When I returned to my room that evening, I found the most beautiful arrangement of flowers delivered to my room, sent by my husband Kenny, whom I had left behind to keep the home front in order. He also had read Jenni's article after hearing me giggle from behind the pages of the *Watchbird*. This arrangement of flowers remained the focal point of my heart and provided an excellent corsage for both myself and Laurella Desborough, Legislative Vice President, for the banquet on Saturday evening.

There are several other persons whom I must mention that I met during my excursions at the convention, one of whom is Lyrae Perry. After I expressed my delight with Jenni Jackson's article to Lyrae, she insisted that I repeat my story to Benny Gallaway, who immediately



*Convention wine tasting challenge between 2001 host state Texas and 2002 host state Florida. Hummmmmmm, this stuff must be some kind of fermented palmetto juice. L to R: top, dispenser of liquid samples - Dwight Greenberg, score keeper - Bob Chambers, tasters - Lisa Albright, Gamini Ratnavira, and Randy Kirkpatrick.*

Photos by Sheldon Dingle




*Genevieve Wall with artist Wayne E. Smyth. Genevieve was the highest bidder and took Wayne's framed theme art of Saint Vincent's Amazons home with her.*

requested that I write an article for next year's publication. Thank you Lyrae and Benny for your confi-

dence in me and your support. Also, I must mention Sheldon Dingle, who saw to it that I was



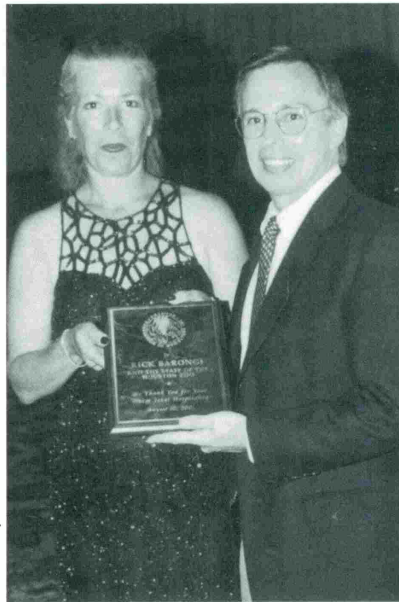
properly introduced to Jenni Jackson, the author of the 'first timer' article which had so profoundly affected me. This was probably the funniest experience of all! I was delighted to meet the person who had brought me "out of my shell" so to speak. As we walked over to meet her, I began to realize that the Jenni I had met on the first day of the convention and had enjoyed talking with every day since, was the same Jenni Jackson whom I had been bragging about to everyone at the convention! What a happy surprise. Thank you Sheldon and Jenni.

In closing, I feel the need to express my special thanks to each and every individual I met at the convention. Everyone saw to it that I felt totally comfortable and a member of the AFA family. There is no doubt that I will be attending future conventions. I am going to share with all the folks I know, that not only was this an educational experience, but one of the warmest experiences of my lifetime. 

*Janis Clark presented an award to Rick Barongi, Zoo Director, representing the staff of the Houston Zoo which sponsored an excellent tour and barbecue for AFA members.*



*L to R: Pat Weeks, Debra Baranyai, Gail Martin, Jenni Jackson, Stacy Ewell, Mona Tuomi. All are first timers but Jenni, whose article encouraged the others.*



*Two AFA presidents. L to R: Robert J. Berry received a rare gift from AFA's past (brass and enameled belt buckle) from current president Benny Gallaway.*



*An annual event, swearing in of the AFA board members. L to R: Dwight Greenberg, Darrel Styles, Sandee Molenda, Benny Gallaway, Natalie Frumin-Weiss, Yvonne Catena, Paul Robben, Nancy Speed, Lyrae Perry, Brent Andrus, Wanda Elder, Jerry Johnson, Jim Hawley.*