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WATCHBIRD STAFF

Sheldon Dingle/Editor (714) 734-7448

M. Jean Hessler/Art Director,
Production (714) 548-3133

Sylvia Mahon/Production
Assistant (714) 556-8425

Susan Dingle/Assistant to Editor (714) 734-7448

Ted Hearsely/Advertising (213) 395-8847

birth on our balcony

by Ross S. Yosnow
Torrance, California

As a child, I never had any pets. Oh we once had a parakeet for a couple of weeks, but my mother gave it to the man who came to paint our apartment. After that I had some fish for about five minutes, and my sister had a gerbil for about as long, but that was it. My parents were not "pet people," so neither was I. That's part of why I live in the city.

My wife is pretty much the same way. She grew up in an apartment in New York, and although she once had a dog, and still occasionally claims to want one, her parents quickly decided that it was too neurotic to keep. As an adult, she's turned her nurturing talents to friends and plants, while I prefer to occupy myself with writing and televised sports.

So a few weeks ago, as I sat watching basketball while Linda watered the plants on our balcony, I couldn't imagine what she wanted from me as she stood at the screen door, frantically trying to get me to leave my favorite sports-watching recliner and join her outdoors. "What is it?" I cried, to no avail. "You've got to see this," she whispered.

When I finally dragged myself outside, Linda was standing by the ficus, staring intently. My first thought was that she had stumbled upon two creatures in the throes of passion, but as I got closer to the plant I saw why my wife was so enthralled. There in our ficus, sitting completely still, was a beautiful hummingbird.

At first we just looked at each other with our mouths open. Although we aren't bird experts, neither of us could ever remember seeing a hummingbird sit so still. As we approached the plant I guess we startled her, because she flew away, revealing a perfect nest and two little eggs.

Although I know nothing about our feathered friends, I've seen enough National Geographic specials to know not to touch the nest or eggs. Instead, I called my father, who, although he has no use for dogs or cats, has long been a nature-lover and bird watcher. He told me that, inasmuch as I had no intention of springing for a feeder, the next best thing was to put sugar-water in a plastic container, add food-coloring to get the bird's attention, and leave it where she

could find it.

Easy enough, I thought. We'll feed her for awhile, she'll hatch the kids and fly off. But I never considered how attached Linda and I would get to our new "pet." Over the next few weeks we were out there every day checking on "mom" and her eggs, making sure that no potential predators were around. She started getting used to us, too. After the first few days she would no longer fly away when we approached the nest, but would calmly sit there, staring at us, no doubt wondering just who these nuts were.

For the next few weeks we acted like proud parents, dragging every friend who came over out to our balcony to see our latest interest. They too were awed at how still mom sat in her nest. After about a month our caring was rewarded. We had our first child, and named him/her Junior. Here was this tiny mess of brown fur and feathers, no more than an inch long, and we loved it. But we were worried about the fact that the other egg still hadn't hatched. How long, we wondered, would that one take?

As the days slipped by, the second egg just laid there, taking up space that Junior would need to grow. Then one day, we learned something about nature. Early one morning, we went out for what had by now become our regular pre-breakfast check-up to find that the second egg had disappeared; without a trace. So much for the chances of slow starters in this world.

With the second egg gone, Junior grew quickly. Within a couple of weeks he/she was as big as mom. Several times a day we would hear them talking to each other, and we'd run outside to find the youngster being fed in the nest. But as far as we could tell, Junior still had not attempted to fly.

Then last week, we awoke to screeching from our balcony. When we went outside it wasn't mom doing the yelling, but a beautiful red and green hummingbird that we figured was dad. Dad was poking Junior in what seemed to be an attempt to get the youngster to fly, but Junior seemed totally uninterested. As we approached the nest, dad flew off, leaving Junior to sit and stare at us.

At this point, I feel compelled to

digress for a moment to mention the fact that my wife, Linda, has always been a catalyst for friends who want to change their lives. Ten years ago she was the first in her group of friends to change careers, and since then, many of them have followed. I mention this to demonstrate that she is the kind of person capable of giving others a needed shove to get them started.

So when we got near the ficus, it was Linda that tugged ever-so-slightly on the branch that held the nest. With that, Junior flew out of the nest, looked around, and took off to parts unknown, never to be seen again.

During the next few days mom came back a few times, looking lost. We checked the nest every now and then, but all we found were a few feathers. Now we don't bother much any more; our lives have returned to normal. But I won't say we don't miss them. Every time we hear birds we still look out on the balcony. And I've recently begun to feel empathy for parents whose children leave the house, frequently resulting in what is correctly termed the "empty nest" syndrome. ●



AAV Annual Conference Scheduled for Sept. 26, '88

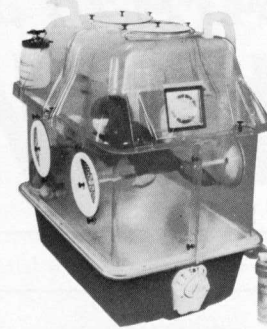
The Association of Avian Veterinarians Annual Conference will be held September 26 through October 1, 1988 at the Adams Mark Hotel, Houston, Texas. Contact Sylvia Kornelsen, AAV Conference Office, 1625 S. Birch, Suite 106, Denver, Colorado 80222 or phone (303) 756-8380.

Call For Papers

The Association of Avian Veterinarians is accepting proposals for clinically oriented case reports, comprehensive reviews or wet labs on avian medical or surgical topics. Material must be original and previously unpublished. Papers will be presented September 26 through October 2, 1988 in Houston, Texas. Send brief abstract to AAV Conference Office, 1625 S. Birch, Suite 106, Denver, Colorado 80222. Phone (303) 756-8380. **Deadline: March 1, 1988.**

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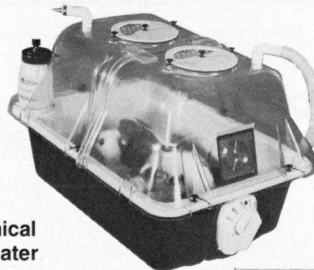
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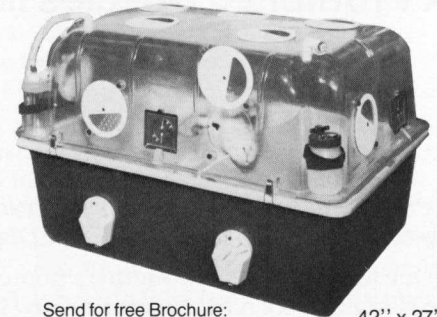
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