

Good Night, Sweet Brenda

by Jami Kennedy
Newhall, California

I guess no matter how many birds we have or how many birds we breed and sell, there will always be a very few special ones. The first birds we bred in any quantity were the ever popular cockatiels. Brenda was one of my hand fed babies.

About three years ago, out of a clutch of four, one pink-eyed lutino baby stood out. She was meeker and smaller than the rest, and long after her clutch mates were weaned and ready for sale, this little one just wouldn't wean. My husband and the pet shop where I take a number of my babies have always accused me of being too soft for my own good when it comes to weaning my babies. (My husband tried to convince me that one of my Blue and Gold Macaws was eight months old when it weaned, but I told him he must be mistaken.) This little cockatiel cried and bobbed

all the time, even when she was full. We nicknamed her Brenda Starved, and the name Brenda just stuck. I never sold Brenda because, you see, she never weaned completely. From the beginning I could see that she was fragile, and even though she finally ate seed and the mixed vegetables I offered all my babies, she still cried for food. When she was 12 weeks old, I tried just ignoring her for three days, but she lost weight and cried constantly. I just accepted the fact that I had another "pet" on my hands and didn't sell her. For the first two years she lived a good life, along with another normal cockatiel I kept who had feathers like fur (named Kitty, of course), and they had the free run of the baby room. We moved into our present home a little over a year ago, and Brenda and Kitty adjusted to the new facility at last. They flew from the bird room into the adjacent kitchen where their cage and food was kept. One day, while we were at work, Brenda happened to land on the cage of a pair of Amazons who had been brought into the house temporarily while their flight outside was under renovation. This was a bad move on our part to begin with, and a bad move on Brenda's part as well. When we arrived home, Brenda had a badly chewed foot. I rushed her out to our veterinarian and he decided that the foot was too badly chewed to save. Brenda had her foot amputated at the ankle. This left just enough stub for her to stand on, when it healed. The healing process was long and slow. For the first few weeks it was touch and go, and Brenda had no desire to eat. She didn't eat seed, vegetables, or cry for food when I hand-fed. I was worried, to say the least. She lost weight, and even though I force fed her four times a day, she threw most of it up and she grew weaker. I took her back to the vet, and he told me I would have to feed her smaller amounts every two hours, around the clock, until she gained her strength back. So, I set the clock at night, got up every two hours, took her to work with me in an incubator, and even took her to club meetings I attended for my various community activities. She became a regular attendee at these meetings, and one

particular club which was currently meeting once or twice a week to plan a special community event, made her an honorary member of the committee. Everyone stopped by to say hello, and though she was still very weak and not eating on her own at this time, she seemed to relish the attention. This continued for six weeks, and I fought with my conscience over thoughts of having her put to sleep because she didn't seem to be getting any better. My daughter even rigged up a hammock made with a diaper and held up with a pair of old suspenders hung around her neck so Brenda could go around the house with Denise as she did her housework. Brenda seemed genuinely comforted by this closeness.

One evening I did my usual check on Brenda and I found her nibbling on the seed inside her incubator. The family jumped for joy, and though she resumed her eating on her own, I continued to hand feed her three times a day. I finally removed her from the incubator, and the bandage covering her stump was removed. She learned to hobble around quite nicely, but she preferred to be carried from place to place, and would readily fly to anyone who was available and lay in their hand and make baby noises. She was spoiled rotten and she didn't care who knew it. A problem arose when we noticed that because she listed to the side of the good foot, a callous of sorts was forming on that good foot. The bottom of the stump was also reddened. I finally figured out what to do. I bought a package of those sponge nose pads for glasses, cut them in two pieces, one third and two thirds, peeled off the backing, and applied to the stump and foot. She had a time getting used to these but, ultimately, they saved her lots of pain, she had "traction" again, and that nasty callous subsided. If the pads fell off, I simply applied a new set. One day, a mobile veterinarian came to our ranch to do an annual check-up on our emus. He noticed Brenda and I told him her sad story. He thought we should find out why Brenda felt the need to be supplemented with hand-feeding at three years of age. He did a blood panel and a few days later I called for the results. I was told Brenda had hypoglycemia. Her blood sugar was too low, and she didn't assimilate her food properly. I was told to get some sucrose to sprinkle on Brenda's food. This I did,

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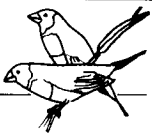
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and applied it liberally. I had for quite some time been sprinkling pancrea-
 zyme on the food, as I was instructed
 to do by my regular avian vet. All this
 didn't seem to help. Brenda ate well,
 flew from room to room, but still
 wished to be babied and held con-
 stantly and, of course, hand fed.

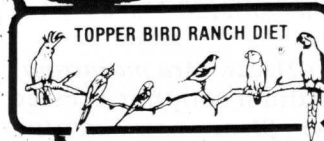
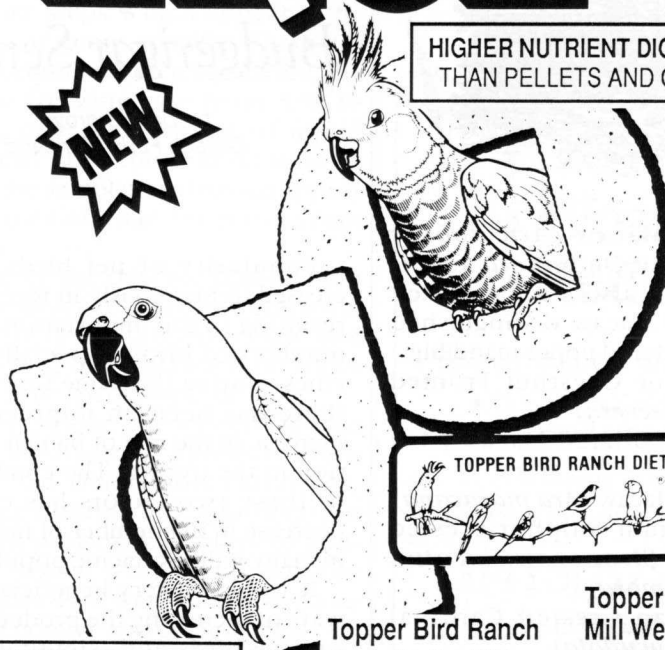
My husband and I attended the AFA
 convention in Phoenix in August
 1989 and left the birds in the capable
 hands of our daughter, her boyfriend,
 and our boarder. We checked in daily
 to see that all was well at home, and
 we were assured the house was still
 standing and the birds were all okay.
 On Sunday morning, the day we were
 to come home, I was awakened at
 5 a.m. by a faint crying. I sat up and
 listened but I couldn't really identify
 the sound. It sounded too strong to
 be a mouse, too weak to be a cat or
 puppy, and I knew it wasn't a baby.
 The faint sound continued for about
 half an hour, on and off. It seemed to
 be in the room but really not in the
 room. After half an hour, the sound
 stopped and I went back to sleep until
 7 a.m. When I awoke, I told my
 husband and the couple with whom
 we were sharing the suite about my
 experience and there was the usual
 tittering and comments about my san-
 ity from the men. We all just let the
 subject go. When we returned home
 that evening, our daughter informed
 us that sometime between 2 a.m. and
 7 a.m. on Sunday morning, Brenda
 had died. When our daughter went
 into the baby room at 7 a.m. to feed,
 Brenda lay dead on the floor. There
 was no sign of blood or foul play; she
 had just slipped away. It seems that
 Brenda had been feeling under the
 weather all day Saturday, and she
 showed no interest in being hand-fed
 at the 11 p.m. feeding. My daughter
 just passed her by and thought no
 more about it. When she found
 Brenda dead that morning, she
 wondered how in the world to
 tell me!

I buried Brenda right beside the
 sign by our front gate which wel-
 comes visitors to our ranch. Chalk it
 up to the ravings of a much-involved
 mother hen, but in spite of the
 ribbing I have been getting, I con-
 tinue to believe that that faint cry I
 heard in my room (but not *really* in
 the room) was Brenda saying good-
 bye to me. I raised her, doctored her,
 and nurtured her and she knew that
 in our home she was loved. Good
 night, sweet Brenda, I will always
 remember you. ●

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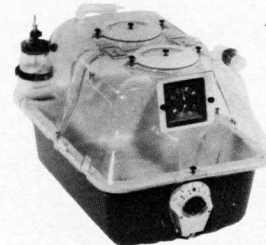
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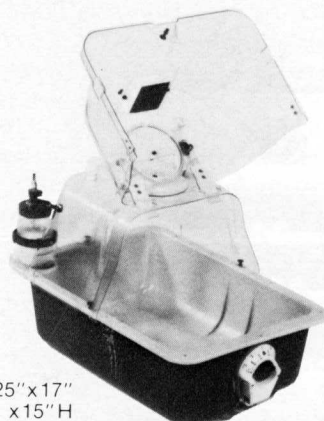
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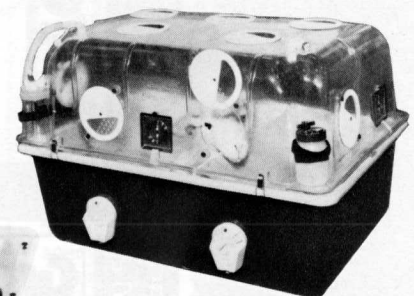
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