

A Supernatural Visit

by Frederick Wickert



In January of 1987 my wife and I saw an advertisement that was of interest to us. A Blue-fronted Amazon parrot was being offered for sale. We had purchased a Double yellow headed Amazon two months before and thought it a good thing to obtain another as a companion.

I called the number and got an answering machine. As I was leaving a message a man answered the phone. We talked for a few minutes and made arrangements to travel to Albany, New York to see the bird.

When we arrived we met John, who was a bachelor and a schoolteacher. He loved and was involved in music and he had three birds. One was a Military Macaw he named Augie. Another was a Moluccan Cockatoo and the third was a small blue Front Amazon named Barbara.

Barbara was the bird we came to see, and we learned that Barbara and Augie were close friends and often played together and mutually groomed each other. John was selling Barbara to get enough money towards the purchase of a Blue and Gold baby macaw that he wanted badly. We liked Barbara and agreed to purchase her.

When we got Barbara home she wasted no time becoming a treasured member of the family. Barbara is a highly talented bird. She has a considerable vocabulary in English, and she could speak a little French and Latin. She can whistle several tunes. She is also acrobatic. She has a sweet loving nature. She and our Double yellow-headed Amazon do not like each other, so she became our companions rather than his. I wrote a letter to John and told him I thought he was a fool to have sold Barbara, and that he could never get her back, even with a million dollars.

My wife, Tae and I frequented a shop in a Schenectady, NY suburb called Niskayuna. It was called "Joan's Exotic birds." We came to know Joan and her daughter Terry well and became friends. Joan had sold Barbara to John as a baby, and she also sold him the Blue and Gold Macaw he wanted so badly. He named the bird Andrew, and we occasionally saw him at Joan's shop. It was our custom to visit Joan's shop every Saturday.

The Military Macaw, Augie was jealous of Andrew and became mean to John. John feared him and brought him to Joan, asking her to sell him on consignment. Joan and Augie fell in love. Everywhere Joan went in the shop, Augie followed her, and rode around on her shoulder at every opportunity. Joan had some other birds in the shop that were her personal pets.

In March, 1987 Joan was having flown in, a number of baby birds from around the country. She needed to restock her supply of baby birds to be sold as pets. Among them were two Yellow-naped Amazons she purchased from a breeder in California. They were placed in a back room separated by a fire door from the rest of the shop. They were kept in empty fish aquariums, and whenever they were handled, Joan and Terry washed their hands with Clorox before going out into the store with the other birds.

One of the new babies began showing signs of illness. The vet was called. The vet took the sick bird to her place and did some tests. The bird tested positive for Exotic Newcastle disease. Newcastle is sometimes called Parrot Fever. It is highly contagious and deadly. The bird shop was placed on quarantine. They were allowed to stay open for business as usual except that none of the birds were allowed to leave the shop, including some boarded birds. Within twenty-four hours the second baby became sick and it too tested positive for new Castle disease. Both birds died.

On March 30th, the USDA came in the shop. At closing time, they took each of the birds in Joan's shop to the basement, put them in a plastic bag and put a hose in the bag and gassed the birds to death. Fifty birds were destroyed that night.

The first bird they took was Augie. He fought and screamed all the way, causing great fear and panic in the other birds.

At home more than fifty miles away, Barbara was playing on the swing I had installed for her in an archway going from the kitchen into another room. At what we learned the next day was the very same time Augie was being killed, Barbara suddenly stopped playing.

A confused expression came on Barbara's face. In English, Barbara said, "Hi Augie. Whatcha doin'?" She repeated those words three times. She then said, "Bye Bye." She continued to look confused, even slightly dazed for a minute or two, and then resumed playing on the swing. Twice more, a week or two apart, Barbara paused in what she was doing and spoke to Augie as if he were right there. Twenty years have gone by since that took place, and Barbara has never again given any sign of a visit from Augie.

We know that Augie visited Barbara in spirit at the exact time of his death. How he knew where to find her, we will never understand, but find her he did. He visited her twice more and then was forever gone. Will they meet again when Barbara passes away? I like to believe that they will.

Investigation revealed the infected birds had been smuggled into the United States and sold to a dealer as domestic bred birds. On April 22, 1987 five persons were arrested for smuggling three hundred baby Yellow-naped Amazons into the United States. The Department of Agriculture reports that one hundred and two of these babies were infected with Newcastle disease. Birds were destroyed in three states because of it.

In the early 1970's an outbreak of this disease in California, took almost three years to eradicate. It cost nearly \$56 million and resulted in the destruction of twelve million chickens, turkeys and other poultry and exotic birds. This time the investigation covered thirty-three states and resulted in the destruction of the birds at fourteen different premises, including Joan's Exotic Birds.

For those of us who love these exotic birds, it was a holocaust.