

Come On Down

by Frederick Wickert



We lived in a house the original part of which was over two hundred years old. No one knew exactly when the house was built. It was built in the Shaker style and in 1933 had been added to and remodeled. It was again added to and remodeled in 1957. The old house had been that of a doctor in the early 1800's. It had a lot of charm.

My wife and I moved into the house when I retired from the Air Force in 1973. Ten years later we were taking care of five developmentally disabled gentlemen who lived with us like members of the family. Two of them are still with us in another home.

The bedrooms were all on the second floor and the rooms were spacious. There was a large hallway with a bench large enough for four people to sit on by the front window, with cabinet doors and dresser type drawers under the upholstered bench. Three of the bedrooms had TV sets in them. The men liked to spend much of their time upstairs watching TV, listening to their tape players and talking and kibitzing with each other when they were not outdoors.

When my wife had a meal ready to eat, it was her custom to go to the bottom of the stairs and call upstairs to the men, "Come on down." When they heard this they went to the bathroom and washed their hands and then came down to the large kitchen to the large dining table we had there. Each had their own place at the table, and my wife and I had ours.

The bottom of the stairs was located inside the front door, positioned between the living room and the dining room. It was necessary to cross the dining room to enter the kitchen. Between the front door and the large window in the front of the dining room was a large parrot cage with a play pen on top. This cage was the home of a Double Yellow Headed Amazon parrot named Sammy. The cage door was closed at night but during the day it was open so Sammy could climb to his play pen on the top of the cage.

The disabled men came home from the sheltered workshop program around 3:00 P.M. One afternoon around 4:00 P.M. a man from the phone company was in the kitchen repairing the phone on the wall. My wife, Tae, was in the kitchen, but was not yet preparing supper.

Suddenly, the men came downstairs, trooped into the kitchen and sat down at the dining table. Tae asked them why in the world they had done that. They all replied she had called them to come on down. Tae had not done any such thing and told them so. She also told them to go back upstairs as they were in the way of the phone repairman.

A day later, the mystery was solved. Sammy the parrot imitated Tae's voice and called out, "Come on down," and the men did just that, thinking Tae had called them. This time I was a witness to it and knew what had happened.

It was not long before Sammy also began saying, "Go back up." He began calling "Come on down," and when the men got the bottom of the stairs, he called out, "Go back up." Tae had to devise another way to call them and have them disregard when they heard Sammy call out, "Come on down."

In January of 1996 the Schoharie Creek flooded the worst ever and devastated our home. It became necessary for us to move to another home, where we now reside. To this day, Sammy occasionally is heard to say, "Go back up," but for some reason he no longer calls out, "Come on down."

Photos are of Sammy on the kitchen table, in his cage, on top of his cage at his play pen, and eating cereal with a spoon.