

## Dad's Canary

*By Dennis Knight*

Dad liked birds. He would awaken to their morning songs, he watched their playful activities at the feeder as he sipped his morning coffee, and he provided fresh water daily in the bird bath. On the other hand, our cocker spaniel aspired to bird catching. She never snared a single one, but her leaping attempts betrayed dad's avian hospitality, like an alligator at a five star hotel.

It was no surprise, then, when Dad brought home the yellow canary. He bought it for its music, but the first day of residence yielded only silence. After all, the canary was only hours removed from the dime store, the cage was new, the environment was new, and hovering around him was a family of nine humans anticipating the first notes. Who could sing under those conditions?

After the second and third day without birdsong, Dad began actively coaching the canary. He sat by the cage and whistled until his throat constricted and his repertoire ran out. Then he played his album of Viennese waltzes, over, and over, and over.

By day five, it was pathetic disillusionment. The bird was obviously defective, typical dime store junk. Wherever the hell they got their birds, it wasn't the Canary Islands.

But despair not. Dad rose as a phoenix inspired and flew to the record store where he found, against all reasonable hope, right there in Laramie, an album of singing canaries. It surely cost more than the bird, but at this point who could care?

Dad bought the record, put it on the Zenith, adjusted the volume, and sat back! One can only ponder what bird messages were coming out, but based on the way the canary came to life, I'd venture it was mostly mating calls. From the opening stanza, our canary expanded his chest, and delivered responsive sonatas that vindicated, finally, Dad's investment.

As long as the record played, the bird sang, his melodies wafting sonorously through the neighborhood. Birds of all feather flew in and perched as close as they dared, given our dog's vertical leap. We even saw a hawk circling, waiting to swoop in for a lemon dessert.

When the phonograph was quiet, however, the bird was too. He just needed something yellow to sing with, and he could thus be activated or stilled from a button on the Zenith. As weeks passed, the canary was turned on with diminishing frequency and by fall, its singing career waned and he served mostly as a newspaper critic, if you get my drift.

To Mom was left the monotony of feeding and cage maintenance, and we will now consider the evidence that she may have thought less of the bird than did Dad and her seven kids. Always a modern woman, she used the most effective products available in the fifties.

Today we can buy a bazooka more easily than we can get a can of bug spray with the power she used that day, but she always maintained she was only controlling flies. Her words declared innocence but her eyes belied her when she told the story of spraying the house, going to the grocery, and returning to find Dad's bird at the bottom of the cage, legs up, stiff as a board. I believe the canary would still be around to sing if he had taken a useful function, such as catching flies.