Our budgie story

B&S Thompson Partnership

Children love bedtime stories; especially about what it was like when their parent was a child. This is our story. One night I shared with my daughter Bella who was aged nine, a bedtime story about my fond childhood memories of breeding and showing budgerigars. I could see in her eyes she was inspired more than by any electronic game or toy. She has always loved animals. It was not long after we had a few budgies. Our first budgie was an albino inspired by the story and came from the pet shop. She was tiny little bundle of feathers, had a small head but turned out to be a great breeder and feeder. We called her ‘Snowy’.

Next it was time to join a budgie club. I had been a member of Eastern District as a child and was curious to reconnect. My recollections were of many birds on rows of show benches. At our first visit to the club, I was surprised that there were only a few birds on one bench. To my amazement there were many familiar faces from all those years ago and I suddenly felt like I was ten years old again even though it was 28 years since I had last attended!

Bella did not seem to mind that she was the only girl and one of only two beginners in the room. Instead she enjoyed the adult ritual of cups of tea and delicious home-made cakes for supper. Before each club night, we also enjoyed duck pancakes at the local Chinese restaurant as part of dad and daughter budgie club night routine.

My dad had retained the breeding cages from when I was a child. With a coat of paint (the limit of my handyman skills) the garage was transformed into a breeding room. My wife did not enjoy all the stray feathers floating into the house but the trade-off was that I had a hobby where I was at home rather than at the pub or playing 18 holes of golf. As such, concessions were given for the loss of garage and a few errant feathers.

With the bird room started, we visited the aviaries of club members. John Caulfield totally inspired Bella with more stories about budgie "breeder secrets" and breeding became the priority. Jimmy Traynor has taught Bella the importance of a sense of humour and encouraged her to buy fewer better birds. She once sat next to Jimmy at an auction and we racked up quite a budgie debt. Ken Stockton interested Bella with the yellow-face variety. James Bader did a wonderful thing and challenged Bella saying he would carry her hand made card for 10 years in his judging case then return it - with that he secured her long term commitment. As a father, I cannot think of a better way to surround my daughter with positive adult influences.

Bella became quite interested in the concept of her own bloodline and quickly worked out that she needed better birds as a foundation. She sold $50 worth of toys on eBay and was poised to buy at auction. We have broken all rules and have sourced many birds from many breeders. I disagree with the general advice not to buy any birds in the first 12 months - a child interest level is much shorter and you only really "see" a bird and its potential when it is yours. However our plan is to ask for some mentoring help soon with culling and pairing.

So far, we have just enjoyed our own firsts - first egg, first chicks, first aviary visit, first auction and most of all Bella’s first trophy. We also have had our first losses. We confessed that our early mistakes in husbandry meant we were not worthy recipients of good gifted birds. However, club members were very accepting that this hobby is all about learning and dealing with setbacks. Our guiding lesson has been to observe and take action. I have been able to apply this powerful insight at work and my staff now gets budgie analogies as part of my coaching advice. Lucky them!

Our experience in a very short time has been diverse. We have travelled to the nationals, visited interstate breeders when on holidays, attended auctions, helped out with club events and visited club member aviaries. In short, we have enjoyed true "quality time" together. Some of the best time we have enjoyed is when Bella sits on my knee in the bird room and we talk about the birds. Often Bella would say little when she listened to fellow breeders or the judges, then chat just like a budgie of what she learned in the car on the way home - so much more than what I get when I ask how her day was at school.

Recently we have changed our membership from Bella Thompson to B&S Thompson partnership. This name was inspired by the Appleton's who clearly enjoy doing things together as equals. Bella was clear her name came first. However it appears unlikely that the Appleton’s partnership will be renamed S&T Appleton with the wife’s intial first anytime soon, but we shared a laugh!

Bella’s confidence has grown and this matters so much at school, with friends and later life. She proudly talks about her knowledge of genetic breeding expectations in pairing, confidently bids at auctions and collects her trophy by herself. She has improved her reading as we pour over auction catalogues full of interesting new words. She has even joined the club committee of management. What an opportunity at age nine to grow her leadership potential.

We have written this story because passing on my childhood interest in budgies has created a beautiful bond and connection with my daughter that I hope inspires other dads. Equally I have found the club members to be generous and genuine friends. I have also strengthened my own connection with my dad and Bella now has something in common to talk about with her Poppy.

It is not an easy thing to find a hobby that a father can do with his daughter. I will look back on my time with Bella and our Budgies with so many lovely together moments and memories. Breeding and showing budgies is a great hobby that is full of interesting people and stories. We proudly display our sticker "budgies are a great family hobby" on our car and we hope to see more families at our club.

The end (Cheep, cheep).