



# Corn Mother News

*Women Who Desire to Grow into Wise  
Old Woman Become Empowered!*

Summer 2009  
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*Hello Everyone and Welcome to the Summer Edition of..*

## The Corn Mother News

Don't you just love it when year after year we exclaim with great "surprise" as each new season "suddenly" out of the blue is upon us? But this year with all that has been happening in my life and the world beyond, summer has truly caught me unprepared. How about you? Are you ready for summer, or is that a silly question? Well, maybe in a couple of weeks when summer is officially here, I will have acclimated. Living where I still need a fire in the hearth at night may be my excuse. Soon I will join you all as I dig through closets and boxes for cool summer shorts.

Still on the theme of "Wow" how time flies, it's been a while since we had a *Lessons from Elizabeth* article. In fact, the last article was in the New Years edition, so we're way over due.

Let me refresh your memory. In that issue, some 5 months ago, I told a story illustrating how Elizabeth kept herself connected to her community and society by **simple acts of engagement**. It's important to remember that Elizabeth was 85 at the time. If you have had any interaction with octogenarians you'll be aware of how easy it is to just drop out. One may have substantial physical problems, one's energy may be low, you may feel angry that you are no longer in the swing of things and even resentful of what old age has wrought. There are a trillion reasons why people just cease to be interested in staying involved in life. And we know from all kinds of substantiated studies that when this drop out happens...well, the end is in sight. (An aside—The Corn Mother is all about changing the above scenario to a more uplifting and positive reality as we move towards becoming long-lived women)

The value of sharing these stories with you is two fold. One, keep in mind the concept that, **you begin to prepare long before you get to where you are going**. It is invaluable for each of us to begin to consciously gather mental images of what healthy, empowered aging looks like. It





makes life so much easier and enjoyable when we can embrace and anticipate rather than fear the future.

The other reason is that most of us are at the age where we have elder parents and relatives that could possibly benefit from our advanced awareness. I remind you of the need to be mindful of the way in which you communicate this awareness. Words tinged with your “superior knowledge” may as the saying goes “fall on deaf ears.” No one likes to be talked down to from some rarefied space of the newly informed or highly educated walking encyclopedia.

It was Christmas eve you may recall and Elizabeth asked me to take her to the Liquor Mart to purchase a bottle of wine. She wanted to have a little holiday cheer to offer her guests who were sure to stop by. Now, she could have very easily asked me or any number of other friends to pick up a bottle for her, but no, she wanted to be a part of the holiday ritual. Although she needed help, Elizabeth was also maintaining a degree of independence by participating in her own shopping.

In this edition, I continue Elizabeth's “Simple Acts of Engagement,” with a deeply touching story that begins in December of the following year and ends in February. This is a heroic saga. A captivating, sometimes funny ironic, sometimes scary and sad story of what on the surface could appear to be a simple act of engagement, but in reality was not simple at all... although quite engaging.

Next, picking up on the last edition's focus on bone health, are you practicing your Dynamic Flamingo Therapy? I hope so, it sure is easy, breezy. To supplement your desire to build and sustain healthy bones I have a new tip from herbalist Susun Weed. Be sure to check this out.

And just a quick update. My fractured shoulder is healing great. I was told by my orthopedist that people, with shoulder fractures like the one I have, often never regain full range of motion, but not to worry, it shouldn't interfere much with the quality of my life. Well, that may be true, but I'm not buying that prognosis. I intend to regain full range of motion and resume my life activities as before. Now, this may sound like a lot of bravado, but I am putting to the test my belief in my ability to be a fully engaged participant in my own healing. I'll keep you posted.

That's about it for this edition. I know you're going to love Elizabeth's story of engagement. It's a beauty.

So, on with the news.

**Lessons from Elizabeth: The elegant simplicity of survival or How to stay in your own home and avoid the nursing home conveyor belt.**





One December in the mid-eighties a story of a domestic parakeet gone wild became the focal point of Elizabeth's life and mine to a lesser degree. Engagement in life in advanced age is the theme here. My objective is to illustrate what this advanced engagement looks like.

The mental image you may retain of Elizabeth gathering the energy to physically enter into the frantic last minute holiday frenzy is very illuminating when you consider what many others at her age and in her position would have done. Likewise, in this article, I ask you to imagine yourself as Elizabeth as you imbibe her story.

Before I go further, I want to lay the scene by letting you know that what you are about to read is the weaving together of two perspectives: Elizabeth's and mine. As this short saga came to an end, I felt we both needed some kind of closure. The act of closure, I also thought, would in some way honor this little creature whose life had gripped ours so fully for the past two months. With this thought in mind, I proposed to Elizabeth that we both write a story about our little parakeet friend and what he had meant to us and then we could share our stories. Elizabeth was game, wrote her story and then solicited the help of a friend to type it up. She even had her typist leave a little space at the top of the first page so she could include an illustration. I will begin with my story; Elizabeth's words are in italics.

### A Real Winter Story

**“Found parakeet living in my pine tree,”** the ad read, placed this past December in the *Daily Camera* by my friend and mentor, Elizabeth. At 86, placing an ad in the newspaper is not always the easiest of tasks, however, Elizabeth even managed to call the newspaper a second time to inform them that they had gotten her phone number wrong and would they please reprint it correctly. In the meantime, I call a couple of radio stations and place an ad in the local classified paper, *The Grapevine*. Survival of this bird becomes a daily ritual for the two of us. Then Channel 9 enters the scene. They know nothing of this lost parakeet, they're looking for a “Neighbors” story. So it was that one Monday in January, Elizabeth and I find ourselves preparing for this short but sweet story of out togetherness and friendship over the past three years. As the camera rolls Elizabeth begins to talk when suddenly she looks up and exclaims, “There's my bird!” The parakeet has arrived as if on cue and has perched itself handsomely on the birdfeeder directly outside the door. The camera doesn't miss a lick and the three of us become the wrap-up story for the 6 o'clock news.

With Channel 9's timely assistance the fruits of our labor begin to pay off: two calls from lost parakeet owners, three calls from parakeet lovers wanting to claim the bird and to add a twist of irony, not one not two, but a total of three calls from cemeteries wanting to sell Elizabeth a grave site. After all she's 86 and surely they can be of great assistance--something like neighbors...you know.





*I always start to feed the birds in the fall when the first frost comes. As soon as I hang the birdfeeder out it only takes two days and all my friends from last winter, mostly sparrows and finches, are back along with the squirrels, who love the sunflower seeds. I also keep the birdbath filled with water if it does not freeze. Watching the birds is one of my greatest pleasures every winter, since I am eighty-six and cannot get outside very much in the winter. The sparrows love to take a bath. All the other birds use the water for drinking only.*

*I am writing this story because if I don't do it now, I might forget about my friendship with a little beautiful tropical bird, a parakeet.*

*One sunny winter day, I suddenly saw something very colorful and unusual eating with all the other birds in my birdfeeder. It was a parakeet, beautiful turquoise and yellow, with a long tail. It must have flown away from somebody who left the window open. I tried to find out to whom the beautiful bird belonged. I advertised in the lost and found section of the Daily Camera, and several radio stations helped me too. Three people contacted me and came to my house, but the parakeet never showed up when they were here. I suggested to one young woman, who lives not too far from my house, and who told me that her parakeet liked to sit on trees near Boulder Creek, that she should bring her birdcage and put it on the bench under the birdfeeder. The bird might get in the cage, and I could give him back to her. It did not work out. I tried to call her, but she was never home.*

*In the meantime, the parakeet (I called him "Freedel because he liked his freedom) came everyday. He came from two weeks before Christmas until the first half of February—everyday for breakfast, lunch and supper and sat for a long time with the other birds in the branches of the old snowball bush in my side yard, and in the tall pine tree in front of my house.*

A bird in the wild, even a beautiful turquoise former pet like Freedel, is not as easy to catch as one might at first think. Thus it was that none of the callers were able to lay claim to this wild and wonderful parakeet.

But can a small tropical bird used to living in the regulated environment of a house survive the winter? We worried. The the winds came and the winds went and Freedel stayed. "He really is a survivor," we'd say to each other over our breakfast coffee as we watched Freedel who seemed to be just as interested in watching us, as we him.

*I tried opening the door to my patio and calling him, "Freedel, Freedel, Freedel," but he always flew away. The ground was covered with snow most of the time, so catching him was impossible for me. All I could do was fill the feeder three times a day.*

After the winds came the snow and so did Freedel only more often now. Elizabeth found herself braving her slippery porch almost every hour determined to keep food readily available for all her





birds, but, of course, particularly for Freedel, whom she assumed was not used to the cold and could use a little help from a friend. Elizabeth kept this ritual up as the temperatures plummeted to below zero.

*I waited every day for Freedel and was worried when he did not show up at his regular time. He survived the terrible wind storm we had and all the snowy and cold weather. Later, it got suddenly very cold and icy, but Freedel seemed not to mind. However, on February 12<sup>th</sup> something happened to poor Freedel.*

*My birdfeeder is stainless steel. I had to buy one like this because the squirrels used to destroy my wooden birdfeeder houses. So, on February 12<sup>th</sup> when Freedel came to sit on the rim of the feeder, he got his little feet frozen, and he fell to the ground.*

Without the use his feet Freedel came less often to eat. When he did come he had to crawl around on his belly to gather food. Sitting on a branch waiting his turn at the birdfeeder was no longer possible. Elizabeth now watched him through her window, hanging by his beak on a branch. Taking flight from such a position required considerable strength. Eventually, he'd muster the energy and make it to the feeder or sometimes to the ground where he'd slowly wiggle about while Elizabeth stood guard warding off the neighborhood cats.

Phone calls had been made to the Audubon Society, to various wildlife organizations and of course to Wildlife Rescue. Advice was given, but no direct help. A woman at Wildlife Rescue recommended, if we couldn't catch Freedel, to find someone taking Tetracycline and sprinkle this antibiotic in the birdseed. It wouldn't harm the other birds and if by chance Freedel's feet were infected this might just help them heal.

Coincidence of coincidences, I, who never takes medicine, not even aspirin, was at that very time taking Tetracycline. Upon hearing of this latest development, I headed to Elizabeth's.

*We suddenly had such nice sunny weather and Freedel still came for a few days and tried hard to feed himself. He picked around on the ground and sat on the low roof of the garage next door. Sometimes he sat for as long as a half hour in the evening sun. Everyday he looked more tired and sick.*

It was then a beautiful spring-like afternoon. I sprinkled the antibiotic in the birdseed as advised. The two of us once again awaited Freedel's arrival. He finally came. It had been days since I had seen him. He looked much smaller and rather shrunken. It was obvious he was quite weak. We watched for a long time. It didn't look as if Freedel was going to make it to his medicine, but with time he eventually was able to push off the roof where he sat and fly to the feeder. I had put the Tetracycline in just the right spot. He ate a little and then was gone





*February 18<sup>th</sup> was the last day he came. I am still looking for the beautiful bird every day, and I miss him very much. For about two months he came every day, and all the wild birds did not mind him. They were just sitting and eating together. I enjoyed the beautiful colors and tried to draw a little picture of him. During these especially stormy winter months, he brought joy and excitement to my life, and my friend Sondra's, as well, to my other friends who came to watch him.*

Elizabeth told me she had been given a lecture by Freedel (meaning she had been taught a lesson) which goes something like this—When freedom is taken, whether by a person or a little creature like Freedel, one has to know how and when to compromise if one is to survive. Freedel never chose to accept Elizabeth's many invitations to come inside.

Now our attention goes to the crocus just now blooming on the sunny side of the house. It appears that winter has left taking with it our friend and leaving memories which linger as we anticipate the unknowns of this new season.

### **Health Tip: Healthy Bones Continued.**

Last month, I drew your attention to herbalist Susun Weed who among other things publishes online the *Wise Woman Mid-Month Newsletter* in which she has a regular column entitled *Menopause Naturally*. Her May 2009 issue was entitled *Building Better Bones*. I suggest you check out this article because it contains some rather shocking information that you may or may not accept as true. If you are like me you will want to know the information so you can factor it into your decision making. How about this one...

*Bone scans don't find women who are at risk of broken bones, they find women who have low bone density...Focusing on osteoporosis, defining it as a disease, using drugs to counter it, we lose sight of the fact that postmenopausal bone mass is a better indicator of breast cancer risk than broken bone risk. Or how about this one, Unfermented soy (e.g., tofu) is especially detrimental to bone health...*

This article is also an excerpt from Susun's book *The NEW Menopausal Years*, which you can purchase by going to <http://www.cornmother.com> click on the Resources/Links button and scroll down to author Susun Weed. Yes, the **Buy Now** link is up and working. Yeah!

### **“I want to be an old woman when I grow up.”**

From a CD by Michelle Shocked, *When I Grow Up*.

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**The Corn Mother News** is dedicated to *Las Tres Viejas*

Frances Grace Higgins, my mother.

Guadalupe de la Cruz Rios, my spiritual guide and healer,  
and Elizabeth G., my mentor.

