

Bye Bye, Birdie!

By: Betsy Bearden

Life gives us so many opportunities to explore the beauty in it and the wondrous things around us, if we will just take a little time to pay attention. I am so guilty of not taking advantage of these gifts. However, one very hot and steamy day this past July, all of that changed.

Steven was in the garage doing whatever it is that men do in the garage; I set out to check on him. It was sweltering out there, and the window fan at high speed wasn't helping the situation. I took him a tall glass of ice water. Before I could leave, he said that he wanted to show me something. On the garage wall was an old canvas nail pouch hanging behind an old archery bow that he'd gotten at a yard sale years ago. (My husband is a yard sale junkie and the bow was a great deal, so he brought it home, and hung it in the garage. Moving on ...) He told me to look in the pouch; I didn't see anything. He told me to take a closer look.

There was a tiny little face, with two tiny brown eyes, and what looked like an ornate white mask around them, and a sliver of a beak hanging over the lip of the pouch. It was a little brown bird! How cozy it looked in the pouch. "Well, hey Birdie," I said. How original, right? It was so cute, and it didn't seem to be afraid of us at all. Then my mind was flooded with questions: was it an abandoned baby, was it hurt and couldn't fly, how did it get in and have time to build a nest, if in fact, it did build the nest, and how would it get out when the garage door is closed 99 percent of the time. Steven said that it, or its mama, must be coming in and out between the gap at the top of the fan between it and the window. "Quick! Turn the fan off," I said! Steven assured me that the grill around the inside and the outside of the fan would keep it from getting hurt, but he turned it off anyway.

I stood inside my kitchen and peeked out the window in the garage door and watched that bird throughout the afternoon for hours! It sat there, and sat there, and sat there, and then suddenly, it moved. I know what you are thinking: I could have just opened the garage door, but there are stray cats in our neighborhood. Birdie hopped out onto the edge of the pouch, and then out to the archery bow where she clenched her feet to the string and tight-walked it a bit and then hopped down onto the tool box in front of the window, zipped up on top of the fan casing, and out through the gap between it and the window! Amazing. Later that night I went to check Birdie, and it was safe and sound in the pouch again. Now I am a city girl, and I know birds nest, but they nest in trees, don't they? So, it took me a few minutes to realize that Birdie must be on the nest. I told her she was welcome to stay with us as long as she wanted.

My friend, Brenda, came down to look at it the next day and she said it was a Carolina Wren, and that they make their nests in just about anything. Then I got worried again about how she was going to teach her babies how to do the whoop-de-do through the window, but I had faith that if Birdie was smart enough to build a nest where she would be safe, then she would be smart enough to get her babies out when the time came.

For the next week, I watched as she kept perfecting her nest, and placed water and breadcrumbs on the utility table beneath it. Each evening I would spend about a minute or two with her and, um, sing—yes, sing to her, and she loved it. Then it happened—we’ve got babies! Over the next few days, she worked non-stop, bringing in food for her new little family, and I worried about when poor Birdie ever slept.

A couple of days later I peeked out the window and saw two little birds, then three, flittering around in the garage. Brand new life is sweet! The hair on their little heads looked like Snoopy’s friend, Woodstock, all messy and soft. I could not make myself leave the back door for watching them. Birdie was outside on the deck calling to them to come outside. Again, I saw something amazing. Birdie came in to feed the babies wherever she found them, but someone else had joined the celebration. It was their daddy! Birdie went back out for food, and Daddy perched himself onto the fan casing. He was trying to show them the way. Now we had Daddy, Eensie, Teensie and Weensie, all congregating toward the fan. They would flitter and fall, and flitter again, but eventually they got back up and made their way to the window. Birdie constantly called to them, and Daddy would come in and out to show them the way.

I was neglecting my work, so I went back to my office and started working, but I couldn’t concentrate—back to window I went. Why are there never any batteries when you need them for your camera? There was Daddy, Eensie, Teensie and Weensie, all on the fan casing. Birdie was outside calling to them.

Daddy showed them once again how to go out, and then Eensie figured out the whoop-de-do, and Teensie and Weensie soon followed. I was so proud and so relieved. But wait. Something moved on the garage floor. There were two more! *Two more!* So now, I had Itty and Bitty. Eventually Itty found its way out, but Bitty was obviously the runt of the group. It finally found its way to the window but couldn’t quite navigate it. I thought about opening the garage door, but the rest of its family was in the back yard. Besides, I had faith in Bittie’s parents. Birdie kept calling it all afternoon.

I suddenly panicked when I realized everyone seemed to have disappeared. I was left alone with Bitty. Now what? I called Steven at work and asked him to come home right away. He wanted to know exactly what it was he was supposed to do when he came home. I don’t know ... something!

I stayed with Bitty in the garage all afternoon. When it flew to the far end, I would talk to it and coax it back to the window. It would sit on the casing again, but just did not know what to do. Finally, Steven came home. He went out to the garage and pulled the window fan out of the window, and now there was a huge opening for Bitty. It finally got to the window and flew outside. Yay! I tore open the door to the deck and saw it sitting on the deck steps. What now? “Okay, no one goes out there for a while,” meaning my two dogs, Yogi and Rocky.

About thirty minutes had passed, so I figured it was safe for the dogs to go out since they had just eaten their dinner. Well, there we all were, about to descend when there sat Bitty

on the same old step. We put on the brakes and I hurried the dogs back in the house. “We have to do something,” I said. It was getting near seven in the evening and I was really worried something might get Bitty if it didn’t fly somewhere. But thankfully, Birdie came to the rescue, and Bittie flitted off after her.

I asked Brenda if they would come back to the nest, and she told me that they were gone for good. I went out that night and looked at the open window and then at the empty nest, and I cried.

The next evening, we sat on the deck for a while and I heard Birdie. I would know that tweet anywhere. Then I saw them—Birdie was on the fence, and then one, two, three, four, five of them with their little Woodstock hair, had perched all up and down the fence. As of the middle of August, they were still hanging close. I have never witnessed anything like that before. The devotion and the dedication of Birdie and their daddy was a life changing experience. Now, don’t get me wrong ... I don’t plan to turn into a binocular totin’ Miss Jane type from the Beverly Hillbillies or like her birdwatcher side kick, Wally Cox, but I do plan to watch these amazing little creatures every chance I get.

So yes—Life does give us so many opportunities: Take advantage of them!

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