


Excerpt from Ruth's Bird Database

Raised one. Thuan brought him home from the depths of the parking garage under Pershing Square. He saw something fluttering on the ramp. Nothing lives down in those dark, airless, hardscaped urban bowels, so he got out to investigate. He couldn't believe it when he saw this frantic flapping bird with nothing to grip and nowhere to hide, and hardly old enough to fledge. A bird so young, Thuan couldn't even tell what kind he was. Thuan tried, but he couldn't find any sign of mother, nest, or any other living thing anywhere at all. Big mystery how the little fluffy guy ended up struggling on the ramp. Thuan brought him home in his shirt pocket. I went to hug Thuan when he got home, but a gentle gesture of his hand stopped me, and I saw this little head blinking out of his pocket with the baby fuzz feathers still waving off it.

I learned to feed Birdie Boy and give him water drops off the end of my finger. We made an aviary on the front upstairs porch. I taught him to fly by perching him on a branch then lowering it so he could flutter off. After putting him in a Marie Callendar's pie pan with an inch of water several times, only to have him step promptly out, I finally got to see him squat down to take his first happy, splashy bath, slinging droplets everywhere. I raised crickets from the pet store for him so he could learn to catch insects. For awhile, I felt like I was tending the entire food chain. I gathered berries for him from the tree next door because that's what I saw the other mocking birds eat. Several times a day, I made a soft food for him from dog kibble soaked in warm water, with sides of peeled, cut up grapes and cherries. We took the screens off either end of the porch when he wanted to fly like the other birds. The porch became both a fly-through and a shelter as we watched him come and go from the porch to the tree outside.

One day I noticed him eating his own berries from the tree, and knew I could start spending less time peeling grapes and softening dog kibble. We watched his baby feathers fade and his mature ones come in, and noticed his beak change from wide and yellow to slender and dark. We also noticed his silhouette change from short and plump to long and slender. We watched his legs lengthen and darken. His cheep-cheep changed to a chirp, even a squawk sometimes. Thuan built criss-cross poles and branches in the porch so he could perch and fly from one to the other. He'd fly in for the night, or when he was tired, or when he wanted to escape the territorial harassment of the other mockingbirds. He would come and go to my kissy noises, until I noticed him wanting more time outside, so I gradually withdrew my voice and touch as I saw he could eat, drink, and bathe on his own outside the sanctuary of the aviary. Once I even saw him freeze



“By the way, Birdie Boy is the reason I became interested in meeting more birds and learning about how they live.”

and hide, heeding an alarm call from other birds when a hawk perched nearby. I knew then he could make it on his own. For awhile, he showed up in the back yard trees or on bare branches outside our windows. It seemed like he was looking in on us, calling to us. Gradually, he moved on. Sometimes I hear crickets in the bushes below the porch, and figure they're descendants of the ones Birdie Boy dropped when he was learning to catch insects. (I concluded this because we never had crickets before). And now every time I hear a lonely male mockingbird singing madly for a mate in the middle of the summer night, I wonder where Birdie Boy is and how he's doing.