

Senior Essay
Third Place
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Bird Box Boy

The large thump that sounded across the jungle gym of Littlerock Academy made the little boy jump, dropping the kickball he had been so diligently holding. As he looked around the playground, wondering what could have possibly made that much noise, he saw a small body at the base of one of the many trees. It seems that one of his classmates had tried to climb the tree and miserably failed. The other children scoffed and snickered at him, although that wasn't anything new, for this was the black sheep of the class that had fallen out of the tree. Everyone saw him as a weird outcast who never played with the other kids. The little boy could see a brown cardboard box that was deformed by the fall, as the teachers went to the sheep's aid and helped him up. When asked why he had tried to do such a dangerous thing, the kid replied, "The birds lost their homes in the storm, I thought that they could live in my Mama's shoe box instead." This caused even more laughter and ridicule from the class. The little boy felt a twinge of sympathy, but the bird box boy didn't even seem to care.

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The bird box boy, as he was now referred to, as the entirety of the class had picked up a routine. Every year after hurricane season, he would build houses for the birds of the playground. The year after his first attempt, he tried another shoebox, but soon realized that it was too weak to withstand the unpredictable weather. This year, he decided that maybe his math and science textbooks would make a sturdy foundation for the birds to live in, cutting them up and gluing them back together to form a new home. The kids in the class found this absolutely hilarious, mocking him as he passed by. The teachers weren't too thrilled with him either. The boy, now a middle schooler who only

passed the playground during brief walks, thought that the bird box boy had the right idea, but just needed better execution; of course, he would never admit this out loud, too scared to see what his peers would say. One day, the boy passed the black sheep and saw him staring at the remains of his textbook birdhouse. It was now a pile of wet paper, as it had rained hard last night. The boy looked around, making sure no one was looking their way, and then whispered, "Next time try something sturdy and thick, like wood."

The bird box boy's startled expression was quickly replaced with a crooked grin, as the boy hurried away before anyone saw him.

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The boy was a teenager now, in high school overloaded with homework and AP tests. The only constant over all these years was of course bird box boy, who had apparently taken his advice from when they were younger and now used the birdhouses he made in woodwork class, even painting various patterns on them for an extra touch. Every day when he passed the little elementary playground, he could see all the brightly colored birdhouses that painted the trees like fruit. The school still ridiculed and made fun of him, but he continued working every year, after hurricane season, making sure all the birds had a home. The class was let out for lunch, and since the horrid weather had finally cleared up, most students were outside enjoying the sun and breeze. The boy made his way to the picnic tables, seeing his friends calling him over. As he was making his way over, he heard a loud voice from above shout, "Hey bud, do me a favor and pass me that hammer right by your feet." The boy looks up to see none other than the bird box boy waving his hands down at him, pointing at said hammer. The boy's gaze

kept shifting from him to the hammer, unsure what to do. Everyone was outside looking at them, expecting the boy to mock the outcast or throw an insult in his face, as normally done. The boy didn't want to do that, but he was scared of how much this would affect his status at school. On one hand, the bird box boy had always been nice and minded his own business, and after all, he was just trying to help the birds, but if the boy were to interact with him now, it could mean the end of having any other friends.

Those friendships that he had been building for years could come to an abrupt end based on his decision right now. Nervously looking back at the bird box boy, he slowly picked up the hammer and handed it to him hesitatingly. "Thanks a bunch!" he replied. Again unsure of himself the boy nervously asked, "Why do you build the birdhouses when everyone always mocks you for it?" This question was answered with the classic crooked smile, and "Have you ever heard that old saying, 'One tree can make a forest, one star can guide a ship at sea, and one laugh can conquer gloom?' Well, I like to think that I'm doing something to better the world, you know?" This gave the boy a pause, "But- but how do you know it even matters, that you're doing anything at all." The bird box boy pointed up, his finger landing on one of his birdhouses, and from that house, emerged a group of three birds, a mother and two hatchlings. "It made a difference to them."

The boy's thoughts cleared and he realized what the right thing to do was, and the consequences of it. The boy grabbed the nails and wood at the ground of the tree and loudly asked, "You need a hand?"