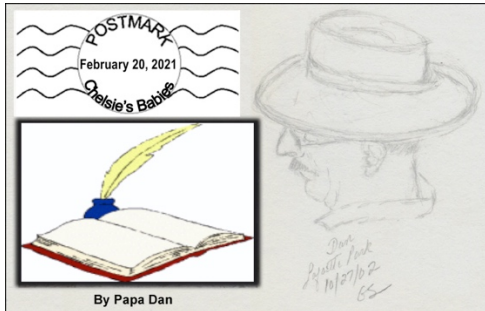


What Passes for Excitement These Days

By Dan Sapone



Gretta: "I bet this needs to become a story ... "

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About three weeks ago, Gretta began to notice that a small bird — a hummingbird — seemed to be hovering, flitting, fluttering around our front door when she walked outside to water the plants or emerged from our front door to go out for a walk around the block. Of course, as with most of our neighbors, over the past year, taking a walk around the block has been the most adventurous activity possible in our COVID world, so any variation from "the usual" attracted our attention. We decided to name this hummingbird Charlie."

One day, we noticed that Charlie was sitting in a crook amid the sparse, recently-pruned branches of one of the rose trees about ten feet from our front door. On closer inspection, it looked like Charlie was perched on a small round knob of the tree a little more than the size of a golf ball. We wondered — Hmmm — was it a nest? Later that day, when Charlie has not nearby, we went out for a walk, took a closer look, and found what looked like two tiny baby birds crunched into that "nest." She showed me, "Look at this! It's a nest. A nest with babies! We looked at each other and were stunned at the tininess of the nest and the babies. After a few steps, we stopped and one of us said, "She's got babies. I guess we should name her Chelsie."

The next day, we happened to look out our kitchen window in time to see Chelsie land on the nest and begin to feed the two beaks protruding out of the nest. When she was done, she flew off, presumably to find more food, and I went out to take a picture. There they were, mouths wide open, apparently expecting more food. At that point, the story spread among the neighbors, each of whom took their turn dropping by to examine the wee neighbors. So, it began ... the babies became the primary topic of conversation around the neighborhood. Such is the level of excitement required in our sheltered world of 2021.



So, over the next week, we noticed that Chelsie's babies grew steadily larger, squeezed together more tightly each day in that little nest. We could see the emergence of what looked like two pairs of wings, with a slight greenish hue, on either side of each of the babies. Every few hours, we watched Mama Chelsie land on the nest and vigorously feed the two open beaks with whatever food she was able to scrounge up at Costco or on her travels around the neighborhood.



About the start of the third week of this evolving spectacle, the babies, with what looked like wings tightly squished in the nest with them, began to change positions. Sometimes they both appeared to lay on their backs in what looked like their 'feeding position. Other times we saw them in alternating positions, one on their backside the other more upright. Sometimes, they both assumed an upright position — giving the impression that they were contemplating the next step in their evolution: would they consider trying to spread those "wings" and try to fly? For us, that thought brought up two new ideas — one exciting and the other quite scary.

Walking in the park, we ran into our friends Ellen and Nancy, who both wanted to hear the latest report in the lives of Chelsie's children. After telling them the latest developments and inviting them to drop by and take a look, Ellen asked a great question: "Have you named the kids yet?"

Hmmmmmm. "No, we haven't. I guess that's our next task, eh?" So, we resolved that we need to choose a couple of names. On the way home, some obvious pairs of names came to mind:

Ralph & Alice — Ellen's suggestion
Sam & Diane
Edith & Archie
Gloria & Meathead
Mickie & Minnie

Bert & Ernie
Batman & Robin
Butch & Sundance
Stan & Laurel — Ellen's suggestion
David & Goliath

→ → OK, we've decided. They are Sam & Diane

A second, scarier thought occurred to us as we noticed a neighbor's grey-and-black cat prowling our street with its usual hungry look. That nest is a pretty tight fit for two growing birds, and it's looking smaller every day as the babies grow larger. What if one of them spreads its wings and tries to fly before it is capable of "liftoff." In that case, presumably, it would fall to the ground and, if that hungry cat was nearby, the baby would become lunch. It was a frightening thought. As caring and responsible .. uh ... grandparents ... or whatever kinds of relatives we were ... what should we do? What could we do? What do people do?



And here on the 20th day of February, 2021, face-to-face with what passes for excitement these days in the world of COVID, that's where we are. Naturally, we have questions: isn't it early in the season for baby birds? Will cold nights harm them? Will they fly from the nest or fall from it? Will the prowling outdoor cat eat them? Do we have some kind of decision to make or is it our job to simply wait and watch and hope that Mother Nature and Mama Chelsie actually know what they're doing. Maybe the responsibility belongs to them and not to us. We'll see.

→ → *The Story Continues* — Sunday, February 21, 2021 ← ←

It's Sunday morning and Sam & Diane are noticeably bigger. Their beaks protrude higher out of the nest; greenish things that look like wings fluff around their torsos; and they are moving around more inside the nest. At one point, Gretta got up on a step ladder to get a better look out our kitchen window and watched while Mama Chelsie dropped in and began feeding the babies. "Come and look! She's feeding them!" I got a glimpse; but by the time I zoomed up my iPhone to get a picture, she darted away. She has a sixth sense for doing that. But, I did get a picture of the kids immediately after she fed them, looking all ... well fed.



A few minute later, I got the best opportunity of all — Chelsie landed on the nest and fed them again. This time I had my iPhone at the ready and I got her in the picture. It's a bit fuzzy, zoomed up that close through the window from my spot in the kitchen, but there she is.



Then after she flew away, I took a chance, pushed the ‘video’ button, and a got a few moments of the kids squirming around a bit. Here they are in the closest thing I’ve gotten to “live action.”



If you can play the video with sound, as Gretta narrates the scene, you might be able to hear in the background another voice in our household. It is the voice of our kitty, Peek-a-Boo, presumably complaining that another creature is getting more attention than she is at that moment, or — *heaven forefend* — lamenting that she would like to get out there, visit that nest, and do what ... well ... we just won’t go there.

As we watch Sam and Diane squirming around in their tiny nest, ruffling — nearly flapping — their growing wings, we speculate that it is just a matter of time, maybe just hours, before that nest becomes too small for them. This afternoon, in the photo below, we see them sitting on top of the nest, just like grown-up hummingbirds do. They looked strong and “ready.”



We wondered which one of those squirms and flaps will cause one of them to fly AND either:

1. fly away
- or
2. drop out of that nest to the ground and fall victim to ... well, we won't go there.

Honestly, they look like they're ready to fly.

At that moment, some of the beauty and the danger came to life simultaneously. The reality of caring for these creatures carries with it the thoughts of the inevitable: these babies – like ALL babies — will one day leave the nest and venture out into the world with all of its opportunities and perils. When that day— when that moment — comes we will no longer be able to enjoy the sweetness that comes with the fact that they are here, being cute, posing for us each day in the nest, here at our home. So, we watch ... and enjoy the moment.

Oh, by the way, lest we romanticize them too much ... we must report that one of our baby birds, the one we've named Sam, now has a nickname. Gretta went out to take a closer look right after one of the recent feedings and Sam, without so much as a warning, let fly with a stream of ... well ... you know ... a liquid stream that travelled at least two feet from the nest, just missing Gretta's shoes. So, from today, Sam has the nickname “Pisser.”

We thought that was the end of the story for today ... but, just before going to bed, at about 10:00 We went out to take another look and ...



They were gone.

We experienced severe “Empty Nest Syndrome” the rest of the night. You can imagine.

Of course, we were not surprised. We knew, and you knew, that this moment would come eventually. In fact, from the way they looked the previous afternoon (in their latest photo, above) the one perched in front looked quite strong, looked fully formed, and for the first time appeared to be sitting on top of the nest, instead of scrunched down inside of it. So, we figured that they would fly away soon. Very soon. That turned out to be true.

→ → *The Story Continues — Monday, February 22, 2021* ← ←

“And it was evening and morning, the next day”

I got up and came downstairs about 7:30 am and walked out the front door to take another look. Once again, the nest was still empty. (Well, whadya’xpect?” you may ask.) I looked around a bit and found something on the ground. After staring for a long moment, I realized that I was looking at a small bird standing there about three feet from the base of the “home” rose tree that contained the nest. It was apparently the smaller of the two babies we had gotten to know in the nest. We had read that if a baby bird falls from a nest, you can pick it up by the torso and place it back in the nest. So, I did that. When I first touched it, the bird flapped its wings and scampered about six inches along the ground — I took that to be its incomplete attempt to fly. I then picked it up and placed it in the nest.

Wow!

I took a picture and went back inside to report that one of the babies was back in the nest, for now.



Monday morning. The little guy — temporarily back in the nest after getting a “lift.”

Well, by 10:00 am, the nest was empty again. Looks like Mama Chelsie and her two babies Sam & Diane (now growing, lively kids) were flying and on their own.



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And now for the good news. For the rest of this day, Monday February 22, we have seen Mama Chelsie and her two kids flitting about among the rest of our rose trees and the large tree out in the front lawn. And, just like the hopes and dreams we have for all of the babies we know as they grow up — they can fly on their own.



→ → And Well, that's the story of Mama Chelsie, and her two kids, Sam and Diane. so far ... ← ←

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OK. just one more thing —

OK. just one more thing — proof of success. This is a picture of Diane, the smaller of the two babies, perched near the top of a tree in our front yard. She's on her own.

