Kid's Learning Center Story: Aubrey's Finches

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Aubrey's Finches

story of the month

By Richard W. Jennings, the author of Orwell's Luck
"The Master of Middle American Whimsy"

Somewhere past Cheery Street where six-grader Aubrey lived with her mom and new dad Reverend Gordon, a cat named Porchie, her mother's Ocicat called Cupid, an octopus named Sandy, and a brand-new fat little mixed-breed dog named Chubby Biscuit, lived an old man on Lyndon Street who raised finches.

His name was Mr. Biddle, which is fine, but alas, Lyndon Street should have been named Linden Street, in honor of a graceful and popular tree. But instead the developer, both a bad speller and middle school dropout, had inadvertently named it after a jug-eared President from Texas who quit his job after a single term and is best remembered for stealing all the White House china when his term of office ended.

But back to the finches.

Ever since Aubrey had held onto the new girl Christine's budgie for a week to teach her a lesson in matrimonial behavior, a bird that Christine had foolishly named Budgie, Aubrey, the second-smallest kid in the sixth grade at Sunflower Middle School in upper Wisconsin, had wanted a little bird to add to her ever-growing menagerie.

Aubrey already had a cage purchased online from drsfostersmith.com by her Uncle Gordon, no relation to her new stepfather, Reverend Gordon.

When Aubrey learned to her delight that Mr. Biddle raised finches, she decided to call on him after school.

"Yes?" Mr. Biddle said, answering the door wearing shoes with Velcro fasteners. "What brings you here?"

"Finches," Aubrey replied politely.

"Then you've come to the right place," Mr. Biddle said, hitching up his elastic-belt trousers over his portly stomach. "Finches are what I do. What kind are you looking for?"

"A small one," Aubrey replied.

"They're all small," Mr. Biddle explained,""when compared to a buzzard, a hawk or a crow - even to a budgie which I

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

would not recommend. Have you ever had one before?"

"No," Aubrey answered. "Just a cat, a dog and an octopus."

"In that case," Mr. Biddle said, "I suggest you choose a pair of Australian grass finches, among which the zebra finches are the most popular. They're easy to care for and easy to breed. They're in this room.'"

"You keep different species in different rooms?" Aubrey inquired.

"Of course," Mr. Biddle replied. "Birds of a feather flock together."

Aubrey followed Mr. Biddle into a sunlit room filled with ten large cages, which each held perhaps two dozen birds, each smaller than a wren. They were chirping and chattering like old ladies on a bus tour of the Holy Land.

"Look around," Mr. Biddle advised. "Take your time. If you have any questions, I'll be in the kitchen having coffee. Just call me."

"Thank you, sir," Aubrey said.

"You're most welcome," Mr. Biddle replied.

Aubrey examined each group with care. Soon she found herself returning to a single cage where an all-white finch (the only one so colored) remained clutching a perch beside a gray and brown and black bird with a red beak and rose-colored cheeks. They seemed to be snuggling each other.

Obviously, Aubrey thought, *they are friends*.

As Aubrey quietly observed them, many other finches came and left the perch, busy as honeybees, but these two - the white one and the multicolored one - ignored the others and remained together, side by side, engaged in what seemed to be a private conversation.

Aubrey stepped into the hall.

"Mr. Biddle?" she called.

"Yes?" Mr. Biddle replied followed by the sound of a chair being scooted back. "Have you found any birds you like?"

Aubrey noticed that while the hair atop the old man's head had grown gray, thin and wispy, thick, dark replacements sprouted from his ears and nose.

How strange it must feel to be growing old, she thought.

"Well, which ones did you pick?" Mr. Biddle asked.

Aubrey pointed out the cuddling white and multi-colored

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

pair.

"Excellent choice!" said Mr. Biddle.

When Aubrey got home, she was carrying two small boxes. She reached into the first box and saw she had retrieved the male. Immediately she placed him in the cage where he promptly flew to a perch. From here, he began singling a call to his friend.

To Aubrey's ears, it sounded as if he were saying, "Kill the wabbit, kill the wabbit, kill the wabbit!"

"She'll be with you in a moment," Aubrey said, reaching into the second box.

But the female finch had other ideas.

Instead of holding still for Aubrey's gentle hand, she flew out of the box, landing on the chandelier high above Aubrey's head.

Uh, oh, Aubrey thought.

Quickly, Aubrey locked the front door and closed the doors to the bathroom and bedrooms.

The white female flew to the sofa and chirped twice.

Her call was answered from inside the cage by, "Kill the wabbit."

This went on for quite some time until, at last, the female was sitting atop the cage exchanging calls with her partner.

Slowly and quietly, Aubrey tiptoed to her bedroom where, after several minutes of searching through her closet, she found the butterfly net that she received as a birthday present back when she was seven.

"GOTCHA!" Aubrey said, gently placing the female in her new home.

Aubrey sat back and watched her new responsibilities explore their cage as she thought of names.

Elvis and Pricilla? After all, among finches, it is the song of the male that attracts the non-singing female.

Norman and Carla? After the doctor and the nurse who operated on Aubrey after she fell off a skateboard, striking her head on a curb.

Bean and Christine? No way!

"Snow White." Aubrey said suddenly. "And, naturally, Prince Charming. Prince for short."

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

Aubrey smiled.

Perfect! She thought.

"Shoot the wabbit," Prince said.

Aubrey lined the bottom of the cage with pages torn from the State Farm atlas of the US. When the finches pooped, which was often, they pooped on Alabama. This reminded Aubrey of a song:

Birds pooped on Alabama last night.

In instructions downloaded from *drsfostersmith.com*, Aubrey learned that finches enjoy fresh, clean parsley. So she gave them a heaping handful. Five minutes later, it was gone.

They sure do like that stuff, Aubrey thought, adding another handful.

Once again, it disappeared in a matter of minutes.

Huh? Aubrey thought, placing another huge handful of parsley in the cage.

Snow White and Prince Charming swooped down onto the deep green leaves, carrying each one, piece-by-piece, to their hideout.

They're not eating this stuff, Aubrey realized. *They're building a nest.*

Two days later, two tiny eggs appeared. The next day, one more egg, until on the third day Snow White produced a fourth pearlescent marble-shaped egg, after which, she rested.

Babies, Aubrey thought. *Who would have thunk it?*

Soon, and suddenly, a little sixth-grader would become a foster mother to four ugly, featherless, hungry, helpless finchlets. This suited Aubrey just fine.

God is in His heaven, she thought, and *all is right with the world.*

Visit the Kids' Learning Center here!
It's filled with fun activities for kids about all types of pets.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*