

## **Aubrey's New Neighbor - © 2011 Richard W. Jennings**

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

Aubrey, the smallest kid in the fifth grade, lived on Cheery Street in a small town in Wisconsin with her orange cat Porchie and her pretty mother Anne, both of whom Aubrey loved dearly.

She was less pleased about the street names in her neighborhood. Cheery Street wasn't so bad, she thought, nor was her tidy three-bedroom house, but it was supposed to have been on Cherry Street. Unfortunately the developer of the neighborhood was a simple-minded man who had dropped out of school. Among his many drawbacks, he was a dreadful speller.

Pine Street had become Pink Street, the sign for Oak Street said Oats, Maple was Marble and the street behind Aubrey's house instead being named Plum was identified on the corner as Plump.

At least he got it right for the lucky souls on Birch Street, but there was no excuse, in Aubrey's opinion, for calling Elm Street Elmo.

One day a family moved into the house that was separated from Aubrey's back yard by a freshly painted white wooden fence. The new owners consisted of a mom, a dad, one skinny boy - a fifth-grader called Bean - and three little brown dachshunds named Sophie, Owen and Jozie.

Aubrey met Bean and his menagerie in the back yard where she had been watching Porchie try to catch butterflies that fortunately flew higher than Porchie, a recently overfed housecat, could leap.

As it turns out, Bean was engaged in an unusual experiment involving all three of his dogs. He considered his work to be a secret of high scientific value and fully expected to read about his success in Scientific American magazine before he reached sixth grade.

"Hi," Aubrey said. "Welcome to the neighborhood."

Although it took a while, requiring repetition, spelling and occasional explanations for the names of two kids, three dogs and a former stray cat, introductions were eventually completed.

Well," Aubrey concluded, "you certainly picked the right neighborhood for a silly name."

"I beg your pardon?" replied Bean.

"Never mind," said Aubrey as Porchie missed a giant yellow swallowtail by inches.

Meanwhile Owen, the only male dog and the biggest of the three, had been barking constantly at Porchie, viewing the Garfield-size kitty with the same enthusiasm as the cat viewed passing butterflies.

"What's his problem?" Aubrey asked.

"Owen?" Bean responded. "He's just tired of working because he has the hardest part."

"The hardest part of what?" Aubrey asked.

"The hardest part of the song," Bean answered as if that explained everything.

The next day Mr. Gordon, principal of the Sunflower Elementary School, introduced Bean to Aubrey's class.

"Bean comes to us all the way from Figley, Kansas," Mr. Gordon explained. "Tell us Bean, what brings you to Wisconsin?"

"You're kidding, right?" said Bean. "I mean when you think about it, if you lived in Figley, Kansas, and had the chance to move to Wisconsin, wouldn't you jump at the chance?"

"I suppose I would," replied Mr. Gordon laughing as he left the room.

Bean took a seat in the back, the twenty-fifth kid in class. Mrs. Bastianich clapped her hands to get everyone's attention who had turned their eyes on Bean, which was everyone but Aubrey.

"Let me remind you, children, that today is Future Day," she said. "Is everyone prepared?"

Twenty-four hands shot up into the air from everyone except Bean who had absolutely no idea what the woman was talking about.

Ian went first.

"When I grow up I plan to become a fifth-grade teacher," he announced proudly, a brief but effective speech that guaranteed him an A from the smiling Mrs. Bastianich.

Tiffany said she planned to become either a movie star or the President of the United States, possibly both.

"The President's job is actually very short," she explained, "whereas a movie star can last a long time if she begins at any early age."

"I want to be a veterinarian like Doctor Foster," said Eric, the kid nicknamed "Brain."

And so it went through twenty-two kids, some of whom aspired to work at McDonald's, others hoping to be cowboys, astronauts, tap dancers, authors, wealthy businesspeople, shoe salesmen, farmers, deep-sea divers, baseball players, professional mountain climbers and inventors.

Lynette said she simply wanted to get married and have lots of children.

Then it was Aubrey's turn.

"I haven't made up my mind," she confessed. "I only recently started the fifth grade. What's the rush?"

By now Bean had caught onto the assignment, so to be a good sport, he held up his hand.

Yes, Bean," Mrs. Bastianich said, "are you prepared to join us?"

"Yes, m'am," Bean answered politely.

"How nice," Mrs. Bastianich said. "Please proceed."

Bean stood up, placed his palm on the back of his chair, cleared his throat and spoke loudly and clearly so everyone could hear.

"I may not wait until I grow up," Bean said to the surprise of his audience. "I may accomplish this much sooner."

"Why, Bean," responded Mrs. Bastianich. "How ambitious of you!"

"Possibly," Bean said, "but the fact is I've already made considerable progress. My goal is to win the Nobel Prize for Science. If I turn out to be the youngest winner ever, so be it. If a kid can travel from Kansas to Wisconsin just to live in a different house he can easily travel from Wisconsin to Sweden to pick up a million-dollar prize."

A few of the boys laughed. Three of the girls, including Lynette, the one who wanted to get married, gazed at Bean in admiration. Mrs. Bastianich appeared perplexed.

Tell us, Bean," Mrs. Bastianich quizzed him. "How do you propose to accomplish this, uh, unusual

achievement?"

"I wish I could tell you," Bean replied, "but to do so might threaten the outcome of the project. I trust you understand."

"Not exactly," said Mrs. Bastianich, "but I appreciate your willingness to participate."

This is going to be a tougher year than I suspected, Mrs. Bastianich thought.

Back home Aubrey once again encountered Bean working with his three dachshunds in their almost-connected back yards. To each dog in succession Bean would make a sound and when it responded properly it would receive a Doctors Foster and Smith delectable duck treat from Bean's jeans pocket.

Okay, wise guy," said Aubrey. "What was that all about?"

"What was what?" answered Bean.

"You know what," she said. "Your becoming a Nobel Prize-winner."

"You have to swear to secrecy," Bean declared.

"Okay, I swear," Aubrey answered.

"I mean really swear," Bean clarified. "Like on your cat's pajamas with electric wires attached."

"I swear," Aubrey said.

"Say it all," Bean insisted. "Say you won't tell anyone ever, on your cat's pajamas with electric wires attached."

With a shrug of her shoulders, Aubrey did as instructed.

"Ladies and gentleman," Bean announced, turning to his dogs. "Begin!"

"Twinkle, twinkle," howled Owen.

"Little," responded Sophie, who was followed by Jozie who barked out the word "star."

A long silence ensued as Bean distributed duck treats.

Finally, Audrey spoke. "That's it?"

"What do you mean 'That's it?'" asked Bean, clearly miffed. "These dogs just sang a song. When was the last time you ever witnessed something like that?"

"That wasn't a song," corrected Aubrey. "It was a partial verse. If you want a song you're going to need a lot more dogs."

She picked up Porchie - not easy given his weight - and returned to her house.

"What a weird kid," Aubrey observed to Porchie after dinner while doing her homework in her bedroom.

"You think he's weird," Porchie replied. "I can sing better than Owen. He's completely off-key."

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