

Gary “SII” Studer II

Something New Every Day

It came to an end when the alarm started reporting on the Infiniti while I was waxing the hood and fender. That’s when a strange squeaking or beeping—I thought it was the car alarm—woke me up. I sat up on my bunk and yawned, rubbing my eyes. The squeaky beeps paused for the moment it took for me to stretch. As I made my bed, the audible annoyance began again. Like it was aware my attention had subsided. It was then that I made the distinction that the beeps were that of a chirping bird.

I’m in prison, so there aren’t any trees near my window. I finished making my bed and peered outside to investigate the bird’s whereabouts. As I approached the window, the chirping stopped like the damn thing knew I was there, and it didn’t want me to locate its position. I stared outside, surveying the landscape closely for several minutes—other buildings, picnic tables, the fence, no birds. I gave up the search and redirected my attention to my morning ritual. I put cream, sugar, and coffee in my mug, baited my toothbrush, slipped on my shower shoes, and made my way to the restroom. All while that bird maniacally sang his praise for... today?

I did my restroom thing, got hot water for my coffee, and headed to the microwave. In the dayroom, I ran into a guy I knew at another joint that just rode in. We caught up and bullshitted for a bit before we decided to meet up on the big yard after lunch.

I returned to my cube where three of my seven cubies still slept. I jumped on my rack, turned on my TV, and stacked my pillows so I could lay back on them. I sipped from my cup and switched the channel to ESPN so I could check the score of last night’s game. I got the score, then switched to the warden’s channel to look at the movie while I drank my mud and woke up. A picture of Amy Winehouse was on the screen, so I put in one of my earbuds and sat back against the pillows. The coffee called, so I took a couple more sips then sat down my cup. That’s when the chirping resumed. I put in both earbuds to drown out the sound, but the incessancy bled through any silent second. I grabbed my cup and took another drink while the chirping continued. I took another gander outside, but still couldn’t see any birds. It sounded like the son-of-a-bitch was perched atop my TV—it was so loud. So I looked. I had to laugh at myself. Am I losing it? Did a screw loosen while I slept? I know damn right there is not going to be a bird on my TV. Why’d I look?

I stretched back out on the pillows and glanced at the screen, enjoying the java for a couple minutes before I noticed the chirping had

desisted. As annoying as it was, its absence left a sense of emptiness. Hell, I kinda missed it. Oh, well, the quaint subtlety that comes with quiet mornings in the pen is serene. The moment I began to settle with that concept, yep, “chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp...” It was like he had something to say and couldn’t say it loud—or fast—enough. I smiled at his effort. I looked again for this vociferous creature, but again, nothing. I observed the design of the other buildings to see if there was a sill above my window he could be on. The closest he could be was on the roof’s edge which was at least five feet higher than the top of the window. I sat back, shaking my head, thinking, “I admire his tenacity, whatever his cause.”

I saw “Footy” cover his head with his pillow as he said, “Shut that window.” “H.P.” answered from under his pillow, “It’s shut.” “Footy” queried with a snarl, “Is he in the damn cube?” I laughed and said “No, I checked. But he’s pissed wherever he is.” He replied, “He’s bitchin’ bout somethin’, huh?” The chirping faded to a dull sound for a couple of minutes, then returned to a full blown alarm—like it was before. This continued for at least two more hours through count and before chow; loud as hell for a couple of minutes, then distant and quieter for a few. But almost constant. Maybe 10 minutes were undisturbed by the bird’s noisy rant that whole time.

After chow, I put off meeting my “Greve” to further investigate this morning’s disturbance. I could hear the continuous chirping as I approached the exterior of my building, but as I neared my window, it ceased. I noticed a darker area on the grass at the end of the building. I stepped closer, leaning in to see what it was. As I focused in, I realized it was a dead bird lying with its wings sprawled open. I heard a single “CHIRP” and looked up in the direction of the sound to see a bird on the roof of my building staring down at me with its head almost completely sideways. Then it flew away.

It was in that moment—through the bird—I realized my ability to empathize...

...I felt its pain.