

When Not to Say "Boo!"

By Gerard S. Coard

As a very young boy growing up in my native Trinidad and Tobago, I was obsessed with catching birds. To my surprise, in an empty lot overgrown with dense thickets next to my home, I observed a nesting dove, and I was determined from that moment to catch that bird.

Early one morning, right after breakfast, the morning sun low in the sky, glistening dew drops still on the soft grass leading to the lot, I headed to the low branch in thicket to catch that bird.

With slow and deliberate steps, I approached the nest. Arms outstretched, my back in a crouch, and the bird with her back toward me. My young heart was beating rapidly in anticipation of what I expected to be a triumphant moment. The gap between me and the bird was getting smaller, and smaller, and smaller. Suddenly, as if overcome by adrenalin, or fear, I shouted... BOO! In a flash, with the sound of wings beating the air rapidly, the bird was gone. I stood alone in the thicket feeling dejected, and defeated by the stupidity of what I had done.

Fast forward years later. The incident of the bird long behind me, I am a young man living in Brooklyn New York. It was a Sunday afternoon and someone had just taken my picture. A picture that will always remind me of that Sunday. I'm dressed smartly, money in my pocket, and my attention focused on a new type of bird... chicks.

Before heading to the train station, I paused observing people on the sidewalk, traffic, yellow cabs, etc. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by an insistent voice in my ear, commanding me to go back into the apartment. I can't explain it, but the "voice" was not going away. I finally relented, and walked back into the apartment, and down the hallway to my bedroom. That's when I saw him: my two-year old brother, who apparently walked away from my mother unnoticed, standing on the windowsill. He was leaning on a shaky screen, with his head on the outside of the raised window, looking down at what was essentially a three-floor drop to the basement level.

I froze for a second, grasping the gravity of the situation. Without making a sound, arms outstretched, back crouched, my steps slow and deliberate, I approached with the experience of the bird in the thicket flooding my brain. And then suddenly, with lesson learned, I grabbed my little baby brother without saying... BOO!