

# My Very Best Friend.

## Companionship in the Unexpected.



Hi there! My name is Hoot. I didn't have a name until that wonderful day. You see, a long long time ago when I was born, I had a beautiful momma and a strong and wise daddy. They took great care of us, my sister and brother and me. Momma and Daddy went outside every day a bunch of times and got us food. They kept us snugly and warm in the big ole nest they had built. We sang songs together, watched them fly with wonder, and talked about when we would be big and be able to fly. Sometimes my sister was mean to me and my brother, teasing us and calling us names. She was the oldest and never let us forget it. She said, "I will be able to fly before you both!"

For days and days, Mom and Dad told us all the rules of flying. We were so excited to get to try! We knew all the rules by heart.

1. Walk to the edge of the barn.
2. Look around for cats and foxes.
3. Look to the sky, don't look down.
4. Hold your head high, spread your wings, and jump.
5. As soon as you are in the air, flap your wings, and you are flying!

"Momma, Momma, when can we try?" we asked every day. Momma was a little nervous about letting us try for the first time. She liked having us safe and sound at home in the nest. But, Dad was brave and strong and knew we were just about ready. One day, when the sun was shining brightly, and there was no rain, Dad left the nest in the old barn and went out. After a while, he came back and said it was time.

I could hardly believe it! Was this for real? Were we really gonna fly? I was so excited, but also scared to death! My sister went first. We all went near the window to watch. She repeated all the rules to herself, looked around, held her head high, looked to the sky, and swoosh! She was off! No problem, she flew around out there for what seemed like forever. "My turn, my turn", my brother and I shouted. "Come back so I can try" I said. She flew back in the window looking so proud of herself. We were proud of her too. She had done an amazing job. She made it look so easy. Before I could claim my spot as second, my little brother waddled over to the big window, spread his wings, and off he went. He looked so powerful and free out there in the sky. He was so good at flying! I was more excited than ever now, I could hardly contain myself. I wanted to go so bad! I wanted to be out there flying with my brother. When he finally came back in and landed, I gulped down the huge lump in my throat, looked at my family and walked to the window. "Ok," I told myself, "I can do this. Look around, nothing scary on the ground, look to the sky, head up high, wings spread wide, and here..... I..... gooooooo....." I stepped off the edge of that window with my wings spread wide, just like my brother and sister had done, soared out the window, and glided right to the ground. Wait, what? I looked up at my expectant family standing in the window, looking down there at me, all the way down on the ground. "Boy, hurry, try it again!" Dad said, "Just run a few steps and take off, just like up here." So I did, I spread my wings, ran, and tried with all of my heart, but I just could not get off the ground. I was so utterly dissappointed on the long walk back to the barn. Momma took me under her wing and tried to love the hurt away, but I could not be consoled. I was so sad and embarrassed. And even though they didn't say it, I knew they were all very disappointed in me too.

I tried again day after day. Nothing would deter me. I would walk to the window, check for predators, look to the sky, spread my wings just like Momma and Dad had taught me, step off the edge of the window, and whoosh. So far, so good; but then, just when I started flapping my wings, nothing happened, I would just glide to the ground. Just like the first time, just like every

time, over and over, glide to the ground, walk back to the barn, climb back into the nest, and feel like a complete and utter failure. I tried every day all day, until the wonderful day.

Now, with spending so much time on the ground, Momma said I needed some more lessons. Lessons about dangerous things. She taught me about cats, dogs, foxes, coyotes, wolves, snakes, and all sorts of other animals that were dangerous to little owls like me. She also told me about mice, squirrels, chipmunks, rats, and other things I could catch and eat, if I ever got the chance. I actually got pretty good at spotting danger. I took a break from my flying lessons if something dangerous was out there. And, believe it or not, I was pretty good at catching little critters to eat, too. Momma said she couldn't bring me food forever. She said I was getting to be almost as big as her now. My sister and brother spent more and more time out flying, going farther and farther away. They came home and told me all about their travels, other birds they had met, places and things they had seen and plans they were making for the future. My brother even told me about a beautiful owl he was falling in love with. They planned on being together and raising a family of their own! Oh, how I wished I could go with them. What was wrong with me, was I broken? damaged? or just plain old stupid. Eventually, my sister and brother flew away and never came back.

My mom and dad were getting older and they hurt in their bones, so one day, they came to me and said "Son, we are going to fly where the weather is warmer." Momma and Daddy were sad to leave me, but they said they didn't have a choice. Momma made sure I remembered how to catch the little animals on the ground to eat, and how to watch for dangers. They said when I learn to fly, come and visit them down south. They sounded like they still believed I would figure it out someday. That gave me a little sparkle of hope. But then, they were gone, and I was all alone in my nest in that big old barn. It had never seemed so big and scary before. All the sounds I heard scared me, creaking and cracking, especially the animals prowling around outside in the dark, just waiting for a silly little owl who can't fly to come out and get eaten. That was my life, until the wonderful day.

One morning when I woke up, I heard whistling like a bird, but not like a bird. It was the most incredible music I had ever heard. I walked over to my window, and there, on the ground, looking around and whistling away, was a... a something. "Ok, is it dangerous or edible?" I asked myself. All of Momma's lessons came flooding back to me. Oh, how I wished she was here with me to tell me what this beautiful creature was. Ok, it's not a cat or a fox, no pointy ears, not a dog, it's whistling, not barking, too little to be a wolf or a coyote. It's definitely not a snake. What could it be? It sounded so friendly and looked so amazing, and I was oh so lonely. Could it be? a... friend? I mustered up all the strength and courage a little owl can muster, walked to the edge of the window, spread my wings, and whoosh! Down I went to the ground to check it out. I was a little ways away, but when it saw me, it was scared "Oh!" it said, "Oh!", I said. Then it looked at me and I looked at it. It walked around in a big circle, a few steps back from me, and I circled around watching it. It was quite a bit bigger than me, but it wasn't trying to get me or eat me, and it wasn't scary. Suddenly, it started talking! Whoa! "Hi," it said, "I'm Chuck, I'm a boy." A boy, a person, no wonder I couldn't figure it out. I had never seen a boy before. He was magnificent. I started talking too, telling him all about how I couldn't fly so my family left me, and how lonely I had been because I didn't have anyone in the whole wide world

anymore, and everything, but he didn't seem to understand what I was saying. But, even if he couldn't understand me he sure was friendly. He smiled and laughed and told me he had just moved to this farm. It was his mammaw and papaw's farm and he and his mom had moved there when his dad left. I sure knew how it felt to be left. I felt sorry for him. I think he was as lonely as me. He told me he didn't have many friends, and that the other kids made fun of him and picked on him sometimes. He told me we could be friends. This was the most wonderful day of my life! I felt like I was on top of the world! I was so excited I started dancing and jumping around, and he was laughing and I was chattering to him, even though he couldn't understand me, and all of a sudden I jumped so high, I flapped my wings, and do you know what happened? I flew! For the very first time in my life, I didn't just glide, I didn't just fall, I actually flew! Oh, could this day get any better? I flew up and down and all around my new friend Chuck. He watched me in amazement. I think he knew how important this was for me. I could feel his excitement. We stayed together all day. He told me all about his old house, his dad, his mom and grandparents. He told me how nervous he was to go to his new school tomorrow for the first time. I listened to everything he said. When I answered him, he said all it sounded like to him was "hoot, hoot, hoot." Then he looked so happy and said, "That's what I'm gonna call you. Your name will be Hoot." I was so proud of my new name. I had never had a name before. He said we would be friends forever and that he would never leave me! Every day after school he came out to that old barn. I could hear him whistling as soon as he started my way. I was the happiest little owl in the whole wide world. I got better and better at flying too, and soon I was flying like a pro. I would wait on Chuck in a tree, or in the window of the barn, and when the giant yellow thing opened up and he jumped out, my heart would sing. He was my very best friend. and through the years we have both grown up a lot, but I will always have my best friend Chuck. What more could a little owl want?

The end.