

Birdhouses

by Jake Barnes

Al's friends thought it odd that he put his dirty clothes in his bathtub. He always had to explain. Those were his *clean* clothes, he said; his dirty clothes were on the floor upstairs.

Al taught school for many years, and when he retired, he was free to devote time to his art. What would be a worthy project, he wondered? And then it came to him. Birdhouses. And he set himself to the task of building 365 birdhouses in 365 days.

That year, if you asked Al, was truly the best of times, the worst of times. His birdhouses were whimsical and delightful creations made from scraps of wood and metal.

It was hell if he fell behind. Then he would have to labor to catch up, and he put in some long days. For his birdhouses were not just birdhouses—they were works of art. And each one was unique. There were birdhouses big and small, tall and squat, sheds and mansions, homes for our feathered friends that made you smile, that popped your eyes and made you say, “Wow!”

Three hundred and sixty-five of them, all in Al's backyard, exposed to sun, wind, and rain, and not a one was for sale. No, sir. When you asked, Al said no. “They're *my* birdhouses,” he said.

