**Birds**

Somebody else’s plastic birds

shouldn’t mean too much,

scattered carefully under the oaks

on a perfectly mowed lawn.

A footnote in neighborhood history at best,

the backdrop for larger,

more important memories.

But somehow, looking back,

those silly birds seemed to be the sun

around which all our lives revolved.

They weren’t much to look at—

just battered plastic decoys.

Geese. Ducks.

A turkey or two.

And a single, nervous flamingo

perched awkwardly outside the flock.

It sometimes ranged ahead or fell behind,

or watched from one side or the other

but never once

mixed with the rest.

They lived in a yard

exactly three blocks south of our street.

Our bus stop was only two blocks south,

but we often migrated farther in the afternoons

to check on the birds.

What were they up to?

Had they moved today?

We were all drawn into this constant mystery.

They never stood still for long.

They rearranged themselves

(it seemed)

when none of us were there to see,

so that, on a Monday, they might be

congregated around the turkeys

under the western oaks,

almost touchable

behind the iron fence that separated yard from sidewalk.

Two days later, they might be

stretched out in a line—

in frozen progress toward the boulder twenty feet away.

We always wondered where they would be next time.

Their lives more unpredictable than our own.

The faithful birds played their game

a couple of times each week.

We came to know Mr. Sessions,

the owner of those birds.

Our wonder changed a bit but didn’t vanish.

The mystery was kept alive in the minds of other children

(the ages we had been when we believed that the birds

just might move for us

if we watched closely enough).

We still walked that extra block

every couple of days.

**Wheat for the World**

**1**Every October, about 1,100 scientists from around the world gather in Des Moines, Iowa, to celebrate the work of Dr. Norman Borlaug. They discuss problems and possible solutions relating to the world’s food supply. They also award the World Food Prize to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to global food security. This prize was the idea of Dr. Norman Borlaug, a scientist whose life’s work ensured that billions of people worldwide would have access to food.

**Early Life**

**2** Norman Borlaug was born near Cresco, Iowa, on March 25, 1914. He was the son of Norwegian immigrants and grew up on their small farm. He learned the importance of hard work by helping his parents with chores on the farm. He attended a one-room school with children of all ages and abilities. There he learned to cooperate and help others who were different from himself. When he went to high school, he became part of the wrestling team. He learned to give everything he had in a match and never quit no matter how strong the opponent might be. The values he learned growing up—hard work, cooperation, and determination—were key in helping him succeed in his life’s work.

**Higher Education**

**3**After completing high school Borlaug wanted to go to college. However, he could not afford it. Borlaug graduated from high school at the peak of the Great Depression, when people were struggling to find jobs and pay for basic needs. Education was a luxury. Despite the hard times, Borlaug found work as a farmhand, earning 50 cents a day. He worked on the farm and saved his earnings for a full year. The next year, he was able to pay to attend the University of Minnesota.

**A Problem With Wheat**

**4** After graduating, Borlaug went to work for the Rockefeller Foundation on a project in Mexico. At that time the country of Mexico was struggling with its food supply. Crops were failing, and people were going hungry. The Foundation asked Borlaug to work with Mexican farmers to try to improve their wheat crops. The kind of wheat they grew often developed stem rust. Stem rust damages wheat so that only a few grains can be harvested from each plant. At first the farmers did not want to plant wheat because they were afraid it would develop stem rust. Eventually, however, Borlaug persuaded some farmers to help him with the research.

**Developing Borlaug Wheat**

**5** Borlaug’s team looked for wheat varieties that were more resistant to stem rust and bred the plants with one another. They did this over and over until they had new varieties that resisted the disease.

**6** Most plant researchers grow only one crop each year. Borlaug’s team decided to speed up their research by growing two crops each year. One crop was grown high in the mountains in summer when the days were long. Then each winter, when the days were shorter, the seeds from the mountain crop were planted near the desert. The next spring, the desert seeds were taken back to plant the mountain crops.

**7** Borlaug had intended only to speed up his research. However, almost by accident, his team made some important advances. Their wheat varieties were not only rust-resistant but also would thrive in different climates. Unlike old wheat varieties that needed a specific amount of daylight to grow, the new wheat varieties grew well no matter how long the day was. The new Borlaug wheat varieties proved invaluable in the coming years.

**Sharing the Wealth**

**8** Mexico was not the only country suffering from failed harvests. Around the world, people were going hungry because farms could not produce enough food. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization knew about Borlaug’s success in Mexico, and they asked him to help. First he worked with India and Pakistan, persuading them to try the varieties he had developed. In a short time, wheat production in these countries increased to four times what it had been.

**9**Following the successes in Mexico, India, and Pakistan, many African countries began using Borlaug’s wheat. Borlaug’s seeds and training for growing them were given freely to any country that asked for them. In return, countries were required to develop colleges of agriculture. These colleges could train young scientists to continue to develop better food crops for their countries.

**Honoring Borlaug and His Work**

**10** Borlaug won many awards during his lifetime. He also worked to create the World Food Prize, which recognizes the importance of continued research in the development of food crops. By creating this prize, Borlaug ensured that his work would not end once his research was complete. The prize inspires other scientists to carry on his legacy and work toward ending world hunger across the globe.