Zoe Eppley
5h ·

1 Back to skua stories. First, as Billy-Ace Baker mentioned the latest Explorer's Gazette of the Old Antarctic Explorer's Association has a story about South Polar Skua migration from Antarctica to the Arctic. It's a great story, great Gazette, and a great organization. Maybe it belongs in your life? oaea.net
I saw my first South Polar Skua in the Bering Sea (~60°N) - before I became bipolar 😉

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COURAGE★SACRIFICE★DEVOTION

EXPLORER'S GAZETTE

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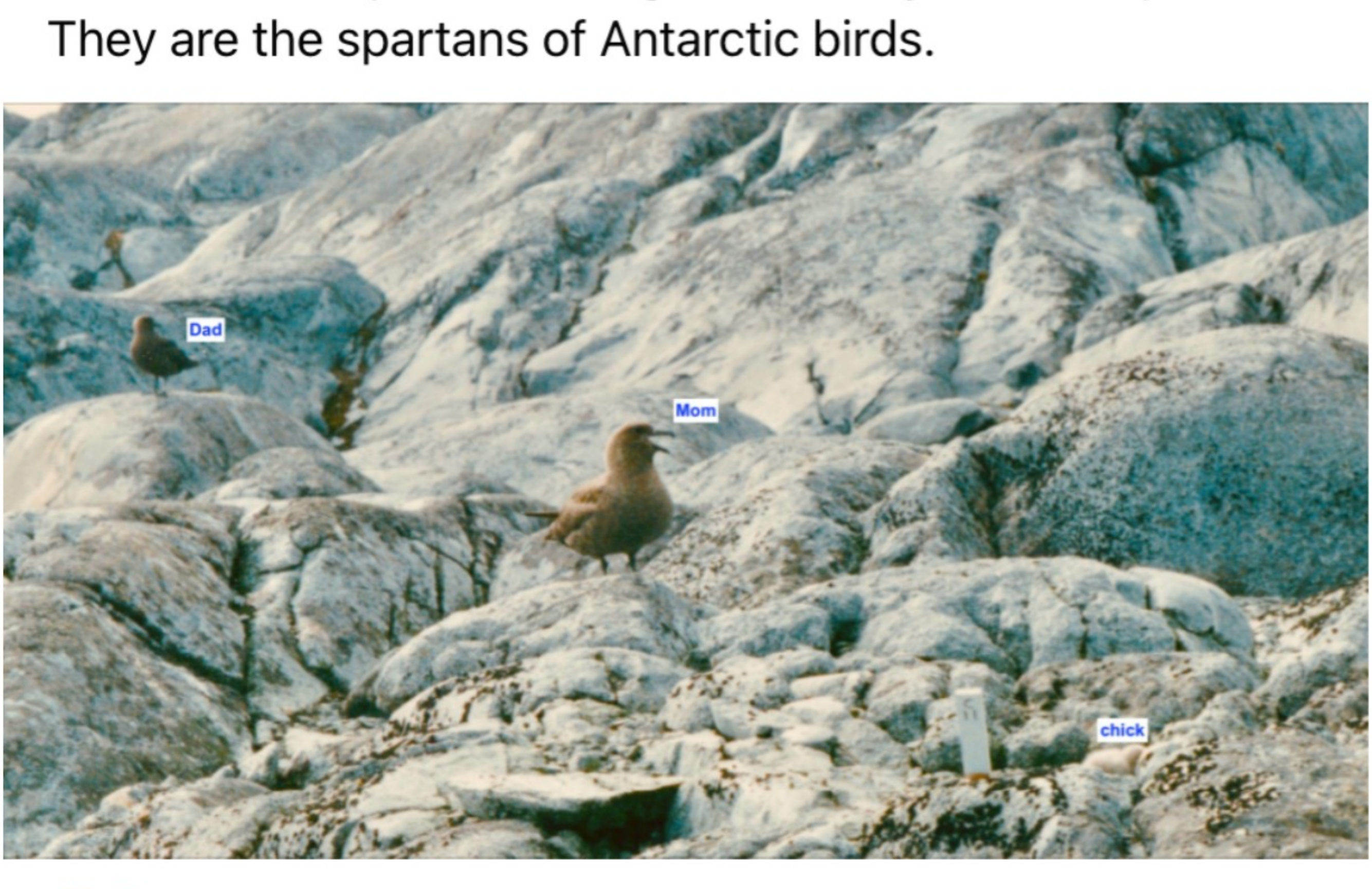
South Polar Skuas display to each other over food and territory
Photo Kimberley Kiska

👍 2 1 Comment

Like Comment

Billy-Ace Baker
Thanks for the plug.

2/ The skua story - NOT a morality tale.
Here is a skua pair's nesting site. Pretty luxurious, eh?
They are the spartans of Antarctic birds.



👍❤ 8 3 Comments

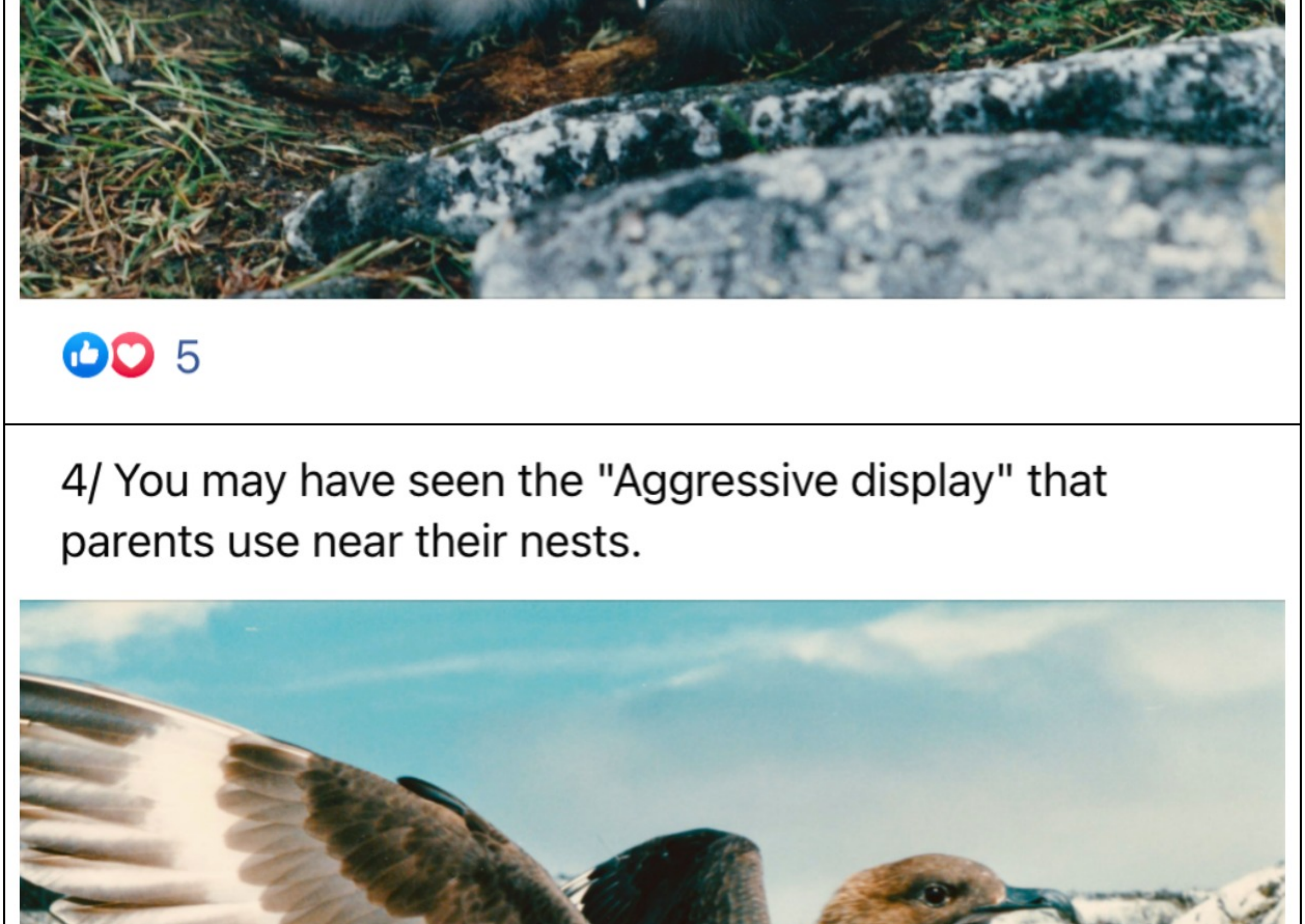
Like Comment

Zoe Eppley
Nesting life is tough for Snow and Antarctic Petrels and Storm Petrels, but they are not so aggressive.
Like · Reply · 5h

Halli Macronectes
Christine Island?
Like · Reply · 4h

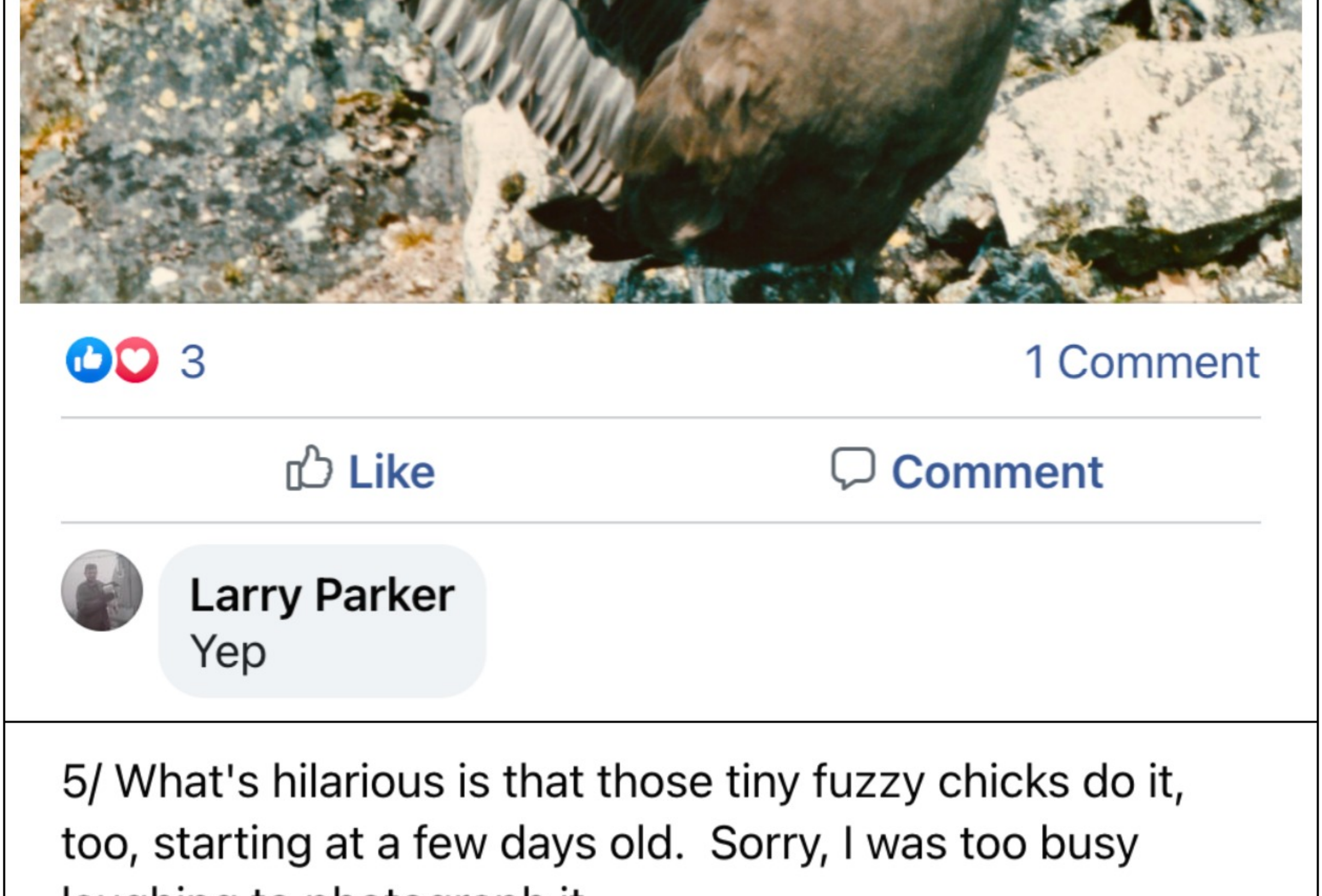
Zoe Eppley
Christine Island, Jan 6-8 1990. We were going to do the watch at Limitrophe but the chicks were too old - we wanted to know how long the adults brooded them (NOT), and other stuff.
👍 1
Like · Reply · 4h

3/ Here are the chicks - 5 days old and already left on their own except for feeding. The white spots on their beaks are egg teeth, which they use to break out of the egg. South Polar Skuas have 2 color morphs - light and dark. This nest has one chick of each. These chicks are lucky to have a nice soft spot with grass, many nest sites are just gravel.



👍❤ 5

4/ You may have seen the "Aggressive display" that parents use near their nests.



👍❤ 3 1 Comment

Like Comment

Larry Parker
Yep

5/ What's hilarious is that those tiny fuzzy chicks do it, too, starting at a few days old. Sorry, I was too busy laughing to photograph it.

👍 3

6/ Knowing that skuas are opportunistic hunters, you might suspect that tender chicks left alone would become tasty morsels for other skuas. Indeed they do. Skuas are lucky to raise 1 chick most years, but they hatch 2 for insurance.
In fat years, there is enough time and food that one parent can stay home and protect the kids - not keep them warm or any sissy thing like that!
Photo - the intrepid Mike Rentel protecting us while we checked a nest.

👍 2

7/ In lean years, it takes both parents away foraging to find enough food and they are lucky if one chick survives. Meanwhile the chicks battle for only chickhood, and the younger or weaker is chased off to enter the food chain. The victor receives all its parents' attention and provision. This is not unique to skuas - all the gulls* and skuas do it, and it is fairly common among birds in general.
*well, not the Ivory Gull that only lays one egg, but you get the idea.

👍 2

8/ It's a tough world. We were watching some nests continuously over a couple of days. One nest had a couple young chicks in it. A small dark skua (probably the dad), landed at the the nest. The older chick came up and started pecking "Dad's" beak, asking to be fed. "Dad" didn't have food to regurgitate. "Dad" looked around, saw the younger chick [queue dramatic music], and proceeded to dismember and feed it to the oldest. Now don't make me regret posting this last bit. Morality is a human thing. Skuas are just trying to get by. If there were more hot dogs to steal, or a bumper crop of krill or penguin eggs/chicks to catch, that poor chick might be alive today - throwing back its wings and crying to the world - "We bad" (Silver Streak reference) before whacking someone upside the head. Viva skuas!

The end

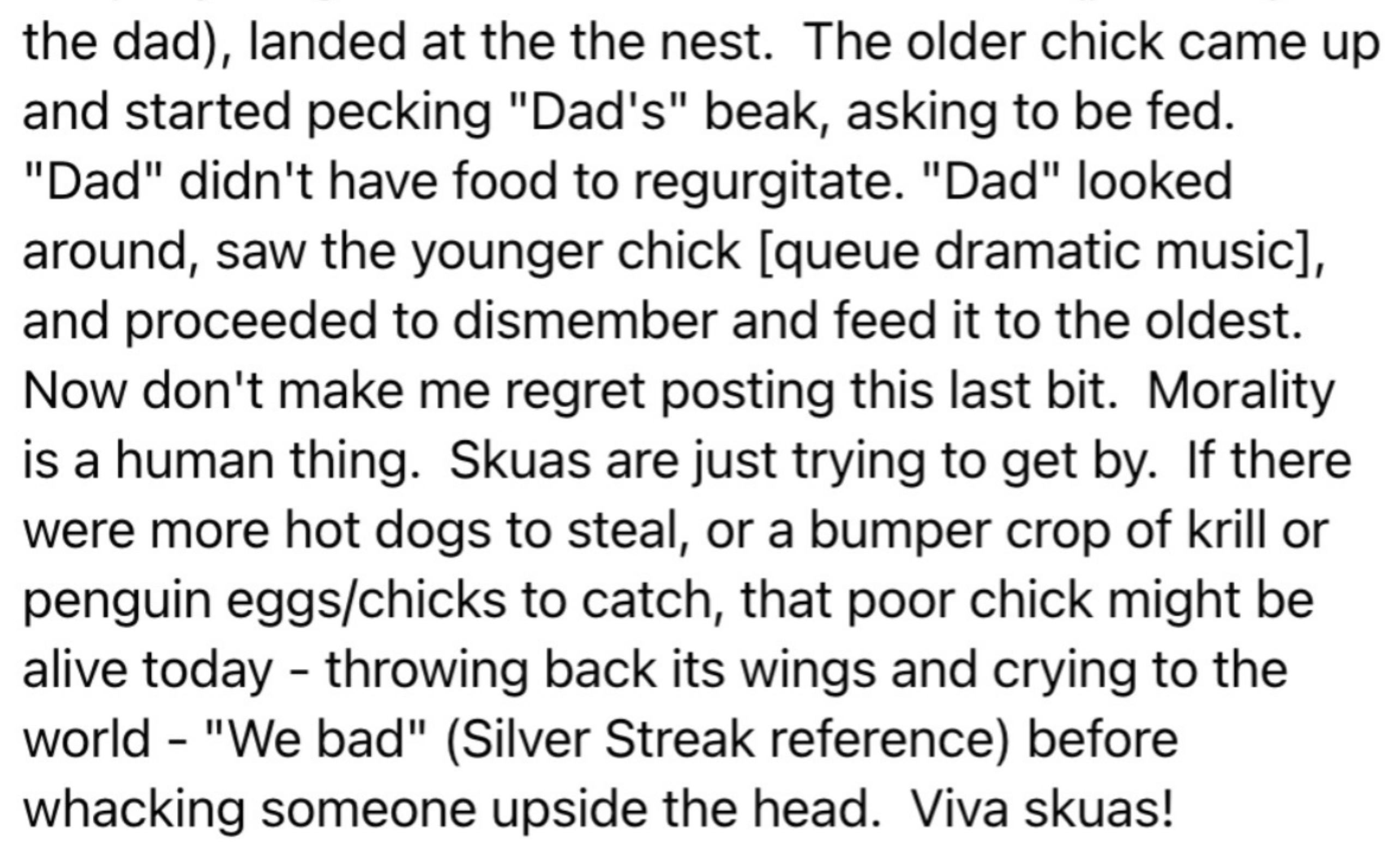


Photo Kimberley Kiska

👍❤ 5 2 Comments

Like Comment

Marian Moyher
I remember you coming to the lab stores that day and telling that story!!