

NARRATOR: These baby chicks were hatched on April 9 in a tree just across the street from the student center. During the week of April 19, MIT's in-house video production department set up a video camera and shared these images 24/7 throughout the Institute via MIT's cable TV system. The following week, we began sharing the development of these chicks with the world via 12-hour-per-day webcast.

We were amazed at how quickly they grew. Many viewers wrote to tell us that they had detected visible growth within a single day. Not unlike the graduates we honor today when they were just babies, the single mission of these youngsters was to be fed and to sleep. The parent hawks constantly doted on the chicks, delivering a nonstop assortment of Cambridge-area prey. Their first tentative steps resulted in the inevitable stumble and header. The parent hawks continued to fortify the nest as the babies grew.

These chicks also experienced some of the same character-building New England weather that your children have been exposed to these past years. At different times, the outstretched wings of the mother protected the babies from a 2-inch dusting of snow or from several downpours.

And through it all, the chicks ate and grew and ate some more. During their sophomore period, the down gave way in places to feathers, and the now juveniles became more adventurous. More aggressive attempts at negotiating the nest earned similar results, a faceplant. But as the footing became sure and the balance improved, it was time to stretch those wings and exercise those muscles.

Now, as juniors, these students were learning as much as they could handle. Mother explained that the food they ate didn't just grow on trees. Lessons were provided in the value of the hunt. And as the last bits of down were preened away and feathers continued to grow, the youngsters enthusiastically tested their abilities at defying gravity.

As is usually the case, one of the siblings was far more the risk taker, the trailblazer. Though only separated by perhaps a day at birth, it was clear that one of the siblings was far more anxious to explore life outside the nest.

Finally, graduation week had arrived, and just a week ago Tuesday, the more precocious sibling, whom we named "Kitty Hawk," jumped from the nest and glided safely to the other side of Mass Ave., landing on a bicycle rack in front of the student center. MIT campus police, aided by a number of onlookers, secured the area while the fledgling practiced takeoffs and landings by flying from handlebar to handle.

Over the next few hours, Kitty Hawk made its way, seemingly a branch at a time, up a nearby evergreen to an elevation where it gained enough confidence to attempt a return flight back to the nest, encouraged by cries from its mother.

Kitty Hawk provided encouragement to the less daring sibling, Mitsy, also known as "Chicken Hawk." But Mitsy wasn't quite ready. Days passed, and Mitsy, although the spirit seemed willing, couldn't bring himself to venture beyond the nest. We speculated that yet another torrential downpour might provide the necessary incentive, but Mitsy toughed it out. Food continued to be provided, and he now had a room all to himself. Why leave?

Parental and sibling encouragement continued to where last Friday, Mitsy jumped, flew to the highest point in the tree, and looked like he was ready. A gust of wind and a flurry of wings, and the less than gracious hawk stumbled downward, luckily landing in the nest below. Failure breeds success, and Mitsy undoubtedly learned from that failed attempt.

The very next morning, Saturday, 5:00 AM, Mitsy took his maiden flight. Perhaps he was waiting for a smaller audience or for the sun to finally shine. But later that day, he and Kitty Hawk were spotted together on the highest ledge of the student center and have since been spotted on ledges and windowsills throughout the Institute. You may even see them flying about today.

This is indeed a place where the young learn while they mature and test their limits and learn from their mistakes and finally leave, with confidence and a sense of great accomplishment, to stretch their wings and explore new horizons where possibilities are boundless. We wish them the very best.