

The Boy and the Hedgehog Highway



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Ben was eight years old and small for his age, with messy dark brown hair that stuck up at the back and a gap-toothed smile. He lived in a red-brick house on a quiet street with lots of gardens. One warm night, he looked out of his window and saw something small and spiky snuffling across the lawn. It was a hedgehog! Ben watched until it disappeared under the fence.



The next morning, Ben told his mum everything. She wore a yellow gardening apron over her striped shirt, and her round glasses shone in the sun. "Hedgehogs roam at night," she said. "They need to visit many gardens to find food and friends." Ben frowned. "But our fence has no holes. How do they get through?" Mum smiled. "They squeeze under, but it's not always safe."



Ben put on his red hoodie with the little hedgehog patch and his green rubber boots. He marched into the garden to look for clues. There were tiny footprints in the mud and a few droppings near the flowerpot. "A hedgehog highway!" he whispered. "That's what they need—a safe path from garden to garden." His brown eyes sparkled with an idea.



Ben and his mum knocked on Mr Patel's door first. Mr Patel was tall and stooped, with a white moustache and a green cardigan. He carried a wooden walking stick and frowned at the fence. "A hole in my fence?" he grumbled. "It took me ages to paint that fence!" Ben explained about the hedgehogs. Mr Patel's bushy eyebrows went up. "In trouble, are they? Well, why didn't you say so?"



Mr Patel fetched his saw and cut a neat square hole at the bottom of his fence. "There," he said proudly. "The first hole on the hedgehog highway." Ben cheered. Mum took a photo. That evening, Ben watched the hole. Nothing happened. Then, just after dark, a small snout poked through. It was a hedgehog! She snuffled and waddled into the garden, a little leaf stuck on her quills.



Ben named her Hetty. She had soft tan fur on her face, tiny black bead eyes, and a little black nose that twitched as she searched for beetles. "She's brave," Ben whispered. "She's testing the new hole." Hetty sniffed around the flowerbed and then slipped back through the hole to Mr Patel's garden. Ben did a little happy dance in his green boots.



The next day, Ben made a list of all the houses on the street. There were seven gardens in a row, and each one had a fence. "If every neighbor cuts one small hole," he said, "the hedgehogs can travel the whole street safely." Mum nodded. "It's called a wildlife corridor. Connected habitats protect animals." Ben liked that. "Let's make it happen!"



Ben and Mum knocked on every door. Some neighbors were unsure. "What about my dog?" asked Mrs Chen. "And my prize roses?" asked old Mr Green. Ben explained that hedgehogs were small and gentle and would help eat garden pests. He showed them a drawing of the hedgehog highway. Most neighbors smiled and said yes. A few needed more persuading, but Ben was determined.



On Saturday, everyone met in the street. Mr Patel brought his saw. Mrs Chen brought lemonade. Mr Green brought a ruler to make sure the holes were the right size. Mum brought a big map of the gardens. "A hole as big as a CD case is perfect," she said. "Big enough for hedgehogs, too small for most dogs." Ben handed out the map and everyone got to work.



The neighbors sawed and hammered and measured. Ben ran from garden to garden with his green boots and his red hoodie, checking each hole. Some fences were wooden, some were wire, but every hole was neat and safe. By lunchtime, all seven gardens were connected. "The hedgehog highway is open!" Ben shouted. Everyone clapped and drank lemonade.



That night, Ben and Mum sat quietly by the fence with a torch, waiting. The moon was bright. First came a rustle. Then Hetty appeared through Mr Patel's hole. She snuffled along the new path, past the flowerpots and under the bushes. She went through hole after hole, all the way to the end of the street. "It works!" Ben whispered. "The highway works!"



A few nights later, Ben saw something wonderful. Hetty came back, and behind her trotted three tiny baby hedgehogs. They followed her through the holes, their little feet pattering on the grass. The whole street was their playground. Ben felt proud and happy. "They're safe now," he said. Mum gave him a hug. "Because you had a big idea and shared it."



Mr Patel invited everyone for tea in his garden. He wore his green cardigan and his best slippers. "I never thought a hole in my fence would make me so happy," he said. Mrs Chen brought biscuits. Mr Green brought a photo of a hedgehog in his roses. Everyone laughed and talked about the highway. Ben looked around and felt warm inside.



Ben and Mum made a little sign for the highway. It said, "Hedgehog Highway—Please Keep Holes Clear." They painted it together on a rainy afternoon. The neighbors put up small markers too. The street looked friendly and connected. Ben's gap-toothed smile stretched from ear to ear. He couldn't wait for the next hedgehog to visit.



That autumn, Ben counted five different hedgehogs using the highway. They came and went between gardens, finding food and friends. The neighbors often stopped to chat by the fences. "It's not just for hedgehogs," said Mum. "It's brought us all together too." Ben nodded. He liked knowing that his street was a safe place for wildlife and for people.



One evening, Ben sat in his garden as the sun went down. Hetty snuffled past with a leaf on her quills, and Ben smiled. He thought about how one small hole in a fence could lead to a whole street of kindness. "When neighbors work together," he said softly, "connected habitats protect animals." And the hedgehogs were safe and happy—just like Ben.