

Fowl-Ups

Sr. Syra thought it would be fun to have some “exotic” chickens. Some of the showy newcomers had feathers on their legs, and there was a grand array of costumes proudly displayed by the showy clucks. One of the more arresting unusuals was “Tina Turner”. Her top-of-the-head flowing red plumage and the “songs” she belted out quite reminded her admirers of a yesterday’s popular songstress. Then there was Arden’s pet, Whiskers, who was wont to fly up on the little girl’s shoulder and ride grandly through the pasture-domain.

Now, believe it or not, some of our chickens laid *colored* eggs, green, blue, or pink! They were lovely pastels and looked great in Easter baskets. Was it really true that these colored eggs had very little, if any cholesterol? We never had that scientifically checked out.

The children had a unique opportunity to learn that being called chicken might just be a compliment! An afternoon phone call from northern Kentucky one day inquired if we could possibly take in an injured one-legged chicken. Why not? Soon rescuer and rescuee were on their way to Peace Place, -- or so they thought. A call from waaay out of the way begged for directions, -- and it wasn’t until around midnight that the tired pair finally arrived at our house. Right out to the chicken house we carried the feathery little cripple and gently bedded her down. Soon after, the happily satisfied driver was on her much more direct way home.



After a half night’s roost, the new environment began dawning on the recent arrival. Her coop-mates became a bit flustered about the surprise emigrant, but when they witnessed her determined efforts to navigate, they resisted the fowl tendency to peck on a handicapped new chick on the lot. In fact, the natives became quite considerate of “Hoppy’s” needs, encouraging her to limp happily for almost ever after.

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Our first pet turkeys were appropriately named Fred and Ethel. (So you were an “I Love Lucy” fan, too?) This rare pair loved to sit on my feet, then jump up and down on them to the beat of their guttural thump-thump. They were polite and sociable with all of

the other critters, but well, they weren't overly bright. On very cold nights we would have to find them, catch them (along with the ordinarily smarter chickens that decided to imitate their "biggers"), and bring all the flapping squawkers into the chicken house or barn.

All but one of our later turkeys were wild ones or mixed offspring (courtesy of the one big "regular" gobbler). One Saturday a phone call came informing us that our turkeys had taken a trip to a neighboring farm. Now it wasn't far away as the crow flies, but as the human walks, it was 2-3 miles to the birds' hideaway.



With no other help at hand, I set out with an eight year old child and an unpredictable dog to find the truants. To us turkey-herders' surprise, our efforts to gather and direct the surprised turkeys up the road home-ward were actually met with some success, and the dog quietly assumed assistance. It took about an hour to reach "almost-home". But then, --passing the woods just before home base, the strutters became flyers and disappeared through the trees and down into the woodsy valley that sheltered a number of still-wild birds! We were dismayed, no, really *upset!* -- until we reached home, and were then *dumbfounded* to meet 15 turkeys greeting us there! Mr. Brooks, our animal expert, explained that only a few of the waiting bunch were really from our farm; the rest were wild volunteer replacements!

During my last late spring and summer days at Peace Place, one of the very thoughtful turkey hens daily laid an egg at the porch door which opened up into my bedroom. What do you think of that?! (Too bad the *goats* couldn't have sent their *milk* via the same convenient home delivery service.)

Gozie was our parading goose. His birth-egg was hatched by an accommodating *chicken*, and neither the hen nor subsequent hatcher ever quite figured out his breed. Anyhow, until mature gander-hood, he apparently considered himself a humanoid (or did he think *we were geese?*), and could usually be seen padding around after people, even joining us dogs, cats, pet ram, and humans for walks down the road. When I did field work, my partner goose-stepped along the rows with me, inspecting every job. Entering adolescence he made several unsuccessful tries to join the geese-flock. Eventually, maturity and persistence paid off and he finally won their acceptance. Was that good enough for our Gozie?? Oh, no! After many battles for gander-*dominance*, he finally toppled Queen of the Honks, -- his own mother, -- and was enthroned as Emperor Gozie.



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An old plastic swimming pool became the pond for Donald and Daisy Duck. They were soon joined by a pair of colorful mallards. Rain water caught in gutters and piped into the swimmin' hole kept the water level up, and the new spring ducklings had a bash of a splash. Everything was just ducky at the pond until a sneaky fox suddenly appeared in broad daylight, -- right under the eyes of the college volunteers who were painting nearby outbuildings, -- and nabbed poor defenseless mother mallard for take-out-dinner! Mournful daddy drake stuck around for several weeks to mind the ducklings, then began searching the skies for another mate. Failing that, the lonesome widower eventually joined a flock of bachelor ducks and was up, up, and away -- for good. (The by-this-time adolescents went to new homes.)

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Guineas were very popular watch-birds. They screeched their warnings whenever anyone or anything *dared* to set foot in *their precinct* during *their shift!* Their off-duty behavior was less responsible. Every once in a while we could expect to hear the screechers desperately screaming! That's their cry of frustration; they have previously

flown over the fence and now don't remember how to get back -- again! So they would noisily run back and forth until deciding to stop for some graze-lunch, or until the gate finally opened for them at farm feeding time.



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Too bad you didn't get to meet "Kooky-bird", a gorgeous orange-pink-peach-yellow and white cockatoo. What a character! From his perch in a sturdy, handsome cockatoo cage near the long porch windows, King Kooky supervised all of the porch, living room, and backyard activities. Whenever he got excited, he would shake and ruffle his velvety feathers, exhibiting a colorful surprise of fresh brightness. Then his dignified pose gave way to really silly postures.

Three squirrel monkeys (more about them later) were porch-mates with "Big Bird". With both "engagements" just a few feet apart, the inmates regularly entertained and communicated with one another. Kooky-bird chattered his own stories (mostly for the birds), and sort of sing-sang contentedly. His two favorite activities: 1) riding all over the house astride the shoulders of a willing human mount and 2) playing tricks. -- Just an example of his peculiar sense of humor:

Larry, a visiting friend decided that he was going to teach this obviously brilliant bird to "wolf-whistle". Part by part the man patiently demonstrated the "wheet-whooh!" His attentive student responded to each precise lesson with a dumb, vacant stare. After about 20 minutes of this scenario, disgusted Larry stomped off. Just as he reached the door, a clear, shrill, perfect "wheet-whooh! blasted out from the smug pupil's "class-room". The people-audience that had been gleefully observing the comedy through the living room windows burst into wild laughter at the kooky triumph and his coach's chagrin.

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At Kooky's request (or so it seemed), three more birds -- two hanging cages -- moved into the porch-neighborhood, and the environment became more musically inclined. The feathery friends lived a cheerful chorus for all to enjoy.

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Another really rare bird at Peace Place was Peter Peacock. The proud white male came here from Breezy Ridge Farm with two doting wives. Tragically, one fell victim to a coyote and the other to a hawk. Peter kept looking , -- and loudly yelling, for a new mate. He also joined the choir of guineas in noisily announcing any "trespassers", but his peculiar shrieks usually originated from a roof-top choir loft. These piercing cries sounded like a human "Help, help!" Eventually our neighbors realized that this was *not* really some desperate person's call of distress.

What an awesome sight each day when the proud bird started to strut, fanning out his gorgeous lacey feathered tail, and then entered into his 15 minute ballet of graceful pirouettes! He definitely *had* and *was* something to be proud of!

When the once-open porch off the sun-room became my bedroom, Peter came every evening to bid me goodnight. He would perch on the rail next to the window, wait for his charge to climb into bed, tuck his beak under his wing, and begin his cautious sleep. Throughout the night he was my faithful protector, -- and at hardly-daybreak he sounded off his very LOUD alarm clock! Wonderful, -- but why so early??