

## Introduction

When I was small, my grandfather who lived with us at the time enjoyed his chickens and the chickenhouse that he and my dad built. It was a very nice house, worthy of any chickens alive in those days. It kept them warm in winter and cool in summer. I didn't realize what a nice chickenhouse it was until later, when it was transformed into a small barn for my horse and survived the transition very well, because it had been built to be quite large and strong. I loved my horse. I didn't really remember the chickens.

Meanwhile, my older brother who was in 4H raised chickens for his project and showed them at the county fair. His red rooster, General Oswald, won a blue ribbon and then lived out his life in our back yard. There were lots of flowers in the flower beds and there was quite an expanse of lawn, and the yard was fenced and safe for General Oswald, keeping neighborhood animals out although the General could have flown away if he'd wanted. He chose to live there with Bunny No Good, a very large white rabbit that had outgrown his hutch. The only dog that watched them was our wonderful dog Mopsey. She never touched them, although she would lie down near them and watch their every move, her mouth watering.

Many years and many life experiences passed before I was around chickens again. These were "my" chickens, but that doesn't fit, because chickens don't seem to belong to anybody but themselves and aren't really in your life. Either they live alongside you, or you are in their lives. They have enchanted and fascinated me ever since.

They have helped strengthen for me the notion that all life on our planet has more innate intelligence than our species has ever allowed itself to believe, imagine, or even speculate might be the case. After you live around chickens and observe them over a period of time, you begin to understand that those little feathered beings that are generally considered to be creatures that lay eggs and that are the subjects of infinite recipes, and not much more, do have complex lives after all. They exhibit behavior that follows social rules and that reveals intricate relationships. Because they cluck, shriek, whistle, coo, and chuckle for instance, and we don't, does not mean that we can assume that there isn't much happening behind those bright, beady eyes or beating within those small, strong hearts.