

## **A Day with Flow**

*By Ani Kokorudz*

The chicken coop was one of the first structures I dreamt of building on our farm. I had once seen Martha Stewart on the cover of a magazine holding a big flourishing red chicken, and thought to myself, that could be me one day. I was ecstatic when after working day and night, our hen house was finally done. I tacked up a sign on the door that proudly read “The Hen Den”. “No loud and bossy roosters around here! Just 25 friendly Rhode Island Red hens.”

I must admit, the coop was impressive in design, kind of like a one-with-nature Frank Lloyd Wright architectural bit of perfection, with a sprawling connected indoor and outdoor section. Outfitted with separate nesting boxes for privacy, big picture windows, wall to wall branches for roosting, and a vast coyote proof outdoor run furnished with dangling fixtures of food, water, fresh cabbage, and even a tree trunk to rest on. To top it off, my elderly neighbour Fred had recently installed a special outdoor latch that he swore was chicken proof.

“Chickens are like Houdini; they’ll find a way out!” he warned.

Fred knew, he’d been a veteran poultryman for over 50 years.

So, on that sunny summer morning, I happily fed our hungry hens and proudly filled my basket with their warm brown eggs. I topped off their nesting boxes with soft wood shavings, filling the air with the sweet woodsy scent of pine. I watched as the hens scurried through their tiny door to the outdoor section. With it being such a perfect day, I decided to join them, and using our new latch entered the outdoor run making sure to secure it shut behind me. I didn't want to have to go through what had transpired the week before when our old latch had flung open, leaving me to chase 25 marathon worthy chickens through the farm for hours.

As I walked around the run tiding their food and water, and fastening a fresh cabbage to the string, trailing behind me was a caravan of hens with their bright red fleshy combs, and swinging wattles bobbing up and down, clucking with curiosity. When I was done and ready to leave, I reached for the latch and tried to unhinge it, but it was stuck. I desperately pushed, pulled and twisted, and in a panic, with all my might attempted to force the door open but nothing worked...I was cooped in! That's right, stuck in the chicken coop, without another human on the farm...and no cell phone. Like a bizarre dream, I realized I had no way out. Coyotes could not get in, and I could not get out! As I turned around to face my new cohabitators, I realized they sensed my unusual circumstance. Their bopping and clucking

suddenly went silent, and their skinny yellow legs froze in mid step, resembling the Royal Dolton chicken figurines I often spotted at the local antique market. I felt as though they were holding their breath to see what I would do next.

My day planned so meticulously flashed before me. Since it wasn't scorching hot, I'd planned to weed the garden, cut up the rhubarb and make a few jars of jam, pit the freshly picked cherries for pie and so on... all now gone to pot! To top it off, my husband and kids wouldn't be home for hours, I couldn't tell you when for I wasn't wearing a watch. The kids would find it odd that I didn't greet them when they came off the school bus, and my husband would wonder why I wasn't there to help him unload the truck from the farmer's market. They wouldn't think to come by the chicken coop until the nighttime feeding - at sunset. Oh, how they would wonder what had happened to me, I thought.

I looked to see if I could fit through their tiny doorway and free myself from the inside, but the hole was way too small, less than half my size. With a deep and defeated sigh, I started making my way to the only seat in the house, the tree trunk. I was suddenly raddled by the deafening screeches and squawks coming from a couple of angry scarlet crested hens, all puffed up, beak to beak, flapping their wings in the air, violently chasing each

other around the hanging cabbage, pausing only to throw a bloody peck or two. As I watched in horror, I started to feel a strange sense that I was in the kitchen with my feuding aunts, Martha and Esther, flailing their arms in protest as they screamed at each other, slamming the cupboards for additional effect.

“You were supposed to make the cabbage perogies for the holidays this year!” Aunt Martha would shout.

“No, that was your job! I was charge of the cabbage rolls...remember?”

Aunt Esther would yell adding on a destructive door slam to boot, and back and forth it would go.

Trying to stop the hen pecking, I wiggled the cabbage on the string but as soon as I sat down, just like my aunts, they were at it again. From the corner of my eye, my attention was diverted to a tight flock of preening hens by the waterer. While glaring at us, they were busy combing their shiny red feathers with their beaks, stopping to cluck secretly amongst themselves as I walked by. I felt myself back to the cold steel gray locker lined hallways of Valley Park Junior High, and the rath of Andrea and Marian – the popular mean girls. As they watched me walk by their lockers, they would break from brushing their perfectly feathered and bleached hair,

and with their chilling stares, make a vile comment about my unremarkable appearance.

“I thought this place was supposed to be friendly!” Not meaning to startle the hens, I yelled out loud.

Just then in the tiny doorway appeared an especially plummy looking hen. It felt as though she'd come out to see all the commotion. Her long lustrous fluffy feathers were the colour of ruby red. Her head had an unusually shaped bright pink circular comb, resembling the floral decorative head pieces worn by hula dancers that I would see when visiting my mother's family in Hawaii. Her soft rhythmic gait felt like she was swaying her feathered hips like hula grass skirts moving side to side, keeping step with the beat of drums and ukeleles. As she slowly floated through the crowd, I noticed her tail feathers waging with happiness. She was truly mesmerizing. This type of calm brought my mother to mind. From Tibet and raised Buddhist, I counted on her for solace especially through my teenage years.

She would softly say “Let yourself go and be like water flowing through the rocks. Don't worry, everything will flow into place”.

I remember desperately trying but most of the time stumbling and falling all over those damn rocks! This hen was like what my mother wished for me,

and what I strived to be. Her tranquil presence put everyone at ease, she was contagious. Never wanting to forget her, I called her “Flow”. To my delight, Flow eventually made her way to the tree trunk I was sitting on, looking at me with her sparkling brown eyes, she gently tilted her head to the side, opened her soft crimson wings, and to my surprise flew up and perched herself right beside me. Her downy plume against my arm, and the soft scent of sweet greenery and pine of her feathers took me to a place where hours felt like minutes... and for once I was able to stop and take it all in.

Then from a distance, the chirpy voices of my daughter Kendra and her best friend Amelia started to become clearer. I could see them laughing and walking, lugging their backpacks with bristol board projects in hand, making their way to visit the hens after getting off the school bus.

“Mom what are you doing sitting in the chicken coop in the middle of the day?” Asked Kendra shocked to see me while opening the latch.

As Flow and I gently tilted our heads towards them, I replied “Just going with the flow honey...we’re going with the flow...”