

February 16, 2009  
Eleanor Shulls



Profile: Eleanor grew up on her parents' farm in Michigan. They also raised cows, work horses, sheep, and pigs. Eleanor is 85 years old.

"Every fall we'd put into the laying house 350 laying hens. Sometimes I got attached to the chickens. I can remember my mother being very considerate of me when we had to sell some of my chickens, instead of processing them for their meat she would sell them to the neighbors.

We ate lots of eggs. My grandfather lived with us in our farmhouse. There was a long staircase in our house, my mother would have eggs prepared, cleaned and ready for market, sitting in baskets along the edge of the stairway. My grandfather couldn't see very well. One day he came walking down the stairs. He caught his foot on the edge of the basket, and tipped the eggs over. A lot of the eggs broke, but a lot were just cracked. Since we couldn't sell the cracked ones, we ate eggs, eggs, eggs. There was something like three or four dozen eggs in the basket, and the ones that were cracked had to be eaten right away. So I can just remember eating eggs for breakfast, eggs for lunch, and eggs for dinner.

I never had any trouble with the hens. The nests were up about three feet off the floor of the laying house, and there were nests built there. The hens would obediently go in their nests and lay their eggs. If they happened to be sitting on the nest and I wasn't sure they wanted me to take their eggs. I would grab a hold of their neck, just gently, and reach under and have no problem getting the eggs. But my sister who was three years older than I would not go near the hens; she was afraid of feathers. My mother said she thought it was because when my sister was much younger she had been chased by a rooster. But I was never afraid of them. Sometimes I would sit on the ground if they were catching hens for the market, or to get them ready for sale, or to move them. They would sit me down on the ground and give me a chicken to hang onto, then they'd bring me another chicken and I was not afraid of them at all, I'd just hang on to them for dear life! I was a very young girl. I haven't been around chickens for many years, probably 50 years.

We had two laying houses. One was upstairs over our garage, and they never got out. They were fed there, they were taken care of, their litter was cleaned, it was kept pretty clean up there. The ones downstairs had a separate house, separate building. I think sometimes they were let out to just scavenge in the yard to see what they could pick up, which was not much. Then we'd have to chase them back in. They never stayed out very long.

I remember feeding them. I would take a ten gallon pail in each hand, carrying grain, and water. I carried feed and mash. I just haven't thought much about those chickens for years. I moved away from Michigan in 1960, but I went back to visit my parents about once a year until they moved out here in 1971. I didn't care much about those chickens after that.

One year I had a flock of chickens of my own in 4H. I kept the required records and I did all the feeding, probably my dad helped me clean the chicken manure out. I can't remember doing that, perhaps that's a memory I want to forget.

Skunks would sometimes get our chickens; they were vultures.

We had an old silo that was taken down and afterwards they had to find a use for it. So they took the lumber and made chicken coops. So there were these round chicken coops about 20 feet across, and they put baby chicks in them. There was a brooder in each house. A brooder is a stove with a hood on it, and they could get under it to warm up and move away from it if they got too warm. One time the weather was terribly hot, I think it was 106 degrees and those poor chickens were hot, but instead of spreading out they gathered together, I don't know why, maybe to protect each other, and when my folks went out to see how they were doing, some of the chicks had piled on top of each other and several of them suffocated because they didn't know enough to spread out. They were only a few weeks old. It was June 6<sup>th</sup>; I don't know why I remember that date. That was a loss my parents didn't want, but not all of them died just a few.

I belonged to a 4H club, and went to meetings. Everyone else raised other kinds of animals, but I raised chickens. I did do a report, writing up what my project had been. Of course, I don't have any of those reports now.

Raising chickens gave me a positive work ethic because I had to take care of the chickens myself. Instead of saying, "You feed the chickens tonight, I don't feel like it." Of course at my house you never said that to your parents anyway. I would close the door to the chicken house at night. I would carry water to them also. I can't remember exactly how many chickens I had for my project, but I think maybe 50. I eventually took some of them to the county fair. They were hens but not yet ready to lay eggs. That was a long time ago. I can't remember how many years ago that was, I'm 85 years now and I was twelve, so 73 years ago.

It was a positive experience for me. Taking responsibility for the chickens, I liked that. It was fun. I liked doing hard work, my chores. It was a part of our living. It was just one of the things we did. You live on a farm and you work.

It's interesting that I can't remember the end of my chicken project; I can't really remember taking them to the fair. Of course taking them to the fair was something my parents did most the work of. I keep thinking I'd like to talk to my parents and ask them. That was so long ago. Strange to recall these things, it's been so long since anyone has asked me about chickens."

-signed— Eleanor Shulls