

MEMORIES FROM THE HEART

By Betty Schaefer McCormick

Maybe some of you remember growing up on a farm and going with your parents to the nursery to pick up baby chicks. I so enjoyed going with my Dad to the Canby Nursery and getting our baby chicks. We would buy about two hundred of them and bring them home to a freshly cleaned and disinfected brooder house. Dad would work so hard to make sure the building was clean and safe for the little birds. I would help him scrub everything and then we put down nice clean straw so it would be warm and there would be lights on day and night to keep them warm. We would use gallon fruit jars on a base for the water and the little birds would sip the water and hold their little beaks in the air and enjoy each drink. They were so cute and cuddly. Dad would check on them every few hours to make sure they were safe. Mom taught me a sound to use as we approached the brooder house to silent them and they would be so quiet and huddle together for safety. We had to check them to be sure none had suffocated and if we found a dead bird we had to remove the dead carcass immediately.

Also baby chicks are shipped through the US Postal Service. My husband is a retired Postmaster and he said the turnaround is about two days for baby chicks. As soon as they enter the Post Office, the recipient is called to come and pick up the birds. Even in cities the size of Milwaukee or Green Bay, baby chicks are being delivered. I always enjoy hearing them in the background. It brings back wonderful memories.

My son works for a large chicken processing company. We visited him and he took us to see one of the large buildings where the baby chicks are housed. There were over 44,000 baby chicks all cheeping away. Not quite the same as watching two hundred in a brooder house. They are still the same cute, cuddly little bird with soft fuzzy feathers. All the food, water and elimination of wastes is automated. The birds are housed in this building for about four weeks and then trucked off to be processed. The buildings are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and then sit empty for a week before another 44,000 are trucked in.

My daughter who eats very natural, recently purchased "range fed eggs". I could not believe four bucks a dozen for eggs. I mentioned that is the only kind of egg I ate when I was growing up. I told her about bringing the chicks home from the nursery, watching them grow up in a fenced in pen, and then letting them run in the woods and yard, scratching and catching bugs. At night, they would come back to the brooder house to sleep. At the end of the summer some of the chickens were butchered for our household meals and some were kept for laying hens. My job was to gather eggs and I just hated it when the old hens would peck at my hands and arms. That was the worst part of gathering eggs.

Our sub division is zoned that we can have four chickens, that isn't quite enough for me to start raising chickens for "range fed eggs". Maybe in the future, but for now, I have my memories of the baby chicks in the nursery, bringing them home in the car in the nursery boxes cheeping away, and watching them grow into mature birds. But the best memory of all is holding a soft, cuddly yellow fuzz ball in your hand and having them cheep.