

# HEATHER VOGEL FREDERICK

---

## *Which Came First, the Chicken or the Dog?*

by Heather Vogel Frederick

There are drawbacks to keeping chickens in the kitchen.

We learned this firsthand a couple of years ago when, in a moment of weakness, I was beguiled by three little balls of fluff at the feed store. I'd always wanted to raise chickens, and although my husband was amenable to the idea, we'd talked it over and agreed that we'd wait until after our boys were grown. One project at a time, as it were.

But here I was and there they were, as cute as only 2-day-old chicks can be—and on sale to boot.

Who can resist chicken on sale? I returned home with my bargain-basement poultry, and a “whole lot of ‘splaining to do,” as Ricky Ricardo would say. Fortunately, my husband found the trio of chicks just as irresistible as I did, and our misadventures in urban farming were launched.

The one thing we hadn't counted on was our dog. Bonnie is a Shetland sheepdog, a herding breed rather than a hunting breed, which is a good thing if one plans to raise chickens. For the first six weeks of their lives, our wee charges were kept in an old rabbit cage in a warm corner of the kitchen, where Bonnie held patient vigil. She'd sit in front of that cage for hours, tracking every peep and flutter. We dubbed it “watching Chicken TV.”

If Bonnie was fascinated by her new pets, they were equally fascinated by her, particularly the littlest chicken, whom we named Pixie. Perhaps it's because she was similar in coloring to our dog, but Pixie clearly thought Bonnie was her mother.

It wasn't until after we released Pixie and her two feathered companions into the backyard that we realized just how attached to Bonnie she had become. Pixie stuck to Bonnie like a burr, and for the years we had them the two of them were inseparable. Where the other two hens were content to be chickens, Pixie clearly aspired to something greater. Each morning, while her coop-mates scritch-scratched inside their run, Pixie nimbly vaulted the fence and trotted over to our back door where she'd stand, clucking vigorously, until someone finally relented and put the dog out. Sometimes the two of them would play tag (which Bonnie enjoyed far more than Pixie), but more often than not the two of them would just hang out on the patio, hoping for snacks. Once in a while, we'd catch the two of them napping together, Pixie curled up right alongside her furry surrogate mother.

At night, when our other hens dutifully marched off to their chicken coop, Pixie would make a beeline for the doghouse. Her preferred perch was atop its roof, and she stubbornly resisted our efforts to pry her off and put her away with the others. During the day, at the first sign of danger—a circling hawk, perhaps, or the baying of a neighbor's beagle—Pixie was off like a flash. But not for the safety of the chicken coop, oh no. Her favorite refuge was inside the doghouse.

## HEATHER VOGEL FREDERICK

---

(That's where she liked to lay her eggs as well, much to Bonnie's surprise.)

Our would-be canine is retired now, living in pastoral splendor with the other hens on a friend's much more suitable spread. I'm sure she misses Bonnie, and I'm pretty sure Bonnie misses her, too. As for us? Well, all I can say is it's a shame we can't teach a dog to lay eggs.