

This week's Monday essay is underway now—on Tuesday. Yesterday, we had a job that took most of the day, in one way or another. Back in May, we ordered twenty-five White Plymouth Rock rooster chicks. The hatchery always sends an extra, and they also send a free “exotic” chick. So, there were twenty-seven. The free chick this time turned out to be a silkie of some kind, this one a white rooster with feathers down to his feet. In addition, we had ordered five red pullets and five Cuckoo Maran pullets, and the hatchery sent us an extra red chick, too.

The roosters spent the summer on grass, weeds, bugs, and also, organic chicken feed that we purchased. They grew up, began to crow, and also started to exhibit the testosterone-fueled behavior that seems to also power the insanity in the White House. They argued, showed their superiority and power over each other, and generally—as much as chickens can—made asses of themselves. So, although they were unaware of the fact, their day of reckoning came at last—yesterday.

Another couple in our family has invested in equipment to make chicken butchering a lot quicker and easier. A big vat of scalding water was ready to prepare them for plucking—after, of course, their posturing and aggression had been permanently ended by the knife. The whirling rubber-fingered plucker efficiently removed the feathers, and we did the rest.

After cutting the chickens into pieces, we washed them and chilled them for several hours in icy water. As soon as all were in the tubs of cold water, we came in and had our lunch—not chicken.

Later, we dried them and packed them for the freezer. The “bony pieces”—the backs, necks, and wings, we brought home for broth. So, after a day butchering, we put two big kettles on the stove and cooked those pieces. Then, we poured the broth into pint jars and filled the pressure canner. It was ten p.m. before the canner was ready to take from the heat. A pressure canner should be left to de-pressurize naturally, so it was morning before I opened the canner and took out eighteen jars of bright broth. Every one had sealed properly, and now, they are stored on a shelf in the fruit cellar, waiting for the winter meals that will be enhanced by the addition of chicken broth.

It is interesting to note the difference in color between store-bought chicken and that which is home grown and from chickens that get their sustenance at least partly from the greens of summer. The fat on our chickens was bright yellow, and each jar of broth has a brilliant ring of fat on the top of the paler liquid.

I would never order chicken of any kind in a restaurant. There is no comparison in taste or quality. And, we know that—although we took the roosters' lives in the end—as long as they were alive, they spent their days doing what chickens do—eating, drinking, peeping, eventually crowing, posturing, challenging each other, fighting, and bursting with pride.

The pullets, meanwhile, calm and happy, are beginning to lay eggs.