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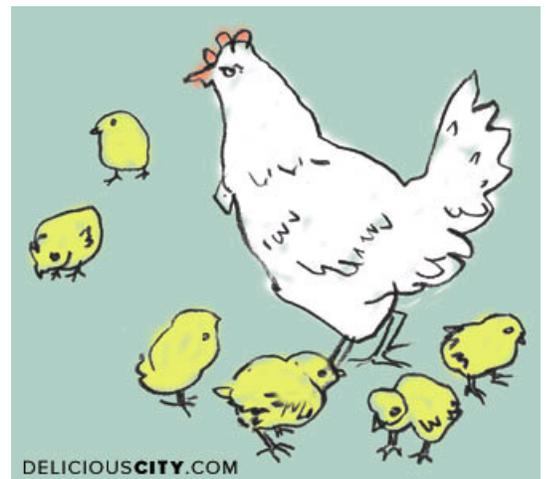


DELICIOUS CITY Issue #1 - Fall 2007

How I Learned to Love the Egg

by Amy Halloran

Once, a stranger stopped by my house to reminisce about growing up in the neighborhood. I had six chickens then and in discussing the birds, I inadvertently led the woman to the fact that each egg could be a chicken. She put her hand to her mouth and made the sign of the cross. I wonder if she stopped eating eggs. I could understand if she did, because I have made many decisions based on eggs. I chose not to attend nursery school because scrambled eggs were served on the day I visited. When I was a little older I chose which sleepover invitations to accept based on whether the parents were likely to serve eggs for breakfast. If they did, they might not allow me to eat something else - this happened once and I ended up in the bathroom.



Eggs are a slithery substance with wonderful properties. LaRousse hails their role as a liaison, and so do I. I have never had trouble eating an egg-built baked good, but hard-boiled, over-easy and otherwise on their own, eggs frighten me. My problems with eggs are texture and taste based. The first omelet I liked came from eggs that I fetched from a hen house at a San Juan Island bed and breakfast. I still remember the thrill of finding an egg in the straw, and the warmth of that egg in my hands. Finding food is magical. The loft of that omelet, and of a cheese strada we made the next day was truly impressive. But the food made from the marvelous eggs was only edible for me because we had a good stock of ketchup. ICK! remained my dominant reaction to eggs until many years later, when I had a baby.

As a new mother, I knew I needed to find a way to like eggs because they are cheap and wholesome fast food. I made the decision to spend more money on eggs around the same time. Paying \$3.00 and up a dozen is quite the leap from the supermarket dollar bargains, but you really get what you pay for with eggs. Compare the yolk from a farmers' market egg with one from an American standard dozen. The egg from hens that get plenty of sunshine and bug-pecking time, plus some omega-threes in their diet will have a sunset orange yolk. The store-bought egg will have a very pale hue to its yolk, and anything you make with it - omelet, cake, even a yolkless meringue - will

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be shorter. Another reason I make sure to keep eggs from clean hens on hand is so that my children can occasionally indulge in the distinct pleasures of eating raw cookie dough.

This is a calculated risk, and don't say I said that buying good eggs will keep you from getting salmonella because I didn't. I just believe that it is very unlikely that the housing conditions at the farms where I get my eggs will make them carriers of said bacteria.

I felt perfectly good about using the eggs my kids collected from our coop in mayonnaise and other USDA keep-away foods. However, we only had our birds for a couple of years. Our six chickens were a few years old when we got them, and after a while we were feeding them more than they were feeding us. Even though a large part of their diet was kitchen scraps - chickens will process your food waste, all but potato peels (most people advised against feeding alium peels but we could detect no trace of onions or garlic in our homemade ice cream), into fine garden manure - they ate a lot of chicken feed and their egg production was down. I was unhappy about having a chicken slaughter in the backyard, and thought for sure it would invite the neighbors to call the cops. Not that it is illegal to kill animals in my city and it appears to be legal in Seattle too, but still, you hate to get a reputation for ritualistic slaughter where you live, and passersby are often cruel in their misunderstandings of events that are even slightly out of the ordinary.



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Nikki Bell

Now that I don't house hens myself, the clean hens that furnish my eggs live on a small farm twenty miles north of us. The farmers deliver us a couple of dozen a week. We save the cartons for them - you should save your egg cartons too because they cost egg handlers a dime a piece and that dime, plus the cost of chicken feed, which is more than hearsay would lead you to understand, really cuts into the profits that keep a roof on the coop.

We are gearing up to get more chickens, though that endeavor will wait until next spring, when we will order some birds from Murray McMurray Hatchery (mcmurrayhatchery.com), the name in chickens for almost a hundred years. Once hatched, chicks can survive for a period of time without food or water, so shipping them is a common practice. Farmers nearby also sell chicks so we might go that route, since we Murray McMurray's minimum order is 25 birds. If you live in Seattle and are considering getting chickens, only three fowl are allowed per city lot, but you could find a bunch of friends to share the shipment.

Seattle, like my city, has no ordinance against roosters, but both places have rules about noise, and as far as I know, there is no way to stop a rooster from crowing. Hens still lay eggs without a rooster, though, so you can easily stock your refrigerator with your three birds, and have enough, usually, to give your neighbors so that they can enjoy the fun of keeping chickens, too. Neighbors won't be tempted to call the codes department on you if you keep the hen house clean, which you should do for your sake and the birds' sakes, but you must do because of urban regulations on odors.

Ordering a catalog from Murray McMurray is a nice first step in the chicken keeping adventure. Or start talking with Seattle Tilth (seattletilth.org), which offers online facts, classes on coop construction and chicken keeping, plus an annual tour of city chickens to help explore the chicken

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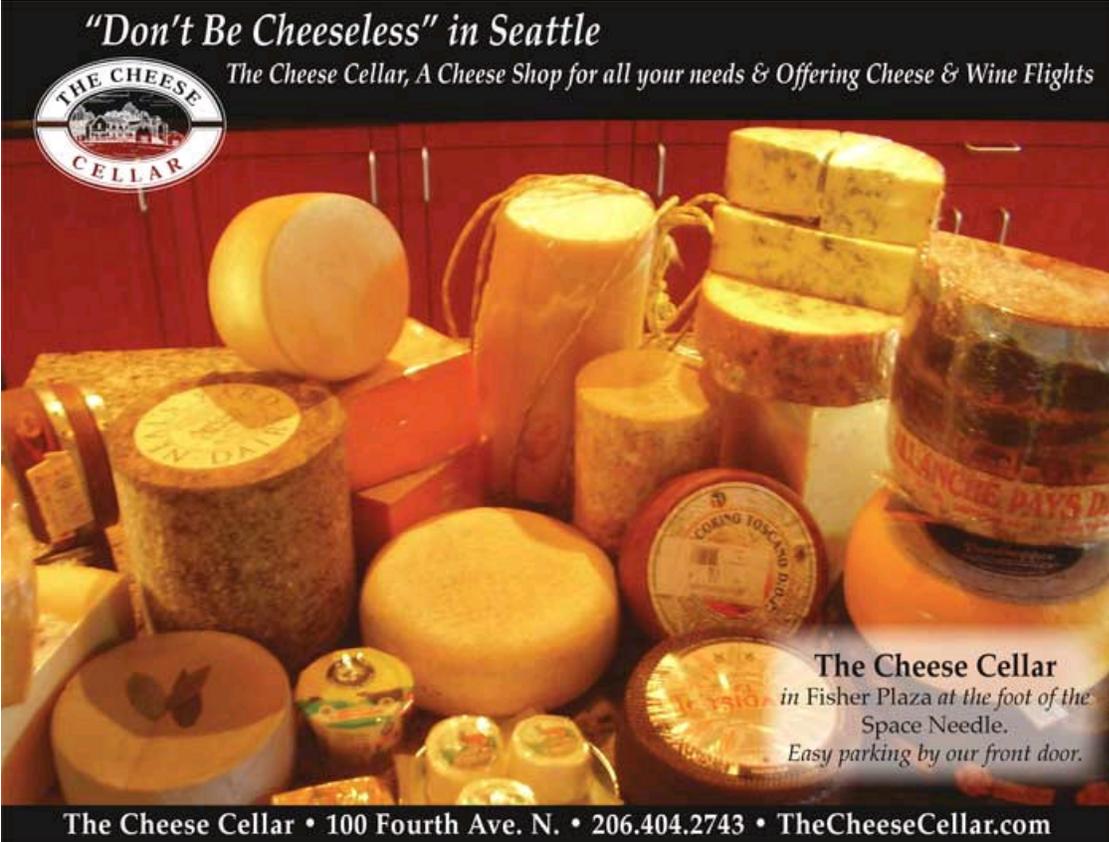
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realm before committing to the habit. Are there chickens in your future? Will you be able to answer the which-came-first conundrum if there are chickens in your life? Only time will tell.

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