

# What I've Learned From Chickens



## Chapter 4: Attitude is Everything

One week to the day after the chickens hatched, I came downstairs to find one lonely chick in the incubator, the sole hatchee of the second batch of eggs. It just stood there looking around at the strange surroundings, probably instinctively knowing that this styrofoam world was not what God intended. I opened the lid and gathered the new life into my hands. I brought it up to my face and we looked at each other for a moment, then I put it with the others in the box on the dining room table.

The other chicks rushed over as a pack and dove at the new chick in a vicious attack. “Stop it!!,” I screeched as I reached in and snatched it out of there as fast as I could. My heart was pounding. Now what was I going to do? The older chicks were already nearly twice the size of this little one after only a week of growing and apparently putting it in with them just wasn’t going to work. I slumped into a chair and thought about this as the little chick snuggled into the nest my hand made against my body. I had one chick that wasn’t accepted by the others. I certainly hadn’t counted on that. While a certain amount of struggle is a good thing for a young chick, I couldn’t allow it to be murdered! And I also couldn’t carry it around with me all day, so I put the lone chick back in the incubator and went in search of another carton. Soon this newest ball of fluff had a separate habitat in an Amazon box next to the others. My thirteen-year-old stepson Liam named this chick Abe, and even though Abe later turned out to be a girl, Abe she remained.

Within the next several days, it became clear that the eight older chicks were quickly outgrowing their stereo box and would need a larger space. It was too soon to put them outside so Mac and I headed off to the appliance store and came home with a dishwasher box. We set it on the dining room floor and layered it with a thick pad of newspaper. Mac added a bowl of food and I decided to try something new to see if I could stop the chicks from pooping in their water. I filled a small bowl with water and placed a saucer over it. Then I turned the whole thing upside-down. Just as I hoped a small amount of water seeped out from under the bowl and filled the saucer. As the chicks drank, more water would be released. I put this contraption up on another inverted bowl to make it the same height as the chick’s heads. After hanging a lamp over the edge, the new home was complete and it was time to move the birds into it.

On a hunch, I took Abe and put her in first. Mac and I watched her scamper around by herself for twenty minutes or so. Then we added one of the other chicks. To my amazement, as Mac set the second chick into the box, Abe ran over and pecked it once on the beak. Bonk. For some reason this caused the new chick to freeze in place. It didn’t move for several long moments and when it did Abe pecked it in the beak again. Bonk. I added another chick and the same thing happened. Whenever they moved, Abe pecked them in the beak and froze them again. We added another and another until they were all in the box together and Abe pecked each in turn as it was added. Bonk. Bonk. Bonk. Abe couldn’t keep up with them all after a while and

they started moving around. Some went over to eat and Abe ran over and chased them off: Abe ate first and only then were the others allowed to eat. Little Abe was still half the size of the older chicks, but she clearly ruled the roost. And she was never the victim again. Within an hour, all of the chicks were running around together as one flock.

What happened? How had Abe gone from being the victim to being the boss within a few days? Clearly Abe decided that the new box belonged to her during the twenty minutes she was alone in there and she was defending her space. There is an old saying: It's not the size of the dog in a fight that matters, it's the size of the fight in the dog. Little Abe stood her ground in a big way.

In this case, the chick benefited from a lack of information—specifically, a lack of memory of the past and a lack of worry about the future. She didn't know she was smaller than the others. She didn't remember that they had attacked her just a few days earlier, so she was not paralyzed with fear that they would attack her again. The only thing she knew was that each bird was entering *her* space and needed to be dealt with. She had no limiting beliefs about her abilities or her rights, she only had chutzpah and attitude.

Little Abe was lucky to be born a chicken. As people, we get bound up in false beliefs about ourselves, we let others tell us who we are and how we fit into our groups and into society as a whole. We buy into collective beliefs about how we should age and how hard it needs to be to earn a living. Wouldn't it be nice to have a reset button and start fresh like little Abe?

Who says we can't? The key lies in our attitude, both the face we show to the world and our own inner knowing. Why are some women and men thought of as attractive when the truth is that if you look carefully at their features, they aren't? It's because they have a power that lights them from within and this power causes them to *act as if* they are attractive. Why is it that some people who don't seem to start out with much going for them become very happy and successful? When you look at the biographies of many famous people, you can see the Abe phenomenon at work. Often these people used their adversity as a powerful force for change. They might have been victims of poverty or abuse as children and withstood enough suffering to finally say ENOUGH and rebuild their lives – their way. They found their reset button.

My first glimpse of the power of belief came during my freshman year of high school. I joined the cross country team and found a place for myself as number seven on the team. The faster girls were all juniors and seniors, so as a freshman it didn't occur to me to question my rank. We had a large team and being seventh was very respectable. About halfway through the season, we traveled to upstate New York for a large invitational meet with dozens of other schools. Hundreds of girls lined up along the starting line and the gun went off with a crack. I set off at my usual pace. Out on the course, in a pretty meadow, I saw the bright yellow jersey of one of my teammates ahead of me. She was number six on the team. I was comforted to see that I was in my place as usual. But before we reached the end of the meadow, I was right on her heels and confronted with the fallibility of my belief that I was number seven. I found myself wondering, Why couldn't I be number six? So I lengthened my stride and passed her. I went on to pass other yellow jerseys that day, number five and four and three and two. I ended that race in

a new position as number two on the team. I never did beat number one that year, but I don't think it was because I had a limiting belief; she was just really fast.

How many of us stay small in our own minds? I've noticed in my life that there are many layers to my smallness and they can all be attributed to failures of attitude. How beautiful it would be to regain the innocence of little Abe and just become as big as I was born to be ... poof ... without limits. Here is an absolute truth: We are born to be creators; we are born to rule the roost of our reality; we are born to shine bright. Some realize this early in life, others like me take half a lifetime to reclaim our birthright ... and some never figure it out.

Where does attitude come from? Our heads? Our hearts? It's hard to imagine that little Abe put much thought into things on her first day with the others. Her attitude came straight from her heart and she acted on it in ways that brought harmony to the group as a whole. It may feel silly to think we have anything to learn from that little chick who was only acting on instinct, but pause for a moment and reconsider. What Abe "knew" by instinct was that she was born to be part of a flock. She "knew" that she had a right to take up her full space and she "knew" she was powerful enough to live her truth. The reason Abe was successful that day was precisely because she *didn't* think about it; she just *acted* on the wisdom of her heart.

What would it be like to live from our hearts? Our actions would come from our authentic selves, the part of us that touches infinity as we know that we are BIG ... and part of something even bigger. We would see the world through the lens of peace, joy, and love, while all of the judgments, fears, and insecurities of our mind would be left behind. We would stand tall, take up our space, and speak our truth. We would live boldly, using our minds as tools of creation as we act upon the guidance of our hearts without hesitation. We would be free. A world where this was the norm would be the paradise we seek.

Why don't we do this automatically? There is a tendency in adult humans toward negative thought -- worries, resentments, fears, anxieties, anger, guilt, jealousy, regret, etc. For someone who has become accustomed to one or more of these cycles of emotion, it is hard to get through a day without succumbing to the negative swirl with all of its chemical responses in the body that stress the immune system and shorten lives. To make matters worse, our negative emotions energize the attractive forces in the universe that seem to say, "Okay, if you want to feel bad, I'll give you something to feel bad about." And around we go.

Before the chickens, I was often lost in negative emotions. I had absolutely no excuse for feeling this way, because by every measure I had a very good life. And yet, despite the smiling face I showed to the world, I remember the constant pain I felt between my shoulder blades, the stiffness in my spine, the mild, but chronic rashes here and there. All of this affected my sense of well-being and wore me out. There was a heavy pit of fear in my abdomen that was only relieved when I had a glass of wine in the evening.

The chicks steadily broke through my negative habits of thought by providing a positive focus each day. Their antics and fluffy little selves brought pure joy and giggles, bringing new light into my soul.