



Egg Layers



Betty, the Rhode Island Red, aka Nurse Nightingale

Call her **Betty the Brave**. She's earned that name. One of Tamerlaine's caretakers found Betty wandering along the side of the road in critical condition and brought her in. Betty was rehabilitated with the idea that she would join our flock in Chicken Village once healed. But instead, she chose to stay at our medical facility, reluctant to leave the side of her new friend, an old rooster named Turkey, in his final days. After his passing, Betty made it clear that caring is her calling. She checks in on her patients daily, and checked up on our caretakers as they make their rounds. Our Florence Nightingale dotes on other hens who feel poorly, and offers comforting coos to those who are new and nervous. Her care truly makes a difference in the recovery of her fellow chickens. We are so grateful that she calls Tamerlaine home.

Her story makes her empathy even more moving. When Betty arrived, her extensive injuries allowed us to put together a pretty clear picture of her life. It was obvious

that she'd been attacked by a predator; her entire scalp had been torn back and there was a bite wound under her right wing. We reattached her scalp and healed her physical wounds. Another clue to her past: her beak had been seared off, indicating she was born in an egg-laying facility.

There will always be questions we can't answer: how in the world did Betty escape predation with such injuries? How did she escape her fate in the food industry? We don't even know how long she was living outside after her escape, and then after her attack. The good news is that we don't need the answers. Betty the Brave is beautiful, and has found her home at Tamerlaine. She will never know fear again.

Our little love Betty is a Rhode Island Red hen. (Fun fact: egg color can be predicted using the color of a chicken's *ear lobes*!) Like all chickens, Betty's breed is highly intelligent. Chickens can do math, see more colors than us, and sense Earth's magnetic field. How's

THAT for bird-brained? While all chickens like to talk—we humans have translated over 20 specific sounds that chickens use to communicate—egg-layers are definitely the chattiest. They are also the most active, and happily run back and forth playing the day away. Foraging, or pecking, is a natural



All chicks are as fluffy and cute as Liberty, another rescue livina at Tamerlaine.

behavior, too. Chickens are incredibly independent and when they are allowed to roam free, do a bang-up job of finding their own food sources. Sadly, most of the egg-laying chickens on Earth will never get the chance to do any of that.



That's because 99% of the 26 or so billion chickens alive right now will spend their entire lives inside factory farms. First, there are facilities where chickens are artificially inseminated to produce more egg layers. These eggs are taken and warmed in incubators until fluffy yellow chicks poke their way out. At about one day old, the confused chicks are placed on fast-moving automated conveyor belts. They are sorted and sexed, despite it being difficult enough that 10-40% of chicks are sexed incorrectly at that young age. Female chicks will be sold to egg producers.

Since male chicks cannot produce eggs and bring in income, they are considered useless. So, they are killed. The method of death is brutal, and even reading about



One last, lonely, day-old chick about to drop into the macerator. Photo credit: Jan Van IJken

it is hard to bear: The tiny chicks are tossed into a macerator, a machine that grinds them up alive. Every year, about 7 billion male chicks are killed in the food industry. Sadly, grinding is considered a "humane" method due to its speed. Other methods involve stuffing them in bags to suffocate, piping in carbon dioxide to poison them, or breaking their necks. In 2005, the American Veterinary Medical Association had to state the obvious fact that chicks should be "killed prior to disposal."

Betty was born into this environment. Upon hatching, she was debeaked: her beak was shortened with a hot blade, without any pain relief, despite having sensitive pain receptors at the end of their beaks.

beaks to bust out of their shells! From there, she and her gal pals would be shoved in crates and trucked to a growing facility until such time she began laying eggs, at which point she would again be crowded into a crate with other birds. This time, she would travel to an egg laying facility—most likely a factory farm.

About 75% of eggs produced in the United States still come from hens kept in "battery cages." Five to 11 chickens are crammed into a single, wire cage. They are given less space than a sheet of paper to move. Cages are stacked on top of one another, allowing feces to fall between the cracks and onto the hens in the lower cages. Without enough room to spread their wings, the birds will spend their entire lives immobilized in cages.

On average, each hen produces about 294 eggs a year—a hugely unnatural number. The factory in which they live tricks their bodies into cycling rapidly by manipulating the lights (they never see sunlight),



Chickens stuffed into stacked battery cages where they'll spend their lives. Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur

causing them to molt and lay eggs continuously, a process that leaches their bodies of calcium. The result, in those wire cages, is easily broken bones. Some will suffer spinal cord deterioration, and become paralyzed. Unable to reach food or water, they will die of dehydration or starvation. Their long claws often get stuck in the wire, forcing them to rip their own claws off, or starve to death.

When a chicken dies in a battery cage, she is rarely removed. The other chickens must live atop her dead body.



At about 60-70 weeks of age, the egg-layers are deemed unproductive. Their bodies simply give out. They aren't bred for meat, so their body parts are sold for animal food, or rendered for products such as oil. Or, they are simply buried alive in pits.

Social and curious birds, chickens' minds suffer as much as their bodies from these conditions. This is why debeaking occurs: to minimize the (financial) damage birds inflict when they begin attacking each other as they mentally deteriorate.

Before people became aware of battery cages, almost all egg-layers lived their lives in this hell. Now, about 25% in the USA are "free range", a nebulous, feel-good term with no actual laws defining its meaning: No laws that mandate a certain amount of room per chicken, or even minimal levels of care. Usually, free range chicks are still crammed into a shed by the tens of thousands. Free range labels often claim that chickens have outside access. By USDA standards, that can be a hole large enough for one chicken to peek her head out. Desperate to escape to the outside, and denied the opportunity for natural behaviors, chickens trample each other to reach that hole, believing it might provide escape.

The good news is that between 2014 and 2018, the number of free range vs. caged egg layers jumped 317%, globally. This tells us that once the public is informed about undeniable cruelty in the food chain, change CAN happen. People WILL step up.

Whether free range or in a battery cage, the accumulation of wastes in a shed creates unbearably toxic air. It's not healthy for the chickens who live there or the people who work there. At Tamerlaine, our compassion extends beyond the furry and feathered to encompass humans, too. A study found workers in hen houses had lung irritation and inflammation from breathing in bacterial toxins—and, unlike the chickens, they get to leave at the end of the day. Workers also sustained physical injuries from contorting to retrieve eggs and from lifting and moving the cages.

Even the neighbors suffer. Huge fans blow the noxious air out of the sheds constantly. The odors travel, as do the

bacteria and particulates. Even neighbors can suffer from salmonella poisoning, asthma, or chronic bronchitis.

The animal agriculture industry is so powerful that lawmakers passed a set of laws known as the "Ag Gag" laws, that prevents workers from speaking out about anything they witness or endure, at risk of prosecution. We need to be speak for the chickens and people harmed by the egg industry.

We think Betty may have escaped off a truck before she was imprisoned to a life of confinement, and we're so glad for it. She's able to forage, take dustbaths, and roost in trees with the other chickies as her breed so enjoys. But Betty is also into her own thing. She prefers a roost overlooking her patients indoors—after all she's been through, is it any wonder? The bottom line is that she's free to do as she pleases. Saving her didn't change the world...but it certainly changed her world.

You can change the world for the billions of chickens just like Betty that are immobilized in cages. We've made a dent in the US in battery cages. And in the EU, they're outlawed. Germany has even banned the culling of male chicks. All of these moves came about because one brave person spoke up first. One brave person decided to be the voice for the voiceless, and others followed. We may not all be that brave—and we certainly aren't all as brave as Betty—but we can still heroes to billions. If we just stop eating eggs made by birds.



Hello, ladies! Our happy hens enjoying another happy day!