

One by one the baby chicks were rocked to sleep. If only they had stayed asleep.

“Just put the tiny head under one of the wings,” my uncle had instructed. “Then gently rock your arms back and forth. They will fall asleep.”

Okay I had told him smiling. “I can do this.”

The year was 1957 or so. The family was visiting my grandparents in a rural Montana town near the Canadian border. Scobey was where I was born and where my parents rocked me to sleep. However, I am sure they did not put my head under my arm. Now, I was 10 years old and a really old uncle, high school age at least, was teaching me how to corral baby chickens in the chicken coop and have them nod off. When I was left alone to try the “Sandman Technique” I started my routine: Grab a sleepy eyed chick and ever so gently put the head in the correct location, then rock.

I was very successful for perhaps the first three chicks. Once I set a babe down in the warming box and grabbed another passerby the one asleep awoke with a jerk, shook its head and stumbled onward toward the heated lamp.

No matter how fast I worked my sandman magic I would have to begin again, and again.

“This will take forever,” I mumbled. Little did I realize that it was a foretelling of how a real life mom has to deal with when she has more than one baby “chick” of her own. Mom had to bed down five of us little ones. No wonder her “Get back in that Bed” was not the warm and gentle “Leave It To Beaver” mom’s voice. I would have three to rock and rock and rock.

Well, there were 30 to 40 baby chicks in that pen. At least that is what I could count. They would not stay still for me to be sure that I didn’t count one, maybe three or four times. I was ready to quit. This chicken coop was hot inside with the warming lamps burning and the summer sunshine boring down on the rooftop. But what would my uncle think? Who would take over for me? Really just how many times a day does someone have to come out here in this tiny little house and put these feisty chickens to sleep? Isn’t there a better way? Put the chicken pen in a hammock and rock IT back and forth without putting any heads under wings. Wouldn’t that work?

The chicken coop door opened and there was my uncle. I was about to say how sorry I was at not putting these little things to sleep when he said that the family was gathering for a family photo. “Hurry, come on,” he said. “Everyone was looking for you and calling your name.”

“But, what about the chickens,” I had asked. “Who will put them to sleep?”

“Oh,” he had said while grinning. “They put themselves to sleep. We don’t have to rock them.”

“Humm,” I said with egg on my face. All I wanted to do was run to my room, climb in bed, cover my head with my arm and pull a quilt over my face and then rock myself to sleep.

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