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Editor's note

Rook

We bring you COOP #9 just in time before 2024 turns to 2025. During this time of year, many of us spend time with our families and loved ones and eat food together. For this edition, we thought we'd group together pieces that evoked that same kind of warmth, togetherness, and nostalgia. Although some of the pieces in this zine are a little darker, to me they do a good job of portraying the darker aspects of the holiday season—excess, as seen in "ayggs," a kind of rotten crumbling as seen in "Barn," and an always-timely reminder of where our food comes from, like in "A Chicken on Farmer Zuckerman's Farm."

Chickens show us how to reconnect with each other, like in "Mother Hen," they teach us to persevere and find our voice like in "Chicken Dance," and they cause us to reflect on our place in the present world like in "Chickens, Children, and Dinosaurs."

Thank you to everyone who contributed poetry and stories. Your pieces really inspired and uplifted us! Thank you to Ronan Hadden for the striking cover, and to all the other wonderful artists featured in this edition: COOP wouldn't be the same without your art. Finally, thank you, dear reader, for taking a moment to celebrate chickens with us! I hope you have a happy 2025 that's as warm and safe as a chicken in a well-built coop!

Editor's note

alliyah

Do you ever have the experience when you're looking for some point of shared commonality between you and your neighbor—maybe a shared geography, interest, or background—and then once you've found that point of connection, it's like the world of communication and empathy opens up? Chickens make for an interesting point of connection. In a way they're ubiquitous. Every continent outside of Antarctica has chickens, they've been around for thousands of years and almost every person has had *some* experience with them they can connect to. Maybe you grew up seeing chickens at a neighborhood farm, maybe you've seen them at a local petting zoo, maybe you painted eggs for Easter or enjoyed deviled eggs for Christmas, maybe you worked at KFC or Raising Canes in high school.

Our 9th zine explores some of these different bonds of human connection through the meeting point of chickens. We hope you enjoy it and hope that it inspires other points of commonality and connection. That's what writing does best right? We write about what we know, experience, and imagine and then others can read and similarly connect in a circle of empathy, understanding, and intrigue. Find something that connects with you here, and share it, or let it inspire you to write something for our next zine!

Thank you as always to all of our talented contributors for your creativity and trust, and a big thank you to our readers too!

COOP

chickens of our poetry

Zine #9

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For submission and publication inquiries please contact us at coop@coopzine.com or visit us on our website, coopzine.com

When finished, please pass on or recycle!

Content Warning: Some poems portray animal death.

Cover art: "Blue Hen"
by Ronan Hadden
Digital

prehensile lips
toward happiness, that greenest, furthest frond in the canopy,
because the eye desires to look upward, and because
everything below sooner or later begins to taste like chicken.

Chickens, Children, and Dinosaurs

Paul Hostovsky
paulhostovsky.com

Chickens make me think of dinosaurs
because they have that dinosaur DNA—can't you
see it? And dinosaurs make me think of children
because children love dinosaurs. Maybe the children
love the dinosaurs because the dinosaurs
were doomed, too. And didn't know it, either.
The chickens are mostly doomed, the dinosaurs
were all doomed, and the children—can't you
see it?—the children are disappearing because they're
turning into us. Take, for example,
this group of fourth graders pushing and shoving
and shuffling through the Museum of Natural History,
like a long line of cockeyed cursive letters
in a penmanship book, each resting a hand
on the shoulder of the next, walking elephant-fashion
under the enormous skeletons of the dinosaurs,
whose names are so long that if you stood them up
    vertically
they might reach the small brains of the dinosaurs
    themselves.
Already the children are disappearing off the faces
of themselves, growing up much too soon, beginning
to forget what the rest of us can't for the life of us
remember, either. First their imaginations will dry up,
then they'll spend their lives putting out volcanoes,
and eating their rivals, and straining upward with pursed,

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Family Outing

Lauren Green
@imlaurengreen on Instagram

Mummy, look chickens! He squealed with excitement. Oh, amazing, I said as if I hadn't seen them 1000 times before. He threw some grains, and a mass of feathers and clucks surrounded us in mere seconds.

My son clutched at his little red bucket with all his strength; worried the chickens would pluck it from his hands.

As we watched the chickens peck away, I wondered how often they'd been fed that morning. My stomach growled, almost time for our lunch.

Shall we get McDonald's on the way home? I asked. As we drive towards the smell of fried food, I can still hear the peck, peck, peck of chickens in my brain as if they were scratching their way into my thoughts. I pictured their scrawny necks and beady eyes.

Chicken nugget meal please, I say into the intercom.

a rooster

Adam McMenemy
@me_andor_franklin on Instagram
Ink and watercolor

May

Mia Nelson
internetpoems.substack.com

You text me a song about never sleeping together,
not even that one Sunday afternoon: yes, I think.
Even though all we did was sleep with each other,
you got it right. I mean: if we're not in love right now,
then were we ever? Did that afternoon happen?
Wobbly table, switching seats with me because of the sun,
how you pulled me into your orbit, how you gave me
the darkness I needed. Gripped the water glass, took my
cold hands and pressed both sides of your face. Yes,
I took your temperature with my body; love-sick, my official
diagnosis. Condensation on my fingers, I traced Punnett
squares
on your knee-cap. Our baby would have: pajamas on at noon,
strawberry jam on her cheeks, blue eyes. Never will I forget
the delight you felt knowing that it was possible, even likely.
I love biology because it is the study of living things and you
were so alive to me, sleeping on your back, eating the cores
of apples, being woken up by the rain. At the farm this week,
a tiny boy named Eli needed to collect eggs or he would die,
which is what he told me. He would die. So we ran to the red
coop over the mud hill and past the Holsteins and there were
two blue eggs and he held them like you once held my eye
in those rooms where no one else was in on the joke.
While the other kids threw hay at each other
or snuck through the baby goat pen,
Eli picked up one black and white hen and cried.

She's so beautiful! He had never seen anything so beautiful,
and he told me and the woman I work with and we said
I know buddy. I know you love the chickens.
He's six years old, as old as the amount of years
from when I first spoke to you. And he reminds me of you,
or us, or the way we were both somehow the inexplicable
animal of the other's life. It turns out our baby would:
sneeze loudly, get hives in grass, not
exist. Here's what I almost never allow myself to consider:
that we did love each other enough. The kid is so utterly,
utterly you. And life will probably always be like this:
not the taste of vanilla, but the experience of it;
a warm wind cutting through fog; deja-vu in the bookstore;
your order called out in a cafe half-way around the world;
hearing my name in the dark or across rooms. Yes, still.
Yes, pathetically. Around every man, I fear for my death.
I never considered what it would mean to have to keep
    living:
not a single color that passes me by
doesn't remind me of you. I have not
really forgotten. Time is still
the only thing we have.

Instant Chicken

Mike Everley
@mj_everley on Instagram, www.everley.link

I am the instant chicken
your easy-keep plastic pet
you don't have to feed me
or take me to the vet.

I really am no bother
my squeak has been removed
just fling me in the cupboard
and I'll remain unmoved.

My mouth is always open
though I make no clucking noise
I really am the perfect
addition to your toys.

Though I am really worried
about that packet in your hand
sage and onion says the label
that stuff should be banned.

It's the cost of living crisis
that's behind this trend
of eating instant chicken
with which I must contend.

ayggs

Marshall B. Mulkey
@nedswigby on Instagram

Buying eggs in bulk
At costco good god
Who needs this many
Eggs? ayggs (as they
Say in the midwest)
I'll buy a hundred of them
Make aygg fried rice
For the entire neighborhood
No one will eat it and I
Can't blame them
Never take egg fried rice
From strangers
Never take eggs from
Strangers only straight out of
The cloaca of birds you know
Fresh! Hot! Ayggs!
One to one hundred at a time
Good god who needs
This many eggs

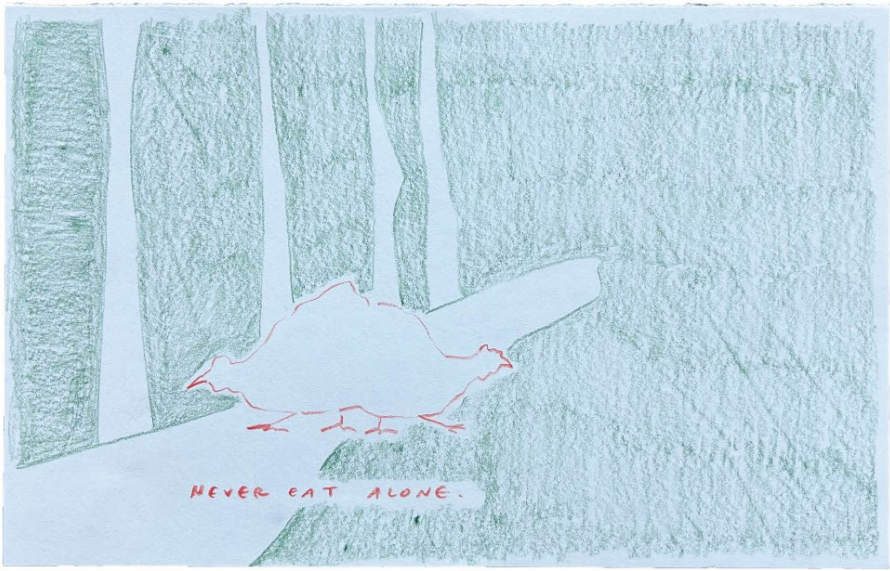
Country Fried Steak

Zara Yasmin Saberi

Curling his legs in under his body,
a loaf is what he's trying to embody,
instead of a bread it's a rotisserie chicken he bakes,
knobby little legs and golden brown fur make up this
country fried steak,
paws and claws extend for a big stretch,
his whiskers twitch wondering what morsel he can next
catch,
begging for salmon with sparkling green eyes,
this chicken will eat any food that he spies,
too thin tail and a white belly,
makes up our dear "chicken" Mister Teddy,
idly snoozing under the sun,
he bakes and bakes 'til he's crispy and well done.

silly sunbathing

Azula Zinnia
Photograph



Never Eat Alone

Gina
@BRAIN2C on Instagram
Colored pencil on paper

Egg Thief

Rachel Turney

There was a time when I was a squatter. I lived in my grandparents' old brick suburban home for almost a year in graduate school after they had moved to assisted living. Their neighbors had those chickens with the feathers on their feet. They were always in my grandpa's garden clucking around. On my way out the door for class I noticed a little nest in the bushes and there was a perfect egg.

The next day there were two eggs in the same spot and the third day there were now three. No chicken, just the eggs nestled in the bushes.

What should I do? Should I tell the neighbors about the eggs? Would they come and collect them?

The next day there were still just three eggs and I decided to take them. I made an omelet before I left for school.

The chicken laid two to three eggs a week that spring and summer.

I collected them and ate them all.

Did the neighbors know? I suspected they might. But they aren't really their eggs after all. They belonged to the chicken, I reasoned, and she had left them for me.
In fall the eggs stopped. I watched the chickens peck around in the garden and the yard and wondered which had been my egg benefactor. By Christmas my grandparents were ready to sell the house and I moved away. I wonder if the chicken returned to her egg laying spot in the spring and what the new neighbors did. Did they eat the eggs as I had done? A part of me doubted it. Not everyone is an egg thief.

The Chicken Dance

Aimee Brooks
@tiny.red.mug on Instagram

The chickens weren't laying eggs. Despite increasing their calcium intake and sunlight, despite moving Bertha behind another fence for a few days so she would stop trying to fight Henrietta, despite scouring the backyard for a secret laying spot (which we wouldn't have bothered of course), there was not an egg to be found.

Juniper hadn't eaten an egg in seven years – nearly as long as we had been together – when she declared that we were getting chickens. There were other unacceptable foods too – it wasn't just meat and eggs – but most brands of soy sauce, red wine, and even honey. I thought the bees weren't missing out on much, it was just their puke after all.

"Honey is not puke," she informed me, "first of all, the pollen never reaches their digestive tract. Second, regardless of how it's made, honey is their food, and it would be wrong to take it from them."

Despite the fact that I disagreed with her – honey is definitely puke – and that bees have stingers and stingers equal pain, I would have much rather had a backyard full of beehives over the chickens.

I tried to Uno reverse some of her techniques on her in the beginning, when I was in the backyard assembling the DIY coop she had picked out online somewhere.

"Don't breeders slaughter all the male chicks?"

"These are going to be rescue chickens." She was sitting in the grass, her skirt billowing around her, a

sunbeam across her left cheek, the light catching in her eyelashes. Part of me didn't want to disturb her peace. Her resolve was so strong – once she had made up her mind about something, she couldn't be stopped.

"I thought chickens ate the shells of their unfertilized eggs."

"What do you think we're going to do with the shells? Eat them ourselves?"

That was a reasonable point.

"But what if instead, we went to one of the farmers' markets, and bought eggs every week?"

"We can't put hens under the stress of capitalism," she said, plucking a dandelion from the grass. "We will take care of them and in return, they'll gift us the eggs."

I missed a nail and hit my thumb with a hammer.

*

It wasn't that I didn't love them, I think I just wasn't a chicken person.

Within hours of their arrival – delivered by the kind souls at the farm animal rescue – our backyard, too, smelled like a farm. There were droppings in the grass where Juniper had once basked in the sun. There were droppings on the porch. There were even droppings in the kitchen from when I left the door open for just a second too long and Clementine and Rosie hurried in, running past my feet, over my open-toed Birkenstocks.

All the poop would have been fine – it is what we signed up or after all, but each morning, just as the first sunlight peaked over the San Juan mountains (around four thirty am), they asked to be let out through clucks and

A chicken on Farmer Zuckerman's Farm

Kate M. Sine
@enis.st.sparrow on Instagram and Threads

Am I even a thought to you?
Or does his Magnificence blind you to the death that still comes to the farm?
My name is Cherry, because my feathers are the same shade as Zuckerman's favorite berry.
How funny that fruit, death, and chickens can be plucked too?
Did you even know my name or do you even dare to ask because
chickens are all the same in how they hang from the hands of the farmer as he pads into the house to feast.

Charlotte, can you save me too?
You can carve "mercy" on an egg shell,
or dress me with your silver web,
cast your spell, make the men believe in the lies you spin.

Please, my name is Cherry, and I want to see the flowers bloom again.

Lita

Ronan Hadden
Gel pen on paper

squawks that had me stumbling downstairs in my pajamas to release them from their coop. It was kind of nice to be up so early, but I couldn't fall back asleep. I found myself worrying about them. A fox, a coyote, or even an unusually large rat (though I hadn't seen many in the Denver suburbs) could have gotten to any of our girls.

They felt no fear, protected by the fence, reassured that I was watching them through the screen door. Within weeks the ladies uprooted most of the garden even though we tried to shoo them away, leaving wilted lettuce and bulbs of garlic scorching in the summer sun, ruining Juniper's plans for us to live on only what we grew. She was still committed for a while, subsisting off last year's legumes and preserved peaches she had taken from our neighbor's tree, but I ate the ham and cheese croissants from the coffee shop where I picked up a few shifts a week, stuffed my face with chocolate chip cookies and Danishes, bringing home boxes of day-old pastries that Juniper turned her nose up to. "Butter," she said with disapproval. "The cows have not been compensated for their labor."

But neither were we. After all the cleaning, feeding, and paying their vet bills when they became ill with some mysterious ailment, not a single egg. I started to feel like a chicken myself – scavenging for food from the ground and other dubious sources. I became increasingly nosy – watching them through the kitchen window, peaking into the coop to see what they were up to. I squabbled with Juniper, picking at her for signing us up for this – five to ten years of nasty birds with no omelets in sight. When I made jokes about cordon bleu, turducken, and other

atrocities, she unleashed her talons on me – verbally of course. It became clear to me that even though the situation was dire, the stars had aligned and we wanted the same thing – a few gosh darn eggs each morning.

When I said we had tried everything, I really meant it. Multiple coops cleanings per day. High protein diets made of worms that gave me full body shudders. Herbal remedies. It wasn't until I ran across the blog "Mother Hen, Mother Earth," run by folks that reminded me a bit of Juniper and myself, that I learned something that I felt could revolutionize our chicken care techniques.

"We need to sing to them," I told her.

"What?"

"That's why they get so excited in the morning. That's when they should be laying. They need to know that we're proud of them, so we need to sing too."

The next morning, we both woke up at four-thirty when the hens began to cluck, and the softest blue light peeked over the mountains.

She started to sing to them, and I sang too.

rock from the ground and pulled his arm back and with a great shout he hurled it at the wall. It hit a support beam with a thunderous, catastrophic bang, thundering and echoing outwards. It was silent, but then the wood buckled and bent and he heaved great gasps and the walls swayed inward and before he could so much as regret it the entire barn collapsed around him in an instant.

Barn

Wyley Fröhlich Jungerman

He remembered building it, laying down the floor-boards and painting the door all pretty and slathering the walls with burning red paint. He built it up and filled it out with horses and his shiny new tractor and the chickens raced through it squawking and chirping and it had been filled with so much life and loud that it nearly burst at the seams.

Time was not a kind predator. He stood in its carved-out interior and felt the weight of the sky heavy on the roof and the wind pummeling the walls and he felt nothing but an ache of empty hunger. It was a starved beast, nothing but peeling red paint and harsh splinters and broken planks. It was an old hen molting through its sickness, and it swayed with the same feebleness, creaking with weary wheezing that clung to the last pleading vestiges of life with its aching fingers. He looked around it with hate and anger because the tractor was broken and he'd sold the horses and the chickens hadn't laid eggs in months. And he thought that maybe it was his fault for not taking care enough, but the idea was such a poisoned, cruel thing that he would rather believe just about anything else.

But maybe he built it up wrong. Maybe it wasn't the weather that peeled the paint but his own fingers scratching it from the weary wood. Maybe the walls were flimsy because he hadn't nailed them in right. Maybe he broke the tractor on a drunken bender. Maybe he starved the chickens.

The farmer stood stiff before he bent down and ripped a

a hen

Adam McMenemy
@me_andor_franklin on Instagram
Ink and watercolor

Chicken Yard

SueB

The hen's black barred feathers undulate
smoothly along her neck as she bobs her head down
while scratching and searching for scrambling
insects. A quick peck and her beady eyes
seem to gleam with pleasure. She squawks
and sometimes flaps her wings after particular victories
known only to her, queen of the chicken yard.

A summer heat wave demands
shorts and bare feet when I venture
to the backyard to wash off the chicken-messy porch
and care for my little flock. Like the hen, my eyes
scan the ground, seeking safe places to walk
through the sunbaked grass.

Although my bangs quickly stick to my forehead
in the Phoenix heat, my ponytail swings
free as I stoop to gently capture the hen
and stroke her back. Grasping her heavy body
in two hands, I point her beak like a weapon
toward black crickets and shiny roaches stirred up
from the hosed-off concrete. Together,
we clear the sidewalk of easy prey.

a hatching chick

Adam McMenemy
@me_andor_franklin on Instagram
Ink and watercolor

sweet dreams
to him.
And, just like
a full-grown chicken,
he had neglected
his mother and her gifts.
The nest is
now empty.
But our intruder
is no chicken,
he has the courage
to call his mother –
who has awaited
this call
for years.
Only a mother
is able to
repeatedly
do the impossible.
It is her
superpower.

After the Bowl

Taylor Kovach

The dust settled up
Sand hourglasses purged
Feathers reaching from shelter
Unlatched doors, feeding on unscathed air
Once again, free roam

Mother Hen

Nathan DeBar
@Nate.debar on Instagram

Sitting there,
all puffed up and hissing,
a rhode island red
covers her
brood.
The intruder to her
peace
is twenty times
her size,
but, though he means her
no harm,
she does what
she can
to protect them.
He carefully skips
the mother's
nesting box
to pick up
the surrounding
eggs.
The intruder stops
and thinks of his
own mother,
thanks to the
defiant little one.
He had been
gone for

too long,
but never forgot
her face.
She was
tall
with brown straight
hair,
brown kind
eyes,
and always
the right thing to say
in her pocket.
Just like the
mother hen,
she raised her
children on her own.
They both
provided warmth
in the winter –
either by feather or cloth.
She would run to
her baby's cries –
no matter the time.
Like a chick to
a worm,
she always found his
lunch.
As a hen clucks
a lullaby
for her chicks to sleep,
his mother sang