

*Digging Deep*

# Something to crow about!

By Cynthia Brian

“I raised chickens because I love that feeling of being in the country and living from the soil” — Eartha Kitt



*Camellias blooming and getting ready to drop.*

*Photos Cynthia Brian*

**W**ith 2017 being the Year of the Rooster, I am excited to share my gratitude to the poultry that graced my life.

Chanticleer may be the reason I am where I am today. When I was 8 years old I announced to my parents that I wanted to be able to go to college. Since my grandparents had barely finished sixth to eighth grades and my parents had high school diplomas, I would be the first person in my family to strive for a university degree. It was decided that the only way this dream would be possible is if I financed it myself. My brilliant idea was to raise chickens, sell the eggs, and enter competitions at fairs to earn the cash.

My first clutch of chickens yielded nine pullets and three cockerels. My favorite rooster was Chanticleer, a beautiful Rhode Island Red, who followed me every-

where. A great deal of time was spent with my brood of 12 as I began my farm fresh egg business through my membership in the 4-H Club. When fair season rolled around, I entered Chanticleer and my hens in the appropriate categories including showmanship. Chanticleer and I won blue ribbons and were named Grand Champions in every competition at every event, including the California State Fair. At fairs outside the county where I resided it was necessary to enter Chanticleer in “open division,” meaning I wasn’t competing against other children or 4-H-er’s but was competing with professional breeders and adult hobbyists. Chanticleer still won Grand Champion and soon I was being heralded as a “California Champion Rooster Raiser” and “The Chicken Lady.” (Of course when I was a teenager I wasn’t enamored with those titles, but today I cherish the honors.) Throughout my teens I raised hundreds of hens and several roosters, but Chanticleer remained the king of the roost, a media star and a winning companion.

Weeds and grass were fed to the barnyard animals as well as scraps from our table. The hens scratched, ate worms and fertilized the yard. The manure from the chicken coop was shoveled into a pile to age for three years before it was mixed into the flowerbeds. (Chicken manure is “hot” and will burn your plants if it is not seasoned.) Everything was recycled in the perfect circle of organic living. Eggs were gathered twice a day and delivered to customers twice a week. I saved every penny and documented every expense.

Chanticleer lived a very long, happy life and I will always be grateful for his friendship, his beautiful stature, and his profitable department. By the time I was 18 I had indeed earned enough dollars from my poultry project, farm labor jobs and scholarships to pay my college tuition at both UCLA and UC Berkeley. And that is something to crow about!

Celebrate the Year of the Rooster. Gung Hay Fat Choy!



*Marvelous mustard fields in the vineyards.*

