

With the passage of time it became clear that our fears were not well founded: we only had two roosters in our collection of chickens, not the seven we originally suspected. As they grew the two roosters were starting to fight, and thus one had to go. Scruffy. Why Scruffy? Well, not only was he the smaller and the less dominant of the two, he was also not quite like other chickens. He had two extra claws on the one foot, and one extra claw on the other. And between the claws grew great big feathers. Not a good thing to have on feet that were in constant contact with the boggy ground of Pinehaven!

The friends who had “given” us the chickens offered to take Scruffy off of our hands, and to do the dastardly deed themselves, when they next culled all their roosters, which was to be any day real soon now. But this meant that Scruffy would have to be caught and boxed, and shipped to the other side of town. We felt that this was quite a scary thing for a chicken in its own right. And so it was that Terry decided to do Scruffy in herself. An axe was bought, a box prepared, and a chopping board prepared<sup>1</sup>.

The day before the event we broke the news to the girls. It is fair to say that there was great unhappiness in the house. There was wailing and gnashing of the teeth, pulling of hair, and copious tears from Tessa. Shakespeare would have been right at home in our house as Tessa rent her dress and repeatedly cried out “Alas, poor Scruffy”. Kylara just cried. But we remained resolute and thus decided that we would cunningly distract the girls by getting a video and playing it when we (Terry) went to do the dastardly deed.

The scene was prepared. The chickens caged, a hole dug, the video started. As the sun was shining I was out on the scaffolding at the back working on the roof of our house<sup>2</sup>. The scaffolding is quite high, and takes a while to clamber onto and off of. Terry went past me as I worked, an axe in her hands. I shouted out “good luck” and carried on working on the roof. A short time passed. Tessa nonchalantly appeared, and yelled to me on her way past “I am off to help Mum”! There was nothing I could do but watch as she vanished towards the chicken coop<sup>3</sup>.

I slowly climbed down the scaffolding and followed in her footsteps, expecting the worst. As I headed up the hill Terry, looking a little pale, and Tessa, looking very grumpy, appeared, coming down again. Terry dangled a blood stained axe in one hand. Tessa was complaining “But Mum, I really wanted to help you kill Scruffy”!

After we cuffed Tessa's ear for whining and sent her back to the video, Terry said to me “it was close – I had just put the body into a hole at the bottom of the compost heap, when Tessa burst onto the scene, wanting to help. I only just managed to put some compost over it to stop her seeing it. Tessa was really put out that she had missed it all, and badly wanted to help do the deed.”

Then we gathered the girls together, to help them overcome their grief at the parting of Scruffy. Terry told them that at times like this it was customary to say a few words about the departed. Tessa's last words on Scruffy were “It's not fair – I didn't get to help kill him”. Kylara scratched her head and said “You know, to be honest, I prefer books to chickens”. It is fair to say that this is not the reaction that Terry and I were expecting after the wailing and gnashing of teeth. So it is left to me to say “Poor Scruffy. We hardly knew you”.

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1 Plasterboard does not make a good chopping board. Be warned.

2 This is another story, and one that I am currently very proud of. After two years of trying to get roofing companies to re-roof our house, I have, under duress, started doing the job myself. Never fear, I will let you know how it goes!

3 I have mentioned the chicken coop before: It is a construction that I am very proud of...