

## HEADLESS CHICKENS

*A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless.  
A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.*

Proverbs 14:16-17

The earliest memory I possess is firmly entrenched because of its grisly nature. For a four-year-old it does not take much to produce a traumatic experience.

Our family lived in a small town on the eastern Colorado plains. My father was pastor of the First Baptist Church. Being a Southern Baptist preacher in Colorado in the 1950's was not a prestigious position. Our first church building was a garage that was closed on Sunday. It would have been an interesting ministry to offer an oil change for first time visitors.

Depending on a new church to provide a salary meant that our family did not have an abundance of worldly possessions. It was not unusual for folks in the congregation to provide produce or share hand-me-down clothes and other items with our family.

On one occasion, my father came home with two live chickens that were donated by a caring church member. My father was a country boy from Texas. However, it was a dairy farm and I am not sure that he had a great deal of experience with poultry.

Since we were not in the egg business, the only value possessed by these chickens was the frying pan. In order for that to occur, my father had to kill the two birds. With hatchet in hand, he proceeded to the back yard for the slaughter.

Since I was only four-years-old, I do not have a clear recollection of the events that transpired. I do not remember seeing the actual beheading of the birds. What sticks in my mind is the sight of two headless chickens, bouncing aimlessly in the back yard, with blood spewing in all directions.

It was an experience that caused me more fear than any Alfred Hitchcock movie. Somehow I was transported out of the backyard to the front porch. That is the end of my memory of that experience.

However, it was not my last encounter with a dead chicken. I was sitting in my office watching the few cars go down the street and contemplating the direction of next Sunday's sermon. I immediately recognized the automobile that pulled into the parking space next to my office window.

I was somewhat surprised that Mrs. Dixon would be coming to see me. She was a Methodist who did not even attend our church on special occasions. As far as I knew, this was the first time she had ever come to the Baptist church.

As I watched her get out of the car, I noticed that she had a dead chicken in her right hand. It did not take me long to surmise what had happened and I knew that I was in for trouble.

My guess was that our family dog, Benji, had been a little bit too friendly with Mrs. Dixon's chicken. It was a rural community with a lot of farm animals and family pets roaming the neighborhood. Our yard did not have a fence so Benji had free access to the whole town. Up to that point I did not know of any problems caused by Benji with the town's livestock.

My fears were confirmed when Mrs. Dixon stormed into my office, without a word of greeting, slammed the dead chicken on my desk, and declared, "Here is your dinner!"

My attempts to apologize were futile. In her eyes it was some type of prize chicken that laid golden eggs. Finally, after saying "I'm sorry," in every language I knew, it was apparent that she could not be appeased. I reached for my wallet and offered to pay for the prize bird.

In response to my question of how much was the chicken worth, Mrs. Dixon did not hesitate to say, "Fifty-five dollars!"

Although I seldom shop for groceries, I knew that this was an exorbitant price for a fryer that still needed to be plucked. When I suggested that several buckets of fried chicken could be purchased from the Colonel at that price Mrs. Dixon was not amused.

Finally, with the realization that I was in a no-win situation, I asked Mrs. Dixon where her chicken was when the fatal encounter with my dog occurred. She replied that her chicken was out of the pen. The conversation was finished when I promised if she would keep her chickens in the pen, my dog would not kill them.

Grabbing the dead fowl by the neck, Mrs. Dixon stormed out of my office in the same manner and with the same anger that she had entered. It was probably the last time this Methodist woman ever set foot in the Baptist church.

In comparing these two experiences it is difficult to say which was more frightening. The headless chickens flapping around the backyard put fear into a four-year old boy as did a woman who lost her head over a dead chicken put fear into a grown man.