

## Karen Telleen-Lawton: A Day with a Chicken Farmer

From gleaning vegetables to butchering chickens, an unlikely birthday present proves to be a memorable adventure



Noozhawk's Karen Telleen-Lawton and husband David enjoy the fruits of their labor on the chicken farm.  
(Mark Tollefson photo)

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | Published on 01.30.2012 10:16 p.m.



When farmer [Mark Tollefson](#) of [Fairview Gardens](#) met us early on a chilly January morning, I didn't know what to expect. My husband, Dave, had contacted [Craving Adventures](#) co-founder Eve Sommer-Belin to design an

interesting birthday escapade. And that it was: We delved into everything from organic veggies to chicken coops, poops and soups.

Mark started us off tranquilly, meandering through the vegetable fields armed with harvest knives. Gleaning broccoli, carrots, watermelon parsnips, tangerines and cherimoyas, we topped our basket with wild lettuces. I also gathered bits of edible plant knowledge, such as the fact that mustards are all edible and identifiable by cruciate flowers and erect and thrusting stems.

The simple pleasure of wandering outdoors was reinforced by Mark's son, who approached us every few minutes with a "new" discovery: "Dad, guess what I found? A ladybug!"

Arms laden, we reached the property's creaky 1895 farmhouse and helped ourselves to coffee and warm carob-chip cookies. Then we settled onto a worn settee on the porch to learn about organic chicken farming. Mark gave us an abbreviated history of chickens, such as that sailors preferred chicken tattoos as a superstition against drowning. Floating wooden crates of chickens (and pigs) were sometimes the only living things to survive a shipwreck.

We learned that backyard chickens then and now provide a local source of protein, controlled quality, fertilizer and natural pest control. Mark shared the history of the Fairview farm, which supports about 50 chickens. Or at least it did until that Saturday.

I stalled us as long as I could, but eventually we walked over to the butchering station, where a scalding can of water awaited. Mark led us beside clean outdoor stainless steel tables, explaining the procedure. Then I manned the cell-phone camera as Mark and Dave slipped into the fenced area to grab a couple of hens.

Holding them to their chests, the guys kept the chickens calm as they carried them to the butchering area. Mark cradled each one for a moment, thanking it for giving its life to our service before placing it into an inverted construction cone (yes, those orange things). Their heads stuck out the cones' tips. They inspected the scene with what seemed like mild curiosity but not alarm. I declined participation in the throat-slitting part. When I looked away, I watched families walking around petting goats and sheep 10 feet away, unaware of the quiet drama in plain sight.

We dredged the carcasses through the scalding water to ease the plucking job. For 15 to 20 minutes we plucked and carved and beheaded and eviscerated until

the chickens looked like what comes in a plastic bag. At that point we placed them on ice and cleaned up ourselves for the tasty part of our adventure.

Eve and the other co-owner, Carolyn Connor, had set the picnic table with blue Provencal tablecloth, a bouquet of flowers, and chocolates beside a bottle of Piocho from [Happy Canyon Vineyards](#). The meal was a delight of homegrown food, from roasted sweet potatoes to a salad medley to — you guessed it — chicken.

Last Earth Day, we attended a talk about raising chickens. I left rather than learn about butchering. Considering that, it was a curious choice for a birthday present. Yet it was a fascinating and enjoyable day, and I'm glad we did it.

Besides, Dave's birthday is coming up and I'm kind of thinking he might like a day of reading [Jane Eyre](#) by the fire and then composing and reading aloud love notes to each other. What do you think, sweetie?

*— Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations spanning sustainability from the environment to finance, economics and justice issues. She is a fee-only financial advisor ([www.DecisivePath.com](http://www.DecisivePath.com)) and a freelance writer ([www.CanyonVoices.com](http://www.CanyonVoices.com)).*