

How a little girl and her hens brought neighbors together in a time of fear

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Juniper and her egg frame. KAUFMAN FAMILY *COURTESY*

Juniper Kaufman, a first-grader at Gig Harbor Academy, has a thing for chickens. In fact, Ken Kaufman, her father, calls her his “chicken whisperer.”

“Something clicks with Juniper and the chickens,” said Ken, a programmer at Starbucks. “I’ve never seen anything like it; they love her. They come right up to her, and one of them will even jump right up into her arms.”

The Kaufman’s property in the Point Fosdick area is home to two cats, a dog, and eleven chickens. Juniper’s favorite animals are the chickens.

“My favorite is Iris and Beatrice,” Juniper said. “Iris has been going nuts recently, she goes ‘bwack, bwack, bwack!’”

TOO MANY EGGS

Each chicken lays an egg a day — too many for the family to use. Earlier this month, Juniper thought: why not give these eggs to the neighbors? But how to do that, in a time of coronavirus “social distancing?”

Juniper’s father build an egg frame and put it out where the family’s driveway meets the road.

Every day Juniper goes to the road and puts the extra eggs, around a half a dozen, on the frame. When neighbors walk by, they see a sign encouraging them to take a few eggs.

“Grocery stores don’t have very many eggs, and most things you can’t cook without eggs,” Juniper said. “That’s why I think everybody should have a little bit of eggs.”

Some days, Juniper said, the eggs were so popular, “The eggs didn’t even touch the eggs stand! They flew.”

KINDNESS IN RETURN

Then something unexpected happened. Neighbors began dropping off their own gifts at the egg frame.

“One person gave me daisies and someone else gave me honey, and one person gave me jam,” Juniper said. “I also got some shells, peaches, walnuts and notes.”

Rona Kaufman, Juniper’s mother and a Pacific Lutheran University professor, said the egg stand has brought her family closer to their neighbors.

“We’ve met more of the people in our neighborhood than we ever have before,” said Rona — even though they have to speak at a distance. “We live in a place where people run and walk a lot, but now we have gotten a conversation started and have gotten to know our neighbors better.”

Like the other students at the private Gig Harbor Academy, Juniper has been studying at home, online, since March 16.

Cristina McDougall, the interim head of school, said Juniper is a student who is full of life. In the past, Juniper has brought some of her eggs to share with the class.

“It didn’t surprise us at all that Juniper was thinking of her hens and of others,” McDougall said. “Juniper’s parents encouraged her to act on this idea, and they supported her. That is truly what Gig Harbor Academy believes, and embodies what a lot of our families believe.”

The school has a theme for the school year: Take Care. The slogan is simple, McDougall said: Take care of yourself, take care of each other, take care of this place.”

And that, in a nutshell, is why Juniper gives away her eggs.

“I wanted to help each other,” she explained, “and help this place.”

♥ "Penny" ♥

♥ "Pretty" ♥

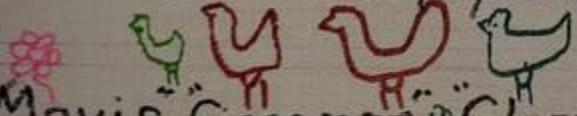
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