

Minnie Rose

by Gerald Elfendahl

I first met Minnie Rose Lovgreen in the early 1970's. As one of the Island's four first "Cooperative Extension WSU Master Gardeners", I was living on an old farm , raising a family and much of our own food. I enjoyed visiting with Island old timers who had thriving subsistence gardens and wonderful advice based on experience growing things in our maritime climate and soils.

Minnie Rose, 85, loved green and was a widow who always seemed to have a chore needing to be done and trees needing pruning. At the end of the day, and often while I was up in a tree, she offered stories. She was really The Master Gardener, not I.

Minnie Rose –you never left out the "Rose"–had been raised in England where maintaining a garden was essential. Life had not been easy for her. You can read about it in her biography, *Far As I Can Remember*.

After pruning, often in winter rain, there always had to be time for hot tea and advice about gardens, chickens, and broad (fauva) beans. She grew the beans as a cover crop planting them in the fall. Hers grew almost as tall as she was. Mine, planted in spring, seemed woefully stunted. With her late-dairyman husband and family having gone, she greatly enjoyed her flock of chickens. They made their home in one of the few remaining sheds from their once large farm. The weathered, red stained, board and batten, shed was a leaner and seemed held together by blackberry vines.

Minnie Rose watched her flock closely, shepherding them when she let them out to graze. I recall her talking to each one by name. They were family. We all marveled at the delightful oral history Minnie Rose shared with Nancy Rekow and illustrated by Elizabeth Hutchison (Zwick)–"Recipes for Raising Chickens." Than Minnie Rose, who could write about chickens so intimately? Who else could share the mother hen's gentle cooing and clucks whispered to baby chicks inside their shell before hatching?

Sadly, this motherly gentleness was lost when promoting her book on a weekday morning KING-TV talk show. Proud Islanders were glued to their TV's like a barnacle to a piling. Folks forgot their tide charts and delayed morning tasks to experience Minnie-Rose's "14 minutes of fame." And there she was in the audience, sitting in the front row. She wore a fine gray wool suit, a blouse with a white lace collar, and a delicate matching gray felt hat with a flower sticking out of the top. With program time running out, the emcee announced the guest author and asked her one question, "When I was a boy, we had a rooster in our chicken yard who always attacked us whenever we enter the yard.. What would you do about that?"

The camera went to close up on a contemplative Minnie-Rose. Here it was. Time running out. Quick Minnie-Rose! She smiled softly and uttered, "Hit it in the head with a board!"

"Thank you Minnie Rose, author of *Recipe for Raising Chickens*. Times up! See you tomorrow."

Thirty-five years later, you still can find Minnie-Roses' *Recipe for Raising Chickens* thanks to Nancy Rekow and friends. And you should, even if you don't raise any.