

Easter Chicken was no dumb cluck

by Gloria Campisi

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The Easter Chicken is alive and clucking — but only because it decided to cross the road.

The chicken bolted from a loading dock at a poultry processing plant in Queen Village last week and dashed into the middle of Swanson Street, where dogwalker Kerri Hunter-Woodman and her client, Raggs, found it.

"It was a chicken, just nonchalantly walking down the street" as cars swerved around it, she said.

She was trying to grab the bird for a rescue when a car squealed to a stop and two men jumped out.

The chicken took one look at the men and took off.

"The feathers were flying," Hunter-Woodman said.

After a chase, the two men throttled the hen, which set it to shrieking, Hunter-Woodman recalled.

"It was like a James Bond movie. What did this chicken do where a car came screeching out of nowhere and takes it hostage?"

She said the men told her the bird went "AWOL from the slaughterhouse."

The captors carried their squawking quarry back to Yee Tung Inc., Swanson Street near Christian, and "threw the bird into the warehouse."

"That's when the bird really started wailing," said Hunter-Woodman, who runs a pet-walking and housesitting business.

"The chicken was clearly trying to com-



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municate with me."

And it worked. She said the hen's plaintive squawks sounded like, "Don't let me die. You can't let me die."

She said she told a man who carried the chicken inside the slaughterhouse: "This has just broken my heart."

Thinking the chicken was doomed to a steaming platter at some restaurant, she and Raggs walked sadly down Swanson Street. Suddenly, she said, a man came out of

the chicken house wearing a hairnet and a long coat. He caught the woman and dog and asked, "Do you want this chicken?"

"I said, yes, yes, I'm thinking, what am I going to do with this chicken? I have eight cats at home ...

"Then I said to myself, 'I'll cross that bridge with this chicken when I get to it.'"

Another slaughterhouse worker handed over the bird.

"A lot of birds died here today," the

slaughterhouse man told her. "This is the only one that survived. It survived because it was feisty."

Hunter-Woodman drove home with the bird squatting comfortably in a box provided by the chicken butchery.

She called every bird sanctuary she could think of, but chickens are livestock — not birds. A sanctuary official suggested the Pennsylvania SPCA on Erie Avenue.

Kerri Hunter-Woodman visits her rescued chicken after the bird was running around like a chicken with its head cut off

There the Easter Chicken — Hunter-Woodman says she decided to name it EC in honor of the holiday — was tested to assure it was free of avian diseases and then placed among other

homeless fowl in the shelter's barnyard.

It can stay on indefinitely, fed, housed and kept in good health "under the protective custody of the society," said shelter manager Charles Spencer.

Back at the slaughterhouse, Chester Fung of Yee Tung Inc., said he knew nothing about last week's breakout.

He said escapes from the slaughterhouse are "very, very unusual." ■