

FIFTH IN A SERIES OF REMINISCENCES BY VENOSTA'S TOM MCLAUGHLIN ON HIS DAYS IN A LOGGING CAMP BACK IN THE 1930'S

(As a young man in a logging camp Tom makes a pet of a friendly sow. While on a walk, they have a close encounter with a wolf. Chased back to camp, the frightened pig refused to stay outside, and crashes through the door of the cabin to be with her master.)

When the sow charged into the cabin, my first thought was that the wolf had returned. She calmed down quickly when she saw me, and gave me a disgruntled lecture for leaving her out there alone, with such terror afoot. Before the sleepers could arise and kill her, I took her outside. But the secret was out. I had to tell all, but I recovered from this embarrassment quite well. She pulled another caper that I never quite forgave her for, but first things first. Clifford, my wise and noble brother, solved the problem of the sow's breakouts. We determined that the wolf had not returned, but decided that he was probably watching the camp from a safe distance.

The horse stable was the most sturdy of the out buildings. Clifford advised me to turn Topsy loose in the stable, and to leave the sow with her. Topsy was the only horse in the stable at the time. It worked. A wolf doesn't like a kick in the head any more than you or I.

I hadn't set out to cultivate a close relationship with the sow, mind you. As far as I was concerned, she was a pig, and that was that. She was in the camp to eat the garbage and that's all. No one around had ever had a pet pig, that I knew of, and I didn't have any desire to be the first. My previous experiences, and memories of pigs, were of slime-filled puddles and being chased by sows when I tried to pick up one of their squealing young.



Tom
McLaughlin

The sow had taken to breaking out early in the season and following me everywhere. At the beginning, I found this interesting and harmless. You know the feeling of flattery you get when an animal takes to you, and seems to like you better than it likes anyone else? I didn't discourage the relationship, but I came to wish that I had.

At first I had felt awkward, and sometimes embarrassed at the attention that the sow lavished on me. The mentality in the camp was that no sensible person would have a pig for a pet. When my brothers were around, I tried to ignore the sow. This maneuver just seemed to make her more attentive. Despite the scorn that the sow was subjected to and that I was subjected to for associating with her, I found myself enjoying her company.

You can say what you like about your pet dog, boa, or whatever, but you will never know the joys of having a real friend until you have experienced the companionship of a pig. Her indiscretions aside, a pet sow is almost everything a pet dog is. Oh, I know that they won't scare off a bear or a wolf, but for downright good friendship, you can't beat that of a pig.

The sow's latest indiscretions began early one Sunday morning, when she had broken out again about daybreak. She came to the cabin door, making the damndest whirring and murmuring sounds. If

you ever have a pet sow, and she starts these whirring sounds, get away from her. Let on that you don't know her. If she follows you around, pretend that you don't notice her. Climb a tree. Anything. But get away from her.

I was inexperienced in this area, and flattered by the sow's attention. Added to that condition, I was disgustingly tender-hearted at that age. I tried to keep this weakness hidden as much as possible, but with little success. I was known to sit up at night with a sick or injured animal, such as a kitten that had been injured by the kick of a cow.

Wherever I wanted to go, the sow was in front of me. She was under my feet and under Topsy's feet. The strangest part of it was that the mare wasn't nipping her any more when she was in the way. Topsy understood. I didn't. I preferred to think that it was a genuine attempt, on the sow's part, to be a good pet. I made the mistake of bragging at the supper table about the sow's intelligence in choosing me as a friend.

The truth came down on my head like a shroud of shattered glass, and just as prickly.

Clifford, getting fed up with the constant talk of my pet sow, leaned across the table and with these words, shut me up for good. "The sow's in love with you. When the hell are you going to wise up, and go to the farm and bring the hog back in the crate? Or are you planning to do the job yourself?"

I've never had reality brought down on me so abruptly.

I went directly to the farm and returned with the hog. It was instant romance. I slunk off to my bunk to sulk in my embarrassment. I was angry with the sow for a while. I felt that she had abused our relationship, and had expected more from me than I was prepared to give. We continued our friendship after a while, but strictly on a platonic basis.