

NINTH IN A SERIES OF REMINISCENCES BY VENOSTA'S TOM MCLAUGHLIN ON HIS DAYS IN A LOGGING CAMP BACK IN THE 1930S (LIFE IN CAMP GROWS COMPLICATED AS TOM'S ANIMAL FRIENDS BECOME HARD TO LIVE WITH AND TAKE TO IGNORING HIM. HIS WIFE'S CLAIRVOYANCY IN THE MATTER OF PREGNANCIES IS EXAMINED.)

Topsy and the sow were both pregnant that winter. Their attitude took on an ominous change after the hog's trip to the camp. At that time in my life, delving into the female mystique was an arena I dared not enter. Life, for me, was thoroughly uncomplicated, and I sailed that route with abandon. I clung to the ship through the storms, and rode the gentle breezes in the sunshine. Like was fluid, if one just rolled with the punches.

This recent development, at the beginning, seemed no big deal. But my animals' attitude was quickly becoming a disturbing inconvenience.

The animals seemed to be pairing up against me. Topsy had developed a stubborn streak, and was becoming hard to handle. She was cross and ignoring my commands. At times, when I had rolled the log up onto the skidway, I would find Topsy and the sow headed for the stable. Topsy wasn't nipping the sow anymore when she got in the way. But she developed the annoying habit of nipping me, when I was slow to unharness or feed her at the end of the day. And the sow had stopped teasing Topsy.

They were both completely ignoring our previous close relationship.

When the two met on the trail they just stopped, and stood nose to nose, in silent communication. They were acting as if I didn't exist. This situation left me baffled and frustrated. I felt as I do when I hear a conversation in a



## Tom McLaughlin

language I do not understand. As if I was missing out on an opportunity to learn something new.

Now, I can imagine in horse to hores, or cow to calf conversation, the message is received something like, "Let's have a run", or "Behave yourself". But horse to pig?

I had an opportunity to explore this phenomena years later. After I was married, as a matter of fact. My wife Therese had the uncanny ability to tell when an acquaintance was pregnant, long before there were any obvious signs. It seemed as if she knew almost the day after the union occurred. How embarrassed her friends would have been, had they known. I couldn't pry the secret of how she knew, out of her. All I got was a smug "you'll see". And sure enough, Therese was dead on in these predictions. Females are like that. It's just another way of maintaining their superiority over we of the weaker sex.

### WIFELY ARROGANCE

I recall the first time that my sweet young wife pulled this arrogance on me. We had just encountered one of her young friends, newly married, and after chatting for a while, we moved on. We hadn't gone far, and were well out of ear shot of anyone, when my little wife climbed up to my ear and whispered, "She's pregnant", nodding her head violently. To prove her wrong, and thereby to

prove my male superiority, once and for all, I insisted on turning back to have another look. After a bit of wrangling, Therese gave in. We hadn't gone far before we caught up with her. While my wife engaged our young friend in conversation, I appraised the situation carefully, even to walking all the way around her. When I returned to her front, I was innocently gazing up and down when our eyes met. There was a message there stark and clear, in her cold stare. It said, "what the hell are you staring at". That was my last journey into voyeurism.

This reminiscence sent my mind whirling and tumbling back to camp, and Topsy and the sow. The animals sensed that each other was pregnant. And they were taking full advantage of their condition. It was becoming more difficult to get the mare to move forward, when the sow was blocking the trail. Moving the sow had to be done by hand. I hadn't yet started to use a switch, but it was getting close.

Have you ever tried to push a stubborn pig off a narrow trail in the deep snow? You get one end off, and before you even get to the other end, the first end is back on again. The sow wasn't averse to rooting me off the trail either. She took the least sign of attention as an indication that I wanted to play. I sometimes found myself sitting in the deep snow, with the sow standing on the trail, high and dry. Have you ever seen a pig grinning?

As smart, and as fast as the sow was, I could sometimes turn the tables on her. If a tree or a stump was positioned just right, I could put my back to it, and get my feet centered on the sow, and send her flying off into the deep snow. The mare, perhaps fearing the same treatment, look off for the skidway, like a bat out of hell. This action presented another grave danger.