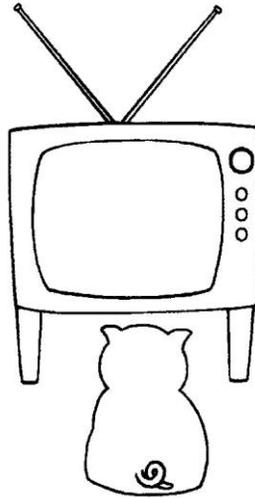


# Pig Journal

Marsha Henry Goff



In early September, 1970, husband Ray announced his intention to raise pigs at his parents' farm "as an investment." You may recall that was just prior to The Great Pig Market Crash.

I was stunned. City born and bred, I knew absolutely nothing about pigs. "That's OK," said Ray, "you just keep the books for me and I'll take care of the pigs. The boys [Ray, Jr. (aka Butch) and Greg (aka Spike)] can help; it will be good for them to have chores."

I agreed to keep the financial records and also kept this diary.

*September 11.* Today we ventured into the pig business. Perhaps ventured isn't the best word. Ventured suggests a cautious approach — sort of like testing the water with your big toe before plunging into the ocean. *Plunging!* That's the word. Today we plunged into the pig business.

Went with Ray to pick up five bred gilts (girl pigs having babies for the first time) that he's purchased from Sam. They're Chester Whites and the first pinky-looking pigs I've ever seen outside a child's storybook. Ray loaded all five into the back of his dad's pickup. Quite a load. On the way to the farm one pig laid down and the others

walked all over her. Didn't seem to bother her a bit although it bothered Ray — who kept stopping the truck to try to get her up — a lot.

Despite the fact pigs are supposed to have high IQs, I have my doubts. Especially about the pig that allows the others to trample her. Sam says these pigs are supposed to farrow (new word to me which means give birth to pigs) between the 1st and 20th of October. All we have to do is feed them and wait.

*September 12:* Ray bought automatic hog waterer which is supposed to save work. Also bought 500 pounds of corn for pigs. Ray was impressed that old man at grain elevator was off on his weight guesstimate only a few pounds when he loaded the corn into the truck.

*September 13.* Ray bought new pump for well to pump water to fill automatic hog waterer.

*September 14:* Ray bought lots of electrical stuff. Has to wire hog barn for heat lamps. Bought underground wiring so he and Butch can start digging three-foot deep trench to put it in; it's a long way from light pole to barn.

September 15: Digging

*September 16:* Still digging.

September 17: Ditto.

*September 18:* Ray's mom says wire should have insulation on top of it. She and Ray started putting insulation in trench.

*September 19:* Ray put pigs on some expensive hog supplement, a farrowing ration. They're supposed to start eating it about ten days before they farrow.

*September 20:* Wiring all done. Now we can go down to the barn at night and watch pigs eat expensive farrowing ration.

*September 21:* Ray's folks had guests while we were out checking on pigs. Guests bought big watermelon and invited us to have some. When just rinds were left, man who brought melon said he'd give rinds to hogs. Ray looked concerned, so I said, "Maybe these hogs won't eat scraps because they're accustomed to expensive pig food."

"Pooh!" said the man, "I never saw a hog yet that wasn't crazy over watermelon rinds. Took rinds down to pigs. Pigs came running, excitedly nosed rinds ... wouldn't eat them.

September 22: Ray says it is time to get farrowing crates ready. Good thing he has a friend who's letting him borrow crates because pigs are running into big money. Took his dad's truck and after two trips had seven crates (two more than we have pigs). Wonder if he's trying to tell me something?

*September 23:* Would you believe Ray has to *sterilize* the farrowing crates? Bought some kind of special chlorine stuff. Also had to buy some kind of pricey powder to keep the pigs lice-free. Goodbye lice. Goodbye \$\$\$\$\$\$\$!

*September 24:* Had to buy some lumber for bottom of farrowing crates. My Understanding Real Estate class instructor said lumber prices had risen 100% in the last couple years. He wasn't kidding! Also bought wire fencing to surround individual farrowing crates so baby pigs will have safe place to play.

*September 25-30:* Ray has missed PTA, Highway Improvement and several other meetings because he was looking after pigs. Hard to explain why husband isn't with me. When I complain, Ray says, "Do you know how much money we've got invested in these pigs?"

I say yes and tell him to the penny. *I* keep the books!

*October 1:* Pigs could have pigs today according to Sam. Two look really ready to deliver little ones. Other three don't look so ready.

*October 2:* Didn't have pigs yesterday. Maybe today.

*October 3:* Maybe tomorrow.

*October 4:* Day after tomorrow maybe.

*October 5:* No pigs.

*October 6:* Still no pigs.

*October 7:* Still waiting.

*October 8:* Ray very touchy. Better not have ham for supper.

*October 9:* Ray checked gestation period for pigs — it's elephants that drag on for years, I think.

*October 10:* Ray called Sam to tell him no pigs yet. Sam said our pigs' sisters, which he still owns, have all had their babies — eight apiece except for one that had three. Ray disgruntled.

October 11: Zero pigs. Two look *very* ready.

October 12: Nothing.

October 13: "Can't be much longer," Ray says.

October 14: "Bound to be pretty soon," Ray says.

October 15: "Any time now," Ray says (through clenched teeth).

October 16: Ray very upset. One of the bred gilts isn't. I asked him if he was sure. He said, "What a dumb question."

I said, "It's a perfectly logical question."

He said, "Because she's ready to mate."

I said, "Oh!"

Ray called Sam who said, "Bring her up and we'll see what we can do."

October 17: Ray, Butch and Spike went to farm to load pig to take to Sam's. Back three hours later. Ray incoherent. Kids *verbal!* Seems that Ray positioned truck in front of loading chute. Butch stood beside wire side of chute holding up old bed board to reinforce wire. Pig walked right up chute to truck bed with Ray following her.

Spike leans head out truck window, yells "HAVE YOU GOT HER LOADED, DAD?"

Scares pig who wheels and dashes back down chute over Ray. Ray very unhappy with Spike; tells him to keep mouth shut. Ray tries to coax pig with corn. Doesn't work. He tries to push pig up chute. Can't do it. Finally gets pig started up chute. Pig changes her mind and throws herself against and through wire where Butch is standing with bed board. Pig gets head stuck in bed board. Knocks Butch down.

Ray rounds up pig, removes bed board. Reinforces wire with sheet of plywood. Gets pig halfway up chute by backing her. Pig runs down chute through Ray's legs. Ray gets stuck backward on pig's back. Pig bucks Ray off. Spike exclaims, "Oh boy, Dad, just like a rodeo!"

Ray says, "Shut up and I won't tell you again."

Ray makes one more try, has big board which he pushes against pig's back legs. Pig turns, knocks Ray down, runs over him. Ray throws board over his face so pig doesn't step on it.

Ray quits. Goes home. Knee hurts. Stomach hurts. Head aches. Calls Sam. Sam claims it is easy to load pig; just put bucket over her head and back her up chute. She'll back to get away from bucket. Ray says he'll try it ... tomorrow.

*October 18:* Bucket works! Gets pig up chute with little difficulty. Sam has expensive York male pig he introduces to Ray's pig. Mission completed. Ray happy. Pig happy, too, and walks up chute right into truck for trip home.

One of the pigs in farrowing crate is making nest with straw. Ray is sure she'll have pigs tonight. Left instructions with his mom to call me if babies arrive and I'm to call him at work. I wait and wait for mom-in-law to call; finally call her. No pigs. She says pig built nest, but then tore it up. Hate to tell Ray no pigs.

*October 19:* Ray and I go out early in morning to see if pig had babies. Didn't.

*October 20:* It's the 20th. Can't be long now, but still no pigs. Ray took three not-so-ready pigs off expensive farrowing ration. Went to elevator to buy more corn. New guy. Sideburns. Mustache. Young. Ray said, "Where do I load corn?"

Guy says, "Hmmm, let's try here."

Corn pours down on truck. Guy said, "Is that corn?"

Ray says, "Yeah."

Corn keeps coming. Ray ordered 300 pounds and bed is getting full. Ray tells guy to stop. Weighs corn at 400 pounds. Ray hopes old guy is there next time he buys corn.

*October 21:* A.M.: Pig building nest again. P.M.: Pig tore up nest.

*October 26:* I had serious talk with pigs. Told them no babies, no food. Pigs do not take serious talk seriously. No babies; Ray still feeding them.

*October 27:* Ray's mom called. One pig escaped from farrowing crate and another pig was turned around in her crate. Pig must have stood on tiptoe to get her front where her back was, I think, because those crates are narrow. I was right. Pigs *are* dumb.

*October 28:* Talked to friend Alice today. Told her no pigs. She raises many, many pigs so she said for Ray to milk pig and if milk came, babies would come in 12 hours. Told Ray. He tried. Pig wanted stomach scratched. No milk. Told Ray pig was lying on back so maybe gravity wouldn't let milk come. He said, "No, dammit, I just can't milk a pig!"

*October 29:* Ray tense. Keeps worrying how much money he has spent on pig food.

*October 30:* Will pigs never farrow? Ray still tense.

*October 31:* No pigs. Halloween. Made Spike a calf costume for Trick-or-Treat. Made papier-mache mask that is supposed to look like a Holstein calf. Pigs on brain so mask looks like black and white spotted pig. Made up poem for him to recite: I am a Holstein calf ... A milk pail I'd make full ... If I were a heifer ... Instead I am a bull.

*November 1:* No pigs.

*November 2:* No pigs.

*November 3:* PIGS! Really! But only two live ones. Four born dead. Ray upset, but glad to have two. One boy, one girl.

*November 4:* Baby pigs doing fine. Cute! Mama pig doing fine. Ray holding up well.

*November 5:* MORE PIGS! Mama pigs are in a rut. Two live boy pigs. Five born dead. Ray put new baby pigs with older baby pigs. First mama pig has fourteen dinner plates so can easily accommodate four pigs. All baby pigs like same dinner plate. Fight a lot, but fight cute!

*November 6:* Baby pigs thriving! Ray pinning hopes on other three soon-to-be-mama pigs.

*November 7:* Bred gilt that wasn't still isn't. Called Sam. Sam said, "Bring her up and we'll trade."

Ray hates to have to load pig again, but uses bucket. Works! Bucket great invention. How else load pig? Ray left unbred gilt at Sam's. Sam says pig has one last chance before she goes to market. Ray brings home new pig that is blind as a bat. Can't see because ears fall over eyes. Supposed to farrow in a month. Can't let new pig in with other pigs. Fight a lot. New pig can't see to defend herself.

I took friend Betty, her kids, Butch and Spike out to farm to see baby pigs. Betty's littlest kid impressed. Wants to share in school that mama pigs pee on their babies. Betty tells him to share about baby pigs, but leave that part out. Bet kid doesn't.

*November 8:* Pigs OK.

*November 9:* Told Ray I think one pig is a runt. Ray says pig is OK.

*November 10:* Found out new pig with ears covering eyes is a Landrace. I thought she was a Chester White with floppy ears. Pig still segregated. Other pigs discriminate against her ... bite even. Still worried about tiny baby pig.

*November 11:* I was right! Pig *is* runt. Weak. Sick. Other three baby pigs won't let runt eat or sleep under heat lamp. Decide pigs are not only dumb, but mean, too! Ray's finally worried about runt. Brings pig, wrapped in swaddling clothes, to our home. Puts pig in straw in box in living room. Pig *stinks!* I buy giant size can of room deodorant. Helps a little. Ray feeds pig calf-starter chocolate milk. Pig can't suck; too weak. Ray feeds with eyedropper. Ray goes to work, leaves me instructions to feed pig at 5:00, 7:00, 9:00 and 11:00. I told him he could take night shift. He said pigs don't eat at night, they sleep.

Pig doesn't like calf-starter. I call Grace who raises pigs. She says feed one part milk, one part water. Pig more enthusiastic about eating — likes milk. Grace's husband, Dave, calls. Tells me pig book says to give weak pig one part corn syrup, two parts water. Pig likes syrup. Eats like pig! Eager! Sloppy! Can't wait to tell Ray that Dave says pig eats at night, too.

*November 12:* Pig skin and bones, but eating. I decide to try Similac. Pig loves it. Told Ray if it's good for babies, surely can't hurt pig. Betty came over to see pig. Brought new kind of bottle. Pig likes new bottle and is learning to suck right. Still using room deodorant because Ray won't let me wash pig.

*November 13:* Pig doing well, so I washed him. Smells OK now. Put baby powder on him. Named him Chester White. Original, huh? Call him Chet for short. Friends dropped in, saw box, thought we had new puppy. Sure surprised to see pig. Chet developing personality. Ray says Chet's brothers and sister don't have his personality, but are about three times bigger than he is.

*November 14:* Chet doesn't stink at all. Paper-trained himself. Pretty smart pig! But I still question whether pigs in general are smart. Chet beginning to make noises. Sometimes sounds like duck; sometimes like dolphin. Butch tape-recorded his dolphin sound — wants kids to think he has pet dolphin. More exotic pet than pig. Chet makes dolphin sound whenever hungry — about every hour and a half. Ray trying to teach Chet to eat oatmeal. Chet likes bottle better.

*November 15:* Chet invited to school. City kids haven't seen baby pig. City teacher hasn't either. I told Spike maybe Chet can visit on Friday for about fifteen minutes. I'll have to take him. Ray calling me Pig Mama. Pig business may break up 14-year marriage.

*November 16:* Chet allowed to walk around house a bit. Can't walk on slippery waxed oak floors — spread-eagles. Likes carpet, but must be watched. I still don't trust him — paper-trained or not.

*November 17:* Chet getting fat — butter-bally even. Cute, though. All pinky-white with shoe button eyes. Smells like baby powder. Likes to play with Ray and kids. Knows his name and comes running and sliding when called.

*November 18:* Mom brought Chet a jeweled collar to wear to school on Friday. Put it on Chet. He tries to scratch it off, shakes head, turns flip-flops. DOES NOT LIKE COLLAR! Shrieks, rolls on floor. Butch and I hold Chet while Ray removes collar. Chet will go to school sans collar. Not as glamorous, but definitely safer, quieter.

*November 19:* Chet invited to *another* school. Popular pig. Said I'd have to see how he reacts at Spike's school, then decide. Told Ray only way we're going to make money in pig business is to train Chet for the movies. Ray dubious. Chet may be smart, but not that smart. Other baby pigs not smart like Chet, but their mama is feeding them. Don't have to buy Similac for them, so might like them better than Chet if he wasn't so little and cute. When he looks at me with those little pig eyes, I just know he's special. Ray is teaching Chet to shake hands. Bribes with bottle. Chet quick learner.

*November 20:* Chet visited five classrooms in two schools today. Made big hit. Showed off. Walked around, made duck and dolphin sounds, demonstrated drinking out of bottle. I gave short biographical sketch of Chet. Told kids his name, that he was two-and-a-half weeks old, weighed three pounds, could shake hands and was paper-trained. Little girl exclaimed in astonishment that her dog was "two *years* old and still can't bring in the paper!"

I carried Chet in a big box covered with gold foil, tied with bow, personalized with his name in glitter. Curious teachers in hall peered in box. One remarked on the darling rabbit; other teacher said, "It's a pig!"

Chet had a good time, but I'm pooped. Lugging pig around all day is a tough job.

*November 21:* Chet impressed with self. Cocky. Doesn't like box. Wants attention. Wants to walk around house. Follows Ray around like dog. Ray almost steps on him three times. Chet banished to box. Mad! Shrieks! Pouts! Finally burrows head in straw. Goes to sleep.

Ray goes out to farm to see about other pigs. Landrace still not accepted. Mean pigs! I suggested to Ray that we sell 500 \$1 chances on pig. Raffle her off. Could get some of our money back. Ray said, "Who'd want to buy a pig?"

I said, "You did!"

Ray mad. No sense of humor.

*November 24:* Can you believe it? Ray brought home another baby pig. Girl. New mama had five live pigs but two died before Ray could warm them. Baby pig he brought home got too close to heat lamp and burned her back. We're putting medicine on burned back; feeding her on bottle. Ray named new pig Ginger — the name we were going to give Butch and Spike if they'd been girls.

Chet doesn't like Ginger. Thinks she stinks. Turns up his nose. Ray says Chet thinks he's a dog. Might be right. Chet makes a woof-woof sound when Ray says, "Bark!" Goes to refrigerator when he wants bottle. Also shakes hands and begs.

*November 25:* Aunt Inez and Uncle Art came for Thanksgiving. Surprised to see two pigs in house. Aunt Inez likes them; Uncle Art just looks at them and chuckles. Grams visiting also. She loves all animals — pigs included.

*November 26:* Aunt Inez keeps saying Ginger looks cold; she worries about her. She likes to talk to Chester and have him grunt back. Uncle Art still chuckling.

*November 27:* Ray ecstatic! Landrace has seven lovely babies. I really do like that Landrace pig!

*November 28:* Aunt Inez and Uncle Art go home. Uncle Art says it's the first time he's ever lived with a hog. We invite them back for Christmas. Uncle Art, noncommittal, asks, "How long you gonna keep those hogs here?"

Have a feeling we won't see them Christmas.

*November 30:* Landrace babies doing splendidly. Landrace pig is good mother. Ray takes Ginger back to farm. Her back healed nicely. Chet is glad she's gone. He's spoiled and doesn't like to share the limelight.

*December 1:* Chet has developed a weird habit. Runs to kitchen when doorbell rings. Waits until visitor is in living room, then casually saunters in. Startled visitor invariably asks, "Is that a pig?"

Ray says to tell them, "No, it's a miniature albino elephant with a bobbed trunk."

*December 2.* Chet eating solid food. Fritos Corn Chips. Spike dropped some on the floor and before I could sweep them up, Chet did the job for me. He absolutely loves them!

*December 3:* Clerk at grocery store curious about why I'm buying so many bags of Fritos. When I tell him they're for our pet pig, he says, "Wow! A pig who likes Fritos!"

I say, "Yes, he just goes hog wild over them!"

*December 4:* Had terrible crisis. Put Chet in basement so he could run around while I vacuumed upstairs. When I shut off vacuum, heard sump-pump click on followed by Chet's scream. Ran downstairs. Chet had fallen in sump-pump hole. His head and front legs were above water and he was clawing wildly at the concrete floor trying to get out.

I lift panicky pig out of sump-pump hole, dry him off and carry him upstairs. Chet looks at me with reproachful eyes. Sulks until Ray comes home, then runs to door to greet him. Ray picks up Chet and when I approach Ray to give him a welcome home kiss, Chet whines and cringes away from me. "What did you do to him?" Ray asks accusingly.

"Not much," I reply "just tried to drown him in the sump-pump."

*December 5:* Ray puts screenwire around sump-pump. Chet back in basement. Doesn't like it much. Can't watch TV. Can't hear stereo.

*December 6:* Ray vaccinates mama pigs for leptospirosis; buys vaccine from neighbor veterinarian. I show Doc pictures of Chet and tell him I want Ray to keep Chet for a boar — not sell him. Doc says, "Yeah, use him as a breeder and raise a flock of miniature pigs!"

May have to get new vet — one more sensitive to patient's feelings.

*December 7.* While reading in living room, I hear garage door being lifted by Culligan man. Forgot to warn him about pig in basement. Hear him open basement door and say, "Ohhhhhhh! Ohhhhhhh! ... IT'S A PIG!"

I go downstairs and say to Culligan man, "This is Chet."

Culligan man says, "It's a PIG!"

"Yeah," I say, "it's a pig and his name is Chet."

Culligan man says, "How 'bout that!"

*December 8:* Ray thinks Culligan man shouldn't be surprised at anything he finds in our basement. So far he's found a white mouse, female German Shepherd in disgrace,

turtle, white rabbit, duck, Butch's garter snake, pigeon and black rabbit. Pig isn't so bad according to Ray; could be a boa constrictor.

*December 9:* Chet can't get enough Fritos. Clerk at store thinks it's mighty expensive pig food. He's right. Baby pigs at farm love less expensive baby pig ration but Chet won't eat it. I told Ray we might see if Chet will eat dog biscuits.

*December 16:* Ginger back with us. Turning into runt because littermates won't let her have mama's milk; she was trying to exist on her mom's water and corn. She takes bottle but also eats baby pig ration. Ray puts Ginger in basement with Chet who watches her eat baby pig ration. He runs over, stands in food tray and eats baby pig ration like starving pig. I give them some Fritos too. Ginger likes them, but likes baby pig ration better. Both like bottle best.

*December 17:* Chet and Ginger great friends. Sleep all cuddled up together. Look like two pale sausages lying side by side. Ginger cleaned up now — looks cute.

*December 19:* Chet's popularity growing. Friend told me she mentioned Chet at a meeting and someone asked if that was the Goff's pig and did he really bark?

*December 21:* Chet invited to another school. Friend Betty picks up Chet and me to take us to school. Chet won't stay in box. I have to hold him on my shoulder so he can look out the car window. People in other cars do double-takes. I tell Betty they're probably thinking, "Man, that kid's the ugliest!" I don't tell her what's really worrying me: that they're also thinking, "Doesn't he look like his mother?"

I carry Chet, squealing loudly, into the kindergarten room. He stops squealing when I set him down on the floor. He walks around, sniffs kids who are making chains for the Christmas tree, eats some of their popcorn, tries a cranberry, spits it out and eats a glob of blue paint. Chet is completely at home. Kids are delighted. Teacher says other classes want to see him, so I take him to visit two other rooms. Chet delighted. Roots hat on floor of last classroom, stretches out on floor and chews on a little girl's boot.

Time to go home. Chet is mad. He's having a good time and doesn't want to leave. Sulks to car, then happy. Likes to ride when he can look out window. Again, double-takes from drivers Chet glad to get home to Ginger. She's thrilled to see him and follows him around like he's a conquering hero.

*December 22:* Ray says he is taking Chet and Ginger back to the farm tomorrow. The boys and I beg to keep them until after Christmas because we already have presents under the tree for them. Ray says to give pigs their presents early; they won't know the difference. He says it is better for the boys if pigs go to the farm before

Christmas because the boys will be excited about their own presents and won't have time to miss pigs. I reluctantly agree.

*December 23: Goodbye Chet. Goodbye Ginger.*

Over two years have passed and people continue to ask about Chet (sometimes they substitute the name Arnold for Chet, indicating the influence of television's popular "Green Acres" sitcom. And recently, Ray ran into our Culligan man in the super market. He told Ray how much he missed the pig we used to have in our basement and wondered whatever happened to him.

Ray told him this true story:

Chet and Ginger went back to the farm where they played together and grew into large pigs. By early summer only Ray could tell Chet from the many other almost identical pigs. Ginger, however, was easily recognized because of the small scar that remained on her back. The mama pigs had new litters and space was at a premium, so, in spite of a few tears (mine), Chet, Ginger and their siblings were sold. (I refused to buy pork for six months.)

We're out of the pig business now, but if we ever buy the cattle ranch we dream about, I'm going to insist that we have a baby pig for a pet. Male or female, I'm going to call it Chet.

[Author's note: Decades have passed since I recorded our family's experience with pig farming. We never bought a cattle ranch and I have a hard time believing that we ever wanted one. But we have never forgotten Chet, the little pig who — in the space of six short weeks — forevermore imprinted himself on our hearts and in our memories.]

