

Little pigs that faced the bad wolf of starvation

Do you remember the story of the big bad wolf stalking three little pigs?

This is a true story of a litter of little pigs that faced something, through a series of innocent happenstances, perhaps as serious as the big, bad wolf — starvation.

One warm summer day when I was about 12 years old, my father discovered a paper sack about half-full of oats in the back of our old pickup. He thought someone had put it there to help catch a horse and had forgotten to take it out of the truck.

He told my older brother to feed the oats to the sow in the hog house. She had a litter of 13 cute white piglets. They were thrifty and frisky, only a few days old, and off to a good start. Then disaster struck.

That evening when I had finished milking the Guernseys and was walking to the house with the milk, I heard a commotion coming from the hog house. It sounded like a hog struggling to breathe as if being strangled.

I set the two pails of rich cream-colored milk on the ground and ran to investigate.

The sow lay there on the floor coughing, wheezing and kicking trying desperately to breathe. The little pigs ran around their house in confusion.

Fearfully they approached their mother only to scurry away from her among a flurry of kicks with her sharp hooves that sent the straw bedding flying in all directions.

I didn't know what to do to help the piglets or their mother. While I watched

her from the doorway, I had a sinking feeling that any assistance I could give would be too late.

In a few moments she quit struggling and lay motionless. She died right there as I watched. The piglets cautiously gathered around her after she became quiet.

Bewildered and frightened, I retrieved

the two buckets of milk and hurried to the house to tell my parents. They went out and pulled the dead mother out of the hog house so the piglets wouldn't continue to nurse.

My family and I, greatly saddened by the death as always when one of our animals died, couldn't understand why a mature, healthy sow would suddenly, virulently die. We all tried to think of anything unusual we might have seen or done.

Finally someone remembered the oats in the paper sack.

Further, someone mentioned that our former landlord and neighbor had borrowed the pickup to go to town. Upon questioning him we learned that while in town he had gone to the county agent and got a sack of poison oats.

He planned to eliminate some gophers that had invaded his hay meadow. He forgot to take the sack out of the pickup when he returned it, thus initiating a chain of events leading to a fatal conclusion.

Silver Threads

Duane A. Portwood



The tiny pigs were so young that they had never learned to eat or drink; their mother would have taught them in due time. She had been, of course, their only source of nutrition. They needed milk to survive.

I found a big cast-iron skillet that

my mother no longer used, poured it full of whole milk and placed it in the straw on the floor. The little pigs curiously regarded me but made no attempt to drink.

Finally, thinking they might learn by example, I got down on my hands and knees in the straw near the skillet and made suckling and slurping noises. Their stimulated curiosity brought them sniffing and grunting around me and the skillet.

They apparently recognized the smell of milk and started licking and sucking at it, and in a surprisingly short time they all learned to drink.

I carried milk to them several times a day. They adopted me as their mother, and when I stepped into their house, they gathered around me squealing and grunting until I had spilled milk into the pan for them.

Feeding those pigs turned out to be my favorite barnyard chore; my 13 adorable, intelligent little pets. They

They made a bed for themselves in

one corner of the hog house by hauling straw, from a pile I placed just inside the door, one mouthful at a time, dropping it on the floor and bouncing back for another mouthful.

I stood and laughed as I watched their antics. They established their toilet in the opposite corner and house-broke themselves.

Pigs, though they are reputedly filthy, are one of the cleanest animals on earth when allowed to live in clean surroundings. I never let their house get dirty.

At first they were so small they could all gather around the 14-inch frying pan. They grew fast, outgrew the skillet, and I had to find, or make, bigger and bigger troughs for them.

As the troughs got bigger, I had to feed them less often and added ground wheat and ground barley to their meals. By the time school started, they required only morning and evening feedings, and I fed them before and after school.

My litter of pigs consumed table scraps in addition to milk, water and ground grain. They grew rapidly.

The disaster that left the baby piglets motherless turned into one of the finest successes I have ever had with farm animals. All of the pigs lived; none of them ever got sick, and they all grew up to be fine hogs.

I've always felt good about that experience. I treasure the memory of those 13 pigs even though I still regret losing the little pigs' mama.