

# IN DEFENSE OF PIGS AS PETS

*By Nancy Shepherd (and Illustrations by Nancy)*



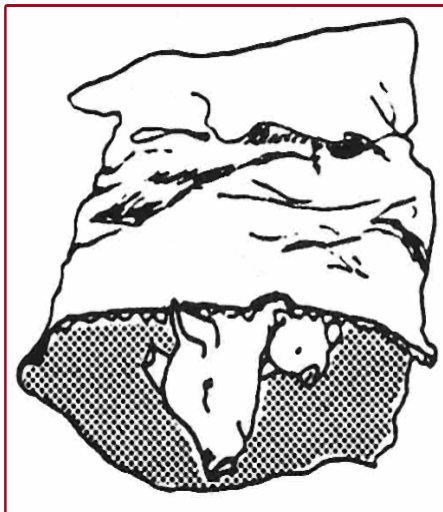
***Banjo, Nancy, Jitterbug -- Jitterbug was my very first Potbellied Pig -1989***

THE introduction of the miniature potbellied pig in the 1980's is a dream come true for people like me, who have always had a fascination for pigs and a certain unexplainable kinship to them. Pigs are indeed cosmic . . . or something. It's hard to explain, but people who feel a special link to them know what I mean.

I raised commercial pigs from 1981 to 2001 (20 years). Often a pig became a pet around the farm because it sustained an injury, had health problems, or there were more babies than teats. These pigs were nurtured and cared for, then either placed in an adoptive home or sold with a group of feeder pigs.

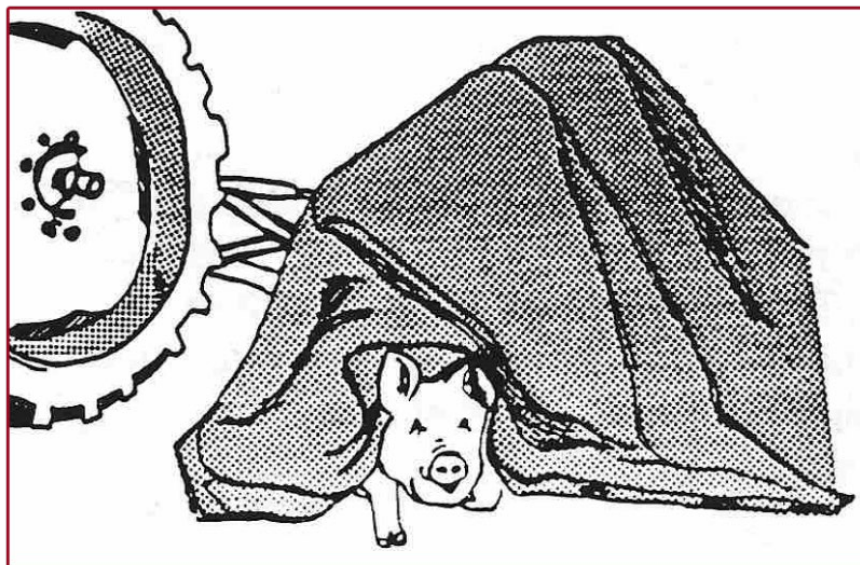
The problem is that these generic pet pigs kept growing and soon were no longer able to travel in the car, stay in the house or cuddle on the living room floor. All pigs have the capability of being wonderful pets due to their high intelligence and sociability. Size has been the only limiting factor.

Banjo, a Hampshire/Yorkshire cross and my most famous pet pig, was born to Tulip as a litter of one. I allowed him to nurse for a week so he would receive all the good immunities from mother's milk. Then he became a house pig. Quickly trained to use a litter box, he slept in the kitchen on a hot water bottle, and every morning would join Brian and I in bed for "bonding with Banjo."

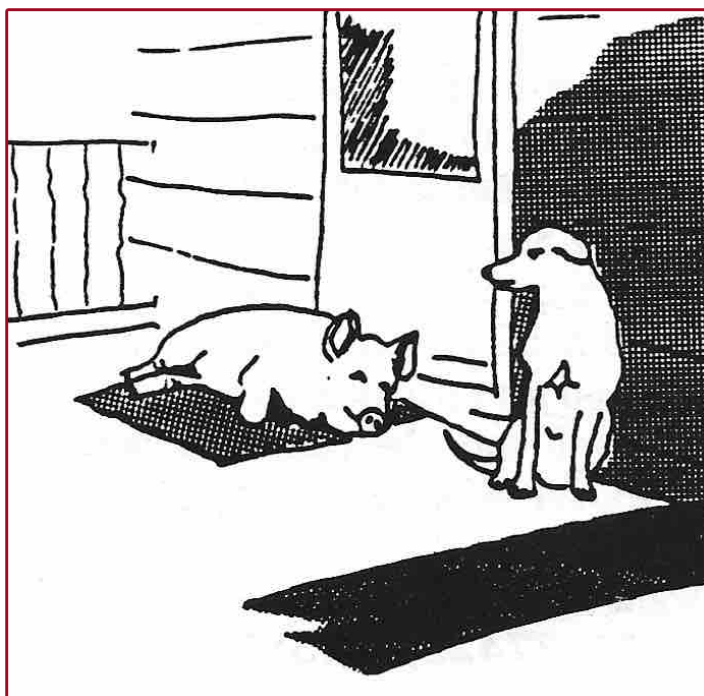


***Banjo cuddling with Jitterbug***

Soon, however, he grew too large to stay inside - so he became a yard pig, choosing a tarp-covered piece of farm equipment as his abode. He very happily remained a yard pig, oinking about in hopes of convincing me to come out and play ... either a walk in the woods or a swim in the pond or basking in the sun together. His favorite treats were MilkBone dog biscuits, Orange Crush soda pop, with his most cherished and long-lasting Boss Hog Bubble Gum Cigars.



*Banjo's self-made sleeping area for naps and such*



*Banjo and Biscuit sunning on front porch*

Eventually, he learned to open feed sacks and any gate, be it latched, wired or booby-trapped. Very clever fellow, that Banjo. Because of his keen intelligence, which often got him into trouble, not to mention his ever-increasing size, Banjo graduated to a pen-pig with his own condo, swimming hole and other amenities.



***Banjo in top-hat for his birthday party***

Banjo was known globally and written up several times by newspapers. He had his own international fan club, complete with membership cards and T-shirts that featured his picture. Every year an annual birthday bash was held in his honor Banjo lived to be ten years old. It was a sad day when he died.

THEN along came a smaller version with equal charm and far fewer hassles - the potbellied pig. I raised these little porcine pals from the spring of 1989 until 2013. They are intelligent, obedient, talented, affectionate, comical, inquisitive, communicative and one-tenth the size of a normal pig. They are easily litter-box trained, have no fleas, do not bark, are not destructive, and don't seem to cause allergies. They require no more veterinarian attention or feed (maybe even less) than a cat or dog. Indeed, "the pig person's perfect pet."

As a pig lover, owner and breeder, my goals were to find good homes for pet pigs, produce quality breeding stock, promote and adhere to reputable breeding practices, educate people about the many wonders of pig parenthood and dispel negative pig notions.

*Note from Nancy: a special thanks to NWMPA for allowing me to reminisce and hopefully engage the readers.*

*This article was first published in Potbellied Pigs Magazine 1991*