

A Special Pig

by Nancy Shepherd

Anemone was born on April 24, 2004. She is from a litter of 7 (2 males and 5 females). Anemone and her sister, Bubbles, went to a lovely home in Kansas City, MO (my hometown). The owners continued to train them, and I would visit occasionally and watch them perform all their tricks. A perfect placement for my perfect little piglets.

I've had potbellied pigs since 1989 and once in a while there is just a very special piglet. Granted each pig is unique in his or her own way, but the exceptional pig is just so much fun. Let me tell you about one such pig, who will remain nameless for the time being.

Kayla Claire (KC), who was kept back to be a breeding sow because of her extraordinary lovey-doveness, and her husband, Albert, had a litter of piglets in April 2004. Seven little ones were born fast and furiously, up and nursing like champs. All was well until about day four, when I noticed one of the females (Little One) wasn't gaining weight like the others. I watched her nurse and she was going through the motions. She did not have a cleft pallet. KC's udder was fine and the teat that Little One was nursing appeared to have plenty of milk.

I decided to supplement her and used a 3 cc syringe filled with milk replacer to feed her. She didn't seem particularly fond of this, but I maintained that she needed it and fed her religiously three times a day. She still was not gaining like the rest, but showed no signs of any medical problem. I guess in the people's world, her condition would have been diagnosed as "failure to thrive".

One day while with mom and litter, I noticed the enema bottle I had used on KC and thought this might make a good nursing bottle for Little One. So, I sterilized it and added the formula. Little One latched on like this was the best and she began to put on a little weight, but she would never catch up with her littermates. It was quite the ritual. I had a little pink towel and the enema bottle. When Little One saw me coming with these items, she knew it was feeding time. I would lay the towel on a big rock in the pen, and she would run up on it and madly suck her enema bottle. It was quite cute and rather endearing. She had been getting special attention three times a day since day four. Needless to say, she was very user-friendly.

A pig client, Jan, came one weekend to drop off her little darling for boarding. On the usual farm tour, we came to the pen with KC and her litter, featuring Little One nursing from her bottle. Jan said, "She is so little. You should name her Mini." I replied that Mini was a very cute name, but in my mind, I felt this was just too common a name for my very special Little One. Bottle in hand, I turned to Jan and said, "Mini means little, but look at the enema bottle she uses to nurse. What about calling her Anemone, a combination of the two and a lovely flower to boot?" It was final. Anemone she would be.

I had to leave town and I felt that my husband, Brian, would not fancy feeding this little piglet from an enema bottle. My new task was to teach Anemone to drink from a pan. Experience told me that this could be a difficult task, with resistance from the piglet. But Anemone was happy to accommodate me and happily sipped milk from her special little pottery bowl. Mission accomplished.

Anemone will let anyone pick her up and love on her. This is very unusual for a young piglet. My favorite maneuver with her is to rub her belly until she flops and then roll over. I continue to roll her over as many times as I wish. She seems to enjoy it. She also likes her pink pig pillow and manages to make it her throne more often than the other pigs.

I just love this little girl. She is not short on bravery or brains -- she picks fights with her littermates and gets right into the food bowl when pellets are provided. She is always right in front when special treats are offered and is a quick learner. She can sit and comes when she is called. I've tried to make Brian come to terms with the fact that this pig is truly special, and we need to keep her. His response is that "She can be very special to someone else. We have enough pigs!"

Anemone will live with her sister-pig, Bubbles, only two hours from the farm. The girls will come to board a few times a year when their family goes away and I can always go and visit when I'm in the area. But I will always remember this Little One fondly and miss her bunches when she leaves me for her new home.

Temperament is certainly something that I breed for and Anemone comes from a long line of wonderfully tempered pigs. As mentioned earlier, her mom, Kayla Claire, was always right in my lap as a piglet and her dam, Kiayla, was the very same way. Kiayla's mother, Munchkin, to this day is sweet as can be at thirteen years old. And we still have Munchkin's dam, Agnes of Hog, who is fourteen years old and Anemone's great-great grandmother. The only one missing is Jitterbug, my first sow and Aggie's dam, who died in January 2003. I just am so pleased that my pigs are staying happy and healthy into their golden years.

I love my life and all the joys the pigs bring!

