



PIG PERSUADER

OCTOBER 2001

I thought I had everything under control on October third. I got up especially early to make my appointment with Eurice (pronounced *Your-iss*) to buy a boar. I had been trying to get this off my list for months. I climbed into the truck ready to roll.

Remember that our first boar, Houdini, was also a graduate of Eurice's establishment. By default, Houdini wound up as whole hog sausage, but without a boar you are shortly *out* of the pig business. A couple of months ago I went and bought a young piglet to replace him. However, what looked like the right equipment on Bernard-Alfonse was in fact a hydrocele hernia, and he was never going to prosper or sire progeny. So I borrowed a friend's horse trailer and that morning set out for Eurice's to return the piglet and buy a full-grown boar.

Climbing into the truck was the last time that day that anything went just exactly right.

Now Eurice is a jovial man with about four hundred pigs (all sizes, shapes, and colors), a hundred goats, sheep, hundreds of chickens, geese, guineas, and turkeys, not to mention pigeons without number, all crowded onto a small place that resembles a nuclear test site. However, he is one of those folks that have an intimidating presence. Not gruff, just the sort of person whose time you know not to waste—not a person to trifle with, as we say in the South. Add to that his recent back trouble, which will soon



require surgery. In getting this boar I didn't want to waste his time or take him farther out of his way than I had to.

First, I forgot where to turn off after I got east of Lawrenceburg. I drove all the way to the Giles County line before I could find a place to turn around. I got to Eurice's by guess, and just on my 8:30 a.m. appointment. He was gracious, but obviously in pain from his back. Then he saw my trailer, with its flop-down ramp as a back gate.

"That won't work. You can't back it up to the hog ramp."

Impasse. He soon broke that by offering to take his pickup back to the hog lot, load the boar, and then transfer him to my trailer. He took off in the truck, then stopped and leaned out the window. "Why don't you just bring that pig on back?"

I nodded, and picked up Bernard-Alfonse in his cage. I had brought him back for a refund. I then *walked* the quarter mile back to the hog lot. Eurice looked at me astonished. "Why'n't you bring him in the truck?" Huffing, I set him down. Yes, why *didn't* I bring him in the truck? After a brief inward examination of the circumstances and my action, cosmic stupidity was the only plausible reason I could name.

Now it was time to catch and load the boar, and I had not a *clue* how we would do this. Pause to ponder, dear Readers, that no pig can be captured without increasing your proximity to a *number* of pigs. Eurice's feed pig lot was *full* of pigs in all sizes, some easily tipping the scales above 400 pounds. And pigs are *not* cuddly. In large crowds they can be downright intimidating. There was, however, nothing for it but to jump over the fence (if the verb "jump" can ever be performed by the noun "Franklin Sanders").

Eurice's plan was simplicity itself. He had a maze of pens leading from one to the other, cobbled together out of every material that an active ingenuity and inscrutable Providence could bring together: barbed wire, hog wire, old pallets, wire panels of every size and manufacture, you name it. He would spread out food on the ground, enticing the boar (and about a hundred other pigs) into that pen, then separate him out into another pen, and finally into the chute leading inexorably into the ramp. At the



mouth of the ramp was parked his pickup truck, with a tubular steel cage on the back, ready to receive the two hundred and fifty pound boar.

In Eurice's hand was a Pig Persuader, a.k.a. an electric cattle prod. The pig has not yet been born who will not yield to a Pig Persuader. Mercy, I would yield to a Pig Persuader.

My job was to manipulate the gates from pen to pen as we separated the pigs. Nervously keeping an eye on a hideous—truly hideous—four hundred pound sow in the next pen, I waded through pigs to shut the first gate. “Good!” complimented Eurice.

I beamed with pride in a job well-done, but had no time to rest on my laurels. Wielding his Persuader, Eurice somehow herded the boar and three other pigs into the pen leading into the chute. In that pen was an oak about two feet through at hip height, with roots all tangled on top of the ground. Eurice started playing merry-go-round with the pigs. I winced every time he moved, thinking about his back, but he never even groaned. He shouted at me to man the gate, and “Don't let that boar out!”

Right. No need to worry about me choking up at this point, *no, sir!* I might be trampled to death by frantic pigs, but when the dust cleared they will find my gnarled knuckles still clinging to that wire panel.

Whoops! Out ran the first pig, then the second, then the third. *Slam!* The boar was successfully isolated into the chute, then charged out and tried to leap the three-foot fence beside me. *Whang!* He mashed his face up against the hog panel strategically leaning inward from the fence, only to turn and face Eurice closing in with his Persuader. Evidently the boar had already met the Persuader. Eurice urged him into the mouth of the chute, where he immediately lost his enthusiasm, turned three or four circles, and tried to make it out past Eurice—far too slow for the Persuader. *Flip, OINK! whirr,* then up the ramp into the pickup, and quicker than you can look Eurice has hopped the fence and *Clang!* slammed shut the sliding door on the cage.

Step one successfully accomplished. Step two, transferring boar from pickup to horse trailer, lay ahead.



Eurice backed his pickup slam up to the horse trailer, straddling the ramp. Now we had to convince the boar to jump down about three feet into the trailer and not wriggle out through any gap between the truck and the trailer. *Hmmmm* . . . How to keep him from wriggling out? Eurice cast his eye around 180 degrees, and lighted on a pile of old pallets. “We’re gonna see how strong you are. Go get one of them pallets.” I hefted the pallet, about as handy as a mainsail in a whirlwind, but not nearly as nimble. I managed to lift it up to bulging-eye level and drop it into the trailer through a slot window, taking care not to shear off my hands at the wrists. Then I had to worm my way into the trailer around the pickup, and stand in the trailer behind the pallet, covering the corner next to the pickup. Eurice, using the Persuader, would encourage the boar to jump down. Once he was in the trailer past me, I would block his way out of the trailer with the pallet. Then Eurice would lift up the ramp and I would back out of the trailer.

The boar was not hard to convince, and the rest of the plan went off without a hitch. However, once the ramp was up, Eurice wanted his unique pallet returned to his world-famous pallet collection, so I had to reach down and deadlift it out by the tips of my fingers. I had—just *barely*—quit myself like a man.

Alas, the day was not yet over. Back at the Top I drove through the pasture and into Pig Holler. Susan and Zach were there to strategize. You have to picture that where we were intending to put the pen for the boar stands to the far right side of a sort of shoulder of land. The farther out you drive straight from the gate in the fence, the more the ground drops off. Twenty yards back from the fence the pigs have rooted out everything to the dirt. Beyond that stand briars and brush and little persimmon trees half the size of your wrist.

Zach and Susan recommended that we pull the truck and trailer into Pig Holler past the gate, then back it up past the existing pen to where we intended to build the new one. Justin and I, on the other hand, insisted that this was too conservative and we could just pull the truck and trailer



around through the brush, back up the hill, and thus miss the painful exercise of backing a trailer in a tight spot and do everything faster to boot.

Justin and I prevailed. Justin drove the truck. Justin almost got there. Then the trailer wheels both—no, all *four*—hung up on little persimmon trees. The truck's rear wheels whirred and smoked. The birds chirped, the crickets sang, the boar slept in the trailer, and Franklin's blood pressure shot to the tree tops. Alas, I could only blame myself. Susan and Zach, wise as always, never said I told you so—probably in foresightful self-defense.

Justin, Zach, and I laid to with machetes, saws, and hatchets and soon had the trailer tires freed. We loosed the trailer from the truck. With Susan behind the steering wheel, spraying us with sod and dirt, we slipped and slid and pushed the truck on up the hill and out. Then we borrowed Liberty's four-wheel drive Explorer, backed it down to the trailer, and pulled the trailer back up the hill. Now we were ready to kneel in the mud and manure for a couple of hours building a pen out of welded wire panels. Around the inside perimeter we strung two strands of electric fencing. We completed everything except the last panel, where the trailer was parked with the sleeping boar.

Meanwhile Susan was busy elsewhere. She had gone to fetch us another hog panel from the pen under the trees. In the process she put down the electric fence and opened the wire panel gate to Pig Holler. Quicker than you can say, "Sod-annihilating renegade swine task force" out walked our younger sow with *eight* half-grown pigs—bee-lining, no doubt, for my long-suffering neighbor's pristine pastures to root them up as energetically as possible in the little time left before sundown.

Finally we got the boar out into the pen. Susan energized the fence, and the uproar began. He closed in on the fence to sniff at one of our sows on the other side. Little by little his ear edged closer to the wire—closer, closer, *ZAP! OINK!* He bounced from one side of the pen to another. His first solution was to back into a corner so he could see whatever it was coming from either direction. This worked until his backside connected with the wire. *ZAP!* To the other side of the pen. Then he lined up alongside the



fence. This worked until his ears touched the wire. *ZAP!* Back and forth and crosswise he bounced around the pen. Finally he just lay down dead center of the pen with a look of defeated disgust on his face.

The weekend before, Justin had built a prototype Swine Chalet, a winter shelter for pigs. Since we already had the truck there, we chained the Swine Chalet up to the truck and dragged it through the gate into Pig Holler. Then we moved Penelope and Bertha, Susan's two bottle-fed pigs, into Pig Holler, *sans* their co-operation.





The pigs all attended to (such as hadn't made good their escape), we turned our attention to the long-neglected chickens. We had to move their electric net-fence ("varmint fence") to give them new turf to tear up. *But first*—all life is tortured by those two words—we had to weed-eat the three-foot-high *wire-weed*. I don't know its real name. I just know that you can't pull it or cut it with anything less than an acetylene cutting torch or wire pliers. I put the saw-toothed blade on the weed-eater. This worked well on everything except the electric varmint fence.

By the time we got the varmint fence back up and the hole mended, the sun was pretty plainly making known his intention to shut down. Those children responsible for feeding animals at evening had disappeared into their accustomed hiding places. They shall remain unnamed. When they were finally roused to their duty, I began trying to call up the missing pigs.

Never before had they failed to come home for supper. I called and I called until I was nearly hoarse. No pigs. I went to the top of the pasture and called. I called down the hollers where the echo might reach them. I called across the high pasture to the pine woods. I called to the east, and to the north, to the south and west. No pigs.

By now the sun was just glowering above the horizon. I couldn't leave those pigs out all night to wreck my neighbor's pastures. I was tired and thirsty and hungry and—let us admit it—*far* from nicey-nice. I spied the four-wheeler parked in the barn, another source of infuriation. It was useless as fangs on a canary. The battery cables had been broken for weeks.

I asked Susan to pull the Toyota pickup into the barn. Looking for the jumper cables—*de rigueur* equipment in any Sanders' family vehicle—I could find ne'er a one in the Toyota. To my delight, I realized that once again my children had failed to put them away. I told Justin where he might find some over at the house, and before too long he returned with them. By now I could barely make out his form in the dark. He squatted down on the left side of the four-wheeler to attach the cables, while I stood on the right where I could attach them to the truck's batteries. Justin handed me the cables in the dark.



While I struggled to distinguish red from black clamp so we wouldn't blow up the truck battery, I felt something squishy on the black clamp.

“What is this, Justin. Did you find those things lying in oil or something?”

In the dark I could see his head turn from side to side, then down to the ground. “Oh, no,” he whispered in hushed tones. “There was turkey poop on the ground.”

Cause and effect quickly met in my mind—one turkey, sixty-five acres, one hand—defying the whole science of probability. Now lest you count me less than a good sport, I want you to understand that nothing on earth has quite the same viscosity as turkey poop. It combines all the unique properties of motor oil, molasses, and Super Glue. It cannot be washed off. The smell must be surgically removed.

I had a whole handful of it.

At this point I was not quite able to laugh, and too weak to cry. Miles from the nearest rag, I stooped down, scooped up a handful of hay, and futilely began trying to scrape it off. Much to the credit of the onlookers' self-control and instinct of self-preservation, *no one* said a word. A hushed silence, as they say, fell over the crowd. Cloaking myself with the shreds of my dignity, I climbed onto the choking four-wheeler. As I attempted to put it in reverse, it died. I dismounted. Quiet, anxious hands pushed it out of the barn, filled the flat tires with air, and reapplied the jumper cables to re-start it. It coughed to life.

I mounted the four-wheeler and roared off into the night, searching for my lost sense of humor, too angry to laugh now, hoping I would be able to laugh later, if I could only get away from the scene without losing my temper. The turkey poop was just the last flashing neon message of a day that said, “You live in a fallen world, where your job is to make things work that never want to work. Get used to it, and smile.”