

Many times we pestered our grandparents for stories of their trip. We were wide-eyed over the pictures of Estes Park and The Garden of the Gods. The mountainous scenery was so very different from Iowa farmland. It didn't look as if one could grow corn there. We couldn't imagine how farmers could plow a field with all those rocks.

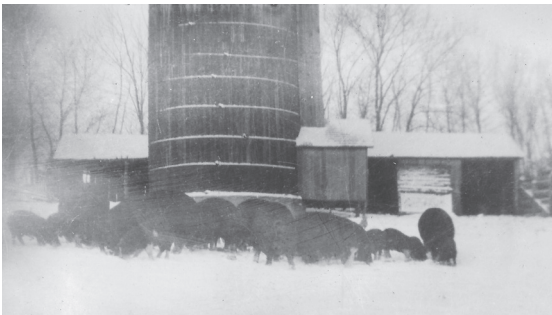
Hopes of traveling to Colorado and visiting Uncle Sam and Aunt Jessie filled our thoughts. Camping sounded like fun to us until we heard about the bugs that bothered them, and the pebbles underfoot. That dampened the charm of camping anywhere but our own back yard.

For the next several years, we were content to throw blankets over the clothes-line for a tent and curl up with a favorite pillow, dreaming of faraway places.

PIGS ON OUR FARM

Before I was born, the major livestock on our farm was swine and short-horn cattle. As kids, we were fascinated by pictures of prize-winning Poland China swine. These images filled a series of leather-like volumes that were stored away in the upstairs bedroom. We'd stretch out on the bed while searching through the yearly volumes to find the biggest, the most handsome, the ugliest, and the meanest looking pigs. We had great times laughing at them.

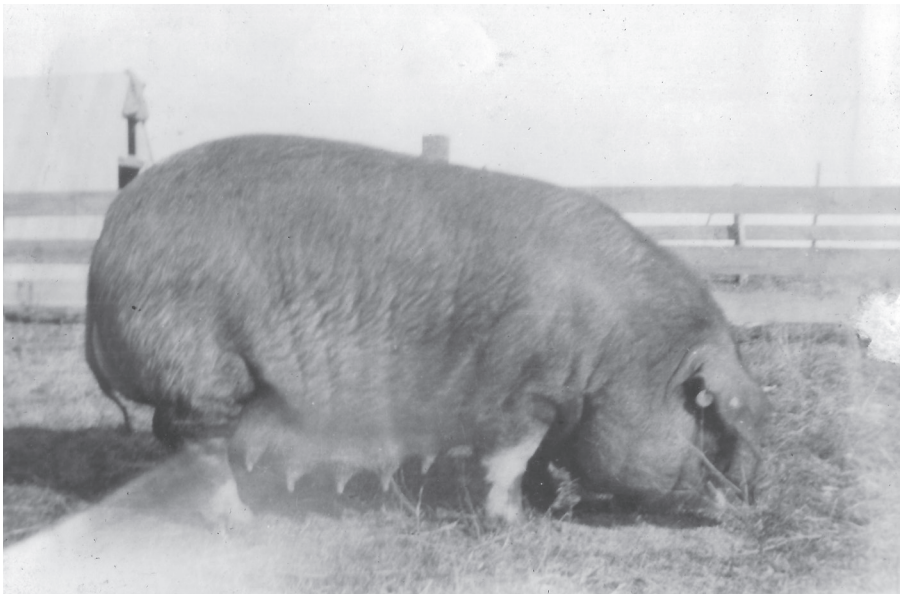
Slopping the pigs was not a popular chore, but Margaret and I were often chosen for the honor. We would walk toward the pigpen, carefully clutching the handles of a tub, hoping the pig slop wouldn't spill. We needed to pour the mixture of vegetable scraps, broken ears of corn, and skimmed milk into the hogs' trough before they got underfoot. When they saw us coming, they hurried to the trough squealing, their noses snuffling for scraps of food as they shoved each other aside to be first. Their grunts and snorts as they slurped up their slop never failed to elicit giggles from us.



Mealtime

The pigs liked to wallow in mud to cool off. They sprawled north of their shack, which also sheltered them from the hot summer sun. The pigpen was smelly and scattered with weeds. The jimson weed was poisonous and had a foul smell, but had lovely white blossoms resembling lilies. We were firmly cautioned to leave it alone. For these reasons, the pigpen was not a place where we chose to play.

Each spring there were several litters of baby piglets to ooh and aah over. It was a treat to watch a mother sow stretch out, her many piglets shoving each other to reach the meal site. Occasionally one little piglet was left without a nipple to feed from. Dad gave us kids the fun job of feeding that little pink baby with a bottle. We liked to do that and usually named the piglet Oinky or Winky, because that's what their greetings sounded like. We giggled when Oinky, who quickly became a pet, rooted his little round, cushy snout into our hands searching for food. He grew fat and followed us around, always ready for a snack. We were amazed at how fast baby piglets became huge hogs, after rooting in the mud and crowding to the trough for food. But since there were usually a dozen or more piglets in a litter, there would probably be another 'Oinky' soon.



Grown Up "Oinky"

I recall many cows lined up in the cattle barn where Dad, Grandpa, and us kids milked them morning and evening. The cream was sold to the creamery, and excess milk was fed to our pigs. The way those pigs slurped that milk up made us laugh. When cousins visited us, milking the cows and feeding those pigs were among the favorite things to do.

THE THRESHERS ARE COMING

Early in the morning we start the day-
The threshers are coming and need to be fed.
Mom, Gram and we girls gather hens from the pen.
“Sorry chicks, there are men to be fed.”

Task of beheading falls to Grandma’s skilled hands.
Hens scalded in water, their feathers to loosen.
Grasping handfuls of feathers, so soggy and limp,
Hens are soon plucked, dressed, and ready for frying.

The wrought-iron skillet on the wood burning range
Soon has chickens sizzling, tempting smells fill the air.
Mom’s fried chicken; a mouth-watering treat!
Then make the gravy for potatoes we’ll mash.

We’ll peel the potatoes, and snap the beans,
Then shuck the corn, fresh from the field.
Slice ripe tomatoes, chop cabbage for slaw,
And cut slices of Mom’s freshly baked bread.

The tea is steeping in the big stone crock.
Add a big ice chunk for a thirst-quenching treat.
The pies were baked yesterday, apple and peach;
Thanks to our orchard, deliciously sweet.

There are basins of water for the men to wash up,
Ready and warmed on the hot concrete walk.
There are soap and towels on the long wash bench,
With combs and a mirror for tidying up.

Stretch out the table as far as it goes,
Set it neatly, in two straight rows.
All’s now ready, and here they come.
Hunger soon quelled. Man what a feed!