

**WHAT DOES**  
**"MAD AS A PEACH ORCHARD BOAR"**  
**MEAN?**  
**(A DIDACTIC DESCENT INTO THE**  
**PERILS OF PORCINE PERVERSIONS)**

**by Francis Baumli, Ph.D.**

Many people have asked me a certain salient question and until this writing I have never been generous enough to answer it. I have very good reasons for my reticence. My first reason is that people obviously want a short answer, something that can be conveyed in half a minute or less. But the question at issue does not lend itself to a continent description. Rather it requires a thorough, even

complicated, explanation. The second reason is that I am bothered by the way this question is always presented to me. Even though my background, up until age 18, was entirely rural, and has been partly-or intermittently-rural ever since, people-especially citified people-pose their question with the smirking presumption that I probably do not know the answer. They even invite me to "guess." Or, what feels most distasteful, they ask me to try and come up with the "best guess." This way of thinking, and this terminology, comes from people who use the Internet. Scattered all over that miasma of electrons called the Internet are various questions which evoke entire blogs or even websites. People are confronted with a question, the format of these queries involves people providing what is called a "guess," and then readers of the blog or website vote on what they consider the "best guess." I find this method of inquiry repugnant on intellectual grounds, but also on other grounds that are so laden with indignation they seem almost like moral grounds. I am not a slovenly thinker who will consent to dealing with someone's greedy clamoring nor will I participate in their guessing game. I either know, or I do not know, and I say so. What also is

repugnant about such answers on the Internet is that, at least with every one of them I have seen, the response to the question is just plain wrong. For example, a fellow pretending to be an old codger who knows all things rural, wrote that "mad as a peach orchard boar" refers to a boar who eats the fallen peaches in a peach orchard. And these peaches, rotting on the ground, have fermented so the boar gets drunk, goes crazy, attacks other hogs, and finally falls over and sleeps his drunkenness off. Well, this is a bunch of hooey. Rotting peaches make little if any alcohol. Certainly not enough to make a 400-pound (or larger) boar get drunk. And those boar hogs don't fall over and sleep off their inebriation. Besides, if the boar hog gets drunk, then why don't the sows get drunk too? It's one of those cases where someone heard a tall-tale and, in order to puff himself up with self-importance, is trying to peddle that tale as part of his repository of folk-lore. Such people want to appear wise. To me they don't even appear ignorant. They are ignorant.

So take my word for it: Rotten peaches don't have enough alcohol in them to get a hog drunk. I've even spent time carefully smelling rotten peaches, and yes, I say to

those of truncated olfactory faculties: alcohol does have a smell. Rotten peaches, at best, occasionally have a trace of alcohol. I even consulted a very accomplished chemist whose hobby (and vice?) is making home-made wine. Mainly he makes dandelion wine, but occasionally he makes other wines, including peach wine (which I find delicious!). When I asked him if rotting peaches have alcohol in them he laughed and said no, they don't, " ... otherwise, why would I have to ferment them into wine?" So on this matter the case is closed. (It should be obvious by now that as regards the question which comprises the title of this little essay, I am not merely guessing at an answer, I know the answer. Presently I will give it.)

The third reason I have been reluctant to answer this question is because my answer entails setting forth a context. I am dealing with a question not just about boar hogs, it also is a question about what happens on a farm and in a peach orchard. The problem is that when people pose this question they are not wanting to learn a lesson. They don't even (in this so-called "Information Age") want information. They want entertainment. And the only kind of entertainment most people want these days is what they call

"light entertainment." But the answer to this question does not provide light entertainment. It is a lesson in orchardry, animal husbandry, and that most difficult branch of axiology: morals. So the third and main reason I have shied away from this question is because I absolutely will not indulge in the undignified practice of providing to others what they are so greedy for: their daily quotient of light entertainment.

I shall set forth an answer to the question attempting to be precise, thorough, even didactic. In short, I will give the answer on my terms, not on the lazy terms of my smirking interlocutors.

I above stated that I know the answer. I therefore have something of an obligation to present my credentials:

I learned the answer from three sources. The first was from neighboring farmers in the rural area where I grew up in the very northwest corner of Missouri. Many farmers had orchards back in those days. My family's farm had a large plum orchard, some cherry trees, but no peach orchard. Several neighboring farmers had peach orchards. I would hear a farmer say something like, "My wife's gonna be mad as a peach orchard boar when she finds out her car got a

big dent in it when I tied my horse to the bumper just because I had to go in the house and make a quick phone call." Or, "I wish I had that peach orchard fenced so I could turn hogs in at the end of the peaches." Or the statement might be, "It's time to turn the hogs in to that orchard, but I ain't got no hogs this year. They got the colic in April and it kilt every one of 'em."

I don't think I ever asked specific questions about these comments. Questions were usually frowned upon by those hard-working farmers. They practiced three mottos: "Watch and learn," "Listen and learn," and, "There's a time for talkin' and a time for doin'." If a young boy like myself wasn't content with learning this way, they had several methods of putting him in his place. The most common one was a sharp rebuke, and if that didn't work, then it was derision—which felt even harsher.

So I waited, watched, listened, and slowly the idea of what "mad as a peach orchard boar" meant began to form.

But finally the day came when I would get a focused and thorough lesson. It came from an uncle. In Maryville, the "big" town close to where our farm was (about 15 miles away where our mother went to do shopping on Saturdays and all

of us went to church on Sundays), I had an uncle and aunt named Rawlings and Jean Tindall. "Aunt Jean and Uncle Rawlings" was how we usually referred to them. Aunt Jean worked for various restaurants about town. Uncle Rawlings had a very small farm in the country and as far as I could tell he was not what the locals would have called a "highly motivated worker." In spring of 1968<sup>1</sup> they decided to open their own restaurant. It was called "Jean's Cafe," and it soon was probably the most popular restaurant in town. It definitely had the best food. The fried catfish they served on Fridays brought in the locals and also people who had heard about their catfish and would drive a long distance to get some. Aunt Jean's home-made tartar sauce was to die for. So was her home-made potato salad, not to mention her home-made pies which people had with coffee at breakfast.

Aunt Jean would be at that restaurant every morning at 3 A.M. to bake the pies and make the potato salad. She would make what she called 50 pounds of potato salad, meaning that 50 pounds of potatoes got peeled—a task she could accomplish in 30 minutes flat with a paring knife while smoking a cigarette. Then that 50 pounds of potato salad would be used at her restaurant for the day, and some

would go to two other restaurants who bought it (way too cheap in my opinion). In other words, Aunt Jean was the hard worker, and Uncle Rawlings was the one who sat in the restaurant, drinking coffee and telling stories. Telling stories was what he liked to do and he was a wealth of information because he was a keen observer of life. The result was that the stories he told were interesting, sometimes even inspiring, and you could count on them being true—if he was in the mood to tell the truth. (Fortunately, by his affect, you could tell when he was “putting you on.”) As for doing any work at the restaurant, about all he did was complain about how the hired waitress didn’t work hard enough. If it was an especially busy day, he might get to his feet and go pour coffee for a couple of customers, but even the effort of this small task elicited considerable grumbling and many withering glares in the direction of the hurrying waitress.

I am not sure how the topic of “mad as a peach orchard boar” came up one afternoon when I was there. Knowing my temperament—always curious—I probably asked. And given his temperament he was quite interested in everything and that included hogs. He had a small farm in the country—about 80

acres. The row-crop ground got rented out. The rest lay idle, except maybe once a month he would go out there and cut some wood. And on occasion—maybe every two years—he would have a few hogs which he would buy in the spring, feed through the summer, then sell in the fall. In fact, as time went by and Jean's Cafe flourished, he began keeping hogs all the time because he could feed the left-overs from the restaurant to his hogs. Sometimes there weren't many left-overs, so he supplemented with corn. Then there were the bewildering (and fortunately, rare) days when, for no reason anyone could discern, there would be almost no customers. When this happened it would only be for one day. It might happen on the the most ordinary day of an ordinary week. Or it might happen on a day when the sale barn was having a big sale and all the rooms in all the small motels around Maryville were booked. Or it might be a Friday, which in that Catholic community, was a good day for fried catfish. But even on days such as these it would happen on rare occasion that there might be no more than a dozen people for lunch when normally there would be more than a hundred. That was when the hogs really had a feast.

In fact this arrangement was what eventually caused Aunt Jean and Uncle Rawlings to close the cafe. The hours were too long, the work was too hard, the profit was too small, managing their few employees was a pain, but they could cope with all that. However, the one thing Uncle Rawlings couldn't cope with was waste. He kept along a fence, close to the back door of the cafe, a row of 10-gallon milk cans. He put the left-overs in those cans—potato peels, food a customer hadn't finished off his plate, or forty pounds of cooked catfish on those days when the customers didn't show up. At the end of the day he would load the big cans in the back of his pickup, drive out to his farm, and dump the cans into the hog troughs. It was cheap hog food because otherwise it would have gone to waste.

But then the health department got involved. They thought all that food being stored in those milk cans was a health hazard and they insisted on his getting rid of those milk cans. All the waste had to go down the garbage disposal into the sewer. The health department wouldn't even compromise and let him keep the milk cans at the back of the parking lot—which would have been a distance of

about 80 feet from the building. Uncle Rawlings argued with the health department to no avail. He fussed, he fumed, he fretted.

Before long everybody in town knew he was so mad he was considering closing the restaurant. And then, in late summer of 1976, Aunt Jean and Uncle Rawlings did close their restaurant. All because the health department thought it was wiser to put all that food waste down the sewer than feed it to hogs.

But a few years earlier, on a very auspicious day in 1968 toward the end of the first summer they were open when the hogs were getting the left-overs, I had the good fortune of sitting in Jean's Cafe and getting a thorough lesson on what a peach orchard boar is.

As I have implied (hoping I do not unfairly deprive him of all due respect) Uncle Rawlings did not like to work. So when the topic of hogs came up, he was more than willing to talk. When you talk about hogs, you feel less obligated to work with hogs. Although he did have hogs, but never had a peach orchard, he always knew how to tuck away in his mind an encyclopedic knowledge of any topic that interested him. So as he talked I knew that everything he said had meaning,

and I soon realized that the most important aspect of his explanation involved understanding some of the things which characterize peach orchards. How hogs pertain to peach orchards is a result of the fact that peach orchards have certain problems.

One problem involves the fact that when those peaches come on in the summer, at the end of the growing season there are many rotting peaches that have fallen to the ground. Those peaches are food, and they provide a great deal of nutrition for hogs if they are let in to the peach orchard where they can eat them. First they eat the peaches, then after the choice peaches are gone they come back and, with their amazingly strong teeth and jaws, eat the peach stones. Finally they root into the ground looking for any peach stones that got trampled down into the ground by their hooves when they were busily eating those peaches and peach stones. So this way the left-over peaches of a peach orchard don't go to waste. Thus hogs in a peach orchard solve a certain problem I heard many a farmer put into words when I was young: "What a shame! All those peaches going to waste, and not a hog to eat 'em."

The second problem with a peach orchard is that weeds grow profusely in there. But as the trees grow, they put out long lateral limbs, and you can't easily get a tractor and brush-hog in there to mow the weeds without breaking limbs off the trees. You can't even hope to mow close to the trunks. For this task of clearing out the weeds around the trees, the hogs come in handy also. The busy frenzy of eating those peaches, peach stones, and grubbing for buried peach stones with their strong busy noses means the weeds get knocked down, many of them even killed, right up to the tree trunks.

A third problem is that the roots of the fruit trees grow fairly close to the surface of the ground, and the moisture needs to get down to those roots for the peach trees to remain healthy. The problem is that with grass and weeds growing all during the spring and summer, the top of the soil becomes hard, crusty, packed, and the moisture from the rains doesn't get down to the tree roots very well. There isn't the option of cultivating the soil. Since the trees' roots are close to the surface, and run a good distance out from the trees, cultivating would tear up the roots and damage or kill the trees. Plus, the process of

trying to do this with a tractor would break off tree limbs the same way trying to mow close to the trees would. But pigs have sharp hooves, they weigh a lot, and when they are doing their feeding in the peach orchard their sharp hooves and their grubbing noses not only tear up the weeds and grass, they also aerate the soil. Hence, the aerated soil allows moisture from the late-fall rains and winter snow-melt to get right down to the trees' roots.

So as Uncle Rawlings explained, having hogs in a peach orchard does a lot of good for the peach orchard. Eating up the peaches not only gives food for the hogs, it also helps keep insects and fungus that are attracted to rotting peaches away from the trees. The hogs get rid of the weeds, which have been using nutrients and moisture that the trees need. And the hogs aerate the soil which lets moisture get down to the trees' roots.

This all sounds like a very simple and tidy method. But there are two problems. First, many orchards are planted on hillsides, or just about any place on a farm where one wouldn't normally do row-crops or run cattle. The result is that you can't turn a bunch of hogs in to a peach orchard unless it is fenced—and fencing a peach orchard involves

money, time, and work for a reward that happens only once a year and involves about two weeks' of work by the hogs. The hogs can't be allowed to run free, because some of them will escape to the woods, or go out on a road and get hit by a car or truck. So only a fenced peach orchard gets to be helped by hogs, most peach orchards aren't fenced, so even people with peach orchards rarely get to see hogs in a peach orchard—and rarely get to learn, first hand, what “mad as a peach orchard boar” means.

I suppose it is possible that a peach orchard boar, with sows in attendance, could go into a mad feeding frenzy in an orchard that isn't fenced. But this would be a rare thing. The pigs would probably be in there by accident because they escaped from their pen or their fenced pasture. And no person would likely get to observe that boar gone mad, at least not for long, because any person foolish enough to stay around would soon find himself either running for his life or losing his life.

This brings us to the second problem involved with “treating” a peach orchard with hogs. This problem involves the hogs themselves.

When a herd of hogs gets turned into a "ripe" (as it is called) peach orchard, this involves usually about 30-50 sows and one boar. Never more than one boar, because if there are two, the clamorous fights are fierce—often drawing blood and sometimes ending in death.

So a herd of eager sows with their boar trots in to the peach orchard. Instantaneously, the eagerness becomes greed, and this is when the problem begins and we learn what "mad as a peach orchard boar" means.

On the subject of "first-hand" experience with a peach orchard boar gone mad, I can speak with authority. I earlier stated that I learned from three sources what a peach orchard boar gone mad is. The first was from brief allusions to the topic made by farmers where I grew up. The second involved my Uncle Rawlings telling me about it while we were sitting in his cafe—Jean's Cafe. This would have been summer of 1968. Much later, in summer of 1975 when my first wife was pregnant with my first child—daughter Dacia—Uncle Rawlings and I talked about it again. But this time he was telling me what he knew while I was embellishing his story with accounts of what I myself had observed.

My direct experience came when I spent the summer of 1971 working in a peach orchard. I was a college student at Columbia, Missouri, and whereas most summers I made my living playing music, that particular summer the music jobs simply weren't there. So I found work at a peach orchard about five miles outside Columbia's city limits. Called "Alexander's Peach Orchard" it had been there many years. Ben, the patriarch, had started it and had managed to make money off of it even during the Great Depression. When I worked there, Ben was an old man, about 80, and he showed up rarely—which I was grateful for because he was imperious, arrogant, and told stories about how he had taken advantage of his workers during the Depression because they couldn't get work elsewhere. By the end of the summer, even though I had spent fewer than a dozen hours with him, I hated him. But the main person in charge of the peach orchard was Ben's son Phil. He was a nice guy. Earnest, hard-working, good-natured, he knew a great deal about growing and selling peaches but not much about other things rural. I liked him very much. Phil had a brother who didn't work in the peach orchard, but sometimes stopped by and chatted. He was somewhat fat, his hands were soft, and

he liked to boast about how he was a "world traveler." I liked him well enough, but I found him, not tiring, but irrelevant because I hadn't done much traveling and didn't care to. I don't remember this irrelevant brother's name. Then there was Uncle Claude. He was Ben's younger brother and Phil's uncle. His relationship with the main peach orchard operation was not well defined—at least not to my understanding. He had a peach orchard of his own nearby, although it was smaller. He had a wife, no kids, and there seemed to be some economic overlap between Phil's peach orchard and Claude's because once in a while they helped each other. I loved the days I could spend time with Claude. He was jovial, relaxed, and an amazing autodidact. He had never been to college, but I already knew enough about 19th-century German philosophy to know that he knew 20 times as much about this field as I did. He knew all the philosophers, all the great literature, and every day he would recite aloud "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam." He also recited other poetry aloud for us as we rode with him in his truck, and always he was a joy and an inspiration.

So my introduction to peach orchards began with Alexander's Peach Orchard, working for Phil Alexander, and

I worked hard through the summer. In Alexander's Peach Orchard there were actually several different-size peach orchards separated from one another, planted with different varieties of peaches so they would "come on" at different times during the summer. This way there would be peaches available all through the summer. The most popular was a variety called Red Haven, then there was New Haven, and Pink Haven, and a brief crop of Angel Hair which was a white peach that had lots of peach fuzz on the skin, and a particular variety they didn't know the name of so I christened it Angel Haven and the name stuck. There were several other varieties too which I no longer remember the names of.

One of these orchards had a fence around it. Only one. When that orchard had been picked over, and all that was left were a few "loner peaches" at the very top of trees too sparse in number to warrant picking, plus all those rotting peaches on the ground, it was time for the hogs.

Claude had a small herd of hogs, but they were a little more than a mile away. We were going to bring them to the fenced peach orchard the next day, and Phil said to me, "You'll be tired by the end of tomorrow." I asked him why

and he said, "You can't reason with hogs. You can't lead 'em or coax 'em or do anything but drive 'em and chase 'em."

"But you can trick 'em," I replied, my rural background showing itself, and Phil asked what I meant. "You'll see tomorrow," I said, grinning. Phil grinned too. He and I got along well, and part of our getting along was playing a little game of showing each other that when we said we could do something then you could count on us to do it.

So the next day I hitched the little Ford tractor to a small two-wheeled cart, had one of the young helpers come with me as I drove the tractor to Claude's, and Phil followed in his pickup. When I arrived, Claude was ready to let the hogs out, but first I asked him if he had any shelled corn. He did, and I asked to have about a bushel put in the cart. Then I got in the cart, had the young helper drive slowly toward the fenced peach orchard while I sat in the back of the cart, and every fifteen seconds or so I would throw a few kernels of corn onto the ground as we drove down the dirt road. The pigs would scuffle and snuffle, in seconds they would have found those grains of corn, and then come running after the cart wanting more. As

we kept going, I would wait longer between the times I threw out corn, and also throw less corn so as to conserve my supply. And even though there was a lot of squealing and commotion, every pig followed right behind. Phil was way back, following slowly in his truck, and I could see him grinning. Every now and then he would wave, and then grin even more broadly. This sure beat spending a good part of the day trying to herd hogs.

In a little over an hour, we were going up the hill to the fenced peach orchard. Then the tractor with cart went through the opened gate, and when the fellow driving the tractor turned it around and we went back out, the hogs had lost all interest in me and my morsels of corn. They were already eating rotten peaches.

They gobbled quickly, within a minute they were scuffling with each other as pigs always do when you pour food in their trough, but this time it became more than scuffling. All hell broke loose as a pandemonium of squeals and fighting erupted within the entire herd. But it subsided as the sows prudently moved apart from each other and headed off in different directions, scrounging for those rotten peaches. Pigs are greedy, when they feel more

greedy than usual they get aggressive, but the sows seem to possess enough sense to stop fighting and get serious about eating.

Not so the boar. He is bigger, stronger, and more aggressive than the sows. His aggression drives his greed and his greed drives his aggression. He is mean and ill-tempered by nature, and quickly works himself up to a frenzy of aggressive eating. Over the next few days, when I had a spare minute, I would go stand by that orchard's fence and watch the boar as he rampaged in his mad frenzy. He would gobble a rotten peach as fast as he could, but if he saw a sow 10 feet away headed in his direction he would charge her and knock her off her feet, then return to the peach he was eating. He might eat two or three more, and then just as he was eating the next peach he would spot a sow maybe 20 feet away with a big peach in her mouth, so he would drop the peach he was eating and charge her. As he knocked her down, she would drop half the peach she had been eating, he would quickly gobble it, then head back toward the peach he had dropped just in time to see a sow finishing it off. In his rage he would charge her, knock her over, then go back to eating. Maybe 50 feet away there

would be several sows clustered together, and this would make him wonder what they had found. So he would rush over there, gobble what they had been eating, then rush off somewhere else to eat. Over and over he would keep repeating the scenario of dropping what he was eating to charge after a sow to get what she was eating. He would be overheated, frothing at the mouth, and very soon it would be obvious that the only thing curbing his ferocity was his self-inflicted fatigue. He was dangerous to the sows because he hurt them and occasionally (not often) injured them, and it didn't take a rural background to figure out that a big boar that mad was dangerous to humans. I stayed on the other side of the fence. I knew that if I didn't the consequences could be immediate, gory, and terminal.

After a few days the peaches were gone, but even as the pigs ate the peach stones on top of the ground, and then with their strong, tough noses grubbed down into the ground searching for peach stones that had been trampled beneath the surface, the boar by this time was convinced that every peach stone being eaten might be a choice peach and his frenzy of charging the sows and trying to take away what they were eating kept on. (Or maybe he was enraged by his

realization that the peach stone probably wasn't a peach, and he was taking his anger out on the hapless sows.) By this time the weeds were gone, the ground was so torn up it was well aerated, and except for the rare times when one of those last "loner peaches" would fall (the mere sound would make the boar go rushing toward it) there was nothing left. At the end of this clean-up, the sows seemed to have gained weight but the boar seemed leaner. He had probably lost weight because, in his raging greed, he had run off more pounds than he had gained by eating those peaches.

So, summed up, a mad peach orchard boar is one that, because of his aggression and greed for the fallen peaches, works himself up into such a frenzy he seems truly mad. Mad as in angry and mad as in crazy. He fights the sows as he tries to get all the peaches for himself. He is so mad he is even dangerous—to the sows and to any human who happens to get in his way. His greed makes him fight constantly, and the only thing that keeps him from succumbing to utter exhaustion is his frenzied aggression.

Watching that one boar in Alexander's Peach Orchard, I saw him get exhausted to the point that I wondered if there

might actually be times when a mad peach orchard boar actually does drive himself past exhaustion to death.

That boar's display of ferocious, but ridiculous, greed was an unhappy spectacle. But I saw probably 20 men at different times come to watch that boar's unseemly conduct. Was their interest spiritually healthy? Many of the medieval philosophers and theologians wrote that one of the pleasures of being in heaven involves watching the sufferings of those in hell. This was not, I daresay, a benevolent view of salvation. Watching the sufferings of those in hell would be, in my opinion, a self-indulgent, malicious, and voyeuristic perversion. Watching that peach orchard boar was, for me, fascinating and instructive, but was it pleasurable? I had no desire to stand there for as long as two hours, as some of those spectators did, watching that boar fight and gobble and rampage. In fact, busy as I was with orchard duties, I doubt I ever watched him for more than two or three minutes at a time.

I anticipate being asked by people why no one thinks to just turn the sows into the orchard and leave the boar back at the barn. There are very good reasons. A boar kept away from sows gets very mean. So mean that within days it may

not be safe even for the farmer who owns him to be in the same pen with that boar. Boars have long tusks, a lot of weight, and pound for pound they are probably stronger than a horse or a bull. I have heard several stories of people being eaten by pigs, which seems to happen when the person is attacked and knocked down by the boar, who then begins his meal and the other pigs join in. Most of these stories seemed almost like myths when I first heard them as a young child. But when I was about eleven years old, there was a farm about 20 miles east of ours where a small child of about three was eaten by hogs. There was a boar, and about six sows, if I remember correctly. I suspect the boar was the perpetrator. The last I heard, as the newscasts followed the story, was that a decision had been made to "sacrifice" the hogs and not butcher them for eating. I knew what "sacrifice" meant. And all the children in that area, who many times had been warned to be careful around hogs because you could get eaten, began taking those warnings very seriously.

Boars, even when not in a peach orchard, are mean. When they are penned up away from sows they get meaner. That is one reason why the boar is not kept out of the peach

orchard. Another reason is because if sows are not in their usual pen, the only thing that will keep them from getting disoriented, nervous, unpredictable, and (on rare occasion) mean as a boar is to have a boar keeping them company. So all in all it is better to have both the sows and their boar with all that pandemonium put into the peach orchard together. Otherwise the boar, if kept alone in its pen, gets dangerously mean. The sows, without their boar, get mean. So it is best to keep the boar and sows together even if the result be a shocking display of the boar's rage against the distaff side of his own porcine species.

Watching that boar at Alexander's Peach Orchard, I had no trouble believing that his rage could be directed toward a human. I always stayed on the safe side of that fence. When water was taken in to the water troughs, the gate was opened carefully by another person just wide enough to let the tractor pulling a cart with a water tank through, and then the water was dispensed by a fellow on the cart without his ever getting off that cart.

Some years later I had opportunity for talking to a fellow who had been attacked by a peach orchard boar. He had been putting water in their water trough, thought they

were safely on the other side of the orchard, and the next thing he knew the boar was charging at him full speed. A close approximation of what he said is as follows: "I don't rightly know that he would have done me damage, once he knocked me down and realized I was human, but I think he would have. I shot him with my .357 Magnum. I carried a pistol back in them days. We decided it was butcherin' time, and we kilt several hogs to make it worth our trouble. You can butcher up a dozen hogs as quick as you can butcher one. I remember that boar sure had big hams."

"Were they tough to chew?" I asked.

"Probably. I don't remember. Maybe not though. My wife sure knows how to cook a country ham up right."

"So did that make you more careful around peach orchard boars?"

"I'm still standin' here, ain't I?"

I have thought about that saying, "mad as a peach orchard boar" many times, and for me it has more reality than it does for most people. I have seen with my own eyes a mad peach orchard boar. And I realize that when a person (or another animal) is described as "mad as a peach orchard boar" the descriptive is metaphorical or hyperbolic.

But is it always? Is it possible for an animal other than a boar to be mad as a peach orchard boar? Yes. Humans. Not often, but I have heard reports of it and have sometimes witnessed this. I have been told of cops who were this mad—for example, bullying and beating someone for something as minor as a traffic violation. They shouldn't have been allowed to be cops. And I have seen a few drunks this mad. They shouldn't have been allowed to be drunks.

These situations involved other animals that were truly (not metaphorically) as mad as a peach orchard boar. Have I ever seen any animal madder than a peach orchard boar? Yes. Sows.

There are two rural expressions that describe a sow when she is mad. One is, "mad as a hog on ice." This happens when a freezing rain has fallen and sows try walking on this slick sheet of ice. With their small pointed hooves, their heavy bodies perched atop those sharp hooves, they have no traction and no stability on ice. They fall, they fight to get up, they eventually do get up, they fall again, and they won't give up. They keep trying to move, and eventually they get to where they are foaming at the mouth, emitting squeals that sound like roars, and they

even bite the ice because they know it is their enemy. The only way to put a stop to this display is for the farmer to put a rope around that sow's shoulders, and wearing cleats, slowly drag her, as she keeps struggling, back to a shed or barn that has a roof that kept the freezing rain out. In that shed there might be a boar which had sense enough to stay off the ice. "Mad as a hog on ice," in my experience, has always described a sow but never a boar. This has caused me to wonder if boars are more intelligent than sows. (Except when they are running hog wild in a peach orchard.) But even a sow that is "mad as a hog on ice," as angry as she is—probably madder than a peach orchard boar, doesn't seem to turn that anger against humans. When she is fighting and biting that ice, she is too helpless to be aggressive toward a human. And she settles down quickly once she is safely off the ice and inside a barn or shed.

But there is another expression which describes a sow that is madder than a peach orchard boar. This expression is, "madder than a bitin' sow." A bitin' sow doesn't just bite. She attacks and bites and will kill. I have known, or known of, a few such sows in my life. And in every instance the sow became that way because of one situation: She had

gotten away from the pig pen or barn, and had had a litter of pigs off in the woods, and this caused her to get so aggressive she could truly be described as mad. Her aggression wouldn't be directed everywhere or at random like the anger of a peach orchard boar. Instead it would seem to be calculated to keep all other animals and humans away from where she had had her pigs (or "piglets"). My friend John Petersen described an encounter with such a sow. His father had lost a leg, so he wore a wooden leg, and it was his father who got charged by the sow. "You never saw a peg-leg run so fast in your life!" was how John described the scene.

"Did you ever find her pigs?" I asked him.

"Not for a while. We started putting corn down there, always staying in the pickup in case she attacked again, and in a few weeks the pigs and the sow tamed down and were eating the corn. Then we drove 'em back up to where the rest of the pigs were."

I have heard several stories of farmers being attacked by such a sow. The sow rarely killed, but she always did considerable damage before deciding that she should go check on her pigs. But one such incident happened close to

home. Our family farm was about two miles from Barnard, the nearest small town, and a sow had escaped from her pen and had had her pigs in the heavy brush along the 102 River. She belonged to the Weathermons, and the sow started attacking people at what was—and is—called "The Barnard Picnic Grounds" which were a mile west of Barnard. (It bears mention that even to this day The Barnard Picnic Grounds are sometimes wrongly referred to as "The Fairgrounds" or "The Barnard Fairgrounds" by some of the locals—especially by the young people. This appellation is quite wrong since this was never the official name, and there never has been a fair at this place in the more than 100 years since The Barnard Picnic Grounds was named. There was, for many years, what was called "The Barnard Picnic" which involved during the summer having an event—usually in July—that brought in carnival rides, food concessions, and games. Plus occasionally—rarely—a brief stage show would be there. But this was not, as one old-timer put it, what would be called a true fair. "A fair is where they bring in animals to be judged, pies and berries to be judged, hand-made quilts are put on display, maybe someone's there making home-made ice cream and selling it. Maybe the rides

and games are there too, but a fair isn't just entertainment for the community. It is the community. What they do and what they want to show off. There ain't nobody in his right mind would call just your ordinary carny a fair.")

My own family's farm was two miles east of Barnard, so we were about three miles from The Barnard Picnic Grounds. When the Weathermon's escaped sow that had gone mad began attacking people, they were warned by the sheriff that they should shoot the sow. To which the father replied, "How can I shoot her if I can't even find her when I go lookin' for her?"<sup>2</sup>

But then the whole town got excited and worried. Two old women drove to The Barnard Picnic Grounds, unaware of that sow's sinister proximity, planning to have a picnic. They were lucky they got attacked before they got out of their car. A boar hog has tusks. A sow has teeth but no tusks, a car's tires are very tough, but before those two frightened old ladies could drive away that sow had bitten through all four tires and then began ramming their car. Two very terrified old ladies drove their car on four flats the mile back to Barnard and stopped at a filling station.

Gary Hilsabeck, president of The Barnard Sportsman<sup>3</sup> Club, was called.

So a few days later The Barnard Sportsman Club organized a safari. They carried rifles and walked abreast, beating the brush just as the "beaters" in a safari do as they move along, flushing animals for the armed hunters. But these beaters didn't flush that sow. I have elsewhere written about how the next day I rode the three miles over there, atop a tall "American Saddlebred" horse, wondering if I might find that sow if I were there with just me and one horse instead of a crowd of noisy men who probably scared her and just made her hunker down. I was carrying two pistols: a .22 and my .44 Magnum. As I was looking the area over while on my horse the sow charged us from behind and to the right. I was a good shot that day, because I drilled her with my big pistol right between the eyes, then rode over to where Gary Hilsabeck worked there in Barnard and told him what I had done. He got busy organizing things. The sow got butchered, was roasted for over 24 hours in a dug pit that had a huge fire on top, and then was eaten the evening of the day after I shot her. By the time I got to the feast for my portion there wasn't a

morsel left. But yes, that "bitin' sow" was madder than a peach orchard boar, more aggressive than a peach orchard boar, and probably more lethal. Until her head bumped into a .44 Magnum slug.

So have I digressed far afield from the topic of boars to the peripheral topic of sows? Have I indulged an unseemly, even obscene, pleasure—thus wallowing in my disquisition for too long a time? No, I have not. I simply decided to expand my original topic. The topic warranted, even demanded, it.

"Mad as a peach orchard boar," "Mad as a hog on ice," "Mad as a bitin' sow." All three expressions are replete with meaning. Especially if they come from my memory, and are channeled through my pen, since I am a man of rural background who gives an accounting based on direct experience. Have my descriptions been burdened by a scholarly, even pedantic, tone? Are they overly protracted? Well, that's what you get when you take a rural farm boy, send him off to college, he gets several degrees including a Ph.D. in philosophy, and then you subject him to questions from dozens of city folk about what a peach orchard boar is. That rural farm boy, after he bought all

those books and spent all those years in college, is not going to be content with providing light entertainment. Give him a topic, and he tells it like it is. In other words, he tells what he knows, and what he knows is true. He has dedicated himself to making the world a less ignorant place, and he dispatches this task with fervent dedication.

So I have set forth many thoughts on boars, sows, pigs or piglets, and other matters which have to do with hogs in general. (Or "hawgs," as many a farmer would say.) And surely you now have some idea as to why a simple explanation as to what a peach orchard boar is just couldn't be given. You needed a context. You needed to get yourself immersed in swinish complexities. You needed what rural folk call, "an edycation."

Just now, bringing this essay to a close, my thoughts go to my wife. I hope (given the late hour) that she is slumbering peacefully. She is one of "them city folk" so I often tease her about what she doesn't know when it comes to country living. Right now it occurs to me that eventually the day may come when I have opportunity for saying to her, "I'd say you're as mad as a bitin' sow!"

That would get her attention. She would want an explanation. Would she take my explanation in good humor? She is a lovely and tolerant woman, but she certainly has an impressively forceful personality. (My polite and cautious way of putting it.)

I suppose I should think this matter over. My best thinking always happens when I am driving my pickup, taking a shower, or standing outside in the dark. Given the late hour, I believe I will go outside and stand in the dark to give this matter a big think.

Outside, thinking it through, I remember the words of that farmer who was attacked by a peach orchard boar gone mad. In response to my question about whether he subsequently was more careful around peach orchard boars, he let me know, with some terse and choice words, that indeed he had been more careful. Reflecting back on those words of his I do believe it would be better to never say to my wife, "You're as mad as a bitin' sow!"

Now, back in my house, I believe I made the right decision. The day may come when I will want to say exactly what that farmer said: "I'm still standin' here, ain't I?"

*July 27 to July 29, 2018  
(written in 3 days)*

*[footnotes added about  
three months later]*

*(Intended to celebrate, and commemorate,  
my wife Abbe Sudvarg's 60th birthday  
of August 22, 2018.)*

*(Posted: December 29, 2018)*

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**ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> I am blessed with a good memory, but my memory does have one chronic flaw. Namely, even though I often can remember all the details of an event, I have a terrible time remembering exactly when it happened. I tell people my problem is that because I remember so many things I can't keep them sorted temporally. For example, something may have happened two weeks ago, and something else may have happened two decades ago, but because my steel trap of a memory can remember both events just as vividly, I don't remember which one happened first. It's not as though I realize one happened longer ago because I remember it vaguely compared to the more recent one which I remember vividly. Both events are temporally jumbled together. Events in my memory are not arranged on a continuum; they occupy an unorganized plenum.

In this case I could not remember, for sure, that it was spring of 1968 that Jean's Cafe opened. Could it have been 1967? Even 1966? Neither Uncle Rawlings nor Aunt Jean have any surviving contemporaries I could ask. I found one woman who had worked for them as a waitress, but she had no idea when the cafe opened, and said she probably didn't

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even know that back when she worked for them. I made many phone calls to relatives; all had opinions but none possessed certainty. I called many county and city officials, each time being told that there probably were records somewhere, but then no one was ever able to find such records because they existed in the pre-computer age. Hence, no one had any idea where those old records might be stored, or if they did have some tentative idea, they didn't want to go looking because they didn't have the time.

As has happened so often before when I was searching for information that pertained to my "old stomping grounds," it was Margaret Kelly of The Nodaway County Historical Society in Maryville who helped steward me in the direction of a successful search.

Margaret suggested I call the Maryville Chamber of Commerce, which I did. I spoke with Shanda Keirseay (whose father Bob Kearsey I had crossed paths with a few times before I reached the age of 20), and she suggested I call her father since in his line of work (refrigeration and air-conditioning) he might have helped my aunt and uncle when they were setting up their cafe. I did call him, we

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reminisced about many delightful things for an hour, but he had never done any work at Jean's Cafe. Still, that conversation was one of the most informative I have had about Maryville's history, which is not surprising since Bob turned 90 only a little over a month before my now writing this footnote.

So I phoned Shanda Keirseay back, asking for other ideas, and she suggested I call the county clerk's office. I told her that I had already called that office more than once, and she replied, "But did you talk to the recorder of deeds?" I wasn't sure, so that is who I called next. At last I found the means to my answer. There I spoke with an unusually friendly and helpful woman named Shirley Schmidt. She displayed uncommon intelligence as she threaded her way through old county records that have now been put online, and she was able to tell me that Otis Rawlings Tindall and Dorothy Jean Tindall bought the property at 1318 East First Street (which would become Jean's Cafe) on December 27, 1967 and they sold it on August 12, 1976. I was amazed and grateful. All this information was right there in Book 289, page 235. So now I could be sure that my initial conversation with Uncle Rawlings about peach orchard boars

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happened during the summer of 1968 because I knew they opened the restaurant in the early spring of the same year they obtained the building, and I knew I was still living in the Maryville area when I had that conversation with Uncle Rawlings. (I would move away from that area late summer of 1968.) So yes; that conversation had taken place not in 1966 or 1967 when I was living right in the middle of Maryville, but during the early part of the summer before I left that general area, i.e., summer of 1968. (Compulsive of me, yes, to thus be so concerned about precision when the subject is peach orchard boards.)

Now I had the information I needed. Also I breathed a sigh of relief, because it occurred to me that I never had actually known whether Aunt Jean and Uncle Rawlings had rented or bought that building. If they had rented it, this trail of inquiry would have led me down one more blind alley instead of at last giving me the answer I needed.

I am thoroughly indebted to Shirley Schmidt, whose official title is Nodaway County Deputy Recorder of Deeds, for her eagerness and generosity in locating these records. Also I am indebted to the Nodaway County Recorder of Deeds, Sandy Smail, who discharges her duties conscientiously and

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thoroughly. She is the one who had initially taken on the visionary (sic) task of putting all the county property deeds online going back to the year 1919 and on up to the present. As of this writing she has them online back to most of 1967. She will continue with this colossal task until her goal is completed, and I am sure that many people henceforth are going to be as well served by her work as I have been. In fact, learning only two days ago (10-24-18) that hers is an elected position (even though it is primarily an office job overseeing her sphere of responsibility), I took it upon myself to write a letter to the editors of the local newspaper—The Maryville Forum—hoping it would help her and also help her able coworkers retain their positions. (Such a loss it would be if the vagaries of politics usurped and sabotaged the task she has set for herself!) The letter I sent to the newspaper is as follows:

**To Nodaway County voters,**

**Our Nodaway County Recorder of Deeds, Sandy Smail, is busy getting all the county's property deeds (going back a full 100 years to 1919!) on-line so they can be easily**

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accessed by the public. This service recently saved me at least a couple dozen hours of work. As my dad Leo Baumli used to say: "Thanks a million!" This time I'm saying thank you to Sandy by asking people to vote for her in the upcoming election.

Sandy isn't a politician. She's a busy woman in her office. But since "Recorder of Deeds" is an elected position, give her your vote simply because she is a very hard worker and does her job so well. She works for us, and that makes her our neighbor in the true sense of the word.

FRANCIS BAUMLI

If my letter is hortatory (albeit more "folksy" and less pedantic than most of my writing) the exhorting tone is deserved precisely because every citizen of every county deserves a public official who is this diligent, thorough, and valuable to their community.

<sup>2</sup> An explanation is in order. One could rightly assert that the escaped sow actually belonged to "Bud" Baker rather than to the Weathermons. Bud was stepfather to the four Weathermon girls, all of them younger than me. (I

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graduated from Barnard's high school in 1966. As for the four Weathermon girls: Vickie graduated in 1968, Sue in 1970, Ruth in 1971, and Gloria in 1973.) This passel of four energetic young girls, all of them pretty and every bit as polite as they were vivacious, caused the locals to rather charmingly identify the farm as "the Weathermon farm," or on hot, extremely humid days, identify it (not so charmingly) as "the Weathermon hog operation." (On these olfactorily-laden, scarcely redolent days, the four Weathermon girls, however pretty and vivacious they were, sometimes had to endure teasing and occasional snide comments not only from their peers but also from a few unkind grown-ups.) I make this commentary and clarification so people can understand how it was that when that "bitin' sow" started bitin', although people were calling it the Weathermon sow, technically (legally) it was Bud Baker's sow and he was held responsible. Therefore he was the one the sheriff called.

Once again we encounter an example of where careful scholarship is always in order for the sake of exactitude. When I first wrote this essay, I spelled the last name as "Weatherman." Upon reflection I realized that I have, in

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Saint Louis, also seen the name spelled as "Whetherman" and "Whethermen" and "Wethermen." A bit of cursory searching revealed it also is spelled "Weathermans" and "Weathermon." My old high school yearbooks provided the correct spelling for the people at issue here: "Weathermon" spelled with an o. So I came close to making a mistake on this matter. Given how pedantic, compulsive, perfectionistic, and unforgiving I am toward myself about such things, had I made this tiny mistake (and later realized it) I would have sweated blood and lost sleep. Why such distress over a tiny mistake? Because, from the perspective of a worthy scholar, no mistake is ever tiny.

Also, no expression of gratitude should ever be neglected by a conscientious scholar. Some searching was in order since I could not remember the names of all the Weathermon sisters. I was aided in this small, albeit stubbornly elusive, quest by my brother Donald Baumli (Don). And I availed myself of the scholarly repository of local lore put together by Janet Hawley, which she generously shared with me. (I present a more complete accounting of Janet and her work in the following footnote.) To both Don and Janet I am humbly grateful.

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<sup>3</sup> Here is a perfect example of where scholarly rectitude keeps company with what otherwise might seem to be relaxed prose. Coming up with the correct name for this club involved, on my part, at least a dozen hours of research—most of this involving telephone inquiries. As a youth, I had heard this club usually called “The Barnard Sportsman’s Club.” But when writing this piece I thought to myself: Is it really “The Barnard Sportsman’s Club” or might it possibly be “The Barnard Sportsmen’s Club” or maybe just “The Barnard Sportsmans Club”? This matter was further complicated by the fact that during my youth some people had called it “The Farmers and Sportsmans Club” which, if correct, would cause similar problems with possible “possessive” spellings, i.e., if, and where, to put an apostrophe. Also, on a couple of occasions I had heard this club called “The Farmers Sportsmans Club” causing even more uncertainty about the name itself, with the possible variations in possessive spelling so numerous with this phrase as to be vertiginous. Hence I had all the more need to make inquiries on behalf of exactitude. Queries to people who at one time were involved with this

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club yielded inconsistent answers, the most common one being a variation of "I don't know" with the implication "Why should anyone care?" and sometimes a challenging "Why do you care?" Old newspaper headlines announcing this club's events were inconsistent in their spelling of the name. And I was almost at a loss as to how to proceed when Margaret Kelly, a volunteer at The Nodaway County Historical Society (Nodaway County being the Missouri county where Barnard is), did considerable research on her own and then directed me to Janet Hawley, formerly of Barnard, Missouri and recently moved to Maryville, Missouri. Exercising exemplary vigilance and diligence in playing the role of computer sleuth, Janet located old records in the Missouri Secretary of State's files and finally found the papers for incorporation of The Barnard Sportsman Club, showing that it was formed as a "Not for Profit Corporation" on February 2, 1956 but then was dissolved December 18, 2002. I had not been interested in when it was formed and had not known that it had subsequently been dissolved. All I wanted to know was the correct name. At last, there on the incorporation papers, it was—and is—printed clearly: The Barnard Sportsman Club.

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My search had come to an end, but I must emphasize my debt and gratitude to these two ladies who provided what I needed. Margaret Kelly modestly describes her role in The Nodaway County Historical Society as primarily a volunteer. If she is correct in this description, I must point out that it fails to note that she is a scholar herself whose insights as a wordsmith are both ingenious and impressive. I have observed (to her) that she is "the most copacetic gal in Northwest Missouri," a compliment few people but she would understand, which in and of itself attests to the stature of her autodidactic pedigree in philology.

And Janet Hawley is an assiduous researcher who over the years has approached many topics with a combination of fervor and compulsiveness, imbibing both their scope and their details with such thoroughness she virtually overwhelms these topics while generously making sure to satiate her readers' needs and curiosity. She has proved to be a trove of local lore in Northwest Missouri, and while I always note the considerable pleasure she gains from doing her work, even more I admire the sense of responsibility she takes to this work. Everything she writes is laden with

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thoroughness and graced with veridicality. I daresay that Thucydides would have considered her a peer.

As an aside I might note that when Janet at last found the information I was needing and mailed it to me, I wrote her a letter suggesting that she tell her husband Darell that in my opinion he should treat her as a goddess for at least a month. Darell replied, "I've already been doing that for fifty years." (Darell and Janet were classmates at our South Nodaway High School. One year ahead of me in our high school, they graduated together in 1965, and married February 10, 1968.) Hence, as of this writing, Janet (O'Connell) Hawley and Darell Hawley have been married for over half a century. So if I give Janet much homage as a researcher and writer, to Janet and Darell—as a married couple—I extend my congratulations and homage. I am proud to have had them as neighbors most of my life.

It bears noting, too, that the entirety of this research has involved a pleasant exercise in renewing bonds with old neighbors in my community of yore while at the same time expanding this community with new neighbors. How sad that so many people think being a scholar involves nothing but lonely, dreary, drudge work. Quite the

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contrary, scholarship is a challenging, exciting, and rewarding social exercise. I am fortunate because I truly love the work I do.