

## A Roberts' Children

One day the Roberts' 1950s Chevy truck came bouncing down their quarter-mile driveway.



It stopped in front of the long white barn, home to several cows and three pigs.

“What’d you get at the auction, Dad?”

Heather yelled as she headed towards the vehicle her father was parking outside the barn.

“Another calf?” Melissa asked, climbing onto the bumper to peer in.

Jonathan toddled along behind them and cried to be picked up.



“Hey, kids, do I have a surprise for you!” said Dad, smiles wreathing his face.

“But you have to get down from there.” And he shooed the children away, for by now they had climbed aboard to get a view of the newest addition to the family farm.

Mom followed, supporting one-year old Josh on her hip, towel in hand.



“What is it, Rhon?” Mom asked as Dad stooped down to gather the animal in his arms. And then Dad climbed from the vehicle, displaying his purchase.



What to their gazing eyes should appear but the most lovely little piglet they had ever seen. Pink with dabs of dark spots around his eyes, the tiny pig stared back at them.

“He’s so cute!” Melissa exclaimed.

“I wonder—what should we name him?” Heather asked.



“Wilbur!” Jonathan offered.

“Like the pig from *Charlotte’s Web*,” Mom smiled.

And Jonathan laughed.

“Then Wilbur it is,” Dad said, amazed the process had taken so short a time.



All the farm animals that lived in the big white barn enjoyed the use of all their limbs. Each cow and pig had four legs that ran, two eyes that saw, and two ears that heard. Except Wilbur.

Wilbur had two eyes that saw, two ears  
that heard, but only two functioning legs.

Poor Wilbur!



He couldn't race the other pigs to  
mealtimes. He couldn't fight over the  
fabulous sow slop. Not Wilbur.

But Wilbur was to live in the same  
murky old barn with the rest of the animals.  
To the children, it didn't seem fair, for  
Wilbur was special, and it seemed he  
required an even more special place to live.

"Dad, we like Wilbur," Melissa  
explained.

"And we don't want him stuck in that  
old barn," Heather added.



“The barn is too big,” Melissa pleaded.

“And damp,” Heather added.

“And dark,” they said together.

“Well,” Dad touched the brim of his green hat, “the chicken coop already has residents.”



“And Cinnamon the goat lives by the old pig barn,” Mom added.

Three-year-old Jonathan had been sitting quietly, hitting two tiny twigs together. “He can sleep in my room!”

And everyone laughed.

“I know!” Dad said at last. “We can make Wilbur a home in the hayloft.”



“It would be soft,” Melissa stated.

“And he could enjoy sweet hay  
whenever he liked,” Heather contributed.

“I guess so,” Dad decided, “As long  
as you kids don’t forget about him up there.”

“Oh, we won’t, Dad!” chorused the  
three.

And they didn’t.



Each night Dad did the farm chores,  
but before he got to Wilbur’s home, one of  
the children had already been by to visit the  
pig.

Sometimes Heather went up to the  
barn alone. Other times, Melissa came  
along. They liked to watch Wilbur scratch  
his back against one of the big wooden posts  
in his new home.



When Jonathan accompanied his sisters, he wanted to feed the pig—just like Dad did.

Soon the mornings were crisp, and frost touched the ground. The children shivered as they pulled their jacket zippers even higher to completely cover their necks. Their breath froze in mid-air, and they

watched as ringlets of vapor rose from Wilbur's nose.



The other farm pigs found snow on their snouts some winter mornings. But not Wilbur. He was safe in the hay loft, tucked away, protected from the shivering cold.



Soon, a blanket of thick white snow covered the ground, but Wilbur lived on, in his home in the hayloft. And in that time, Wilbur became a very special family friend.

As the seasons changed, Wilbur did too. His tiny face got larger; his ears pointed farther up; and he hobbled about on his two now-larger legs in the hay loft.

But as with every other animal on the Roberts' farm, Wilbur's life was intended for one particular purpose.



An entire year passed. By now, Wilbur was a full-grown pig. And by now, he was ready to leave the Roberts's farm for another destination.



It all happened one day when children were away at school. That afternoon, when Heather went to do the farm chores, there was no Wilbur.

“Where did Wilbur go, Mom?” she asked as her mom kneaded bread at the kitchen counter.

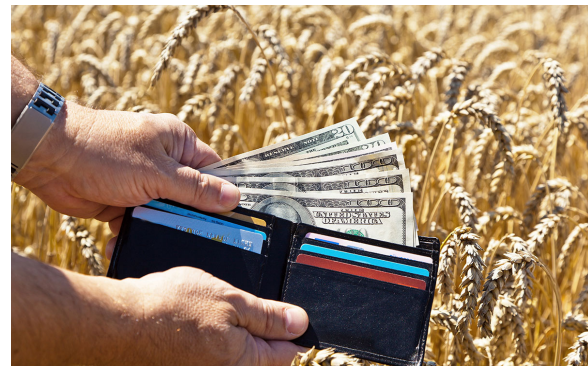
“To market,” Mom replied.



“He’s gone?” Melissa said later when she went out to visit the pig.

The girls were somewhat disheartened, but they imagined Wilbur living somewhere else, finding a new barn and farm friends.

Some other family had probably felt sorry for the crippled pig and had purchased him for themselves. In the process, Dad had gotten some much-needed money.



So the girls comforted themselves with the thought that Wilbur must be enjoying a better home of his own. They had enjoyed knowing the pig and now Wilbur would make a fine pet for someone else—probably someone with more money than the Roberts had.



One morning in mid-January, as Melissa descended the rickety wooden steps, she smelled something delicious.

As she stepped happily from step to step, she breathed in deeply to the wonderful aroma of bacon frying on the stove top.

“Mmmm, my favorite!” she exclaimed, as she saw Mom bending over the counter, stirring batter for pancakes.



“Is it pancakes and bacon?” she asked.

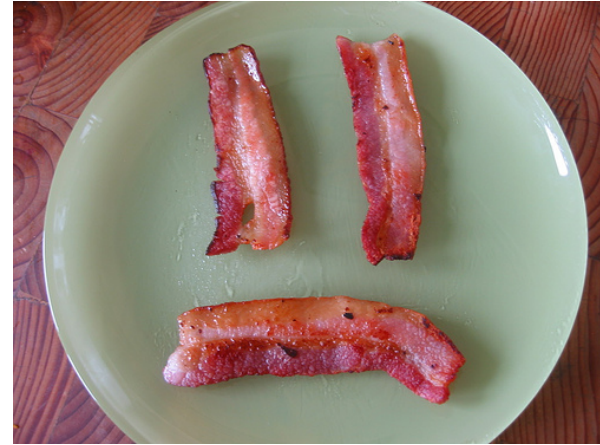
“It is,” Mom replied.

The children were halfway through their morning meal when Dad suddenly took a piece of bacon and, stroking it, said, “Poor Wilbur.”

The children became immediately quiet. Heather choked on a small portion of soft bacon.

Mom’s eyes looked at hers.

For explanation, their mother said, “On a farm, animals are intended for a purpose,” she said.



“But Wilbur?” Heather wondered aloud as the taste of bacon in her mouth suddenly turned stale.

“Yes, even Wilbur,” Mom said finally.

It was hard for the children to digest that final bit of bacon on their plates, but

each of them swallowed hard.



That morning, Heather quietly completed her chores. As she peered into the pigs' pens and saw the cows in their stalls, she suddenly became aware that these animals could not become close friends, like Wilbur had been.



“On a farm, animals are intended for a purpose,” Heather heard her mother’s voice saying her seven-year-old arms grabbed the last slab of straw and shook it out for the new piglets to lie on.



Later, as Mom finished reading them their bedtime story, the children had a question.



“Why did Wilbur have to die?” asked Jonathan.

“And why did we eat him for breakfast?” asked Melissa, remembering the tasty bacon from that morning.

“Well,” Mom said sweetly, “the animals are here to help us. That’s what God says in Genesis 1:26. Heather, why don’t you read that verse for us.”



Heather opened her small red Bible to read: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them

have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”



“Who was made in God’s image?”

The children thought hard. Then Melissa said, “Man.”

“Right,” said Mom. “Man is a name that applies to humans. So we were made in

God’s image. Does that verse say that animals were made in God’s image?”

The children thought again. “No,” Heather replied.

“Right,” Mom said.



“Now, *dominion* means being in charge of something else. Just like God created people and God is in charge of

people, God made it so that man would have the dominion over animals.”

“Like Wilbur?” asked Jonathan.



“Like Wilbur,” Dad said, adjusting his green Lemke hat as he peered over the shoulders of his children, who were sitting close, listening.

“Dominion also means we get to raise animals to sell them...and later, to eat them.”

“It feels kind of sad,” said Heather, remembering their breakfast that morning.



“When you’ve become friends with an animal like Wilbur, it does feel sad,” agreed Mom.

“But remember,” Dad added, “God created a world where there was no death.”

“Adam and Eve messed it up,” Melissa reminded.

“Right, when they sinned.”



“So because of sin in the world, there is death.”

“Death isn’t enjoyable for anyone,” Mom explained, “but God has made it so that the death of animals, such as Wilbur, can be turned into something good, like food for us.”



It was beginning to make sense, but that didn’t take away the sad feeling Heather got in the



pit of her stomach the next time they had pork chops for Sunday dinner.

But Wilbur had taught everyone some important lessons. The Roberts' children had learned that farm animals had a specific purpose. And Mom and Dad had learned something, too.



“Rhon, I don’t think we should name the animals on the farm—at least the ones

that are going to get butchered,” Mom said one day to Dad when the children had all gone to bed. He was sitting by the warm wood stove cracking hickory nuts and she was finishing up the last dishes.



“I think you’re right, Tonda,” Dad agreed. “The kids—and us—we just get too

attached to these creatures when they've got names."



So after Wilbur's time, most of the farm animals on the Roberts' farm were unnamed—with the exception of milk cows like Jerusha and Stephanie, Bessie, and others—none of whom were intended for market but rather for a life of service, providing milk for the family farm.



Oh, and a hen named Goldie. But that's another story for another time. And if you can wait until our next story in the series, you'll learn about the hen who laid green eggs.

Until then,

Aunt Heather