



# Animal House

AN AFTERNOON WITH ARTIST  
JUD TURNER AND HIS PET FAMILY

by Alex Notman

**S**tanding in Jud Turner's kitchen, a gaggle of cats gobbling snacks at our feet, we hear a faint ting-a-ling coming from the basement.

"I think he just rang his bell," Turner says, straining to hear. "He has a bell that he rings when he wants to go outside or wants to know what's up." Turner disappears down the stairs.

"What's up, piggy?" I hear him say. He's answered with some contented snorting.

The Eugene sculptor's life reads something like a modern-day James Herriot novel. Just replace the rolling English countryside with the hills of South Eugene, the barn animals with five domestic cats (Gray Cat, Poppy, Roo, Brown Bear and Merle), one hell of a pot-bellied pig and, with Turner as your narrator, you're bound to hear some hilarious and sweet stories, and learn quite a bit about pigs.

Following in Turner's footsteps, I meet Ziggy, an 82-pound black Vietnamese pot-bellied pig rooting around his little kingdom. To call it a pen would be too crude; Ziggy's gated living area is filled with blankets, a pig-sized tent, toys, a cat tree and a sliding door with a ramp leading to his favorite place, the backyard. It's also raised about a foot above the floor with rubber matting underneath. Pigs, it turns out, pee a lot. ("I've timed him once and he pees for two minutes and 30 seconds straight," Turner tells me, laughing. "I couldn't believe it.")

Luckily for everyone, Ziggy prefers the backyard. Turner sets up the ramp and the nearly 2-year-old pig waddles down into the fenced-in yard mostly shaded from the towering pines. Ziggy puts his snout down to the pine-needled path, yellow swallowtails fluttering above him, and roots around for treasure (i.e., food or the occasional mushroom and misplaced candle) while Turner tells me of how the pig came to them.

Jud Turner and his wife Melissa Turner had long-wanted a pig, mostly for its cuteness and intelligence factor. They found a breeder in Salem and soon brought the fuzzy 10-pound piglet home. They quickly learned that they had to assert their dominance.

"We had read that pigs are hierarchical, social animals so they bond really well but they also are always looking for what's the pecking order in the situation," he says. "The pig knows he's way above the cats but he's below Melissa and I."

While Turner is clearly smitten with pig life — Ziggy goes with Turner every day to his studio off West 11th, strapped into the passenger seat of his truck — he warns potential domestic pig owners of the commitment. Pigs have a life expectancy of 10 to 20 years and, he says, many breeders try to downplay how large a full-grown pig will become.

"There's a big problem of abandoning these pigs once they get big," he says. "Especially because pigs are such social, bonded, intelligent animals, the pig loses its family and doesn't easily integrate with other pigs."

Ziggy's bond with Turner is clear: He comes chortling towards Turner like a dog when called and gives affectionate nudges with his wet, whiskered snout (the snout is wet because it's the only part of the body through which pigs sweat).

But Ziggy, in spite of the pecking order, has also bonded with two of the cats: Gray Cat and Merle. The cats often sleep with him in his nest of blankets, especially when the heat lamp is on in winter.

We walk over to the new outside cat enclosure on the side of the house and Ziggy gets to work plowing through the dirt with his nose. Soon, the brown tabby Merle appears through an open window, hops down a cat tower and trots over to Ziggy. The two nuzzle each other and Merle assists Ziggy with his eternal treasure hunt. ■

**'IT'S NOT LIKE A DOG OR CAT — IT HAS SORT OF SPECIFIC PIG BEHAVIORS. IT LIKES ROUTINE; IT'S WAY LAZIER THAN A DOG WOULD BE IN TERMS OF HOW MUCH IT SLEEPS,' JUD TURNER SAYS**

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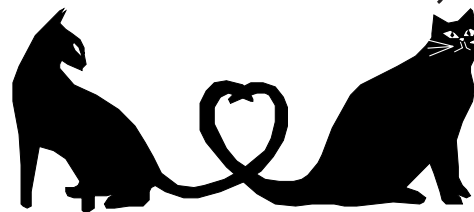


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