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A Pig in Three Parts



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Part I

Life of a Pig



It's hard to tell who is more stubborn: Bill Ellison or one of his pigs.

His pigs, like all pigs, are stubborn by nature; they're squat, 250-pound beasts that refuse to change their trajectory to avoid stepping on each other, whether a 600-pound boar or a two-day-old piglet. Ellison's stubbornness is part of his nature as well; he refuses to adopt the modern mode of pig raising.

Most pig farmers are now termed pork producers. And Iowa is king of pork production. Nearly 18 million pigs, according to the US Department of Agriculture, live on little more than 1,100 square miles. By contrast, the New York City metro area has about 18 million people spread over 6,720 square miles. The pigs are packed — at times more than 10,000 animals — into buildings where they are born, raised and fed. They pigs are so removed from their base behaviors that even sex is unnecessary: they procreate through artificial insemination.

Ellison and business (and life) partner Lois Pavelka give their pigs outdoor runs and grow everything they feed: oats, alfalfa, soybeans and corn. While agriculture has become increasingly populated by farms dedicated to single species, Ellison see himself as a rebel. "I don't think if I gave you 24 hours to put ten guys like me on a bus," he says, "that you could do that."

Fortunately, a man who considers himself one of a kind was able to find his soul mate.

"I was left with this farm without a farmer," Pavelka said of the time six years ago between her husband's death and her partnership with Ellison. Her farming experience was mostly balancing the books. Her husband's death had left Pavelka with a small herd of cattle, 100 freshly planted acres and a decision to make.

She was able to delay making a choice about the farm while Ellison, whom Pavelka had known as a neighbor for decades, and another neighbor tended the cattle and the fields, in addition to their own land.

She decided to start auctioning everything but the land. So away went her husband's new combine, the hay rack, and lot after lot of miscellany. The buildings weren't used and fell into disrepair while Pavelka returned to work as a school nurse in Mount Vernon.

It was then that Ellison told Pavelka that he had fallen in love with her. It was Ellison's influence that brought animals back to this patch of land along the Cedar River.

When he makes his rounds each day, he calls the lambs, the cows, the pigs and the horses with a different call for each. During the ewes' spring birthing, he spends 12 straight hours a day watching over the lambs in the barn. He insists that there is a right way and a wrong way to raise animals. Ellison says he simply loves raising livestock (he relaxes by watching online livestock auctions). And he abhors the modern methodology.

"The hogs in those confinement lots are insane. Literally insane. You can just look at them and tell," he says. "Humans would be too, if they were packed in like those hogs. If you're going to call yourself a farmer, you should farm. Everybody mass produces meat."

Their farm used to be, like the majority of Iowa farms still are, dedicated to corn and soybeans. And while Ellison and Pavelka have brought animals back to their land, they've watched the neighbors give up livestock. It's easier to grow plants than raise animals. The income from renting farmland is more stable than the income from pasturing on it.

His pigs, bred from a mixture of old breeds with thick layers of fat to help weather cold Midwestern winters, roam outdoors. They eat what they can find in the dirt, supplemented by grains and grasses grown in the fields down the hill from their pens. They actually procreate through sexual intercourse.

But unless you buy meat at one of the three eastern Iowa farmers' markets where Pavelka sells pork and lamb out of the trunk of her tan Camry sedan, you've never tasted the farm's harvest.

When Americans think of farms, they probably imagine something similar to Ellison's: sheep herded by dogs, cattle, pigs and horses; pastures and crop fields; a sagging red barn with a slow-running river running nearby.

He dresses the part, too. If overalls and a seed-company hat is the farmer's uniform, Ellison wears the home alternate: short-sleeved button-down shirt, usually open to the third button,

tucked into jeans with patched knees and work boots. His belt holds a leather pouch duct-taped together and filled with pliers, screwdrivers and other miscellaneous tools.

Pavelka, now working on the farm fulltime and retired from nursing, can't hide her need to nurture. There were the four lambs in a makeshift pen against the garage to whom she dutifully bottle-fed expensive lamb formula until they were healthy enough to join the herd. The barn cats aren't required to hunt vermin to live, instead eating a daily ration of Meow Mix. She's usually excited when a new litter of soft, fuzzy and warm piglets is born ("It's the only time they're cute") but this time she wasn't.

So many piglets of the newest litter were stillborn, the farmer had stopped counting the corpses. From the first of the 12 sows to give birth, just four piglets survived. Ellison didn't know what was killing his pigs. Pavelka would click her tongue and shake her head and Ellison, though he wouldn't admit it, was discouraged.

Over the next month, half of the piglets were stillborn and two of the sows died. Others refused to eat and were left emaciated. A vet told Ellison by phone he thought it was porcine respiratory and respiratory syndrome, or PRRS, and that there was little he could do except save what pigs he could.

Farms are as much places of death as they are places of life. And as much as the couple felt sorry for the dead piglets, they still needed to attend to business. Every corpse was damaged merchandise.

Ellison and Pavelka were lucky that pigs weren't their sole source of income. If a farmer only raises pigs, especially if he raises them in close quarters, PRRS threatens his entire operation. Though they had fewer pigs than they had expected, Ellison and Pavelka had other unaffected livestock that they could sell.

Even with threats like this to farms dedicated to single species, since the 1970s, pork production has steadily moved away from family farms. Think of it as the Wal-Mart effect, but instead of local shops being undercut by big discounters, small farms spend more to raise pigs

(because they can't take advantage of economies of scale) but can then only sell that pig for the same price as a scaled-up producer.

So, many of these smaller farms have switched from raising livestock to growing corn and soybeans. (In most cases, these crops ultimately feed the animals housed in so-called central animal feeding operations.) And as Iowa's farmers age, they find it easier to sit in air-conditioned combine cabs than deal with the physical work of moving stubborn pigs around, putting rings into porcine noses so to prevent damage to the pastures, and castrating the young males.

When the youngest generation of pigs were about three months old, Pavelka and Ellison figured it was time to castrate their own pigs. It has to be done before the males are too big to hold but after the sows are no longer standing guard over their babies. (A sow can be extremely protective of her piglets one minute and, in the next, flop down on her side, crushing and killing them.) It might have been the one time when they were glad to have had such small litters.

All 34 remaining piglets were corralled into a writhing mass in one corner of the hog house. In turn, Pavelka would hoist each by its hind leg and the farmers would peer at the struggling animal's nether regions.

"Gilt!" Ellison said, identifying a female, and the pig was released on to the other side of the fence. The next would be lifted, "Can you hold it still? Oh, she's a gilt." They would sort until they found a boar.

While Pavelka grabbed hold of each leg and hung the struggling boar upside down between her legs, Ellison held a scalpel and bottle of iodine. The pig would stop struggling and Ellison would make quick incisions in the soft skin where each leg met the pig's trunk. A squeeze to expose the testicles is followed by a scalpel stroke to castrate.

The pigs seem disturbed only at the moment of castration and, after a spray of iodine, walked away with only their pride injured.

Ellison takes pride in the doing the dirty work and respecting his pigs. “If you’re going to be a farmer,” he says, “be a farmer.” But Ellison has his practical side, too. To prevent the sows from accidentally crushing their offspring, they are kept in cages just big enough for them to stand in until the piglets are weaned. But when combined with his idealism, it means he stops by a couple times each day to let the pigs out and bring them back in.

Pavelka and Ellison can rattle off the reasons to stop farming, to “move to the condo,” as they put it. Now, if they’re efficient with the everyday chores, a four-hour window opens up in the afternoon — for a bigger project; her pension check goes right into the farm and it isn’t close to profitability; hauling animals to slaughterhouse counts as a vacation day.

Even though selling directly to the consumers allows them to make about twice from each pig as it would fetch at auction, hawking four-packs of pork chops is inefficient; a good week at the farmers’ market grosses \$1,500 and the markets are only open six months each year. Last year the farm swallowed up more than \$10,000 in gasoline alone. Add in the costs of seeds, additional fertilizers, broken equipment, and Pavelka and Ellison are lucky to break even.

And because they grow their own grains and grasses — soybeans, corn, alfalfa and oats — for feed, the pair have the troubles of both cultivation and husbandry to deal with.

Pavelka and Ellison laugh and brush off the question about why they continue to do it. But on a day when the sun was warm and the wind blew across the grass Ellison offered what may have been his most direct response.

He smiled as 22 cows and their two-week-old calves trotted past to a section of pasture he’d just opened up, with knee-high grass, woods and a stream. He looked contented and at peace as he smiled.

“What else are we going to do?” Ellison asked. “Sit around and wait to die?”

Part II

Death of a Pig



The first time I met Doug Havel, he was standing in a pool of blood. Lying on its right side on the floor next to him was the pig. Despite the .22-caliber bullet lodged in the pig's cranium and its severed, still-gushing jugular, its hind legs twitched.

I was here as a meat eater. A meat eater who knew little more about the meat I ate than its price per pound and the color of its Styrofoam tray. A meat eater who needed to slaughter a pig to appreciate where my bacon had come from and what the animal had suffered for me to enjoy it.

My odyssey backward from pork to pig had started with a plan to make sausage and a subsequent trip to my supermarket's meat counter. There I had asked the department's night manager for a five-pound hunk of pork shoulder butt. The request received a blank stare. He wasn't sure what I was talking about. He called his boss, who wasn't any more helpful.

Since there are nearly 18 million pigs in Iowa, producer of about 30 percent of the nation's pork supply and twice that of the second-ranked state, I was surprised that neither man knew much about the animals whose flesh he was selling. Meat arrives at most stores in boxes, broken at least into primals, the next smallest cuts after entire sides, and shrink-wrapped.

While it has become trendy for chefs to have a hand in slaughtering animals with TV cameras pointed at them and for some consumers to seek out only locally raised and slaughtered meat, most of the 3,000 or so slaughterhouses in the United States are disassembly lines: operations that have broken butchery into a series of simple tasks that low-wage laborers continuously repeat. The largest mechanized slaughterhouses can process some 20,000 animals every day.

By contrast Havel's ten-employee slaughterhouse is one of a decreasing number where a single butcher turns living tissue into meat. He personally butchers animals every weekday and has for more than two decades.

He is a butcher, not a meat cutter, a distinction meat workers make between those who actually kill and those who only work with the meat. Havel was someone who could show me how to kill a pig myself.

Havel slaughtered his first pig when he was 22. It was his father's pet pig. Its name was Fred.

"After we shot it," Havel says in the dry humor his job demands, "it was Dead Fred."

Three decades later, his experience, most in this shop, built by his father in 1984, allows him to make butchering look easy. Then I watched him slaughter eight pigs that day. He had started slaughtering at six that morning.

Killing Fred didn't bother Havel then as killing animals doesn't bother him now. Except, just a little, the lambs. Alone in the slaughtering room, they bleat.

"It's like they're crying."

Despite Havel's admission, he showed no sign of weakness or hesitation in the slaughter room. He turned animals into meat the way I might turn flour into bread. And I felt the need to adopt a certain machismo while I was near this man. (At another small abattoir, the butcher offered me a freshly steamed brat to eat while I watched him carve up four pigs. Even though I wasn't hungry, I ate the grey, intestine-wrapped meat.)

From his two years as a utility man on a kill line of a now-closed Rath Packing plant, from his father, and from his own trial and error, Havel learned to slaughter. Now he slaughters 25 hogs and 15 cattle — he always calls them beef to distinguish them from dairy cows — every week.

Havel supplies meat to the area's natural-foods grocers, many restaurants and the new Riverside Casino and Golf Resort a mile down the road. His modest success forces Havel to buy and process boxed and shrink-wrapped meat from the major processors. His customers want chops from the pig's back, not cuts of the shoulders or legs. Havel can't keep killing pigs just for pork chops.

The messy part of Havel's work takes place in a 15-foot-square room that smells of barnyard-animal excrement inside a white cinder-block building in Riverside, Iowa, a town of less than 1,000 best known as the future birthplace of *Star Trek's* Capt. James T. Kirk.

A sign, “Try our famous beef jerky,” covers the building’s east side and is large enough to be read from the highway that passes nearby (he sells about 700 pounds of beef jerky every week in addition to sticks of dried elk meat). Across the street from Bud’s Custom Meats, named for his father, is, in an ironic twist, a cow pasture and St. Francis’ Veterinary Clinic.

Havel is a lean-muscled man with short hair and round, gold-rimmed glasses on his slender, pointed nose. He wears a white, short-sleeved button-down shirt, with his name embroidered on the right breast, tucked into white pants.

When he slaughters, Havel adds a faded-blue rubber apron that covers him from chest to ankle, and tucks his pants into knee-high, olive-green, rubber boots. Even though he uses equipment that’s sole purpose is to rip through flesh and bone, this is the extent of his protective gear; unlike laborers in large processing plants, where speed often trumps precision, he wears no chainmail gloves or torso armor.

The 45-year-old Havel doesn’t enjoy this part of his job; it’s physically exhausting and dirty. “An apron,” he says, “only covers so much.”

The deaths are part of a simple routine. Ushering in a 700-pound sow from a sheltered holding pen in the next room with a few slaps on her rear, Havel shuts her in a 4-by-10-foot pen in the slaughter room.

The sow had been raised by Havel’s brother about 15 miles south of the shop on the family farm. Pigs are optimally slaughtered when they are six months old and weigh around 250 pounds. This sow’s breeding career was finished and, though age has toughened her meat, she now has no value to her owner outside of the meat market.

I watched as Havel lifted the .22-caliber rifle from the rack that runs along the east wall above an assortment of meat hooks and walks towards her head. With a quiet, almost whispered, “pss-pss-pss,” Havel coaxed the animal’s eyes — and more importantly, forehead — towards him, he aimed and pulled the trigger.

A .22 round has enough power to penetrate the skull of the pigs, sheep, cattle, and farm-raised elk Havel slaughters, but not to exit. Instead, it rattles around inside, cutting the brain into ribbons.

The sound following the rifle's hiss is like a heavy playground ball slapping wet cement. The animal just drops to the floor.

It doesn't always happen this way. Occasionally the victim will move just as Havel pulls the trigger or the animal's skull is too thick for the bullet to puncture. Sometimes a second, third or fourth shot is necessary.

But this time, a well-placed bullet, right into the center of the pig's brain, sent the beast reeling. Her eyes rolled back into her head, her expression reminding me of Jim Carrey reacting to a swift kick to the balls, and blood started to trickle out of her nostrils. There was no squealing or screaming, but she did convulse, kicking the metal wall, scratched and dented from the thousands of others that had preceded her. Havel replaced the rifle in the rack and picked up a curved 7-inch knife and cut open the sow's jugular, releasing a gush of bright red blood.

It had been just six seconds since he pulled the trigger.

The sooner the animal's major bloodway is opened, the better. The heart continues to beat for several minutes, pushing blood from the body. If the pig isn't completely drained, bloodspots will form in the meat. Sometimes the beast's back leg muscles will be so tensed that the blood vessels will pop as if suffering a coronary. After two and a half minutes, the sow's muscles relax and she ceases to move.

Havel wrapped a chain around the sow's back legs, attached her to a winch and hoisted her until her head was suspended two feet above the ground. He slid a stretcher-like rack under her and lowered her until her back rests on it. Havel took his knife to an orange-handled honing steel, held the sow's head back and cut out the tongue and put it in a bucket of water for later. He grabbed the sow's right ear and cut off her head. He tossed it into a 50-gallon gray bucket marked "inedible."

Feet quickly followed the head into the bucket, each limb being partially cut and then snapped off with the crunch of bone, cartilage and ligaments.

These gut- and blood-filled tubs will be collected by a meat by-products company in top-loading trucks that resemble enormous garbage trucks. The company converts this offal into pet food, livestock feed and rendered fat.

Without head or feet, the pig no longer looked like a pig. But as one large unskinned carcass, it didn't look like pork, either. Over the next 20 minutes, Havel shaped the pig into something again recognizable, this time as food.

Havel ran a knife along the pig's chest and, using a wide-bladed skinning knife, separated the pale pink hide from the creamy white lard. He's particularly careful when he reaches the belly. While fat is trimmed off of most pork cuts, the belly is the source of bacon and a gouge here would lead to strip after strip of unsightly meat.

With the entire belly bare, Hovel used a saw that looks like an enlarged electric meat knife, to tear through the front of the ribcage and the back of the pelvis. The steaming guts and the rest of the skin are removed and the carcass is hung by its shanks and sawed in half down the backbone with an even larger saw.

And then it was done. What began as a nearly 700-pound animal was now two steaming 220-pound halves of pork. But even after Havel had shot, stuck, skinned and split the sow, her muscles continued to twitch.

At first, I thought the movement was an illusion, a combination of the light, water dripping down the hosed-off carcass and my own adrenaline. As I leaned in closer, I realized it was not. The twitching continued for about half an hour.

After the meat has cooled, Havel or one of his employees will cut the carcass into primal cuts before breaking it down further into bacons and hams, chops and ribs.

And while Havel really enjoys that part of his job, he would like to stop slaughtering at his shop altogether.

Part of the problem is that he has a hard time finding someone else to do this dirty work.

These small slaughterhouses are often family operations, invariably sold from father to son. When Havel retires in two decades, his shop, like so many others, will probably close. His 20-year-old daughter, a student at Coe College 50 miles from the slaughterhouse, has no taste for the family trade.

And with the number of grocery stores that work even with primal cuts decreasing, he knows that the pool of potential employees and buyers is small. Only two of his current employees, one 28 years old and the other 73, have extensive meat experience; both came to the shop after the small plant they worked at ten miles away closed. Neither has an interest in slaughtering and Havel scoffs at the idea that just anyone could pick up the trade.

“It will take six months before they’re a butcher,” he said. “It’ll take them three months just to learn how to sharpen a knife.”

I didn’t wipe off the pig’s blood that sprayed onto my gray sneakers or the single spot on my right forearm. As I drove home, I felt like animal shit and barnyard grime coated my body and adhered to my nose hairs. No matter how many times or how hard I scrubbed, I sensed the scent of the slaughter surrounding me the rest of that day.

We’ve distanced ourselves for good reason. Yuri, the six-foot-two, wide-shouldered Russian wearing a white apron covered with maroon dried blood, was so disturbed by the witness of his first slaughter that he couldn’t understand why anyone would do it voluntarily.

“The first time I saw it, I couldn’t sleep. I saw blood in my dreams,” said the 28-year-old who wouldn’t give his last name because he was afraid future employers wouldn’t hire him if they knew how he’d paid his way through college. “And I didn’t kill it. I just saw it.”

I began to have second thoughts about killing my own pig. I’m neither a shooter nor killer. My only experience firing a gun was target practice with a bold-action .22-caliber rifle at summer camp as a 12-year-old. My only experience killing was shooting a sparrow with my younger

brother's BB gun while the bird sat in a poplar tree in my parent's backyard. I was relieved when the family cat pounced on the flailing feathers.

Then came the day I woke up at 5:35 a.m. to kill a pig.

My night's sleep had been short and I still felt exhausted when I awoke. How the pig slept, outside the abattoir, delivered for this fate a day and a half before, I don't know. Frightened? Cold? Lonely?

I called Havel, the butcher, to confirm that we were still on for the slaughter. Yes, he said somewhat to my dismay and somewhat to my relief. Can you be here by 7:30?

The gray light of the rising sun through the clouds seemed appropriately ominous. So did the derailed freight train engine near the interchange onto highway that would take me to the slaughterhouse.

My muscles tightened and my heart rate rose when I turned off the highway and saw the white brick building. The drive was shorter than I remembered.

Inside it was a swirl of activity as the butcher's ten employees broke down an entire side of beef; slashing, slicing, sawing. None acknowledged me as I stood by the cases of meat in the front, waiting while the another hog was finished in the slaughter room.

When it was my turn, I was waved back. Then Havel, in his olive-green boots and faded-purple apron, sauntered in. He handed me .22-caliber.

"It's on safety."

The bullet had to pierce the pig's thick skull to stun it. The shot's angle and position are everything. If you drew an X from each ear to the opposite eye, I was aiming for the small depression that lay in the middle.

Even at point-blank, getting in position to shoot a pig is a dance with an unwilling partner. I had the added trouble of working up the nerve to pull the trigger. You have to shoot the pig with it looking you in the eye.

Each time the pig looked at me, every time I had a shot, I was slow to act and the pig would look away.

"I know, I know," I said, answering the pig's imagined protests. "This is going to be hard on both of us."

Admittedly, it would be harder on him.

I clicked my tongue to entice the pig to turn his gaze toward me. He obliged. I aimed. Deep breath. Safety off. I pulled the trigger.

Nothing.

Havel took the gun and ejected the misfired round and handed rifle back.

"It's on safety."

Again the dance. The pig turned around in his pen. I clicked my tongue. Havel reached in to push the pig back around to face me. He squealed in protest. Havel sprayed water on the ground and the pig turned, put his head down and drank. Aim. Safety off. Trigger.

Nothing.

Havel took the gun. I laughed at the ridiculousness of having worked up the nerve twice, and having failed twice. Havel cleared the misfire then opened the backdoor, aimed toward an open snow-covered farm field and fired. He closed the door and handed the gun back.

"It's on safety."

The pig seemed undisturbed by any of this. He just stood there. He looked at me. Aim, safety off, trigger.

Bang.

The pig's face went brain-dead blank and he fell to the ground. Havel reached in and cut its throat. The pig thrashed, kicking the wall and gushing crimson. Its movements eventually slowed and its life was over.

Suspecting that I would, well, butcher the butchering, Havel skinned, eviscerated and split the hog.

I was disappointed that I didn't feel a profound sadness or emptiness. But the disappointment was overwhelmed by a feeling of pride and accomplishment. It was an act necessary for the eating of meat but a part that I usually give little thought to while I am eating.

Maybe I'm heartless — a monster — for not feeling sadness. But this pig was destined from the day he was born to die so someone could eat him. By participating in his death and dismemberment, I was no longer in denial. The pig's blood was on my hands.

Part III

Rebirth of a Pig



Herb Eckhouse's prosciutto is so good that when Robert Parker, the celebrated wine critic, tasted it, he called it "stunning" and ordered a \$3,000-pig's worth of cured pork.

So it's hard to believe that Eckhouse is a former seed-company executive with a Harvard MBA who, just five years ago, had not cured a single pig's leg.

"Prosciutto making is magical, it's mystical, it's alchemy," he says, "but people have done this for thousands of years. It's not that difficult. It's a robust process."

The curing of a typical American ham can be appetite draining; the meat is injected with saltwater and the meat inflates like a tire being filled with air.

Contrast that with the well-regarded dry-cured hams of Parma, Italy, and the south of Spain. There, the hind legs of pigs are rubbed with salt and pretty much left alone to dehydrate for months. The art is in the variables: temperature, humidity, length of aging.

These are the techniques that Herb and Kathy Eckhouse are employing at their plant in Norwalk, Iowa. The irony is that their company, La Quercia, is, well, preserving the traditional approach by employing air jets, fans, heater, humidifiers and dehumidifiers.

And their results, dubbed prosciutto Americano, are rivaling *prosciutto di Parma* and Spanish *jamón ibérico*. The products of the couple's three-year-old plant have drawn praise from the likes of Mario Batali and Alice Waters.

Cured pork first enticed Eckhouse decades ago. Kathy's parents would take the couple to Pig by the Tail, a shop just down the street from Waters' restaurant, Chez Panisse, in Berkeley, Calif. A poster from the shop still hangs next to Herb's desk at the plant.

Eckhouse's experiments began in February 2003 when he salted four hams, put them in a silver two-door refrigerator in his garage for six months and then hung them in his finished basement for another three. Eckhouse had moved the white acoustic ceiling tiles so he could hang the meat from hooks in the wooden floor joists.

He checked the drying pig legs almost daily. Taking the room's temperature. Adjusting fans. Opening and closing the air vent in the ceiling. Checking each ham for mold. Letting in fresh air through a window. After one ham had been gnawed by mice, he put paper plates on the strings holding the meat to block the vermins' decent. He kept his records in an Excel spreadsheet.

First thing one morning, during the summer three years ago, Eckhouse went down to check his second batch of hanging meats. For whatever reason, he didn't turn the light on as he began his daily machinations. The cool, moist air came in with the sunlight through the basement window well. And then, as he moved within a foot of one ham, he saw the undulating white mass.

When he realized it was his precious ham crawling with maggots, Eckhouse screamed.

He bolted upstairs, implored his wife Kathy and their three children not to go into the basement and, eventually, settled his nerves. Then he returned to the cellar, found and repaired a hole in the window screen, cut out the infested meat and left the remaining ham to hang another three months.

"That's when Kathy decided we were truly nuts," Eckhouse said.

He did not feed this prosciutto to Alice Waters, who tried a successive test batch, but did feed it to his son and maybe to his wife.

"I don't know that I *knowingly* ate any," said Kathy.

It was another lesson for Eckhouse, who had begun his learning process in Parma, Italy, two decades earlier when he took charge of Pioneer Hybrid's Italian operation. It was during his three and a half years there that he first tasted that city's world-class prosciutto.

It also changed the way the family ate. They found the food both delicious and incredibly simple and straightforward. The Eckhouses learned that complex recipes weren't necessary as long as the ingredients were good.

"You don't want to be elaborate in your production," he said he learned, "but elaborate in your procurement."

Back in Iowa, Eckhouse took early retirement from Pioneer and, in January 2001, began importing the cured meats from Europe with the hope of learning the nuances of the American high-end meat market and producing his own. Importing gave Eckhouse access to Italian prosciutto plants. He was, after all, a collaborator rather than a possible American-market competitor.

He also enrolled in a meat science course at Iowa State University. It just so happened that Paul Bertoli, the former chef at Chez Panisse, was attending the same class. Bertoli, revered in his own right for his ability to cure pork, was setting up a shop in Berkeley to make handcrafted sausages and other *salumi*.

The two men stood out from the rest of the group. Bertoli and Eckhouse were planning companies that returned to traditional charcuterie techniques. Their classmates were mostly employees of large meat processors learning what could be done to make pepperoni more quickly on an assembly line.

After regular trips to Italy, 14 home-cured experimental hams and thumbs up from members of the American culinary brain trust, the Eckhouses broke ground on their prosciutto plant four summers ago. The plant was built and ready to operate after nine months.

It also takes nine months for one of Eckhouse's hams to be ready for market. And if you follow the path of one of those hams through the plant — but in just 15 minutes — the experience is like moving through the seasons in rapid succession. First is the cool, wintery environment where the fresh meat goes after it arrives and is boned, salted and laid on racks every Friday. As the pieces lose moisture, they are hung by the shank end and slowly cycled through a series of coolers, each slightly warmer than the last as if coming on the winter thaw.

Then comes spring, where the pieces are covered with *sugna*, a mixture of lard, flour and spices. While most of the meat is still wrapped in flesh, coating the exposed meat slows moisture loss and seals out mold.

Finally the hams hang in the summer zone, a vast room that contains thousands of hams and where the air is balmy, smelling subtly musty and earthy. By the time the process has finished, the meat has lost about half its weight.

This long maturation made it a difficult transition from curing half a dozen hams every six months to 500 every week. The length of the curing cycle meant that La Quercia would process about 19,500 more hams before the quality of the first could be assessed.

The Eckhouses' success with a small variety of cured meats has allowed them to experiment with other cuts such as dry sausages and bone-in hams. These experiments hang throughout the plant in different stages of production. But Eckhouse doesn't want to expand the company's offerings wildly.

"We're only going to do things we like to eat," Eckhouse said. "That's one of our rules."

Eckhouse loves his work. It helps that the national press has fawned over his meat. And with national distribution through retailers such as Whole Foods and Williams-Sonoma, where the meats fetch around \$25 per pound, selling tons of meat isn't the problem he was afraid it would be.

Eckhouse's biggest problem has become sourcing his pork. With Iowa's hog population at more than 17 million, Eckhouse thought finding the ideal pigs — "buff and fatty," as Kathy puts it — would be the easy part. But La Quercia is relatively small scale, perhaps an eighth of the size of an Italian plant, and cannot dictate the market like its Italian brethren can. And the market for the kind of pork Eckhouse needs is still considered niche.

So the couple took on another experiment and contracted with Jude Becker. The hog farmer, in Dyersville, Iowa, three hours from the plant, raised four dozen organic, acorn-finished, free-range Berkshire pigs. The pigs are believed to be the first ever acorn-finished hogs raised in the United States.

The meat is being sold as a pork-of-the-month club of sorts. Customers, among them Robert Parker, chefs Mario Batali and Charlie Trotter, each plunked down \$3,000 for a pig's worth of

meat. After slaughter, customers received the meat best eaten fresh, such as the chops and caul fat. The remainder of each carcass is being doled out as it finishes curing. The exercise is forcing the Eckhouses to learn how to cure pieces of meat that are often discarded, Italian-style meats such as guanciale, or bacon from the jowls, and lardo, or curded back fat.

Even though La Quercia borrows heavily from Italian tradition, the Eckhouses are steadfastly Iowan. They see the business as their small effort to prevent more Midwestern land from being converted to corn for ethanol.

Their success hasn't changed their approach.

"This is still exciting to me. I'm still tuned in," Eckhouse said. "My reaction is still 'Oh my God, are we gonna get all these things sold?' But I don't worry as much as I used to."

When Michelin-starred chef and restaurateur Daniel Boulud added their prosciutto to the menu of one of his Manhattan spots, it didn't hurt their sales either. And its listing on the menu is apt; between *Jambons De Paris* and *D'Espanagne*, is La Quercia's. Boulud lists the company's meat as *Jambon D'Iowa*.

Part IV

Multimedia



These pieces of multimedia are available on the project's Web site at deathofapig.com/multimedia

“Life of a pig”

A 21-picture, captioned photo gallery depicting the life of a pig on Bill Ellison and Lois Pavelka's farm from birth to departure for slaughter.

“Learning to kill”

An 8-minute and 50-second video of me trying to shoot a pig under the watchful — and irritated — eye of Doug Havel.

“The butcher's craft”

A 4-minute and 28-second video of butcher Doug Havel explaining how to breakdown a pig.

“How to make bacon”

A six-step Flash guide to making bacon at home.

“How to make *guaciale*”

A five-step Flash guide to making jowl bacon at home

“How to make *lardo* and dry-cured pork belly”

A six-step Flash-guide to making dry-cured pork belly and back fat at home.

Part V

Photo Essay





Bill Ellison, 63, fills the pregnant sows' water and hoses them down. The sows pull themselves out of the mud and push each other out of the way to get under the stream. Unable to sweat, pigs rely on evaporation and insulating fat to help regulate body temperature.



The pig's home for her first six months is this farrowing house surrounded by a makeshift fence and pasture for grazing. Omnivorous by nature, pigs will eat practically anything: grass, corn, soybeans, dairy products and even each other.



A pregnant sow wanders out of the farrowing house at the sound of food. When the sows near the end of gestation, a period of three months, three weeks and three days according to tradition, Ellison moves the sows into the enclosed area where the piglets can have more protection from the elements and larger pigs that might step on and kill them.



The week-old piglet plays in the mud near its mother.



On the farm's northern acres, the flats near the Cedar River, Ellison plants crops and occasional grazes his livestock. He grows all of his own alfalfa, soy beans, oats and corn for feed and straw for bedding.





The piglets play, newly freed from the watchful eyes of their mothers. To the right are farrowing crates, cages used to prevent sows from lying on and crushing their young. Mothering ability is passed on genetically and the increased use of the crates has reduced the need for breeders to select for the trait.



Ellison's business (and life) partner Lois Pavelka, 69, holds a three-month-old pig so Ellison can castrate him using a scalpel. Following removal of the testicles, the area is sprayed with iodine. Uncastrated males produce meat that has an off-flavor, called boar taint, said to be reminiscent of soap. The taint is from the presence of testosterone and other hormones. Besides tasting better, castrated males, or barrows, are calmer and easier to handle.



Using old equipments means not having to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars buying new but it also means spending a lot of time replacing broken belts and jury-rigging parts.



Bales of straw and alfalfa hay are stacked where ever there is room, such as on an old hayrack and in a rusted horse trailer, during the summer. The farm is self-sufficient and for the past several years, Ellison has been able to sell remaining products in the spring when his new crop of hay comes in.



After the piglets are weaned at about three months, the sows are moved to the farm's northern pastures. The dozen sows and a single boar spend most of each day sleeping in the shade of this barn.





Hogs love to dig and, left to their own devices, can tear up entire pastures with their calloused snouts. Nose rings, like the ones this sow sports, allow some rooting but make deep digging uncomfortable. Getting the piercing isn't fun either; Bill Ellison and his son had to wear ear muffs when they put these rings in.



\$1,500 in sales is a good week at the farmers markets for Pavelka and Ellison, but that income only comes from May through October. Seed, gasoline and fertilizer can quickly eat up revenue. So they keep costs low cost by using old equipment. Ellison is an avid auction-goer who loves to brag about his latest bargain. He still uses a John Deere combine from the 1980s, seen here in the machine shed, despite the frustration caused by its constant need for repair.



Hay bales lined up, ready for winter feeding.



The six-month-old pig trots out of her shelter, seemingly oblivious to the brisk wind and bone-chilling cold. Fresh straw bedding and a thick layer of back fat allow the pig to make it through cold Midwestern winters without heated shelter. Because most commercial pigs are from lean breeds and finished on feed mixed with a drug called Paylean, which encourages their bodies to produce lean muscle instead of fat, they require heating in the winter and cooling in the summer.



Six-month-old pigs poke their noses out, trying to sniff a visitor. Pigs are smart (believed to be below only apes and whales in intelligence) and naturally curious. While a sheep or cow will try to keep space between a stranger and itself, pigs have an intense interest in new things.



Ellison separates the pig from the rest of the herd for transport to slaughter. He selects which pigs he thinks are ready the way another might select a lobster from a tank. At nine months, the pig is nearing 250 pounds and ready to be slaughtered for meat.



Ellison moves the pig from her outdoor pen in a wire-sided crate attached to a skid-loader to put her into the horse trailer he uses to transport animals to slaughterhouse. She'll spend the night in the bedded trailer with two other hogs before an hour-and-a-half-drive to meet her fate in the morning.

Part VI

Reflective Essay



I didn't come to this program expecting to fall in love with new media, convergence journalism or nonlinear storytelling. On my first day, I had no interest in using technology for anything more than word processing. I wanted to write for an alternative weekly. My goals were to become better at writing and reporting and to leave with strong enough journalism credentials to be employable.

When I compare the first story I wrote for Journalistic Reporting and Writing, which I took before I had even applied to this school, with my master's project, I know I have accomplished my first goal. Whether anyone is foolish enough to employ me is yet to be seen.

It helps that I'll be entering the job market with some of today's essential journalism technical knowhow. I came to the program with a higher-than-average comfort level with technology and experience as freelance video producer. However, I focused on new media mostly by accident; the only reason I took Web Journalism Basics my first semester was because I figured it was silly to leave school without knowing HTML, not because I thought it might be the entire basis of my career in journalism.

I have taken or taught every technology-intensive workshop the School of Journalism has offered. This puts me in a unique position to assess the school's readiness to train journalists for the technologically reliant future.

The technology that is available to the school is impressive: 18 new high-end Macs, four labs with enough computers to accommodate entire classes, eight sound-proof booths perfect for audio or video production and a variety of professional grade video and audio equipment and a demonstrated willingness to buy more. It was a boon to this project to have these facilities and equipment available.

I applaud the faculty's willingness to require all incoming undergraduate journalism majors to take a class in multimedia. Though students will only be required to take these 10 hours working with multimedia, it's a step in the right direction. So is requiring professional master's students to produce, as part of the master's media project, a second story in a medium other than text.

All too often I have encountered, as a student and an instructor, students who are woefully unprepared to work in the brave new journalism world they will be entering. It's not just that new media jobs pay better, they are more secure than traditional ones.

I was in the master's professional program for an entire semester before someone pointed out to me that new media could be more than repurposed newspaper stories slapped onto the World Wide Web. I fear that the online component of my project too closely resembles this all-too-common paradigm and doesn't take full advantage of the nonlinear environment.

But writing and reporting is what this school has taught me. The School of Journalism and Mass Communication is print heavy and teaches important pieces of the craft. I've enjoyed and learned much debating whether "meat" was a better word choice than "muscle" and if data can be kept in a spreadsheet as well as on one. I've learned how to report, tell a story and develop an idea from professors with traditional media backgrounds just as much as I have from those who are fully invested in technology.

But my interests now lie in multimedia and I've had means precious few opportunities to pull all of the elements together. When I go hunting for jobs, knowing the principles of multimedia is important, but it won't be enough; the job market requires new hires to know how to produce multimedia.

For my project I wanted to produce Flash. I had originally envisioned building the entire Web site in Flash or, at a minimum, interactive graphics. This added dimension would have added improved my project and been impressive on my resume. But this school has no one well-versed in that technology so creating the three Flash pieces in this project was a small struggle. When the program didn't behave as I expected, it became an exercise in searching Google, wading through help files and trial and error.

While I would have loved to take an entire semester on Flash, I recognize the issues with offering such a class. It's an advance technology that few students are interested in or qualified to take. And unless the school implements a track system, this would likely be an impossibility for the future.

An absence of tracks gave me the ability to pursue a wide array of interests. For example, editing wasn't of any interest to me until I took Don McLeese's editing course hoping I might become a better proofreader of my own work.

The lack of tracks also left me taking classes with students who restricted the level of discussion. I was often the only master's student in many of my online classes. In these classes we would cover well-treaded territory before exploring these concepts, which I found new and exciting, in greater depth. This master's project was the first opportunity I had to build a multimedia news package of any complexity.

Looking back on my experience, I believe there are several goals that the school should have: exposing students to the actual production of multimedia, allowing interested student to explore multimedia in a greater depth and preparing students for the new media workforce. If the school were to make a conscious effort to integrate some technology and new media elements into every workshop — from what would be a fairly natural fit with Television News to what would be somewhat shoehorned in Narrative Journalism — it would give students the skills for future success.

Had these new media elements been a larger part of my earlier classes, I might have had a stronger sense of the overarching plan for this package earlier. But because I kept learning about the developing field of multimedia packaging as I went, my plans continually shifted. Remember that my original proposal called for little more than text plunked into HTML documents with some video sidebars. But I also wish I had kept ahead of the project, as much of it felt like it was came down to the end.

My project has convinced me that one-man-band multimedia journalism will not survive; it will kill anyone who has tries to do it for any length of time. Producing an entire multimedia package on my own forced me to work outside of my comfort zone and, honestly, skill level. A perusal of the slide show is proof that photography is not my strong suit.

But having tried these various mediums, I hope that I am better at envisioning how a person more adept at wielding the tools might use them to tell amazing stories suited to that medium.

Unless and until the journalism school pushes new media onto its students through its required curriculum, it will under serve its students. As it stands now, it is far too easy to avoid learning the skills necessary in the new world of journalism.

If this essay has left a bitter taste or convinced you that I feel my two years at the school have been wasted, that was not my intent. Let me be clear: I have never been more optimistic about journalism as my calling nor about own my future. Nor the excellence of the journalism school.

My optimism is because of the talented teachers with whom I have the pleasure of learning from and working with. Teachers like Don McLeese, with whom I had the type of editor-writer relationship that I hope to have with others throughout my career. He helped me shape the text of this project to say what I wanted it to say. He taught me that when editing to have patience and to always begin with whatever miniscule good there might be before listing a piece's myriad sins. Without him I would never have considered editing as a career option or understood the difference between who and whom.

I also owe a debt to Steve Bloom, who was the first person to ever deconstruct the writing process for me in a way I understood. Much of the text in this project came from pieces or ideas originally intended for one of his classes. Bloom's many axioms, impressed upon me during three writing courses, will always color the way I think about and talk about writing.

I learned most of what I know about new media from David Domingo, and I learned just as much teaching with him as I did as his student. He was the first to point out to me what online journalism could do if it was allowed to be its own beast instead of being tied to a newspaper or television station. I fear that he will be disappointed that this project is so print-like.

Every single instructor I've had at this school has helped me get better at asking and answering the most important question in journalism: What's the story, stupid?

Part VII

Literature Review



Books

Bourdain, A. (2001). *A Cook's Tour: In Search of the Perfect Meal*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Sure Anthony Bourdain is an annoying television personality, a man who has chosen shtick over creativity. But there was a time when he used his popularity for good, such as when he was writing books like this. The opening chapter, about a traditional pig butchering party in Portugal, is a powerful and humorous blow-by-blow depiction. I borrowed his blow-by-blow framework for my own pig slaughter piece, though mine isn't as funny.

Bertolli, P. (2003). *Cooking by Hand*. New York : Clarkson Potter.

Paul Bertolli's book is part cookbook, part food memoir. In one chapter, he fondly recounts the cured meats his grandfather would give his family for Christmas before explaining how to use virtually everything from a single pig. The author is also a very minor character in my own piece on cured meats and reading his thoughts on food helped me prepare for interviews with Herb and Kathy Eckhouse.

Bloom, S. (2002). *Inside the Writer's Mind: Writing Narrative Journalism*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Press.

If every required textbook was written like this I'd keep up on my reading. The introduction will be familiar to any of author's former students. (I hear his voice reading to me instead of my natural monologue.) But reading entire stories and then the writer's critique and reasoning has been enlightening as I try to figure out how to write the things I want to.

Faux, M. (1977). *Drying, Curing, and Smoking Food*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap.

There are a lot of books on this list about curing meats. They are easier to find than books on raising and slaughtering animals, probably because there is a market for reading about that stage of meat and less so the earlier ones.

Fink, D. (1998). *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Large meatpackers such as IBP are incredibly secretive about their operations. When Iowa State University anthropologist Deborah Fink wanted to write about meatpacking workers, she had to go undercover. Her story of working at a large pork-processing plant was a source for the larger context in which I put Doug Havel.

Fisher, M.F.K. (1941). "Consider the Oyster." In M.F.K. Fisher, *The Art of Eating* (pp. 123-184). New York: Macmillan.

When I originally conceived this project, it was my hope to write a profile that would humanize a pig. This was the second piece that I attempted to cop from. Fisher has the chops to pull off a piece that follows a single mollusk's life. I do not. My attempts felt artificial while hers feels natural. The rest of the book serves to reinforce Fisher's skills as a writer.

Grigson, J. (1967). *Charcuterie and French Pork Cookery*. London: Michael Joseph.

I have an admission: all of these books about curing meat have blended in my mind somewhat since I read them.

Horwitz, R. P. (1998). *Hog Ties: Pigs, Manure, and Mortality in American culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Richard Horwitz, a former University of Iowa professor of American studies, is another pig-obsessed man. In this book he explores the cultural associations of pigs. He was more interested in the current mode of pork production than I was: he worked at a confinement hog farm for his book.

Kaminsky, P. (2005). *The Perfect Pig: Encounters with Remarkable Swine and Some Great Ways to Cook Them*. New York: Hyperion.

In Peter Kaminsky's ode to the pig, he travels the world seeking the greatest ham. For him, this also means seeking the greatest pigs. He is able to fawn over pigs and pork in a way that inspired me.

Kerrane, K. & Tagoda, B. (Eds.) (1997). *The Art of Fact*. New York: Touchstone.

This was my first journalism textbook. It's full of examples of how good writers can vary their writing style and voice and still fall under the heading of nonfiction. Standout pieces that influenced my own writing are an excerpt from David Simon's *Homicide*, Ernest Hemingway's "Japanese Earthquake" and Joan Didion's "Los Angeles Notebook."

Keller, T. (1999). *The French Laundry Cookbook*. New York: Artisan.

The recipes are too involved and require ingredients too rare for me to use this as a cookbook. But the vignettes about important moments in the life and career of the highly regarded chef are pieces I return to time and again. In "The Importance of Rabbits," Keller tells of his own misadventure slaughtering rabbits for the first time and how it changed the way he thinks about meat. That essay changed the way I thought about meat when I first read it. (The photography is gorgeous and can only be called food porn.)

Kinsella, J., & Harvey, D. T. (1996). *Professional Charcutier: Sausage Making, Curing, Terrines and Pates*. New York: Wiley & Sons.

How many books about the joys of pork can I fit on this list? Lots. Figuring out how to cure pork isn't easy.

Kingsolver, B. (2007). *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*. New York: Harper Collins.

Like *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Kingsolver's book falls into the can-you-believe-how-we-eat-nowadays? category. It's a topic that I have tried to write about several times in different ways — including my master's project — with varying degrees of success. Kingsolver's personal tale about growing and raising everything her family eats for a year is akin to my own back-to-the-pig (as Don McLeese has called it) tale. Bill Ellison and Lois Pavelka started reading this book at about the same time I did. I was never able to get out of them what they thought of it. Lois would just complain that, though she had checked it out, Bill was the one who read it at night.

Kummer, C. (2002). *The Pleasures of Slow Food: Celebrating Authentic Traditions, Flavors and Recipes*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

The Atlantic's food critic was writing about the Slow Food Movement, an effort to preserve traditional foods and methods from around the world, before it was trendy. In this book, Kummer offers the background stories of people involved in the movement in addition to recipes for authentic cuisine. The movement and this book, one of the earliest to come out of that movement, were part of my inspiration to write about people directly involved in the production of food.

Kutas, R. (1984). *Great sausage recipes and meat curing*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Sausage Maker.

Another book about curing meat. This guy laughs in the face of those who say nitrates and fat will lead to one's demise. In other words, my kind of guy. The author is, of course, dead.

Meyer, E. (2004). *CSS Pocket Reference*. Cambridge: O'Reilly.

This is an essential technical reference for the styling of Web pages using cascading style sheets. Since I hand code most of my Web documents, I find such texts necessary but this one covers me in most situations. And, yes, it does fit in a pocket.

McGee, H. (1984). *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*. New York: Fireside.

Harold McGee is my favorite technical science writer. While he deals almost exclusively with food and drink, he writes about the underlying science in a way that is both clear and interesting, no easy feat when he's dealing with proteins and sugars on a molecular level. This work gave me a background understanding of how meat curing works.

Orlean, S. (2000). "Show Dog." In D. Remnick (Ed.), *Life Stores: Profiles from The New Yorker* (pp. 497-503). New York: Random House.

The lead of the profile is so good, I'll quote it: "If I were a bitch, I'd be in love with Biff Truesdale. Biff is perfect. He's friendly, good-looking, rich, famous, and in excellent physical condition. He almost never drools." I cite this profile individually because I so

wanted to steal the idea from this lead for my pig piece but I couldn't make it work.
Susan Orlean I am not.

Pollan, M. (2006). *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin Press.

The opening chapter, which follows the path of corn from an Iowa field to a McDonald's meal, is an great example of what deep research combined with personal narrative can achieve in journalism. Showing the path a certain food takes from farm to plate is something I hope this project does, even though I have done so in a much less direct fashion. (As an aside, it shows the state of Iowa's media when a New Yorker teaching at UC Berkeley has produced the most prominent writing on the farm bill.)

Remnick, D. (2000). *Life Stories: Profiles from The New Yorker*. New York: Random House.

My project is essentially profiles. What better place to start than where the profile started? With almost 30 profiles from *The New Yorker*, in styles straightforward to bizarre, I should have found something that I could use as a framework for my own pieces, especially the profile, which never really got off the group, of a pig. Janet Malcolm's "Forty-one False Starts" takes that frustrating experience of writing to a new high. Perhaps, after my own frustrations, I should have borrowed that idea.

Robuchon, J., et. al. (2001). *Larousse Gastronomique*. New York: Clarkson Potter.

Whenever I have a question about an ingredient's use or history, I pull out this hefty volume. (It's also the storehouse for my souvenir menus of memorable meals.) While it offers little on non-European cuisine, it offered lots of information about traditional and modern cured meats of Spain and Italy. That information was helpful when I was working on the piece about La Quercia.

Ruhlman, M. (1997). *The Making of a Chef: Mastering Heat at the Culinary Institute of America*. New York: Henry Holt.

I have three of Michael Ruhlman's books on my list (four if you credit him with *The French Laundry Cookbook*), but this is the only one that is truly personal narrative journalism. He seamlessly weaves his own tale of learning to cook at America's

preeminent cooking school with the tales of his classmates and instructors. I looked towards this for my tale of pig slaughter in an attempt to balance my experience with Doug Havel's own story.

Ruhlman, M. (2000). *The Soul of a Chef: The Journey Toward Perfection*. New York: Viking.

This was the first memorable piece of food writing I read, I think. While Ruhlman has since played more of a character in his own books, in this one he is in the background, reporting and writing. It's his level of observation that really makes his books work and something I hope to bring to my own work.

Ruhlman, M., & Polcyn, B. (2006). *Charcuterie: The Craft of Salting, Smoking, and Curing*. New York: Norton.

I was attempting to make sausage from a recipe in this book when I encountered the know-nothing meat-counter clerk that led to this project. During the creation of the online step-by-step explainers, this cookbook was invaluable as it answered practically every question I had about technique.

Stepp, C. (2007). *Writing as Craft and Magic*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Carl Sessions Stepp's "prewriting," or putting all the good stuff down in one place without worrying about transitions or spelling or grammar, is a helpful technique for me. I tend to get caught on details too early in the writing and having someone tell me to not worry about it helps me get past that point and focus on getting everything together.

Strunk, W. (2000) *The Elements of Style: Fourth Ed*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Must I explain why the preeminent guide to writing and style is on my list? Another of E.B. White's contributions to my education.

Watson, L. (2004). *The Whole Hog: Exploring the Extraordinary Potential of Pigs*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian.

I spent many nights during this project tossing and turning and thinking about pigs. I take solace in the knowledge that someone was more pig-obsessed than I. The author is

more interested in the behavior of pigs, while I was more interested in the flavor of pigs but, still, the book was helpful in understanding the natural tendencies of the animals with which I was spending so much time.

White, E. B. (1952). *Charlotte's Web*. New York: HarperCollins.

I think it is safe to say that is that *Charlotte's Web* has shaped the pig in the public consciousness more than any other single work. As Judy Polumbaum pointed at when I first proposed this project: "How can you write about pigs and not reference *Charlotte's Web*?"

White, E. B. (1947). "Death of a Pig." In E. B. White, *Essays of E. B. White* (pp. 20- 29). New York: Harper Perennial.

As if the project's URL isn't enough of an indication of this essay's influence. Written before *Charlotte's Web*, "Death of a Pig" is a great example of how a writer's voice and personality can shine through simple language.

Zinsser, W. (2001). *On Writing Well*. New York: Collins.

My favorite part of this book is, of course, the author's discussion of E.B. White's "Death of a Pig."

Newspapers & Magazines

Buford, B. (2007, December 3). "Red, White, and Bleu: What Do We Eat When We Eat Meat?" *The New Yorker*, pp. 94 – 98.

Bill Buford's presents a discussion of what meat is as a book review. The way he connects rough butcher's diagrams with our decreasing familiarity with animal flesh is a good point.

Fussell, B. (2007, July). "American Prime." *Saveur*, pp. 45-67.

This piece, about beef from cow to plate, served as an early template for my project. It appeared in what *Saveur* called "The Beef Issue" and was accompanied by a zillion sidebars, recipes and charts. If I planned better at the beginning (or been ahead of the

game at the end) and had faith in my ability to build Flash, I would have made a porcine, new-media version of this issue.

Klinkenborg, V. (2007, October 25). "Two Pigs." *The New York Times*, p. A24.

When I read Verlyn Klinkenborg's op-ed piece, I became morose. He was poetic and simple and seemed to sum up a great many things in a very few words. It felt as though it somehow diminished what I was trying to do with my project. How I envy Klinkenborg's writing.

Moskin, J. (2008, January 16). "Chefs' New Goal: Looking Diner in the Eye." *The New York Times*, p. C1.

Some would point to this piece as another example of *The New York Times* writing about a trend two years late (Gordon Ramsay raised and slaughtered animals for his British television show a few years ago). Still, Julia Moskin does a nice job of presenting a lot of characters (including Herb Eckhouse) and moving from anecdote to anecdote.

Shorto, Russell (2004, January 11). "A Short-Order Revolutionary." *The New York Times Magazine*, pp. 18.

Russell Shorto's long piece is about the Farmer's Diner in Vermont, a restaurant that is trying to harness the power of local farms to create the ultimate locavore greasy spoon. Written before locavore was even a word.

Vitello, P. (2007, April 1). "Being nice to the bacon, before you bring it home." *The New York Times*, p. E3.

Paul Vitello offers a poorly framed trend piece on fast food companies showing an interest in humanely raised meat (after the public complains, of course). While it deals mostly with pigs it begins and ends with a personal story about killing rabbits for stew.

Edible Iowa River Valley.

I'm not ashamed to say that I pulled a few ideas out of local Edible Communities publication, including La Quercia. I'm proud to say that my pieces are all better than the one in this magazine.

Online

Chow. <http://www.chow.com/>

The only multimedia magazine solely about food that I'm aware of. It makes good use of its medium: it has good looks, good writing and good multimedia. The most applicable story is an entire section on making your own pancetta (and can be found at <http://www.chow.com/stories/10131>).

On The Media (2008, February 22). "Meat marketing."

<http://www.onthemedial.org/episodes/2008/02/22/segments/94043>. Accessed February 23, 2008.

An interesting discussion of what level of disgust can make it into mainstream media spurred by the *Washington Post's* posting of an undercover video of downer cows at a California slaughterhouse. (The video, from the United States Humane Society, led to a huge meat recall.) Needless to say, my videos are probably too graphic to be acceptable for the mainstream.

Shea, C. (2007). "New Grub Steet." http://www.cjr.org/essay/new_grub_street.php. Accessed June 13, 2007.

The author questions how ethics became wrapped up with food journalism. A good question — the what-you're-doing-wrong stances that are often apart of food writing wouldn't be acceptable in other places, so why do we put up with it there? Perhaps the author feels guilty about her "celery avec pesticides." I would argue that journalist have the responsibility to speak out against wrongs they see, even one's involving the personal choices of others.

Levy, P. (2007, September 19). "Food, Inglorious Food." *Slate*.

<http://www.slate.com/id/2174218/>

An apparently older reporter complains about the state of food writing today. While I'm guilty of some of what he would call sins (revolting scenes of animal slaughter, for example), I have to agree with the main thrust: food writing has become a who-can-be-grossest machismo fest.

McAdams, M. *Teaching Online Journalism*. <http://mindymcadams.com/tojou/>

Mindy McAdams teaches online journalism at the University of Florida. Her blog offers insight into learning multimedia, getting a job in the new media (and new-media) landscape and what it's important to know. (One post, about her own student's master professional projects, terrified me. Have I been going about this all wrong? I think she would tell me that I have not fully used the advantages of the Web.)

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Colin Mulvany is the multimedia editor at *The Spokesman-Review* in Spokane, Wash. His blog is a great resource for good examples of newspaper multimedia and his own thoughts on the field.