

The Story of Tripod, the Three-Legged Pig

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Henry Streator, the new American history teacher at Weeder's Clump High School, was a man who was quick to judge. He wasn't in the community very long until he started making fun of the local customs. He was going to set these quaint, backward people straight. When it was time to get a haircut, he asked fellow teachers to recommend a good barber, and several people mentioned Mal Cutter's Barber Shop. Henry had also heard that Mal Cutter was somewhat of an authority on local history, so he wanted to test him to see how much he knew. Royal Dorfman, who taught English at the high school, suggested that Henry ask Mal Cutter to tell him the story of Tripod the Three-legged Pig. "It's a story I'm sure you will enjoy," Royal Dorfman had said.

Henry walked into Mal Cutter's Barber Shop, nodded to the loafers, who were quite obviously taking measure of him, and introduced himself to Mal. After a vigorous hand shake and a hail-fellow-well-met welcome, Mal invited Henry to take a seat in the barber chair. As he settled down to await the ministrations of the convivial barber, Henry said, "I have been hearing about a three-legged pig named Tripod. Do you know the story?"

"I know the story, and I will be glad to tell it to you," Mal Cutter said as he fixed the barber's cloth snugly around Henry's neck. "It's an inspirational story, but it doesn't have a happy ending, so if you are looking for a *Little House on the Prairie* kind of story, you are in for disappointment."

Henry said, "I can't stand that program. It's like *The Waltons*. Every episode requires five hankies."

Mal nodded sympathetically, cleared his throat, and began, "The story of Tripod has its beginnings several years ago on the farm of Cletes Greenfield. The Greenfield farm is about seven miles out on the Old Boggs Road. It was farrowing time, and Cletes' sows had produced their usual record number of piglets. Cletes' son Clay was a junior at the high school at the time, and he helped his father take care of the new pigs. In fact, Clay could not go out for the baseball team because his father needed him to work on the farm

." "One day, after he had filled the water tanks and the feeders Clay was just kind of loafing around, thinking about asking May Wheat, the most fetching rustic charmer in the high school, to go to the prom with him. To amuse himself, he went over to this little pig and began rubbing its belly. Clay expected the little pig to run away, but the opposite happened. Pleased with this special attention, the little pig flopped on its side as if to beg for Clay to continue the massage. Laughing, Clay kept rubbing the pig's belly, amused at the pig's reaction and wondering if May Wheat would respond in the same manner to a belly rub.

"The next time Clay came to do the chores, the little pig saw him coming, ran up to him, and flopped on its side, awaiting another belly rub. Clay laughed and gently stroked the pig's belly. To Clay, it was a joke, but to the little pig it was a source of indescribable pleasure, perhaps the highlight of the pig's day or even its life.

"Well, the belly rub became a routine for the two of them. Every time Clay came to do the chores, the little pig, no matter where he was in the lot, spotted him and came running for the special attention Clay bestowed on him. Finally, the pig waited at the gate for Clay to arrive. It was a beautiful story of a boy and his pig or a pig and his boy, whichever way you want to express it."

Henry Streator was disappointed. He hated pet stories, and he was expecting more than another story about a boy and his dog, so he interrupted Mal and said, "That's nice, but what about the name? Why was the pig named Tripod? And why was this pig so special?"

"Well, I wasn't finished with the story. I just paused to clear my throat. In July, Clay Greenfield had an emergency appendectomy and was unable to do his chores, thus interrupting the belly rubs for the little pig. Now this is conjecture of course, but most folks thought the pig was bewildered by Clay's absence and didn't know what to do. Cletes told Clay that the pig would not eat and was always standing off by himself and looking like he had lost his best friend.

"Cletes thought everything would be all right once Clay came back after recovering from his surgery, but Cletes could not have anticipated what happened next. Not many people could, I guess. The little pig decided that he would go searching for his friend, so that night he slipped under the fence and started in the direction Clay always came from.

"Now the Greenfield house is located at a distance from the hog lot, at the top of a long hill. The little fellow made it to the foot of the hill and was suddenly attacked by coyotes. Of course, the pig tried to defend himself, but he was no match for the coyotes because they outnumbered him, and no pig can run as fast as coyotes. The pig squealed as loud as he could. Fortunately, Cletes heard the noise and came running down the hill with his shotgun in time to save the pig's life. But the coyotes had done their damage. One had chewed off the pig's left front leg and escaped with it."

"Wait just a minute. Now why would a man want to save a pig's life? This story isn't making sense," Henry protested.

"Well, you have to know Cletes Greenfield to answer that question. Cletes hated to lose an animal or even a chicken to predators. But he was also a practical man. When he saw that the pig had lost a leg, he raised his gun to shoot it and put an end to its misery because what good is a three-legged pig? Clay, however, persuaded his father to spare the pig's life. He said he would care for the little fellow, and the next day he took it to the local vet, a man named Dr. Heinie Minimus, who wrote bad poetry and was also a specialist at making artificial limbs. In fact, it was Dr. Minimus who dubbed the pig Tripod.

"Dr. Minimus fashioned a system of leather straps and a wooden leg, which enabled Tripod to resemble normal pigs. The ingenuous vet, also a fan of John Wayne movies, remarked that Tripod walked like Walter Brennan, but at least he had some mobility."

Here Mal Cutter paused to clear his throat, and Henry Streator said, "Pardon me, but I still don't see how Tripod is so special. So, he has a wooden leg. That doesn't make him special or heroic, only an oddity, a kind of freak among pigs, if you will."

"You need to hear the rest of the story. The Greenfields had this great Fourth of July party. Relatives and friends gathered in the yard for a picnic. There was even a rock band. It was a community event. People were everywhere. A little two-year-old girl wandered away. No one noticed her go over to the swimming pool and fall in. But Tripod saw her. He ran and got Clay, who dove into the pool and rescued the little girl. Tripod saved the child's life."

As if to impress Henry, Mal said in the solemn voice of a phony doctor in a TV commercial, "**The pig saved the child's life!**"

Henry Streator was dumbfounded, but before he could object, Mal Cutter continued, “Then on Thanksgiving the Greenfields had their traditional harvest feast. There was turkey, beef, roast duck, mutton, cheese pudding, candied yams, dressing with and without onions, Zephyr Goodson’s ham loaf, all kinds of pie and cake, and homemade ice cream. The people ate and ate until they were stuffed and could barely move. The family went to bed early that night.

“A fire broke out in the kitchen, but everyone was sound asleep and didn’t notice the smoke. Tripod saw the fire. He ran upstairs and awakened Clay, who smelled the smoke and got the family out immediately. There was considerable damage to the kitchen, but no one was hurt. I’m telling you the **pig saved their lives! The pig saved their lives!**”

“That’s nice, but I don’t know where this story is going? Henry opined. “There has to be more to this story.”

“Well, there is, a lot more. Cletes Greenfield decided that he had to move out of Illinois because of the terrible financial condition of the state, complicated by the failure of the elected officials to do anything to remedy it, not to mention passing a budget for the year or addressing the problems of infrastructure. Meanwhile, his son Clay had enrolled at Heliotrope University on a football scholarship. Clay wanted to keep Tripod with him, but the university would not allow him to have a pig in his room. So, he worked out a deal with my Uncle Bub Cutter to board Tripod at Bub’s farm. Clay could visit him on vacations and even take him to Florida on spring break. Clay was planning to go into farming after he graduated from Heliotrope, and then he could give Tripod a good home for the rest of his life. That was the plan. And it worked perfectly until Clay’s senior year at college.”

“What happened then?” Henry asked, anxious to hear the end of the story.

Mal paused dramatically, shook his head sadly, rolled his eyes heavenward, and replied, “One dark and stormy night chicken thieves hit Uncle Bub’s farm. They made off with a lot of chickens and even stole Tripod. No one knows what became of him. Now here is the strange part. Tripod became an urban legend. Possum Gwathmy thought he saw Tripod at the Indiana State Fair, but he couldn’t be sure. Then little Cindy Borak said she saw Tripod on an episode of Bozo’s Circus, leading Bozo’s Grand March. Several people have sworn that Tripod was on a Farmers Insurance commercial. Others claim to have seen him on beer commercials and even at Menards. Despite all of these sightings, Tripod has never been found.”

Then the door opened, and an intense young man entered. One of the loafers couldn’t resist, and he said, “Well, if it isn’t Clay Greenfield himself.”

Mal Cutter had finished cutting Henry Streator’s hair. He quickly removed the barber’s cloth and hurriedly brushed Henry’s shoulders just to make him look spiffy.

Moved by the story, Henry said to Clay, “Do you think you will ever find Tripod?”

Clay Greenfield looked at Henry Streator as if he was an alien from another planet. He shook his head and said, “My good man, I have no idea what you are talking about.”

Sheepishly, with a triumphant grin, Mal Cutter excused himself to go to his back room, claiming he needed to see a man about a dog while the loafers snickered, guffawed, and roared with laughter.

