

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The Vietnamese Potbellied Pig

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Brenda - 3rd generation Con
Line and daughter to Pinto
Pete

Back in the mid 80's both Keith Connell and his daughter Karen shared the following story:

Keith was owner of the Bowmanville Zoo in Ontario, Canada, and by 1985 had started to build one of the world's premier camel breeding programs in the world. In the early 1980's he traveled to a large camel auction somewhere in Asia. There were over 200,000 people at the auction, with several hundred camels consigned. Towards the end of the auction when bidding was getting very intense for the few remaining best camels, there was a disruption in the crowd that brought everything to a standstill. The auctioneer had to halt the bidding as the noise from the crowd suddenly turned to waves of laughter. Keith was puzzled and curious and pushed his way through several hundred people to view the source of the laughter. He caught a glimpse of a little black sow racing and weaving through the crowd as if her very life depended upon it. In hot pursuit were eight baby hellions, squealing and screaming for their mother to lie down so they could nurse. As they converged upon her, she gave up, laid down and the piglets began nursing with hundreds of people looking on. Keith was quoted as saying, "I have got to have some of these pigs." And so, the story begins....

In the mid 80's Keith imported into Canada the Vietnamese potbellied pig for his zoo. Soon they were imported into the United States where they were welcomed by zoos and later by breeders and by those who love pigs. It never entered their minds that the 250 pound pig was large. When compared to the farm hog weighing over 600 pounds, they were small, and they could be handled and kept as pets. They could even be house trained to become part of households. They were mostly all black, short, had lots of wrinkles, and were "oh, so loveable". They became known as the Con Line.

Soon more pigs were brought in by Leavitt. They were known for their gentle dispositions, black and white markings, plus they were smaller than the Con Line. Next the Royal Whites were brought into the U.S. by Espberger, but they were much larger. This allowed an out cross for breeding but still kept them as pure potbellied pigs.

A couple things to point out:

1. Pigs from Asia couldn't come directly into Canada or the U.S., so Keith Connell went to Sweden, where they had also been brought in. There they were mixed with the Swiss White, so these imports were not purebred potbellied pigs, but always still referred to as Vietnamese Potbellied pigs.
2. When Keith brought the potbellied pig to Canada the first time, they arrived via ship, and their paperwork wasn't correct. Consequently they were not allowed off the ship and had to be returned, paperwork completed again, and then they were shipped back over.

Another story shared by Karen Connell, Keith's daughter:

In the fall of 1988 the first potbellied pigs were consigned to one of the largest auctions in the country, Lolli Brothers, located in Macon, Missouri. It was the debut of the potbellied pig to the general public in the United States. The piglets came from Connie Merrifield in Alberta, Canada. She had purchased breeding stock from Keith Connell. These were pintos (60% white with blue eyes and sired by Pinto Pete



Pinto Pete

and Chrystal). Keith Connell sat in the bleachers waiting, bored because the piglets were going to be the last animals to go through the auction. It was midnight and the beer had been flowing all night. The crowd at the auction was primed and ready. At 12:42 A.M. the first two eight week old gilts appeared in the ring. The bidding was fast and furious. Twenty minutes later the piglets (2 sisters) had sold---and sold for \$12,500 and \$14,000 respectively. The story goes on that Keith Connell was so shocked he fell off the bleachers and had to be

carried away by his buddies. They also carried away several kegs of beer so they could celebrate how much the pigs had brought at the auction. This is how the potbellied pig entered the U.S. as pets for the first time.

Color was not as important as having a small pig as a pet, but some of the pigs being bred had shorter snouts, so breeders picked up on that and began to breed for a shorter wrinkled snout. They were so cute, but they had breathing problems as the snouts became shorter and more wrinkled, causing squished up faces. More and more breeders began to pop up all over, each trying to breed for a certain color or conformation. Soon the breeding of the potbellied pig was out of control. Pig lovers began setting up and running potbellied pig sanctuaries. They tried to keep up with finding homes for them but pigs are very prolific if allowed to be and they multiply quickly. Many folks adopted them but didn't neuter them, so the potbellied pig sanctuaries began neutering the males and spaying the females. The cost to get this done was high. Not a lot of vets at the time were experienced with these surgeries. The

pigs kept coming, as did more sanctuaries and more spaying and neutering.

The number of potbellied pigs was out of control, and the bloodline of these pigs suffered. Because no more mini pigs were being brought into the U.S., the bloodline suffered further. Eventually the registration was a forgotten thing as more and more pigs were bred to pigs related to them. Breeders call it line breeding, but in reality it is inbreeding. Pigs began to suffer. Some breeders brought in ferals and mixed them with potbellies. Then they began inbreeding them to get them smaller.



Sophia 2014-2015

Next, a new generation of pig people arrived on the scene. The new pig people want only a very small pig, and breeders see money. Not truly caring about the welfare of these pigs, they want a much smaller pig. They don't care about the health issues that are developing. The pigs have begun to suffer and many die from genetic issues. More and more are sickly now and some are struggling or dying from being so inbred. The breeders don't care, as long as they are making money. The inbreeding continues. They are selling what they call new types of pigs that include the micro mini, teacup, and Juliani---the list goes on. More and more are dumped because they weigh over 50 pounds. Buyers no longer want them, and sanctuaries are overwhelmed or closing down.

Thirty years have come and gone and so has the true Vietnamese potbellied pig. Greed has taken over and killed them off, one by one. No lines, no new very small pigs brought because they were really something they were healthy. They are gone



Honey Bunny

registration, no new blood into the U.S. This is very sad to behold and to love, plus but not forgotten.