

PIGS WERE MY LIVE MODELS

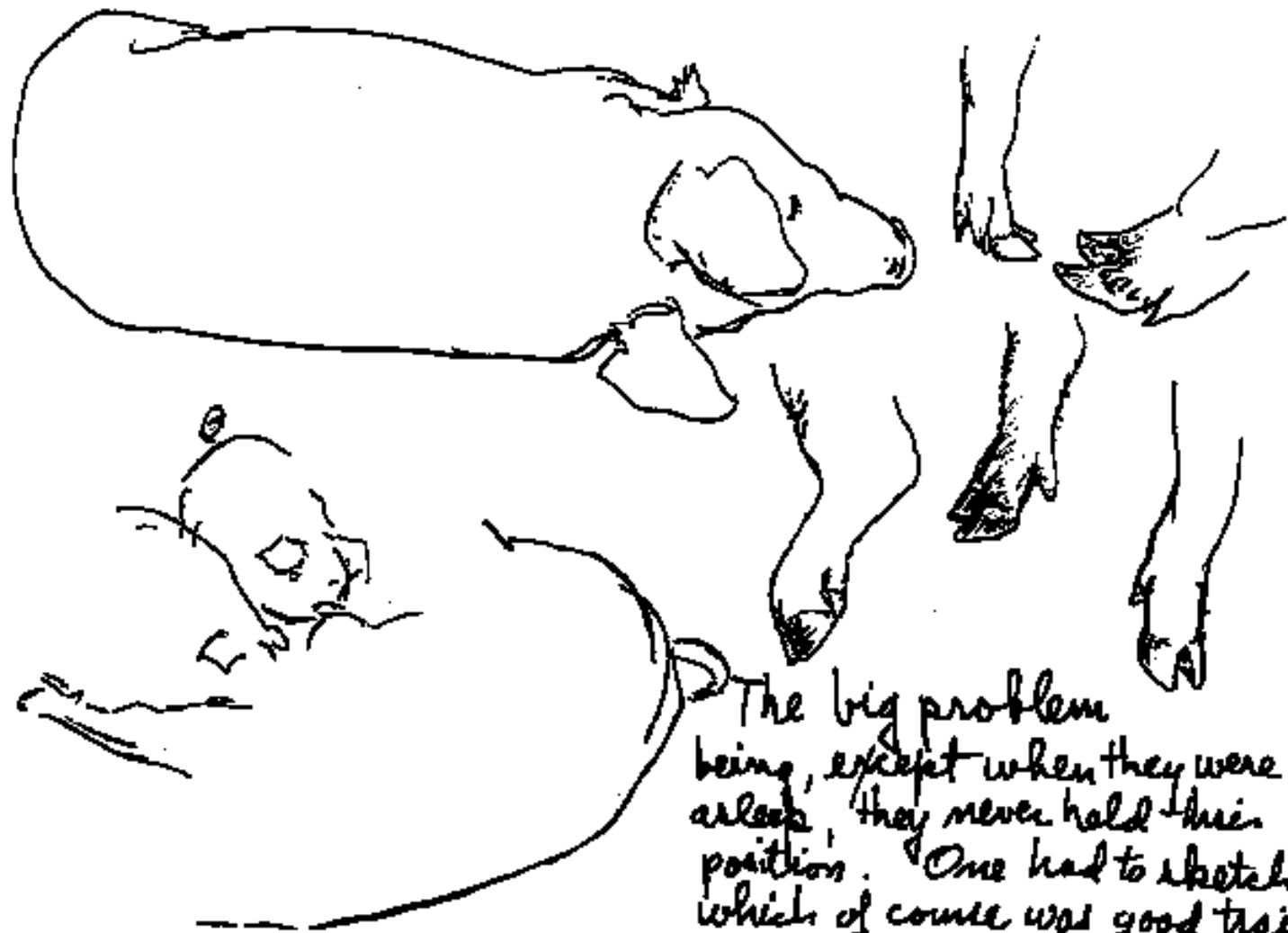
Most serious art students are provided with live, professional, nude models in order to learn to draw the human form. Later, at the University of Iowa, I had a class in which I was provided this opportunity. It was invaluable training.

However, when first learning to draw from life, pigs were my models.

Ever since I started wielding a pencil, I drew every chance I got. But I drew what I saw in my imagination. However, when Virginia Allinson, a close family friend, took some of my sorry samples to show to Ding Darling, he set me straight.

Ding, whose editorial cartoons appeared daily on the front page of the *Des Moines Register*, was my idol from afar. His drawings were, to me, what cartoons should look like, and I would try copying them, as well as making some of my own. I decided at an early age that I wanted to be a cartoonist like Ding.

When our friend brought back the report from her meeting with Ding, I found that his stern advice was that I should draw from life if I was going to learn to draw. And he sent back some pencils and a sketchbook and suggested I use the farm animals as models.



The big problem
being, except when they were
asleep, they never held their
position. One had to sketch fast,
which of course was good training

This I set about doing studiously, sketching our horses, cows, chickens, and pigs every chance I got. Since the pigs in their pens were usually more available, they were the ones that I drew the most.

The fact was, except when I caught them asleep, they were constantly on the move, providing valuable lessons in sketching rapidly. At such times I would have to concentrate on an ear, a snout, or a leg and then quickly move on to some other part of my model's anatomy.

This early training came in handy when, in the university live-model classes, we were required to make quick-action sketches as the models changed their positions every few seconds.

Thus, my early drawing sessions with pigs on our farm were invaluable lessons in my learning to draw. I feel I owe those pigs, as well as my mentor, Ding, who set me on the right path.

MAKING IT ALL WORTHWHILE

Finally, when the chores were all done and we came in from the cold to the warmth and fragrance of the kitchen at suppertime, with the steaming pork roast Mom had just taken from the oven, we did not have to be told twice to “wash up and get to the table.”

The brown gravy made from the drippings of the roast, poured over the boiled potatoes, went well with the fresh-baked buns spread with home-churned butter and homemade strawberry jam. It was a feast fit for a king.

But we certainly were not royalty. In fact, we would have been considered the peasant class. However, we felt very rich and privileged to be able to live “so high on the hog.” We had no problem entering into the spirit of Dad’s table prayer of thanks.

Now, looking back from a perspective of over eighty years, I can appreciate the fact that we were indeed blessed, even though those were the years of the Great Depression. The prices for farm products were depressingly low and cash was scarce, even though our farm home was without modern conveniences (even for that time), we were indeed privileged. We were living on a family farm where we could experience the rewards of our own labor, as long as we didn’t measure those rewards in terms of the marketplace but in terms of a home secure in love.