

If Pigs Could Sing
The Best-Selling Story of the Indigestible Brothers

Dusty Dunger

With Morris Dooley III

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Foreword by Henry Kazoo Dunger

If Pigs Could Sing is a classic example of writing something that somehow comes to a dead end and you can't think of anything else to say on the subject. The first half of Trauma remained unfinished for over a year ... but I very much doubt if we will ever hear any more about The Indigestible Brothers. However, I will explain the background to the story and why it came to such a sudden stop at a later date. GM, 2003

Sunday Best Pants In The Sky

Dusty said I was allowed to start telling this story because I was the first one to see the two twin twisters.

The two twin twisters came from over Rasher way around four o'clock in the afternoon August 12 and they was like some drunk in his black Sunday best pants, staggering this way and staggering that way. First we thought they was going to miss us but they come staggering back again and ripped up the Schmucker place so that the piggery flew clear up into the air with 37 prize hogs still in it. Holy Jesus it was raining bacon.

Then the twisters come screaming right through the center of town and smashed 28 buildings clear to smithereens including Dad's candy store and that was how we got poor and had to sell our house on Denouement Street and move back in with grandpa and grandma.

Dad said this was evidence that the Lord Our God is not entirely lacking in a sense of humor but what was so funny about it search me. Signed, Henry (Kazoo).

I Am Named

At the instant my umbilical cord was cut, I slipped out of Doctor Parfitt's hands *shlupp* onto the floor and rolled under the bed. My grandmother retrieved me puzzled but unhurt, although I was studded all over with dust bunnies, which is why I was given the sobriquet Dusty. 'Sobriquet' is a word generally used by the population at large to mean 'affectionate nickname' but in fact it comes from the French for a tap under the chin.

Tap as in touch, because you wouldn't, like, have a faucet under your chin. I guess I should be grateful they didn't call me Bunny because I've met a couple of guys called Bunny and they were both deeply troubled, one slightly more troubled than the other. Like, he collected different sorts of bath plugs. Henry my younger brother would have called him 'screwy.'

My Brother Comes Into The World

Two years and one week later my younger brother Henry was born. At the instant my brother's umbilical cord was cut, he slipped out of Doctor Parfitt's hands *shlupp* onto the floor but instead of rolling under the bed he hit his head pretty damn good on one of Doctor Parfitt's wingtip Oxfords and that left him kind of amazed for the rest of his life. My parents christened him Henry and I always call him Henry but everybody else mostly calls him Kazoo because he can press his right nostril flat with his finger and blow tunes out of his left nostril like a kazoo. Except when he has a headcold and then he sounds like somebody blowing a drinking-straw into a bowl of pretty thick barley stew.

It's Hard To Credit It

It's hard to credit it now that we're rich and famous and we have a guy called Emilio whose sole job it is to go out for pizza and to personally hand-pick off the pineapple, but our formative years were very threadbare times and how we overcame our disadvantage and our heartbreak is the stuff of epics and pigs.

My Family Right Or Wrong

Our family name is Dunger which is actually German for manure but how we earned it or whether we deserved it is lost in the mists of history. Where we lived in Iowa there were more Germans per average street corner than Germany. Joseph Goebbels could easily have come from Iowa if he hadn't come from Rheydt in the Rhineland (population 27,468) and he would probably would have reared fascist pigs.

My father Ray was kind of a manic depressive which is unusual for somebody who ran a candy store. I don't think he ever forgave our grandfather for leaving the south side of Chicago and moving to Slow Rapids, Iowa, giving no other explanation except that he had always wanted to live in an oxymoron.

To reach Slow Rapids you have to drive due west from Hiawatha until you run out of gas and then you have to walk about a mile-and-a-half unless you can catch a ride on a pig truck. The land is so flat that you can see Slow Rapids from about fifteen miles away, even though the tallest building is the water-tower with Slow Rabbits painted on it because the local signwriter was dyslexic or hard of hearing or maybe he had a thing for rabbits. I'll tell you how flat it is: we drove past some gopher mounds once and we thought that my father had taken us for a vacation in the mountains.

Although he had no hog-rearing experience Grandpa bought a heap of books on animal husbandry and it wasn't long before he became a moderately prosperous pig-farmer. He always said that you can learn how to do absolutely anything from books, even cardio-thoracic surgery and how to play the spoons. I personally believe that my father only went into the confectionery business because it was the polar opposite of pig farming and that he was making a statement. Anything less like a Large White than a quarter-pound of lemon sherbets is hard to imagine.

Dunger's Delights was right on the north-west corner of Hauptmann Square which was named after William Hauptmann (1845 - 1903) who was the first man to realize that pigs grew faster and fatter if you sang opera to them. Before the phonograph was invented he used to book some of the world's most famous singers to come out to his spread and give his porkers an afternoon of *Così Fan Tutte*. There's even a photograph of Enrico Caruso standing on a broccoli box and about two hundred pigs gathered all around him with their snouts all

lifted up in total admiration and this sort of beatific look in their eyes. The second Thursday in every August was Hauptmann Day in Slow Rapids and everybody would gather in Charlie's Meadows by the Thick Silty River for barbecued ribs and excerpts from *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*. I can't hear opera now without smelling pork. Henry says he can't blow off without smelling pork, which will give you a general idea of Henry's way of always going over the edge when it comes to matters of parlor behavior.

In my imagination I can still look in through the window of Dunger's Delights and see my old man standing behind the counter, tall and kind of attenuated like those people taking Our Lord down from the cross in one of those El Greco paintings, beaky nose, big wave of white hair, and a long brown apron that practically skimmed the floor. And in front of the counter I can see some podgy crewcut kid with hot red cheeks frowning at all of the Hershey kisses and licorice sticks and Twizzlers and Mary Janes and gobstoppers, trying to decide how to spend the last 37 cents of his allowance, and my father's expression so utterly mortified that you'd think that running a candy-store was slightly worse than irritable bowel syndrome.

On August 12, 1965, at eleven minutes to seven in the evening, my father's career in confectionery came to a violent end when the sky turned this weird prune color and there was a sound like a runaway train crammed with hysterical elephants. Two tornadoes came ripping through Hauptmann Square at 223 miles an hour and the buildings on the north-west corner were smashed into millions and millions and millions of pieces. My father had never bothered to take out insurance on the grounds that nobody was going to come in with a pump-action shotgun and demand to have a suitcase filled with peppermint walking-sticks. I guess he may have been secretly glad not to have to run the candy store any more, but we were utterly and degradingly busted, like worse than *The Grapes of Wrath*.

My Mother Tries To Be Brave

After the tornadoes passed by and the wind dropped the family went to look at what was left of the candy-store. My mother took hold of my father's hand so that you would have thought they were two little orphans alone in the world instead of parents.

'We're going to have to be brave,' she told him.

'Brave?' he said. 'We can't even afford to be insouciant.'

He trod glumly around the wreckage, his feet crackling on the sticks. My mother said, 'There's chicken pot-pie for supper,' as if that was the answer to everything.

'Chicken pot-pie? With dumplings?'

'That's right.'

'Well, that's just dandy, so long as we can make it last for the next six months.'

'Ray, please, you're bound to get work. Painting and decorating, maybe, or working on cars. Just something to tide us over.'

My father picked a raspberry cough lozenge out of the splinters. He turned it this way and that, and then he threw it as far and as hard as he could. When he turned around, I was shocked to see that his eyes were filled with tears. I had seen him gloomy before, but I had

never seen him cry. It was only then that I began to grasp the true awfulness of what had happened to us.

Henry had picked up two sticks. He was ten then, and I was twelve. 'What are you doing, Henry?'

'I m trying to see if they match. I mean, if we could find all of the matching sticks and glue them back together again --'

My father came up and gently took the sticks away from him, and tossed them aside. 'If you tried to glue all of these sticks back together again, son, you d be old men by the time you finished, and I don t want old men for sons.'

He put his arms around our shoulders and together we walked away from what was left of Dungen s Delights and my mother came along behind.

'We can manage, Ray,' she insisted. 'You could fix fences maybe. Or chair-bottoms.' My father stopped and stared at her and I have never seen anybody look so stupefied in my life. 'Chair-bottoms?' he repeated.

My mother gave him a worried little nod.

'*Chair-bottoms?*' he screamed, with spit flying out of his mouth. '*Chair-bottoms?*'

'Ray, please. I was only trying to think to the future.'

'*Chair-bottoms! God Almighty! Chair-bottoms!*'

He must have screamed it about a hundred times, all the way home, because I can t look at a chair-bottom now without thinking about that day, and I still don t have a clue what made him so mad.

Life With Grandpa & Grandma

My mother Rita had a whole heap of wavy blonde hair and one of those sweet lost-looking faces as if she couldn t quite remember what she was supposed to do next, and a lot of the time she couldn t, which meant that she and Henry had much in common, and my mother hadn t even been dropped on her head onto Doctor Parfitt s left shoe, although I guess he would have been pretty much taken aback if she had.

Men who weren t unnerved by my mother s slightly unfocused squint thought she was extremely worth leering at and this made my father even more edgy than usual. If any male visitor started giving my mother the eye he used to put on a very scratchy record of the *Dead March From Saul* and clear his throat repeatedly like a TB-sufferer until the visitor began to grow uneasy, which under the circumstances took not much longer than about fifteen seconds.

I suppose my father and mother were still having relations in 1965, not like uncles or aunts or anything but sex. But it wasn t easy to look at my father and think of sex. It was like looking at somebody s broken umbrella and thinking of sex. It doesn t seem very likely that they can get it up any more.

Our grandpa on the other hand was always winking and snorting and woo-hooing at young women and squeezing grandma s ass when she was standing at the sink and generally behaving like a feisty old goat. When they reached 60 he and grandma had sold off all of their pigs and most of their acres and settled down for a comfortable retirement which in grandpa s case consisted of playing poker with a whole lot of other feisty old goats and swapping dubious jokes like the one about the guy who had a talking anus, not only a *talking* anus but a *philosophical* anus.

He was a very dapper man, always dressed in a stripey shirt and fancy necktie and buttoned-up vest, with a little clipped moustache and shiny gold eyeglasses. Before he took up pig farming he had been a professional musician and he always used to claim that he had reduced Eleanor Roosevelt to tears with his tuba rendition of *The Girl I Love Has A Left-Footed Limp*. He played it for us once after Sunday lunch, with grandma singing, and I was genuinely surprised that Eleanor Roosevelt had only been reduced to tears and hadn t immediately left the auditorium and thrown herself in the Chicago River with her reticule to weigh her down.

In case you don t know the words of *The Girl I Love Has A Left-Footed Limp* they go as follows:

*The girl I love is so beautiful
She makes the roses look ugly
Her eyes they shine like a bald man s bean
And her sweaters fit oooh so snugly*

*The girl I love is a goddess on earth
But one day she fell out of a blimp
She hit a haystack at 54 ½ miles an hour
And she now has a left-footed limp*

*The girl I love is brilliant and bright
But I m going noplace, she frowned
Every time that I try to walk straightly
I keep going round and round.*

*I go round, I go round, I go round, I go round
I try but I simply can t starpet
I m a gimp with a limp, a left-footed limp
And I ve worn a round hole in the carpet.*

Now the melody was pretty sobering as melodies go and the tuba doesn t generally make for relaxing listening in your average 8 x 10 domestic parlor, but there was no doubt that grandpa could play that thing like a virtuoso, and I was surprised to discover that grandma could sing so good, although her voice was kind of shrillish and gabbly as if she was trying to beat grandpa to the end of the song. Grandma said she couldn t help it because she had learned the words from an overwound Victrola.

Grandpa and grandma were real generous when it came to taking care of us, but my father couldn t bear to take charity, even from his own kith, and every day he would admonish us not to make gluttons of ourselves at the supper table. This wasn t as much of a hardship as you might think because grandma s cooking was what you might politely call idiosyncratic and what you might less politely call shit. Grandma s notion of a Brunswick stew looked and tasted like a spavined rooster that had been overtaken by a slow tide of molten lava, and my

father used to say (behind her back) that her beaten biscuits hadn't just been beaten, they had been routed and driven back to the banks of the Mississippi.

It was accommodation which was the main difficulty because although grandpa and grandma's house was comfortable enough, with all of its fringed carpets and its antique knick-knacks, its chairs and its china-cabinets and its clocks and its elephant's foot umbrella stand, it had only three bedrooms and of course Henry and me had to share the smallest, which was about the size and shape of a tipped-over outhouse.

We Discuss Hooters

One sticky evening at the end of September 1965 Henry and I lay in our bunk beds and discussed hooters.

'You know what Randy Bennett said today about Ellie-Jane Kuhne?' asked Henry.

'What, that she'll let you take a look at her hooters?'

'That's right.' *Sniff, bubble* - Henry had another headcold. 'How much does she charge?'

'Fifty cents, that's what I heard.'

'I've got a quarter. Do you think she'll let me take a look at just one?'

'What's the point of looking at a single hooter?'

'I don't know. It's better than no hooter at all.'

'Well, I've got eleven cents. Maybe if we club together she'll let us take a look at a hooter-and-a-half.'

Long silence. Inch by inch the evening sunlight crept down the sloping ceiling. Our school pants were hanging by their withered suspenders from the back of the chair. This was the only item of furniture for which there was any space in our bedroom, apart from the bunk beds, and grandpa had been obliged to cut four inches off its legs because the ceiling came down so low, so it was like a kind of Hobbit's chair.

Our pants had so many patches in the seats that they were more patch than pant. Grandpa had offered to buy us a new pair each but my father had huffily refused on the grounds that his pride was more important than patches. Personally I couldn't understand why my father's pride meant that we had to walk to school with what looked like traditional quilts sewn onto our otherwise gray flannel asses, but I guess the experience taught me why pride is one of the seven deadly sins, because no man's pride is worth two small brothers staying in a hot, empty classroom during recess, silently crayoning, because they can't take any more taunts about their chintz-and-brocade behinds.

After a while, Kazoo said, 'I'd like to see Miss Hunsworthy's hooters. They're *humungous*. They must be the biggest hooters in the history of hooters.'

'There is no history of hooters. Do you think you can go into the library and say, "Excuse me, can I borrow *The History of Hooters*?"'

'I'll bet there is too. They keep it locked up in a secret room, that's all. I bet if you're a doctor or something you can ask to borrow *The History of Hooters*. I bet it's got pictures in it, too,

all kinds of different hooters. I bet some girls have hooters so big they have to wheel them around in wheelbarrows.'

'Oh, and you really think that Miss Hunsworthy is going to show you her hooters? What are you going to do, stroll up to her desk after geography and say, "That stuff about the coconut trade in the South Pacific was really very impressive, Miss Hunsworthy, and talking of impressive coconuts, mind if I take a sneaky peekarooni at yours?"'

'What s "impressive"?'

'The odds against Miss Hunsworthy ever letting you take a look at her hooters.'

'Maybe we should write to *Playboy* and tell them about Miss Hunsworthy s hooters and then they ll put her in the centerfold and we ll get to see them that way.'

'Oh, sure, and pigs are going to fly.'

'They did when the two twin twisters came through the Schmucker place.'

And, yes, I had to admit that Henry was right; and one day, in fact, we did get to see Miss Hunsworthy s hooters, although in rather unpredictable circumstances.

The Person We Liked The Least

The person we liked the least was Mucas Mayer, whose father owned the largest pig-rearing spread in Slow Rapids. Mucas had everything that we didn t have, like long pants without any fancy quilting on the ass, and unwithered suspenders with shiny clips, and shoes that hadn t been waterproofed inside with roofing-felt, and a BB gun.

Mucas was gargantuan for twelve, with a pale wobbly face and all of this curly black hair so that he always looked like it was Halloween and he was wearing a fright wig. He had a butt so big that Henry called it Mount Buttmore. Mucas was forever punching people in the bicep to make their nerves go dead, and saying your shirt button s hanging loose and when you looked down he would flick the tip of your nose. I mean not just once but over and over and he was so irritating that it gave you a rash all over just to look at him, and you had to go and rub your back against a tree.

I guess I shouldn t be uncharitable because Mucas s twin brother had died at birth like Elvis Presley s. His parents were going to call them Micah and Lucas and so when only one of them survived they kind of joined the names together and christened him Mucas. He was too busy flicking other kids under the nose to realize that his first name was homophonous with nasal secretions and that his second name was synomonous with a popular brand of wiener. Because of this Henry and I called him Snot Dog.

But Snot Dog s life was hardly a tragedy compared to ours. The Mayer spread covered hundreds of acres, and the Mayers reared thousands of hogs annually, and lived in a huge white house with a windpump and inside outhouses and a stable full of thoroughbred ponies and a garage with Buicks in it, brand new gleaming Electras, not like my father s Roadmaster which was immediately postwar and let out an explosion like a twenty-megaton H-bomb every time it started, which it didn t very often.

Without question the thing we liked the least about Mucas was that Libby Polaski seemed to be so sweet on him. This was my first introduction to the complete incomprehensibility of

women, by which I mean that thing about women that makes you want to hit yourself in the face with a cast-iron skillet, at least twice, because you just don't get it. Trying to understand women is like trying to understand why mirrors reverse you left to right but don't turn you upside-down. Libby was gorgeous, right on the cusp of womanhood, which meant that she was just about to ready to start wearing the cups of womanhood. She had long shiny reddish-brown hair and dreamy green eyes and scabs on her knees from climbing trees. I had a fantasy in which she and I sat side by side on the banks of the Thick Silty River on a summer afternoon, and I would pick the scabs of her knees and eat them. I mean, at the age of 12, that's about the closest you're going to get to oral sex.

Libby also had an overbite. Girls with overbites have a mesmerizingly erotic effect on me, I just can't resist the way their top teeth balance on the cushions of their lower lips. It makes them look like they're vulnerable and slightly baffled about life and their parents can't afford a decent orthodontist. Why third-rate dentistry should give me boner I shall never know, but there it is. Some guys are turned on by women who are really overweight, like whenever they walk down the aisle in the supermarket it looks like somebody's staging the world rhinoceros-wrestling championship under their dress.

All those warm summer afternoons I used to sit in the classroom at Slow Rapids Junior High and stare at Libby in her pink gingham dress, with the sun sparkling on all the tiny little hairs on her arms, and the yearning would actually hurt. And what did she do to repay my adoration? She spent all of her time with Snot Dog Mayer. Chatting to him, flirting with him, actually *touching* him for Christ's sake. I can never forget her throwing her head back and laughing at one of his dumb jokes, like who wrote *Forty Years As A Lion Tamer?* Claude Bottom.

It was only years later that I discovered two things. One was that women have a special gland in their nose which is connected to their eyes. As soon as they smell money they go blind. The second was a class photograph. It had been taken in the days in which I adored Libby Polaski from three desks away, and at the end of the second row there was this scrawny, sad-faced kid with a smudge on the end of his nose, and a haircut that looked as if Conor Macleod of the Clan Macleod had taken a diagonal swing at him and given him a diagonal crewcut. 'There can be only one! Oh shit, missed!' This kid looked so shabby and pathetic and miserable and yet I couldn't remember who he was. I mean, you'd have to remember somebody *that* downtrodden.

It was only when I turned the photograph over and checked the caption on the back that I realized it was me. I don't think I've ever burned with so much embarrassment in all my life. All those years at Slow Rapids Junior High, I had been unwaveringly convinced that I could easily be mistaken for Ricky Nelson.

Henry's Love Life

My brother Henry on the other hand never had any trouble getting the girls he wanted, despite the fact that he looked equally as poverty-stricken as me, in fact worse in a way because when he was eight he had to start wearing these really thick glasses that you could have used to start a forest fire except of course where we lived there weren't any forests for hundreds of miles. I guess the reason for Henry's success with girls was that he was never romantic or sentimental about anything which may have had something to do with Dr Parfitt's toecap.

That's another thing I was later to learn about girls.

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