“Christopher Hogwood came home on my lap in a shoebox. He was a creature who would prove in many ways to be more human than I am.”

–from The Good Good Pig

A naturalist who spent months at a time living on her own among wild creatures in remote jungles, Sy Montgomery had always felt more comfortable with animals than with people. So she gladly opened her heart to a sick piglet who had been crowded away from nourishing meals by his stronger siblings. Yet Sy had no inkling that this piglet, later named Christopher Hogwood, would not only survive but flourish—and she soon found herself engaged with her small-town community in ways she had never dreamed possible. Unexpectedly, Christopher provided this peripatetic traveler with something she had sought all her life: an anchor (eventually weighing 750 pounds) to family and home.

The Good Good Pig celebrates Christopher Hogwood in all his glory, from his inauspicious infancy to hog heaven in rural New Hampshire, where his boundless zest for life and his large, loving heart made him absolute monarch over a (mostly) peaceable kingdom. At first, his domain included only Sy’s cosseted hens and her beautiful border collie, Tess. Then the neighbors began fetching Christopher home from his unauthorized jaunts, the little girls next door started giving him warm, soapy baths, and the villagers brought him delicious leftovers. His intelligence and fame increased along with his girth. He was featured in USA Today and on
several National Public Radio environmental programs. On election day, some voters even wrote in Christopher’s name on their ballots.

But as this enchanting book describes, Christopher Hogwood’s influence extended far beyond celebrity; for he was, as a friend said, a great big Buddha master. Sy reveals what she and others learned from this generous soul who just so happened to be a pig—lessons about self-acceptance, the meaning of family, the value of community, and the pleasures of the sweet green Earth. The Good Good Pig provides proof that with love, almost anything is possible.

My Personal Review:
One person in Christopher Hogwood’s community was able to get a check cashed on the strength of being a friend of the well-known pig. Christopher was a write-in candidate for local elective office, and his death was mourned not only by his slop-bearers but by friends around the world.

Sy Montgomery, a writer usually more concerned with insects and apes and occasional children (JOURNEY OF THE PINK DOLPHINS), has gifted those of us who did not know Christopher with the amusing, remarkable, poignant and revelatory biography of a pig who started life small and influenced the world around him in a big way.

We know long before Montgomery tells us that Christopher is her sort of therapy-pig, a portal of entry into the world of magic and faith that children inhabit. Christopher was an orphan, and she and her husband Howard, also a writer, took time out of their busy, introverted lives in a cherished farmhouse in New Hampshire to spoil the good good pig. Even a simple thing like watching him eat became a special pastime for Sy and her neighbors: Pigs are quite literally made for eating --- they were bred to eat and get fat fast...grunting, slurping and snorting with delight, Christopher ate with the enthusiasm of a gourmand and the grace of an athlete. Even the gourmet bistro sent him leftovers.

When two young girls, Kate and Jane, moved in near the pig parlor, they fell in love with their porcine neighbor and started bringing him food. One of them took to communing with the pig when she felt blue. Together with Sy, they initiated Pig Spa in place of just plain old tummy-rubbing. They untangled his tail, bathed him and polished his hooves with cocoa butter. But the truth is, while the brushing, bathing, tail-braiding and nipple stroking delighted Christopher Hogwood, even more it restored the humans who touched him.

Christopher grew large --- topping 700 pounds from having been a runt with a tenuous hold on early life --- and smart, able to unlock complicated hasps and having a mind to roam. The local policeman took to carrying apples in his car to lure the mammoth pet back home, and the locals got
used to occasional random visits from Sys favorite foster child. Christopher inspired trust and was beloved by children, some of whom proclaimed him better than a horse. He was often filmed and became a Christmas card for Sy and Howard, his raffish photos a reward to his many sloppers, combers and therapy clients.

There is nothing about this book to slow down the enthusiastic reader or bore the knowledgeable one --- both will race through to its natural conclusion with a tear here, a giggle there, a sigh of species empathy along the way. Though I would not be able to consider having a hog instead of a dog in my house, I admire Sy for taking Christopher in, and him for being such a gracious recipient of her fond affections. It was an adoption made in hog heaven.

--- Reviewed by Barbara Bamberger Scott

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