Interview with Alice (pseudonym), pet pig keeper.

29th June 2022, online

Conducted by researcher [K].

K: Can you tell me about your pigs?

P: I’ve had the two of them for about six months, I got them in december. I never actually anticipated having pigs. I do live in quite a rural area and I've got about 10 acres of land, most is rented for horses. Got about a 3 acre field, I had some sheep on it in October. I also run a cat rescue charity and as a result of that, I was asked to take on this pig. Someone else had her in utterly irresponsible circumstances, they were keeping her in an airing cupboard in Coventry. So they had her as a piglet, she’s a little kune kune. Realised quite quickly at about 13 weeks that it obviously wasn’t appropriate to have a pig in an airing cupboard in the house. So, she was moved. A friend of a friend took her to the farm. The farm was an arable farm and it really wasn’t set up for livestock. So, they were desperate to find somewhere and I was asked by a mutual friend if I wanted a pig, which to be honest, I really didn’t but then, we went and met her. She was absolutely lovely. By this point, she had been attacked by a dog as well. We had her, and she... because presumably, she had been very humanized from living in a house, do you know what I mean?

K: She enjoyed human company a lot?

P: Yeah, she was extremely needy and extremely demanding. She went into a little paddock in the field and because it was all done at very short notice, she had like a little house. She had that with some straw in. It became very apparent that she was very lonely. So, we immediately started looking for another kune kune, and we located one and went to go and collect them, probably about 4 weeks later. Just between Christmas and New Year.

K: Where was the second pig from?

P: Up north somewhere.

K: Did you buy that pig as a piglet?

P: She was about the same as [Tia], so about 4 months old. But they were more commercially farmed pigs, sounds awful when you have them as pets, but they were more used for hog roasts because kune kunes are quite small. They use them for hog roasts. This place wasn’t doing the hog roasts because it was the tail end of COVID, the commercial events and parties that they sold the pigs for weren’t really happening, so they had an overstock of pigs, so that’s where she came from. But for us, she is just a pet.

K: And you didn’t want a pig?

P: Erm, no. As I say, it’s quite a rural area, I've got chickens which I've had for a couple years and I've had sheep in October. So, I had already got a holding number and whatnot. It was more sort of the rescue side of it, but I did it.

K: How do you think your relationship has changed with them since you first got them?

P: I just think they are adorable. I haven’t got any experience with them, we’ve got multiple other animals, cats, dogs, chickens, sheep, fish... you know what I mean? All kinds of things. I'd never considered pigs as anything.... I don’t eat meat, I haven’t eaten meat for about 30 years but I'd never really considered them as anything. My partner years ago did have pigs, about 20 years ago. He sort of talked about them, but I'd never really considered them in anyway but the moment she came, certainly [Tia], because she was so ridiculously tame and so ridiculously friendly, she wanted to sit in your lap all the time, more like a dog really. Um, but then certainly... [Carly] was slightly different because she had come from a more commercial environment. But now, she’s just the same, very friendly, they come when they’re called. Certainly, nice behavioral aspects like wagging their tails because they are happy to see you, all these things that you just never consider. Far more intelligent, I’ve always heard it said that they are far more intelligent, but until you actually interact with them regularly you don’t really see it.

K: In what ways do they show you that they’re intelligent?

P: Um, learning routines very quickly, learning the times of day you do things. Their actual interactions with you, like going to find you to be brushed, like standing where the brush hangs. [Carly] loves it but [Tia] absolutely hates it. Following you around everywhere, they know which neighbours will feed them so they will go over to them. There are various neighbours that back on to the field. Personality-wise they are quite different, [Tia] is a lot more confident and curious and more interactive with people. Possibly because she had that slightly more humanised aspect to her in earlier life. As I say, they know who does what for them. They certainly recognize, it is very clear that they recognize different people. Some people can call them till they’re blue in the face and they won’t pay no notice. Others, they are straight there.

K: You said they have different personalities, does that mean your relationship with both of them is different?

P: Erm, certainly [Tia], yeah. She is the one who will come and... when it’s nice weather and you go and sit out there, she is straight on your lap and will want to be cuddled. She will put her head on your shoulder and you can talk into her ear. [Carly] is not quite that interactive, but that was one thing that... [Tia]’s vocalisations were much more varied I thought, and [Carly] seems to have picked them up, whereas before she was just grunting and that was it. [Tia]’s vocalisations were vary varied and different in pitch. She appeared to be communicating, like feelings, how she felt about stuff, she made it very clear. [Carly] seems to have picked that up now as well.

K: Do you understand what they’re saying?

P: You can sort of see their mood. Yeah, so if she gets peevish about stuff, she is very vocal. Not just screaming, but if she’s cross about something or feels she has missed out on food, she is very communicative.

K: How much of your daily routine is involved with caring for them?  
  
P: They have to fit in with everybody else. So the morning routine is going through the rescue cats. They know the sheep have the be fed, then it’s the cats, then it’s them, then it’s the chickens. If there’s anything like broken eggs, they will stand at the gate and see if they come their way. I feed them when I'm home from work and then in the evening, it’s like settling their bed. But it’s very weather dependent, because mine aren’t house pigs. They are in the field. So it is weather dependent as to how much interaction I've got time for, but certainly for a period every day you go in. Certainly [Tia], she will stand up at the gate and you just can’t ignore her.

* Interview cut short due to participant having to leave -