Interview with Sandra (pseudonym) pet pig keeper

21st June 2022, online.

Conducted by researcher [K]

P: I'm busy feeding her right now, [Dusty]! [encourages her to look at camera]

K: She’s a cutie! Tell me a bit about her

P: So, I got her in October. She doesn’t like anyone but me, absolutely hates my daughter with a passion. My daughter is not allowed in the same room as us, not allowed to sit on the bed with me. Um, she’s actually very intelligent. She knows that if we leave the washing upstairs it needs to come down, so she will bring it down for you. Um, she knows how to kiss. She’s really well trained, the woman said compared to others... I know there are horror stories of pigs biting kids fingers off, she won’t do that. If I tell her not to touch food she won’t touch it, which is very unlike a pig. Um, but yeah, she pretty much thinks she’s a dog. Barks like one, goes out on the lead. Expects to be spoon-fed.

K: Where did you get her from?

P: So, a lady called [breeder name], her dad was a pig farmer for like 40 year and she decided to breed the little ones. The mum and dad are like half the size of [Dusty], she’s not a micro-pig in the sense of her weight, but yeah.

K: How old is she now?

P: 10 months.

K: So, why did you want a pig in particular?

P: I’m actually bipolar, and one of the side-effects is ridiculous purchases. So, I think it was always in my mind either a pig or a monkey, but I decided against that because it’s apparently quite bad. But when I got her, I absolutely loved her to bits. I'd never give her back, no matter how many people give them back she isn’t going anywhere. She could never have a farm life now, she doesn’t know what that is, she sleeps on a bed.

K: In your bed?

P: Yeah! It’s strange, so the woman was like pigs are quite close to their keepers, but she is something else. She will sleep right next to me. When I first got her she wouldn’t come up the stairs, it was strange. We had like a pug and a chihuahua at the time, but not she comes up. She will stand on the landing and grunt at me as if to say ‘it’s time for bed’ and I’m like ‘no [Dusty]!, it’s 6:30, we can’t go to bed now!”. Er, if anyone comes in the house and she wants me to get away from them, she will grunt as if to say it’s time for bed. But yeah, sleeps in the bed next to me.

K: And what were you expecting to get out of having a pet pig?

P: Like the videos that you see on TikTok where they are really well behaved, and mine is like the devil child! Where they will let you brush them and put them in the bath, she will like squeal if she goes into the bath, sounds like we are murdering her. I didn’t think she would be so destructive.

K: How is she destructive?

P: Well, she’s stopped doing it now, but when I first got her, she pulled off every bit of beading that we had, she pulled up stairs. She’s really artistic, she likes to paint so I just freshly painted a white passage and she’s gone in and put her snout in the white paint. I’m like... shitting hell, why do you keep doing that? She’s kind of stopped now but I dunno what she is gonna be like. I leave the back door open but she tends to push the door on the dog and leave the dog outside. I don’t think she will be destructive now, but she was at first.

K: Do you do any training with her?

P: Yeah, she knows how to sit. She’s quite good with it because normally they will just savage it. If you look on my Instagram, she will open the box and look at it, and put it back down. She looks at me like ‘what are we waiting for?’ but if I tell her not to do something she won’t. Which is quite unusual for a pig. She knows how to dance and she runs. If she hears the ice cream van outside, she runs and waits outside and sits. So, she knows what sounds are what. Obviously, they can predict the weather as well which is strange. Normally, she can walk by my side without the lead, but I put it on her and she squealed up the street and knocked all the bins over, she ran in here and she wouldn’t even eat. So I thought there was something up, so I rang the woman and she said “oh has it been raining?” and I said yeah, and she asked if there was gonna be thunderstorms and I said yeah, she said she can predict it. Isn’t that strange?

K: Maybe she can sense it in the air?

P: She literally squealed, like cows will sit down won’t they? She got in and she was panting because, heaven forbid there would be a bit of rain and it would touch her.

K: Bit of a princess then!

P: Oh yes, she always has to have a blanket too. She is spoilt, I wouldn’t have it any other way.

K: Did you pick her out specifically?

P: Yeah, so there was like ten of them and she sent me the pictures. Really strange because she looks like the most innocent, little, cute wet-nosed pig that you’re ever gonna get, then I got the devil. So, I actually paid more for her because she had certain colourings and stuff, but she is totally my pig. We had a chihuahua that died after 13 years and at her death bed she growled at my daughter, and she is living on in [Dusty]!

K: So, the colours and marking drew you to her?

P: Yeah, which I find strange because the woman said she was 100 quid more, I was like oh it’s fine. It was just her cute little face and I thought that she looks like she is gonna be lovely and well-behaved. But I didn’t get peace, I got problems!

K: Does she have her ear tagged or anything?

P: No. She is booked in for a hysterectomy in August because she keeps humping me and only me. If you got to my Instagram, you’ll see that she doesn’t take a fancy to anyone else except me. Obviously the weight of her means I'm black and blue. It's really cruel for her as well because she is just storming round the house like crying and howling and she can’t settle. It must make her feel awful, so she is booked in for that in August. She’s not herself that week, she is restless and crying... bloody annoying as well.

K: Have you had much contact with DEFRA or APHA about licenses?

P: No, I got her and they never been in touch since.

K: How would you describe your relationship with her?

P: You know what, after Ellie died, although I love our other dog, I never thought I'd get close to another animal again. But honestly, I am so attached to her, she is everything. I have bipolar and spent a lot of time with her and she doesn’t like going anywhere without me and I'm the same. We go for a beer together, I'm really close with her. She is lovely. I know she is a pain in the ass and she’s probably cost me thousands in floors, which will probably continue, but she’s just so close to me and she is lovely, aren’t. You [Dusty]?

K: Do you think she helps you with your health and wellbeing?

P: Yeah, I mean to be honest she is quite helpful in the house. She will turn all the electricals off. She’s got this thing where I've got the football on or something and because she isn’t getting the attention, she will flick the switch with her snout and turn it off. Such a little asshole. But I think if I hadn’t had her around I’d feel a lot more lonely.

K: Does your relationship with her differ to the relationship you have with your dogs?

P: I let her get away with murder. I share everything with her. Ow! [Dusty]! [[Dusty] budges her]. She is spoilt so much she gets whatever she wants. I love the other dog, don’t get me wrong.

K: But you think you’re closer to [Dusty]?

P: yeah

K: Why?  
  
P: I think because she’s got a very similar personality to me. We only like each other, we’re quite grumpy, we love our food. You can just tell when she walks in the room, she is so sassy. I think she is quite similar to me, quite antisocial we are.

K: How would you say she fits into your life?

P: That’s the one thing... this is why I won’t tell anyone where to get a pig, because the reality is it’s really hard. If I wanna go out somewhere or on holiday, but luckily my sister has a farm she can go to, but she will not go with anybody else. Er, my brother in law came in the other day and she shot off because she doesn’t like anyone but me. I work security and if my daughter can’t stay at home, I can’t go because she will not go with anyone but me. But in reality, I probably didn’t think it through. I don’t think I'll ever be able to do two weeks in Ibiza again! She would howl the house down for me, even if my daughter was there. I think she would be lost without me. I didn’t think it through to be fair.

K: Is she part of your family?

P: Yeah. She’s next in command, there’s me, [Dusty], my daughter, then the dog. She won’t even let my daughter sit on the same bed as us, I know we laugh about it but she says “mam you shouldn’t have let her get like that”. Our chihuahua was the same, she thought she was higher up the command than her but I said you’ve gotta show dominance with her. If I want her to move, I’ll just shift her and say move, in like a firm voice. She will pretend to snap, but she wouldn’t get me. Where she knows my daughter is scared of her, she will do it more. My daughter will go “ah!” because she’s 16, now she thinks she is higher up in command.

K: So [Dusty] can pick up on peoples feelings?

P: Oh yeah she’s not daft. My friend came round the other day and wanted her to move out the way. My friend was sat next to me and she bit my friends leg. I thought she was joking at first, but there was a bit of a mark. I opened the oven door and she must have thought my friend was gonna take her snacks so she lunged for her a bit. I mean, I let her be more dominant than I should have really. If that is her at ten months then god knows what she will be like when she’s massive.

K: Yeah

P: She will probably be a bit of a handful for everybody else, but not me.

K: So did you actively work on building up a bond with her?

P: Um, well when I first got her it was initially for my daughter, but she straight away took a dislike to her and attached to me. I stupidly kept picking her up and putting her on the bed with me, and I wish I hadn’t now. The bed, I have no room at night. She has to be touching me with her trotters, I'm black and blue and I wake up every morning with a bad back. And I'm like, why did I do that when I first got her? When you look on the pig group, you see they all sleep downstairs in their bed and this twat is next to me. My ex came over the other day and she couldn’t get near me on the bed, I thought how am I ever gonna date again? She is not gonna give up that bed for nobody. [laughs] it’s my own fault really. But it was an instant bond really.

K: Ok and do you trust eachother?

P: Yeah. She’ll not go to anyone but me. When we first got her she ran under the kitchen cupboard and I thought, we’ve made a mistake here. I took her away from her sisters and brothers and she is gonna hate me, but now I don’t think she would go back to a normal pig life, she’s become accustomed to this life she has now.

K: Has having a pet pig changed your perception about them as animals at all?

P: Yeah, they’re really hard work. It’s not like the videos on TikTok, like those Chinese people who get their pigs to sit still and take them out for nice walks... I don’t understand how, they are so destructive. I didn’t know that... I knew they were intelligent, but it’s like having a toddler 24/7. It’s exhausting. I didn’t think it would be this much hard work.

K: In terms of personality, were you expecting her to be like she is?

P: No, I wasn’t expecting an asshole! I laugh about it but she is a proper little asshole. If she can do something to agitate someone she will. On a morning now when she wants breakfast, she will take all the pans out until I get up. She’s an asshole. She is really picky with what she eats. I got a Chinese the other night and she wouldn’t eat the mushrooms. She pulls the pipe out the garden.... I didn’t think that she would be as clingy as what she is.

K: When you got her where did you get information about pig care?

P: Er, I watched a lot of videos on youtube. Er, again all those pigs seems really well behaved. Like, they come over to get their nails clipped and she would not allow me to do that. Er, but it was mainly like the Facebook groups. Some of them are condescending on their though, I tend not to post too much on their now.

K: How do you think [Dusty] perceived her relationship with you?

P: That she’s equal. Like we’re the heads. I think she likes to think she’s my boss, but I am. She doesn't like, scare me when she does things. I think she just thinks she’s my favourite. She will nudge my daughter and the dog out the way to get to me and she knows she gets away with it. She is sick of [Dusty] [points at dog]

K: do they get on?

P: [Dusty] is very aggressive with food, so if she smells it and the dog is too slow, [Dusty] will literally come over and grab it. What is strange is, she was never an aggressive dog, but she has this aggression towards [Dusty] and she doesn’t tolerate it. Er, so if she goes, so [Dusty] would never in a million years go for Bo, but Bo would go for her and she will swipe her out the way. If you play silly games you win silly prizes. If you try go for a pig that weight what do you think is gonna happen. [Dusty] thinks she is above her.

K: Does [Dusty] in anyway show she has an emotional connection with you?

P: Yeah, so, this is really strange right. When the dog died, it was April, I was obviously crying and she leans in. She’s doing a little noise, like singing to me to soothe me. I asked the lady and that pig knew there was something the matter with me and she kept trying to sing to me. It was like the cutest thing ever, she was trying to look after me and that’s lovely of her.

K: That’s sweet.

P: They’re definitely more emotional than people think they would be. She knows when she’s done something wrong too. She straight away will put her head down if she knows she is in trouble. She’s not stupid, she will still do it, but, yeah. They really are emotional and pick up on if you’re upset.

K: Has your relationship with her changed over time?

P: Yeah, I'm like, massively attached to her now. I didn’t think I would be when we first got her because she was so difficult to like come near, if you put your hand out she would scarper away. When we first got her and picked her up to put her on the bed, she would poo out of sheer fright. Now, it doesn’t bother her. I just didn’t think we would be as close as we are. She can walk next to me without a lead and everything.

K: How has your life changed since you’ve had her?

P: er.. Better. I had really bad stress and stuff, but she makes me get up earlier which is better for me, I'm in a routine and I can’t be like selfish and lie in bed all day because I’ve got something to look after. So, yeah she’s probably been a good thing to have a round. Not food wise though, Christ she costs me an absolute fortune in food but she’s made me happy to be around.

K: What does she eat?

P: [laughs] so, she is mega expensive. She has oats in the morning. She will normally only have it if it’s mixed with warm milk and she won’t touch it if it’s cold. She likes fruit chopped into that. They are meant to really like peanut butter but she hates it. My daughter put some on the end of the spoon and [Dusty] had a temper and staring at her all day because it annoyed her. She won’t eat potatoes. She will have a bucket of veg outside and fruit. My mum says are you still feeding her those pellets every day because she is getting big. She is about 20 times bigger than everyone else. She is used to that high life now.

K: Do you think she will get much bigger?

P: yeah! If you go look at her mum and dad, they are like the size of a staffy. Her brothers and sisters are smaller. She gets a lot of attention when we are out, it’s just annoying when people come up to you all the time. They ask, ‘did you think you were gonna buy a minipig’. But I'm getting quite pissed off with people randomly sticking a phone in my face and taking pictures. If you ask, it’s no problem. But when they drive past videoing it. That’s probably the worst thing about it, I didn’t buy a pig to be put on social media without my permission. I didn’t buy one for the attention. I bought one in a moment of madness but I love her. She should be allowed to walk down the road without fingers in her face. The first time I took her to the beach was a massive experience, there were kids coming over all the time. It really agitates me now. If you ask, I'll stop and take a photo but don’t just start fucking filming me. It’s the jokes as well... a guy shouted over at me the other day “I'll have a sandwich” like trying to be clever, I said “what do you mean by that mate?”. He was like it’s just a joke, but I don’t like it, don’t make jokes about her. So yeah, it’s really annoying.

K: Do you think it’s to do with misconceptions people have about pigs?

P: no, I think it’s literally because they are so desperate to get more likes and stuff on social media.

K: You get jokes about bacon?

P: Yeah

K: How does that make you feel?

P: I threaten them to come to their door. [laughs]. I'll go to their house, I'm a bit of lunatic like that.

K: do you have feelings about eating meat in general?

P: no. You know what, when I first got her, so, I used to get a bacon sandwich every morning before work. I used to get this homeless man the same. I thought, I'll have my last one. Then I got home and realised I had a load of salami in the fridge, so we thought we would just finish it. Then, she smelt it. She was like, what the hell is that. So, I let her have some. You can’t let her watch the dogs have some piping hot chicken and not you, so she’s always eaten meat. She eats pork. I know that... this girl on the group... they’re very judgmental on there... she put that I can’t give her sweets because they have pork gelatine in there. I thought, she eats pork! She has gammon. I wasn’t gonna personally eat it, but I thought if you are... I am! So she still eats it.

K: So, was it before you got [Dusty] that you were going to try vegetarian?

P: So, I was vegan like two years ago for health reasons. Then I went back on the meat. A few days before I got her I thought, I won’t eat bacon again. But then when I saw she would have it, I thought, oh sod ya, I'll have it to. It's not something I openly tell people, especially in the Facebook group, there would be uproar and people wouldn’t be offended. But yeah she fuckin’ eats meat. She had slow roasted gammon the other day, she loves it. She is so fuckin spoilt.

K: Do your family and friends understand the relationship you do have with her?

P: [My daughter] does, it’s just like how I was with the chihuahua. My sister is like, why did you get one. And I'm like, just woke up one day and got one. I wouldn’t change her now, never give her back. If I can’t go on holiday or do things, then so be it. I love her.

K: What’s your favourite activity to do with [Dusty]?

P: eat sweets. We do go for walks and stuff, but it would be nice to go out for a walk and not answer the same five questions like “what kind of dog is that?” “i bet that eats anything” “i bet you got that so you could get rid of a dead body”... you know, you’ve just got nothing left to give by the end, can’t even laugh at it anymore. I used to like going for walks, but yeah. I like having a joint and a couple sweets. She likes the smell of it. She ate a cake before, I got home and I saw [Dusty] had one of my special brownies.

K: Has she ever been unwell?

P: No, she is really healthy. I take her out for walks, she gets loads of veg, there’s no reason why she shouldn’t [be healthy]. The only time she was poorly, I never knew this so it’s like a life lesson, when she was horny she wouldn’t come in the house and just wanted to walk it off all the time. She burnt her paw, the palm when it was too hot. But that is the only time. The guy said he’s gonna give her the hysterectomy because they tend to get a lot of infections in the urethra and stuff like that, so it will hopefully take all that away. I wouldn’t want the vet bill to be honest.

K: Have you had to call a vet about anything?

P: Yeah, it was honestly so hard to book her in for the hysterectomy. Honestly, I must have rang about twelve vets and none of them dealt with pigs. It was a life lesson because if there was ever an emergency what would I do? The nearest one that deals with her is an hour away. At Barnard castle. I was ringing round, and no one really does pet pigs. Luckily, I managed to get hold of a vet and he is amazing, he is going to do her hooves at the same time.

K: is this a farm vet?

P: yeah he is a farm vet, he said he’s done an awful lot of sheep but hasn’t done a pig yet, which I thought was strange. He rang me back and seemed to know what he is doing so I trust him.

K: would you think about getting more pigs?

P: You know what, I did think about it. I think to have a pig then to give it away, if genuinely the landlord came to me now and said you can’t have a pig, I'd go as well. I did think the other week about getting another one but then I thought, Jesus, no. It's gonna be bad enough asking like my sister to look after [Dusty], so not two. It’s taking the piss. It’s tempting but I never would.

K: Is there anything else you’d like to say, or any stories you might have that would give me insight into the meaning [Dusty] has to you?

P: you’re probably best off having a look at my Instagram. All the videos are on there. Like, I don’t know, I'd never ever in a million years, no matter how naughty she was, I would never give her back. I say to people though, don’t get one unless you are 100% sure you can do it. [walks outside to show me [Dusty]] she has loads of places out here to go but she wouldn’t stay out here for love nor money. I personally won’t tell anyone where I got her, I don’t wanna be responsible for when they give them back. I know she would be heartbroken if she was taken away from me. Nothing can happen to me for the forseeable because I've got to be with her and look after her.