Interview with Angela (pseudonym) pet pig keeper

20th June 2022, online.

Conducted by researcher [K]

K: So if you don’t mind starting off, why did you decide to have pet pigs?

P: Well, I always wanted a pink pig called [Theo] from when I was a little girl and I told my mum, that’s what I was going to do. It ended up being a boy pink pig called [Theo] in the end [laughs] but I just always wanted them. I had 3 children and it wasn’t feasible and then I met somebody, I remarried... long story short, and I met somebody as crazy as me so for my 50th birthday, he did loads and loads of research and the rest is history, we got them.

K: So where did those pigs come from?

P: [the breeder], he’d already researched [the breeder] and strangely enough, we’d had some sort of disappointment, so we went away and the place where we were staying happened to be near [the breeder] and they were absolutely amazing and we ended up putting a deposit down on two pigs because it’s always better to have two pigs than one, which I didn’t actually realise.

K: So you didn’t really have much preparation time?

P: Well, we did because preparation is the most important thing. My husband had done about a years research on pigs, was it feasible to have them in a normal home and a normal garden? Where to get them from, everything like that. Then we had a good six months before we got them, we researched and we did the set up really well. Um, I think the set-up is the most important thing when you’re going to have pigs in a home, it’s got to be right. You can’t just decide to get a pig one day. Because they hadn’t even actually been born when we bought two. Basically, they were going to be so we put our name down on the waiting list and we waited about six months, and we needed those six months.

K: What did you do in those six months to set up?

P: We converted the garage and we converted part of the garden. On my Facebook page there are lots of pictures of our original pen. They’ve got bigger and bigger over the last two years because they’ve grown with the pigs. You have to be prepared for them to grow. I mean one of our pigs is 45 kilograms and his brother is 90 kilograms. They were born a day apart from the same farm so that’s how much they can differ. So yeah, we basically converted the garage so they had an indoor and outdoor area that was completely enclosed. We were going to have them as house pigs, but they’re not really house pigs although the garage is more like a room, we get in there and interact all the time. We give them a lot of enrichment because they’re in an enclosed area and it’s not as big as we like, so the enrichment has to be really well thought out and changed constantly for them. It’s a case of evolving with them and growing with them.

K: Can you tell me more about the enrichment?

P: So you know those big horse balls that horses have that are sort of hexagonal, they have those, they are one of the best things we have. They also have horse treat balls. What we have found is that you can’t really get treats for pigs because pigs are considered like just a commodity it is very, very difficult to get any treats for pigs so we have to kind of adapt. [lifts up a ball] this is one of the balls, we have loads of them so they have those indoors and outdoors. We have chains, they love chains for some reason which we put peanut butter on, they have blankets indoor and hay and straw outdoors. They love blankets. Erm, they have concrete because they have to have concrete under their hooves indoor and outdoors, they have toys like a dog toy. We have to be careful there are no hard bits in there though. They have bottles hung up with holes in so that they can tap them to get the pignuts out. They have horse bale things of hay outside. They have a paddling pool with those playballs in and sow nuts in the bottom. Stuff like that. Quite similar to dogs, but thing is with pigs is that they’re so intelligent they work it out way quicker than a dog, so I've got this bowl thing that you have to tip to get the sow nuts out and they have to tip it, you can’t just roll it. [Ruby] worked that out in seconds! Literally, you can’t outsmart them, whatever you give them they will work it out.

K: And what kind of places did you look for research?

P: Mainly the internet, we did find though that we have to adapt a lot of it ourselves because there is just nothing out there for pigs. Everything that we buy is for another animal, like a horse or a dog and we have to either make it ourselves or adapt it. My husband did start making pig toys specifically which are little platforms with wheels on, things that they have to move around to get the treats. So he makes his own toys and we sent them to a few sanctuaries to try, just because there’s literally nothing out there for pigs. He also makes vegan pig treats as well for our pigs because again we can’t get anything. Obviously dogs are completely different in that some toys aren’t suitable for the pigs. But yeah, it was basically the internet. Some farm shops. Now the farm shops, and I did email one specific retailer, all the pig... I wouldn’t even say enrichment because they don’t do enrichment for pigs... but all the pig stuff they had was like torture implements, literally. I emailed them like why have you got lovely fun things for horses and dogs but all the stuff for pigs are literally instruments of torture? I just couldn’t believe it.

K: Did they get back to you?

P: They said that’s what DEFRA advise. I said DEFRA don’t have animal welfare in mind at all... I won’t go into that. I said please just try and think of pigs in a different way, for them rather than for the people. What we noticed, when we researched, and I'm on a farm sanctuary course at the moment, but my original course was about pigs and when I went on the course it was literally just pigs as commodities and fattening. I emailed the college and said this isn’t about pigs, this is about pigs for humans. This isn’t actually what they are like, so they changed my course because I refused to do it because it upset me so much. So, what we found is there is nothing out there for pigs, or very, very little. The stuff that is out there is from America, I've just ordered some bits from America because they are gradually getting it in the States, but we have just got such a long way to go over here so that’s why we make our own stuff a lot of the time.

K: Do you think that’s because there are more pet pigs over in America?

P: I think so and I think it’s because they’ve got more land and space. I think a lot of the time what they do eventually comes over here and I think there’s possible more farm sanctuaries over there than there is over here because they do seem to have a lot more availability of products for pigs and for people that can keep pigs as pets, even the coats we’ve had to get dog coats for them and adapt them. Now we get them handmade which is quite expensive, but we have a lady that donated a harness to [Harper] because he is disabled. But everything we’ve got we’ve either made ourselves or had to adapt.

K: You mentioned making vegan treats for them, are you yourself vegan?

P: Yes

K: What made you become vegan if you don’t mind me asking?

P: Well, I was vegetarian anyway, my father was a vegetarian, he was like a pioneer because he died at the age of 84 a couple of years ago. He was vegetarian before it was even a thing. So, I've kind of been brought up to respect animals and not just see them as commodities. The reason I went vegan is because when I got the pigs, is started to contact a lot of farm sanctuaries and research things and I'm constantly on the internet and doing courses. They fascinated me so much and I started looking at farm animals in a different light and what I found out about the dairy industry was so horrific, it was as bad, if not worse than the meat industry and I thought, oh my gosh, I didn’t know any of this. I was so horrified, I just decided that was it, I would never, I wouldn’t have any animal products in the house. The clothes that we wear, products I use, everything that we buy new now it’s vegan.

K: So did kind of getting your own pigs prompt you to look at that information more?

P: 100%. Absolutely. They have literally changed out lives, turned our world upside down, completely transformed.

K: In what ways?

P: diet, lifestyle, just the love we have for them is just, really weird, it’s like love on a deep level. We have a dog, it’s not mine it’s actually my son’s, and I actually love him to bits, I've had a dog before. But the love we have for the pigs is almost like an empathetic love because when I look at them, I think, oh my gosh you’re so disrespected in society and abused, it just literally saddens me, whereas dogs are respected and if you hurt a dog, you’re a scumbag, if you hurt a pig, you’re just doing your job. So, dogs already have that level of respect in society and pigs don’t. The love and empathy we have for our pigs goes kind of beyond having a normal pet if that makes sense. Just because of the passion and the visions I see of pigs being abused and on slaughter trucks and that. It kind of makes me have a deeper respect for the pigs I've got and them in general. It’s literally changed everything I think about farm animals, farming, erm it’s just changed everything to the point where it’s even changed where we’re going to live, we’re moving to set up a sanctuary to try and save as many pigs as we can. Possibly other farm animals as well but you have to be careful because of the whole TB thing and DEFRA which makes it impossible. Um, but yeah, they just changed the way we think really, they give us so much more empathy.

K: That’s quite nice to hear, talking to you and other sanctuaries where those pigs are almost like the lucky ones, do you agree?

P: Exactly, it should be the norm like it is for dogs and cats. Seeing as they’re the third most intelligent animal on the planet, you’d think we have more respect for them. But I think it is coming, it is changing, obviously we’ve got a long way to go. Obviously, we get a lot of flack. But we do get more support than we do flack, 1% flack and 99% support. But you do get trolls and people who just think we’re mad and people who will not change.

K: is that over social media?

P: Yeah. People don’t generally do it to my face but if we get even the slightest hint of anyone disrespecting the pigs, we’ve got a zero tolerance, we just block them. They don’t ever get the chance to... they’ve only got to say something like ‘oh, all I see is bacon’ or something like that, or ‘that would make a tasty snack’. That’s it, they’re blocked. They don’t get a second chance; I won’t have anyone talking about them like that. So we kind of nip it in the bud, I don’t argue with people.

K: and how have people in your real life taken to your pigs?

P: So I've got three adult kids. My son lives here and is like, still thinks we’re mad. It is what it is. He’s not particularly interested. My other two daughters are fine, one of them absolutely loves animals and is vegetarian anyway. The other one just thinks it’s funny. I mean our family think we’re a bit loopy, but the thing is you never get support from your family, it’s always outsiders who think you’re amazing. So we get that from other people rather than our family. Our neighbours are absolutely brilliant, we couldn’t want for better neighbours. They’ve never ever complained. I mean, we do keep them very clean, the poos get cleaned up 3 to 5 times a day, and we try and keep them as neat as we can. We try and make it as good for our neighbors as we can. One of our pigs, the female, is very attention seeking so that is hard. But yeah, they’ve.. We haven’t had any problems and actually we rent this house and our landlord has been great and let us have them, which we were very surprised about. I am quite house proud, well I don’t live in a dump so I make sure everything is clean and tidy. We spend all day doing it and making sure it is sanitised and everything. So we don’t have any problems with neighbors. I do ocasionally get flack for being vegan from family though.

K: I’m vegan too, I get it!

P: Fellow vegan! Well done.

K: So first few weeks of having pigs, how did you adjust to life with your new pet?

P: To be honest I was just a bit obsessed with them. I could not believe how brilliant they were. Unlike puppies, they sleep all night. The first night they came back, I slept on the sofa, and they slept in a little play pen and I kept think they will get up in a minute, but they didn’t. We put them to bed about 8 o’clock and they sleep... sometimes we have to wake them up about 9, 9:30 in the morning. We’ve got a pet that sleeps all night, that’s fantastic. They’re so cute. They don’t like being picked up, they don’t like height or their trotters being off the ground, so we cuddle them on our laps when it suited them. They’re very much ‘i cuddle you when it suits me’. But adjusting to life, I'm just trying to think back. It was just mad, because we had a dachshund, he hasn’t responded very well to them and we’ve tried to train him but it just doesn’t work. He occasionally comes into contact with them now, but I had visions of them being in the house all the time.

K: How many pigs do you have?

P: We have 3.

K: are they are a particular breed?

P: Well they are [the breeder] pigs apart from one, [Theo], he is the big one. He is part potbelly. We’re not 100% sure he’s not part commercial because he’s so big and there were two commercial pigs at [the breeder]and the mum, his mum wasn’t really supposed to get pregnant, and they don’t know who the dad is. He just kept on growing. He’s three times the size of all the other pigs there. So he might be part Large White or something, but we don’t care, we love him and we’re not really bothered.

K: Did you expect them to be as big as they are?

P: [Ruby] and [Harper] are about the same size-ish. [Theo] did surpass all our expectations by becoming a tank, but we just literally love him for it and we were prepared for whatever size because we were warned you can’t tell how big a pig is actually going to get. [the breeder] were absolutely amazing, I cannot fault them. The manager doesn’t ever let anyone have a pig without showing them the parents. We do feed our pigs a little more than they do, but that’s normal because they are our pets. We try and make sure we don’t overfeed them because [Theo] will get fed the same, but [Theo] does have a tendency to be on the plump side so we are careful with him. It’s easy to overfeed them. The information we got from [the breeder] was brilliant, they could not have been more helpful to us.

K: Is there any aspect of pig care that you struggled with a bit at first?

P: Um. I don’t... well, obviously the rooting, just completely uprooting the garden, we don’t mind we don’t have a garden now, it’s just a pig pen. Maybe keeping up with how intelligent they are, and keeping them occupied. The level of intelligence was challenging because they are very, very demanding when looked after properly and when they know they are looked after properly, they will push and push and push and push you to your absolute limit. So that was difficult finding toys for them when we weren’t there and giving them the liven of attention that they need. We gradually adapted to that and they have loads of attention now, but trying to find toys and things was quite hard.

K: What’s the day-to-day interactions with them like?

P: Funny thing is I literally just done a video of that to go on Facebook. Wake up in the morning, get them out, put their coats on if it’s cold. Hide the sow nuts in lots of places. Get all [Harper]’s meds ready. Take all the fruit out, I give the others fruit to because they will know if [Harper] is getting fruit and they aren’t. Then I pick up all the poo and then they have porridge at 11 o’clock. Then we leave them to play and get on with it until 2 o’clock. Then we go out there and we play with them, interact with them, pick up the poos and put some sow nuts down. That’s when they have their treat either a banana or pear, or a watermelon in the summer. At half 3, we wash their hooves, bring them in, take their coats off, put them in the indoor pen which I have prepared for them in the morning with heat lamps. We put a film on for them and give them a toy each and they just play with the film and watch the film and chill out on their blankets. At 6 o’clock we go in. We have to lift [Harper] up. Every time he lies down he have to lift him up. We usually put another film on. If the film ends, [Ruby] will scream at us. She loves a film on. We can hear her screaming and we know the film has ended and we’ve got to change it. At 8 o’clock we go in and give them their supper, put the blankets down, change the wee pads, turn the light off and say goodnight to them and that’s when they make completely different noises. They settle down and make their content noise. Then at 10 o’clock, once they’ve made their beds and they’re asleep, we go in and just put blankets on each of them, kiss them goodnight and they won’t move until we get them up in the morning. And that is basic. Obviously within that time we’re changing water troughs and all sort of things. So, it is very time consuming but that’s the level of interaction we have with them. We are constantly with them and if we go out, any of those times, we get a pig sitter in who is an animal behaviourist. She comes and looks after them. We can’t physically go out for the day unless we pay someone to be here for the day, we can’t just leave them. So completely enveloped our world, time wise and money wise. I mean you don’t have to treat them like that, but it’s what they deserve. I want them to be as happy as they can possibly be. For that to happen, as it’s quite a small garden, I mean it’s a standard garden, I mean we should be on the sanctuary by now but because of Covid it hasn’t happen. We want to make their lives as enriched as I possibly can here, until we’re on the sanctuary. The routine will probably change but at the moment we just want them to be happy and content and know that they are loved and safe. They’re very jumpy pigs. Very nervous. I’m not surprised really when you consider how we treat them. They probably learned to just be very wary but you know, [Theo] is very aware of any little noise. But between four and six I'll go in and brush them or trim their hooves, or clean their ears, put pig oil on their coats or just lay with them and fuss them. So, every day I will do something extra with them. Whatever that is, just so that they know that they are loved and also because they need their hooves trimmed and things like that.

K: And you say so they know they are loved. How do you think the pigs perceive their relationship with you?

P: I think they think of us as almost their guardians. I was saying this to my husband the other day, I wonder if they know, because like the pigs we will rescue will know the difference between the hellhole and then living with us, they will get that. But our pigs have only ever known love and never been harmed and never been mistreated. I would like to know what they think. But I think they do feel safe, they know their routine, they trust us completely. If a stranger walks behind the fence they literally jump. I think they trust us. They’re so intuitive that [Theo] had to have a blood test once and [Ruby] was in the same pen. I mean you probably know how they take blood from pigs and it’s so awful, I was so upset, I did video it because I thought, if I'm going to live on a farm sanctuary I'm going to have to man up to this a little bit. So, I videoed it but I stayed distant because I didn’t want [Theo] relating me to what was happening to him. [Ruby] is very, very trusting and loving but when they’d finished, I cuddled him, [Ruby] was very wary. She was watching the whole thing and it terrified her. I should have taken her out of the pen but I just didn’t. The next day when we went in the pen, she actually ran away from us for the first time ever and it really upset me because I thought she’s lost trust in us because we’ve allowed that to happen. It took us hours of coaxing and cuddling her, reassuring her, stroking her, to get her that trust back. Whereas a dog would immediately trust you again. Pigs, they remember things. So If we ever have a fall out, because [Theo] will bite me sometimes, and I was on the phone the other day and trying to put his coat on and because I wasn’t paying attention, he got jealous and went to bite me. I know every time he bites me it’s because I've done something wrong, like I'm in a hurry, because they pick up on how you’re feeling. So, if we’re stressed, they are completely different with us. They pick up our stress. I read somewhere that a pig will always know your intention towards it when you step towards it which is why they run away from farmers and that sort of thing. The general joke is you can’t catch a piglet. Well, you can but they know... they know your intention toward them. I hope they trust us and love us and just know how safe they are, I think they pretty much do, but if we go away for a couple of days when we come back, they, [Theo] especially, is in a really bad mood for a couple hours maybe, or days. If my husband goes away, again he changes. He like, lets him know about it. You just can’t pull the wool over their eyes. They make Brian, our dachshund, look thick. I mean dogs are intelligent, but the pigs make him look like an idiot. You can’t outsmart them, they know what they are doing. It’s a weird relationship I think with humans and pigs, but it is a very special one, very special.

K: and what are their relationships with each other like?

P: I think [Theo] doesn’t really like [Ruby]. They are in the same pen but when we have more land they won’t have to be. They rub each other up the wrong way, they shouldn’t really be together and they get on each other’s nerves, but they sleep together at night. [Theo] will tolerate [Ruby] if he can’t be bothered to do anything about it. Other than that they fight all the time, well I say fight, just a bit of argy-bargy, but pigs do fight with each other anyway. [Harper], [Ruby] doesn’t understand [Harper] because she hasn’t always been here. So we got her about a year after we got the other two. [Theo] I think loves [Harper], but he can bully him because he is disabled so we keep [Harper] separate from the other two. He likes to be in a separate pen, but to see them and be able to smell and talk to them through the bars, that’s what he likes and when he is happiest. But once he is down he can’t get back up, so [Theo] got to the stage where he was knocking him over, either by wanting to play or getting in a mood with him and [Harper] would go down and that would be it. So [Theo] and [Harper] are close but they can’t be in the same pen. [Harper] can’t be in the same pen as another pig because he just gets bullied. But [Ruby] and [Theo], they just don’t ever stop arguing it is literally like kids. But at night they do snuggle up together and look like two little ages. Second [Theo] is up, [Ruby] will clear off in her pen.

K: [Theo] and [Harper], are they castrated?

P: Yes. they were castrated at [the breeder]. I’d do it anyway because we wouldn’t breed from them. I don’t like the idea of changing an animal’s anatomy to suit us, I don’t like it but unfortunately, we don’t live in a perfect world and if we’re going to live on a farm sanctuary we’re going to have to, we cannot have uncastrated boars running around. It doesn’t do them any good anyway because they’ve got an urge in them that they can’t fulfil, they’re frustrated, noisy, and aggressive. So, we would have had them done anyway. We’ve actually had [Ruby] done as well.

K: At what age?

P: I think it was about 3 months. The reason was, most people don’t know, because pigs don’t live a long time they don’t care, but they are very, very likely to get cancer, the girls. So, they have to have a litter every three years or they’re very susceptible to cancer. We asked for advice from a vet in Bristol and they do microsurgery now, keyhole surgery where they go in and do it that way. We paid a lot of money to have her done but they said that was the safest thing for her because if you leave it she’s more than likely to get cancer. We asked what if we could let her have one litter, we were just trying to think of everything. They said she would have to have a litter every three years to avoid it. Also every three months she was in heat and it was uncomfortable for her and making her hormonal and everything. She would just have such a better quality of life with it done. I hated myself for it, I cried that day and my husband said when he took her to the vets, she literally clung to him like she knew something was going to happen and it almost broke us, but she came round and healed and she was fine and now she is much happier. So we’re glad she had it done but it was a horrible decision to make because it’s quite a big operation for a female pig to get done.

K: Yes, as they get older it’s more risky.

P: That’s what they said, if you don’t have it done now and she gets cancer, you’re then going to have to operate on her when she is older and that is more of a risk. So the best chance of a quality of life, because we said we want quality and length of life, we want her to live as long as she can naturally and her quality of life to be the best it can be. They said in that case, this is what you need to do, so that is what we did. We just took that risk but it was horrible, it was awful.

K: Can’t have been a nice decision to make. How old are they now?

P: [Theo] and [Harper] are two and a half and [Ruby] is one and a half.

K: And can you talk more about [Harper]’s disability?

P: yeah, so when we first got him after a few months he started falling over, he could get back up but he just kept falling. We thought it was some kind of fit. Long story short, we investigated and investigated, no one knew what was wrong with him. He went to Bristol University, had blood tests, finally they test him for muscular dystrophy and everything. Finally, they find out he had myotonia congentia. They said the only one other pig on record to have this is one in Brazil and I said, it’s not actually that rare, is it? They said, to be honest, before they would even be diagnosed with this, they would be put down. That got us thinking about the farm sanctuary and everything. Having him put down was not even an option. We do have to lift him up every two hours, so in about twenty minutes my husband will go lift him up from the hay barn so he can have his porridge. He cannot get up on his own, so once he is down, he is completely unable to get himself up. So, he wears a harness so I can get him up. He doesn’t have to wear a harness when my husband picks him up because he can weight bear him but I can’t. Basically, we just manage it with phenytoin and then um, I put him on glucosamine which I'm gradually upping and we’re fundraising for a laser gun for him at the moment, and I put heat pads on him. They taught me at Bristol University physiotherapy that I do for him, not on a daily basis but probably every other day. But it is very, very time-consuming. We’re so grateful, [the breeder] said he was the only disabled pig they’ve ever had and my husband and I said we were meant to get him because I don’t know, I'm not saying everybody... but there are a lot of people who wouldn’t have kept him. It’s a lot of hard work. Obviously, he is worth it but it’s quite a bad disability for him to have.

K: and how difficult was it to get to the stage of an actual diagnosis?

P: well our vets have been absolutely amazing, so the Bristol University vets and our local farm vet, they’re fully aware they are pets and they suggested the university, so although the journey to Bristol and back have been a little concerning, only from his point of view, they’ve been so helpful because they’re intrigued as well, they haven’t had the opportunity to work with a pig like that. They said usually they’d get put down so it’s a brilliant opportunity for them to learn. They were really intrigued, so we’ve had a positive experience with both our vets, they are amazing.

K: And did you make contact with your local farm bet before you got them?

P: Yes I think they came out and did their jabs, they only have one jab, I can’t remember, begins with L. They have one a year and we send of stool samples for worms and things. So they came out and did a regular check, interestingly they do stay longer than they normally would because they say it’s nice being here because normally if they visit a farm they’re not cared for in the same way, so yeah we’ve had a really positive experience with our vets. Obviously, people go into that profession because they love animals, so for them it’s probably nice for them to see somewhere where pigs are considered pets and not just a commodity. So I think they like coming out. Sometimes we are a little bit over the top, but I'm like, I need him checked out. Um, but yeah, [Theo] is has a bit of a dodgy tummy, he’s a bit of a diva really, sensitive to everything, But he is on antacid, so we put it in his porridge because he is prone to being sick. We have to be careful what fruit we give him and things like that.

K: So have your pigs had any significant health problems other than [Harper]’s disability?

P: Um, not really, no. [Theo] limped once but that is because he likes to jump on the side and he hurt himself. He also had an ear infection once. [Ruby] has had nothing. [Harper] is just his disability. [Theo] seems quite sensitive. Apart from that, no, absolutely fine. Actually, [Harper] did have a skin disorder which cleared up with some cream. That’s it.

K: How would you decide what to call a vet for and what to manage at home?

P: I can do a lot more at home than I used to. I used to call a vet for a temperature. If [Theo] is sick now we don’t call a vet because it’s probably just something he ate. He shivers when he gets cold too and we have to warm him up, we’ve learned to do that ourselves. So we do call the vet out less than we used to because we have more experience now. I now don’t do that, I only phone the vet if I think they’re really poorly. I did call the vet once actually because [Ruby] got a bit of carrot stuck in her throat, she was doing strange things with her mouth. Yeah, if I thought something was really wrong, it would have to be a temperature or something quite drastic. Most things we manage ourselves now.

K: and are you aware of any biosecurity issues to you as a pet pig owner?

P: yeah so we do have visitors and they have to wear those blue covers over their shoes before they come in. We don’t have any other animals apart from the dog. When the dog has been to the park we always wash his paws before he goes into the garden. Something beginning with L... they were immunised against because we were taking them out to the park, we don’t anymore because [Theo] is too big. If he decided to run he would, well I'd go flying. So, there’s not that much of a risk because no one goes in the garden really. We are a bit worried about rats, we put humane traps down. Apart from that. We also regularly rake over and put new bark down and we do put artificial grass down. Once it gets nasty, we throw it away. There isn’t that much out there that would necessarily harm them. We regularly pick up the wet straw and stuff. We regularly wash the patio, wash their hooves. We keep the indoor pen very, very clean. I sweep it out and put antibacterial spray all in the corners and wash the blankets every week. Everything is always getting washed. So, I'm aware of the biosecurity but I'm not too aware of what they could get, probably because I don’t need to be at this stage because everything is clean. I’m actually learning about biosecurity on my course at the moment. Um, I will need to know a lot more about it when we have new rescues, they have to be in isolation and everything else. The only place we’ve taken [Harper] in the last year is an indoor fayre where he was petted by everyone. They wore gloves and only fed him our food. So, we do a lot. We don’t want to make it too sterile, because we need to build up their immune system. But we do try.

K: Do you get information from DEFRA about biosecurity?

P: I have but it is irrelevant to us because they tend to talk about herds, so it doesn’t apply to us. Yet. It will when we move, but at the moment they don’t come into contact with any other animals or pigs. They don’t go out. So DEFRA don’t really bother with us really. We try keep a low profile. I mean we’ve got a walking license, a CPH and a license to take [Harper] to the fayre. So, everything we do is above board.

K: I’m intrigued about the walking license, what did you have to do to get that granted?

P: So, we had to submit exactly where we were planning to take them, exactly the route and where they were going to be and basically the guy from the animal health agency walked the route, making sure there were no fast food places or other animal places or farms. We since got another one. We did take them in the car actually because we’re near a main road and it would distract traffic, it’s a 40 mile per hour speed limit and we didn’t want to distract traffic. We took them to the park and people absolutely loved it. We would let them off the lead and they would stick with us and never go off, they’d stay with us. When [Theo] got too big, we stopped it. But they were like celebrities. People were lovely.

K: So what kind of inspired you to start the sanctuary?

P: [Harper]. We went back to [the breeder] and they said ‘we’re so sorry about [Harper], can we give you a replacement pig?’ and we were like, no. Honestly. We said if you get any more disabled pig, please give them to us and that just got us thinking. If there’s him, there’s probably more out there. So we just got thinking. The idea grew and because mum is selling her land and moving in with us, we’re pulling all our resources together and she absolutely loves animals, so did my dad. We were going to buy a farm but it fell through so we went looking for something bigger. I started being friends with so many sanctuaries, and we now do the transport for a lot of them. The first one we did, someone just messaged me saying there’s this boar that’s been abandoned by a farmer for 18 months and being fed by locals. We said we have to find him a home, we did find him a home at an animal sanctuary. We went and got him in a Fiat van, put him in the back, he was frickin enormous. We absolutely loved him, but it was the scariest journey ever but when we got him there, he’s now been castrated, and he’s got a forever home and he’s happy. I said to my husband, that’s what we are meant to do because everything in me was fulfilled. We sold the Audi for a land rover, fundraised for a trailer, went on to save four more females who now have a forever home and it’s just in us now, there’s our faith too. We feel we’re being led to do it, it’s our mission. We tried all sorts of things, we tried IVF and stuff like that but it didn’t happen. But I knew we were together for a reason because we were both very passionate about injustice. So, we both went to Uganda, we sponsor kids in Uganda but I knew we weren’t meant to move there, so I though what is it that we are meant to do? Just, all out of the blue, I said to God ‘it’s animals isn’t it?’ and within weeks we had the dog, he was at risk of going somewhere nasty. We didn’t plan on him but we got him. Then we got [Harper] and he just happened to be disabled. I just want to save as many as we can financially give a home to, even if it’s only a few, it won’t change the world but it will change the world for them.

K: So it will be a forever home for them?

P: We might foster a few if they have homes to go to, but generally speaking it will be a forever home where they will be safe. Generally speaking, it’s difficult passing pigs on because people will say they will keep pigs then they won’t. We’ve had it before where we’ve had to go teach them because they weren’t enriching them enough and they were escaping. There was another saying they didn’t know they were that expensive to feed. So rehoming is almost impossible if it’s not a sanctuary. People don’t know how complex they are and what they need. With the sanctuary, we just feel we’ve been put together to do this because we both feel so passionate about helping animals and in the sanctuary, we want to raise awareness for people and create an education centre where pigs can learn about pigs and also the truth about farming as well.

K: That’s interesting your faith has informed that as well.

P: Yeah, well when my kids say to me that we’re leaving them, I'm like well we’re not leaving you, I know that we’re meant to do this and if I'm wrong, I'll come back, but I don’t think I am wrong about this. I think this is what we’re meant to do and when you have a calling to do something that is so strong, because we are both so passionate about injustices and everything like that. We both have the same heart and when two people get together and got the same heart, you can do amazing things.

K: so, when you pick up pigs from sanctuaries where are you picking them up from?

P: The first one was abandoned. Second one was this guy hadn’t realised pigs breed so young so he had just let this boar and this female in together and they had babies, and we took 6 females to a sanctuary in Wales. We met him in a car park and the babies were terrified, but now they love humans, seeing them evolve from being literally terrified to gradually really happy, that was amazing. But this guy didn’t have a clue bless him, but at least he didn’t kill them. The next one, it was people who lived in Wales, that was a long old drive with a trailer, the owner got ill and the pigs kept escaping because they weren’t being enriched. There were four of them and we took them to a sanctuary near Sussex I think. Then there were people who rented land and the landowner wanted it back and they had nowhere to put them, but that’s basically what we’ve rescued so far.

K: Have you had conversations with animal rights activists who go on to farms?

P: Yeah we’ve had a few interested in our pigs and I am friends with a lot on Facebook. In actual fact, one of them rang us about the first rescue. If someone asks us to rescue a pig, we don’t stop until we find it a home. We can’t have it here but we won’t stop fighting until we get a home no matter what. We’ve done hundreds and hundreds of miles in a weekend before because sanctuaries are too busy. If we can help then we will. Another one had two uncastrated boars in a normal house, she’d been told they don’t have to be castrated by the breeder, that’s the worst advice! She had four kids and they were aggressive. But yeah always ready for the next one. The animal movement people have been really good too, I’ve only ever had one woman on the phone who was a bit snotty with me but generally they are helpful when we ring up and ask for a movement license, no problems yet. So, we’ve been quite lucky with everyone but I think sometimes it’s the way you approach people, we’re not aggressive vegans! We tread carefully and explain what we are doing rather than shove it down their throats. It’s easy to get emotional but we don’t want to get a reputation for being rude.

K: To wrap up, what’s your favourite thing about pigs?

P: It’s gotta be their snouts. They’re the cutest things and they give kisses, you can rub them to calm them down, it’s got to be the cutest thing about pigs.