Interview with Jacqui (pseudonym) pig sanctuary founder

25th November 2021, walking interview, in person at sanctuary

Researcher = [K]

**K:** Could you tell me a bit about how [Sanctuary name] came about?

**P:** [Sanctuary name] started completely by accident and erm, I started with my own four pet pigs. I knew how big they would get to and did kind of the basic research. Obviously, didn't know that much about pig keeping but did do the research in terms of what kind of feeds they needed, what kinds of care and how big they were going to end up being. Erm, we were asked to rescue or take six Potbellies from someone that was moving house and they couldn't take the pigs with them and this lady had tried absolutely everywhere, she tried RSPCA, farmers, friends, everyone she knew, friends of friends and all the rest of it. She said, "I just don't know what to do, I can't take them with me, if I don't find a home for them, I'm going to have to get them put down." Erm, my husband was, he has a removals company, and he was doing the quotes for her move and he ended up just saying, "oh I'll ask the wife, she keeps pigs" and sort of came back and said, "do you want to rescue these six Potbellies because the outlook is a bit grim for them", and I said "well, yeah! Of course, I do!". So, they came to the sanctuary and that's actually what started the sanctuary, because we did a load of research and then just suddenly realised that actually, there are no pig sanctuaries around, there's no porcine rescue centres and they're so difficult to rehome, and that's why she couldn't just, it's not like a cat or dog, where you can in theory, put them into a domestic environment, and there's nowhere for them to go. Usually, through no fault of the animal, they end up being euthanised because it's so hard to find homes for them, and that's literally how [Sanctuary name] started. So, complete accident and it's just literally blossomed and flourished in the last five years.

**K:** Seems like you've got lots of interest and people ringing you all the time.

**P:** Yeah, I wanted to let you know the number because although we've got forty pigs here, if I did take every pig I've been asked to take, I would have getting up for 800. I'm probably asked twice a week to take pigs, often single ones and I get pairs, then sometimes I get "I've got seven pigs can you take them" or "I've got an unwanted litter". Erm, you know, so that kind of number I think shows the two sides of it really, one is they're miss-sold, you know, the myth of the micro pig, and quite often you'll get breeders, kind of like puppy farming. They don't give two hoots where the animals go to, as long as they get money, and they charge an awful lot of money. Then you get the other side of it, where people don't do their research properly and they think that they can put this animal into the same type of environment, and you can look after it in the same way as a cat or a dog. Suddenly, I get most of them going "oh, I bought this micro pig, that was meant to be a micro pig and now it's enormous" and I say, "well that’s because you bought a baby, it's grown into an adult" and the words, it's one of those things, it would be lovely to change the word because there's no such thing as a little adult micro pig. But people don't seem to think "oh, well if there were lots of them, I'd see them all being trotted around on leads up and down the high street". You know, have you ever seen that? Erm, and so people don't really think it through and actually doing their research about having an animal. They're very sentient animals, the should be in pairs, they get very lonely on their own. Erm, and again, with these animals, because they're so intelligent, they're inquisitive and they will, you know, you put them on your sofa and go out to work, they will shred your solar because you know, they want to know what's going on and their snout and their olfactory senses are their biggest sense. So, they do everything enquiring with their noses and their mouths, then suddenly it's like, well this animal is really destructive, or it's dug up my garden, and I thought I could teach it not to root and sort of take it away their instinctive behaviours. So, there is a big issue with people keeping pet pigs without doing it properly.

**K:** And what's your general attitude towards keeping a pig as a pet, has it changed over time or?

**P:** Erm I think they make fantastic pets, but they're not cats and dogs. So, every pet that people choose to have, they need to be looked after in a particular way, if you choose to have chickens and look after chickens you're not going to look after them the same way as you look after a cat. It's the same for these animals that because they're so big and so heavy, they're hard to find homes for. Also, if they're mistreated and aggressive, they're potentially very dangerous. Say you had a thousand people who would be prepared, or wanted to take a dog, you might have a hundred that would be prepared to take a rescue. And if you had a hundred people that wanted a pet pig, you'd be lucky if you could find one that would take a rescue because they want the small, little piglet and then they want to be able to train them within the house and the environment they're in. So, a rescue animal that could be very aggressive, erm is not something that is going to be top of people's list of wanting to take on. You know, they're not fluffy bunnies, and as lovely as they are, you still have to have a healthy respect for them.

**K:** Yeah. Is that one of the common reasons why people might seek to give them up then?

**P:** I think they don't really realise the management of them and the size of them. And also, I mean I've got two micros, quite often they're sold as "oh well they won't get much bigger than a Labrador". Well technically, these two micros are not much taller than a Labrador, but they're ten times as strong and ten times as wilful and ten times as heavy and you know, all of those things. They're not animals that you can manage, you can't just pick them up and move them, you've got no chance of doing that. I think people just don't generally realise. I think a lot of it is you can't guarantee the size that your micro pig or your pig is going to end up because it's all hereditary genetics. So, you might buy from a micro breeder and end up with a pig that's the size of a large black. You just don't know, because somewhere in the genetic bloodline there's a large breed that's come through. So, I think it is a combination of poor research, bad sales and people just not knowing what to expect.

**K:** Seems like they're pretty common issues as I'm talking to more people and people moving homes, as you said in the beginning, and not taking their pigs with them.

**P:** Yeah, and you know some people might be renting somewhere and they certainly think it's a great idea to have a pet pig, and then the landlord goes "no thank you very much, I'm not having a pig tear up my garden" and it's like "well I'm going to have to get rid of it". Then, the RSPCA don't have facilities to be able to take these animals, so they'll put them on their website as needing rehoming, but they don't physically take them. In fact, the RSPCA have asked me to take animals from them in the past because they don't have that facility and they don't have the knowledge of care to be able to look after them as well. So, kind of the most common factor seems to be the size that the animals get to without people realising, and in theory, you're supposed to have a license, you're supposed to have a CPH number, you know all this anyway, and a herd number, and be registered with APHA and everything else before the animals move. But again, if you get an unscrupulous breeder, they'll just be having their hand out for the cash, so they won't care if you've got the CPH. Also, it kind of goes back to the council as well, because councils will grant you a CPH if you've got a garden the size of a postage stamp, and it's not necessarily appropriate. Then you get neighbours complaining and people have to get rid of their pigs. I mean, what do you do about it? It's partly trying to raise awareness, which obviously you're trying to do as well through your research, it's trying to raise awareness so that people stop and think a bit more. That's a big part of what the sanctuary is, it's about educating people. Giving them the facts, showing them the animals and letting them have an interactive experience, but actually realising that these animals are lovely, but I can't keep them on the sofa forever. It's about bonds and connections, having an interactive experience that is enriching for humans, which is obviously part of your research, and enriching for the animals as well. It's a two-way street. Here, it's not commercial, it’s not a petting farm, it's not a money-making exercise at all, it's about trying to get those bonds and connections back for people with the animals. And to kind of rehab for the animals in terms of social and emotional care. So physical rehab, but social and emotional rehab as well. But again, trying to find homes for them is incredibly difficult and I've got a huge, long waiting list, not surprisingly.

**K:** Yeah, could you elaborate a little bit more on the two-way relationship and building a bond with your pig? Are you saying that this is something owners fail to do or?

**P:** No, I’m not necessarily saying that owners fail to do it, but you do need that kind of commitment, you know animals, I mean all the research being done around pigs suggest they’re as intelligent as a three-year-old child. So, they dream, they have emotions, they have feelings, they have memory, they have all of those things. So, you can teach them to sit down, you can teach it to roll on its side for a belly rub, but what you give to an animal, a bit like what you give a child, is what you get back. So, if there's love and kindness there, then you're going to get love and kindness back. If you've got a very damaged animal, that might take two years for them to trust you and it's about building those trust bonds. But for the animals to interact with people who come and visit, they get enrichment, they get attention, they get belly rubs and back scratches and treats and all the rest of it. That's part of their enrichment and enjoyment, and just as much it is for all the schools that come up here and all the other visitors because they get to see these animals and actually physically be able to touch them. If you go to a petting farm, they're separated out, because they're not socialised in the same way. You can't physically touch them because they potentially, they will bite you or they think your hand has got a snack attached to it and it doesn't, it will be your fingers! And so, reforming those bonds is really important, and human interaction is really important as well.

**K:** So how many pigs roughly, out of all the ones that do come to you, kind of have those damaged social bonds with people and may not trust people?

**P:** There’s a few of them that have been really, really damaged. One that we actually lost recently, he was locked in a shed for three years. The people, I think, just didn’t know how to look after him so he was fed and watered, but he was locked up in a shed. So, he had a tiny little space and there was no social interaction with him. He was very aggressive, that aggression when he came here was fear driven. Pigs do have this do or die, fight or flight mentality and it took over two years for him to be happy and calm and know my voice. I mean he knew my voice on my smell but to know that I wasn’t going to be harm come to him and that he was in a safe space. So, it can take quite a long time, and there’s another one, she was just kept in a back garden in south London on a patch of concrete with a nose ring. She was very aggressive, and I used to get into the pen, and she’s come up behind you and get hold of the back of your legs and things but again it’s all just fear. So, it just takes time to teach them that you don't need to do that, you don't need to do that. It's just a daily thing, it's like a damaged child, you teach them to accept what happened, but it's happened, you can't change it so let's live with it and find another way of doing things, and it's very much like that for the animals here.

**K:** That must take a lot of patience.

**P:** It does take a lot of patience, it's almost counselling for pigs! But that it a really important part of it. And there is a mixture, some of them are mistreated, some of them, I've had a couple of abandoned ones. Some people are moving house and can't take their pigs with them, one pair of pigs came because the woman was getting divorced. So different reasons, not all of them have been mistreated, but they can't be kept, and the bottom line is they would be euthanised if they didn't come here. So, it's, I suppose more than anything it is raising awareness of these animals. As I say, they do make great pets, I wouldn't not recommend them as a pet. But you do have to have the right environment. It's a bit like having a Great Dane in a flat. You'd have to be slightly bonkers to do that, and that's what people do. Particularly when they've got babies, and they say they're all cuddly and lovely. Then suddenly, this cuddly, lovely thing is like this big [spreads hands out to gesture a big pig], err it's cuddly and lovely but also very big and very heavy.

**K:** Do you see a lot of variety in the spaces pigs were kept in before coming to you? Like in a house, outside...

**P:** A mixture, yeah of the places they've been kept. One of them was in an abandoned wood that we had to round up, which was quite a challenge! There's a few that have had a very nice amount of space, I mean there's a set of three boys, that came here because the lady was eighty years old, got COPD and her husband died and she couldn't manage them. She said, "I can't look after them anymore, I'm more concerned about their wellbeing than anything else and you know, if you can't take them then I will put them to sleep because I don't want them to suffer". You know, genuine reasons. There was another group before that came, I'd been in a dialogue with this lady for two and a half years, she was very poorly, she was going through lung failure. She said, "I'm not pressurising you, but if you can't take them then I will put them to sleep because I don't know where they're going to go, and I can't trust someone to look after them properly". She has since passed away, bless her, so she did get something that one of her wishes was that she would know that her pigs were safe. They don't all come with damage, you know, those four were absolutely loved to death. She absolutely adored these animals and so did her two daughters, but the two daughters are at uni age, one's at uni, one at college and they haven't got a father around. So, they had to give them up. It has to be, to come here, because space and like so many animal charities, there's no funding that comes in, apart from what we do ourselves. Erm, it has to be last chance saloon, it's not someone who goes "oh I'm a bit fed up with it, will you have my pig". If they're being looked after and cared for and they're not in an environment that is detrimental to them or is threatening, then they're not top of the list. Even though there is a long waiting list, it depends on the urgency, who takes priority.

**K:** And do you see pigs that are kept indoors more than pigs that are kept outdoors or is it really a mixed bag?

**P:** Erm, most of the ones we have taken here are from outdoors, but I do generally say that to consider a pig that is kept indoors, they would have to be trained. Well, I wouldn't say trained, but they would have to be acclimatised to living outside. Because I won't have pigs living in the house and I don't think that the animals, as they've evolved, I don't think that they're designed to live in centrally heated houses. It's a bit like we're not designed to live in water, it's that kind of thing. But each to their own, I don't criticise people who do that, as long as they give the animal the right kind of care. But for me personally, what they need is to be outside, they need to be digging and rooting and creating mayhem in their pen, and digging to Australia and everything, because that is what they do for enrichment and enjoyment and its instinctive behaviour.

It seems like you've got, over the years, a pretty steady income of pigs coming to you.

**K:** But was it, I had a look at the list it was 2019-20 there was slightly less, do you know why that was?

**P:** It was less, erm because I had cancer and so I was going through an awful lot of treatment, and then we had lockdown as well. So, we did have quite a big influx, then I got diagnosed with breast cancer and had to go through all the treatment. So, we weren't in a position to take anymore animals and for me to spend the time rehabilitating them. It was more focussing on able to care for the ones that were already here, than take anymore. Then obviously the lockdown last March, it went very quiet for a few months and then there was a big surge in people who had bought micro pigs in lockdown for company. Then suddenly, it was "oh I'm back to work I don't know what to do with it". A bit like people who bought kittens and puppies for company over that period of time, so that's the reason why there was a dip in numbers. Also, the fact that we're filling up, there's now forty pigs here and we've got nineteen permanent pens, but they're all full. Because I don't just kind of tip them out into one big field and off, they go, they live in a social group. So, if they come in a pair, they will live in that social pair. So, it's not like I can just take another couple and chuck them in the same pen with another two. So, if a new group come, then we build a new pen. So, we do it in a slightly different way, I think there's two other sanctuaries that I know of that are porcine. One of them I believe has since shut down, but they used to do the field method, which was put them into a big field and they would keep goats in the stables or wherever they kept them, to stop them from fighting. So, goats are a very good leveller for pigs because they've got very big horns! They're actually very good to stop animals from fighting. So, I suppose, we do it in the way that it seems to work and if we have a single pig then we try to integrate with another one. Or if we lose one and one is left on its own, we then try and integrate with one of the other animals. So, they always have company, but they're in a sort of a group system up in the main field, with pathways so they can see each other and talk to each other. They do interact and they do see each other socially. So, the few that are on their own, they're preparing to be socialised together, so they can still talk to each other through the fences and get snout to snout contact and get used to each other.

**K:** Yeah, important to maintain those social groups. Interesting you say about the beginning of lockdown, you saw an increase. Because this is something, I've been asking a lot of sanctuaries, whether they saw a similar thing like the puppy boom that happened at the beginning of lockdown. But no one seems to have seen it, which kind of surprised me, but it seems that you have?

**P:** Yeah, I think it's because erm, really, [Sanctuary name] was one of the only exclusively porcine sanctuaries. So, a lot of the other sanctuaries take a variety of animals, a variety of species, whereas [Sanctuary name] only takes pigs. We happened to have an accident with some guinea pigs but that's a completely separate thing! Erm, so it is only pigs. In terms of other sanctuaries, you've got cows, you've got sheep and various other farmed animals, the chances are that's not going to change very much. But I did have a surge at the end of lockdown with people not wanting their not so little micro pig anymore.Yeah, so think people just go "oh I'll message [Sanctuary name]!" That's what happens, and because there's so few around, everyone seems to know about it that's within that sort of circle and it's got quite a wide reach because there are so few pig sanctuaries that exist.

**K:** So, these people had their pigs maybe four or five months before they come to you? Maybe even less. Did they come from breeders?

**P:** They're people who had bought them from breeders and then suddenly realised they were a bit too much to handle and that they weren't dogs [laughs]. You kind of have to read between the lines of what's going on because people don't always tell you the truth, is the best way to describe it.

**K:** Yeah, and it seems like breeders are just outright lying a lot of the time as well.

**P:** I think like anything, there are good breeders and there are unscrupulous breeders. So, you'll get a good dog breeder, and you'll get a puppy farmer. You get that with pigs, some of them are fantastic. In fact, my two Kune’s came from a very good, registered breeder in Cambridge, and they came... I'm not into buying animals, I would rather rescue. But sometimes if it's for the wellbeing of the animal and I have no choice, I will buy an animal to enhance and enrich their lives. So, these two came as company for an old sow that we rescued, erm who had lost her buddy, who was actually the last of my original pigs. So, they came from a registered breeder, everything done properly. If you go to one of the micro farms, they will just churn them out because that's one of their money-making methods. Erm, I do have some that have come from quite well-known mini pig breeders that... what can I say!? Even from my standards are not micro pigs.

**K:** And what qualities would make a good breeder?

**P:** Erm, I think being completely honest and explaining to people the size that they can get, the fact that they can't guarantee the size the animal is going to get because no one has a complete bloodline. You also have to actively talk to people about the environment that animal is going to, even going to check the environment that the animal is going to, and encouraging people to have a pair, because they get very lonely on their own. Erm, but I think it boils down to the honesty of people. Unfortunately, it's not going to change. We might be able to make a little bit of a difference, a drop in the ocean, but hopefully that drop in the ocean will have a ripple effect and just raise awareness a little bit around our little corner of the world.

**K:** I hope so yeah. I'm hearing a lot about the bad breeders, but not so much about good breeders. So, it's nice to know they exist.

**P:** They do exist, but because they're generally not commercial, it's not necessarily something that people will know. I mean I happen to know about this Kune breeder because I'm registered with the Kune society and my original four were Kune’s. So, with that I could find a Kune breeder that I wanted to get in touch with. But because, sort of micro farming is very lucrative, I think that's when you get the breeders that are not quite as scrupulous. I don't think non-commercial breeders are quite so easy to find. I think it's easy to have a go to, "let's go to a micro pig breeder", and up they all come. Whereas non-commercial ones will charge you the right amount of money for the animal and everything else. I mean my two pure-bred Kunes were £75 each. Some of the micro pigs that I've had in and I've had the paperwork for are £750. You look at them and think, well technically if you compared them to another species, they're mongrels. Micros are mongrels. So, if you wanted to put a monetary value on them, they're not worth that kind of money. To me, money is completely irrelevant, but it shows you the comparison of two pure breed Kunes that are effectively pedigrees, or you've got micros which most people don't realise are not breeds. They're kind of a mish mash, Heinz 57, lots of animals thrown in together. Erm, and because of the word micro they just call them a micro pig and people think they're a pedigree pig and because of the cute factor and everything, people will put their hands in their pocket and pay a lot of money for an animal they don't have any guarantees about.

**K:** Yeah, and why do you think people want a pedigree pig? What's the appeal of having one?

**P:** I don't know, I mean I started my porcine journey with Kunes and Kunes generally, the reason why we went for Kunes was not so much of the fact that they were purebreds. But for two reasons, one, they're a very docile breed, and two, they were almost extinct about thirty years ago and there's a chap, you may come across him, called Andy Case. He brought, they're not indigenous to New Zealand but they do come from New Zealand, he brought some over from New Zealand and started a pure breed programme to actually save the species. So that was one of the reasons for getting them, not to breed them, but to actually be able to save a species of animal that was in danger of becoming extinct. So, their numbers are increasing now, and rather than being endangered, they're now on the vulnerable list and the numbers are coming up. Er, it's the same as Large Black's, they're vulnerable as well and there's not very many breeding pairs in England. I've got two Large Blacks that are rescues, I would never breed them anyway, because it's not money making. I'm not interested in making money out of them or exploiting them. They would be too old now anyway. But there's only, I think 600 female breeding females in the country for Large Blacks, it's a very small number. But they are farmed animals, because they're one of the large breeds, so in terms of farming there is a big yield on them because of the product.

**K:** Obviously, they are farmed animals, but I think with the "micro pigs" or "teacup" pigs, people almost don't see them as farmed animals, and it's quite concerning when they have different needs and things.

**P:** Yeah, I mean, again, the breeder I got my two Kunes from, she will farm them in as much as a very small way. So, if she has a litter and those animals don't go to be pet pigs, they will be processed. Erm, she has that kind of the way that she deals, the way that she breeds. So, I think, realistically, the kind of micro pig farms, they probably do the same thing, but you don't really hear about it. So, if you've got a mini-pig farm and you've got all these piglets running around and you've got 20 people that will buy 50 of the piglets, of course, if it's supposedly a mini-pig farm, and they don't stay small for very long, where do they go? So realistically, out of all of those piglets, probably half will end up in process because they're not then serving a purpose, a commercial purpose in terms of being pets.

**K:** And do you think over time, if you have a pet pig, change their attitude towards farmed animals and the livestock industry in general?

**P:** I think they do, there's a lot of people who visit here. I mean, all I do is just, I'm one of those people who will never say "you must, you mustn't, you should, you shouldn't". All I will do is give people facts and talk to them about the animals. Quite often people will say to me "my god, they're enormous! I've never seen a pig that big before". And I say, that's because you don't see a fully grown pig. Unless you see a breeding sow or a breeding boar on a farm, you will never see a fully grown pig. "Oh, why is that?". Well because they're processed by the time they're six months old. I'm not telling someone that you shouldn't eat meat, I'm just saying this is something you possible don't know. Most people are "Really? They're babies". I say, well yes, this is the farming industry, this is how farming works. But again, I have no criticism of farming, we've evolved as omnivores, we've been farming since the year dot. I think for a lot of people it's the intensity of the farming, but that's down to supply and demand. You can't go round and say, "oh the farmers are really cruel", because if you're demanding cheap meat from Tesco, then that is what is going to happen. So, there's a massive amount of, you know, you could pool of that in from all different animals and you've got for and against for absolutely everything. I do have a few people that comes from farming research erm sort of backgrounds and they come up here and I say, I'm not challenging farming by rescuing these animals, it's nothing to do with that. But I won't take farmed animals, simply because it's, nine times out of ten, if I'm asked to take a farmed animal it's stolen. Because obviously there are people who have a different passion, and they will steal piglets and say can you take them. Well, no I won't, because it's a stolen animal. Technically, although it's an animal with feelings, it's not someone else's property to give to me. So, you have to find this fine line, fine balance between doing what's right and doing what's ethically right for you, and actually doing what is right for someone else.

**K:** Yeah, I've heard a lot of stories about people stealing pigs from farmers or buying them from farmers markets and then realising they don't know what to do with it, then going to sanctuaries and saying, "here you go!"

**P:** Yeah, yeah. That isn't uncommon for that to happen, erm and again, I get farmers phoning me up saying "I don't suppose you've had someone try and offload a couple of Landrace sows on you because we had a couple stolen last night". So, I'm kind of, I'm sort of this person that sits in the middle of this, and again you see the sides of farming life and activism and sort of veganism life as well. Sort of these two worlds colliding here, but it's keeping it very impartial to absolutely everything. I don't take sides and I don't promote farming, I don't promote a plant-based world or anything like that. The most important thing is to focus on the animals that are here and to give them the life that they deserve to have.

**K:** It seems like you're sort of dealing with what's left over from all these things happening.

**P:** Yeah, that's kind of the thing. But again, it's just trying to you know, we all share one planet, that's the bottom line, so let's enjoy what we've got and enjoy Mother Nature and enjoy out interaction with these other animals and enjoy those connections. Just give, certainly for these, give these animals some security and wellbeing and enrichment. And again, I'm not going to change the world, but I can hopefully do my little bit in my little corner of it.

**K:** Can you tell me how a relationship with a pig might differ from having other pets like a dog or cat? Either your own experiences or testimonies from other people.

**P:** From my own experience, it's because generally they're incredibly big animals, it's difficult to say for example, you couldn't snuggle up on the sofa if you want and your dog or cat can come sit with you. You can't snuggle up with a pig. Yes, you can to a degree, but you have to be careful. I have one pig called [Harry], you may well have seen him, he's over 45 stone of pig. He's soppy as anything because he came here as a baby, but he has no idea how strong he is. So, he's got a thing about playing with the straw bags and he'll come up behind you and I'll say, "no you can't have it [Harry]". But he will just bat you out the way to pick up the bag, but that batting out the way you'll go flying across the paddock because he has no idea of his own strength. But I think you can get close to them and get closer to them than other domestic animals like cat, because they're so intelligent. So, [Harry], this Large White Landrace cross, I've had to train him to sit, come to a call, roll over for a belly rub and that's about management as well. So, if he's out in the paddock having a run, I've got to know if I call him, he's going to come back. I can't move 45 stone of pig, he's got to move himself. So, you can get close to them, but possibly, you can get close to them touching them, petting them, having that kind of interaction with belly rubs, talking to them and all the rest of it, you can train them to do certain things, but it's not the kind of thing, you can't necessarily snuggly up in the stable with them and go to sleep. I mean I used to with my original four when I was training them, I'd snuggle up with them. But you couldn't spend the night with [Harry], you'd be squashed by the morning! So, there are practical limitations to having them. But it depends, if you had a pair that you kept in your garden that came in and out of your house, you'd probably have a different relationship with them than I have with the animals that are outside. So, there's nothing to say you can't cuddle up infant of the first, so it's entirely possible that happens. In fact, I do know one family that has three of them and yeah, they're in the house and on the sofas and by the fireplace, that's how they live. But they're with them all the time, they're not just leaving them and going off to work.

**K:** And is it the way pigs are brought up, to like a lot of human interaction, or is that built into them?

**P:** I think it is because they are so intelligent, and because they have these connections and understandings and communication skills, I think that a lot of it is built into them. But they do understand affection, they do remember pain, they do remember poor treatment. So, they have an awful lot of emotions we have. I think genetically, they're only a chromosome away from us. They're nicknamed horizontal humans as they are genetically made up, their body layout is the same of us, and actually that's why they do use parts, you know, pig heart valves, parts of eyes and stuff like that, because of the less risk of rejection in transplants. The only thing that pigs can't do that we can do is sweat. So that's one of the things that they struggle with and they're actually worse in hot weather than they are in cold weather.

**K:** Yeah, they roll themselves round in mud to cool themselves, down don't they?

**P:** Yeah, and I think that gives them the reputation of being dirty, when actually they're the cleanest of any of the farmed animals, I'll say in inverted commas, because they're the only animal that doesn't poo and wee in their house. So, they'll come out to the toilet, whereas a cow or a sheep will just poop wherever it wants to. But pigs are actually remarkably clean. But because they use the mud to coat their skin and pull their body temperature down, people just think their dirty.

**K:** And could you potty train a pig if you wanted to?

**P:** Yes, there are people I know who keep their pig in the house and would potty train them in the exact same way as a dog. But they are intelligent enough to do that.

**K:** Would be easier to keep them in the house. It's a big problem that's cropping up, people can't teach them to live in the house and integrate them into home life and family life, which is why they get given up, but it seems it is possible.

**P:** It is possible, a bit like having a puppy. You have to start at the beginning, you put it on puppy pads, you teach it, you move the puppy pad a foot this way, you move it closer and closer and closer to the back door. It's fairly obvious and it's the same kind of thing if you're trying to teach a pig to do something. Like you can teach a pig to sit. It's not hard to teach a pig to sit, like it's not hard to teach a dog to sit. You've just got to be a patient, it's a repetitive thing you know, training, training, training. But you do have to, because they're such strong animals, you have to establish ground rules and boundaries. People give up with that, and of course you can't then like a puppy, say "no, you're going that". So, you have to have the patience and that's where the difficulties come from.

**K**: So do you come out every morning and check them all too?

**P**: Yes, just check them all, make sure they’re alright. Some of them need medication so I might help with that. I go give them all a scratch as well. [She points to a small wound on one of the pig’s backs] Like this, here. You see that? That’s where the birds get them. You’ll see a few of them with similar marks. These four are quite slow as well, so they can’t get away quickly. Magpies and crows will fly over, sit on their backs and peck them. They’re probably quite sore. The white marks you see around them is where we’ve put on sudocrem to fight any infection.

**K:** Poor girls! What other medications might they take?

**P:** So, a lot of them we give a mix of turmeric, black pepper and linseed oil to supplement them. That’s for their arthritis, which a lot of our pigs have. The mixture is actually for horses but we find it works well so we use that every day, usually in a treat we put it so they just eat it up. Aspirin as well. So, [Harvey] has Parkinson’s, and he takes that.

K: How long has he had Parkinson’s?

**P:** I noticed he was trembling in his front legs. I monitored it for a bit, but it didn’t improve, so I called the vet out. We tried different things, but it didn’t make a difference. I said to them, the symptoms he displays are very similar to Parkinson’s in humans, with the shaking, and our vet agreed. I think he’s probably the first pig to ever be diagnosed with Parkinson’s! They just don’t get to be that old. Yes, so it was a bit of trial and error because the vet wasn’t sure. But, he’s getting on alright. The other three are usually out first at breakfast time, but [Harvey] is the dominant one so when he comes out they let him eat and then he’ll go back to bed. When he goes, I imagine two of them will fight it out to assert dominance again, I’m not sure who will win. When we moved them in this pen, they were in another pen before, [Harvey] was in charge. I made sure to move him first into this one for that reason, but they did fight a couple of times. [Harvey] is still the boss though.

**K:** Is your vet a farm vet?

**P**: Yes, they’re very good. I have their numbers so I can call and say “I’ve just noticed this in this pig…” and they’ll come out right away. They talk with us a lot about each animal and what would be best, so they’re really very good.

K: Do you think it is different to veterinary care on farms?

**P:** They always say they like coming here. , I think they like seeing the care we give to our individual pigs and the bonds we have with them. We have more of a chat with them, sometimes they’ll even call us when they see another pig with a problem and ask what we’ve done. Like with the arthritis, they know we have a lot of pigs with that and they ask what supplements we give, what works and so on. So, they can share that with other owners.

**K:** Oh really?

**P:** People say “oh I’m sure you could find a vet who will do it for free” or something, but I always use them, we have a good relationship with them and they’ll come out straight away if we need them to.

**K:** And are there any challenges pet owners might have that we haven't touched on yet?

**P:** I mean, to be honest with you, I think some of the, one of the big things that I know, and I know from experience and erm, sort of research and hands on here, is that people will buy a pig and what they don't realise possible is that these pigs need to have company. They need to be in at least a pair, and they get incredible lonely, and they can die from broken hearts. So, if they're in a pair and they lose their buddy, it's quite possible that the other one will go. Depends on how much interaction they have and how much attention and time they get from their human companions, so I had one of my original four, one of them died and she was joined at the hip, [Pepper], she was joined at the hip with [Rose], they went absolutely everywhere together. Eight days later, [Rose] died. No reason, no health issues, she just gave up. There was no explanation, she really did just give up.

**K:** That's sad.

**P:** Yeah, it's tragic. But that's what their bond is and erm, I've got one unwanted litter, there were eight of them originally. The woman decided she didn't want them, and they were going to be euthanised. One of them, the three of them had a genetic defect that came from the mum. So, the ones that were built like the mum picked up this genetic defect and erm one of them started shutting down. It was really muddy, and I was trying to hack straw around her, I knew she was going to die, but I wanted her to be comfortable and have enough dignity to be able to go peacefully. As I was trying to lift her, she let out a distress call and the other animals, the others in her sibling group barrelled down the pen, straight at me. I was in the pen with my son, and I just said, "get out, get out now", because it doesn't matter that I'm mum that feeds them, it's a cry for help and they literally ran through all this mud and they surrounded her to look after her and make sure she was okay. So, they're really, really intelligent.

**K:** Bless them, they seem to have very strong social ties. Erm, can you tell me about any common health problems that you see in the pigs that come to you.

**P:** Erm one of the most common health problems, er, pigs are pretty hardy. They don't tend to get mud fever like you do with horses, and that's usually because people tend to hose hot legs down and they cool down too quickly and it gives them mud fever. And generally, they don't suffer from foot rot. They do suffer from respiratory illnesses and they can get pneumonia, I've lost a couple through pneumonia. And one of the most common things that I've found is that sows at five years old, it's not uncommon for them to develop uterine and ovarian tumours. Quite often it doesn't cause a problem and that animal will go on and live quite happily into old age, but it seems to be quite a common thing. They seem to have a hormone imbalance that changes them, so they go through quite a big bleed at five years old. One of the pigs, she had that, and she hasn't had another bleed since, she's now 6, heading on to 7. One of them who I lost a few weeks ago, [Rose], she ended up having a bleed and unfortunately picked up an infection which then travelled through her and we couldn't fix it with antibiotics unfortunately. But generally, they are pretty tough. They are hardy and they can live a long time. I don't think people take that into account, that actually your pig can live for twenty years. It's not very likely, it's like saying we can get to 120 but if we get to 80, we haven't had a bad innings. So generally, I would say the animals are between eight and twelve. I've got three boys that are eleven this year. But they're all heading towards a kind of like nine, ten mark in terms of age. It's a bit like a geriatric home for pigs here! So, once they come here, they generally stay here, they grow old here and they'll die here. When it happens it's horrible, but then we have space to rescue more that need a home as much as they needed a home when they first came here.

**K:** And in what cases would you rehome a pig?

**P:** If someone came to me and said I want a pair of pigs, I'm moving, or I've got a sanctuary then they're very welcome to take a group of pigs. I wouldn't let them go individually and I'd go and see where they're going and what the environment is, and if these people have got any idea what they're doing. So, any animal that would go from here, the place would be vetted, and the people would be vetted as well.

**K:** And we spoke a bit about CPH numbers at the beginning as well. Do you find a lot of owners are unaware of the regulations and the need to have a CPH number?

**P:** [nodding] I've moved many on a stray license. Again, it's to do with breeders that are not really interested in what should happen. A good breeder would say, until you've got a CPH number and a herd number, you can't have the animal because I need to do the paperwork and do the transfer. So, there's been quite a lot I’ve moved on a stray licence through DEFRA. DEFRA would rather know where an animal is than not. So, I actually have a very good relationship with DEFRA, I'll phone them up and say, "I've got another one that's coming to me". Because then that animal is recorded here, so that's where the animal is. Obviously, there's loads of them out there that they don't know about. And that is to stop the spread of disease.

**K:** Yeah, it is worrying. If there was an outbreak, they wouldn't know where half the pigs are.

**P:** That's the thing, that's obviously why you're supposed to register and everything else. The downside of that is if there is an outbreak somewhere and I end up within a quarantine zone, it doesn't matter that these animals aren't going to the food chain, they'd all be euthanised. So, let's hope that will never happen, but there's always that possibility. I mean, I'm incredibly strict with the food the animals eat here, and I have to assume that the farming community are also very strict too. I think they are, you know, Foot and Mouth was so horrific and caused by animals being fed animal by-products when everything kind of went into a big mixer and was just given out to all the animals. But pigs are generally the only farmed animals that are omnivores only, but they never have any meat product or meat by-product. They have a very mixed diet, because they're not farmed so I don't have to worry about fattening, weaning and finisher process. So, they will get cake and buns, they do get treats. They get fruit and veg, nuts and you know, so they have a mixed diet here, but it is all stuff that is strictly vegetarian. Not a huge amount of dairy, that would appear in a cake or biscuit or something. Sometimes we get tubs of ice cream donated so in summer they get troughs of ice cream and they're really happy. But generally, they won't have a huge amount of dairy because they don't process it very well. They won't eat raw potatoes because they're hard to process. So, they're similar to us in what they are able to digest.

**K:** Yeah, I've heard some stories about owners feeding their pigs strict biscuits and bread and things, even ham sandwiches which is worrying! Is that something you come across?

**P:** Well one pig we picked up was fed on table scraps, so it would have everything, meat, gravy, you name it in there, chicken bones. Everything was in there, and that is actually illegal. Erm, yeah, some of them do have a very interesting diet. But it is very strict here, we don't have anything like that at all. Anything that comes in, even though it's classed as waste, it's stuff that can't be used by supermarkets like Tesco and Waitrose and places like that. So, they call it their waste because they can't use it for human consumption, but I can use it. Everything is processed, we go through it all, we don't just tip it out to them. So, pots of salad, we'll make sure if it's had anything, like it it's got chicken sealed on the side, they do not have that that is contaminated. It goes away. We don't even take the salad out of it. So yeah, very strict.

**K:** Yeah. Is there anything before we wrap up that you'd like to add about pet pig ownership or, I'll call it "the pet pig industry"

**P:** I would have to say, owning a pet pig is wonderful. I mean, having my four originally was lovely. I'm very blessed, we have the space. We have a big paddock, they used to run in the paddock, and they had their own styes, they had the freedom to wander round and do what they wanted to do. If I lived somewhere with a tiny garden or flat, I wouldn't get any animal. So, I think it's just finding the right environment and the right balance for them. As long as the animal is loved, they have interaction and they understand kindness, then to a certain extent it doesn't really matter.