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Couple gets more than bargained for when they adopted Esther

By KIM NURSALL
Torstar News Service

There's always been a little wonder in the story of Steve Jenkins and Derek Walter.

Or, as is the case nowadays, a big wonder: namely, their 400-pound pet pig, Esther.

"Everything's really typical with us," Jenkins jokingly told the Star from his and Walter's home in Georgetown.

The rustic wooden floors, electric fireplace and thoughtfully decorated walls are easy to miss in the couple's living room. For most of the day, you will find a not-even-two-years-old, 400-pound, light-pink pet pig lazily dozing on a sagging black leather couch in the corner. Esther's head will slump onto the two-seater's armrest, while the edges of her closed mouth tick slightly upward - "she's smiling," said Jenkins.

Although Esther wasn't supposed to weigh more than 50 pounds, she now takes up a lot of space— both in the couple's home, and in their hearts and minds. Not only have Jenkins, 31, and Walter, 32, stopped eating meat and dairy, they plan to open a pig sanctuary, and Esther's story has brought them worldwide attention from animal activists to tv producers to book publishers.

"She's changed everything," says Jenkins, giving Esther's back a rub.

Jenkins had made a snap decision after being messaged about a mini-pig on Facebook. Within a couple months, however, the couple was starting to panic. Esther would not stop growing. Worse, Jenkins'

acquaintance wouldn't return their messages or phone calls.

"We figure it was a scheme where (a farm) would take runts, fix the tail, tell people they're mini-pigs" and sell them, said Walter. "That's what we think happened, but nobody will talk to us."

The couple began investigating, and discovered others who had been duped. Although moving to the country and taking care of animals was always part of their plan, Esther has sped up that process.

After being in contact with a handful of

Ontario's animal sanctuaries, they realized there's a real need for homes for abandoned pigs, either because farms dispose of runts or because people, like them, get saddled with a not-so-mini-pig.

Until the couple leave behind their urban digs, however, Esther will continue swimming in the couple's backyard koi pond, sifting through her mulch-filled pig pen, finding ways to

open every door (including the freezer) and cuddling on the couch.

"She's a 400-pound suck that just wants to be loved," said Jenkins, adding her "insane intelligence" and personality forced the couple to rethink how they view farm animals.

"We are not advocating for people to go out and get farm pigs as pets," he said. Especially since, at 400 pounds, they're not certain when Esther will stop growing.

**Read the full story online at
www.theifp.ca/news**



Esther gets a friendly scolding from Derek Walter after she opened the freezer looking for food..

Bernard Weil, Toronto Star



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