

Kea's Escape from a Piggery to a Storybook Farm

By Laurelee Blanchard, Leilani Farm Sanctuary

One December morning, a tiny piglet, born at a piggery where she was slated to be raised for pork, squeezed beneath a gate and escaped into a neighbor's garage. The neighbor wrapped the little pig in a blanket and named her Kea (which means "white" in Hawaiian). Kea was the size of a rabbit, with white bristly hair and a high-pitched squeal. After contemplating the piglet's fate, the neighbor brought Kea to Leilani Farm Sanctuary, where she would be safe and loved for her entire life.



Kea's arrives at Leilani Farm Sanctuary

As soon as Kea arrived at the Sanctuary, she met George, our blind pot-bellied pig, whom she immediately tried to nurse on. George was not receptive to Kea, so we put her in with the rabbits, where she had lots of fun running in circles with them in their spacious enclosure. Within two weeks, Kea had outgrown the rabbit yard.



Kea meets George

Domestic Yorkshire pigs like Kea are bred by the pork industry to grow very large at a rapid pace. They gain a pound a day and can reach a staggering 1,000 pounds. Few pigs of this breed ever live to full size, because they are typically sent to slaughter at six months of age.



A fast-growing pig with a big appetite

After outgrowing the rabbit yard, Kea was introduced to the other farm animals, including donkeys, deer, and goats. She enjoyed mingling with the herd and exploring the lush 8-acre farm. Penny, a goat with a sassy attitude, loved to tease Kea by head-butting her. The taunting lasted a couple of weeks until one day Kea realized that she was big enough to retaliate. Then, she had great fun by relentlessly chasing Penny all over the farm.

Soon Kea became fond of the donkeys and followed them everywhere, nuzzling their faces with her pink snout. When talking to the donkeys, she made entirely different vocalizations than the usual oinks, grunts, snorts, and squeals that pigs typically make. When they brayed, she imitated them. She even tried to ride them and frequently stood on her two hind legs with her chin resting on their backs.



Kea falls in love with the donkeys

Now, when the sun goes down each day, Kea and the goats leave their pasture and walk through Animal Alley to the goat house where they sleep. A huge wild boar (whom we named Gus) comes over to flirt with Kea through the fence after dark. The “pig talk” between the two of them can be heard from the nearby cottage.

Quite the opportunist, Kea races first thing in the morning to the fruit orchard to snatch up any fruit that has fallen from the trees before the goats find it. Pigs are clever animals, with cognitive abilities equivalent to 3-year old humans’.* Kea has also figured out that when someone arrives with food scraps, the smartest approach is to sneakily walk toward her in a round-about way, to avoid alerting the goats to the goodies.



A pig in paradise

Indeed, Kea has all the comforts a pig could ever dream of: an idyllic life with mud baths, a fruit orchard, sunshine, and love. By contrast, for the billions of pigs raised in factory farms, life is miserable. These pigs are treated as pork-producing machines and are forced to live on filthy, crowded concrete floors. Pregnant female pigs spend 24 hours a day confined in sow stalls so small and narrow that they can’t turn around or even lie down comfortably. After giving birth, mother pigs (sows) are placed in farrowing crates to nurse their babies.



Gestation crate



Farrowing crate



Inside a Maui pig farm

At the end of their hopeless lives, factory-farmed pigs are trucked to slaughterhouses where they are violently killed for human consumption.

Please think of Kea's sisters and brothers before ordering your next hotdog, ham sandwich, or bacon breakfast, and have mercy on the pigs. Be compassionate and go vegan!



* Scientists, researchers and farmers agree that pigs are among the most intelligent of all animals. Halverson's research (as cited in Novek, 2005) on the behavior of domesticated pigs supports the view that pigs are highly intelligent, communicative and sociable. Studies have shown that pigs have the cognitive capacity to distinguish individual pigs (McLeman, Mendl, Jones, & Wathes, 2008). Pig behaviorist Dr. Stanley Curtis tested the intelligence, learning ability and memory of pigs through a series of experiments in which pigs manipulated joysticks with their mouths to solve mazes and play games on a computer (Singer & Mason, 2006). He determined that pigs are more intelligent than dogs and have intelligence levels comparable to those of an average 3-year-old human child (McLaughlin, 2008).