

Animal Celebrities:

Esther the Wonder Pig and Rev, The Border Collie

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Two special animals live near the Niagara Escarpment, and both are becoming increasingly famous. One is a beautiful Border Collie who can perform more than 200 tricks, wins awards and works as a professional actor in commercials and films. The other is a 650-pound house pig.



▲ Esther napping on her daybed after breakfast, with one of her Dads, Derek Walter, nearby.

▼ Rev, the Border Collie performing part of a dance with owner and trainer Maddisen Phelan.





▲ Esther in the barn for her breakfast, wearing her cupcake cape, giving a wary eye to strangers.

► Rev holds a hoop for Fidget to jump through.





◀ Rev is a beautiful brown and white Border Collie with a floppy right ear.

▼ Esther remains watchful of the photographer, despite being hand fed mango by Steve Jenkins, who says “She probably eats better than you do.”



The house pig is Esther, a commercial pig who had been mistaken for a mini pig and had been reared in domestic family surroundings. Instead of condemning her to a brief existence as a breeding sow in a farm operation, her owners did what was necessary to keep Esther as a pet member of the family.

Steve Jenkins and Derek Walter had been living in Georgetown when they took in what they thought was a cute mini pig. By the time they learned that they had a commercial piglet that would grow to hundreds of pounds in weight, they had already bonded with Esther, a bright, curious, playful and increasingly challenging pet. Keeping Esther completely changed their lives.

Fairly soon, they stopped eating meat and eventually became vegans, or followers of an “Esther-approved diet,” as they prefer to say. They



▲ Steve holds Esther's bonnet, which was a gift to Esther to prevent her ears from getting frostbite, from a woman in Finland. Esther's measurements are on the website.



► Showing great focus, Rev leaps high at Maddisen's command. They live near the Escarpment north of Georgetown.

began a Facebook page for Esther that attracted a big following, now numbering more than one million people. They wrote a book, *Esther the Wonder Pig*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller. They asked online for donations to buy a farm so Esther would have more room, and received enough to buy a farm near Campbellville and create Happily Ever Esther Farm Sanctuary (HEEFS) to provide a home for other needy farm animals. HEEFS

is now a registered charity receiving vital support for pigs, cows, sheep, fowl, goats, rabbits, a donkey and a horse.

Border Collie

According to his website, Rev is a performer, actor and "spokesdoggie." In 2015 his owner Maddisen Phelan created a five-second video of Rev wearing a Santa hat and giving a "Christmas hug" to his dog-friend Fidget. After posting it online, it was viewed more than six million

times. His Facebook page now has more than 39,000 Likes. Appearances on TV shows, in local newspapers and at community events followed.

A second Christmas video shows Rev preparing for Santa with his wish list, decorating the tree with toys and a golden garland, putting wrapped presents under the tree, circling the tree in excitement, and even putting dog biscuits on a plate.

Wonder Pig

Esther now has a bedroom of her own on the main floor of the farmhouse, as she doesn't like to climb stairs to the second storey where her "Dads" sleep. She also has a daybed in the front room right next to the kitchen. A large cushion shaped like a pig leans against the bottom freezer of the fridge, keeping it closed. Esther took the front off the freezer with her nose, in the days when she used to raid the freezer for food. Now



the freezer is kept empty, but that doesn't stop her from occasionally wrenching it open again, just to check. She is also able to use her snout to open the sliding patio door so that she can get in and out as she wants. She doesn't close the door however.

She loves rooting in earth and rolling in mud, but she's house trained and lets herself be showered. On hot summer days she plops over into her own plastic kiddie swimming pool, next to a sign that says

“Clothing optional.” In cold weather she wears a cape for warmth and a hat to protect her ears from frostbite.

All this and more can be seen in online posts and videos that keep her many worldwide fans informed. Esther has staff who work full time for her, including a social media person and people who fill merchandise orders. You can buy clothing, pillows, jewellery, lanyards, calendars, gift cards, mugs and more, all with piggy themes.



◀ Leaping onto Maddisen's back and balancing there is just one of the tricks that Rev makes look easy.

parts and started with a clicker and treats. He picked things up quicker than just by my saying yes."

Esther Options

There are several ways to get more involved with Esther. A children's book called *The Adventures of Esther the Wonder Pig* is scheduled for publication in March 2018. There is discussion of a TV show about Esther being developed. There will be a second annual Esther Cruise around the Caribbean for a week in late February 2018, with all proceeds going to support the animals at HEEFS.

Tours of the farm are offered for individuals and groups. You may see Esther by chance only, as she is not put on display. Volunteer workers on the farm are always sought, to help with the many different

New Tricks

Rev has talent, although it may be Maddisen who's talented, to be able to teach Rev so much. He can pick up coins and deposit them in a tin with a slot on top. He can roll himself up into a blanket. He tudies up all his toys. He can sit on his hind legs and hold items between his front paws. On

command, he will lift a leg as if urinating. He can balance himself on his front paws. He will walk between Maddisen's legs with his front paws on her feet. He leaps over her outstretched arms, through a loop she forms with her arms, and will jump onto her back. He stands on the soles of her feet when she's lying

on her stomach, bending her legs up behind her. He will cover his face with a paw. He leaps, rolls, walks backwards, in circles...and more.

"I started at nine or 10 weeks old with easier commands," says Maddisen. "I was inspired by other dog owners and videos. I break tricks down into



▲ Derek, left, and Steve lure Esther awake with an apple. “If she didn’t like you, she wouldn’t be napping,” says Steve. “She’d be sitting up looking at you.” It feels like a compliment to have a world-famous pig’s approval.



animals, raise food, maintain the grounds and structures, and more. The website happilyeveresther.ca has more information. In addition to their Facebook pages, Esther and Rev have websites devoted to them: estherthewonderpig.com and revthebordercollie.wix.com/home. **NEV**