



► **Crystal Porter**, an IT project manager, works from home while **Walter Pigg** keeps her company.

Everyone deserves a name

Crystal Porter's love of animals inspired Willowbrook Farms Animal Sanctuary

About 35 minutes west of Cook's headquarters in Bloomington, Indiana, down a winding country road you will find **Crystal Porter's** hobby. Nestled in the rural countryside of Bloomfield, Indiana, is a 21-acre farm where Crystal lives with her husband **Matt** and son **Alex**. It's no ordinary farm. You won't find acres of tall corn waving in the wind ready to harvest or rows of neatly planted soybeans. However, you might find Cora the cow placidly grazing in an open pasture, Charlie the donkey raising his head from munching grass to give you a friendly nod, and Walter Pigg lumbering up to you to get a closer look.

Crystal's hobby or "other job" is providing a sanctuary for farmed animals, which Crystal defines as any animal that is used for any product. While her career brought her to Cook as a project manager in IT a little over two years ago, her lifelong devotion to animals has become a second career with the founding of Willowbrook Farms Animal Sanctuary.

A crossroads

The Porter family came to a crossroads in December 2017 when Matt lost his job in Springfield, Illinois.

"I asked him, 'What do you want to do?'" said Crystal. "We agreed that we had always wanted to work with

animals, but we didn't know how we could do that now." With that, the Porters decided to open a farmed animal sanctuary. Crystal and Matt brainstormed the name Willowbrook Farms Animal Sanctuary.

"I like willow trees and planned on planting them on the property, and my husband suggested a brook, which to me is calming, and the name came together perfectly. We wanted to create a peaceful sanctuary for the animals," Crystal added.

In February 2018, the sanctuary became incorporated, and by April that same year it reached official 501c3 nonprofit status. Their first rescues were two chickens aptly named **Willow** and **Brook**, who were quickly followed by a classroom hamster named **Harriet Houdini**, a box turtle named **Sheldon, Benjamin** the turkey, and **Penn** the rooster.

"All of our animals have names. Everyone deserves the dignity of a name," explained Crystal. "Some of the animals that come to the sanctuary already have names; if they don't, we name them ourselves."

The Porters quickly outgrew their home in the city limits of Springfield. They called a real estate agent, and the journey really began. In September 2018, the Porters and the animals moved to the spacious farm and have been expanding their roster of animal residents ever since, rescued 41 animals so far, with 21 animals currently residing at Willowbrook. The sanctuary is a twofold organization that offers a permanent sanctuary to animals the Porters are able to support and that works with people to help place the animals they don't currently have the resources to accommodate at other homes, shelters, and sanctuaries.

A typical day

A typical day down on the farm is a family affair for the Porters. Crystal and Matt are the primary care givers

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– Crystal Porter, IT project manager

of all of the animals with help from their son, Alex. The animals require daily care that includes a morning and evening routine. Starting around 8:30 am every morning, Matt is busy getting **Walter Pigg** up and outside, as Walter is the only farmed animal who gets to live inside the home. (Don't worry. He is housebroken.)

During the day, they are always busy checking and cleaning water troughs, feeding the animals, prepping for the next feeding, and keeping the chickens in and out of their coop with careful timing due to potential predators and the chickens' natural active times. Additionally, each animal requires individual care, and the Porters use a task calendar to organize that care.

While Crystal is at Cook working during the day, Matt and Alex are caring for the animals and building or planning building projects for animal enclosures and fencing. Their evenings are filled with a repeat of the morning routine and corralling Walter and the chickens to safety for the night. When they finally sit down for the evening, they are at their computers writing grants, creating building plans and material lists, and

Continued on page 9



▲ The sign leading up to Willowbrook Farms Animal Sanctuary.



▲ Charlie Donkey.



▲ Sheldon, a three-toed box turtle.

FEATURES

Continued from previous page

Journeys to the sanctuary

If the animals could, they would each tell you a heartwarming and sometimes harrowing story about how they arrived at Willowbrook. Crystal describes the unique journeys of Cora, Walter Pigg, and GiGi.

Cora

"Cora has endured a lot. She was born in the dairy industry, and as a general practice prior to 2017, had her tail docked without anesthesia. We don't know the reason why, but after a couple of years, the dairy industry sold her off for slaughter. However, a university purchased her, and she became a lab animal for a year. When her year was up, the university sold her back to the slaughter barn to regain their assets. Thankfully, a vet student fell in love with her and raised money to purchase her and bring her here. Cora literally dodged the slaughter bullet twice and is now finally living in a space where she gets everything she needs to be safe, happy, and healthy, including proper vet care and shelter."

Walter Pigg

"Walter was named Pig when he got here. We didn't want to just call him Pig, but he clearly knew Pig as his name. It took a few hours, but we came up with Walter Pigg. We added two Gs to the name because it's fancy and looks like a full name. Walter's original family was told he was a teacup pig and would not get bigger than 30 pounds. Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a teacup pig. When mini-pigs, like Walter, are sold as teacup pigs, the new owners are directed on how to maintain a strict diet, one that usually leaves the pig malnourished and unable to grow to full size. For Walter, his first family soon realized that he was always hungry, so they fed him, and he started to grow. At 8 months old, Walter weighed 75 pounds. They lived in town, and they had no land. They loved him and didn't want him to be hurt, so they put a plea out to find a home that would not harm him. He's a little over two years old now and weighs 175 pounds. Pigs grow until they're five, so he's probably going to stop at about 250 pounds. We don't know anything about his parents or lineage, but he's going to be a big boy."

GiGi

"It makes you believe in God or serendipity—everything lined up so perfectly for GiGi ("Girly Girl"); it seems we were meant to help her. GiGi had lived happily in a flock of 20 chickens until one day they started to try and cannibalize her. The owner kept her safe but put out a Facebook plea for help. She didn't want to watch Girly Girl be killed but didn't know what else to do. As it turns out, we were going to be traveling to Springfield, Illinois, heading there to celebrate Father's Day. Not ten minutes into planning our trip, we received a Facebook message from Matt's brother, who told us a friend of a friend had posted about GiGi needing a new home. Oakford was only 30 minutes away from where we were going. I remember saying, 'I guess we are getting a chicken this weekend!' The trip home was great because she rode in the backseat like a dog looking out the window. GiGi has a condition called crooked toe, making her differently abled. With crooked toe, the muscles in the chicken's toes don't develop correctly, and you only have about a week after birth to correct it. Hers was not corrected, so GiGi has a crazy case of deformed feet, but she is the happiest chicken. She's also the most adventurous chicken; nothing scares GiGi. She is big, bold, and beautiful."



Continued from page 7

maintaining the sanctuary's website, www.wfas-cares.com, and blog.

"Our animals are ambassadors for their species, so educating people about them on social media platforms and the website is a useful way for fundraising and sharing educational tidbits, photos, and stories of the animals," explained Crystal.

The COVID pandemic has negatively influenced the amount of donations to the farm.

"The animals still get sick and still need to be fed no matter what is going on in the world. They still need us," she added.

Healthy living

Crystal opens the farm to people who request private tours—complete with a homemade, plant-based lunch that she offers visitors. One of her favorite results of the animal sanctuary is the opportunity to uniquely connect with people and educate them about whole food, plant-based eating. Four years ago, she was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes after living almost two decades with many other chronic issues and morbid obesity. Becoming a whole-food, plant-based eater has helped her lose almost 130 pounds naturally and eliminate taking 8 different medications totaling 12 pills daily.

With the daily busyness of running the sanctuary and all of its responsibilities, will Crystal and Matt ever get a vacation?

"I saw a meme once that read you shouldn't live a life that you need a vacation from; build a life that you want to be in," Crystal answered. "That's what this sanctuary has become. I'm allowed to connect with nature and animals. I feel connected to everything around me, and I'm making an impact on people and animals' lives. I don't want to take a vacation from the sanctuary. My happiness may not be standard, and that's okay."

• **Terrie Nicodemus** (*Teresa.Nicodemus@CookMedical.com*) is a written content specialist in Corporate Marketing and Communications.

Goulash

A plant-based recipe, by Crystal

NOTE: All cans are 15-ounce cans. T= Tablespoon; tsp = teaspoon

Ingredients

- ▶ 1 bag soy crumbles (or 2 cups cooked lentils)
- ▶ 1/4 cup veggie broth (or water)
- ▶ 1 medium onion, diced
- ▶ 3 T minced garlic
- ▶ 3 T dried Italian seasoning
- ▶ 1 1/2 T dried parsley flakes
- ▶ 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- ▶ 1 can fire-roasted tomatoes (do not drain; keep the liquid)
- ▶ 3 cans of tomato sauce
- ▶ 1 T Worcestershire sauce (make sure you are using a vegan sauce; most brands contain fish)
- ▶ 2 T soy sauce (or tamari sauce)
- ▶ 1 T lemon juice
- ▶ 1 T ground thyme
- ▶ 1 tsp black pepper
- ▶ 8 ounces dried elbow macaroni (make sure the brand you use is vegan)
- ▶ 4 cups water

Instructions

1. In a large pot, sauté the onion and garlic in the veggie broth until the onion is soft (not translucent).
2. Add all remaining ingredients and bring to a boil.
3. Once it is boiling, stir and reduce heat to a medium simmer.
4. Cook until pasta is tender.

I normally let it sit for about 10 minutes once the heat has been turned off to allow everything to settle together (and not be lava).

Porter, C. Goulash. <https://wfas-cares.com>. Accessed December 16, 2020.