

THE  
BOOK  
OF  
**T.O.F.U.**

THE BOOK OF T.O.F.U.

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can’t imagine narrowing it down to just a portion of  
a page. So, I won’t.

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## FOREWORD

I first came across T.O.F.U. Magazine several years ago after seeing a link to a new issue online. Being vegan, I tend to at least check out vegan or vegan-inspired publications and will forever be grateful that I went to the website and soon afterwards purchased my first issue.

What was missing from the magazine is part of what first attracted me to it. No stories on famous or celebrity vegans, no photos of perfectly built men, and no stories telling me why I am or am not a real vegan. The magazine had stories about real people, real issues, and, sprinkled throughout, tasty recipes for me to try by people like me. It also had great stories about activism.

As I finished one issue and started to read past issues, one word kept hitting me. It's a word that I hear often in the vegan and animal rights movements, but also even more often in the equality and human rights movements. It's a word that is at the core of who I am as a human being, and the work I try to do on a daily basis to make this world a better and safer place for all living beings.

Liberation.

The focus of T.O.F.U. Magazine may not be liberation, yet the stories presented are from people all over the world who bring us closer to liberation, whether that be regarding animals, race, body size, personal shaming, sexism, hetero-norms, or food.

I soon began corresponding with Ryan and thus started a relationship that has enriched my life on so many levels. Ryan gives me hope for the future, and I am filled with gratitude for his friendship and all he brings to my life.

As I became a big fan of the magazine, I also created [The Gay Vegans blog](#). T.O.F.U. Magazine inspired me to write about items not always related to food, and also showed me that I had allies throughout many communities who were interested in not only liberation but in many issues that affect activist communities that are not talked about often enough.

I have come to know Ryan on a very personal level, and he has taught me a lot. If you have ever enjoyed a photo on [The Gay Vegans Instagram account](#), you can thank Ryan! Having been on a couple of multi-day road trips with Ryan, I find that he engages me and inspires me in ways that not only make me a better activist, they also make me a better human being.

Very much like what T.O.F.U. Magazine has done for those who have spent time reading even just one issue.

Which brings us to 2015 and Ryan letting me know his thoughts about this book. A printed book. I, of course, loved the idea, and here we are.

In these pages, you will find stories and thoughts from people who bring you the opportunity to think of something in a way that perhaps you have not thought of in the past. Some of them will make you take a deep look into yourself, and others will remind you that you are not alone on this journey.

Together, this collection has the chance to bring inclusiveness, diversity, debate, and thought-provoking ideas not only to the reader personally, but to any activism the reader is part of. Indeed it has the chance to bring all of this into any particular movement.

As activists, the world can be an uncomfortable, if not frightening place. The amount of violence, bigotry, and hate that we fight easily becomes exhausting. It is vital that we create communities where we can envelop ourselves with support and love, communities that invigorate us, inspire us, and, when needed, nurture us. The community that I have found with other readers and contributors of T.O.F.U. Magazine has become that for me.

Turn off your phone. Close your laptop. Grab a cup of your favourite tea or coffee, and find a comfortable spot to enjoy this collection.

You and the world you are trying to create will be better for it.

Dan Hanley,  
[The Gay Vegans](#)

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is the end.

It may seem like the beginning to those of you who are just now picking up this book, getting comfortable, and preparing to read the pages beyond this one, but in reality it's the final chapter of a rather long story.

I don't know exactly when I decided to do an anthology for the magazine, but I do know it was before I finished The Wild T.O.F.U. Tour, and probably even before I started to plan that trek across parts of Canada and the United States. In fact, it was most likely an idea in my head even before I quit my job over a year ago to focus on the magazine.

Add to that the fact that the book consists of articles from issues which span nearly a decade, and the reason why I'm seeing this as a conclusion rather than a continuation or a beginning of something is a little clearer.

So, while some of you may just now be starting to find out what T.O.F.U. is all about (and I am so grateful that you're doing that) I have to admit that I'm glad this story is coming to a close for me.

Don't get me wrong, the whole thing has been incredible, and I honestly didn't expect some of the highs, just as much as I didn't expect some of the lows. However, it's also been a lot more complicated than I thought it would be, and (once again) I'm not sure I could have seen it through if it wasn't for the people that supported me.

In the case of this book, that support was even more evident because of the Kickstarter, and knowing that so many people wanted this thing in their hands before they even knew exactly what it was helped during the lows for sure.

That being said, I'd be lying if I didn't admit that having that support in advance also caused a lot of stress. Add to that the fact that this is the first time a T.O.F.U. release has been printed since early 2009, and everything seemed a little more intense than usual. I've never wanted to disappoint my readers, the authors, or those who loved the magazine, but having so many put up their money to see the book in print (especially given that so many past issues have been pay-what-you-want) was both humbling and nerve-wracking.

Plus, print is substantially more permanent than digital. In the past, even though I spent hours and hours going over each issue before I finally published it, I always knew that any email from an eager word detective could be answered soon after by uploading an updated version with the issue(s) corrected.

Print, on the other hand, isn't as forgiving. Of course, that's probably part of the reason why people such as myself, and hopefully you, have a deeper interest in just what finds its way to the pages underneath your fingers. Whatever that is, be it put there on purpose or the product of too much chocolate and not enough sleep during a late-night editing session, it's a statement that lasts, possibly even longer than its creator.

And so, each book can also become a marker, be it one that signals the start of something or the end of it. Either way, it's a sign that once there was an idea, and thanks to the work of those who believed in the idea, it became more than just a passing thought. It became something that could be passed on.

Hopefully, after you've read all the pieces that give this thing weight (in more ways than one), you'll feel the same way about The Book of T.O.F.U. and all of the messages it presents.

As for me, I'm once again enjoying the sense of accomplishment that comes from finishing a letter like this, while also wondering just how the next T.O.F.U. story will start. As always, I'm not sure. However, I know it's good to be back in print, and just like this book, I have a feeling T.O.F.U. will be sticking around.

Until next time,



**Content Warning:** *The articles within this book contain discussions of violence towards animals, sexual violence towards women including rape, gender-based oppression of women, and other sensitive subjects.*





# THE INTERSECTION OF FEMINISM AND VEGANISM

By Ashley Bratty  
Originally in Issue 8, February 2015

Let's talk about sex(ism).

It's a topic that, sadly, deserves whole books devoted to it, even in regard to just the vegan/animal rights community. Luckily, there are a number of them, and they're growing. So, when T.O.F.U. finally focused on the subject for its eighth issue, I knew that it could only really provide an intro to the problem in the hopes of encouraging people to seek out more on their own.

Thankfully, Ashley's piece served as a great stepping stone into the topic, and it also works well for this book.

Connecting veganism and the oppression of animals with so many other forms of oppression is an important step to take, and Ashley provides plenty of reasons why it's also a very necessary

one. Whether it's through familiar examples in the media, or support from research, she not only makes it clear how prevalent the issue is, she also shows what's at stake: lives.

Of course, when it comes to animal oppression, many of us have already made this connection, and that's why veganism usually follows suit. However, our efforts cannot stop there. In fact, as Ashley points out, it's important for us to never really stop making an effort to learn and be willing to change.

After all, if we are all connected in some way, it's only when all of us have broken free that we can truly end oppression.



If you connect with online or in-person activist communities, you may have noticed a word that keeps surfacing, especially when conversations get heated and criticisms of failing to be inclusive or progressive sound: intersectionality. It is a concept that is being injected into so many conversations about oppression because it firmly belongs there. Intersectionality is a term that describes structural inequality as the root cause for all types of oppression, and by doing so highlights the importance of seeing all types of oppression as connected and often reinforcing each other.

But what does intersectionality look like? As an example, when we criticize the mainstream feminist movement as being concerned only with the needs of white, straight, cis-gendered, women we are criticizing it for not being aware of the need to be intersectional or for not being successful at upholding intersectionality. To have a conversation about oppression, of any kind, and not recognize that people have multiple identities (gender, race, ability, and so many more) is short-sighted and not inclusive. An intersectional, inclusive conversation about women's oppression would include many voices and would recognize the variety of life experiences as all valid, if all very different.

*"Just as feminists proclaimed that 'rape is violence, not sex,' vegetarians wish to name the violence of meat eating. Both groups challenge commonly used terms. Mary Daly calls the phrase 'forcible rape' a reversal by redundancy because it implies that all rapes are not forcible [...] The use of adjectives in the phrases 'humane slaughter' and 'forcible rape' promotes a conceptual misfocusing that relativizes these acts of violence [...] Just as all rapes are forcible, all slaughter of animals for food is inhumane regardless of what it is called."*

- Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*

It might sound strange to be injecting a connection about the oppression of non-human animals into the existing culture of talking about the oppression of women (or of any other oppressed group) but it isn't... because it's already there. The long-standing culture of patriarchy, and the somewhat more recent but equally oppressive culture of capitalism, has left us a legacy of violence towards animals the same way it has left us a legacy of violence towards women. Women and non-human animals have been denied their own personal integrity and treated as property to be bought and sold, traded and used, and even slaughtered for gains.

*"Turning a person into a thing is almost always the first step in justifying violence against that person."*

- Jean Kilbourne

Think for a moment about the idea of objectification. The word calls to mind feminist decryings of sexualized women used to sell products, of anger at being harassed on the streets, of women being treated as less than intelligent because they are women. All of these examples are variations of objectification, because objectification describes the process of turning someone into an object. Turning someone into something. Objectification is the literal definition of the business of slaughterhouses. Animals enter the building whole, alive, and all individuals with their own wants, needs, and desires. They are someone. They leave the building dismembered into products, no longer even referred to as the animals they were but under product names such as sirloin, chops, and filets. They are objects now. They are something.

When we see an image of a model's body used to sell beer or a luxury car, she has been objectified in a different but no less serious way. She is a pretty thing used as an object in an ad, not a person with her own life and ideas. She is

a glorified piece of scenery. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) frequently fails to be intersectional when they use women's bodies to sell their message of ending violence against animals. They often forget the women used as objects in their images and campaigns are sending a different message of violence.

*"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."*

- Desmond Tutu

Perhaps the most important thing about intersectionality is that it isn't optional anymore, perhaps it never was. The danger faced by oppressed groups like women and non-human animals is serious and the time to consider them as deeply interconnected arrived a long time ago. Our silence on the matter of feminism while engaging in discussions about veganism or vice versa only serves to reinforce the systems and structures that continue the oppression and the violence.

How can we expect a culture that is heavily dependent on acts of violence to create what they eat for lunch to condemn and prevent acts of violence against women?

With more understanding about the intersection of violence against women and violence against animals, we are beginning to see research that finds the empirical, numbers-based evidence to reinforce the social justice activist culture of vegan feminism. In her study "Social Disorganization in Slaughterhouse Communities" Central Florida

University Ph.D. student Racine Jacques found that proximity to a slaughterhouse is correlated with a 166% increase in arrests for rape. Rates of other types of crimes were also higher but none stand out so remarkably. This isn't a coincidence. Industrialized violence is not tidily separate from other forms of violence. How can we expect a culture that is heavily dependent on acts of violence to create what they eat for lunch to condemn and prevent acts of violence against women? We hear "She was asking for it" to describe both women who have been victims of sexual violence or abuse and to describe livestock who meet their fate on the slaughterhouse floor. The truth is that neither are to blame for what happened to them. They are both victims of structural violence.

In The Book of T.O.F.U., you will find the beginnings of many conversations that draw connections between veganism and feminism, as well as other forms of oppression. It's so important to remember that we all have a responsibility to monitor our place in these conversations and, when needed, remember to take a step back and think about how we contribute to or fight back against what is going on in our world. We are seeing change, and we are headed towards better days for the animals, for women, and for all other oppressed groups, but we will get there faster if more people join the conversation.

---

Ashley Bratty is an anti-violence worker, activist, writer, illustrator, dancer, and shameless nerd living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Her hobbies include smashing the patriarchy, dancing the lindy hop, adventurous vegan baking, and tabletop gaming.

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"Creating a movie called *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and then creating a cookbook called *Fifty Shades of Chicken* – that is all part of maintaining a status quo of dominance over non-dominant beings."

Carol J. Adams (*The Sexual Politics of Meat*),  
Issue 8, February 2015





## THE PERFECTLY AVERAGE VEGAN FEELING THE EXTRA WEIGHT OF THE VEGAN LABEL

By Michele Truty  
Originally in Issue 7, May 2013

In the two-plus years since I wrote this, sadly, though not surprisingly, not much has changed. I'd say "nothing," but the world is talking more about body acceptance in general. And talking is something. The same weekend this was published, I sat on a panel on body image at Vida Vegan Con, the vegan media and lifestyle conference, and it was standing room only. Panelists, moderator Laura Beck, and our audience shared stories, fears, and advice, and the conversations sparked by the session had an even greater reach.

The body acceptance campaigns are not perfect, as most embrace one trait and reject another. (Still a lot of the "real women have curves" sort of thing out there.) It has been great to hear from those in ED recovery—here there's been much discussion and support lately—since this is such an at-risk group for physical harm. Also, social media has been a powerful tool to share our

humanness, our perceived flaws, reaching out to others to show them they're not alone.

But—and it's a big but—we're still seeing the same polished faces, the same celebrity worship, when it comes to vegan heroes. If anything, we're seeing the rise of the health vegan and the vegan athlete. We're still using images of society's ideal human specimens to lure non-vegans into giving a vegan diet a shot. And yes, it's an effective tactic, but the potential for harm to those who let the pressure get to them is an unnecessary risk, as not all of us who try can live up to that ideal.

A trend that infuriates me is the "plant-based" label we're seeing more of on food items and in the news. On one hand, it seems people are realizing that calling themselves vegans while disregarding animal exploitation is a lie. They're starting to understand that veganism is a lifestyle, a belief system, not a diet. And this market is

growing quickly, thus the exciting decline of meat, egg, and dairy consumption. On the other hand (the infuriated one), you can very easily live with your plant-based diet without considering animal welfare. If you search online for "plant-based," you're not going to get nearly the same results as if you search "vegan." You aren't going to be challenged to face up to what the rest of your lifestyle does to other animals. You're just going to be congratulated for your healthy choice and how much you're helping the environment.

Personally, in these few years, I have not changed too much. If anything, I've internalized more perceived faults as I age and my body cares less and less about what I want it to do. Instead, being diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder that directly causes joint and tissue inflammation, I am proof that, well, not all vegans are healthy, and it has nothing to do with my diet. The knowledge of my physical image issues unfortunately does not disarm them, but it is a start. Let's hope my 52-year-old brain will be smarter and in better control than my 42-year-old brain. If I can spread the message of compassion to others, there is no reason I shouldn't be able to turn that message inward. So... as far as serving as an example, still not perfect, but I am, as are we all, a work in progress.

I hesitate to write or speak on the issue of body image because I am not generally honest about mine. When I told people I was writing about this, admitting that it weighs heavily on my mind, I was met with a few replies in the vein of "But you know you're not fat." I would immediately think of the body under my clothing—the one they can't see—aging, untuned, the shape of my thighs almost visible in my "How can I care what I look like in these baggy plaid" pants. So instead of "I know," or "Thank you," I say, "A, you haven't seen

me naked, and B, it's not about how you see me." Now, that's not to say that I don't care how others see me. I wish it was, but as much as I mature (or at least age), I don't see my self-image improving. For a modern woman—and as a vegan advocate/ambassador—that's hardly healthy.

I created a survey to see how other people felt about their bodies and how being vegan affected that. Not just eating a vegan diet, but labelling themselves vegan—did carrying the vegan label add to the already unfair pressure to look a certain way? The response, from hundreds of vegan men and women age 15-60, was startling, not only to see how many of us feel we are not good enough, but that so many thanked me for the survey as an opportunity to talk about the subject in a safe (read: anonymous) way. Why can't we talk about it?! The answer to that is simple. Stupid, but simple. We think and feel rotten things when it comes to body image. Don't believe me? Here are my own answers to the survey—and I offered everyone who took it a big hug from me, so I hope the offer goes the other way!

### ***Specs:***

39-year-old female. Vegan for seven years; vegetarian (or getting there) for 20 before that.

### ***Why do you follow the diet you do?***

I don't feel it's fair or right to ask people or animals to suffer unnecessarily for me. The environmental and health benefits are a glorious bonus package.

### ***Height & Weight***

Height: 5 feet, 6 inches.

Weight: Not quite sure.

The last time I weighed myself was a year or two ago and I was 135 lbs. I fear weight as a number and have habitually looked away from the scale, telling the nurse to write it down and not say it out

loud. I've seen the number do horrible things to people, and I'm just obsessive enough that it could be dangerous.

***How comfortable/satisfied are you with your body?***

Somewhat. Mindful clothing choices can mask what time (age, years of endometriosis, cystic ovaries, and fibroids—and the subsequent chemical and surgical therapies), not to mention laziness, have done to what lies beneath. I am not about to prance around in a bikini—nobody needs to see that mess. I know with effort I could get my arms and thighs in check, and the overall midsection would get in line almost by accident. But I don't put in the effort.

***How do you think others would sum you up, physically?***

Average. I think I do a good job hiding the things I want to hide. I am told I look younger than my age.

***Do you feel pressure to look a certain way based on others' perception of your diet? Explain.***

I do. In the past, when people heard the word "vegan," they often imagined an emaciated hippie, eating lentils and sprouts. Today, most have met or at least heard of someone who is vegan. I've been told stories about "the vegan I know," and they're either super skinny or fat. Like people are surprised I'm vegan because I'm neither. I hope I can be included in their "vegans I know." I want to be a positive example.

The current—or at least emerging—view of veganism is healthy, and I do want to be healthy, maybe not strictly out of advocacy, but in general. While I put most of the pressure on myself, I do recognize the outside influence.

***How sexually attractive do you feel?***

Very. I think the reason I feel attractive is that after all these years on and off the hetero market I know

how open men are where sex is involved. They'll take 'em thin, they'll take 'em big. A perfectly toned body is not a requirement by any means. Also, I've had the same guy around for 16 years, and he still super digs me.

***What effort, if any, do you put in to your physical being?***

Occasional exercise. If I feel pudgy or lethargic, I'll maybe avoid sugar and focus on my greens. I have in the past turned to fasting, or the watermelon diet, which ensures I trim myself down a bit, but also causes what I like to call "sparkly head." So dumb.

***Have you ever been accosted based on your physical being? How?***

Developing breasts at the age and speed I did made for a rough junior high experience. I was still thin, so the comments were "positive," meaning boys said the stupid things they said to get closer to me, not make me feel bad about myself. Instead I was confused and uncomfortable.

***Have you ever been diagnosed with an eating disorder? Or do you fear you might have one?***

No. I've got the obsessive down, but I think my analysis of every thought and feeling has prevented the compulsive aspect. It's like I'm a recovering alcoholic without ever drinking alcohol.

**We are too skinny, we are too fat, we are not as toned or muscular as we want to be.**

***What did I learn from the survey?***

Most of us are not 100% happy with ourselves and it makes some of us treat ourselves rather poorly.

While some attribute their negative self-image to aging, most of it is directly related to body weight and shape. We are too skinny, we are too fat, we are not as toned or muscular as we want to be. There does seem to be a curve to people's overall self-image and their perceived image to others. Just as many feel fantastic about themselves as feel abysmal; same goes for those who fall in the "fairly" or "somewhat" regions.

While many of us (18% of vegan respondents) have had some brush with eating disorders or disordered eating, be it diagnosed or not, either ongoing or simply confined to that period in high school when we were super depressed (oh, high school), less than 1% of these claimed to have gone vegan primarily for health reasons. And approximately a quarter of us make some real effort in the form of meal planning/nutrient counting, exercise (more than seven hours a week), or plastic surgery.

Overall, only 8% of respondents chose veganism primarily for health reasons, and many of those said while health benefits drew them to the diet, the ethical reasons have crept in and have taken over. Most of us are vegan for ethical reasons, followed by environmental, so at least for those who were drawn to my survey, veganism is mainly a lifestyle born of a belief system, not a diet.

Finally, 58% of the surveyed vegans said they felt the pressure or at least perceived the stereotype of the ideal vegan from others. This, I find to be an unhealthy number. Some do claim to see the perception but deny it has any effect on them, but for many, we want—or feel the responsibility—to advocate for veganism with our physical selves. We want to look fit, healthy, and young in the name of veganism.

In our attempts to appeal to/convince/pressure people to accept our lifestyle, we make promises of that which we, as a society, want. Want to be fit and young forever? Eat vegan! We end up alienating

so many of our own, vegans of all shapes and sizes. They are our collateral damage, their sense of worth is diminished, sacrificed so that we may spread our message of compassion. How does that make sense?!

Groups and individuals like PETA and Vegan Vixens defend what they do, objectifying—and the

**We end up alienating so many of our own, vegans of all shapes and sizes. They are our collateral damage, their sense of worth is diminished, sacrificed so that we may spread our message of compassion.**

byproduct of that, shaming—by saying they are doing it for the animals. And it's true, these campaigns catch the eye of many who might not otherwise be exposed to the concept of veganism, but their image of a vegan is so singular. Of course, I would rather go naked than wear fur, but you're never going to see my white ass in an ad. (You're welcome.) Even PCRM (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine) has gotten called out for fat shaming; after this criticism, the cover of their Vegetarian Starter Kit is still an overweight man trying to understand this whole vegetarian thing, implying that overweight people should eat a plant-based diet to not be so overweight.

Some say campaigns such as PETA's Sexiest Vegetarian contest aren't any worse than the pressures from generic American media. Is that true? Do we hold this vegan group to a higher standard because as idealists we think we should be better than that? Then why all the lists of celebrities, models, athletes, and actors, as super-fit, gorgeous vegans? This tactic is simply a PG version, when you think about it. We're still holding up the "perfect" bodies as our vegan ambassadors, even if they are primped and pressured to the extreme. Look around;

it's tough to find openly vegan celebrities who don't fit society's physical ideal... probably because they're celebrities, whose job it is to always be camera-ready, lest their imperfections be blown up on the cover of some tabloid.

We need to redefine the role of the vegan ambassador as an example to the rest of the world of just how diverse vegans can be. We are skinny. We are fat. We get old. We get cancer. We make mistakes. By hiding aspects of vegan life we think society doesn't want to see, we run the risk of perceived pretense. No, just pretense. We're lying to the world and the world knows it, so naturally

**We are all worthy vegan ambassadors and worthy people. We need to give ourselves a break.**

they grow suspicious. We become one of those misleading infographics that imply, ounce for ounce, kale has more protein than beef. We become the ultra-tan starlet with one eyelift too many. Nobody's buying what we're trying to sell.

What we need to sell is facts, nothing more. Vegan foods contain zero cholesterol and can supply adequate protein and iron for healthy children and adults. Vegan foods reduce irrigation demand for calorie production. Oh yeah, and vegan foods don't make animals suffer or die. The implication that you'll stay fit and vibrant like Emily Deschanel or Woody Harrelson – honest or

not, because who knows, you just might – is simply unnecessary. We are all worthy vegan ambassadors and worthy people. We need to give ourselves a break. *Waaaay* easier said than done, sure, but here's one more voice saying it.

For my part as a vegan ambassador, I will keep fighting the fight to feel better about myself, to ignore whatever sense of ideal I've been sold. You probably won't see me in a bikini anytime soon, but I will try to wear fewer sweaters in the summer (you know what I mean). I will continue to indulge when I want because I am confident that my healthy lifestyle includes not only carrots and tempeh, but also cupcakes and tempura. Living a life of moderation is important to me, for my own happiness, as well as others' view of me as a perfectly average vegan.

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“Studies have shown that sex does sell, when you are selling a sex/sexy product, not a long term decision.”

Lyndsay Penner, *Issue 9*, June 2015

## REFRAMING WHAT BEAUTY MEANS

By JL Fields

Originally in Issue 7, May 2013

I wrote this piece three years ago, during my vegan wonder years of learning from, and becoming part of, a vegan community. Through rose-coloured glasses, I believed that we were the same animal-loving community. Since then I've learned that some plant-eaters – plant-strong, WFPB (whole foods plant-based), etc. – cringe at the word vegan. And cringe when they see me up on a stage talking about healthy food and ethical living. I've learned that some vegans throw round/chubby/fat vegans under the bus.

I've learned that, like most communities, there are fragments and various subsets.

I've learned that some folks do not consider me a solid spokesperson for veganism because of my round belly. I once followed a speaker on a veg fest stage who took off his shirt to demonstrate how amazing his vegan body was. I climbed onto the stage and told the crowd to

watch out because I just might take my shirt off to show the other side of veganism, which isn't a side at all. It just is. I don't eat animals because I'm vegan. I don't eat their by-products. I don't wear their skin or fur or feathers.

I love vegan food. So much so that I have a belly to prove it.

Three years later, I'm still a round vegan. A bit more of a cynic when it comes to this idea of "community," though I have made some progress. I'm feeling a little less disappointed and a bit more hopeful. I continue to meet and surround myself with people who are vegan for the animals and don't shame others to make or prove their point. My community.

When I close my eyes I see an image in my head. I am light, thin, waif-like. I have long, wavy hair. I am glowing. I am youthful. I am a size two.

Then I open my eyes, peer into the mirror and see me. I do glow. I'm forty-something (oh, who am I kidding, I'm knocking on 50 years old). I have short, grey hair. I am definitely not a size two.

I used to be. When I was vegetarian.

Now I am vegan, and I am not skinny.

I never experienced an eating disorder, but, for most of my adult life, I bought into the notion that skinny is ideal, preferred, better. In my twenties I was skinny. I called it high metabolism, but the truth of the matter is that I smoked a lot of cigarettes and skipped a lot of meals, opting for Budweiser while hanging out with my local dart team. In my thirties, I settled down a bit, choosing food over beer, but cigarettes kept coming in and out of my life. By my late thirties, that high metabolism was a distant memory and I was at my heaviest. I went on a diet – the first of many – lost a lot of weight, shimmied my hips into size two jeans and decided to give up smoking. Fearful that I would gain all that weight back, I bought some running shoes and jumped on a treadmill. A month after turning forty, I ran a marathon. Six months later, I ran another one. Seventeen half-marathons and ten or so triathlons later, I was entering my 45th year and on yet another January diet because, it turns out, no matter how much I ran or trained, I ended every year less skinny.

This diet was a little different. I did a two-week nutritional cleanse, and, at the end of it, I realized I had not consumed dairy or eggs for 16 days. I went vegan.

That first year vegan was life-altering. After years of avoiding the kitchen, I became a cook. I experimented with recipes, took great joy in food, and, after years of avoiding "carbs," I finally and fully enjoyed eating once-taboo foods. Whole-grain

breads and pastas, sweet vegan treats, and more. During that year I became less obsessed with racing and more interested in living a balanced life. At the end of the year, I found myself back in the same place: not skinny.

What? The wonder vegan diet didn't make me skinny? Nope.

I did something radical. I didn't go on a diet. I simply bought bigger clothes and kept living my life. I continued to eat fabulous vegan foods (veggies, fruit, beans, grains) and healthy fats (nuts, seeds, avocado, and plant oils). I didn't avoid added salt (eat your iodine!) and, though I don't really have a sweet tooth, I didn't oppose added sugar because I've never met a vegan cupcake I didn't want to eat.

Now, I weigh about 20 pounds more than my skinny days. I am in excellent health, gaining most of my nutrients from my plant-based diet and supplementing where necessary (B-12 and Vitamin D these days).

I am not today's poster-child for veganism. I'm not skinny, I'm not a waif, and I eat oil. I have reframed what beauty means to me.

**In fact, I make a point to avoid "selling veganism." I want to encourage veganism as a path to a more compassionate life.**

I think I make people nervous. I'm not a skinny vegan because I'm not on a diet. In fact, I make a point to avoid "selling veganism." I want to encourage veganism as a path to a more compassionate life. There are no guarantees when it comes to health, weight, and size when we go vegan but, as my friend Ginny Messina says, veganism for the animals "never disappoints."

I consider myself as an ambassador of joyful vegan eating, as the opposite of deprivation, as a

necessary fuller figure in a room of thinner vegans. I consider myself a living, breathing example that compassion toward animals can lead to compassion to oneself.

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JL Fields is a vegan lifestyle coach & educator, Food for Life instructor, personal chef, career coach, and a corporate consultant. She is the author of *Vegan Pressure Cooking: Beans, Grains, and One-Pot Meals in Minutes*, co-author of *Vegan for Her: The Woman’s Guide to Being Healthy and Fit on a Plant-Based Diet*, writes the monthly vegan dining review for the *Colorado Springs Gazette* and produces and hosts the radio show “Easy Vegan” which broadcasts on KCMJ in Colorado Springs, CO and on WADR in Janesville, WI, as well as online globally ([KCMJ.org](http://KCMJ.org)) and via the TuneIn app. She lives in Colorado Springs with her husband Dave and their rescued cats, CK and Ernie.

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“When it all comes down to it,  
no one should go into a ‘diet’  
or ‘lifestyle’ by being attacked.”

Monica Giomo, *Issue 7*, May 2013



# UNCONDITIONAL COMPASSION

## THE NEED FOR FAT ACCEPTANCE IN THE ANIMAL RIGHTS COMMUNITY

By Chelsea Lincoln

Originally in Issue 7, May 2013

For pretty much every issue, when I've been accepting submissions from authors, there has always been that moment. The moment when I end up crying over an article or I find myself simply smiling at the end and thinking "this issue is going to be great." Given the emotion involved with the topic of fat shaming and body image, I'm sure I felt that way as the articles came in for Issue 7, but I'm certain I did when Chelsea sent me her piece.

Sadly, Chelsea and I have only really crossed paths a few times (most recently at the Resistance Ecology Conference in Portland, Oregon), but it's because of the honesty of her piece that I feel like I know her at least a little better than so many other folks I've met at conferences or in passing. Of course, when one is writing about

such a personal issue, it's hard not to want to connect with the reader.

It's that connection that is so important, especially when tackling such a sadly widespread issue in the vegan community (and mainstream society as well), and I think Chelsea does it incredibly well. After all, she starts with a topic that is surely the reason why so many of us live the way we do: a love for animals.

Through her love for animals, and their unconditional returning of that love, Chelsea found comfort and strength, and I hope that stories like hers will not only help others to find the same, but to also find their compassion. After all, we're all animals.



My cat Roy is dying. I am preoccupied with giving him as much love as possible in the limited time he has left. Although this is obviously painful to do, I decided to embrace what I was going through since he has always shown me a great abundance of love. I then realized it was actually relevant to being a fat vegan.

You see, when I was young, I was teased a lot for being fat. I grew up being told and shown that I am not worthy of love because of my size. This perception changed when, on my seventh birthday, I got the greatest gift ever: A guinea pig I named Kristy. She showed me kindness and unconditional love. She showed me support and care. She would kiss my tears and purr in comfort. It saved me. It opened my eyes to the compassion, love, and personalities that animals truly have.

Loving Kristy made me start thinking about how other animals are treated in the world. I instinctively understood that the many ways they are mistreated was not acceptable. I would like to think that I would now be vegan no matter what. Yet, in some ways, my fatness is directly connected to my veganism.

Animals have always been who I lean on for support. If I feel out of place at a party, I will find a kitty for comfort. If I am out in nature, I appreciate all the beauty around me and truly come alive when I see wildlife. I am currently in school to pursue marine mammal conservation because it is such a passion of mine. Animals are my saviour in life.

Perhaps it now becomes all the more clear why it hurts so much to lose Roy. He loves me unconditionally and does not see my size. He snuggles with me at night and greets me when I get home from work. He will often wrap his body around the back of my neck or cling to my side like a koala bear. He knows the kindness I give.

When it comes to humans, however, I have always felt I was looked at and treated differently

because I am fat. I have been discriminated against and even experienced this prejudice within the animal rights community. I do not fit the stereotype of what a vegan looks like and have been told that I am a bad vegan example. That is also ironic because I have been told by a lot of non-vegans that I look really healthy, since I have such rosy cheeks and am not rail-thin.

I have also been a target at protests because I am fat. One time someone yelled that I couldn't be vegetarian because of my size. I have been called names while people threw hamburgers my way. I was left out of organizing due to lack of respect because I'm fat. Someone once told me after reading my "Make peace, not pork" patch that my parents should have thought of that before creating me. The list goes on.

One of my worst experiences was being verbally assaulted at a protest. A man came out of a veal-serving restaurant that was the target of the protest. He started to yell about how ugly and awful I was simply because I was simultaneously fat and expressing my opinion. All the other protesters started to yell to the man that he was being mean and should stop. I just stood there in shock by the response of everyone around me. No one told

**This was my community, my friends,  
yet I did not receive any real support.**

the man attacking me that he was wrong. In fact, nobody contradicted him in any way.

Eventually, the protest ended, and everyone went home. No one checked in with me to see if I was okay. It was as if it was just another protest, and nothing really happened. This was my community, my friends, yet I did not receive any real support. I felt alone and uncomfortable. There are times I can be really strong or have a hard exterior, but of course actions like this affect me.

All of my life I have been active. I ran around the local forest and played all the sports I could. At this time, I was biking everywhere, doing aerobics, strength training, hiking, and more. I was always struggling considerably with my body image since I was constantly being told my size was unacceptable, but I was also doing everything “right” with a healthy vegan diet and staying so active. I didn’t understand what I was doing wrong. I spent a ridiculous amount of time hating myself and crying since I did not fit in. I cannot express how much this controlled my life and made me feel inferior and depressed. I came to a place in my life where I decided I had to accept my body as is, or I would hate myself for the rest of eternity.

This is where my path to fat and self-acceptance started. It was not easy. Some people were annoyed at me for speaking up for myself or pointing out things that left me out. I lost a lot of friends. I also gained friends and found an entire community working towards fat acceptance. As I confidently called myself fat, I noticed that most people felt uncomfortable with the word or tried to reassure me that I was not, as if it was a bad word. The word fat is just like tall or short: They are not bad words, only descriptions. I am fat. This does not tell you how much I exercise, what I eat, what my health is, or anything else besides my size.

I know it is hard to get away from stereotypes as a society. I don’t think a single doctor ever asked me my activity level or questions about my diet before deciding it on their own. One time my blood pressure was a little high, so the doctor said maybe I should walk at least 15 minutes a day. I told her I bike 15 miles a day. It turned out my high blood pressure was due to stress, and it has been normal ever since I created healthy boundaries for my needy family.

I’ve started to use the term “fat hate” to explain some of the things I observe in society. Some people seem to think that is too harsh, but

they do not deal with the ridiculous amount of negative words, images, and messages of people targeting fat bodies. Fat people are targeted daily with stereotypes and a barrage of statements that our bodies are not acceptable.

**I know we have been told over and over again about calculating your BMI to determine health levels and that size is as simple as calories in, calories out. But our bodies are not simple.**

Often I will see news reports where headless fat bodies are pictured while “reporting” about obesity. These human beings did not give permission for their images to be used, and the newscasters using the images do not know these people’s stories. Size does not reflect health. I know we have been told over and over again about calculating your BMI to determine health levels and that size is as simple as calories in, calories out. But our bodies are not simple.

The human body deals with nutrients and exercise differently from one another. Yo-yo dieting is one of the unhealthiest things a person can do to their body. When 95% of diets fail, and often people end up weighing more than they started, it’s crazy that it’s still a common practice. And not just common, but celebrated and expected. You can be fit and fat, just like you can be thin and unhealthy. We simply come in a diversity of body shapes and sizes.

Regardless of a person’s size, the individual is in charge of their own body. There is no obligation for anyone to try and live a healthy lifestyle and health is never a guarantee. We are all human beings that deserve respect no matter what. No body type is safe from the criticism of the diet and fashion

industries, and most people hate their own bodies due to the societal idea that the thinner you are, the better. No one ever reaches the “ideal.” I think it is important to see that this is a bigger issue than just the lack of fat acceptance. People are never taught to accept their own bodies, and that is just so sad. Self-acceptance should be encouraged for everyone.

Thin privilege does exist, however, and we need to acknowledge the need for fat-acceptance. Smaller bodies are less likely to be judged by what they are putting in their mouths or buying at the grocery store. Their health will be given the benefit of the doubt, and a doctor visit will focus on the medical issue they’re experiencing. They do not have to worry about being denied insurance or having inferior care. They don’t have people look

**Fat people are less likely to seek medical help due to the way they are treated and the stereotypes doctors have. Some doctors have actually refused to treat medical conditions until a patient loses weight.**

at them in disgust or call them lazy only because of their size.

The sad truth is this conditioning puts the health of everybody at risk. Fat people are less likely to seek medical help due to the way they are treated and the stereotypes doctors have. Some doctors have actually refused to treat medical conditions until a patient loses weight. One of my doctors used to encourage me to be on the Atkins diet, since it helped her lose weight, obviously not caring about healthy eating. For thin counterparts, no one is telling them they should eat healthy and fit exercise into their life. To me, it makes sense for doctors to encourage a healthy lifestyle for all body types. The reality that

this does not happen is quite ridiculous.

I could go on and on about how all the stereotypes of fat people are wrong. I could display all the medical and scientific papers that support the possibility of health at every size. I know there will be plenty of people who will deny whatever I say and exclaim, “What about health!” and not be open to my truth. The conditioning of what size is “acceptable” is strong and takes great effort to overcome. It is important that we do, however. This hate toward fat people is hurting our society, and it is hurting our activism.

Fat-shaming images have been used in activist culture for quite some time. PETA is one of the biggest culprits; it has shown a fat man with a pig snout for his nose, the fat belly of a man to promote veganism to fit into plane seats, imagery that compares a plus-sized woman to a whale, and so much more. I have seen many incarnations of the “evolution of man” with a fat belly, blaming fast food. The most recent incarnation of this image was seen on Occupy Monsanto’s Facebook page, which read “McDonald’s Evolution Theory.” Their Facebook thread was filled with a lot of fat hate and fat-shaming statements, such as “If someone is fat because they wouldn’t stop eating shit like this then they deserve it.” Occupy Monsanto stated on the thread they are not trying to shame fat people, just McDonald’s, but that is exactly what the image is doing.

Years ago, there was an “ad” in *Adbusters Magazine* with an image of a boy’s fat bare back and the words “There’s a little McDonald’s in all of us.” I remember being so outraged seeing this and exclaimed, “I haven’t had that shit in over ten years!” The idea that someone would look at my fat body and assume I consumed McDonald’s garbage was so enraging!

Are fat people just their fat thighs, double chins, and bellies? Are we not people as well? Some are vegan, bike riders, runners, swimmers, anti-corporate

activists, anarchists, bloggers, and gardeners; we are valuable members of the community and worthy of respect. We should not have to worry about our own community targeting the image we see in the mirror. We should not have to worry that we will stand alone if we are attacked for our physical appearance. We should expect you to act as our ally. We should be able to stand together to spread

**Imagine a world where  
size is not an issue and all  
that hateful energy was poured  
into making a difference  
in this world.**

the message of compassion. How is anyone going to recognize that veganism is a compassionate choice when you are bullying them with fat hate or bombarding them with fat-shaming imagery?

People do not realize what type of impact fat-shaming and body-hating images have on people of all sizes. Personally, I get upset by all the ignorance. People seem so ready to attack others and join the bandwagon of blaming fat people. It is truly sad to see that this size-obsessed culture has created a society of people who hate their bodies! They spend a considerable amount of time degrading themselves. Talk about unhealthy! Imagine a world where size is not an issue and all that hateful energy is poured into making a difference in this world. What could we accomplish?

If we take a stand against fat hate and find body acceptance in the movement, we all win. We can still stand up and talk about eating vegan and living a cruelty-free lifestyle. We can stand proud and truly participate in a compassionate world. We can show by example that oppression is connected,

so we will advocate respect for every being. Doing so will actually invite more people to join the movement. It will be inclusive to truly promote a community where people stop wasting time insulting other people's bodies and their own.

As my cat Roy continues to love me through his illness while I hurt so deeply, I am reminded that acceptance can be unconditional. I love animals for this reason. This is why I am vegan. Animals in my life taught me compassion and as I grew older and learned about ways animals suffer, I learned to speak up. I forced myself to use my voice and take a stand even though I was shy and scared. I found animal rights because animals were always there for me as support while people were treating me cruelly. But I cannot stand up and fight for them while others are tearing me down.

If you can't understand all my words about fat acceptance, at least respect my right to exist. Know that my voice is strong, and the animals have the right for me to use it for their benefit, without you getting in my way. Recognize the diversity of voices that want to speak up, but need support from the community as a whole. If we all stick together, our voices will be so much louder and have a bigger impact. We could truly start to focus on the messages we want to spread: ending cruelty to animals.

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Chelsea has been vegan about 20 years and fat all her life. She spends her spare time photographing wildlife, going on hikes, and playing with her cats and rats. She is known amongst her friends as a great baker and some of her recipes can be found on her website.

**Website:** [flavorvegan.blogspot.com](http://flavorvegan.blogspot.com)

“Veganism isn’t for the faint of heart.  
It’s not about happy animals or pictures  
of avocados next to the pet goat.  
It is about being realistic about  
what we consume and why.  
It’s not about judgment, but reality.”

Jess Huber, *Issue 8*, February 2015

## FLESH AND BLOOD

### FINDING YOUR INNER STRENGTH THROUGH ACTIVISM

By Whitney Metz

Originally in Issue 7, May 2013

First of all, I would like to say how much I appreciate being included in this collection. It meant a great deal to me to be asked to contribute to T.O.F.U. in the first place and to have my article considered one of the “Best of T.O.F.U.” is truly an honour. It’s so wonderful to know that people enjoyed reading my story, and I hope that my experience can be of help to someone else who has faced similar issues.

I wish I could tell you that, since I wrote the article, I have figured everything out and gotten my life together. Unfortunately, that is not the case. I’m still struggling to find my place in this world. I’m still looking for my life’s purpose. I have made a lot of progress in some areas, and no matter how many times I have faltered in every other aspect of my life, I have never once doubted my commitment to veganism and animal rights. Also, I have managed to preserve

my positive feelings about my body throughout all of my many ups and downs.

Finally finding some measure of confidence in my body has allowed me to do things that I was never able to before. Since writing this article I have taken up martial arts, which is something I had always wanted to do, but never did because I doubted my abilities. I have also started doing videos along with my written blog, which may not seem like a big deal to most, but for someone who once cringed at the very idea of having her picture taken, it’s a pretty big step. Perhaps an even bigger step is the fact that I have occasionally been doing modelling for my sister, who is a photographer. Whenever she has an interesting idea for a shoot she would like to try, she often tests it out on me, and then uses my shoot as an example for potential clients.

I guess the point here is that, even though my life is still a mess (and probably always will be), my new-found confidence has opened me up to new possibilities and made everything just a little bit easier. The more I realize what I am truly capable of, the more motivated I become to continue to challenge myself to be the best that I can in my everyday life and as an activist. Thank you to everyone who read my article the first time: I hope that it still rings true for you today.

In recent years, it has basically become common knowledge that one of the best things you can do for your physical health is to adopt a vegan diet. I can certainly vouch for this. I have seen remarkable improvement in my health and physical appearance since becoming vegan almost eight years ago. Two things I don’t think most people are aware of though are the emotional and psychological benefits of veganism. Those areas are where my most amazing results have been. There was a time, not so long ago, when I was a very different person from the one I am today. I was deeply unhappy with my body, my life, my self. Veganism, or more accurately animal rights, helped me to get past my former feelings of worthlessness, ugliness, and self-doubt and to become a better, happier person.

For me, veganism was never about health. In fact, when I first became vegan, I had no idea how healthy it was. That was something that I learned along the way. For me, it was a moral imperative. I loved animals and didn’t want them to suffer, so I had to stop supporting an industry that was built upon that suffering. Still, for a long time, my commitment to animal rights only went so far as my own refusal to support animal agriculture. I hated the feeling of isolation I got from discussing my beliefs with those who didn’t understand. So, for the most part, I kept my veganism and ideas about animal rights to myself. I only discussed my beliefs

if I was asked directly, and even then I talked about them in vague terms and generalizations and never expressed how deep my feelings about them were.

**Every time I looked in the mirror, I felt ashamed of what I saw. I longed to be different in every way but, most importantly, I longed to be thin.**

It was only after I realized the true importance of this cause, and started actually standing up for it, that I began to see myself changing for the better.

Back when I first became vegan, I had an extremely unhealthy relationship with my body. I hated everything about it. Every time I looked in the mirror, I felt ashamed of what I saw. I longed to be different in every way but, most importantly, I longed to be thin. I saw pictures of girls who everyone agreed were far too skinny and hated myself because I didn’t look like them. I set down strict rules for myself about what, and when, and how much I was allowed to eat and berated myself if I broke them. I measured my food out carefully to ensure I wasn’t eating too much. I never actually got to the point where I was physically unhealthy, but I was definitely emotionally unhealthy. It seemed the harder I tried, the worse I felt.

My dysfunctional relationship with my body manifested itself in other ways too. I was constantly disappointed or frustrated with myself, and my life, and I frequently ended up taking out those feelings on my body. I found that physical pain helped to distract my mind from whatever emotional pain I was feeling at the time. Since back then those feelings were almost constant, my body suffered a great deal of abuse. I did my best to keep the scars hidden, but every now and then someone would see one and I would be forced to concoct some story about where it came from. I always wondered



how many people actually believed me and how many just didn't want to know the truth. I still have the marks today, but they now serve as a reminder of how far I have come.

I think the real source of these problems was the feeling of worthlessness that I carried with me wherever I went. I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, and I desperately wanted to have a purpose. This was all going on around the time that I started college (the first time). I had no idea what I wanted to do. I knew I didn't want to be one of those people who worked just to make money. I wanted to do something I could feel good about. I wanted to make a difference in the world. During my three semesters in college, I had three different majors. Nothing I tried felt right. Nothing felt important enough for me to want to stick with it.

**It got to the point where the only thing that kept me breathing was knowing how much it would hurt the people around me if I stopped. Even that didn't seem enough at times.**

I kept thinking that if I could find the right major, the right path, I would start to feel like my life mattered, but I never did.

Every time I tried something new and found it just as unfulfilling as the last thing, I got a little closer to just giving up. It got harder and harder to believe that I was ever going to overcome the feelings of uselessness and ugliness that I dealt with on a daily basis. It got to the point where the only thing that kept me breathing was knowing how much it would hurt the people around me if I stopped. Even that didn't seem enough at times. For quite a while, there was a constant debate inside my head about whether or not I could stand one more day.

This all began to turn around when I finally decided to give animal rights a bigger part in my life. At some point, after dropping out of college and getting a meaningless job, I started to realize that animal rights meant far more to me than I had been willing to acknowledge before. I began to understand that it was far too important a cause for me to be satisfied with my own boycott of animal industries. I had always known that I wanted to help make the world a better place, and I had never been able to figure out why I couldn't seem to find a way to do that. Here was my chance. Here was a cause that mattered to me and that had the potential to make a real impact on the world. I would just have to be brave enough to stand up for it, in spite of the fact that no one else around me would.

As soon as I decided to truly dedicate myself to the cause, the world started to look different to me. I started to look different to me. I began to see myself and everything around me in the context of animal rights. I considered my own behaviours and the implications they could have for my new goal of improving the world for animals. I realized that so much of what I was doing was harming the cause I cared so much for. I came to understand that I would have to put my own low self-esteem and poor body image aside and do what needed to be done to help animals.

My goals for my body started to change when I began thinking of myself as an activist. There were, and still are to some extent, these stereotypes about the "sickly," "skinny" vegan. I realized that I didn't want to help perpetuate that idea. I made a conscious decision to stop trying to be skinny and start trying to be healthy. It was difficult at first. I still idolized that super-skinny look and persuading myself to stop wanting to look like that was very hard. I stopped thinking so much about how much food I was eating and started paying attention to what kinds of food I was eating, only healthy,

nutrient-rich, vegan foods. Instead of focusing on reducing calories, I started focusing more on exercise. For the first time in my life, I started to feel better about my body. Instead of looking in the mirror and seeing all of the fat I was unable to lose, I started noticing the progress I had made. I started to get stronger and was able to do things I had not been able to do before. In the past, I had always based my ideas about my body on how thin it was, and now I began basing them on how strong it was.

Something that really helped to solidify this new way of thinking about my body was my internships at Farm Sanctuary. My first internship in Watkins Glen, New York, felt like a test of my determination. I would start work at seven, trudge through snow that often reached my knees in temperatures that rarely went above freezing. I actually found the work itself to be pretty enjoyable, although I wasn't very good at it at that point. Depending on the day, I would be shovelling out barns, shovelling snow (when it got so deep that we couldn't walk through it), feeding animals, or helping with health checks, which meant helping to catch animals and hold them still while their hooves were trimmed, ears were cleaned, etc. By the time my first internship ended, I had gained some confidence, but also realized that I wanted to be better. I had seen how strong and capable the people who worked at the sanctuary were and I wanted to be like that.

By the time I left my second internship in Acton, California, I was, at least for the most part, able to keep up with the shelter staff. In Acton, the work day started a bit later and the weather was much more reasonable, but the work was harder and required more strength and endurance. Every day, I saw myself getting stronger, and it felt good to be able to do things I had not been able to before. Once, toward the end of my internship, a work party came to help at the shelter. The volunteers

were raking up straw and manure and putting it into the big trashcans that we used to clean out the barns. Whenever one got full, I would go pick it up and dump it into the tractor. After I had dumped

**Getting to spend time with them every day constantly reaffirmed my belief in animal rights and made me feel like I was making a difference, at least in their lives.**

a particularly heavy trashcan a woman said to me, "You're incredibly strong." Hearing that felt better than hearing "You're incredibly skinny" ever could.

My internships at Farm Sanctuary helped me in other ways, besides just allowing me to gain a new perspective on my own body. They gave me an opportunity to do things that I had never done, and wasn't sure I could do. Perhaps most importantly, they resulted in my adoption of my two pigs, Riley and Petunia, who have made such a difference in my life. Getting to spend time with them every day constantly reaffirmed my belief in animal rights and made me feel like I was making a difference, at least in their lives.

I had several experiences in Watkins Glen that were awful or terrifying, but I am so very grateful now to have had them. Once I had to drive a cat to the vet through a snowstorm that was unlike anything I had ever seen. I felt certain that I was going to wreck and freeze to death in a snowbank, but I didn't. I made it safely to the vet and back despite, at times, not being able to see the road in front of me. The hardest thing I did while I was in New York though was say goodbye to a good friend. Ms. Foreman was one of the first animals I met on my initial visit to Farm Sanctuary, the summer before my internship. She was a beautiful black and white cow and the first time we met she came over to

me and rubbed her face on my leg. She seemed so healthy and happy that first time I met her, but by the time I started my internship, her health had deteriorated drastically. She eventually got to the point where she could no longer stand and they called a vet in to euthanize her. I, along with several interns and staff, stayed with her until the end. The experience was both terrible and beautiful at the same time. It was so awful to watch her go, but seeing all of these people who loved her gathered around her made me happy for her. It also made me think about all of the animals who will never experience anything like that. I think that was the saddest part.

Going to Acton meant flying for the first time in my life. Not only flying, but flying from one side of the United States to the other on my own. I had no idea what to expect from the experience and was pretty surprised to find that I actually enjoyed most of it. I had plenty of other exciting moments after I arrived in Acton. Once I had to chase down an escaped goat and wrestle him back inside the fence. Another time a Brahma bull threatened to gore me. I had my back against a fence and he placed the tip of one of his horns against my midsection and slowly swayed his head back and forth dragging his horn from one side of my stomach to the other. I didn't want to startle him so I just stood perfectly still and eventually he lifted his head and slowly walked away. I spent the rest of my internship trying to make friends with him. By the end, he still didn't want me to touch him, but he would gladly take carrots from my hand.

Knowing that I was able to do all of these things has helped me to overcome some of my negative ideas about myself. I had felt weak and helpless for so long, and it was a bit of a shock to find that I wasn't. Surely, if I can drive through a blizzard and stand up to a Brahma bull, I can face the little challenges that everyday life presents. I finally feel like maybe I do have the strength to do something with my life.

My time at Farm Sanctuary, along with many other experiences I have had over the last few years, has also helped me to realize that, whatever I end up doing with my life, my ultimate goal is to work for animal rights. I don't know that I will ever actually find a job with an animal rights organization, but either way it is what my purpose in life truly is. I have stopped worrying so much about what kind of job I will have because, while I still wish that I could have a job that really matters to me, I will find a way to incorporate my activism into whatever I am doing.

I recently decided to return to college to study psychology. I'm still not sure exactly what my plans are but, if nothing else, I will be a better activist because I will have a better understanding of the way people think. So far, I have managed to incorporate animal rights into almost every assign-

**I'm not going to pretend that my life is perfect now, or that I'm perfect. For the first time though, I can honestly say that my life is worth it, and that I'm okay.**

ment I have done. I have challenged myself to reach as many people as I possibly can during my time in school. Hopefully, by the time I graduate, I will have had enough practice and gained enough knowledge to be a far more effective activist than I am now.

I am a different person today than I was a few years ago, and I owe that to the animal rights movement. It has given me so much. I have so many things now that I never thought I would have. I have confidence, a more positive view of my body and, most importantly, purpose. I'm not going to pretend that my life is perfect now, or that I'm perfect. For the first time though, I can honestly say that my life is worth it, and that I'm okay. Sure, there

are still times when I see a picture in a magazine of some model and think, just for a moment, "I wish I looked like her." Then I remind myself that I don't wish that because, odds are, that girl can't shovel out barns or carry bales of hay. I don't want to be skinny; I want to be strong. I am not going to strive for a look; I am going to strive for a life.

I realize now that it doesn't matter what I do, or what I look like, because what I AM is an activist. I no longer feel the need to define myself by some arbitrary standard of beauty or by some job title. I know who I am and I know what my purpose is. I only hope that someday I will be able to do as much for the movement as it has done for me.

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Whitney Metz has been vegan for ten years. She has interned twice at Farm Sanctuary and has two adopted pigs, Riley and Tuni.

YouTube: [Volatile Vegan Videos](#)



LIFE

# WHY I STOPPED TELLING PEOPLE I'M VEGAN

## TRYING TO FIND MYSELF AMIDST BEING TOLD WHO I WAS

By Marieke Gruwel  
Originally in Issue 8, February 2015

I wrote this piece over a year ago now and I have a whole new suitcase of baggage I can share with you. I became vegetarian at the age of twelve and vegan at fourteen and this piece describes the ups and downs of trying to figure out who I wanted to be all while being told who I was. It turned into a story about how I navigated the world of veganism as a teenager and a young adult, a world that I am still trying to figure out.

A lot can change in a year. I can add a natur-  
opath to the list of professionals who concerned themselves more with my diet than my mental health, asking questions like, “How sold are you on this vegan thing?” I can add men I have met or even dated to the list of people who have said inappropriate or rude things to me as a result of finding out about my veganism. But my story also has many positive updates. I am more confident in my choices and in myself. I have more friends who

are conscientious about what they eat—some have even gone vegetarian or vegan. I have found that the majority of people I encounter on a day-to-day basis are accepting, even encouraging, of vegans.

I still have questions, though. I still do not know the right way to go about it all. To be honest, most days I do not even think about the fact that I am vegan, it is just second nature. However, there are still days when it hits me like a ton of bricks. And I cry. I get angry. I ask myself how something so important has taken a back seat in my life, in who I am, in how I identify. I wonder if I could be doing more, if I should be more vocal about my veganism and let it take the front seat for a while. I want to believe that my respectful, peaceful, and quiet activism is the most effective, or is it just a cop-out?

So I guess you could say, even after eight years of being a vegan, I am still trying to navigate it all. But you know what? I think that is okay.

When I was thinking about what to write in this article, I had so many ideas that I could not keep track of them. But then, when I got around to sitting down and putting them on paper, I was stumped and had no idea where to start or how to express myself correctly. And so begins my article: with an introduction that has been used countless times by writers, alongside a complementary tone of uncertainty. I cannot count how many times I have sat at my computer screen trying to begin a paper, a Facebook status, or even just a comment on some form of social media, and have been stumped. I have noticed a trend, however. This only happens when I have a strong opinion or am passionate about what I am going to say, and I think this is where I got myself into trouble as a young vegan. Being vegan as a teenager was much more than not being able to eat the dip at a party or buy cupcakes at a bake sale. It became who I was and how I was labelled—even if I did not agree with the stereotypes thrown upon me. I would like to share with you my experience of being vegan while coming of age because sometimes it was great, sometimes it was funny, and sometimes it just downright sucked.

I am sure most of you have heard the joke, “How do you know if someone is vegan? Don’t worry, they’ll tell you.” I have to admit, when I first went vegan I lived up to that stereotype wholeheartedly. I went vegetarian when I was twelve years old and by the age of fourteen, I had decided to go vegan. I felt great. Every time you sit down for a meal you make a choice—and here I was, at fourteen years old, making what I thought was the best possible choice. I was saving animals. It was at this time that people started commenting on my diet, most likely because I was no longer just going through my “vegetarian phase.” I had the urge to tell the world about being vegan, and I wanted to let everyone in on the horrors of factory farming and how easy it was to stand against it. I never really

made the connection that the food on my plate came from a living (and more importantly, feeling) animal until I went vegetarian. Therefore, I thought that if I made the connection for others, they would just as happily ditch the animal products. But I was naïve. Instead of being praised and respected for the choices I made, I was often teased, labelled, and judged.

**What was shocking then,  
and is even more shocking now,  
is the number of adults who  
made my diet their business.**

Surprisingly, this was not just an issue with my peers. Understandably, when you are young, there is a tendency to make jokes about things that make you uncomfortable or push you out of your comfort zone. Of course, I did not understand this when I was that age, but at least I can look back now with a more forgiving lens. What was shocking then, and is even more shocking now, is the number of adults who made my diet their business. Throughout high school I suffered from various mental health issues and have been repeatedly “diagnosed” with various mental illnesses, from depression and bipolar to post-traumatic stress disorder and borderline personality disorder. Alongside being prescribed numerous drugs (which is another story altogether), I had to attend therapy. I experienced a pretty traumatic event when I was young, and I was having an incredibly tough time getting through life. Needless to say, I really needed therapy. Well, I was in luck—someone knew exactly what was wrong with me and how I could fix it.

When I went to meet with the psychiatrist I was referred to by my family doctor, I proudly discussed my veganism when asked to talk about myself. Little did I know, this tidbit of information (that I never would have guessed had anything to do with my

mental health) turned out to be precisely what was wrong with me. According to her, my veganism was the cause of my depression, my self-loathing, my inability to function in society, and my suicidal thoughts. Who knew eating vegetables could cause so much pain? That day I learned that “vegan” was not simply a word to describe what I did or did not eat.

The definition of vegan, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, is quite simple. A vegan is a person who does not eat or use animal products. Easy. For me, that is what I was signing up for. I was prepared to politely reject birthday cake and forgo the pizza at parties. And to be completely honest, I was ready to hear about how kind and ethical I was—come on, I was fourteen. But, like I said, when you are young and something makes you uncomfortable the normal reaction is to make fun of it. And this is what happened. Instead of playing along with the humour and gently showing others why I made the choices I did, I took the attacks on veganism

### **Was this what it meant to be vegan? Because if it was, I did not like it.**

personally. I reached out online to find support, and seven years ago the most accessible support came from PETA, specifically peta2.

I joined the peta2 Street Team, I ordered their starter kits and flyers, and I bought a variety of vegan apparel (including the famous “I am not a nugget” tote bag). I had already been known as “the crazy vegan” in my high school, so I thought I might as well embrace it and try to be an activist. I remember going to my first (and last) peta2 event. It was when KFC finally introduced a veggie option on their menu and was agreeing to more humane treatment in their farms. Outside of one of the KFCs in downtown Winnipeg, peta2 was celebrating

their “victory” by handing out coupons for the new vegetarian sandwich in, yes, you guessed it, their famous lettuce bikinis. I went to go order this new option, which I actually had a difficult time getting veganized because the sandwich on the menu was not even vegan, and then proceeded to get my picture taken with the women in the lettuce bikinis to get my Street Team points. I remember feeling so uncomfortable. Groups of men were standing around trying to get attention from the women, and cars were continuously passing by, honking their horns, and shouting things at the women as they held their signs at the edge of the street. Was this what it meant to be vegan? Because if it was, I did not like it.

I was lost for a while. I did not want to be part of the only vegan community I knew of, but I sure as hell did not want to stop being a vegan. I felt as if I had to live up to the vegan stereotypes in order to be a real vegan. And I wanted to be a real vegan because I strongly believed (and still do) that eating a vegan diet is the right thing to do. But I really had no idea how to be vegan other than in the most basic definition of the word. I slowed down with the animal rights activism and remained quiet when people shoved meat in my face (I’m sure you have all been there at some point; it takes a lot to not get angry). One of the hardest days I endured in high school was when I was in grade eleven and my environmental science class got the chance to watch a documentary about factory farming and its devastating effects on the environment. I was pleasantly surprised when the documentary also shed some light on the treatment the animals received in these massive industrial farms. I had seen footage of this sort numerous times before, but it was clear many of my peers had not. I noticed some of the students close their eyes or gasp, which was a normal reaction, but a handful of the students started laughing and imitating the cries of the animal who were being beaten and abused. I walked out of that class feeling physically ill.

I finally figured out that it was not me. I was the only vegan in my high school and I had no other vegan friends, so naturally I took the teasing as a personal attack. That day I learned that, unfortunately, no matter who the message came from, it was not going to be taken seriously by some. I really wish that they were attacking me personally because that would be so much easier to accept and understand than the fact that some people just do not care. I could not stop trying to help the animals, but my activism became quieter and more personal.

By the time I got to university, my veganism was not something I wore on my sleeve, but if you got to know me it would certainly come up. Things were getting better and people were more understanding than before. I was starting to feel more comfortable with who I was becoming because it finally felt like I was starting to decide who I was. Good things must always come to an end, though. One summer evening I went to a pub with some friends to catch a band. I started talking to some guy at the bar and we really hit it off. After we had been chatting for some time, he ordered two shots, and I politely declined the offer. When he asked me why, I explained that I could not take the shot because, if memory serves correctly, it had something like Bailey’s in it and I explained I could not have dairy because I was vegan. His face dropped—it was almost as if I had told him I could not drink dairy because I was an alien from another planet. He proceeded to tell me that he once dated a crazy vegan before and that if anything were to happen between us it would only last for an evening. I smiled at him, and rejected his offer with a “f\*\*\* you.”

I cannot decide, however, if getting rejected purely because I am vegan is better than the unwanted comments about my sex life. I cannot count how many times men have asked me upon finding out that I am vegan if I swallow. Often,

they stand around with their friends and giggle and one of them blurts it out and they think they are all comedians. These occurrences got so annoying that I actually stopped telling men I was vegan until I had to. I have dated guys for weeks without my veganism entering the conversation. This takes a fair bit of skill, if I do say so myself. Coffee dates, movies, concerts—but never dinner. I also began using allergies as an excuse for why I did not

### **Is it my fault that others have misconceptions about vegans? No. Can I decide what kind of vegan I want to be? Of course.**

eat certain things. It turns out people get really offended when you do not want to eat their cookies and, speaking from experience, telling them you are vegan does not always work. People respect allergies much more than they respect ethics.

I really had no idea how to present myself. If I told people I was vegan, I was often treated differently, like in the case of my psychiatrist. Maybe if I had kept my veganism to myself I would have received the treatment I needed. But keeping my veganism from people I am dating, new friends, and even coworkers did not seem right and, in the long run, just did not work. By not sharing this part of myself with others, I felt like I was hiding a part of me. And this was not a part of me that I wanted to hide. Is it my fault that others have misconceptions about vegans? No. Can I decide what kind of vegan I want to be? Of course. And by doing this, I might even be able to shift people’s perceptions on what a vegan is and show them that we are all different and that that is okay.

Yet, as I struggled with when and how to present this part of me to others, I also struggled with what word, or words, to use. Words can be a powerful thing, so perhaps changing my language

was the easiest way to fix this problem. I noticed a growing trend on the internet of people using the term “plant-based” to define their vegan lifestyle. I found that most people using this term were using it as a way to define a way of eating for their health as opposed to a way of eating for ethical reasons. My veganism, however, has nothing to do with my health. It is a nice bonus, but I would be vegan even if eating animals was the healthiest thing you could do for your body. For me, the other ways of describing a vegan lifestyle did not fit with my personal beliefs. So I returned to the word “vegan” and gave it some serious thought.

Why was I letting an old psychiatrist, mean kids from high school, and random men from bars scare me away from using the word vegan? When I tell people I am a feminist and they ask me if I shave my legs or hate men I do not stop identifying as a feminist—I try to explain to them what feminism really means. I would never tell anyone how they should identify themselves because I believe that people should call themselves or identify as whatever they feel comfortable with. But I also believe that as people following vegan lifestyles, we should not let stereotypes or misconceptions about the term turn us away from embracing the word vegan. A vegan is someone who does not eat or use animal products—the rest of yourself is up to you to define, and you should not let anyone tell you differently.

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“While women were the main force of the movement, it was women who were being used in advertisements; being shamed for being fat, for not being able to provide their children with fresh vegetables, covered in bruises and chains (e.g., PETA).”

Keira Edwards-Huolohan, *Issue 9*, June 2015

## TURKEYS AND TITLES

By Jessica Sarter

Originally in Issue 8, February 2015

It's a funny thing to look back on my words and struggles in the past and remember how big they seemed then and how I don't even think of them today. My original article was centred just on me becoming a vegetarian. I had sent it out into the world and got a response (from T.O.F.U.) a month later. By the time of my deadline, about another month later, I had begun to look beyond vegetarianism and was struggling with the moral impact of still consuming dairy and eggs. So I updated the article to include my desires and fears towards veganism. And that was the article that was published in the magazine.

The last date that I have for making edits to that article was August of 2014. In January of 2015, I decided to try one of those "vegan pledges" and just go vegan for a month. I liked the idea of saying I was trying it while also knowing there was an end date to my efforts if it was too

difficult. And as I moved through that month, I realized I could actually make the transition. The build-up and the fear of loss and failure was in my head and had less to do with what to eat and more to do with my own issues. My perfectionism reared its head and made me think if I couldn't do it perfectly then I shouldn't do it at all. My ego feared that I wouldn't seem as sexy once I told people I had not only stopped eating bacon, but now I wasn't eating cream cheese either. My inner-introvert loathed the idea of having to now ask if a sauce was made with butter.

I tried re-writing the article and adding in my new lifestyle changes. But the tone of the original is what I want other people to read and remember. It's so liberating when you have finally decided who you want to be and you know that you can do it. I've never looked back since deciding I would officially be vegan. But getting there

meant not only changing what I eat, but having to change my perception of myself. And I hope that's what people take away from my words. Giving up cheese is the easy part. Confronting all that keeps us from becoming who we want to be is where the real change happens.

I am not one for titles. I don't like being locked into what a title means or being defined by the symbolism of certain words. This is why I'm in a "partnership" with my man instead of "married," a "student of Buddhism" instead of a "Buddhist" and well, you get the gist. And while I've never been much of a meat eater, I have never taken on the title and presumed responsibility of being a vegetarian.

My food choices have often been a conversation piece when I was out and passed on meat dishes or ordered three different sides and called it a meal. At times, I liked the attention, because, yes, you can't help but feel a little superior knowing that you are in fact on the moral high ground here. And at times, it was annoying, such as when people would ask if it wasn't hard for me not to eat that steak. On a good day, I would say something like "no, because if I ever want steak, I can eat it," which is difficult to say without sounding like you think the person is an idiot. Or I would reply "Do you miss eating things you don't like?" which again, can kind of sound condescending but, really, come on!

I wasn't planning on assuming this new title. It just kind of happened on its own. The way I love my pets and have seen how full of personality and feeling they are certainly opened my eyes to animals. My work in NYC to ban carriage horses made me feel good, yet hypocritical. I have sat and listened to Buddha's teaching on compassion for all living beings and had a gnawing feeling that maybe I was cherry-picking my spiritual practices a little too much.

So, I stopped eating meat last year. It didn't happen overnight, it just kind of unfolded. Like

everyone else, bacon was a favourite and then one night last summer I had a dream about baby pigs and woke up and said I won't eat that again. Just like that, it was done. The only thing I really did still eat was chicken, but even that became obsolete. Yet I still didn't see myself as vegetarian. To me, vegetarians were like my old roommate who would say things like "what kind of flesh are you cooking" or "are you finished with the carcass?" if I left chicken out. And I thought it was awful when she said those things and truly felt she meant to offend me. Maybe she did and maybe she didn't. All I know is that when she spoke like that while standing in tree pose in our kitchen it shaped my view of vegetarians.

Whenever I have thought about completely giving up meat I have wondered what I would do on the holidays. I mean, turkey and stuffing are my favourite part. What would I eat? What would everyone else eat? Would I feel weird? Would they

**"I'm a vegetarian," I declared.  
"Yeah I know," was his unaffected  
reply as he hung up his coat.**

feel weird? And when Thanksgiving came around, I ate turkey and stuffing as usual.

The next morning I awoke with that bad feeling you get when you know something is wrong, but you haven't been awake long enough to remember what it is yet. And there it was. I had broken my long spell on non-vegetarian-vegetarianism. I was surprised to find that I had a guilty feeling inside. And then I realized it. I was done with turkey. What would I do if I couldn't eat stuffing though? It was my favourite thing to eat throughout the whole day. I would make it without the sausage in it. That's what. It's funny to suddenly see that the sausage was always a part of the stuffing that I tried to pick out as much as possible anyway. When my



boyfriend came home I said it. I wanted to just drop the bomb. Shock and awe. “I’m a vegetarian,” I declared. “Yeah I know,” was his unaffected reply as he hung up his coat. Apparently, I always had been in his eyes. I just hadn’t arrived there myself.

The next morning when I woke, it hit me. Shrimp! I eat shrimp in the summer! I hadn’t even thought about it. I immediately felt regret at locking myself in as a vegetarian. Damn, had I told anyone else yet? A quick Google search proved that, yes, I could be a pescatarian – a vegetarian who eats fish – but that’s a little too contradictory for me. Especially since shrimp is the only seafood I ever eat. Was I going to let that one thing keep me from stepping into a place that will make me feel more whole and consistent? I reasoned that there must be some feeling of sacrifice otherwise this decision would have come to me long ago. And so I said goodbye to shrimp and was happy with my decision to commit to a title that reminded me of whom I was at that time in my life.

Unfortunately, that good feeling was short-lived. Because just one day with PETA in your Facebook feed will quickly remind you that while you may be a better person for not eating meat, you damn sure have a long way to go if you want to honour the rights of animals. Great, I gave up meat but I couldn’t turn a blind eye to the fact that my dairy use contributed to abuse that may have been worse than death. I didn’t drink dairy milk, but I didn’t walk away from food that had it in it. I volunteered several times this year at Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary in upstate New York. This last time I sat out in a field and gave Reiki to a calf that would once have been either food or a milk machine. The moment was beautiful, she and I laying in a field together, and, as I sat there, I wondered what the fuck was wrong with me that I couldn’t just make a full commitment to veganism?

And that’s the question. What is wrong with me that I don’t just say this is it and then that’s it? I

speak only for myself when I say the mental process feels like when I quit smoking. I swear I thought about it forever, loathed myself for not quitting even while I was smoking my cigarettes. In a way, it was a desire to escape that cycle of feeling pissed at myself every time I “enjoyed” a smoke that helped me to quit. How are giving up meat and quitting smoking even remotely connected? Yes, I know, by smoking I was making a choice to harm myself, and by consuming animal products I am participating in the suffering of animals that have not chosen to harm themselves. But in my observation of myself, the mental and spiritual process I am going through is very similar. Both changes greatly affect my life and my identity. Even positive changes in who you are can take some adjusting to. I “want” to be vegan yet at the same time I think I am fearful of it. Is that fear because of the unknown? Is that fear based on my need to be a perfect vegan which means once I say yes, I can never mess up? Am I being lazy? Am I afraid of the title? Writing the article alone gives me anxiety as if I’ll be held accountable afterwards. I’m trying to take my own advice that I give my clients and recognize the steps that I’m making, examining the struggles I have and constantly educating myself so that my subconscious will do some of the work for me. I think veganism is a simple choice for some people and for others it is something to aspire to.

As I write this, I fear the backlash from others. “I thought this was a vegan magazine!” “Why don’t you send this to a vegetarian magazine?!!!!” “You either do or you don’t!” And on and on. Ultimately that’s some of that fear that I speak of. I have met many vegans in my travels this last year and can’t remember an actual public shaming (everyone is braver online!). And I tell people the truth, having decided that if and when I take another new title I want it to be true. And people say the same things that they say any time you see someone on a journey that you recognize yourself in. Like

any other goal, I hear things like congrats on the vegetarianism, here try this cashew cheese, and every step counts, etc. And I take that in and I give it back to others. When you do that for people, it helps them feel like they are a part of something bigger and that their progress in getting there is just as important. For me personally, the last thing I need is someone telling me that I am sucking at this as if I don’t have my own inner critic for just such feedback.

### **And while the comments I see online can make even holding these discussions seem scary, the people I have met continue to remind me of their normal-ness.**

Fortunately, living in Brooklyn has made it possible to try many vegan dishes that most people won’t see for years. I’ve been buying more and more vegan products, recently discovering veggie crumbles, which has joyfully brought tacos back into my life. The cheese situation sucks, as anyone on the East Coast will attest. California seems like a magical haven where great vegan things are happening while I wait for them to come to Whole Foods. I actively seek out opportunities to try vegan foods now. We have a great event called Smorgasburg where I started visiting the vegan vendors and sampling all kinds of good stuff. And while the comments I see online can make even holding these discussions seem scary, the people I have met continue to remind me of their normal-ness. I am currently operating under the premise that by trying the best vegan foods made with love and thought and careful culinary skills I will be able to really see the potential in these new foods. I had seen Daiya cheddar in the grocery store but never tried it after having some other horrible vegan cheese. But I ordered it when

I saw it as an ingredient in a sandwich at an event and as I bit into it I think I might have actually whispered, oh god thank you, realizing that all is not lost with vegan cheese. My Facebook wall now has my new vegan finds – “Wow you should try this vegan sour cream” – sandwiched between pictures of me having cocktails and me in yoga poses (oh the irony).

So that’s my story that I submitted to a vegan magazine because, regardless of my title, I read vegan magazines. And I think a lot of V-curious people do as well. And I hope that it reminds some vegans of how they got to where they are and I hope that it lets other people know that they are not alone in trying to figure out what essentially is a whole new way of life. I hope it pisses some vegans off because without their fire and passion veganism would likely not even be the big topic that it is now. But mostly I wrote this for me because, while I have always hated titles, I have never been afraid to publicly commit to being a student of something that matters to me.

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Jessica Sarter is an ICF Certified life coach and a Reiki Master/Teacher. She believes in combining a holistic practice with a realistic lifestyle for both herself and her clients. A “bodhisattva in high heels” Jessica is both a healer and a career woman. She is the founder of Get Balanced and Centered in Brooklyn, New York.

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## GAME BIRDS & GROWING UP

By Aleks Salb

Originally in Issue 6, December 2011

Although years had passed since Aleks' piece was published in the issue with a focus on diversity and oppression (a focus that would continue, in some ways, for every issue after), his was another piece that had stuck with me long after I did my final edit and published the issue.

So, when he asked me just why I wanted to include this piece in The Book of T.O.F.U., there were a number of reasons that made their way into my response.

First, the incredibly personal nature of the piece is the kind of thing that always makes me feel amazingly lucky to be involved with such authors.

Second, and maybe most importantly, Aleks' piece (similar to Jessica's "Turkey and Titles") shares an account of struggle while coming to terms with one's actions and the consequences for animals, and it certainly doesn't offer an

easy solution. Although some might argue that veganism is *always* about such a thing, there's an incredible amount of privilege to be found in the statements of those who think the answer is black and white.

However, for many others, the answer is far from simple. Whether it's a family business like the one Aleks worked for, or a factory farm offering a chance for employment in an area with little opportunity, there are plenty of people who struggle daily with a choice a lot of us will never face.

Of course, the one we are faced with is whether or not to show compassion, and I hope Aleks' story helps to shed some light on just how easy that choice can be.



I grew up on a gamebird hunting resort. Dad owned pens packed full of thousands of quail, pheasants, and chukar. Male pheasants were the trophy bird; they had ringed neck plumage, long tail feathers, and banded iridescent patches. Our main service was to take a requested number of these game birds out in bags, swing them around until they were too disoriented to fly right away, and then dump them into tall grass clumps in our fields. After a short wait, the hunters could bring their bird dogs and flush the birds out of the grass and into flight. They'd shoot the birds with 12 or 20 gauge shotguns.

We also had a 50-foot wooden tower along a tree line near the pond behind our house. We had a pulley to haul pheasants up in plastic cages. Around this tower were dozens of stations marked by hay bales where the hunters stood. We'd throw a pheasant off the top, and it would try to fly for cover. After we'd throw it off, we had to duck right away because about 30 eager people would start to shoot. Congressmen in particular liked tower hunts.

Once shot, birds would get stuffed into collection bags and brought back to our cleaning stations. We offered a dressing and packing service, so if they wanted, the hunters could carry the birds home to eat. A lot of the birds would only be wounded or still partially alive after being shot. We swung them by their necks to kill them. Nearly every day of the hunting season, I and a few hired help would be deploying, killing, and cutting up these game birds.

The birds were raised in captivity, but they weren't like domestic birds. Pheasants are territorial and caging made them hyper-aggressive and neurotic. Blinders were stapled to their beaks to keep them from seeing what was in front of them and pecking or striking each other to death.

As for me, I was a labourer in an assembly line of death, or as I think of it, a dis-assembly line. We took lives and bodies apart. My childhood was like many family farms: you work where you live. You

work for free and as much as you're made to. On the plus side, there's no commute. On the downside, there is no escape.

Truth is, I was bad at it. Pheasants were majestic and beautiful and wild and frightening. I wanted them to be free or just left alone. I hated the men, I hated killing and gutting things every day. Setting them in the hunting fields made me feel guilty. When their bodies returned in stained bags, it was mortifying and, depending on the carnage, revolting. Stripping their skin and cutting them up made me nauseated. Homeschooling meant I was always there, so what I didn't do, I watched happen.

Sabotage was plotted every so often, and I got away with a few jailbreaks and equipment malfunctions. I staged crying fits and belligerence and became expert at hiding for hours in unlikely spaces. I was always dragged back and put to work again. I was the bad kid and nobody ever listened when I said this was a bad business.

To stay functional, I had to cope and distract myself from daily life. I'd hold my breath or cross my eyes, count or clench my teeth in different patterns. I controlled the few things I could with rigid severity. Every so often I'd try to fly off the tower.

The business wasn't that profitable and my dad wasn't great at running it. The hunters were mostly creeps, johns, pedophiles, businessmen and politicians, and more often than not those categories had some overlap. To survive was a type of success, but emotionally checking out was more immediately rewarding. Every hour of labour was double duty. There was the work, then work of shutting out what I did. Eventually I clenched and counted and closed my way into feeling less of anything, on any day. Pretending to be normal became normal then became nothing. My dad and his friends said I was growing up. I took their word for it.

I left that place the first chance I could. Fifteen.

While learning how to make choices and live

with the ones that had been made for me, the anesthetic of growing up was slow to wear off. The walls and scaffolding I had built to survive didn't just drop away when no longer needed, instead it morphed into other constructions. Mostly mausoleums. I had an obligation to house years of dead birds and long-dead parts of me. Empathy had been cut off at the source, so I had to pretend to be kind, since I knew how to pretend. Most of my feelings felt like imaginary friends. I recalled details, but not the feelings themselves. When I called for help, it was mostly to empty rooms.

I ran from a guilty past, but also chased it. I wanted to be vibrant and sensitive to myself, to other people and creatures again. But it was locked up in a kid on the other side of a painful history I was trying to erase. When I stopped eating meat, I actually worried I was deliberately weakening myself. I despaired that all those years of hardening might be for nothing and that the misery would go to waste. I couldn't keep growing up and growing numb and couldn't be that little loving person I remembered. Putting senses to sleep can be done through little tricks and bought time, but waking them up again, it seemed, would take earthquakes.

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Aleks Salb travelled across North America by bus, rail and car before eventually immigrating to Vancouver, British Columbia in 2012. He is currently celebrating his late-twenties, his recent marriage to a devastatingly handsome Russian gnome, and a blossoming career in social strategy. Current projects include memoirs of his life and a poetic translation of his paternal grandmother's oral history.

“I actually feel that framing a vegan product as ‘cruelty-free’ creates a one dimensional ‘it’s only about the animals not being exploited’ approach to vegan consumerism. I know there are products that are vegan out there that are organic, fairtrade, and sweatshop and human exploitation free, but that is small compared to the products out there that are not.”

Dr. A. Breeze Harper (*Sistah Vegan*), Issue 6, December 2011



## MODERN VEGAN: CO-EXISTENCE IS KEY

By Danielle Elliot  
Originally in Issue 6, December 2011

One of the reasons T.O.F.U. started was to give a platform to people who may not normally have had one in an effort to show that veganism went beyond the very vocal folks who made the news. In fact, what T.O.F.U. set out to do in some ways was to showcase that vegans could be where you least expected us to be.

The point was to show that being vegan was just a part of who someone was, and that also meant that deciding to go vegan didn't have to involve completely changing who you were.

Of course, over the years the magazine's focus shifted every now and then, but I like to think it continued to showcase a number of vegans who were doing things their own way

Perhaps one of the issues where this was the most evident was in Issue 6, which not only included Danielle's submission, but also contained interviews with both Jasmin Singer

and Dr. A. Breeze Harper, two vegans who are certainly vocal.

Like any community connected by a cause, it's this mix of people that leads to change on many levels (along with plenty of drama!), and I couldn't imagine publishing this book without including pieces such as Danielle's, which help to illustrate that being vegan doesn't mean being alienated from the rest of the world.

Sure, how you get to that point is up to you, but hopefully over the years T.O.F.U. has helped to show that there are a lot of us out there.

You just need to know where to look.



Like every other kid in my not-so-exciting hometown, I just wanted to fit in. I was the student council treasurer, never the president. I wasn't really a good athlete, but was on every team. The only thing I campaigned for was recycling—I was born on Earth Day, so I liked to consider it my personal agenda. College was more of the same, with countless football tailgates and hangovers flushed away by Philly cheesesteaks. I felt like crap more often than not, but that's just college, right? I was just a typical girl, living what so many consider the typical American life. I liked it that way.

And then, seemingly overnight, I no longer fit in. That's what happens when you go vegan. But if you've read T.O.F.U., you know this already.

For me, it started innocently enough. One night, while browsing the racks at Barnes & Noble, I picked up a copy of *Skinny Bitch*. Everything in it made sense, from the health benefits to the environmental impact. It seemed like a no-brainer; an intelligent way to lose weight while having a positive impact on the environment and saving a few animals. I wasn't an animal rights activist, but I understood the cause and liked the idea of helping out.

### THE NEW ME

I expected people, especially my family, to support me. After all, when I'd tried Weight Watchers, everyone was excited for me. When I tried the South Beach Diet, an atrocious attempt to lose weight that left me hospitalized on an IV drip because I was so severely dehydrated, people weren't really concerned. "Hey, you lost weight!" they said. My mom is obsessed with dieting, so I thought she might even jump on board. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Having never met a vegan, and not personally knowing any vegetarians, I suddenly found myself facing what felt like an impossible feat: figuring out how to convince my friends and family that I am

still me, just without the acne, horrific farts, or mood swings. (Yes, I had all of those. They were awful.)

For the first few months, I tried to be the advocate I never wanted to be. I defended my views by quoting articles and citing research studies.

**My siblings just rolled their eyes.  
My friends stopped calling  
—they didn't want to hear any more  
about how great I felt—  
and stopped inviting me to dinner.**

I emailed the articles to everyone on my contact list. This didn't help, even when no one could hand me solid research debunking my arguments. My siblings just rolled their eyes. My friends stopped calling—they didn't want to hear any more about how great I felt—and stopped inviting me to dinner. One close friend from high school still doesn't talk to me, three years later. It was time to come up with a new approach.

### VERSION 2.0

Instead of talking about them, I tried to get everyone to eat vegan foods. I offered to make dinner for family parties, invited friends over for brunch. This also backfired, as I was consistently insulted when people didn't love the food I served. It probably had more to do with the fact that I'm no queen of the kitchen, but I took it personally. My cousin even showed up at my birthday brunch with a loaf of pepperoni bread. That's a staple at every meal on Staten Island, where she lives, so she thought everyone would be excited. I was so insulted. But my family brushes everything off—emotional reactions to something as silly as a loaf of pepperoni bread are considered laughable, so I had to get over it. I still wanted to fit in with my family, vegan or not.

### THIRD TIME IS THE CHARM

I finally struck a balance by just not talking about it so much. No one sits at the table explaining why they like turkey, so I have politely asked them to stop asking me why I like tempeh. I don't defend my choices, I just ask them to respect that this is what I think is best for my health and for the environment, and I have no desire to be an advocate. If they ask for information, I provide it. Otherwise, I just want to eat dinner and talk about Aunt Sally's crazy adventures in Thailand, just like everyone else.

I also still want to fit in with my friends. I dragged them to countless vegan restaurants and cafes in my early days. It didn't last long. Just as I was sick of restaurants that have nothing for a vegan, they were sick of menus that listed completely foreign foods. So we've compromised. We meet at hybrids, as we lovingly call them, or at Japanese, Thai, Indian or Mexican restaurants.

**I have no desire to spend an hour educating someone, when I could be home whipping up delicious vegan treats or out to dinner with my friends—some of whom have started to go vegan.**

### RESPECT

Having found a balance with my family and friends, I still find it amazing how complete strangers react to my veganism. In fact, I usually just don't mention it (unless I want to scare them away). If they show genuine interest, I'll point them towards a few of my favourite vegan bloggers or articles. But that's as far as I go. I have no desire to spend an hour educating someone, when I could be home whipping up delicious vegan treats or out to dinner with my friends—some of whom have started to go vegan. It took me stepping down from the soapbox

for them to become genuinely interested.

The resistance to my diet hasn't only come from carnivores. As someone who aligns with the “modern vegan” movement—i.e., sometimes I make mistakes, sometimes I eat an M&M, I'm not perfect—I have also dealt with harassment from abolitionist vegans. Just as I ask my family to respect my choices, I completely respect the abolitionist view. But I don't want it shoved down my throat. I've been stalked and threatened by an abolitionist vegan who thinks I don't follow the vegan diet strictly. As far as I'm concerned, that just hurts the cause. Every day that someone is vegan is one less day they are not vegan. Every vegan day, every vegan meal, is a triumph for health, the environment, and animal rights.

It was hard enough trying to learn to cook and deciphering restaurant menus that are geared towards butter and meat lovers. Going vegan is a challenge in itself. Standing on a soapbox, defending every morsel you put in your mouth, can put you over the edge. Asking for respect, and showing respect, will go much further.

Three years after embarking on this vegan experiment, I'm almost back where I started. My friends and family realize I'm still me. I'm still a typical girl, only now, I'm living an extraordinary life.

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Danielle Elliot is a freelance writer focusing on science, sports, culture, and the many intersections between the three. Her work has appeared in *National Geographic*, *The Atlantic*, *Grantland*, and many other publications.

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“If someone chooses to volunteer their time, donate money, fundraise, keep abreast of veg\*n and animal issues, be part of the vegetarian community, and be a representative of successful vegan living, do these actions have no value?”

Zoë Rasputin, *Issue 4*, December 2010



## CONFESSIONS OF A REAL VEGAN HOUSEWIFE

By Robin Fetter  
Originally in Issue 6, December 2011

Since my article was first published in T.O.F.U., my writing and activism definitely has not stopped! I've been actively involved in talking about vegan parenting through interviews, blogging, podcasts, and even speaking at [Chicago Veganmania](#) as a panel expert on the subject. Along with this, I've also appeared on talk radio to normalize veganism, and I even managed to sway some local non-vegans to try delicious vegan food while doing so. Even better, I'm happy to say it was a huge hit!

On a personal level, a lot has changed too. When I first wrote the article, my daughter, Raegan, was an only child. Now, I'm happy to say that she has two more sisters, Camille and

Hollis. Thanks to becoming a parent to more than one child, I realized the need for a local resource for like-minded parents, and the Charlottesville Veg Parents Network was born. Together, we host potlucks, meet-ups, and provide a place to ask questions and receive advice from people who understand the veg lifestyle.

Although having three kids has kept me busy, I also still continue to [blog](#) and [post YouTube videos](#), all while keeping my family fed and my husband busy with a "to-do" list a mile long! Sure, life can be exhausting, but it's hard to say "no" when there's a great message such as veganism that makes it all worthwhile!

I will be the first to admit that I still get a cheap thrill whenever I see the look on people's faces when I tell them that I am a vegan. But what really gets me grinning from ear to ear is when my husband is present and he announces proudly that he is a vegan too. The main reason for the shock from others is that we do not fit the stereotypical vegan mold which they might have ingrained in their minds. To them, we come off as a typical married couple in our 30s with an infant daughter who was *not* named Earth, Wind, or Fire. We wear clothing from the same stores they shop at, only more mindful of where our clothes actually come from, refusing to buy anything that does not fit with our beliefs. Last year, our church hosted a festival

**What people in that same grocery store do not know about me is that my gag reflex goes crazy whenever I pass the aisles of meat and artisan cheeses so I always manage to route around those aisles.**

in which my vegan cupcake creation won second place in their annual "Chocolate Festival-Cupcake Throwdown." What made my win a huge deal was that my cupcake was the only vegan entry and it blew away the judges as they probably never had a vegan cupcake, nor did they know that my family and I lived that kind of lifestyle. Somehow to them, we must have blended in too well. For example, I normally do the grocery shopping and you will probably see me reading the labels of everything I purchase (even if it's something I've bought many times before) just like most concerned moms who only want to provide their families with the very best when it comes to nutrition. What people in that same grocery store do not know about me

is that my gag reflex goes crazy whenever I pass the aisles of meat and artisan cheeses so I always manage to route around those aisles.

### IT JUST MADE SENSE

My husband and I have been vegan together for over three years. Going vegan was a joint agreement, unlike most situations I hear with the wife dragging the husband kicking and screaming towards a compassionate lifestyle. For us, it just made sense. All of our friends, who have known us back from our "pre-vegan" years, will agree that since we became vegan, we have been overall more vocal than before. It's hard for them to hear what we learned about animal cruelty, and it's even harder for them to try and erase the image we give as they are eating their cheeseburgers off the grill. Needless to say, I am pretty confident our non-vegan friends mentally prepare themselves days in advance before they have us over to visit. What they don't know is that our approach is mild in comparison to some vegans we know. My husband and I are not the kind to picket in front of a department store. Instead, we host a lot of vegan potlucks and help [organize vegan friendly events](#) in our area. Those events are probably as exciting as our activism gets. It's not that we don't care as much as the one who pickets in front of a store, but our approach is different and believe me—both approaches work just as effectively. While the picketer is trying to grab your attention within seconds, my husband and I are trying to make you think a little longer than that. In my opinion, you can inspire a lot of people just by being a living example. I believe that every day you can show someone, whether it be a random stranger or a coworker, how easy veganism can be. I am proud to say that I know some of the names of those whose lives I touched and as a result they are now vegan. And I am looking forward to raising my daughter in a lifestyle she can be proud of and it

probably wouldn't surprise me if she started leafletting or protesting in front of her school's cafeteria in the name of animal rights. When that time comes, she will always know that she has her mom and dad supporting her and maybe even helping her put together those picketing signs, who knows?

WE CAN ALL DO SOMETHING

With all of the subtle hints my family and I put out about our vegan lifestyle, it is no wonder how sometimes others feel we are indifferent to such a great cause. When you think of veganism, there are probably a handful of names you know of from either cookbooks or from the Internet. All of those people who stand out in your mind probably work full-time and earn money promoting a lifestyle that they love. As much as I share their love and passion, sometimes I doubt I will ever have a job that I love, supporting a cause I believe 100% in, but I always knew that there was *something* I could do. Last month, I was inspired to blog about my life as a vegan housewife. Being a wife, mother, and vegan is not an easy job, but it isn't impossible either; I know there are others out there that are scared of the vegan activists, scared of the effort, and, of course, scared of the stigmas that come with veganism. With stars like Alicia Silverstone,

Ellen DeGeneres, and even Bill Clinton, veganism is becoming more mainstream. I may not be a star, but I want to show how simple it is to raise a vegan family. I may not get paid to do this, but I am definitely doing something I love, and I gladly work for free. So far, the more I blog, the more I am inspired and in turn, I hope I inspire not only other vegan families, but also non-vegan families who have thought about giving the cruelty-free lifestyle a try.

Robin Fetter is a wife, mother, and vegan who does not fit the stereotype of veganism. She created The Real Vegan Housewife back in 2011 as a way to pull the curtain back on a typical vegan family... her own!

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**Twitter:** [vegnhousewife](#)

“One of the most powerful things a vegan can do is live by example and show others how easy it is.”

Marika Collins, Issue 3, June 2009

## THE HOUSE IS THEIR CAGE

By Liz Solo

Originally in Issue 2, October 2007

I'm not sure how long I've known Liz, but I do know it was before I was even vegan. Funny enough, we didn't cross paths in the province we both call "home," but in the one just west of it: Nova Scotia.

Travelling with her band at the time, aptly named *Lizband*, to the East Coast Music Awards in Halifax, Liz soon ended up with a gig (like so many other indie bands that weekend) at the Ceilidh Connection, where I was starting to book shows with no idea just how much of my life it would change.

Over the years since then, Liz and I have crossed paths a number of times, and many of them happened in part because we were choosing to support the other in what they were doing, whether it was an independent rock conference in Newfoundland and Labrador or simply buying my old Super Nintendo before I left the province.

I think we continue to do these things because, like a number of other folks back home, Liz and I understand how important the support of a community is. Of course, she's also not afraid to forge her own path.

Along with the conviction Liz has in her opinions, it doesn't hurt that she knows how to write an entertaining piece, and I'll never forget how much my past partner and I laughed at the first piece she submitted in 2007 for our premiere issue. I don't know if we told her that at the time, but it still brings a smile to my face.

And so, even though this piece might be a bird of a slightly different feather (you'll groan at this joke in another page), I'm happy we were able to find it a new home in this collection.



Younger Self was always trying to do the right thing and for a long time believed that having animals in the house was the best way to teach the children about compassion. Pets would give the kids the opportunity to connect with other life forms in a meaningful way as they learned valuable lessons about responsibility. Younger Self had many good intentions.

One summer there were pet rats as well as a pair of red-throated finches. I would leave everyone's cage open so the animals could come and go as they liked, wanting them to have their freedom. Given the opportunity, however, pet rats will hunt small birds in the middle of the night and once I awoke in the pitch darkness to what sounded like a tiny baby screaming. That night it was my sad duty to intervene in a midnight rat raid that ultimately proved fatal to one of the finches.

It took a long time to learn the lesson. When one of the children asked for a pet it was always my impulse to say yes. So when my oldest asked for a new pet for her birthday I considered what animal might be best. A puppy? Too dependent. Might as well just have another kid. A cat? Nice and self-contained, a real indie animal, but way too much maintenance. No, something small, a budgie bird or a fish, maybe.

We took a trip to the Mall. In a small cage in the back room of Pet City there was a lone dove, called a ring-necked dove. She was a beautiful, streamlined, cream-coloured creature with a dark ring around her neck. We loved the dove at first sight and not only that—she was on sale. Normally doves come in pairs but the store had heartlessly sold her mate earlier in the week.

They put her in a small paper box and we took her home and set up a perch and a little living space by the window. After the incident with the finches, where the rats had trapped them in their cage, I had a no cage policy in the house. Despite this

policy the dove wasn't happy. She seemed lonely. She'd just sit and stare out the window. She'd sigh and ruffle her feathers. I could tell she was still in mourning over her lost mate.

Feeling very bad about the dove's broken heart and my part in it, I called the pet store and asked if I could order in a new mate. Younger Self did not have a clue. When Pet City called to say the male dove had arrived, I went to pick him up and saw to my dismay that he had also come as part of a pair.

**She seemed lonely.  
She'd just sit and stare out  
the window. She'd sigh and  
ruffle her feathers.**

The people at the pet store reached into the cage and took him away from his mate. I thought to stop them but was so conflicted. I pictured our poor dove sitting dejectedly in the window at home and made the ill-fated decision to buy him anyway—starting the whole bitter cycle over again.

I brought him back and took him out of his box and presented him to our dove and she took one look at him and she just knew. She absolutely hated his guts and that was that. We thought she might warm up after a while, but that didn't ever happen. Oh, but he tried. He tried hard. He pursued her every waking moment of every single day and very early in the mornings, when the sun was just rising, the entire household would awaken to the sounds of his love calls.

His love calls were a relentless repeating coo that started high and descended, with great drama, down low. There was a dance as well, he'd undulate his body up and down and up and down, then he twirled around in two circles, then up and down and up and down, then round in circles, all the while cooing and puffing himself up to twice his

size. She would stare at the wall or preen her wings. Sometimes she would just sit there and hate him. After a while we kind of started to hate him too, he was just so insistent. He wouldn't stop. Even when we separated them, he would fly upstairs and stand outside her door, cooing and dancing his heart out.

His charms must have succeeded at least once because one day we found an egg in the pot of the cactus plant in the living room. A little glowing white egg. It was magical. She sat on it and lovingly tended it for about a day, and then she saw an opportunity in the shape of an open window and flew away. The egg lay neglected and nothing

**It was the expert opinion of the wildlife people in Gander and the Bird Lady that the dove had flown very, very, very far off course during migration.**

hatched and it went bad and eventually I had to dispose of it.

A few months later, there was a story on the news about a woman who had found a ring-necked dove up north in Gander. She had brought it to the local Bird Lady. There was an interview from the Bird Lady's living room, a space she'd converted into a sanctuary. It was the expert opinion of the wildlife people in Gander and the Bird Lady that the dove had flown very, very, very far off course during migration. Its journey must have been extraordinary, they said.

She looked healthy. Something had compelled her North for some reason but at least now she's living in peace. Her counterpart also eventually

found his way out the window, and a few weeks later our cab driver friend said he saw our dove hanging out with the pigeons in Churchill Square. The dove was doing his dance and apparently the pigeons were really digging it.

That wasn't the first time I had released foreign wildlife onto the island. I suppose I could be arrested. But this was how Younger Self learned that no matter how much love and attention we shower upon the little creatures all they ever want to do is to get away. Even our beloved housecat, a very pampered animal, spends an inordinate amount of time sitting on the back of the couch looking out the window.

The little teddy bear hamsters weren't happy with their elaborate Habitrail habitat, no matter how many extensions we built onto it. We loved them so much with their soft fur and fierce teddy bear faces. They did not return our affections, however, and before long they chewed their way out of their cage and went out into the world, too.

I often wonder about the teddy bear hamsters. Did they make it? Are they off conquering the harsh island terrain, breeding networks of teddy bear hamster colonies, hibernating underground through the long Newfoundland winters? Perhaps one day, like in five hundred years, the wild teddy bear hamster will be a heritage animal and the ring-necked doves will have interbred with the city pigeons to create a whole new dove sub-species.

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Liz Solo is a performance artist, activist, and musician based in St. John's, Newfoundland.

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“All oppression – whether the oppression of animals, sexual minorities, racial or ethnic minorities, or fill-in-the-oppressed-group-here – is, on some level, rooted in the similar mentality of ‘othering’.”

Jasmin Singer (*Our Hen House*), Issue 6, December 2011

# A WORLD WITHOUT ANIMAL TESTING

By Cinthia Tiberi Ljungqvist  
Originally in Issue 3, June 2009

Veg roommate wanted.

It's the sort of listing that is becoming more common these days, but when I received an email from a Swedish student looking to move to Halifax in the summer and seeking some like-minded people, times were different.

T.O.F.U. was just an issue or two into its existence, but things had gone well enough that said student knew about the magazine an ocean away. And so, she decided that if someone in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada was going to know how to connect with veg folks before she made the trek to Dalhousie University, it would be me.

And that's how I met Cinthia, my favourite Swede, and one of my best friends.

Since that email, we've shared many more, along with a couple of apartments, close chats, a road trip to Sigur Rós in Montreal, adventures in

Sweden, and plenty of other things. Throughout it all, she's been a supporter of the magazine, and pretty much anything else I've done. In fact, she was the illustrator behind the book of poetry I released to coincide with publishing Issue 3 and heading out on the first North American T.O.F.U. tour. Along with that, she also wrote this piece for the issue.

Cinthia's piece explores the struggles that happen when vegans try to do good within a world that isn't quite there yet. Her desire to work within a field that she knows can benefit any number of living creatures has to be balanced with not wanting to harm those same individuals.

Sadly, like so many things in life, the answer isn't always easy.



As a biology student, animal testing has sadly become a part of my daily life. It's usually more theoretical than practical, but in one way or another it's always there to remind me of the exploitation of life and the loss of respect for it. I frequently ask myself how valid these different studies are and, more often, whether or not we really need them.

**"If you have a chance to oppress someone, of course you take it."**

Once I had a discussion with a biology student at Lund University in Sweden about different types of animal oppression occurring at the university, and the response was "If you have a chance to oppress someone, of course you take it." This may seem like a very radical statement made by only one person, but, to be honest, I think that's how the human world works at most times. We have lost our respect toward life and see everything as a potential profit for ourselves, no matter what the cost.

Globally, 50 to 100 million animals are used every year in different experiments. In Sweden alone, 2,700 new experiments start each day, which adds up to approximately one million unwilling participants per year. Adding scientific trawling to this, the numbers increase to about four million individuals killed every year (1).

There are a lot of different types of animal testing, which can basically be summarized into three different areas: biomedical, educational, and product safety (2). As might be expected, some of these experiments are harder to argue against than others. For example, any animal testing used to provide luxury to humans, which is basically the safety testing of products such as cosmetic and household cleaning products, is not hard to criticize, and I think a lot of people agree that this sort of animal testing is unnecessary.

Personally, the area of animal testing that I am most connected with is educational. Educational animal testing usually involves experiments with the purpose to provide information about the animals and their relation to their natural habitat. Usually, they are claimed to be for the protection of habitats or animal populations, or sometimes to simply understand the physiology of a living creature in the name of human curiosity. Animals are used from elementary school up to higher education levels for this purpose. At the higher levels, animal testing is used to study animal behaviour, animal physiology and morphology, to practice surgeries in veterinary school, etc. It is also used by the military to test chemical weapons or to improve equipment, such as developing sonar systems by studying the echolocation ability of dolphins. Due to the broad range of experiments and their applications, some of them are harder to argue against than others.

However, the area of animal testing to which I believe most people find it hardest to disagree with is the safety testing of drugs, pesticides, or biochemical products. Here the ethical reasoning gets more difficult. This, I believe, is because the field aims to improve overall human health. Living in a currently anthropocentric world, humans are placed above all else. As a supporter of the opening of Oxford's neuroscience lab in the UK pointed out "Who would you save: The child with cancer or the rat?" As I see it, the discussion about animal testing should never be a question of choosing between two individuals. One should never have to make that choice.

To get an objective perspective, I talked about animal testing with people who perform it and those who have tried to avoid using animals in their careers. The people I talked to were professors and students from Lund University in Sweden, the Veterinary School of Sweden, and Dalhousie University in Canada. I also talked to an animal-testing technician who works at one of the Swedish University Hospitals,



and I researched web sites for organizations that were against animal testing.

For the article, personal information will be kept anonymous.

## ANIMALS IN EDUCATION

When talking to different professors about animal experiments, it became clear to me that most of them see it as a trade-off, something that needs to be done for the sake of knowledge, the sake of the species, and for the sake of humans. For example, if we didn't know about the physiology of an animal, we would miss important information about their needs within an ecosystem. These requirements have become a topic that is addressed in conservation biology as human impact on ecosystems becomes more intense. According to

**Despite all of this, they said that they evaluated the need of actually killing animals for each of their studies, and that their purpose of doing research was never for the benefit of humans.**

many, the use of animals in experiments is justified for the sake of their own survival as a species. Still, a professor of conservation biology (Dalhousie University, Canada) claimed that they had been working with conservation issues their entire career without using any experimental animals and without any data based on animal testing. At the time of the interview, this individual had 13 articles published in *Nature*, a prestigious peer-based science journal. So, obviously the exclusion of animal testing in scientific work is achievable. The professor also said that they refused to do any animal testing or dissection during their entire education in biology, something that is almost impossible to achieve as a biology student today.

According to a professor in fish biology (Dalhousie University, Canada), animals used in education, such as behavioural studies, physiology, or dissections are thought to connect us to nature. A professor in physiology (Dalhousie University, Canada) argued against that and said that to connect with nature, we just need to go outside, to take a walk in the forest, etc. However, the professor in fish biology claimed that humans don't really want nature anymore, so science is our only way to connect people to it. They argued that nature's inhabitants are far from our daily life, especially for marine ecosystems. However, by being able to see the physical animal in three dimensions and obtaining an understanding of the variety of species that exist, the eyes of the public could be opened to the importance of protecting ecosystems.

Further, they believed that a lot of animal testing in all three key areas was a waste. They also argued that some experiments that were thought to be "light" as they didn't include physiological harm to the species, such as translocation or other manipulative studies, were far worse than just killing the animals, as it prolonged their suffering due to changes in their environment. Despite all of this, they said that they evaluated the need of actually killing animals for each of their studies, and that their purpose of doing research was never for the benefit of humans.

Throughout education, plenty of experiments being done claim to help animals. For example, knowing the effect of a chemical could help us find ways to mitigate its impact on wild species and knowing a songbird's behaviour could help to protect its habitat. Many studies, however, are not done with any direct intention to save the species. They are undertaken as a matter of human interest and perhaps a need to connect to nature. One should question the ethical purpose of this, and also acknowledge the extent of this sort of research.

A professor in animal behaviour (Dalhousie University, Canada) pointed out that "Everything has to do with the scale that we do things. Of course we could, and should, decrease the amount of animal testing that we do," but they also suggested that among all the useless results one valuable data point could be discovered that could be of great help. Personally, they also believed that they could continue all their research without using animals.

## ANIMALS IN VETERINARY SCHOOL

A veterinarian (Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Sweden) nicely illustrated the double standard towards animals that is common at veterinary school, where some animals had an emotional value to humans while others were simply seen as material. They said that veterinarians have a double role where they learn to cure and treat individual animals, while, at the same time, operating under conditions where nearly all animals they meet are used or abused in one way or another. They learn to treat diseases caused by a system based on human profit and industrial efficiency, rather than to work towards changing the system that causes the diseases. For example, they said that one of the main tasks for veterinarians is to treat mastitis in cows, which is a disease caused mainly because they are bred to produce too much milk.

Both veterinarians believed that the veterinary school could play an important role in increasing respect towards animals, but that little is being done to move in this direction. One key suggestion they had was that veterinarians should follow the same Hippocratic Oath as medical doctors: "Above all, do no harm." They pointed out that a specific veterinary school in the United States, the Western University (3,4), promoted the philosophy "Reverence for life" throughout a student's education. This philosophy included not using animals that were killed unethically for education, and the university was providing

the same high standard of education as any other veterinary school in the country.

## ANIMALS IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

Scientifically, these tests cannot be directly applied to humans due to species differentiation. The Dr Hadwen Trust (5), the UK's leading medical research charity of non-animal techniques, argues that even if testing drugs on other species like mice could get an overall idea of the function of a drug, the results provided could be very misleading due to species differentiation. There is a range of evidence where drugs tested on animals show no fatal or deleterious effect on various species even at very high doses, but when applied to humans they cause serious damage or health problems.

**They learn to treat diseases caused by a system based on human profit and industrial efficiency, rather than to work towards changing the system that causes the diseases.**

Still, according to a laboratory animal technician at a research hospital (Karolinska University Hospital, Sweden), we needed animal testing to know how drugs affected a whole body system, and this was not possible with such things as cell cultures.

## DISCUSSION

All those interviewed, except for the veterinarian, agreed that a lot of experiments are a waste of life, but that they put human health before the life of other species. The veterinary student believed that we could live in a world without vivisection in which all life could be equally valid. They also believed that new research methods could open up new possibilities and gain results that we all could benefit from. Both the professor in conservation

biology and the veterinary student recognized that there was a lack of respect to the individuals in all areas of animal testing and in the animal industry. The professor in conservation biology said they always considered the individual, but in the case of animals used in research to provide a cure to fatal diseases in humans, they found it hard to look at an animal's life as equal to a human's life. Still, they pointed out there is a lack of knowledge and progress towards alternative methods in this area, which was unfortunate since a lot of experiments on animals could be avoided without endangering human health.

Alternatives to animal testing have proven to be cheaper, quicker, and more effective than animal experiments. The fact is that, during the last century, a lot of effort has been put into creating alternatives to animal testing. Although this effort was most likely based on the inaccuracy of using another species for human medicine rather than ethical reasons, this will mean a lot for the animals kept in laboratories around the world. However, we still need to come up with more alternatives, and, as the veterinary student pointed out, we will probably not see an end to animal experiments until it becomes economically unfavourable.

Of course, there are things that can be done in many areas, including personally. First, we have to ask ourselves if we really are in need of more products, such as cosmetics and housecleaning items, and whether or not those products need to be tested on animals to ensure our own health and safety. Second, we need better education (theoretical, ethical, and practical) in elementary schools that is not based on animal experiments. We need to increase knowledge of the importance of respecting

life of all kinds; we need to get our connection with nature back. I believe we have a moral responsibility to not abuse, use, or oppress any life on this planet, including nature as a whole. Sadly, I cannot see this happening in our current society, which is based on capitalism. Instead, I see the practical result of the statement by the biology student, "If you have a chance to oppress someone, of course you take it." It is all about profit. This is even clearer if you look at the pharmacy companies that profit from sick people in need of their product. Even here in Sweden, where the welfare system is one of the best in the world, the government decides which medicines will be available and subsidized on the market, even though the medicine would save or mitigate a person's condition drastically. These means many medications are just too expensive for those in need. So, whom will we save? People who can afford to be saved?

Overall, I can see the difficulties in putting a stop to animal testing from an anthropocentric, ethical perspective for the possibility of risking human health. However, I do not think this would be the necessary outcome of it. We just have to do research with more patience and precautions. I also believe that there is another side of the decline in human health today that cannot be cured by drugs, pesticides, better housecleaning products, etc., and that is the structure of our society and how it causes diseases, starvation, a need for nature conservation, etc. We are, in my point of view, basically doing a lot of this to ourselves, and no one or anything else should suffer because of that. The animal-testing technician said that due to the research done in these three different areas of animal testing, we are happier and better than before since we can now

live longer, healthier lives. Personally, I believe this is not true; quantity is not quality. I would rather see myself living in a world where my actions do not oppress others, and justifying one form of oppression is no different from justifying another one to simply continue our healthier, "happier," and longer Western life.

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Cinthia has an M.Sc in Marine Biology and specializes in marine mammals science. She has been involved in various conservation projects for marine mammals worldwide. Along with her academic career, Cinthia has also been involved in various animal rights groups, including working with Sea Shepherd in documenting the whale hunt in the Faroe Islands. Currently, Cinthia is living in Sweden working in environmental management.

# KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

By Ryan Patey  
Originally in Issue 3, June 2009

Outside of the Letter from the Editor within every issue, this may have been the last thing I wrote for a T.O.F.U. issue. As far as I'm concerned, that's a good thing. Back when the magazine was first being published, things like Facebook were still developing, and the magazine itself was just an offshoot of the music promotion work I did. T.O.F.U. didn't even have its own site, just a page on the Tumbleweed Entertainment website.

Obviously, things changed, and the magazine grew. With it, I like to think I did too, and I can see it now after looking back at the pieces I wrote, and the things that were included in each issue. Given that this piece covers so much in terms of my personal progression as a vegan and even hints at where the magazine would be headed, I felt it should be included.

Although the magazine no longer needs me to fill its pages just to have something to call an issue, I have to admit that I do influence what is said overall by the publication. Taking a step back from writing my own pieces was one way I've attempted to minimize that, and I'm still working on finding others.

Finally, even though I don't think I've attended a protest since the one I mention in the article, I like to think that each time I hit "publish" I'm committing some sort of revolt. I'm just always amazed that the voices around me continue to increase in numbers and strength with each new issue, and I'll be forever grateful to that vegan who chose compassion over confrontation as I began my journey to where I am now.



It may shock some of you to know that it was on the same campus where I now write these words that I once argued against being vegetarian (vegan was not even in my vocabulary at the time). I was concerned about drawing the line at any level, and I argued that stopping at sentient beings as defined by a certain set of criteria would someday be seen as barbaric and ignorant as the definition of sentience changed and evolved. Similar to how we once considered women and so many other minorities to be less than the white male (arguably in many, if not all cases, we still do), someday people would wonder how we could have stopped at beings that were capable of thought or feeling pain, or some other measure. I came to the conclusion that a true environmentalist, a true believer in the rights of other living things to live free without pain or suffering caused by another's actions, would kill themselves. As I wished to continue living at that point, and still do today, I remained a meat-eater and decided that if I was not going to go all the way, I might as well stay where I was.

Obviously, this attitude changed over time. In fact, it was both time and the acceptance of one specific vegan that led to me slowly drifting over to the Veg\* side. If it was not for that acceptance, I'm not sure I would be who I am today. If she had chosen to treat me as one of the ignorant, the cruel, and the murderous that can be seen to make up the ranks of those who murder animals for their own benefit, then my idea of a vegan may have been completely different.

I have written about compassion for those who choose to consume flesh in previous issues (Compassion for Conformity, Issue 1), but two recent incidents have led me to think that writing about it again may be necessary. It should be no surprise that both of these incidents happened because of some rather public declarations of veganism and animal rights.

## I CAN HAS CHEEZBURGER?

The first incident began innocently enough. I was posting on a Montreal message board looking for help with a tour date there. In typical message board fashion, a simple request for vegan or veg musicians and supporters to contact me led to the usual postings about how good animals taste, how

**His name alone suggested that the fates had conspired to have this meeting take place long before I posted the words that started it all.**

many animals someone would eat for each one I did not, and someone even posted a picture of a steak. Of course, this would have been par for the course if it were not for one Mr. Cheeseburger. His name alone suggested that the fates had conspired to have this meeting take place long before I posted the words that started it all. So it was with the innocent posting for musicians that Cheeseburger and I spent the next few weeks having what, for lack of a better word, could be called a discussion.

From the beginning, it was evident that there would be no turning point in Cheeseburger's life if I posted links to Meet Your Meat, Earthlings, or any other typical video from the animal rights arsenal. His postings and immediate categorization of vegans (including myself) demonstrated that those he had met before me, as well as the mainstream media, had already given him the ammunition necessary to go to war.

However, to the surprise of most of those involved in the posting, I did not attack. Admittedly, I'm not the most aggressive vegan to start with, but in this case I knew the hard facts would be simple words on the screen. Instead, for several pages, I attempted to deconstruct his misconception of

who I was because I identified myself as a vegan. Although my success with Cheeseburger may be questionable, the postings by others suggested that I might have at least softened the opinions of a few. So, over the period of a few weeks and numerous posts later, I heard from a few musicians and then the topic slowly made its way down the list and out of sight.

## THE SEAL HUNT

The message board incident alone had me thinking about my identity as a vegan, both internally and through the lens of the outside world, but it was not until my first protest that I realized just how different these two identities were. In the past I had dealt with the misconceptions and assumptions that a vegan label came with from the people I met, but it was only a few days ago that I experienced first-hand what this could mean when coupled with an issue as divisive as the seal hunt.

Living most of my life in Newfoundland, the seal hunt hit a little closer to home than it would for most animal rights activists. Although I grew up in a family entrenched in the oil industry, which is a whole other article in itself, I couldn't help but develop an understanding of the mentality and

**Except for the occasional drive-by shout of “fuck the seals” and various other unnecessary declarations, it seemed like the vigil would be both silent and peaceful.**

motivation behind so many of those on the island who looked to the hunt as an annual source of food and materials for personal use. By no means did I learn to accept the use of these wonderful animals for fur or other industrialized purposes. However,

it is because of this split viewpoint that I left one night for a candlelight vigil for the seals with a lack of certainty in why I was going.

The vigil itself was easy enough to take part. I simply held a small light and stood with the others on a busy intersection in downtown Halifax while pamphlets were handed out to those passing by. We heard accounts of how the day had gone and learned of the incident involving a transit bus driver who had felt the need to leave his vehicle to club the stuffed seal set-up on the sidewalk. Except for the occasional drive-by shout of “fuck the seals” and various other unnecessary declarations, it seemed like the vigil would be both silent and peaceful.

That was until John showed up.

From the stance he took in front of us to the accent in his voice, it was obvious John was not there to applaud and support what we were doing. The simple declaration of facts about the seal population, the current state of the fishery, and other important factors to support a stop to the hunt held little weight. As John proceeded to present his own thoughts on how the seals were eating up everything under the ice and listening to the words of Heather Mills and Paul McCartney was a terrible way to make decisions, he continued to repeat these facts to the “mainlanders” and the “hippies” that countered with their own version of the truth. Tempers and voices started to rise.

When I finally acknowledged that I was from Newfoundland as well, and understood to some degree where he was coming from, there was a slight shift in the tactics of both parties. Although John openly admitted he was inebriated and should not be arguing with me over such things, I was doubtful that his stance would be any different the next day. I wish I could say the conversation ended with plans for introducing John to a vegan diet and a life free of animal cruelty, but that was not the case. However, unlike Cheeseburger, at least I

received a handshake and an acknowledgement of some respect before John decided to walk away.

Although there are many things I could discuss that arose from both of these incidents, there are two main points that I continue to think about. First, the obvious need for a person to understand and inform themselves of the facts that support whatever they choose to do and those counter to it, especially when it can be as confrontational as animal rights and food choices. Second is the need to acknowledge and determine how detrimental or inconsequential the current perception of vegans and AR activists is within today's society. Coupled with this is the effect of the vegan or AR activist's perception of those who simply do not share their views.

## KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Despite my constant declaration that the one true thing that I carry with me from my days within these concrete buildings is a student debt to be repaid, there are other things that carry some value. One of these is the fact that knowledge is power, and with this power many great things can be accomplished. However, it is because of the strength in knowledge that I was also taught to be cautious of where it came from, and this is perhaps one of the most important things I know today.

Whether deciphering a label in a grocery store or protesting on a street corner, being vegan means determining a lot of facts. Luckily, in this day and age there are many ways to accomplish this no matter what the topic. A quick search on the Internet can provide one with enough information to justify a vegan diet and condemn any given part of an omnivore's lifestyle with ease. Of course, this hotbed of information can also provide the other side to any story, and this is where the real problem lies. Do our facts hold more truth than those that are used against us? One can often fall into the

trap of believing that all information that supports a gut instinct or a peer consensus equals the truth. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and the

**Although you can try to pick your battles, you have to be prepared when the battle picks you.**

same connection you feel with the “facts” you carry around to support your case is felt by those who will confront you at the family table or in front of a department store selling fur.

This is why it is important not only to learn the facts that support your side of the argument, but also to be aware of the facts that support the opposing side. Although you can try to pick your battles, you have to be prepared when the battle picks you. Simply knowing the effects of the meat industry on global warming (Bittman, 2008) or the health benefits of a veg\* diet (Mangels, Messina, Melina et. al., 2003) may not help when confronted with the impact the recent boom in soy production has on the environment (Barnes, 2008) or the questionable validity of the research reported by the PCRM (Kava, 2002).

It is only through understanding both the responsibilities and the consequences of the choices you make and the knowledge you use to support it that you can hope to make the greatest difference in a world that needs every bit of help you can offer. Being capable of acknowledging problems with your argument, and perhaps even accepting that you do not have a solution to it, may help to open up dialog with many more people. Open dialog is probably the most important element of creating the changes we all wish to see in the world.

## CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

Along with the ability to have an open dialog, the fostering of a broader compassion towards all



living things, humans included, should be considered. If we are to truly save the world, it is my opinion that saving the majority of its inhabitants is of great importance. Although it seems safe to say that vegans have an exceptional respect for living creatures, I have too often noticed a strong disrespect for those who are filed in the same rank with us as humans.

It is this deep disgust with those who eat meat, and the labels that are so easily applied to them based on this one characteristic that makes me question how we can expect to persuade people to view the creatures they now treat so cruelly with the same respect they would treat another of their kind. Although some may argue that their lack of concern for the well-being of another living creature warrants refusing to acknowledge them as intelligent individuals, I would suggest that this judgment of an individual through one aspect of their being is no different from the judgment they use to treat other creatures so cruelly. If we are unable to see the whole person as a sum of all the things they do and believe, how can we persuade them to consider a farm animal as more than a meal?

Along with this apparent contradiction in how omnivores are perceived for their cruelty, this simplistic view can also be seen as harmful to the animal rights movement in general. Both Cheeseburger and John justified their anger with their perception of either a vegan or an animal rights activist. This common perception often involves the idea that we would rather see an animal live over a human, which surely conflicts with the majority of people who would hold the human higher. Before a word was said on my end, both individuals were immediately aggressive and felt under attack. This

reaction is rarely the start of an interaction that leads to a positive change, and it is this reaction that we should work towards changing.

To provide a way to understand how it feels to have someone judge you based solely on one thing, you should consider how other groups that have made lifestyle choices based on food would view you. How would you justify your decision to simply eat a vegan diet to someone who was a raw foodist? How would you justify your involvement in the commercial food industry to someone who was a freegan? In either case, how do you feel they would view you if they were simply using your food choices as the criteria?

DON'T TAKE MY WORD FOR IT

By no means am I the sole authority on how you should live your life, and I hope by now you have come to realize that letting the choices of others influence your own is not always the best way to live. I know that there are people out there who would disagree with my view, and possibly be angered by many of the things I have said, but it is the differences in opinion that I welcome. The last thing I would want in this world is to have everyone in agreement. If we were, I would not have changed my life in many of the ways I did to be the person I am today. However, and perhaps this is why I differ from some of the other vegans out there, I also would not have ended up here if it was not for the acceptance of a vegan who saw me as more than just a carnivore. If it was not for her viewing me as someone with both good and bad qualities, I would probably still be eating something that once had a face, and you would not be reading the words you now hold in your hands.

Since flipping burgers at McDonald's in high school, Ryan has toured with and promoted numerous musicians, managed an all-ages venue, coordinated shows and festivals, written children's stories in South Korea, hosted talks at vegetarian conferences, lived with geckos in Costa Rica, and moved far too many times. For the most part, he also published T.O.F.U. whenever possible during these adventures. Now, since quitting his full-time job over a year ago, Ryan is focused on the magazine and figuring out where his backpack will end up next.

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## PROMOTING VEGANISM

By Leigh-Chantelle  
Originally in Issue 5, May 2011

I wrote this article for Issue 5 of T.O.F.U. Magazine, and the ideas and suggestions are still as relevant today. I've been vegan for almost 20 years now and have run my [vivalavegan.net](http://vivalavegan.net) website for 10 years! In this time I've seen so many changes—for good and bad—in the vegan and animal rights movements. It's great to have so many vegan products, restaurants and shops, and to have the term “vegan” being used by so many people and the mainstream media. But do people really know the meaning of the word? Is the term being watered down and are we

losing the core ethics of our movement? I say yes to all of these questions, but offer you ways to promote veganism going forward—not just as a diet, a weight loss programme, or a fad as the mainstream loves to focus on. By using your skills and expertise to show others that you are a committed and consistently conscious person—in more ways than just being vegan (that's a whole other article!)—we can truly educate people about our movement and make some ethical changes along the way!

Being vegan is not enough. We need to be utilizing our skills, interests, passions, qualifications, and expertise to promote veganism as best we can. Don't underestimate your ability to encourage others to be involved with creating the change we are all aiming for. There are many different ways of accomplishing things, and I do not believe that one way is the best way for all. Know what you are good at, what you're passionate about, what you actually want to do, and get active!

Having an idea or a product is not enough, you need to promote it, just like being vegan. Why are you vegan? What made you decide to become vegan originally? Focus on these areas and educate others to what you believe in and what you know. In order to spread, your idea has to matter, to yourself and especially to others. Provide value, have something to stay, and try to have a unique focus or approach. Stay focused, inspire others, and lead by example. Show how easy it is to be vegan.

How can you get more involved with promoting veganism? Work out your strengths and what you enjoy, inspire others with your passions, know your industry well, and show confidence in your material. Whatever you do, focus on the positive and the credible, and don't exaggerate or lie about your expertise. We can all push for change. The only limits are your passion and imagination.

### GET WRITING

Writing letters is a really great way of getting our vegan message out that seems to be almost forgotten with the embrace of emails, Twitter, Facebook, and other methods of communication. Consider writing to your friends or family's favourite restaurant that doesn't have enough vegan options and offer some suggestions of your own. Most vegans are obsessed with food, so put this to use: send photos of the great vegan meals you've created and make sure you include the recipe. Write to the editor of

newspapers and magazines, giving your feedback on the stories they run, both positive and negative. Write and send recommendations to food manufacturers, shops, grocery stores and supermarkets asking for more options and giving suggestions of alternative brands. Always be polite, check your spelling and grammar, and include your full name and contact details.

**Write to your local members of parliament (or even arrange face-to-face meetings) to ask for stronger animal cruelty sentences or to change legislation.**

If you enjoy writing articles, submit some of your work to your favourite magazines and newspapers, or to ones that need some differing opinions, or ask to be a guest columnist. Write and distribute newsletters or start a 'zine on veganism, food, restaurants, products, reviews of products, interviews, quotes, and more. Start a writing group and encourage others to help you. Write to your local members of parliament (or even arrange face-to-face meetings) to ask for stronger animal cruelty sentences or to change legislation. There are sections in publications for public service announcements, ask for a discounted rate (especially if you're from a charity or not-for-profit group), or see if they have donated space available. You can also approach local radio stations and TV stations for the same.

### SOCIALIZING

Food is a great way to get people involved. Whether it's organizing regular meet and eats at your favourite vegan or vegan-friendly restaurant, organizing and hosting cooking classes or demonstrations, bringing food to work, or getting people to attend a vegan potluck at your house,

there are many ways you can promote veganism simply by showing other people how many vegan restaurants, meals, and foods we actually have. Obviously, showing that the food we eat is delicious is key. There are many vegan groups in most major cities, but if your city or town doesn't have one, start one. Ideas include: sporting groups (e.g., running team, basketball team, bowling team), walking groups, environmental groups, bird watching groups, gardening groups, shopping groups, and more.

## EDUCATION

If you're good at organizing classes, workshops, seminars, forums, panels, or even just able to set up a projector and screen to show DVD and film screenings, work out what your topic will be and find people who can help. Cooking classes and workshops are great, as are nutritional seminars, speaking, panel discussions, and more. Find a spot that you can use that is either free or inexpensive to hire (e.g., libraries and halls) and get the word out about your event. If you're a good speaker, do some research and offer to speak at schools, universities, colleges, health stores, yoga classes, and other groups that would benefit from your expertise.

Vegan information and starter kits are another easy yet effective way to get the message out, so always have spares in your car or in your bag. Get together with other people who are good at writing and compiling information and create your own information kits, newsletters, or 'zines. You can send or mail out this information to schools, universities, libraries, and the like. Another way to get involved is to study what you're passionate about: animal law, veterinary medicine, human medicine, nutrition, science, and the culinary arts, for example. If you so desire, you can even get involved with governmental bodies and parliament. Some of these jobs and industries really need vegan people to help change

the methods that are becoming more and more outdated as time goes on. Could this be you?

## OUTREACH

There are many ways to be active in the community and reach out to those who may not know about veganism. Depending on what you do and where you go, you may need licenses, liability insurance, and other council requirements, so make sure you do your research and tick all the boxes before you advertise what you're planning. A simple yet effective idea is to have a card table or two with information, free food samples, and at least a couple of people who are passionate and good at public interaction. Some examples of where to set up your table include markets, festivals, outside band and music venues, universities, colleges, food fairs, health food stores, restaurants, libraries, radio

### **VegFund.org funds people and organizations to engage with the public through food sampling, video outreach and other methods.**

stations, sporting arenas, etc. Keep in mind to focus on big holidays and specific areas and events where there will be more foot traffic so you can reach a lot more people.

Free vegan food samples and other giveaways are a great way to be more interactive with the public. VegFund.org funds people and organizations to engage with the public through food sampling, video outreach and other methods. Leafleting in conjunction with your table or on its own is another way to get your message out, especially in heavy traffic areas such as train stations and universities. Other ways to get people involved is to enter anyone who joins your mailing list on the day in a draw to win a hamper of vegan goodies or discount vouchers.

Message t-shirts, clothing, badges, patches, and merchandise or branding is also an effective way to get people to start a conversation with you about veganism. Wear your statements of veganism loud and proud, and be subtle or graphic with your images and slogans. Stickers on your car, diary, guitar, drum kit, or folder are a good temporary way to get the message out. Tattoos are also effective, but less temporary. There are many vegan alternatives to shoes, bags, wallets, guitar straps, belts, and more. When someone compliments you on your great sense of shoe style, a simple "No animals died for these shoes" brings the message across in a non-confrontational way.

## DEMONSTRATIONS

Demonstrations, protests, marches, and sit-ins can be organized in many different areas for many different reasons. Make sure you get a group of passionate and vocal people to participate, bring visuals, and organize licenses and insurance if needed. There are various holidays and celebrations at certain times of year where there will be extra people and more foot traffic. Places to focus on include pharmaceutical companies, medical laboratories, schools or universities that have laboratories, sponsors who give money to circuses, rodeos and other cruel events; agriculture businesses, designers and companies that stock fur, leather, wool, silk; military training areas, restaurants, embassies, parliamentary buildings, landmarks, and many more depending on your goals.

## MARKETING

Think of the many ways businesses advertise their company and their products and take a page or two out of their book. Fundraisers, broadcasting on TV and radio, advertising in magazines, newspapers, billboards, bus and train stations; direct mail-outs of informative CDs or DVDs, apps, and exhibitions

are a few marketing options to consider. Point of sale displays that can be driven or ridden around with your photography, designs or print material on vans, trucks, utility vehicles, bicycles, and motorbikes can be quite effective. Most of the above ideas require quite a bit of money to happen, so organize

### **Other simple ways you can do something today include changing your email signature to include vegan facts, quotes or images; give a gift of a vegan cookbook, voucher for a vegan store, or offer to cook a vegan meal to anyone who isn't vegan.**

some fundraisers or engage with local, national, and international groups and organizations to see if they'd be able to fund your idea.

## OTHER IDEAS

If you're good with a camera, can keep a secret, can handle seeing abuse and neglect in person, and want to get involved on the front line, direct action or undercover investigation may be for you. Other simple ways you can do something today include changing your email signature to include vegan facts, quotes or images; give a gift of a vegan cookbook, voucher for a vegan store, or offer to cook a vegan meal to anyone who isn't vegan. Phone your local radio station during talkback to share your views, advice, and ideas to the general public. Donate goods, your money or your time as a volunteer at sanctuaries, shelters, not-for-profit groups, or local businesses. Organize a fundraiser for your favourite charity – bake offs or cupcake stands always work extremely well! If you're in a position of influence, use this for good, promote veganism every way you can, whether you're a musician, poet, writer, actor, on the radio, teaching, or a parent.

Keep up-to-date with what's happening in the vegan and animal rights movement by joining groups, attending meetings, and generally getting involved the best way you can. Support other groups and community events, attend anything you can, even if you may not agree with the group who is hosting the event, or the topics discussed. If you keep an open mind, you can learn more. Sign up to receive news from your favourite websites and blogs, get Google alerts sent to your email address, join Facebook, Twitter, and other social media websites that have constant interaction.

Purchase memberships for groups or copies of (T.O.F.U.) magazines for friends, family, libraries, and schools to help get the message out. Support vegan businesses. Read. Listen. Observe. Repeat. Above all the best way you can promote veganism is to be vegan. Be consistent and be genuine, keep an open mind, as there is more than one way to get things done. Remember you can only take one step at a time. Have some time out for yourself to do the things that you love. Ask and actually listen, do your

best to promote what we need to for the voiceless. Help build our vegan community. Keep your mind on your goals, stay focused and believe that you are part of the change that this world needs. Promote the positive, inspire others, and lead by example. Show how easy it is to be vegan.

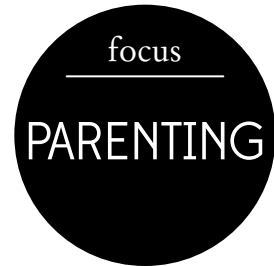
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Leigh-Chantelle is a published author, international speaker & consultant, singer/ songwriter, and blogger who lives mostly in Brisbane, Australia. She has run the online vegan community Viva la Vegan! since 2005, bringing positive education, information, and vegan outreach to a worldwide audience. Leigh-Chantelle gives lectures, workshops, consultations, and coaching for understanding social media, staging effective events, and vegan health and lifestyle.

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“What needs to happen now is the movement from knowledge to ACTION. If we want to change things (and we have to, now, the Earth depends on it, NOW), we have to put our care and our compassion into action.”

Jo-Anne McArthur (*We Animals*), Issue 5, May 2011



# VEGAN PARENT FORCES CHILD TO EAT NOTHING BUT A WHOLE FOODS, PLANT-BASED DIET

By Kelly Twomey  
Originally in Issue 4, December 2010

It's hard to believe it's been nearly five years since Kelly wrote this piece for the magazine. Of course, it's hard to believe I've known Kelly for even longer. Over that time, we've chatted about a number of things, crossed paths at the Toronto Vegetarian Food Festival, and helped each other out with several endeavours. However, it's possible that one of the best things to come out of Kelly and I knowing each other is the lovely bamboo utensil set I bought from her at the aforementioned festival.

Okay, maybe that's not quite true, but it certainly has come in handy plenty of times, and it's because Kelly provided me with those tools that I've been able to make even better decisions when travelling and eating.

Similarly, Kelly's piece on vegan parenting from the fourth issue was meant to help T.O.F.U. readers for a number of years as they went through the ups and downs of raising vegan children with the tools they needed to make ethical decisions. Now, as a mother of two, Kelly continues to play an active role in the vegan community, both in her own home and beyond.

Chances are, the results of her activism will last longer than my utensil set as her children grow older and carry those ideas with them, but I'm hoping we won't know for sure for at least another few years.



It's always struck me as funny that the vegan diet is such a "public" diet. Put two people side by side, a vegan and a non-vegan, and the vegan will be the one asked about where they get their protein, their iron, their calcium... And what do you eat anyway as a vegan? The omnivore, no matter what their diet consists of (say, for example, fast food, take-out, convenience foods, junk food) will never be asked those questions. Vegans must constantly substantiate what they eat. As a result, most vegans I know have read a handful of nutrition books, or at the

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of worried family/friends/strangers  
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one nutrient or another.**

very least scoured the internet for nutrition basics, so that we can be armed and ready when questioned about our intake of macronutrients.

I have had my share of curious and critical questions from people when confronted with my veganism, and I therefore expected a lot more dietary interference during my first pregnancy. I was prepared for the onslaught of worried family/friends/strangers who thought I might be lacking in one nutrient or another. Surprisingly, not only did almost everyone I know accept the fact that I would continue to be a vegan during my pregnancy, there were relatively few comments about singled out nutrients, and the comments that I did receive were always of a curious nature (which I never mind discussing), as opposed to a judgmental one. There was really only one major line of questions on the minds of those around me:

"Are you going to raise your child vegan?"  
"Are you going to let your child eat meat?"  
"What if your child doesn't want to be vegan?"  
People generally feel very uncomfortable about

vegans "imposing" their vegan beliefs on children. They seem to be very concerned for the child's welfare. Perhaps it's the fault of the famous parents that starved their child in 2003. The parents were vegan and charged with murder because they decided to feed their infant nothing but soy milk apple juice, and their baby died of starvation. Then there was the French couple, who in 2008, only fed their 11 month old baby breast milk, despite the fact that she was grossly underweight, pale and lethargic. These are not "vegan" issues, and it's a shame that the fact that the parents are vegan held the spotlight.

Everyone has heard of these stories, and people have presented them to me on several occasions as "proof" that veganism is dangerous for babies. Apple juice and soy milk does not constitute a vegan diet. The first baby was six months old when she died, and therefore she should have been drinking breast milk, or, at the very least, infant formula (I am not an advocate for formula, however it is an alternative if there's a valid reason why the child cannot have breast milk). It is advised that neither cow's milk, nor soy milk is offered until the child is at least 12 months old. The second baby was only receiving breast milk at 11 months old, despite obvious signs that she was malnourished, and against the baby's doctor's advice. The recommendation from the World Health Organization states: "Appropriate complementary feeding should start from the age of six months with continued breastfeeding up to two years or beyond." These stories are clearly ones of neglect and ignorance rather than "veganism." However, despite hundreds of positive articles on the health of a vegan diet since these parents starved their children years ago, people still think of these stories when they hear about vegan parenting.

These tragic stories are examples of how one or two news stories can infiltrate the minds of the general population, despite so much evidence



showing that a vegan diet can be very healthful and can reduce and eliminate many of the ailments we face today.

In contrast with those parents from 2003 and 2008, I consider myself a “healthy” vegan. I eat a variety of fruit, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds to fuel myself. I don’t eat a lot of junk food, deep-fried, heavily processed, or fast food. Logically, I will pass the same food that I eat to my daughters, so if those around me realize that my health is important to me and I eat healthfully, why would they not expect that I would give my child the same healthful food?

I tend to look at meat and dairy as I would cigarettes and alcohol. Sure, lots of people smoke and drink, and not everyone dies from it, but they are poisons we choose to take into our bodies. Meat and dairy are also avoidable poisons. Animal products are high in cholesterol and contribute largely to heart disease. Dairy has been linked to everything from ear infections to cancer. (We won’t even approach the topic of growth hormones and antibiotics, the size of this article just doesn’t allow for it.) When I get the question “Will you let your child eat meat?” I equate it to “Will you let your child smoke cigarettes?” Nobody ever asks parents the latter because no rational parent would encourage their child to inhale toxins, even when the parent is a smoker him- or herself. They also know that a time will come when children no longer listen to their parents and do what they want despite the consequences. It’s our job as parents to make sure they never want to do it in the first place. Sometimes we will succeed, but sometimes we won’t.

Most of us raise our children with our belief system and our values. That’s not “imposing” our beliefs, it’s called parenting. There will come a time, when our children will make choices as to how they will rebel, be it trying a cigarette or a burger. My only hope is that I raise my daughters in a way that allows them to make smart decisions, stay true to their

values, and respect their own health above “looking cool” or “fitting in.”

Continuing with the smoking analogy, smoking wasn’t a big deal in the 1950s. Nobody knew about the serious health consequences affiliated with smoking cigarettes. Since then, we’ve learned that smoking causes cancer. We therefore pass

**I’m not sure exactly when  
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at the petting zoo.**

that information down to our children, and as a result, there are far fewer smokers now than there were 60 years ago, and we’ve managed to ban smoking from almost all indoor public spaces. There are more and more studies that are indicating that meat, dairy and eggs are huge culprits when it comes to cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, asthma, ear infections, eczema, and the list goes on. The World Health Organization has just announced that processed meat—including bacon, sausages and ham—is amongst the most “cancer-causing substances, alongside arsenic and asbestos.” If I can teach my children to love plant foods, to eat healthfully, and to refrain from eating animal products, then I’m raising them in the healthiest way that I know. When it comes to teaching them about the ethics of veganism, I plan to be age-appropriately honest about it. I will start by telling them that animals are our friends, and we don’t eat our friends. The evidence of friendship will be pretty clear to them, as most kids are raised learning to love animals. I’m not sure exactly when

the disconnect happens, but it’s clear that little kids are not taught that the chicken in the bucket for dinner is the same as the chicken that we just saw playing in the dirt at the petting zoo. I’m sure my girls will have lots of questions about living as a vegan as they grow, and I’ll try to answer all of their questions with honesty, and compassion. If they decide, when they are old enough, that they disagree with me and want to eat animals, well then I don’t have any more say than I would if they decided to start smoking.

Being an involved parent means teaching our kids what we know. My eyes have been opened to the horrors of the animal industry, and I can no longer shut them or turn away from it. The way we “farm” animals for food has changed dramatically in the last 50 years, and the small family farm is becoming just a memory of how it used to be. As my children grow, I will encourage them to ask questions, be critical, and learn everything they can about the way animals are raised for food, the destructive impact factory farms have on the planet, and the impact animal foods have on our health.

Being a vegan is the most healthful and compassionate way to live, and I couldn’t fathom raising my daughters in any other way. There’s no guarantee that they’ll always live that way, but until they are old enough to make their own choices, I will teach them my beliefs and ethics, just as all parents do with their children. They will grow with a strong foundation of compassion and respect for animals, for their own health, and for the environment.

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Kelly is a vegan mom of two vibrant and healthy vegan girls who loves debunking myths about vegan pregnancy and parenting. She has also been very active in the vegan community for many years, including running an online vegan store, volunteering at the Toronto Vegetarian Food Fest, and sitting on the organizing committee for Guelph’s first and second annual Vegfest over the past two years. Kelly currently calls Mississauga, Ontario home.

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## NATURAL BORN VEGAN

By Morgain Hughes  
Originally in Issue 9, June 2015

### How did it all start?

Looking back I must say it was at the back of my head for years. Veganism. I had been vegetarian for over 15 years, I gave up milk when my son was born as it didn't agree with him. A few years later, my daughter arrived, and, when she was over 12 months old, I was told she was allergic to eggs and meat.

The decision to go vegan came naturally. At first, we struggled to find products which were vegan-friendly as the packaging isn't that well-labelled in the UK. We ate mainly fruit and vegetables on their own. The revolution came when we found the vegan community online. Real people, eating real food. I became braver and started experimenting with our meals, checking protein intake, iron levels, etc. It became a part of our daily life, shopping together, cooking together, our family grew closer, and we bonded

on a completely different level than before.

Now, we are learning every day and finding out ways of being the best we can be, for the planet, for the animals, and for other human beings.

That's how the [Little Vegan Planet](#) blog was born. A friend of mine was completely surprised by how vegan food could taste so good. She said I should start a blog and share the recipes. At first, I wasn't sure and was a bit reluctant, fearing negativity from other people. In the past, some people had been far from supportive, accusing me of mistreating my children for feeding them plant-based nutrients, and I experienced bad feedback from close friends, family, and complete strangers.

The blog led to an [Instagram](#) account. From there, a publishing deal found its way to me, and my new cookbook is due to be published in 2016.

When I found T.O.F.U. and saw a call for contributors to write about their experience with raising vegan children, I was on the case. I went through ups and downs with my children and their diet. It was an emotional roller coaster at times. Sharing those experiences and showing people that vegan children can be happy and very healthy is important to me. Children are little people who can make grown-up decisions when needed. My children have shown me a great deal about being a parent, a teacher, and an influencer. They opened my eyes to the world outside, the world they see and experience.

When we are children, we often rebel against our parent's choices. When we become parents, we justify those choices. When is it the right time to let your children decide for themselves? From the moment when they are babies, we force our choices on our children: the red cute outfit which you like so much but your toddler hates, the swimming lessons which you take your son to so he learns how to behave in the water, the time when they go to bed, even what and when they eat. We often don't realize we do those things due to our routine and because it suits us. We stop them from doing what they want to do. "Don't put your hands in your mouth! Don't eat your sister! Don't run like a loon!" Don't, don't, don't... So how about raising vegan children? When do we let them decide? How do we convince them it is the right and only choice? How do we convince them it's their choice?

My son will be seven in a few weeks. He is a vibrant, intelligent, young man. I try to raise him to be full of empathy, kind, and open-minded. I want him to be the best he can be, and I try to guide him the way I think is best. And for now, he lets me. Because he is only young. But when he is older, I don't think I will have the same amount of influence in his life as I have now.

We have not always been vegan. When my daughter arrived, I quickly realized she was rather intolerant to eggs and dairy, add meat to the equation and you have a perfect born vegan. Being a vegetarian for years, it was an easy transition for me, as I was never a fan of eggs or milk. My meat-eating son? Not so much. When I could have justified my daughter's diet due to her allergies, I had no excuses to justify stopping my son from eating meat, dairy, and eggs. Of course, my reasons were

**He became withdrawn, he had no friends, no one would invite him to a birthday party, he was a sad little boy. And it broke my heart. Was it because I made him vegan?**

pure and simple. I wanted him to be healthy and happy. I wanted him to eat fresh, organic produce. The ambition was great, but the reality kicked in fast: raising vegan children is not easy, especially in a society such as ours.

Being judged wherever I went, told what a horrible mother I was, and that I was making my children sick. People had this idea in their heads that I was keeping my children in cages feeding them lettuce once in a while. But I was determined to stay vegan and to raise vegan children. Children who would be the future, the saviours of our planet, the inventors of a better tomorrow. Children who would be loving toward every living creature, who would resent violence and war, and who would appreciate nature, peace, and tranquility. The problems started tumbling down fast. My ambition was big and I soon realized I might have taken on too much to handle. My son started having troubles at school. I ended up homeschooling him, waiting for a place in another school. He became withdrawn, he had no friends, no one would invite him to a birthday party,

he was a sad little boy. And it broke my heart. Was it because I made him vegan? Maybe, maybe not. He started asking why I wanted him to be the weirdo, why I wouldn't let him eat what other children were eating, and why he wasn't like everyone else. He was rebellious, naughty, and seriously unhappy. I made this drastic change to his life without any of his consent.

It's hard explaining your reasons to a little child, who just wants to be accepted. Showing him videos or articles was not an option; he was too young and too sensitive.

My parents never talked to me about any of their problems, they were the authorities in our household and they never showed their children they had weaknesses. But I wanted to raise my children in a different way, I wanted them to be able to show their emotions and to share them with others. So I did what not many have done: I admitted to making a mistake. I told my little son how sorry I was for not asking how he felt about the diet change, I told him that I did it for us as a family, for our health, for our planet, and for our furry friends. He was absolutely horrified that the chicken humans eat was an actual dead chicken. It was hard for him to wrap his young mind around it. How come people had to kill animals?

We made a list of things he missed most, and we also made a list of substitutes. His top choice was ice cream! After some research, he absolutely fell in love with lemon sorbet. We also decided that he will have a say in our diet, and, if there is anything he wants to eat, we will talk about it and then decide. Since then, we plan our meals together. The children always help me cook. We go to the market together to pick our fruit and veg. It's a vital part of our lives and it is absolutely amazing seeing my kids making their own choices and taking charge in so many important aspects of life.

My son started his new school full of confidence, he wrote a letter to his classmates, saying why he is the way he is, and that vegan doesn't mean he is weird or different. Here is a little piece of his letter:

"My name is Toby. I'm 6 years old, I have a sister and a cat. His name is Biscuit. My family is vegan. What is vegan? Vegan means we do not eat meat, eggs, or milk. We eat lots of fruit and we eat beans. I like being vegan and it makes me happy as I want to save the planet and the animals."

His teacher invited me in to talk to the children about our diet. Some of the parents weren't happy as their kids started to ask to become vegan!

I am so proud of my little man, he came a long way. He is a bit older now, and he has put so much hard work into his journey to veganism. He is a little ambassador, and he is proud to be vegan.

If anything, taking my children through the vegan journey has taught me that no one is too old or too young to improve his/her life. There is always a light at the end of our tunnel. When we are the influence on the younger generation, we need to make sure our children are free to make their own choices. Let them choose to be vegans, for the right reasons, not because we want them to be. Our children will change the world, and they will change it for the better.

Morgain is a military wife, mother of two vegan children, writer, blog addict, and an all-homemade maniac. Addicted to her kitchen and travelling. Retired ballerina. Currently pursuing her dream of teaching and working on a new venture—a vegan cookbook!

**Website:** [littleveganplanet.blogspot.com](http://littleveganplanet.blogspot.com)  
**Instagram:** [littleveganplanet](https://www.instagram.com/littleveganplanet)

“Without using any labels, our children will be encouraged to feel the same compassion for others and hunger for knowledge that we feel every day.”

Jack E. (*Cursed Arrows/Bardos*), Issue 4, December 2010

## MAMA STAYS MEATY

### (OR WHY BABY BOOMERS HATE BRUSSELS SPROUTS)

By Lisa Febre  
Originally in Issue 9, June 2015

There's nothing better than working with someone on a piece for a new issue and knowing that they're excited about the topic. Sure, it happens a lot, but every now and then someone surprises me by going the extra mile. In the case of the last issue, Lisa was one of those people.

Focusing on the topic of age, Lisa was the first person to approach me about writing for the issue. Soon after we worked out a direction for the piece, she emailed me a survey that she was going to send to a number of friends and family, and the piece grew from there.

As always, it was my hope that highlighting age as something to consider when approaching people about veganism would help others to develop a better understanding of where any possible resistance may come from. Thanks to the survey, and Lisa's hard work, the piece did just that.

Through accounts from various family members and friends, we have a chance to understand how such things as the Great Depression may play a part in people's strong desire to include meat in their diets, even when the act of killing and preparing the meat has left some scarred. Along with this, a recurring scenario familiar to many may help to explain an aversion to vegetables.

Of course, this piece can not speak for all Baby Boomers, especially since a number of them identify as vegan, but it can help to encourage a conversation around age, and that's a discussion whose time has come.



I barely remember a life outside of being vegetarian or vegan. I went vegetarian when I was 16 after a research project on animal testing. Though it was difficult for me to maintain a vegetarian lifestyle in high school, once I left for college I was able to start cooking for myself, and things became much easier. Animal rights was the reason I went vegetarian, and it was the only reason I went vegan at 33. Learning about the horrors of the dairy industry, specifically the treatment and abuse of male calves, made it easy to give up that precious cheese that everyone proclaims they just can't live without. But not everyone feels this way, and it seems that the group of individuals who either are outright opposed (or at the very least find it difficult to adopt a more plant-based diet) are those in the fifty and over age group. Why is this?

Just by observation, it seems as if younger adults (16-30 years old) are more likely to go vegan. Talk to a person during his/her early adulthood, and you may plant a seed that grows into veganism. It's wonderful and inspiring! But why is it so easy to convert a young adult when it seems nearly impossible to talk to an older one (fifty and older) about the same issues? Is there something that we, as preachy vegans, can do better to initiate the older generation into the vegan cult?

I decided to ask a dozen friends and family members, ages fifty and older, a set of questions regarding how the "Go Vegan!" message can be reshaped to fit their demographic. Questions about organic food, social structure, medical benefits, and family history were added to my list of queries. What I have garnered has made it clear that there is much to be learned from our elders, and definitely much they want to learn from younger vegans.

The most obvious answer to the question "Why does the 'Go Vegan' message seem to fall on deaf ears when those ears are over 50?" was repeated over and over by my respondents: "you can't teach

an old dog new tricks." People are set in their ways, and the more years that pass, the stronger those ways are reinforced. I believe it may be possible to hit on one topic, one detail, one small point that may make that old dog sit up and think, "I never knew..." You have to know your audience, and I think the fewer people you bring the vegan message to at a given time, the better your chance is to touch them in some way. A blanket "Go Vegan!" post on your Facebook newsfeed with a picture of a sow in a gestation crate is more likely to scare off the vast majority of bacon lovers; a conversation with your mother about how you think cutting dairy may help her arthritis, and encouraging her to Google the subject is likely to be more successful. Will she cut dairy? Possibly. Maybe the point isn't to push an all-or-nothing approach on our older family and friends but to encourage small changes that have a direct benefit for them.

This leads me to the most important point of this research—the feeling that the word "vegan" represents an all-or-nothing way of living. People who are not vegan see this as a challenge to their right to eat what they want. They surmise there are implied rules to being vegan, that you can't cut just eggs or pork, but you've got to eliminate everything. That is really scary to most people. The word itself holds a lot of power, as many of us know who deal with criticism from friends and family, and my test subjects were very resistant to calling anything they ate "vegan" much less labelling themselves as such. This could be the biggest wrong turn in the vegan message. Instead of making people feel as if they have to give up everything, and call themselves "vegan," maybe it would be better to encourage them to give up (or cut back?) on just a few things. Who knows where that kind of thinking will lead?

I found that all of the respondents were interested in the idea of Meatless Monday menus and advertising. It certainly encourages them to cut



back on meat without having to give it up completely. Most people are resistant to the cold turkey approach. And rightly so. When I hear someone say, “I couldn’t possibly give up ice cream!” I imagine how awful I would feel if someone told me I had to give up chocolate right away, citing reasons I didn’t fully understand or care about. Instead of trying to persuade them to give up something they clearly have an emotional attachment to, why not suggest they first give up something they don’t like much or eat as often? Moderation may suit us all better—people don’t need meat at every single meal, just as I certainly don’t need a half-pound of chocolate every afternoon. Introducing the idea of Meatless Mondays is a kinder, gentler approach. It sends the message that you don’t have to be vegan; you can just try it one day a week and see if you like it.

Coming from my friend Melinda, who responded quite elaborately to my questions, was the news that she and her family have been enjoying a meatless meal at least once a week for a few years now. Everyone feels better, and it gives her a chance to try some new recipes. On top of that, she estimates that 95 percent of her groceries are organic. She places eating organic higher on her priority list than the once-a-week meatless meal. In fact, I discovered many respondents were more open to trying organic produce and chemical-free meats. It seems obvious people are much more concerned about the antibiotics, growth hormones, and pesticides because these are tangible concerns for everyone living in our society. Organic foods allow them to feel some control over these chemicals, though those who responded that they do not buy organic claimed the reason was concern regarding the actual labelling process and the integrity of organic verification.

What kind of influence can those in the medical field wield over their patients—even when

it comes to what to eat, what not to eat? The 60 and older portion of my interviewees are of the age when they are starting to have some chronic health concerns, which means they are seeing their doctors more often than they used to. Many of my respondents told me they would not discuss any dietary questions with their doctor. It wasn’t their doctor’s business was a common mantra. One person said: “Sometimes their advice is based on their own personal opinions without bothering to do any in-depth research on any social issues or concerns surrounding healthy eating.”

**The Baby Boomers are a group not easily swayed or affected by criticism. They would be more likely to respond to a medical event that touches them personally and make changes when they reach that conclusion on their own.**

The one factor that surprised me the most was the pushback regarding the health benefits that would result from cutting animal products from one’s diet. I don’t expect any of my respondents to read “The China Study,” or subscribe to PCRM’s updates, but it seems relatively easy to get information on the internet regarding the positive effects of cutting red meat, in particular, on blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and cholesterol. Almost every single respondent told me this wasn’t true, and even if their doctors told them this was so, they wouldn’t believe their physicians. This is very interesting to me. Why the resistance to this particular fact? It may be important to note that most did not continue answering any more of the questions in the “medical” category after my query regarding whether they would discuss their diets with their doctors.

Another overwhelming opinion all the respondents expressed was that they don’t care at all what people think about the things they do. Perhaps they consider themselves shielded from criticism—by age and the inherent respect that’s given to them once they reach a certain age—and carry on as they see fit, but many teenagers and young adults might be bothered by ridicule once they are outed as vegan. People may not feel so bold to laugh at a 60-year-old who cuts out meat, while a 20-year-old vegan is fair game. It’s this aspect of the conversation that reinforces my theory that it is the word “vegan” that brings the negative comments and attention. The Baby Boomers are a group not easily swayed or affected by criticism. They would be more likely to respond to a medical event that touches them personally and make changes when they reach that conclusion on their own.

Family history played a huge part in the perception of what being vegan means to my interviewees. For the older respondents (65 and older), their parents were children during The Great Depression. With that came a lack of proper diet. A few people pointed out there was a belief that meat and butter were outward signs of middle class comfort. How did that affect the way they raised their own children in the Post-WWII world? What kinds of dietary habits did the Great Depression children grow up with that they couldn’t shake once they became parents themselves? “Eat everything on your plate!” was something that every single respondent said their parents had told them on a regular basis. Not being able to get up from the table until you eat everything—no matter whether you like that food—was common practice, it seems. I remember being told this often during my childhood in the 1970s. Once, at the age of five, I was required to eat a smelt (fish) before being excused from the table. I not only gagged and cried in front of everyone, but to this day I remember the incident

vividly. This made me swear I would never make my own son eat anything he didn’t like—animal or vegetable.

Quite a few people told me stories of the backyard slaughter of lambs, chickens, and ducks, and the lingering sadness they still feel about those experiences. My mother remembers live chickens hanging over the tub in the basement washroom awaiting slaughter. I often wondered about my grandmother’s disgust toward chicken, so my father told me stories of his childhood and a neighbour who brought over live chickens every few weeks. My grandmother was so uneasy about the slaughter and then tending to the task of cleaning and preparing the carcasses, that in response she would cook the meat until it was dry and inedible. One of my

**Sadly, most of the stories submitted to me involved a vegetable being the thing that held a child at the table, and that very same vegetable is something—to this day—they won’t eat.**

mother’s younger sisters, MaryAnn, recalls coming home from school one spring day to find a lamb in the backyard. It became her pet, and she played with it. When Easter Sunday came around, the lamb was gone. The children were told it “ran away.” In her naïveté, the following year she believed the lamb had returned, and so tied the knots tighter hoping to prevent it from running away again. She tells me now that the sadness has haunted her her whole life, and she has not eaten lamb since then.

The inclusion of meat at meals for many of these families (from my grandparents’ Post-Depression childhood, to my parents’ Post-WWII childhood) meant an actual connection with the animals. They would slaughter the beasts, prepare and cook

them, and eat them, which meant meat came at a higher cost than monetary concerns: the energy and time put into preparation, and for some, like my grandmother, overcoming the fear and disgust at the process. To not finish everything on your plate was an insult not just to the animal, but to the parent who had to toil to bring that meal to the table. Could there be some residual guilt among the Baby Boomers? If you don't eat meat, you're somehow disrespecting someone—a parent—who went to all the trouble to make you this meal?

I find it interesting that vegetables came across as a punishment during my respondents' childhood. Brussels sprouts were at the centre of the controversy. If the dog wouldn't eat them, "there must be something very wrong with them!" offered Melinda. Children have very sensitive palates. They have "new" tastebuds that amplify all flavours. Thus, I'm never surprised when a child chooses a hotdog over broccoli. However, if the broccoli is turned into a punishment ("No dessert until your broccoli is gone!"), then the likelihood of that child eating broccoli as an adult diminishes. Sadly, most of the stories submitted to me involved a vegetable being the thing that held a child at the table, and that very same vegetable is something—to this day—they won't eat.

Finally, I have a better understanding of the genesis of the familiar dinner table question: "You're just going to eat vegetables...?" If vegetables are the thing you have to suffer through to get to the good stuff, who in their right mind would choose

to eat only them? Who would choose to give up pork chops and cheese and all the delicious comfort food they enjoy for a plate full of punishment and sacrifice?

I couldn't be more thrilled to have received the responses from my friends and family. The question wasn't "Why aren't *you* vegan?" but "*Why* aren't you vegan?" If the message can be tailored to fit this demographic better we'd see a lot more vegan Boomers. My own tune is going to change with my friends and family. Less "vegan" food, and more meatless and animal-free meals. Judging by the stories I've heard, I've got a better shot at encouraging someone to stop eating the animal they were so saddened to see slaughtered as a child. And maybe, just maybe, I can convince my dear friend Melinda that Brussels sprouts are actually quite delicious. I just have to find the right recipe to share with her.

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Lisa Febre is a professional classical musician living in Los Angeles, who also enjoys writing in her spare time. In 2007, she found a way to combine her passion for animals and food with her blog "The Valley Vegan" which chronicles her adventures in vegan dining at non-vegan restaurants. As the lone vegan in her family, she also likes to explore the ways in which we can be better advocates for animals without alienating the people we love.

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“Be compassionate. In every situation whether it is to do with animals or humans, be compassionate and understanding. Try not to take an aggressive approach towards people, lead by example.”

TeenVGN, Issue 9, June 2015

## A GAY VEGAN COMES OF AGE

By Dan Hanley  
Originally in Issue 9, June 2015

I can't specifically recall the first time Dan and I connected, but I do remember the first time we actually met, and each time after that.

If you know Dan, it's probably not that hard to recall the first time you met him either. Chances are, you'll remember a hug, a smile, and most likely a laugh or two. Basically, you'll recall that feeling that someone cared.

This compassion doesn't just exist for those Dan has met. It's something he feels and expresses for so many he may never come face-to-face with, and that's one of the biggest reasons he'll always have a spot in an issue of T.O.F.U. for as long as I publish it.

So many of us are focused on trying to open the eyes of everyone around us in some way or another to the cruelty that happens to millions of living beings each day, and it's hard to not have

our passion turn into anger and outrage when faced with ignorance or cruelty.

In the foreword, Dan writes about how much I've influenced him since we've met, but I don't know if I can ever express how much he has done the same for me. Rarely have I met someone who continues to face the world with love, even when it greets him with something else.

I may not know Dan's life story, but with each piece he writes, I learn a little more about who he is, who he was, and who he wants to be, and it's that sort of experience that I hope for with every article in the magazine.

Thus, when it came time to put together The Book of T.O.F.U., one of my easiest decisions was to include Dan in its pages. After reading his most recent submission, I think you'll understand why.



50.

Well almost.

There was a time when I didn't think I would make it even close to 50. In the late 80s and early 90s, over 40,000 gay men a year were dying from complications due to HIV/AIDS. By the time I became vegan just before my 30th birthday in 1996, the HIV drug cocktail was starting to save lives and the rate of death was still high but decreasing every month. This was a very dark period, one filled with death and loss. And the number you just read was not a typo: 40,000+ a year were dying. These included my housemate, my best friend, several co-workers, neighbours, men I had dated, and close friends.

At 29, I got to know my first vegan. She worked for me as my assistant. Both she and her husband were vegan and I finally started to take a deeper look at my dinner plate. They invited me to all-vegan potlucks and I soon realized how delicious vegan food was. I remembered a Tibetan Buddhist monk telling me years earlier while having dinner with a group after a human rights protest that he was surprised that I was so compassionate but when it came to my dinner plate I dropped my compassion. Yep, he said it. It sure did impact me. He planted the seed, and although it seemed a little harsh I knew it was coming from a place of love and respect not only for me, but for animals too.

In January of 1996, after being vegetarian for two weeks, I went vegan. My hold out: Ben & Jerry's Cherry Garcia ice cream.

This was in Norfolk, VA. When I left the US Navy, I decided to stay there. Norfolk has come a long way and having PETA headquartered there has helped the vegan food scene. But in 1996, there wasn't anything to brag about around vegan food. Portobello mushroom burger after portobello mushroom burger. Fortunately, for me there was

an amazing group of vegans that welcomed me to potlucks. I got to eat delicious vegan food, build community, and learn how to cook.

What a different world it was back then, not only in regard to being vegan, but in everything that affected my identity: my gender, my sexual orientation, my privilege and class, my idea of being a man, my idea of becoming a man, and my thinking around action, activism, and politics. When I became vegan, I had no idea that one day I would be 100% comfortable with being a gay man, that I would legally marry another man, and that my veganism would just be part of the man I would become.

I didn't go to my first vegan restaurant until 2000 while in San Francisco for work. Millennium. I sat there for two hours amazed. On my second trip to the city, I went back to Millennium with two of my dearest friends, that time for dessert.

By this time I was living in Denver, Colorado and had gotten to know many other vegans as well as animal rights activists. It was in Denver that my activism changed from HIV/AIDS and human rights to include animal rights.

No matter how long one has been vegan, times have changed. I can think of everything just in the

**One thing that is very clear to me is that the animal rights movement is fractured. We fight a lot. Whether local groups or national causes, I see it a lot and it disturbs me.**

last six months, year, two years. In the last several years companies like Gardein, EatPastry, Beyond Meat, and Daiya have completely changed what options a vegan has in the market. Kale is common. In the same time vegan cheese companies have popped up everywhere (to my delight!).

As an animal rights activist, I have also seen change in activism. Of course, in almost 20 years, a lot is going to change. One thing that is very clear to me is that the animal rights movement is fractured. We fight a lot. Whether local groups or national causes, I see it a lot and it disturbs me. The voice of the voiceless animals we are fighting for gets drowned out when activists fight amongst themselves and what a shame that is. Often I take a good look in the mirror and ask myself if I am honestly being the best, strongest, and most passionate voice I can be for the voiceless. We can't always be right. A little self-reflection never hurts.

I think about this a lot and remember back to when so many people were dying. Groups all over the country banded together to take care of sick friends, to fight discrimination towards people with HIV/AIDS, and to demand the government at least acknowledge that there was a problem. Some days all I could do as an activist was hold the hand of someone in his or her last hours. I can't imagine how worse the situation would have been if all of the groups fought amongst themselves. Sure there were disagreements, yet the focus seemed to always be on the fact that so many people were dying and how could we, together, support them.

I choose to reach out to all who want to fight for animal rights. The bottom line is that we as animal rights activists or we as vegans or we as human rights activists all have more in common than not. There is a bigger picture, one that is vastly more important than personal opinions of others who might not look or act as one wishes they would. Animals suffer incredible cruelty every day. We have the power to fight that.

My personal activism continues to evolve. I use the [blog](#) for much of my activism. I constantly am surprised by how much more I can learn if I open my mind to it. An example is an interaction I had on [Twitter](#) when another activist taught me that

the way I was referring to people as “brothers and sisters” was not as inclusive as if I referred to those same people as “siblings.” Her point was that the term I was using could be construed as binary, that not everyone chooses to check a male or female box. I was grateful for her comment and have been using the term siblings more often.

I have also become more active in fighting for transgender equality and against the abhorrent cycle of violence that is crushing my trans siblings. If I have my details correct, seven trans women have been murdered so far in 2015! Several others have taken their own lives.

This brings me to another point: one can support a number of different causes and struggles, not just one particular group. By that, I mean that I can be a strong advocate for animals who are tortured and live their lives in fear and simultaneously be an ally for trans women of colour. It is crucial for me to be true to myself in my activism which sometimes means that I ask activists in one circle why they don't include activists in another circle.

I will never accept bigotry in any of the communities I am part of.

The [Gay Vegans](#) blog has been huge for me to not only stay connected with other activists, but to support new activists and new vegans, to be part of discussions around politics, gender, privilege, and more, and to support those who might not feel connected with ideas and networks to make this world a better place for all living beings. Through the blog, I feel stronger than ever as an activist.

Throughout the past 20 years, my activism has ebbed and flowed. Sometimes I felt very close to the animal rights community and other times I felt far apart. Many times I have donated to national groups only to be put on some mailing list and then be asked for another donation before I was even thanked for the first donation. Yet to this day, Mike (my husband) and I still donate to national groups

as they are making things happen. I am particularly supportive of any national groups that fight for animals in laboratories.

There are so many amazing non-profits out there in regard to animal rights that I believe there is something for everyone, no matter what your particular passion is.

As a twenty-something activist, the world might seem bleak in regard to animal cruelty. I have to

**My form of activism might not look like yours. It doesn't have to. That I am certain about. All activism requires is action. Effectiveness is pretty good too.**

say that it is easy to start feeling that way. Yet in the short time I have been around, I have seen crazy changes. Just here in Denver, I was able to be a part of an amazing attempt to stop using dogs in physiology classes at our state medical school. It wasn't easy, and it took several years, but the labs stopped using dogs. Nationally, animals are no longer used in physiology classes in the vast majority of medical schools. Also, there are vegan options on college campuses. More companies don't test on animals than do use animals for testing. There are dozens, if not well over 100 vegan restaurants in the U.S.A. and Canada. And so many more people today consume non-dairy milk over cow's milk than just a few years ago.

Change is happening. It doesn't happen in a vacuum. It can't happen on its own. Every day I try to do at least one thing that will support animals that are suffering. Or people who are demonized. Or oceans that can't take much more human destruction. My form of activism might not look like yours. It doesn't have to. That I am certain about. All activism requires is action. Effectiveness is pretty good too.

When I think of getting close to 50, I am reminded that in the last several years I have really begun to focus on my health. The first part of that is eating healthy. Yes, it is possible to eat unhealthy as a vegan. I could personally give many examples. Yet these days Mike and I spend more of our budget on fruits and vegetables and legumes than anything else. Even though there has never been a greater variety of processed foods for vegans, we have become quite comfortable with pears, kale, spinach, apples, mangoes, blackberries, blueberries, Swiss chard, etc. I also find myself loving to cook and bake more than ever. I don't know if that comes with age or just wanting to create more in the kitchen.

Another part of focusing on my health is exercise. I am finally getting to the gym three days a week. When I was 47, I trained for and finished my first half-marathon. It wasn't easy. The training was amazing as I had never in my life run that far (nor was I interested in doing so) and training for a 13.1 mile run means one has to run a lot to train. The training was part of what I loved about the half-marathon. I am currently training for my third. Running is not for everyone. Being physically active is a huge way for me to continue to stay healthy as I age. One can start whenever; it's never too late.

Then there is retirement. I am closer to the age I hope to retire than the age I began to work. I'm not sure what retirement looks like for me/us exactly. I know we want to live in the San Diego area when retired. I also know that we will want to be able to go out to the awesome vegan restaurants that will be everywhere by the time we retire. This means that we have to save for retirement. I barely hear about this in the vegan and animal rights communities and I think it is so important. If you enjoy supporting a non-profit now, they will be in just as much need when you retire. We want to be able to continue to be philanthropic when we retire.



We want to make sure that we have the basics and can travel once in a while.

So we save. Like exercise, I believe it is never too late to start planning and saving for retirement. Our community has many people in it who know about these things and can be helpful. If you are younger, all the better. Start now, even if it's just a little every paycheck. If you work for a company that does a company match in the 401K program, at least put as much into that for the match. There are definitely funds out there that will match your ethics; you just have to find them. Even if you just invest in your local credit union's certificate of deposits you will be in a better situation than if you do nothing.

Because of my blog I think of veganism as part of my identity more than it actually is. At this point in my life, it's just part of who I am naturally.

As a blogger, I am frequently asked for advice, especially by folks who are newly vegan, about living vegan and living as an activist. It's common to be asked in a way that starts with "because you've been around so long"! I love that! Here are a few of the suggestions that I have come up:

**Find a vegan nutritionist online** and follow them. We have a couple on [our blog site](#). When you become vegan, it's so important to make sure you're getting all of the right things that your body needs.

**Brush and floss.** Yes, it sounds silly. Yet when you have to get a crown and you would rather donate that money to a group fighting for the voiceless, you realize that brushing and flossing pays off.

**Sticks and stones will hurt you but words won't.** I say this because it's not true. Words can be hurtful. Go easy. If folks are asking for honest advice, give it to them, compassionately. Be kind. Be supportive. I see too often, especially with social media, where someone asks a question and they are pounced on.

**Whatever your cause, you can be a voice for those you are supporting.** For me it's animals, gay and lesbian and trans people around the world persecuted and even executed for being who they are, the homeless, and battered women. If I am an ally, I cannot be a jerk. I cannot be a judgmental prick who knows everything and calls anyone who disagrees with me a terrible name. That helps no one.

**If you are in love** and are fortunate to be in a relationship with that person, make sure they know that. I am fortunate to be married to my best friend, the love of my life, and my good and perfect gift from God. No matter what I am working on as an activist, I make sure he gets love from me and that I am an active participant in our marriage.

**Vote.** On my blog [I write about this often](#). Vote in every election and at every level. From city council to your local board of education to your state capitol and beyond. Let those who represent you know who you are and what you believe. Build relationships with them. One day those you are an ally for will need their support.

**Take care of yourself.** The animals need you. Self-care is critical.

**Don't take your life for granted.** One day I was 29 and going vegan and the next I was 49 writing about being vegan for almost 20 years. Live your life. Live every day. Each day we have an opportunity to be a voice for the voiceless and to make this world a better place for all living beings.

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Dan Hanley is a professional non-profit fundraiser who also created and writes for The Gay Vegans blog. He believes in working to make the world a better and safer place for all living beings while building bridges and focusing on the fact that we all have more in common than not. In his spare time he loves the beach, eating, and engaging folks to vote and become more politically active. He lives in the Los Angeles area with his husband Mike and their four companion animals Miguel, Suga, Monti, and Rose.

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D.I.Y.

# A VEGAN SUPPER CLUB HOW-TO GUIDE

By Jess Sconé & Maeve Connor  
Originally in Issue 7, May 2013

It's been a handful of years since our last supper club, where we'd spend months of our free time brainstorming elaborate meals and jotting down far too many ideas in notebooks (in between riveting karaoke sets at dive bars, of course). Besides the glory and craze of night of the show—because that's what it really was, a dramatic, culinary presentation, and seeing if we could pull it off—it was in these notebooks that the supper club really lived. Maeve and I would dine out, pour over cookbooks of our favourite cuisines, send each other blog recipes, get inspired by far off and not-so-far off travels and write it all down, again and again. We were endlessly inspired, and wanted to inspire others. We wanted to serve a special meal to special people of dishes \*we\* weren't seeing elsewhere around town.

Two best friends running a supper club led to grand trips to Asian supermarkets and ingredients

you'll never hear us complaining about having too much of (hey there, roasted rice powder). Life has grown busier, as it does, seeping into the free times we spent with those notebooks and flavours.

Looking back, I have such fond memories of those few years of sporadic supper clubs and all the contemplation and engrossed recipe testing to get the Serrano seitan or Northern green curry sauce \*just right\*, preview dinners with friends, wonderfully intimate final evenings, and, most importantly, the notebooks and friendship that nurtured it all along the way. It remains so hard to throw away an old notebook... you know you can open it one day and relive it all again.

- jess

P.S. Never say never again. Heartichoke Supper Club ramblings and ideas may resurface one of these days.

## WHY HOST A SUPPER CLUB?

Having your own restaurant is a fun fantasy, but it's also, from what we hear, a whole lot of work. Coming up with a name and a concept and a menu sounds like so much fun, but securing financing, hiring employees, working crazy hours, and quite likely having the business fail in the first year is less our speed. We love potlucks, but we also love being in control of the entire dining experience. For a while we just channeled our love of cooking elaborate meals into cooking at casual gatherings for our friends, and we still love to do that, but then one day it occurred to us... why not do that, but fancy it up, make several courses, branch outside our social circle... and maybe come out ahead? We started Heartichoke Supper Club because we love creative plant-based cuisine and we're always looking for new challenges. Running our private supper club has become an incredibly satisfying hobby. When you're cooking for paying guests, you can spend more on quality ingredients (assuming you're not wealthy, fancy dinner parties can be a struggle when you're doing them for free), no one shows up with a tub of grocery store hummus and you're not cooking for anyone who would honestly rather be eating tater tots. It's great practice if you do want to have your own restaurant or be a chef someday, but it's also pretty fun if you want to keep your day job.

## PLANNING YOUR MENU

Each of our dinners so far has been loosely based on a cuisine of a different country, but instead of trying to recreate "authentic" vegan versions of foods, we have taken advantage of local ingredients and used our creativity to create original dishes inspired by those cuisines. We live in Portland, Oregon, which is a great place for produce, and we try to incorporate as many local ingredients as possible in our dishes.

Purple cauliflower? Brussels sprout raab? Heirloom tomatoes? Opal basil? Red garlic? Check!

So how do we get started planning our menu? One of our best resources has been our local libraries. Once we decide on a country, we check out cookbooks of that country's cuisine and start to think about how we can interpret it in a vegan way using local ingredients. When we did a Thai dinner, it was largely inspired by Jess's travels in Thailand and her new-found obsession with veganizing

**Do you have a soft spot for waffles?  
Consider a savoury-meets-sweet  
waffle feast, or better yet,  
make it Belgian-cuisine focused.**

every curry paste recipe ever, while our French and Spanish dinners were mostly inspired by books and what was in season at the time. Most likely, if you're planning on hosting a supper club, you're familiar with developing your own creative recipes, so we shouldn't have to give you much guidance there. Do you have a soft spot for waffles? Consider a savoury-meets-sweet waffle feast, or better yet, make it Belgian-cuisine focused.

Of course, you don't have to base your dinner on one country's cuisine. You can use whatever inspiration comes to you to plan your menu. Assuming you don't want to lose money on your supper club, it is important to think about how much your ingredients will cost. Come up with a budget. You don't need saffron in every dish, as we learned when we did our Spanish dinner. Remember, small portions are fancy, and rice is cheap.

Our first two dinners had five full courses. It was very ambitious, and everyone seemed uncomfortably full by the end. When we hosted our third, we decided to just do three, plus a very simple starter, and we will probably continue to

do so. While five courses was doable, it was a lot crazier in our kitchen, we spent a lot more money, and we don't really think anyone was that much more impressed. We had to remind ourselves that this wasn't the time to be a vegan potluck nerd. Don't make it harder for yourself than necessary. Impress with flavours, ingredients, and presentation, not quantity.

## GETTING GUESTS

So how do you get people to pay you to eat your food? Start with people you know. Talk to your friends and get them to talk to their friends. We promote our supper club through Facebook and Tumblr, and have an email list of all past guests. Don't necessarily expect a bunch of strangers to come to your first event—you might have to build a positive reputation first. Offer your friends a discount, get them to get their friends to come, and convince them to spread the word. Obviously, if you have a blog that's read by vegans in your area,

**Know what people in your city will be willing to pay. Maybe in New York and San Francisco you could charge quite a bit, but in Portland it can be difficult to get people to part with more than \$30.**

that will help. You can also contact people through local vegan and vegetarian groups, like ones that go through Meetup.com. Make sure to figure out how many people you can reasonably serve before you start selling tickets.

We collect payment through Paypal before the event, though collecting money at the actual meal could also be an option. Of course, if people don't

show up, you may end up losing a lot of money on ingredients. We charged less for our first dinner, figuring that we should build a name for ourselves before asking for more money. Know what people in your city will be willing to pay. Maybe in New York and San Francisco you could charge quite a bit, but in Portland it can be difficult to get people to part with more than \$30.

## SETTING

Unless you have a friend with a restaurant they're letting you host a "pop up" night in or you have the finances to rent something legitimate, you're going to be hosting your dinner on the down-low... you know, secretly. It's in the name, after-all. Try to get a location with room for a family-style seating, it'll really make things easier in terms of serving, plus, you get good old-fashioned mingling. Your guests are vegan or vegan-friendly and about to behold a truly unique, in-the-know dining experience, so they have something to talk about. Be sure to keep the location under wraps until confirmation (or payments—that's up to you, but cash will probably work best) has been made. Let folks know if there are allergens present, and keep the kitchen and premises as tidy as possible. We're playing professional and are all grown ups here.

## DO A TEST RUN!

Nervous about your ability to get dinner on the table in a timely fashion for a large group? You probably should be, it's hard sometimes! Doing a test run for friends is a great way to practice. Before our first dinner, we prepared every course we would be doing for the actual dinner for our friends for free. After that dinner, we were much more confident about our abilities, and no longer felt the need to test every single dish. Instead, we usually have a

gathering with our friends to test a few things, work on our plating, and see what problems we run into. At our most recent dinner, which was a benefit, we actually charged for the test run as well, and our friends had no problem helping out.

## HOW TO GET READY

Since we like to keep our costs as low as possible, and we frequently seek out hard-to-find ingredients, we like to get shopping for non-perishable ingredients out of the way as soon as possible, preferably a few weeks in advance. This gives us time to track down ingredients that we thought we would be able to find the first time around and couldn't—your local Asian market will always be out of Thai tea if you shop for it the day before you need it. We get as much of our produce as possible from a farmer's market the day of the dinner. Remember to be flexible! We frequently don't decide what kind of greens or what kind of mushrooms we're using until the day of the dinner, we just see what looks best at the market. If you need something specific, have a back-up plan. If lemongrass is critical to what you're making and there is none at the farmer's market, know where else you can go to get it.

Prepare as many things as possible beforehand. You should not be chopping vegetables or preparing sauces once guests have arrived. Just warming and plating things takes up enough time, we promise! Write a list of everything you need to get done and check it off as you go. Organization is key—you don't want to be plating the entree and realize you're missing a component.

So, you're totally organized and ready to feed a ton of people a fancy dinner. What are you going to eat? Like, before dinner? Making sure you have food for yourself to eat throughout the day is important too, and it's an easy thing to forget. Maybe it's ironic, but if there was ever a good reason to have some frozen convenience meal that doesn't require any dishes

handy, this is it. Don't assume you'll have time to run out for take-out, because things could get crazy.

## GETTING HELP

We cook as a team, but we need more help in the kitchen than that. We recommend having at least two helpers in the kitchen to help wash dishes

**There are three parts of making a dish impressive: ingredients, taste, and presentation.**

and run last-minute errands. Maybe you'll be more prepared than us, but we have needed people to run last-minute errands plenty of times, and have been so grateful for the help. We conveniently hold our supper club a block away from a grocery store, but if you're not so lucky, make sure you have someone available who has a car and can make a quick grocery run. Hopefully you're lucky enough to have friends who will help in exchange for some food odds and ends and access to the kitchen wine supply.

## PLATING

Unless you're serving food family-style, make sure to pay attention to plating and make your food look nice! There are three parts of making a dish impressive: ingredients, taste, and presentation. Obviously, you can have one or two of these without the other, but if you want to really impress your guests, make all three happen. A supper club is not a buffet. Simply put: practice plating. Watch some *Chopped*, take a look at some food blogs, and get creative. Take a deep breath before you even begin—and before each component is added—or shall we say, adorned. And don't forget your garnish!

Think about the herbs in your dishes – would some more add a nice punch? Would a contrast of something else, such as a specialty flaked salt, add that something else?

Fancy-pants plating, sauces (and drizzles and oils and purees, etc.) can take the ingredients of a sloppy bowl and transform them into a fetching presentation.

DEALING WITH THE PUBLIC

Are you cooking the whole time? Are you hosting? Timing is one of the biggest learning experiences of the supper club experience. You certainly have the opportunity to sneak away into the kitchen for the duration of your own dinner party, but will the guests ever see your face? We recommend greeting your guests, introducing yourself, and since you are likely the chefs here, spending a moment to describe the dishes as they’re being served. At least once. And hey – play some soft music, and don’t gossip in the kitchen!

DIY ETHIC AND LOVE

We love making creative food, but we’re okay with being a little rough around the edges. Our dishes don’t match and sometimes they’re disposable. Our small talk with the first guest is always ridiculously awkward. But we live in Portland, where nine out of ten people prefer to drink out of mason jars, and we think Heartichoke is charming. No, it

doesn’t feel like dining at a five-star restaurant. We think our food is five-star, but it still feels like you’re eating in a living room at a table rented from a party store, and we think that’s perfectly ok.

Jess “Sconé” Sconato is a native New Yorker turned longtime Oregonian whose fondness for intimate soirées and thematic potlucks turned into a career as a from-scratch event planner. Jess spends her free time talking to her cats (Huxley & Zelda), reading post-apocalyptic fiction, biking with her wife Julia, taking care of a little community garden plot, obsessing over curry pastes, and serving as the Events & Conference Director for Portland’s Hatch Innovation and Hatch Oregon. She is the co-founder of the award-winning Vida Vegan Con (2009-2015), and the sporadic, but mighty, Vegan Iron Chef organization. She holds a degree in Marketing Communication from Emerson College in Boston, MA.

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**Instagram:** [jdfunks](https://www.instagram.com/jdfunks)  
**Twitter:** [getsconed](https://twitter.com/getsconed)

Alanna Maeve Connor is an almost-native Portlander, non-profit community organizer, and full-time cat lady. She last wrote this bio in 2011, and during that time she loved Gossip Girl, Sleater-Kinney, Old Fashioneds, and her cat Agnes was somewhat ruining her life. As of 2015, these all remain true, but she’s way more into Scandal and How to Get Away with Murder since Blair and Serena went off the air.

“It is difficult trying to navigate one’s desire for sociopolitical outcry and at the same time trying to be sensitive to the feelings of human beings. When it comes to stuff like that, when it comes to feminism, body image, sizeist behaviour. When it comes to factory farming, I’d have less of a concern for people’s feelings.”

Bif Naked, Issue 2, October 2007

## GROW IT ON YOUR BALCONY!

By Stéphane Groleau  
Originally in Issue 5, May 2011

From a large undertaking like organizing a veg fest to something as small as planting some seeds, I've always loved the D.I.Y. section's ability to offer people a chance to learn from other vegans. There are so many people doing great things around the world, and I'm constantly excited to find more of them that are willing to share their knowledge with each new issue.

For a number of issues now, Stéphane has been one of those people, and I've always enjoyed his pieces for their ability to encourage people to just get out and do things. Whether its creating the world's first vegan accordion (check [Issue 4](#) for info on that!) or growing tomatoes on

a balcony, Stéphane has plenty of experience, and he continues to be kind enough to pass it on to T.O.F.U. readers.

In the case of this piece, although it won't help you make music, it will certainly lead to some great meals down the road. From where to plant to suggestions on just what to sow, Stéphane covers the bases so you can spend more time getting your hands dirty and turning your thumbs green instead of using them to Google every single step on your phone.



For more than 7 years, we've been growing food in downtown Quebec City. Urban gardening isn't just about feeding ourselves, it's also about being more self-reliant, creating wildlife habitats, greening the city, and developing skills. When we harvest, we know where the food comes from and it proves that veganic food is possible, tasty, and fun to do! To help you do the same, here are some tips for success.

### STARTING OUT

In short, the recipe is simple: get a container, put dirt in it, plant seeds, then give water and sunlight. That's all it takes. The rest is a matter of getting more precise and aware of what each plant needs to make it thrive.

Any container can be converted into an urban mini-garden: a bucket, an old garbage bin, a flower box, or an old bath tub will all work. You can also build larger boxes using wood (just avoid treated wood). If you prefer to buy new, there's a growing number of containers offered on the market. Smart pots, for example, are inexpensive ones made of black fabric, but they might need more frequent watering. It's only a matter of what you have on hand, and what money or time you want to invest. Of course, depending on the space available and the desired crops, some containers might be more suitable. One of the best has a double bottom which serves as a water reservoir. This means we don't have to water the plant constantly on hot days.

### BUILDING A CONTAINER

This technique is used by the group Craque-Bitume in Quebec City for building containers out of old plastic buckets. This kind of food-grade plastic bucket can be collected at restaurants. You can ask them, or you can look in the streets, you might find some. Each growing container needs two buckets, inserted one inside the other. The first one serves

for the potting mix and the plants, the other one holds water as a reservoir.

The first step is to make a big hole in the bottom of the inner bucket to insert a small container with that diameter. This is the link that will allow roots to

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go down and reach the water. The water also has the possibility of going up by capillarity.

Make a few small holes in the bottom of the inner bucket for drainage, and make many small holes in the small container to allow water and roots to access the water. Also, make a hole the diameter of a piece of pipe near the side of the inner bucket to slide in the pipe. This way, you can later fill the water reservoir. To finish, make a small hole in the outer bucket about three inches high from the bottom. This is the overflow. If too much water gets into the reservoir, it will flow out. This avoids drowning the plant roots.

Now it's time to plant! Fill the bucket with potting mix, then add plants. When you want to water, just pour water through the pipe to fill the bottom directly. Don't attempt to fill the reservoir from the top through the potting mix, it will leach all the nutrients.

### Local Potting Mix

Commercial mixes usually contain peat moss, a non-renewable material extracted from bogs that destroys whole ecosystems. Those mixes often contain compost or fertilizers made of animal manure or by-products. To get away from this, and try to only use local renewable resources, we've been experimenting with homemade potting



mix. A good mixture we come up with is domestic compost, composted leaves, and composted chipped branch woods (composted tree clippings) in equal parts. Domestic compost and leaves are easy to find, but in some areas, tree clippings can be harder to get. Overall, leaves and clippings should be well composted – smelling and looking like forested soil. Typically, it takes one or two years to get there. For more information, the UK-based [Vegan Organic Network](#) offers information sheets on propagation and potting mix recipes.

### WHAT TO GROW?

Most plants can be grown in containers, though some are easier than others. Depending on the plant, the needs for nutrients, warmth, and light will change. In general, I think containers are at their best with fruit-bearing and continuous growing plants. (Remember, in botanical terms, tomatoes, eggplant, and cucumbers are all fruits!) Climbing plants like beans and cucumbers or indeterminate tomatoes are wonderful because they can grow vertically or extend on the “balcony fence” continually, saving space and being very productive. Each year, my Spanish beans reach the balcony of my upstairs neighbour! I avoid

**Remember, in botanical terms,  
tomatoes, eggplant,  
and cucumbers are all fruits!**

growing plants that we usually cut (e.g., lettuce, cauliflower), or that we harvest completely (root plants like carrots or beet). Those use space all summer and we end up with only one or two carrots. That isn't the most efficient approach in my opinion.

We can also mix different plants in the same container. Though, keep in mind the size of the plant at maturity to avoid overcrowding a container.

In a typical two-by-three foot box, you can have two tomato plants, plus a few basil plants, or a few rows of carrots and leeks, or one cabbage in the middle and one lettuce in each corner. For the beginner, the most rewarding balcony crop would be cherry tomatoes. They are easy to grow, productive, and can sustain heat. For small areas, we can also find compact cherry plants. It's more enjoyable to have many small fruits to eat every day, rather than just one big tomato. I prefer the indeterminate kind of tomatoes because they keep growing and produce new vines and fruits until the first frost. I simply attach them to a string fixed to the ceiling and wrap the main stem around. Conversely, determinate tomatoes stop expanding at a certain point and produce a more bushy plant. Regardless of the type you choose, if you end up with a surplus, tomatoes can be frozen as-is in a bag and later taken out directly from the freezer and put in soup or a sauce. Of course, it should also be noted that tomatoes (and cucumbers) are demanding plants, needing rich compost, plenty of water, and a very sunny spot.

Basil grows well too, and is an essential companion, both in the garden and in meals! It's advantageous to harvest basil by cutting the main stems just over the junction of the two leaves. This produces two more shoots, which increases the potential yield and makes the plant go bushy.

Climbing beans are also a good crop that is easy to grow. French filet climbing beans can produce soft and abundant pods. Strings or a trellis can be used to support them. Unharvested beans or overly mature ones can be left on the plant until the first frosts and harvested as dried beans. Spanish beans not only produce big beans, they make wonderful purple flowers. Also, they make awesome chili!

Kale is so nutritious everyone should eat it... and grow it! It will grow and survive until hard frosts. And even then, frozen leaves buried under the snow can

still be harvested. To harvest, just pick the biggest leaves at the bottom first.

Plants like tomatoes, eggplant, pepper, and cucumber appreciate the heat. Choose a well-lit place, ideally south facing. Placing them next to a brick wall will give extra warmth at night because it accumulates heat during the day. Lettuce, spinach, cress, peas, chards, Brussels sprouts, and radishes prefer cooler places and are less demanding of sunshine.

### Plants or Seeds?

Many plants aren't native to Canada – they've been introduced by farmers, gardeners, and travelers. So, many plants need to be started indoors, if we want them to have enough time during the summer to reach maturity. Tomatoes, for example, should be started indoors six weeks before the last risk of frost, which is around April 5 in Quebec City. Otherwise, it wouldn't have time to produce enough fruits, if any. You can buy such plants at farmers' markets or in a garden centre. Starting seedlings ourselves isn't the easiest thing: they need regular care and artificial light, but it allows much more flexibility choosing the varieties you'd like to grow. Did you know there are over 500 varieties of tomatoes? Seed packs usually contain basic growing instructions.

Seedlings are sown in small trays, then as they grow, we transplant them in bigger pots. The easiest way is to buy ready-made potting mix. Bags are available at garden centres and hardware stores. Try to buy organic ones, and read the label to see if there are animal components.

### FEEDING THE PLANTS

I would say that the first thing to do if you want to grow vegan organic food is to start by making compost! When we buy potting mix or commercial compost, it's hard to know if manure, fish emulsion

or slaughterhouse by-products were used in the mix. If you have access to some land, reserve a shadowed area for a compost bin. Otherwise, you can use or start a community composting scheme or use a balcony composter.

### Balcony Compost

For urban growers who are limited to balconies and rooftops, it may seem like a challenge to make your own compost. Veganic gardener Marco Pagliarulo, who has a 5th-floor balcony garden in downtown Toronto, came up with an innovative homemade technique for composting in a container garden on his balcony.

A simple do-it-yourself design, the balcony compost has the potential to bring veganic composting to skyscrapers, rooftops, concrete surfaces, and contaminated lots. The design has already won first place in Toronto's container gardening competition, and was featured in the book *City Farmer: Adventures in Growing Urban Food*.

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The concept is quite simple: a bottomless bucket is nestled inside of a larger container. Inside the bottomless bucket, finely-cut food scraps and brown leaves are mixed together, which slowly break down into compost. Between the bucket and the container, soil is added and plants are grown. These plants are automatically nourished by the compost that seeps out of the bottomless bucket.

Free Fertilizer

Healthy vegans should definitely consider using their urine to fertilize. Rich in nitrogen and potassium, perfect for tasty tomatoes. Dilute one part urine in ten parts water. It's free stuff, and diverts urine that would otherwise pollute our waterways.

CONCLUSION

In the end, there's nothing more valuable than experience. Just do it! You can't learn to play an instrument without practicing, the same is true with growing food. Experience and confidence comes with practice. Take notes of your successes and failures. To help yourself along, visit other gardens, talk with accomplished gardeners, look on the internet, and observe nature. But for sure, don't wait, and try it out when you can!

To learn more about building containers, making vegetable compost, or balcony composting, visit Veganic Agriculture Network: [goveganic.net](http://goveganic.net).

GOOD READING

Burnett, Graham. 2008. *Permaculture: A Beginners Guide*. Spiralseed.

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Steinfeld, Carol. 2009. *Liquid Gold, the Lore & Logic of Using Urine to Grow Plants*. New Society Publishers.

Co-founder of the Veganic Agriculture Network, Stéphane Groleau is a long-time vegan advocate who studied organic farming. He has been co-organizing a monthly vegan potluck in Quebec City since 2008. Eco film-maker, musician, web-master, and speaker, he aims to promote innovative vegan ideas.

Twitter: [veganquebec](https://twitter.com/veganquebec)

“But these two are not mutually exclusive, it’s possible to live a socially conscious lifestyle, respecting animals and recognizing the dangers of being a farm worker or working in meat plants. Women, children, and other vulnerable populations are not in competition in the argument for ethical veganism.”

Noemi Martinez, Issue 6, December 2011

# STARTING A VEG FEST

By Ashley Flitter  
Originally in Issue 7, May 2013

Although the D.I.Y. section of each issue covers a range of topics, most of which can be done on a small scale, there are occasionally pieces that benefit from the efforts of a community. Of course, one could argue that such things as creating and operating a small business or organizing a veg fest can be done individually, but I suspect many of those that have found success did so with plenty of people supporting them.

It's because of the importance of community that I was happy when Ashley suggested writing a piece about starting a veg fest, and it's part of the reason why I wanted to include it in this book. With most major cities now having at least one veg festival, it's been great to see them popping up in so many smaller corners of the world, and Ashley's piece gives plenty of helpful tips on how to put a town on the map as well.

As someone with years of experience planning events myself, I think Ashley did a great job of highlighting both the benefits and the possible pitfalls of tackling a fest, and her resources are sure to come in handy for plenty of people (maybe you?) as they take those first steps to give us all something to look forward to in the future in a town we may not even know exists right now.



P.S. There are even talks of a Veg Fest happening in my home province, Newfoundland and Labrador. So be sure to keep an eye on T.O.F.U.'s social media to find out more in the future!

July 2012 marked the first Twin Cities Veg Fest, the first all-vegan festival held in Minnesota, and the organizers haven't looked back since. The six-hour veg fest saw more than 1,000 people come through its doors to check out animal rights organizations, sample vegan food, and connect with other vegans and veg-curious folks. The Twin Cities Veg Fest is just one example of a number of vegetarian and vegan festivals that happen each year and the number keeps growing.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF VEG FESTIVALS

If you don't live in an area where a veg fest is held, then you may consider helping to start one in your city. Though the process can take up to a year, the final festival is well worth the work that goes into the planning and organizing. Here are some tips that will help get you started on the path to hosting a veg fest where you live.

## ALIGN WITH LOCAL CAUSES

The first step to starting a veg fest is to find other like-minded people who can help you refine your ideas and put you on the right path to executing them. A veg fest is a large undertaking and you will start off on the right foot by bringing the idea to a larger organization that has resources, both money and people, to help bring the festival to life. If there

**The Texas VegFest, which just celebrated its fourth year, had around 5,000 attendees, while the first annual Twin Cities Veg Fest had just over 1,000.**

are no such organizations in your area, you can contact local environmental organizations, as they may also be interested in putting on the event. You

don't necessarily need to be a member of the group in order to approach them about your festival ideas, but you should do your research and make sure you understand the goals of the organization and that a festival would help support some of those goals.

## SET YOUR GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

While you are in the process of looking for a group to align with for the event, it's important to define what your goals and expectations are. Not only will this help you find the right organization for the event, but it will also help you understand the scope of the project better. If you know how many people you'd like to see in attendance, which vendors you'd like to participate, and what types of activities you want to put on during the festival you can better plan for the festival's venue and your marketing and volunteer needs. In addition, the more clearly you can articulate your project to others, the more likely it is that they'll want to support your endeavour.

## FIND A VENUE AND SET A DATE

Depending on the size of your city, you can probably count on having upwards of 1,000 attendees for the first year of your veg festival. The Texas VegFest, which just celebrated its fourth year, had around 5,000 attendees this year, while the first annual Twin Cities Veg Fest had just over 1,000. Knowing the size of your city, the size of the veg community in the area, and the newness of the event, you can determine the size of venue you'll need. If you plan to have the festival in the summer, finding an outdoor venue is ideal, though you'll need to have a backup plan in place for inclement weather.

The date of your event will be somewhat dependent on your venue, so once you find a place you like, talk with the property's manager

about open dates. Weekends are ideal for these types of events as that's when most people are off of work. After you agree on a date with your team and the property manager, decide what time you want to hold the event and the length of it. The majority of veg fests, such as the Mad City Veg Fest in Wisconsin, are held on a weekend day for

**A website not only helps you to advertise the date, time, location, and events of the festival, but it can also help with organization.**

about six to eight hours in the middle of the day (eg., 10 am–4 pm). If you expect the number of attendees to be less than a few thousand, then you are probably safe to hold the event for six hours over the course of a Saturday or Sunday.

**BUILD A WEBSITE**

Once the event details are locked in, the next step is to start your marketing campaign, beginning with a website. Most non-profit organizations have a website, so you may just choose to piggyback off of that site and dedicate a page to the event. However, in order to appeal to a broader audience you may want to create a new website specifically for the event. A website not only helps you to advertise the date, time, location, and events of the festival, but it can also help with organization. You can create a sign-up page for volunteers, forms for potential sponsors (or provide them a contact email address), and sponsor information such as pricing and perks. The website will be the hub of your veg fest until the day of the event, so you should spend some time creating a well-designed, organized, and informative site. This site will also serve as a place where you can update people on

the next veg fest, if the first one is successful. See the resources at the end of this article to help you get started with your site today.

**ORGANIZE YOUR VOLUNTEERS**

After you begin advertising for the festival it's likely you'll start to get volunteers asking how they can help. If you are working with another organization to put on the event then you'll also have help from their existing volunteers to get things rolling. Before you assign any tasks to volunteers, though, you should break the duties up and separate them into various committees. For example, you may have committees for setup/clean-up, sponsor recruitment, vendor outreach, and website maintenance. Once you have committees set up, you can ask your volunteers where they think they'd be of the most help and divide them up that way. You can also assign a coordinator for each committee that will help ensure things keep moving forward and that way you don't have to follow up with each volunteer individually, you can just communicate with the different coordinators.

**FIND SPONSORS AND VENDORS**

You can help out your sponsor and vendor committees by doing some research ahead of time on the companies/organizations you think would be a good fit for the event. Sponsors are going to be people/companies that support the event, either financially or with product donations, while vendors are going to be either people who want to sell food/products at the event or who want to table. This is where you'll want to look back at your goals for the event to help you determine what types of sponsors and vendors to reach out to. If a group or product doesn't fit with the overall goals of the event, then you should pass on having their presence at the event, even if they are willing to provide financial

support. You should work closely with the organization putting the event on to determine which groups best fit with the event's needs.

**THE LOGISTICS**

There are many logistical items that will need to be worked out in order for the event to run smoothly. You'll need tables, chairs, electrical outlets, extension cords, posters, event programs, aid stations, garbage cans/recycle bins, and more, so be sure to coordinate with the host organization to make sure all of the small things are covered. Check with the venue you are using to see which items they may have available for you to use and then make arrangements to get the remainder of what you'll need. Chances are you can ask for your volunteers to bring supplies they may already have or you can contact a local rental store to get things such as tents, tables, and chairs. If you are operating as a non-profit, you may be able to get a discount from select businesses for certain items (plates, cups, etc.).

**PLAN THE SET-UP AND FLOW**

As the day approaches, you'll want to create a detailed plan of how things will go. If your venue will allow it, you may want to have volunteers do most of the physical set-up the night before the event, otherwise you'll want to get an early start to ensure everything is ready for when the vendors arrive. Make sure your vendors know what time to show up and what's expected of them at the festival. Have a plan in place for emergencies, inclement weather, and other logistical issues, such as garbage removal/clean-up. You'll want to make sure your volunteers are up to speed on the day's events so they can direct attendees in the right direction and answer their questions.

**Take some time to talk to attendees and ask for their feedback on the event, including what they'd like to see in the future, and if the veg fest made a difference in how they view veganism.**

**HAVE FUN!**

Don't forget to take a minute to sit back and enjoy the benefits of all your hard work. The more fun your volunteers and you have, the more likely it is that attendees will also have a great time at the event. Take some time to talk to attendees and ask for their feedback on the event, including what they'd like to see in the future, and if the veg fest made a difference in how they view veganism. You could do this in the form of a survey as people leave, or as in the case of the Twin Cities Veg Fest, you could use a survey as a raffle entry for vegan goodies such as cookbooks and t-shirts. Planning and organizing a veg fest doesn't have to be a daunting task. By making connections with other vegans and veg-friendly organizations in your area you can work together to have a veg fest up and running in no time. If you get stuck, you can always reach out to other veg fest event organizers to ask for some guidance or just to help keep you motivated. The payoff for all of your hard work is exposing people to veganism who may never have understood what it was, and connecting with others who live a compassionate lifestyle.

**RESOURCES**

Understanding the process for starting a veg fest is a great jumping off point, but far too often we hoard ideas and are stingy with action. These resources are intended to help you take the underrated, yet vitally important second step in starting veg fest: taking massive action. Use these

resources to start your website, recruit volunteers, spark interest, create robust partnerships, and to showcase your hard work.

Website Tools

Hosting and Domains

- [BlueHost.com](#)
- [GaiaHost.coop](#)
- [DreamHost.com](#)

Free Website Hosts

- [Wordpress.com](#)
- [Blogger.com](#)
- [Tumblr.com](#)
- [Weebly.com](#)

Essential WordPress Plugins

- [Events Manager](#)
- [MailChimp for WP](#)
- [Easy Contact Form Solution](#)
- [Yoast SEO](#)

Social Tools

- [Hootsuite.com](#)
- [Buffer.com](#)
- [SproutSocial.com](#)
- [MailChimp.com](#)

Places to Connect

These general places and organizations should spark ideas for where to start looking for partnerships in your own community.

- Local Humane Society and/or other Animal Welfare Groups
- Gyms, CrossFit Boxes, Fitness Groups (check bulletin boards in stores and libraries)
- Healthy Living Groups (check your city’s community education sites)
- Environmental Groups (local Sierra Club chapter, college groups)

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“Unless you were one of the fortunate souls who have been vegan since birth, you must remember that you too were where they are at one point. If being vegan is about being compassionate to animals, we must also be compassionate to each other as humans.”

Christa R. Shelton, [Issue 6](#), December 2011





## VEGANISM, HAPPINESS, AND THE ART OF LETTING GO

By Ashley Fineberg  
Originally in Issue 5, May 2011

I can't say it's a fact, but I'm pretty sure Ashley is one of the first people I ever met through the magazine directly. At the very least, she may be one of the few people I know who travelled in bad weather to make it to an event, friend or not. Since that time, we've come to know each other rather well, and we've even crossed paths in a number of different cities while one or the other of us was travelling.

Speaking of, those reading this article may be interested in learning that she did indeed make the trek across Canada (and to South America), and it was chronicled in *Issue 6*. Together, both that piece and the one included here, help to show how the art of letting go is a process that never stops, but it can be incredibly rewarding once you start.

Like many pieces throughout T.O.F.U., Ashley's provides reassurance that you are not alone in feeling uncomfortable in the norm, and that knowledge can be a great help in taking the first step down the road less travelled. For myself, I'm happy to have known Ashley since before she began the journey that led her to settle (for now) here on the West Coast of Canada, and I'm glad that we crossed paths right before I began so many travels of my own.

Hopefully, this piece will help to inspire you to do the same. If it does, and you cross paths with Ashley, feel free to invite her to a *Hey Rosetta!* show. I owe her one. Or two. Or three.



Contentment isn't something you constantly think about when you're a child. You're happy that you got to play at the park, sad that you were denied dessert, and your day brightens again as you watch your favourite cartoon. Things change when you age. Obstacles and stress increase, but your tactics in dealing with them seem to stay the same; temper tantrums don't disappear with baby fat. Through my teens I longed for more money, a better body, a nicer house, higher grades, a perfect boyfriend, yadda, yadda, yadda – nothing too atypical, except

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that I let these things affect my every waking moment. Most of my words were harsh or negative toward family, friends, and myself. In addition, I was becoming all-too aware of how harsh our world can be on a greater scale, and I desperately wanted to see change. I couldn't comprehend how humans could justify the inhumane treatment of animals, and how kids my age could just shrug it off so nonchalantly.

On my 17th birthday, my state of mind was made glaringly obvious when a well-meaning friend presented me with *The Art of Happiness*. I was slightly offended by her not-so-subtle hint; I hadn't realized that my inner unrest was so visible to others. The book didn't receive a positive response from me (shocking, I know). Sure, part of me wished to know the secret behind his near-constant positivity, and I knew I could benefit from dealing with life's shit more easily. Certainly the Dalai Lama's cheerful face on the cover was inviting, and the blurb on the back was enough to think the book could change my entire outlook on life. However,

the cynic in me was adamant that my moodiness was part of my charm; I shouldn't have to change my personality any more than my peers. After a half-assed attempt to open my mind, His Holiness's serene face soon found its way to a dark corner of my bookshelf, where his wise words have been gathering dust for the past decade. Every few years, I'll feel inspired and eagerly dig out the book, ready to confront my inner Debbie Downer and learn how to stay on the bright side, but I have yet to make it past the first chapter.

Does this mean I've spent the better part of my 20s skulking around like Eeyore, perpetually seeing the negative in every little thing, always expecting the worst? Well... mostly. I kept my head down and was determined to follow a path that society said would bring me happiness: university, a husband, ideas on a good career, a cute dog. None of these things seemed to strike a chord (except the dog!), and my negative mindset persisted. But there have been times, especially in recent years, when I've been able to find contentment all on my own. It's easy to attain as long as I have eight hours of sleep, a good meal in my stomach, \$2 for a coffee, comfortable shoes, and a warm, sunny day to spend exactly as I please – particularly with said dog. Is that so much to ask? OK, so there's more to happiness than having unlimited sunshine and coffee refills, even for me.

Contentment comes from a deeper place, perhaps hidden until you experience a personal eureka! moment and discover the source of your true inner peace. I presume that if you're reading this article you are a vegetarian of some degree, or at least an ally to the veggers of the world (if you're neither then you may continue to fester within, even after my rambles), and you're probably already happier by default. Adopting this lifestyle is a significant step toward personal happiness for several reasons. First, we can finally let go of the

hypocrisy and guilt that we carried around, no longer wracking our brains for justifications on using animal products. Second, we tend to eat more healthful, energizing foods that contribute to an overall feeling of awesomeness. Conscious eating also spreads joy to others, as when we seek ethical and organic foods. A local farmer's day is brightened when your hard-earned penny goes into their produce and not to the greedy paws of supermarkets, factory farmers, and international "food" corporations. Vegan or not, if you've experienced the atmosphere of a farmers' market you'll know how uplifted and

**Personally, I've always assumed the naysayers are simply envious and too frightened to make their own risky leap toward freedom.**

generous people are, even amidst the chaos of the 10 am rush. A sense of community takes hold, you find yourself smiling at friends and strangers alike, and you leave with a grin almost as big as the cinnamon bun you acquired. Nourishing your body, helping eliminate cruelty, supporting hard-working small farms—how can you *not* be happier as a herbivore?

Still, there is more to us than what we consume, even if animal activism is our strongest propeller in life. Certainly the veggie friends in my life have a wide range of interests and priorities, all of which add to the peace they've found through vegetarianism. Not surprisingly, the most common source of happiness they cited is simply music. And it's not just listening to our favourite bands, either; creative output is paramount. I have a friend who would do nearly anything to open for Bright Eyes, and in the past few months has found his voice—literally and figuratively—by giving himself over to music. Time spent writing his own songs has led him down a path

of self-discovery and bliss that he otherwise might have missed had he trudged along in the routine of school and work. Instead, he broke free of the things he felt were holding him back and is immersed in a musical world that is sure to reward him with inner peace. This change in his life goals and personality has jarred those around him, which seems to be common whenever someone breaks away from the norm. Personally, I've always assumed the naysayers are simply envious and too frightened to make their own risky leap toward freedom.

Several others in my life have found success after freeing themselves from the daily grind. Two of my best friends made the difficult decision to drop out of university, despite the pressure from teachers, family, and society in general that makes it almost impossible to avoid post-secondary these days—never mind abandoning it mid-degree! Lord forbid your tuition isn't refunded. One friend was so terrified of quitting that she wrote a lengthy email to everyone she thought would be affected by this, even my own parents (two of the most supportive people I know). In the few years since then, she has settled in a new city, found a job she is comfortable with, and secured a tight-knit group of friends that would never judge her for leaving a stressful BEd behind. She is undeniably happiest without the strain of education pulling her down. My other friend also has no regrets in dropping out—in fact, it probably saved her life. She was able to escape a dark period in her life, survived a few shitty jobs in the interim, and now holds a fabulous position at a great local business. Both of these lovely ladies still have a passion for educating themselves and possess enviable brains that will lead them far in life—with or without an expensive piece of paper to back that up.

Shunning society's ideals is surprisingly uplifting—and easy, when you get the hang of it. A great guy I know has spent most of his adult

life seeking his own path, with hardly a care for anyone's negative opinions on the matter. Instead of burdening himself with a career for the sake of it, he spends his time working toward personal enlightenment. This is an arduous task in itself, and he will experience his fair share of suffering along the way, but the contentment and stability he receives is entirely worthwhile. He doesn't blink at working back-breaking or mind-numbing jobs because he knows that the long-term outcome is worth any short-term pain. Through these jobs, he's been able to travel to amazing corners of the world, and has spent time with life-affirming people that most of us will never have the pleasure of meeting. He may always avoid Western society's expectations of him, and may encounter hoards of people that demand an explanation, but his mind is open and his heart is full. What 9-5 desk job can offer you all of that?

Some aspects of personal happiness still fall well within the "norm" of society. My good friend, for instance, is in pure domestic bliss when she plays hostess to friends and family. She is truly in her element when she gets to prepare a delectable meal. Reading cookbooks like a juicy novel, salivating over a new kitchen appliance, and serving up a nutritious dinner are all essential in her well-being. In contrast, another friend avoids cooking whenever possible and has situated herself in a city prime for take-away meals. Quite unlike my domestic pal, this friend finds serenity in her 120 lb Great Dane, who drags her about like a rag doll and takes up her entire bed. The pleasure my friend gets from spending time with her lap-dog-at-heart is incomparable to anything else in her life, and I don't doubt that she would be miserable without him, drool and all.

My own path to serenity remains under construction. Part of me feels proud for getting my nearly-useless BA, if only because it was a challenge I didn't back down from. Despite this, my

urge for learning in the classroom is becoming less and less enticing as I discover how much the real world has to offer. Lately, my personal happiness has come in the form of doing what I want to do, and being where I want to be, instead of fretting over the expectations of everyone around me. I still worry about my body, my bank account, my boyfriend—the usual—but these things no longer occupy my entire headspace. Nor do global issues send me into the depths of despair. Anytime I begin to feel overwhelmed from a bad hair day or the latest world tragedy, I take a breath and realize that things can always be worse, and that I'm just one little person doing the best I can. As for my personal happiness, I realize that I needn't follow society's expectations so closely. My objectives have changed drastically since I was 17, and I am more than happy to shun the pressure of a full-time job, the drudge of living to work, working to consume, consuming to seek fulfillment. My commitment to veganism has kept me strong, and my awareness on animal rights is always expanding. This spring I gave up my apartment, quit my job, renewed my passport, and began planning my departure across the country and down to South America—all in an effort to be truly, utterly content. I don't think I've had a bigger smile on my face since I was galloping around like a horse twenty years ago. As for His Holiness, well, I'm ready to see if his ideas have finally matched my own.

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Ashley Fineberg currently resides on Vancouver Island, soaking up its beauty, pursuing her degree in Education. After an adventurous journey hitchhiking across Canada, spending a few weeks hiking in Peru, and sleeping anywhere from a tent in the woods to a car on the beach, she has become content with smaller adventures in her West Coast back yard... for now.

## T.O.F.U. MAGAZINE

First published in 2007, after the success of two independent vegan cookbooks and a vegan dining guide to the city of Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada, T.O.F.U. Magazine was created to showcase the lives of vegans from around the world. Today, the magazine also sponsors veg-related events and touring musicians, offers a grant program to vegans doing incredible work, and has branched out to take a critical look at veganism and its intersection with other forms of oppression while still offering interviews, D.I.Y. pieces, and more.

You can find all the past issues, available digitally for whatever price you want to pay, at:

**[tofu.limitedrun.com](http://tofu.limitedrun.com)**

For more information about the magazine, including plans for future issues, please visit:

**[tofumagazine.com](http://tofumagazine.com)**



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