

T.O.F.U.

T.O.F.U. MAGAZINE

there is an alternative | issue 11 | June 2017



NotRipe

How selling veganism as a cure-all
leaves some feeling like dirt.

T.O.F.U.

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Totally and Obviously Fucked Up is a vegan magazine that focuses on intersectionality and the need for the vegan and animal rights community to address key issues within itself as well as outside. T.O.F.U. aims to spark conversations that will change the world for more than just the animals. For more information, please visit tofumagazine.com.

ABOUT THE COVER

As one of the more prominent food items within the health-centric vegan and plant-based community, the banana was the perfect subject for this cover. Along with allowing me to easily portray a frown, the banana itself also hides plenty of problems beneath its bright skin and personal health benefits. For more info on this, please visit: foodispower.org/bananas

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SPECIAL THANKS

Kudos to my [Patreon](https://patreon.com/tofumagazine) subscribers who went above and beyond the usual pledge level:

Dan Hanley | Don Nicholson | me&you. body.



FROM THE EDITOR

The original version of this piece involved talking about seeing the forest before the trees or whatever way that saying goes, and it was fitting in a way.

However, I now feel the better version would be one that relates to the fact that soon after I took this picture in the Highlands on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada, I ended up lost in the woods.

I spent what was probably at least 30 minutes or more trying to find my way back onto the barely existent path that I had followed to get to the clearing, and I was almost ready to simply walk in a straight line through brush, trees, and whatever until I found the road (my phone could at least give me the right direction for that) when I found the trail.

For those of you who have been following the development of this issue over the last year or so, you probably already see how this story applies, especially if you stuck it out with me over the first 3-4 months of this year when I just couldn't find a way to move forward with the magazine. Quite simply, I was lost.

Luckily, just like that time in the woods, I did eventually find my way back to wanting to work on the issue, and now here we are today with a finished product. Hopefully, you're as excited as I am to finally have T.O.F.U. #11 out into the wild.

Now, who's ready to see what's around the next corner for the magazine?

Ryan Ratz

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Content Warning: articles within this issue contain references to restrictive or disordered eating, violence against animals, and suicidal thoughts/actions.



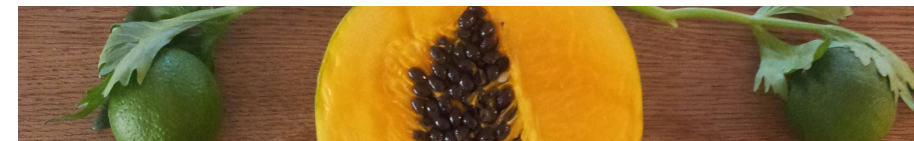
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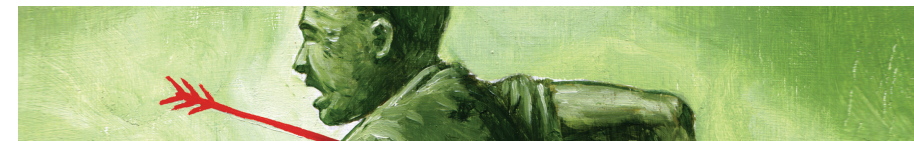
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THE VEGAN PRESCRIPTION

RESULTS MAY VARY

Words by Amanda SVS Lily | Illustration by Matt Gauck

With the rise in popularity of the term “plant-based”, it is becoming more evident than ever that the word “vegan”¹ is not just about what a person eats. Someone can follow a plant-based diet, and not value the same principles that another person who identifies as a vegan does. Being vegan is not a diet. Veganism is about lifestyle choices. For vegans, our daily decision making is about more than what is on our plates. Thus, the actual mental and physical health of each person who identifies as a vegan, as well as our diet, can vary greatly.

Similar to many of you, although I am a vegan, I am not a superhero. Depending on which side of the ever-popular, yet painfully superficial argument many vegans are presented with by people who are not vegan, I am likely to be considered one of two things: (a) I am vegan and thus must never get sick. I can walk through walls and shoot laser beams out of my eyes when someone argues with me or threatens

to put dairy milk in my tea. Or, conversely: (b) Since I am vegan, I am most certainly deficient in something (likely protein), and my bones would break in an instant should I accept an invitation to arm wrestle a baby. Not to mention my terribly righteous and pushy attitude. Both of these stereotypes of vegans, as is the case with all stereotypes, are distorted. They rely heavily on generalizations about a spectrum of people who are incredibly diverse.

Unfortunately, many of those promoting veganism also use exaggerations and generalizations. In their case, the argument presented is often that someone who is vegan is healthy beyond a doubt. If they are not experiencing high levels of health, or looking a certain way, it is because they ate something wrong or slipped up in some way. Due to the appeal of this promise, we often see people who promote veganism this way treated as gurus or health experts, whether they have expertise in the

field or not, and regardless of who they put down to push their message. Thanks to this popular narrow view, the diversity of the vegan population, including the array of health problems experienced before or after becoming vegan, is rarely addressed.

If the Problem Persists...

Outside of diet, which can be complicated enough, there are many other factors that also contribute to the state of one's health. On a personal level, things such as genetics can play a crucial role in determining one's physical state. Along with this, life in our modern world can be hectic and overwhelming. Not everyone spends their days studying nutrition, fitness, and other health factors. Even those that do may lack the required knowledge to critically analyze the things they read, which can have drastic consequences. Not everyone can control their environment, whether that's at work, home, or when being social. On a larger scale, many people are responsible for meeting the needs of others and have little time for themselves. Not to mention the various systemic issues that can negatively affect a person's environment and access to quality food and other resources. Thus, socially marginalized and underprivileged populations are more likely to experience additional obstacles in accessing what they need to be healthy. In addition to these more immediate factors, any two people may have also had very different lifestyles prior to becoming vegan and thus have varying factors affecting their present state of health. Despite all of these differences, they can still fit the general description of being vegan.

Overall, it is incredibly ignorant to expect that any person, vegan or not, can go through life without any health problems. Not only that, the severity of these health problems can vary greatly, and can be physical or mental. Health problems happen. The way they are identified and dealt with determines what happens next.

Diagnosis: Vegan

From my personal experience, I have noticed that people who are vegan tend to question their diet as the probable cause of any health problems, despite the fact that the same may be experienced by someone who is omnivorous. Additionally, people who eat omnivorous diets will perpetuate this way of thinking, due, at least partly, to the cultural entrenchment of their diet whereby their questions and judgments seem to stem from a lack of knowledge in nutrition and health sciences. Luckily, some things can be done to provide peace of mind -a state that can be hard to achieve with the pervasive questioning and judgment by the individual and those around them. Regular blood analysis and personal health analysis would be examples of such activities.

For those who adopt veganism, hoping it will act as a cure-all, being unaware of the health problems that people who are vegan can experience means they could wind up disappointed. Similar to using sex to promote veganism, those who do not see the health results they are promised may choose to stop being vegan. These people may even become very vocal against it, and we all know the media loves a good "ex-vegan gets sick" story.

As a community, acknowledging the fact that vegans can be sick or become sick can also help those who are currently facing health problems. Openly talking about the issues, and being supportive of those who do discuss such things, can go a long way in terms of improving a person's well-being, as well as creating a more inclusive movement that can only grow stronger as we discover how to help each other.

Take With Food and a Clear Conscience

Going vegan is not a medical prescription. It is a choice made for philosophical reasons. For me, becoming vegan and adopting a plant-based diet,

among other factors, worked to improve my health. However, I am aware that becoming vegan may not produce the same results for everyone.

Sure, by becoming a vegan you may experience many improvements in your health. If, however, you do experience any health problems as a vegan, does that mean you failed as a vegan? No. Again, veganism is a choice based on ethics. There is no way a personal health problem can be because someone "wasn't vegan enough", just as many health problems are not simply "because they were vegan". The truth is that health problems are a normal occurrence whether you are vegan or not. Other factors must be considered when attempting to keep in good health including stress, genes, chosen food intake, mental health, and more. None of these factors are addressed directly by veganism, and this is one of the many reasons why you should talk with a medical professional (not a website or popular blogger), if you are experiencing any health issues.

The sooner we learn to accept that veganism is not a perfect solution, the sooner we can create a stronger community through inclusion and open discussion. Throughout this issue, numerous people have offered their voices to be a part of that conversation, and I hope you'll learn something from their stories. Regardless of why we're all vegan, embracing our differences and acknowledging our struggles is a win-win for both ourselves and the animals.

Footnotes

1. According to The Vegan Society, veganism is defined as "A philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude -as far as is possible and practicable - all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit to humans, animals and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals."

Amanda Lily is a vegan Health Coach and Personal Trainer that offers coaching to those who want to adopt a kinder diet, but struggle with the logistical and social challenges of fitting it into their daily lives. Through workshops and virtual coaching with one-on-one and group sessions, she helps people all over North America find a way to bring their choices more in-line with their values.

w: amandalily.com



FROM SILENT TO STENTORIAN

A JOURNEY OF FATIGUE, PAIN, AND PASSION

Words by Nichole Dinato | Illustration by Núria Vall

I have always been a sickly person; my dad used to say he thought I was born with “fired blood.” He suffered from severe allergies and depression my whole life. Unfortunately, I inherited his sensitivities and spent most of my childhood baffled at the seemingly endless energy of other kids.

Despite this, I was a smart kid, ambitious and high-achieving, full of empathy for others with a burning fire to dismantle any injustice in my path. Due to this drive and passion, my mom believed that I would change the world. Her faith haunted me my whole life: I was supposed to be changing the world when, most days, I was caught up trying to survive it.

Finding Veganism, Losing Myself

My journey into veganism started like that of so many others: I was looking for a way to lose weight and to become healthy. I suffered from restrictive

eating and over-exercise tendencies for years, with periods of overeating. I was exhausted by the struggle, and wanted a way to eat that removed the need to count calories. Enter my discovery of veganism.

Over the years, I was able to finally internalize the cruel truths of our food system and became an ethical vegan. However, veganism failed me as a magical weight-loss solution and path to perfect health; I found myself getting more sick, and putting on weight. If the ethics hadn’t gripped me, I may have become just another ex-vegan floating in a sea of disillusioned dieters.

Instead, my ethical veganism has brought me the most intense sense of purpose I could possibly imagine. I found a community. I found the concept of intersectionality. I found my calling in life: I started the *Vegan Warrior Princesses Attack* podcast with my friend Callie. I finally found a way to make a difference.

And yet, my health continued to decline until it got to the point where I could barely function. I was exhausted all the time, but was unable to sleep; I woke up every morning thinking “I can’t do this anymore” and then somehow dragged myself through another day of work. My apartment became filthy; showering was an insurmountable chore. I was gripped by panic and depression at all times. I had no family, no spouse, no back-up plan. I spent the first few moments of every day after my alarm went off thinking, “I can’t” and then, “I must.”

I had a word to use with my friends and my work, but my situation was as nebulous and vague to them as when I didn’t. I was drowning.

On top of this, Callie and I were working hard to grow the show. Taping episodes, running our website, and interacting with our listeners was a great joy, but also another source of pressure and panic. There have been endless social events to attend, networking opportunities, fundraisers, educational events, all of which drained my already depleted energy. Every new commitment sent me into a dark place. I was spiralling.

I became mired in hopelessness and was thinking about giving up a lot. I didn’t feel like I could talk to anyone about this; how could anyone understand I was thinking about hurting myself when they couldn’t understand what I was experiencing?

I got bloodwork done and everything came back “great.” Though I registered low on protein and cholesterol, every vegan’s worst nightmare, my doctor’s office told me that I was the picture of health. I finally was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, but that didn’t help anything. People don’t understand what fibromyalgia is and chronic conditions like fibro are very difficult to explain to others. I had a

word to use with my friends and my work, but my situation was as nebulous and vague to them as when I didn’t. I was drowning.

Working to Heal

I am happy to say that through a series of fortunate events around my health insurance and some incentives at work to switch plans, I am now able to work with a naturopathic doctor and am slowly getting better. I’ve realized that my digestive system was badly damaged from my eating disorders and long periods of stress. I also realized I have adrenal fatigue, which is a common sister condition to fibromyalgia, so I’m working to rest and heal my body. Being gentle on myself was never easy, and this healing process has already been extremely humbling.

One of the things I’ve done in my healing journey is give up gluten, along with faux meats, highly processed foods, large amounts of raw foods, anything that is difficult to digest. My digestion is weak, and these foods cause me a noticeable amount of distress.

Fury from the Community

I never would have imagined the vitriol that I would get from other vegans for being gluten-free. Every day I see people fervently sharing articles about how no one needs to give up gluten unless they’re Celiac, that they are ruining it for the rest of us, or just being annoying. I have been made fun of by proxy constantly, just for doing something that is good for my body. There is an irrational and confusing amount of hatred in the community for those who are gluten-free. We get accused of promoting bad science, or making vegans look high-maintenance. Those of us that are not Celiac are told that we’re fakes, that we’re misinformed or even stupid. Why it’s so infuriating to others that we simply cut out something that makes us feel bad, I



So now I speak out. I speak out about being a sick vegan who struggles with chronic health issues, mental illness, and disordered eating.

will never understand. I don't face the same ire over not eating meat analogs. Though I'm not Celiac, gluten has a very strong impact on my well-being and I avoid it at all costs.

I also feel judged and isolated from the raw vegan community, who promote raw foods as the cure to all ills. Raw food is more difficult for your body to process. While I have no doubt that raw foods are very good for us, I can't eat raw foods in more than small amounts right now without experiencing distress. My body can't break them down properly, so I don't absorb the nutrients. Gentle, warm, cooked foods are best for me as I heal, but I have a hard time communicating this to raw foodists who look at me, exhausted and out-of-shape, and assume I don't know what I'm talking about.

Knowing My Limits

Becoming someone who is not able-bodied greatly changed my perspective on marketing veganism "by any means" in order to attract the largest number of people. Seeing the community rely so heavily on selling veganism as a weight-loss miracle, a magical cure-all, and a way to be fit, fast, and strong has been incredibly alienating for me. I am not fit, thin, or healthy. My ability to love my broken, tired body is a moment-to-moment struggle. Knowing that I am living disproof to the power of veganism over all that ails us leaves me feeling invisible, disgusting, and unwanted.

I used to be strong, and I used to be thin. Not having control over my own body has cut me off at the knees. It has broken me in ways that I didn't think I could survive. I have days where I have to lay down for two or three hours after work in order to be able to cook myself dinner, with no energy leftover for cleaning the dishes. I can't lift, run, or diet. I do short, gentle workouts when I can, and practice telling myself, "it's OK." I

started a compassion journal to recognize teeny-tiny accomplishments that for me, are miracles. "Cooked healthful dinner AND did dishes today!" "Did two 10 minute yoga videos!" "Finished show notes AND scheduled social media posts for the week!" "Spent the whole day resting because I needed to and didn't feel guilty about it!" These baby steps keep me tethered to hope for a healed body and remind me to care for myself as I would for a loved one.

Speaking Out

As my veganism was evolving, I badly wanted to be a voice in the vegan movement, a leader, but knowing that I was a vegan who didn't look the part kept me quiet for so long. I was afraid that I would be judged, that my opinions would be nullified by my physical appearance and my struggle.

Once I started the podcast with Callie, everything changed. I discovered intersectionality and inclusiveness. I was always aggressively liberal, believing in equal rights, free healthcare, love for all; but learning about all the subtle ways people can be oppressed, how those oppressions intersect, learning about oppressions I wasn't even aware of, being exposed to people who do this work, my world truly opened up. I learned about the body positivity movement, and the term "ableism". It took me almost a year to realize that ableism was something that impacted my life, to realize that I am not able-bodied.

As much as I felt alienated from the wider vegan community, I found a home and a language of acceptance in this smaller group of vegans who are aware and fighting for change. I found my voice, and I use it now to educate others on these issues. I'm learning all the time and the more my knowledge grows, the more I realize I have yet to learn.

So now I speak out. I speak out about being a sick vegan who struggles with chronic health

issues, mental illness, and disordered eating. I try to bring awareness to those who market veganism through physical avenues that they are isolating and hurting a large portion of the community (a VERY unpopular opinion, sadly).

The more I speak out, the more I find people who understand me, who accept me, who are fighting for and have been fighting for the same changes in our community. I find people who educate me on the issues further, who lead me to others who are pioneers and leaders in these areas so I can continuously educate myself and improve my advocacy, and use our platform to give others who are often ignored or marginalized a place to speak out and be heard.

The more I speak out, the more I observe the on-going problems with racism, classism, body-shaming, and cissexism that are rampant in our movement. As painful and discouraging as it is, I am glad for this experience. I am glad that I can no longer be ignorant, that I can no longer kid myself that these things aren't happening.

Even though I have seen so much ugliness, and will only see more as the show grows, I have also seen a lot of emotional strength, compassion, and beauty. I have hope that we are moving towards a mainstream movement that is less hateful and privileged, to one that provides a safe accepting space for vegans of all abilities, colours, genders, classes, and more.

A Call to Action

It's up to us, each and every one of us, to think about the content we are putting out in the world, think about how we comment on other vegans' posts, how we react to the stories we are being told. It's up to us to replace the knee-jerk reactions and the rage with empathy and compassion. We can change this movement in order to then change the world. We just have to put down our privilege, our walls, and our preconceived notions, and be kind to one another.

Nichole Dinato, with her dear friend Callie Coker, runs and hosts *Vegan Warrior Princesses Attack!*, a philosophical podcast that digs into tough vegan topics with grit and loads of humour. They also publish a vegan advice column, and a series called *I Am A Vegan* that gives vegans from all walks of life a platform to tell their stories from their own unique viewpoint.

w: veganwarriorprincessesattack.com



I remember the first time it happened to me. I was sixteen, working in my family's small town diner over the summer. Being the lone vegan in the kitchen, I held myself accountable for mostly desserts and home fries, the two most essential food groups, clearly. As I rolled out a dozen pie crusts, completely engrossed in whatever pop punk song blared into my headphones at the time, I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder, Margaret, the breakfast cook. Her expression was grave, "Sarah, my son is refusing to eat meat. I'm so worried he'll turn into a twig. What do you eat that you still stay so large on your vegan diet?"

I paused a moment, stunned at her blunt commentary on my body type. An ethical vegan most influenced by some cool bands and a few documentaries, it never really occurred to me that someone would consider veganism a *diet*. It was a lifestyle choice to me, really. *Wait, are vegans*

notoriously thin? Is that a thing? Should I place concern on my size? Despite being one of the only vegans I knew, I suddenly felt like a fat, radical exception to a stereotype.

I can't remember how I answered Margaret's question that day, truth be told. What I do recall, is the awkward silence that followed as my face burned, flustered, the deep fryer sizzling distantly. I recall the shame I carried as I rode home on my bike that afternoon, suddenly hyper aware of my body, its size. *Am I a blatant contradiction to vegans everywhere?*

I wish this little blip in time only lingered in my memory because it's the only instance I've felt shamed for my body and diet while living a vegan lifestyle. However, the more the vegan movement gains popularity in my neck of the woods, the more I find myself in this situation. Of course, not everyone gives up animal products for the same cause. For

this reason, veganism often finds itself marketed as more of a "diet" than a lifestyle. My heart does grow with the notion of less animals consumed overall, despite peoples' choice in doing so. However, judging one another for these choices can also divide veganism as a movement, if we're not careful.

Before quitting the 9-5 grind to sling vegan cupcakes, an employer got pretty stoked to hear about my lifestyle too; she was giving plant-eating life a go as well. She was so stoked, in fact, that she had to share her copy of the most "life-changing" book she had ever read, *Skinny Bitch*. I had an idea of what the contents would be, but accepted the book out of polite obligation, and excitement to bond over our shared veganism. I opened it up to the introduction, "Are you sick and tired of being fat? Good. If you can't take one more day of self-loathing, you're ready to get skinny." (Barnouin, Freedman, page 10). This was literally the very first line of the book. *Are you fat? Do you hate yourself? Good.* The first chapter alone hurdles so many triggering, food-shaming one liners at the reader, I had to put it down. I also had to bring "hey you're fabulous" cookies to work the next day, when I returned it to its lender. It was either that, or spiteful pizza grease stains.

I don't fault that person for lending me *Skinny Bitch*, at all. She was trying to find common ground, and this unfortunate title was the first thing she associated with veganism. Now, I work for myself, as a vegan baker. None of my coworkers want to lend me diet books, partially due to the fact that I

work all alone, so that might get weird. I've collected all sorts of vegan friends and acquaintances in the city who love cupcakes and are not sorry about it. I love the idea of exerting activism through treats. Everyday, I have the opportunity to try and prove that a vegan lifestyle does not require compromising taste, comfort, or the strong nostalgic ties we associate with our favourite food. All of that can be enjoyed vegan. I also love having the ability to interact with other businesses locally and globally, who are also on a mission to provide vegans (and also non-vegans) with cruelty-free options. I like referring to this commonality that groups this little community together as a "vegan umbrella." Sometimes though, I still find myself standing next to someone underneath that umbrella who perceives veganism differently.

Fast forwarding a decade from the aforementioned *Margaret Incident of 2005*. I'm hanging out at a farmer's market, slinging some handmade pizza rolls and top notch cupcakes, feeling just aces. A fellow vegan vendor lingers, reads my ingredients, and comments that I could be thinner if I stopped baking with oil and wheat products, "After all, you're already vegan. Otherwise, what's the point?" There are customers around me, uncomfortably clenching boxes of treats. Only weeks before, we had bonded over being vegan in a market full of free range eggs and freezers full of assorted animal parts. However, this draws a clear line between our values. My face burns, not unlike the *Margaret Incident of 2005*. This time though, I'm not frozen, "The point is, I care about animals and not really carbs, if you could spare us all the food-shaming." While obviously not impressed with her triggering, body-shaming language, I'm more upset that as two vegan folks who previously stuck together, this divided us.

My heart breaks every time I hear someone "joke" about how many kilometres (that's MILES, for

you folks in the States) they'd have to run to enjoy a cupcake, because I think they deserve both. Vegan friendly businesses, publications, bloggers, continue to pop up, associating words with the vegan diet vernacular such as "cleanse," "no regrets," "detox," and "guilt free," implying to us that some food should be regretted. This language encourages us to scrutinize our habits, and not in a way that is comfortable, healthy, or manageable for everyone. What if this language were shifted to explore what our food can be, as opposed to what it shouldn't be? Could negative reinforcement be replaced with language that makes their offerings shine to a certain target market, without shaming the rest of us? What does that look like? Should I stop asking rhetorical questions? Probably. Did I just spill broccoli soup on my lap whilst typing because I got distracted trying to find more bread? Yes, yes I did.

I don't know if I believe that we can just tune out all of this noise on demand. I have been absorbing this dialogue from both inside and outside my vegan bubble since the *Margaret Incident of 2005*, and it's very likely to continue. It shapes my self perception in strange and interesting ways. Most days, I wake up stoked that my job is to make people awesome vegan food, promoting a kinder lifestyle. Other days though, the weight of this discussion is a bit too much, and I'm convinced I need to stop

what I'm doing and find out what *spirulina* is. There's nothing wrong with either adaptation of veganism, but those latter thoughts are distracting, and I know they make me a weaker activist, some days. It's doubtful that there will ever be a moment where we all pile in under this strangely large vegan umbrella for the same reason, but collectively, our actions are reducing animal consumption as a whole, and that is so important. Let's just try to exercise compassion, acknowledging that we are all trying to be our best selves, and the best advocates for the shit we care about. Let's maybe try not to leave anyone out from under this metaphorical umbrella, because there's room for everyone. Also, if anyone knows where to find a literal umbrella that big, please hit me up. It's been a real rainy spring.

Sarah Louise is a vegan bake-tivist & blogger, hailing from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She can most often be found in her kitchen creating cakes & naming them after cringe-worthy puns whilst listening to pop punk, frantically meeting some sort of writing deadline (*cough*), or watching *The X-Files*! You can find her lurking about the Internet at

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DOING THE LEAST HARM

Words and Photo by Keira Edwards Huolohan

“Has anyone here tried a vegan diet to help with their endometriosis pain?”

The question stared at me from the screen. It was not the first time that I had seen it posted in one of the endometriosis groups that I was a part of.

“I’ve been vegan for six years,” I replied, “I was only diagnosed with endometriosis a year ago, when the pain started getting worse.”

I wonder if I should be encouraging them to go vegan anyway; should I be lying to promote veganism?

No, I tell myself quickly, lying is never the right way to promote a cause. Others chime in, saying that they were already vegan before their diagnosis, while a few say that cutting out dairy and meat helped them manage their pain.

Just the Facts

There is some evidence that a vegetarian diet can reduce pain associated with dysmenorrhea (painful

periods)¹, but there is no clear evidence that it will help with endometriosis² – in fact, fish oil is one of the more highly recommended food supplements². Even though there is some evidence to support that vegetarian diets help dysmenorrhea, I feel that pushing a vegan diet on people who are vulnerable is wrong. I’ve been dealing with chronic pelvic pain for nearly a year and a half. It makes you desperate to try just about anything and to exploit that for a vegan agenda is, I feel, reprehensible.

For the last 16 months, since my surgery in January 2015, the longest I’ve been what I consider “pain free” has been eight days. Even then, I still had some mild pain when I went to the bathroom or tightened my abdominal muscles. Due to this near constant pain, I have been struggling with depression and suicidal ideation because I feel like I will never be free of this pain. I’ve tried all sorts of painkillers, usually with no relief. The surgery in January was meant to be the

magic bullet, and it did not work. If someone offered me another magic bullet, I would probably leap at it, no matter the cost to myself. Simply put, I am so sick of the pain that I would consider anything to make it stop. Even writing this now, I feel close to crying. For people to say that veganism will ‘cure’ endometriosis (when this is not true) takes advantage of this emotionally fragile state and I truly think that is wrong.

I feel that this ‘wrongness’ is amplified in the endometriosis community, due to the fact that it’s mainly comprised of women. Women who have been told from a young age that food and diet are ways to control their lives in positive ways; weight, attractiveness, etc. Women who are especially at risk of negative behaviours towards food restriction. This worries me doubly because vegan groups are usually very fat-phobic. Many people with endometriosis have fluctuating weights due to a whole plethora of reasons; bad diets due to low energy, being unable to exercise due to pain, hormonal imbalances, drug side effects, and more.

Seeing as I am already vegan, and was vegan when I was diagnosed with endometriosis, I find the suggestion that veganism will ‘cure’ endometriosis funny. It also partially makes me feel like it’s my fault and that I’m doing something wrong because I’m already vegan and I’m still in pain. As though I didn’t worship at the Church of Veganism regularly enough to be granted the magical powers that others seem to have. Not receiving these magic powers could cause someone to question their faith in veganism.

My GP (general practitioner/doctor) has never questioned my vegan diet, trusting me to know what I’m doing (and I imagine the blood test results helped to convince them). The doctor at the hospital where I had my surgery, however, believed that my increased pain after surgery was due to my vegan diet (even though there is some evidence that high vegetable diets can have some small chance of not only alleviating dysmenorrhea but also preventing

endometriosis³). Without any analysis of my blood, he came to this conclusion based purely on the fact that I said I have bowel movements 3-4 times per day. When he suggested this, I was at a pretty low point. It had been about six months after my surgery; I had expected it to help me, but everything was worse. I never spoke to him again. I almost reported him. I decided to go through a private specialist instead. It’s been more expensive, but worth it. He’s never once questioned my veganism or tried to blame it for my pain. He has instead tried to gather evidence.

While I have been lucky in that my GP and new specialist have not been critical of my vegan diet, I can imagine that a person who was desperate and had critical doctors (and trusted those doctors) might not stick to a vegan diet. I would not blame them either – I know the utter desperation to control anything you can to make things better. And the utter hopelessness when nothing works.

We’re Not Perfect

After my surgery, I was emotionally and physically exhausted. I was not eating well (e.g. baked beans on toast, faux meats with BBQ sauce, hot chips, skipping meals sometimes). Since everyone seems to assume vegan diets are filled with healthy foods, no one ever seemed to notice or question that this was happening (not that I feel it is their duty to do so). I was almost pushed over into very restricted eating in part because a friend got hospitalized due to their low weight. I imagine it would have been easier to be non-vegan and healthy during that time, thanks to all the readily available meals out there (e.g., frozen meals, takeaway). I don’t think that I will ever stop being vegan, even if it gets hard like that again, but I could understand if someone did. Occasionally, I wonder if my loyalty to veganism sometimes comes at the cost of my own self worth/health. At what point do we have to consider our own well-being in a world that is pitted against vegans? Can someone

really be blamed for being unable to access vegan food for emotional/physical reasons, when it is the non-vegan society that causes this problem?

The vegan community can be very unwelcoming to those with chronic illness. Vegans and vegan movements tend to prop up images of idealized ‘health’ (i.e. skinny, not sick, not disabled) and ideas of healthy eating that exclude those with chronic illnesses. Some of the diets that are promoted also exclude those with chronic illnesses (e.g. raw, organic), especially those of us with chronic illnesses that are/have been living in poverty. Many vegans are also vehemently anti-medicine, believing that animals are tortured for every bit of medicine and, therefore, that humans should suffer (and in some cases die) instead of receiving medications.

A memory of mine that probably highlights this the most is when a vegan in a Facebook group said that they had cancer. People immediately started to question whether that person was really vegan, as of course (sarcasm) a vegan diet would have magically protected them from cancer. Others questioned whether or not that person had actually gotten cancer – were they just faking it for attention? Didn’t they know that vegan food had mystical powers that prevented cancer?

It is for this and many other reasons that I began distancing myself from the vegan community years ago. It was only in the last couple of years that I began to find smaller groups that were interested in an intersectional approach to veganism, and that used evidence and science for a lot of their claims. These groups often cared about the people, and understood that not everyone had the capacity to be vegan all the time.

Endometriosis groups, on the other hand, don’t really care what you eat. People in these groups seem to think that it’s your body, so it’s up to you what you put in it. They will recommend things that have worked for them, or things that have been advertised by others, but

that’s about it. I’ve never had anyone get into debates about ethics or nutrition, but then again I’ve been in the endometriosis groups for 1/6th of the time I’ve been vegan. Maybe I’ve yet to see things get nasty.

I believe that vegan communities have a lot more work to do before they are open to everyone. Veganism, to me, has always been about doing the least harm possible, about nurturing, care, and compassion. This is why I will not advocate veganism to desperate people (but will give advice when asked). This is why I will not yell at or judge people who cannot currently maintain being vegan. I will instead help where I can, advocate for more accessible food and nutrition knowledge, equality, better treatment of those with chronic illnesses, etc. All of these contribute to a more vegan world – veganism isn’t just about individual diets, it’s about achieving a more equitable world. That, for me, involves looking after disabled and chronically ill people and welcoming and helping them where we can.

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A note on my personal journey: I’ve had less pain since April 2016. I’ve been told I need more surgery to remove some endometriosis but for now I’m focusing on living my life. I’m part way through my Masters, and I’ve moved back to full time work. If you want to get in contact, please feel free to write to me.

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Words and Photos by Caitlin Galer-Unti | Illustrations by Michelle Lee

Five years ago, I first set foot in Barcelona. It was a charming Mediterranean city with winding cobblestoned alleyways lined with shops selling Spanish ham and seafood paella restaurants - and very few vegan options. I fed myself by way of a lot of pasta prepared in my hostel, plus some falafel I was thrilled to find in the old part of town one day. Four years later, when I moved here, I found a city transformed: still a sunny, beautiful place filled with Gothic architecture, but now more vegan-friendly than ever. Bullfighting was banned in the region in 2011, and, in 2016, the city declared itself “#VegFriendly” and City Hall began promoting Meat Free Mondays, plus it started work on an information point for vegetarian and vegan visitors to the city.

Barcelona’s history of veganism is complex. In the 1920s, Barcelona doctors Capo and Fernandez treated illnesses with a vegetarian diet (“Storm Across the Atlantic,” *Vegetarian Times*, March 1994). In the 20s and 30s, prior to the Spanish Civil War, vegetarianism and the anarchist and feminist movements were often intertwined, and grew rapidly at this time. However, following the Civil War, under the oppressive regime of dictator Francisco Franco, who ruled Spain from 1939 to

1975, vegetarianism was discouraged - as was any form of being “different”. Franco brutally repressed anyone who seemed outside the norm. Under his rule, while some Spaniards remained vegetarian at home, it was with difficulty, and it was hard to find vegetarian food in public. Only after Franco’s death in 1975 were vegetarian restaurants opened or reopened, and Spanish doctors began to discuss the health benefits of avoiding meat once again (“Storm Across the Atlantic,” *Vegetarian Times*, March 1994).

According to the *Vegetarian Times* article, Spanish vegetarians at the time numbered as low as in the hundreds. Now, estimates show there are between 1.5 and 2 million vegetarians in Spain. Life in Barcelona, the capital of Catalunya (the first and so far only region in Spain to ban bullfighting), is increasingly vegan-friendly. Come to Barcelona, and you’ll likely fall in love with the swirling tile designs lining the buildings and streets, the laidback life, the proximity to the beach, and the constant sunshine. But you’ll stick around for the ease of finding vegan food and friends. Read on for some of Barcelona’s best vegan and vegan-friendly places.



Teresa Carles

Teresa, the eponymous chef of the restaurant, grew interested in vegetarianism in the 70s, travelled the US and Europe in 1977 to learn about vegetarian cuisine, and returned home to found her first vegetarian restaurant, Paradis of Lleida, in 1979 in Lleida, Catalunya. In 2011, she and her family opened Teresa Carles, a vegetarian restaurant in Barcelona. Teresa Carles is the place to go if you want an enjoyable dining experience in a beautiful setting in Barcelona - think exposed brickwork, clean lines, and dark wood. The menu changes seasonally with some favourites remaining; try Teresa's kale salad made with organic kale, cherry tomatoes, avocado, nori seaweed, and lime dressing, or homemade whole grain lasagna layered with cashew cheese, masala chai spiced pumpkin, sundried tomato sauce, spinach, and pine nuts and mushrooms.

Carrer de Jovellanos, 2, 08001 Barcelona, Spain

w: teresacarles.com



Petit Brot

On the healthy end of the spectrum, if you are looking for a raw vegan place in Barcelona, Petit Brot in trendy Raval is a great choice. This small raw juicery opened in late 2015 and in addition to offering a big menu of freshly prepared, made-to-order juices and smoothies, they also offer a daily raw lunch dish, raw desserts, cheeses, and house-made kale chips. The duo behind Petit Brot opened it to showcase healthy eating and inspire others to do the same, and you can feel the care put into each dish and drink. All wide open space and minimalist furniture, with a big communal table in the centre and plants growing next to the windows (they grow most of their own sprouts), Petit Brot is a beautiful place to eat.

Carrer del Dr. Dou, 10, 08001 Barcelona, Spain

w: petitbrot.es





Sesamo

You might pass by the small, unassuming entrance to Sesamo on a side street near Sant Antoni without ever realising that inside lies a gin bar and one of Barcelona's most popular vegetarian restaurants. Sesamo is one of the few vegetarian restaurants in Barcelona to offer tapas, and you can get a €25 (per person) chef's tasting menu with 7 tapas plus a drink. Dishes vary from the traditional (bread with tomato) to tapas with a twist (smoked watermelon gazpacho or padron peppers with chilli and lime).

Carrer de Sant Antoni Abat, 52, 08001 Barcelona, Spain

Green Spot

Green Spot is testament to the growing popularity of veg food in Catalunya, as the first vegetarian restaurant opened by parent restaurant company En Compañia de Lobos. The menu spans a wide range of different cuisines, from lettuce-encased san boy chao tofu and mushroom parcels with Korean dipping sauce to homemade Thai-style curry with black rice to activated carbon pizza with wok-fried vegetables and peanuts.

Carrer de la Reina Cristina, 12, 08003 Barcelona, Spain

w: encompaniadelobos.com/green-spot

Dolce Pizza y los Veganos

Dolce Pizza, an all-vegetarian pizzeria, has two locations, one in the Gracia neighborhood and the other near the Sagrada Familia. Dolce offers pasta and rice dishes (most of which are vegan). Half of Dolce's pizzas are completely vegan, with homemade vegan cheeses made from carrot or tofu. Try the pesto pizza topped with homemade vegan mozzarella and spicy vegan chorizo. For dessert, try the vegan tiramisu.

Sagrada Familia branch: Av. de Gaudí, 74, 08025 Barcelona, Spain

Gracia branch: Carrer Hipólito Lázaro, 34, 08870 Barcelona, Spain

w: dolcepizzaylosveganos.com

CatBar

One of Barcelona's oldest vegan establishments, CatBar is a British-owned beer bar. In addition to a wide range of beers on tap and craft beers by the bottle, CatBar do a range of all-vegan burgers, plus a wheat-free dish of the day. CatBar is also home to the monthly Vegan Drinks, where you can meet local vegans and vegans passing through the city (the meetup is run in English, Spanish and Catalan).

Carrer de la Bòria, 17, 08003 Barcelona, Spain

fb: facebook.com/CatBarCAT



Vegesana

Barcelona's sole vegetarian Chinese restaurant, VeGESana, is seldom talked about, which is a shame as their berenjena salteada (Yuxiang-style eggplant) is possibly the best I've ever had. Crispy on the outside, soft on the inside, and topped with a delicious sweet-sour sauce, the eggplant (as with all their dishes) comes with a carved carrot animal. The chef is a big fan of carving carrots, and makes elaborate birds and fish out of them.

Carrer d'Aribau, 14, 08011 Barcelona, Spain

w: vegesanabcn.com



Vacka

Vacka, a healthy vegan (and partly raw) cafe, is in the popular area of Gracia. Everything's made from scratch here and Vacka do a great lunch deal. For just under €10, you can get a burger or a raw plate, a dessert, water, and a tea or coffee. While the cafe may look small when you first enter, there's extra seating around the corner in the back, so don't be put off by the limited seating in the front.

Carrer de Sèneca, 4, 08006 Barcelona, Spain





| Pedestrians stroll along the Rambla de Catalunya.



Vegetart

One of Barcelona's best-kept secrets, this little takeaway deli is tucked into a tiny space off a street in the bohemian area of Gracia. Vegetart serves the best vegan Spanish omelette or "tortilla" in the city. Tortilla is traditionally made by frying potatoes and onions, then mixing in eggs and frying again to make a giant potato omelette that's then cut into slices. At Vegetart, they make their vegan version with chickpea flour.

In addition to selling slices of Spanish omelette, Vegetart sell a variety of salads, pasta, sandwiches, cookies, and cakes, with the selection changing daily. Most dishes are extremely inexpensive, ranging from €1.50 to €4. The shop doesn't have any seating so you're best off getting some food and taking it to a nearby square, such as Placa del Sol, to eat in the sun.

Carrer del Torrent de l'Olla, 138, 08012 Barcelona, Spain

fb: [facebook.com/VegetartCuinaVegana](https://www.facebook.com/VegetartCuinaVegana)



Knella

Barcelona's dotted with little bakeries - you can hardly walk down a street without seeing several. The whole city seems bread-obsessed, and it's typical for people to eat nothing but a coffee and a cheese or ham croissant for breakfast. Luckily, Barcelona also has a few vegan-friendly bakeries, like Knella, which makes vegan croissants. If you too have gone years without the buttery, flaky goodness of a croissant in your mouth, you need to visit. Try the chocolate-stuffed croissant or the spelt croissant. You won't regret it.

Carrer de Milà i Fontanals, 9, 08012 Barcelona, Spain

fb: [facebook.com/knella.es](https://www.facebook.com/knella.es)



Honourable Mentions

- Healthy shopping at The Living Food
- 2Y Macrobiotic
- Petit Brot & The Living Food cheeses



A few of the many streets and squares of Barcelona.

Vegan Scene

Barcelona has a fairly active vegan scene, thanks to the growing presence of veganism in the city - though groups can be disparate and difficult to find out about. The best place to go to find vegan groups in the city is [meetup.com](#). There are several vegan social groups on Meetup, including [Barcelona Vegans](#), which runs the aforementioned Vegan Drinks. Barcelona is also home to twice-monthly vegan fairs, run by another group. You can find them

on [Facebook](#) (search for “Feria Vegana Barcelona”). The events are small affairs, with a dozen or so tables selling different foods, t-shirts, and handmade cosmetics. Worth a look if you want to check out the local vegan scene. If the government comes through on their promise to make Barcelona truly #VegFriendly, they’ll be connecting vegan groups around the city, as well as providing information on vegan groups and businesses through the information point they’re creating.

It’s hard to believe that just a few years ago, this city had only a few vegan restaurants, and, a couple of decades ago, Spain had just a few hundred vegetarians. Now, Barcelona is full of vegan and vegan-friendly spots - and even the government is in on promoting veganism. There’s never been a better time to visit this sun-filled Mediterranean city.

Caitlin Galer-Unti is a vegan food and travel writer who lived in Barcelona for over a year and recently moved back to London. She’s travelled to 30 countries (and counting) and blogs about the vegan food she finds and makes around the world at [theveganword.com](#). You can get 15% off Caitlin’s vegan guidebook to Barcelona with the code “tofur7”.

w: theveganword.com/vegan-barcelona-guide/



THE BROKEN-HEARTED VEGAN

Words by Raymond Walker | Illustration by Matt Gauck

I am cycling up the long UBC hill on my Crescent one-speed bicycle. The hill looks intimidating, but it isn't a big deal. It's a gradual incline and the ocean view is inspirational. I do it often. Something's off this morning, though. A strange feeling in my chest. A kind of nausea and burning. Like I had sprinted a 10K.

It goes away at the top of the hill.

I forget about it until the next day.

I get that same tightness just strolling up a slight incline. The same thing the day after that and the day after that. Finally, it happens during a nap. Something serious might be going on.

I wait a few hours until my wife, Teresa gets home.

"Could be your heart," she suggests.

"Ha!" I scoff.

I am a trim 61-year-old. I bicycle. I swim. I work out with weights regularly and twice a week I do a

punishing 2.9 kilometre hike up Grouse mountain. I was the top senior at last year's inaugural O2X race on that same mountain. At annual check-ups my doctor praises me for my 'enviable' blood pressure. Sure, there was one moment of concern a few years earlier when a routine EKG showed some sort of anomaly. I took a stress test. I passed in the top 90th percentile. Hoo rah!

I know. I know. Lots of seemingly fit people have heart attacks.

Remember Jim Fixx the former two-pack a day smoker who in 1977 wrote the best seller *The Joy of Running* and is often credited for starting America's fitness revolution? A massive heart attack abbreviated his final jog when he was only 52 years old. Three of his coronary arteries were almost totally blocked.

Exercise is not enough. Obviously. Diet is important too.

No meat. No dairy. No processed foods. I eat tons of green vegetables - spinach, kale, romaine. I eat cabbage, beets, and red peppers. I love vegetables. Love the taste. Love the variety. I also eat nuts, seeds, legumes, and fruit. So much fruit: apples, bananas, blueberries, strawberries, kiwis, and cherries.

The top fifteen foods for a healthy heart? Check. Check, check and check. I eat them all, except salmon, coffee, and red wine. And actually that thing about red wine being good for you is more a case of smart public relations than good science¹.

So, like I said, heart attack seems unlikely. Absurd even.

And yet.

The nurse from the UBC Urgent Care ward seems anxious as she takes my vitals.

Blood doesn't lie. It doesn't even exaggerate. It's a heart attack. A mild one, sure. But it's still a bloody, fucking heart attack.

Just my imagination, I'm sure.

Blood pressure great. Pulse good. Pallor fine. Deep breath? No problem. I don't look like a guy having a heart attack. Probably indigestion. I'm not feeling any pain. Just a vague discomfort.

"Give me some Gravol and send me home," I tell her. I laugh. She doesn't.

My blood results come back: elevated cardiac troponin levels.

Blood doesn't lie. It doesn't even exaggerate. It's a heart attack. A mild one, sure. But it's still a bloody, fucking heart attack. The harried doctor, who has also been looking after a construction worker with a dislocated arm, an elderly woman who fell off a step, a kid with a rugby injury, and an elderly man with pneumonia, diplomatically advises that I am having a 'heart event'.

There must be some mistake.

I am a poster boy for heart health, damnit! I am also a dimwit for not checking into the hospital when I first experienced chest discomfort, says a taunting voice, which I vaguely recognize as my conscience.

I am stripped of my clothes, hustled into a hospital gown, an IV inserted into my wrist, my chest and legs liberally dappled with EKG connectors and plopped on a not very comfortable gurney surrounded by blinking, beeping machines. None of the nurses, aides, or paramedics get my Monty Python joke about the machine that goes ping.

I am to be dispatched, post haste, by ambulance to Vancouver General Hospital where there are doctors and state of the art machinery to deal with people like me.

People like me.

People with bad hearts.

I have been duped.

I am a victim of a sophisticated plant-based conspiracy.

"Sorry?" says the paramedic who is prepping me for my ambulance trip.

"Nothing. Just talking to myself."

Dr. Campbell, your famous China Study is obviously a fraud; a clever conspiracy to sell more vegetables. Kim Barnouin, your Skinny Bitch is a potty-mouthed figment of your imagination. Dr Gregor, your NutritionFacts should be NutritionFiction. You are unconscionable perjurers Dr. Garth Davis, Dr Esselstyn, Dr. Barnard, Dr. Ornish, and all you other scheming, plant-based propagandists. And, by the way, Angela Liddon? I'm going to burn my copy of your Oh She Glows vegan cookbook.

"Dear, you're mumbling. Are you okay?" asks my wife putting a cool hand on my not very fevered brow.

The paramedics bustle me into the back of the ambulance.

To hell with it. I'll get them to pull over at McDonalds. I'll treat. I've got time. My heart attack's not going away.

Burgers, fries and chocolate shake.

Damn rights, I'm going back to eating meat. My plant-based diet has failed me. I'll eat doe-eyed calves, fuzzy little chicks, squealing piglets and even unicorns if I can find them. (Cooked first of course. I'm not a barbarian.) On Facebook, I'll befriend Chris Masterjohn, the Weston A. Price Foundation spokesman who claimed in the Don't Eat Anything With A Face debate that being vegan caused mental health issues and ruined his teeth². I might even read the Vegetarian Myth, the book in which author Lierre Keith proves conclusively by exhaustive internet searching that vegans are responsible for psoriasis, the pine beetle infestation, and the fall of the Roman empire.

I will have some explaining to do, I realize.

I have been passionate, even evangelic, when it comes to defending a plant-based diet. People's eyes have glazed over. They have invented medical emergencies, suddenly remembered unsupervised children left at home, and espied long-lost friends across the room with whom they urgently need to consult.

But those who did stick around to debate? Ha!

Not enough protein in plants? Nonsense! First of all: It's almost impossible to have a protein deficiency, unless you're a breatharian, or a famine victim. Kwashiorkor. That's the medical term for the condition. You never hear the word because a protein deficiency occurs so infrequently. Secondly, the plant world offers a delicious and healthy variety of protein-rich foods, including nuts, seeds, tofu, and legumes.

Vitamin B12? Sure, I take a supplement. So should we all. Pernicious anemia is as common in meat eaters as it is in vegans. It is a byproduct of our modern emphasis on cleanliness and sterility.

Eat a mouthful of dirt every now and then and you probably won't have to worry. Salmonella might be an issue though.

But plant's feel pain. C'mon. This is one of the weakest arguments ever. For those who skipped high school biology, plants don't have a brain or a central nervous system. Yank a carrot from the ground and then go kill a pig. Examine carefully the two experiences and then see if you can spot any key differences. (Hint: blood and screaming are two.)

From now on, instead of food, I'll stick to politics and religion. It's less polarizing. Say, what is it about women and Donald Trump? Hey, do you think Jesus would have turned water to wine at a gay wedding?

To hell with it. I'll have two double burgers and I'll Supersize the fries. A recent study in the Annals of Internal Medicine coyly entitled "Association of Dietary, Circulating and Supplement Fatty Acids with Coronary Risk" proved conclusively that saturated fat is actually good for you. Ha!

There's a study for every cause. Cigarette manufacturers used them, even as cancer and mortality rates soared, to prove smoking was actually good for you.

Except it didn't. And it isn't.

The study is critically flawed, was the consensus from the scientific community³. Even some of its authors have been lukewarm in its defence and have taken pains to point out that the media (think of Time magazine's 'Eat Butter' headline here) generally misinterpreted the report's controversial conclusions. Department chair Walter Willett at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health damns the paper as being seriously misleading with major errors and omissions.

Oh well. Who cares? There's a study for every cause. Cigarette manufacturers used them, even as cancer and mortality rates soared, to prove smoking was actually good for you. Industry officials brandished them to show there was absolutely nothing wrong with lead in the gas fumes we inhaled, or in the paint that decorated our living room walls and children's cribs.

When the devil wearies of scripture, she quotes studies.

But . . .

The idea of eating flesh, after five years of veganism, actually makes me a bit squirmy. I have seen too many slaughter house videos. Millions of horribly mistreated animals over-dosed with antibiotics and hormones cruelly dispatched every hour just to satiate the world's addiction. It might take me a few weeks to redevelop that comforting cognitive dissonance that allows meat eaters to say they love animals, but also support their continued torture. Also adding to the unsavouriness of the moment would be the niggling, indigestion-causing fact that the dairy and meat-processing industries are a soil and water polluting, resource-gobbling environmental catastrophe.

Okay, okay. We won't stop at McDonalds.

"Did you say something?" says the ride-along nurse who is keeping an eye on my heart monitor.

It's too late for a pit stop anyway. We have arrived.

The VGH emergency ward is packed. Of course, it is. Emergency rooms always are.

Supplicants for emergency care are stacked like airplanes at London's Heathrow Airport on Christmas Eve. Beside me a girl, barely more than a teenager, is curled up on a stretcher staring at the wall. I meet eyes with a middle-aged man slumped in a chair. No empathy there. I am his competition for an audience with the doctor. Except my cardiac troponin levels are a get into emergency right away

card, don't fill out a questionnaire, don't sit there fidgeting in the crowded waiting room with the rest of the sick people.

I am parked beside the admitting station and have a clear view of the computer used to register patients. The most common entry on that data base is heart related. Every third line almost. Which isn't surprising, I suppose, seeing that heart disease is the number one killer of men and women around the world⁴.

My name is on that list. Another blip in those grim statistics.

It's not bloody fair.

Diet, exercise, meditation? Pshaw. Hogwash. Bilge water. Twaddle. Didn't do me any good.

Quit worrying about artificial sweeteners, corn syrup, sodium and potassium benzoate, artificial colouring, (blue, green, red and yellow). Let MSG be your friend. Eat your charred steak. Don't sweat the heterocyclic amines and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. What do scientists's know anyway? Doesn't make any difference. Pain, debilitating illness and a lingering, undignified death is our destiny. No sense trying to avoid it.

"Everything okay?" asks the paramedic as he backs me into my new space, efficiently titled Stretcher 8. My troponin levels gets me immediate access to the emergency ward, but no further. The over-burdened cardiac care unit hasn't got room for one more poor slob with a damaged ticker.

I am separated from my new neighbours by yellow curtains. Stretcher 9 is a bleeding haemorrhoid that has erupted spectacularly. I see shadows of nursing scurrying back and forth. The patient screams profanities at the apologetic surgeon suturing the inconveniently located wound. Stretcher seven is a vomiting. A nurse explains the details of his do not resuscitate order to what I assume are family members. A drunk woman temporarily parked in front of the nurse's station, does a face plant on

the tiled floor when she tries to crawl out of her stretcher. Across the ward in a room guarded by a security officer, a woman screeches hoarsely that she is being held against her will.

"I just want to be free," she wails.

I know the feeling.

I am given a biodegradable urinal. I am in emergency for the night.

Late the next day, I am wheeled away for an angiogram. One of my coronary arteries is blocked. Only one though. That's a good thing. A left, circumflex vessel occlusion. Percutaneous coronary intervention is required. A catheter is threaded from my wrist to my beleaguered heart. A miniature balloon covered by a stent (a small mesh tube made of medical-grade metal) is inserted to the point of blockage and inflated. The stent expands. My artery is unclogged. The withered tendrils of tiny veins deprived of life-giving blood are abruptly reinvigorated. The balloon is deflated and withdrawn. The stent stays. My heart is repaired. My bionically-improved self is wheeled in blue, toasty-warm hospital socks to the cardiac care unit. It is like a five-star hotel compared to my previous quarters.

The next day, a succession of nurses, doctors and medical students meander past by my bed. I am advised to be circumspect with post-operation exertions. Don't forget to take your medications, I am admonished. They tsk-tsk their sympathies and move on when I try to explain the terrible injustice I have suffered at the hands of a unscrupulous and mendacious plant-eating confederacy.

I'm sent home early.

I'm in great shape for a heart attack victim.

I have to take a blood thinner for a year. I have prescriptions for baby aspirin and a cholesterol-reducing statin that I am obliged to take for the rest of my life, even though my cholesterol levels aren't that bad and studies have shown a plant-based diet is more effective than statins which have many

alarming side-effects. That is the problem with...

Oops. I forgot. I have renounced my plant-based diet.

Goodbye kale. Goodbye tofu, broccoli, avocado, spinach, quinoa, lentils...

Except, well... I love those foods. Really. How can I live without avocados? Critics who says a vegan diet is boring have obviously never eaten a vegan diet.

I have prescriptions for baby aspirin and a cholesterol-reducing statin that I am obliged to take for the rest of my life, even though my cholesterol levels aren't that bad and studies have shown a plant-based diet is more effective than statins which have many alarming side-effects.

I might have been a bit hasty.

A couple of things I haven't taken into consideration.

For example, what about the role played by genetics? Fixx had heart disease in his family. So do I. After a succession of heart attacks stretching over a decade, my dad was finally killed by an aneurism when he was only 66. He was a smoker, though. He was a mechanic who was poisoned by carbon monoxide several times when working underneath idling cars. He was also exposed to toxic fumes while fighting fires during the blitz. He didn't eat well. He didn't exercise.

He wasn't health conscious.

But there's something else, I blush to confess.

Neither was I.

There was a time, as recently as five years ago, when I was not so particular about the foods I consumed. If it tasted good, I ate it. Had seconds

usually. Thirds, even. It never occurred to me to check food labels. So many ingredients and such long names. I had faith in the Canada Food Guide. I believed Health Canada when it said trans fats were safe. I switched channels when supposed health food experts started nattering on about pink slime in meat.

A meal wasn't a meal unless it included a slab of some sort of meat, usually hamburger or chicken, covered in cheese and heavily dosed with some sugary condiment, because meat, like soy, doesn't taste very good if it isn't flavoured. Chicken wings without hot sauce or sweet and sour sauce? *Gross!* A burger without ketchup, relish, or barbecue sauce? *Blech.* Vegetables were that little wilted pile of colourful stuff ostracized on the side of the plate.

I tuned out gentle hints from friends and family and tried to ignore the chronic fatigue, joint pains, and colds that seemed to last forever. I even limped

into my doctor's office one day suffering from gout, an excruciating malady caused by an excess of uric acid. It used to be associated with fat kings like Henry VIII who subsisted on red meat and booze. Sadly, even commoners like me can eat like that now.

One day, not long after the gout diagnosis, a blood test revealed, surprise, surprise, that type 2 diabetes could now be added to the list of serious health issues I was blissfully ignoring. I had joined a not-so exclusive club that included three million other hapless Canadians, many of them children⁵.

At this juncture, my health careening toward the cliff's edge, family members held an intervention.

"No meat. No dairy. No processed foods," they pleaded, cajoled, and threatened.

"Just for a month," they said.

A stupid idea, but I agreed, "One month. Not a day, not even a minute longer."

But...

Within a week I noticed an improvement in my energy levels. I lost weight. I could never lose weight before. My cholesterol levels improved. So did my blood pressure. Blood-sugar levels dropped precipitously. Food cravings vanished.

One month became two months, became three months, became four...

Within a year, to my doctor's amazement, my health was improving. I ran a 10k race, which had been on a long list, along with touching my toes and going without an afternoon nap, of things I would never be able to do again.

I have an epiphany as Teresa drives away from the hospital.

My 'heart event' obviously has more to do with my past than it does with my current diet. Atherosclerosis takes years to develop, after all. My heart attack would have occurred sooner and been much more serious if I hadn't changed my eating habits.

Actually, that's not my epiphany. That's Teresa talking.

My epiphany is that I get to keep my cheery blue, toasty-warm, non-slip hospital socks.

"It's just common sense, isn't it?" asks Teresa.

"A diet rich in fibre, vitamins, and minerals is obviously the most efficient way to recover from any illness, not just a heart attack. It is the kind of diet that lets you stay physically active and mentally alert even to an old age," she says. "You can't really argue with all the research which has been dramatically corroborated by your own experience, can you?"

"Of course not, that would just be stupid," I mumble as the hospital recedes in the rear-view mirror.

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FACING FAILING HEALTH AS A VEGAN

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAYWARD REBHAL

Intro and Questions by Lyndsay Penner

Eating vegan did not save my life. This choice did not erase my depression, make my psoriasis disappear, nor have my extra chub melt off. The least healthy I've ever been was while eating vegan. It felt like the vegan propaganda lied to me. Documentaries told me it would cure all ailments, articles said you could be a bodybuilder or athlete, and blogs said you could eat amazing food and be fit too. Guilt would creep up when living compassionately didn't do all that was promised.

Luckily, thanks to folks such as Sayward Rebhal of *Bonzai Aphrodite*, more people are sharing their journeys through a health crisis and being honest about their struggles. For Sayward, disclosing these issues with the readers of her blog didn't come easy when she published "Facing Failing Health As A Vegan" in January 2013. However, her struggle and belief in compassion shined through every word and accentuated the guilt I've personally held when in doubt. I've never shared my path to a slightly healthier life, so holy moly did I ever have questions about that process (and so much more)!

For those who may not read your blog, or who might have missed your talk at Vida Vegan Con, can you summarize what you have shared about having a health crisis and its role with your vegan identity?

Definitely. So I first became sick in 2010, following the birth of my son. It started slowly and because I was a new mom and dealing with all the trials and tribulations (both mental and physical) of new motherhood, it took me quite some time to realize that what I was experiencing was not normal “new mom stuff”. I immediately reached out to medical professionals (first my midwife, then an MD, then a Chinese Medicine doctor) and was told over and over that what I was experiencing was in fact normal – “typical new mom stuff” is the line I heard a lot.

It was very frustrating and I felt incredibly alone, which is something I’m sure most people who have experienced chronic illness can relate to. Time passed and my symptoms got worse. Friends and family questioned my vegan diet (of course) but I was adamant that my veganism was not the problem. Finally, over a year and a half into my ordeal, I visited a naturopath. She was the first health professional who took me seriously, and she immediately ordered blood work.

The results were absolutely devastating to me, as a passionate ethical vegan. My cholesterol was dangerously low (most people don’t realize that cholesterol has a lower limit as well as an upper one, but it does. Your body uses cholesterol to make hormones, and without enough of it, my hormones were completely out of balance) and I was also suffering from protein depletion. Yes, I was a vegan who was not getting enough protein!

I was crushed. And angry, oh man, I was really angry. All those vegan doctors and leaders and gurus, they had been telling me I was eating the healthiest diet on the planet, that I didn’t need to worry, and they had LIED to me! I was so angry

after I got those results. Nobody had warned me about this!

But, like I said, I’m an ethical vegan. And so although my naturopath was encouraging me to eat eggs, I ultimately decided that I would try and heal myself while remaining vegan. I was *this close* though, to eating those eggs. And that experience has given me so much empathy for other vegans who get sick.

When I was sick, I felt all alone, like I couldn’t tell anyone in the vegan community what I was going through. It’s a horrible feeling, that kind of guilt and shame and fear. And since getting better (I did get better, and stayed vegan the entire time), I have begun to speak out about my experience. And what has been so amazing, and also sort of really sad, is the number of people who have quietly, privately, reached out to commiserate. They Facebook message me and email me and come up to speak to me in hushed tones after I give a talk. SO MANY vegans are feeling sick, and feeling like they’re not “allowed” to talk about it. It breaks my heart. And it’s something we really need to change about our community.

Why was it important for you to share your story of failing health and veganism? What were your thoughts prior to sharing this vulnerability?

I felt like my story was important because I had never read another story like it. All I ever read were stories of ex-vegans – of people getting sick on a vegan diet and then giving up veganism and going back to eating animals. There were lots of salacious, sensationalist stories like that all over the internet. So at the time I published my own story in 2013, I was really just trying to be a counter balance to that dominant narrative.

And yeah, I was terrified. I thought that angry vegans would eat me alive, attack me and tear me apart, for daring to admit that veganism is anything



And yeah, I was terrified. I thought that angry vegans would eat me alive, attack me and tear me apart, for daring to admit that veganism is anything less than glowing dewy skin and long lithe legs and boundless energy.

less than glowing dewy skin and long lithe legs and boundless energy. My heart was pounding when I hit the “publish” button that day.

But what happened surprised me twofold: one, the vegan community really embraced my story. I got very little pushback; it was almost entirely an empathetic and loving reception. But two, and more importantly, I began to hear from other vegans who had similar experiences. LOTS of other vegans. Even some well-known and well-respected vegan leaders, emailing me in privacy and thanking me for speaking out because they, too, were sick or struggling, and they never felt like they could share their experience.

So although I initially published my story to counter the dominant ex-vegan narrative, I’ve since come to understand that its true importance lay in countering the dominant vegan narrative – the one that says that all vegans are shiny happy healthy glowing unicorn-pooing people. Because that’s just not true, and to act like it’s true is actually harmful.

Like I said at the end of my original piece: *“If nobody shares their stories, then everyone feels alone.”*

What kind of reactions have you experienced after sharing your struggles to remain vegan facing a health crisis?

It’s been almost exclusively positive. Like I said, I was scared of the blowback, but overall people have seemed inspired and motivated by my willingness to share my story. The original post went a little bit viral, and I think it’s helped a lot of sick and struggling vegans find a glimmer of hope.

What role do you think self-diagnosis, online community support, and medical professionals have played in your personal journey? How did each of these options affect how you proceeded with the others?

Ooh, that’s a big question! It’s a tricky thing, because on the one hand, there is a real lack of education among health professionals regarding diet and nutrition and the role it has in overall physical and mental wellbeing – and that’s not even adding in the vegan component! So a lot of times people are forced to self-diagnose, to seek out their own answers. And the internet can be good for that, and the online community can offer some seriously-needed emotional support when you just feel shitty and sick and all alone because no one has any answers for you.

I’ve known people who have essentially become experts on their own disease or disorder, done all the digging and research, read the primary literature, got their own blood tested, even got their DNA tested, to figure out what’s wrong with them and how to fix it – and with success! But that takes so much time and so much energy. It shouldn’t have to be that way.

It’s also a really, really slippery slope. It takes a very particular type of person to be able to successfully navigate the minefield that is Nutrition On The Internet. There is just so much bad advice, snake oil selling, bunk junk science, and really dangerous ideas, all wrapped up in pretty packages seeming so legitimate. It’s easy to get tricked and the consequences can be disastrous.

As far as my own personal journey, I definitely fell down those rabbit holes. I have vivid memories of being propped up in bed in the middle of the night, my baby nursing himself to sleep, and just scouring the internet for answers. Discussion forums and message boards and nutrition blogs. There is so much out there and pretty much each thing you read contradicts the thing you read before it. It’s dizzying.

Ultimately, I had to find a qualified professional who was able to help me. I was so lucky that I was able to do that. I don’t know what might have happened if I hadn’t.

What factors do you think played into how doctors did not take you seriously initially?

Well, my situation was a little unique because I had just given birth to my son. Pregnancy throws our bodies into all sorts of turmoil, and so does becoming a new mom – with all of the sleepless nights, worry, new stressors, and everything else it entails. So I think my doctors (midwife, MD, and acupuncturist) were too quick to dismiss my concerns. They probably hear a lot of similar sentiment from most new moms, and unfortunately, I feel like they just went on autopilot. They didn’t really listen.

If you are feeling like you are sick, don’t let a doctor steamroll you or brush you aside. Find a new doctor! When I told my naturopath what I was experiencing, she looked me right in the eyes and said “It sounds like you are really struggling. Let’s figure out what’s wrong”. That affirmation, just hearing those words, meant so much to me. Don’t settle for anything less!

How do you define acceptable “typical mom stuff” struggles? When doctors were telling you that women should endure awful symptoms, where did you draw the line? How did the vegan mom community play into this?

Oooh boy, another huge question! Okay, so the truth is, there is a bunch of “new mom stuff” that is just messy and awkward and uncomfortable, no two ways about it. That’s not like, the patriarchy. It’s just biology. Pregnancy, and childbirth, and nursing, are really hard on your body!

But I think where the issue comes in, and I think what you mean when you say “acceptable” is that there is this idea that women are just meant to endure all this on their own. The doctors I saw, even the female ones, were so quick to try and quiet my concerns and move me along. In our [American] culture, our current archetype for motherhood is this

be-all, do-all, say-nothing woman. We are meant to be all-nurturing, all-sacrificing, all-inspiring all the time, with never a negative thought to pass through our minds. It’s a mega-martyr construct, and it’s completely unrealistic.

And actually, that’s a similar sort of archetype that vegans are supposed to uphold. Vegans are expected to be shining, glowing examples of optimal health and wellness – anything less is letting down the cause and a failure to the animals. Never mind that you’re sick or hurting! Suck it up and put on your pretty face so you don’t give veganism a bad name.

So yeah, you put those two things together? That’s a LOT of frigg’in’ pressure.

You’ve written a book about vegan pregnancy, how have people received your poor health disclosure, in regard to your advice on vegan pregnancy?

It’s never really been an issue. Actually, I wish I would have followed the advice in my book a little more closely – the nutrition information I shared in the book is really sound. If I had stuck to it, I may not have gotten sick!

Tell me more about the feelings around that first kindness from Dr. Lasse. How did finally finding support affect your health and beliefs?

My whole experience of getting sick has lent me incredible insight into the mind-body connection. I learned that you can not have a sick body and have a healthy mind, or vice versa. What I mean by that is, it’s impossible to wake up in pain every day and *not* develop depression. Or conversely, I can’t imagine suffering from severe anxiety and *not* having that manifest as stress, inflammation, or ailment in my body. So I understand now that mental health and physical health are inextricably linked, and I think Dr. Lasse really understood that too.



I always say my experience with Naturopathy was like medicine and therapy all rolled into one. We talked about my physical symptoms of course, but we also talked about my emotional triggers. We talked about my marriage, my relationship with my son, the feelings of inadequacy that being sick brought on. We talked about the anxiety I had developed and how that feedback loop exacerbated my physical symptoms. I cried a lot in her office. It was so healing.

Having a health care worker who really sits with you, shows you care and patience – it's just something I hadn't experienced ever before. And where I was back then? So sick and alone and confused and completely filled with shame and self-loathing? Well, that care and patience was exactly what I needed.

How do you think the vegan community and the medical establishment are at odds? How do you think they compliment each other? Has your experience shifted your views on this?

Honestly I'm much less concerned with how the vegan community and the medical community are at odds, because I think that's something that will work itself out in time. For all their faults, doctors are incredibly rational people. And right now there is a growing mountain of evidence in support of a plant-based diet. The medical community is already coming around, and as more research is done, more individual doctors will readjust their ideology, and eventually things will reach a tipping point.

But honestly, what concerns me a lot more is the way the vegan community seems to be at odds with itself. High-carbers versus junk food vegans versus low fat raw vegan fruitarians versus "nutritarians" versus paleo vegans versus Orthorexic Gurus A, B, and C. It goes on and on, and that doesn't even begin to get into the war between the welfarists and the abolitionists.

Why are vegans so angry at each other? Why are they so mean to each other, just because they happen to choose different macronutrient ratios?? I think this is a much more pressing issue for our community.

Without the privilege of being in Portland, having access to health care professionals through insurance, and a body that was relatively mobile, how do you feel your situation would have differed? What are your thoughts on people who do not choose to fight to remain vegan? How does the judgement you've faced challenge this?

I am completely 100% conscious of my privilege and how it played into my ability to remain vegan. It's something I always keep in mind, and I made sure to emphasize it in my original piece. That was actually one of the greatest takeaways for me, personally, from this whole experience. As I said in that first blog post:

"And if I, a deeply committed ethical vegan with a reputation and career on the line, living in freakin' Portland, Oregon, can actually consider going back . . . well, then I can't blame isolated vegans in small towns who have no support system at all, for doing the same."

Not everyone has the same access, the same set of experiences, or the same privilege. We have to act with compassion and love. The truth is that most people who stop being vegan feel awful about it. But when they are attacked by the vegan community – as they always invariably are – it becomes a lot easier for them to build their walls. To push veganism further away..

I know an ex-ex-vegan who says eating eggs was one of the hardest things she ever did. She felt so much guilt and sorrow when she did it, but she was sick and suffering, and she made that choice. And she told me that the attacks from her vegan community, the scorn and outrage she faced when



she confessed what she had done, was almost too much for her to take. She became so angry at the vegan community, and that anger was what prevented her from returning to veganism for a very long time.

Now she's vegan again and she urges other vegans to treat ex-vegans with empathy and compassion. And she's 100% right.

I know I'm just a hippie at heart, but the old saying is true. Love is the answer. It just really always is.

Do you think there is a need for bloggers, writers, and other folks involved in promoting the vegan lifestyle to be more open about the negative experiences related to eating this way? How do you think people wanting to make it sound all positive affects readers? How has it affected you?

YES. I think it's the most important thing!

We have to share our stories. All of our stories.

Look, veganism is amazing, and it's going to save the world. But right now, in terms of human history, this thing is brand freaking new. So we're still trying to iron out all the kinks, and figure out how to make this new thing work for everybody. Which is okay – it's part of the process. But if we're all just running around yelling “NO KINKS NO I'M FINE I SWEAR NOTHING WRONG” while we're secretly hurting, well

then how can we possibly ever figure out what needs fixing?

And to be clear, the problem is not veganism itself. The problem is the lack of information. We just need to share the information so we can find new solutions. Collectively. Together. In community.

That's the most important thing.

Sayward Rebhal is a writer, a mother, a mover, and a maker. She is currently working towards a Master's degree in Ecology, and is a certified Vegan Lifestyle Coach. Sayward is the author of *Vegan Pregnancy Survival Guide* (Herbivore, 2011) and blogs at *Bonzai Aphrodite*.

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Before recently deciding to focus on her career, Lyndsay curated *LP Hoopta*, where she shared her love of alternative music and vegan eats. The site featured simple recipes, music news, reviews, and interviews with musicians, writers, artists, and activists. Now, she continues to share her love for vegan food on Instagram.

ig: [@LP_vegan](https://www.instagram.com/LP_vegan)

Kitchen Photo Credit: Erin Feinblat

NO! That's not
Gluten-Free!



MY DISEASE, MY BODY

Words by Marieke Gruwel | Illustration by Amanda Rogers

In January of 2016, I was unexpectedly diagnosed with celiac disease. By unexpectedly, I mean that I did not go see my doctor because I felt as though something was wrong. I was having my not-so regular check up and it was this check up that led to my eventual diagnosis. I remember when I found out. I was shocked, but I also found it a little humorous. *I get to tell my friends and family that I am not only vegan, but I'm also celiac—what joy!* The anti-social introvert in me thought that this may actually be a good thing; veganism was getting too easy. Vegan options were popping up everywhere and I was running out of excuses for not attending dinner parties. And let's face it, cooking for a vegan celiac is not the easiest task.

Amidst the humour I found in my diagnosis, I was actually pretty upset. The first question I asked my doctor was, "wait, but can I still drink whiskey?" The question was influenced half by the reality

that sipping whiskey by the fireplace is one of my favourite past times and half by the cynicism I felt towards eating a gluten free diet. Is being gluten free actually a thing? Does it really matter if I sneak a piece of baguette at night?

More Than a Fad?

I quickly learned that the answer to both these questions was "yes". I am far from an expert on celiac disease and I am definitely no scientist, therefore I am not here to comment on the differences between being celiac and being gluten intolerant. Nor will I comment on whether I believe the latter is grounded in any sort of proof. I do not know, and even if I did, that is not the point of this piece. That debate is all over the internet and frankly, it makes me angry. Why must we shame people for trying a diet that so many professionals have praised? Maybe I'm less judgmental because I fell for it, too. Years before

I was diagnosed with celiac, I was working at a health food store and I jumped on the gluten free bandwagon.

I was so desperately searching for something to make me feel better back then; I was an awkward, depressed, and self-conscious young adult. Everywhere I looked people were boasting a gluten free diet, so I tried it and I did actually feel better, for a while. I lost a few pounds and people were complimenting me all the time. But going gluten free didn't solve all my problems, even though that is how it was marketed to me. I'm not saying that we should pity everyone who chooses to eat gluten free, far from that actually. All I'm saying is that we never know what has motivated someone's decision to change their lifestyle, therefore why must we shame them for it?

I often had stomachaches and I was tired all the time, but I ascribed this to being an anxiety ridden full time student who was juggling five jobs.

That being said, I understand why it angers people with celiac when people go gluten free if there is no medical reason for them to do so. Before I was diagnosed, I didn't actually know what celiac disease was. I knew that eating gluten would make someone with celiac ill, but I had no idea why. I later found out that celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder in which the small intestine is damaged if gluten is ingested. There are so many symptoms, but the most common involve intestinal upsets, fatigue, and/or a rash. I often had stomachaches and I was tired all the time, but I ascribed this to being an anxiety ridden full time student who was juggling five jobs. Yet, some people with celiac react so badly to gluten that it can have an effect on their work life, their relationships, and even their mental health. Therefore, it makes sense that people are

angry when a disease that can have a devastating effect on a person's life is turned into a fad.

The Consequences of Cheating

The problem with the gluten free fad, especially for those with celiac, is that people do not take it seriously anymore, and for obvious reasons. When I went gluten free a few years back, I cheated all the time. Eating gluten free was a choice—there were no repercussions for cheating. Yet now there are (ultimately, there always were for me, I just did not know). I can do serious damage to my body so I have to take it seriously. In an attempt to figure out how to do it the right way, I reached out to a few people I knew had celiac and I also interacted with some people on social media. I was surprised when I wasn't welcomed into the club with open arms. Instead, I was relentlessly questioned about my diagnosis, what my doctor said, and how it all came about. I'm a pretty open person and I often do not mind sharing, but these questions did not come from a place of concern or even curiosity. I finally figured it out. They were protective. They did not want one more person out there identifying with a disease that that person may not even have. When I thought about it like this, it made more sense.

The gluten free lifestyle has a bad reputation and this bad reputation is prevalent everywhere. For example, my brother worked in a restaurant that offered gluten free options. He expressed frustration when the kitchen would go through the trouble of cleaning everything to make sure the meal was prepared without any cross contamination only to later find that same customer taking a bite of their friend's meal or ordering a baked good for dessert. After instances like this, it is easy to see why people do not take people who ask for gluten free meals seriously. Perhaps that is why when I went out for breakfast a couple months ago, my waiter gave me a snarky look when I asked for my vegan breakfast

to also be made gluten free. She was then reluctant to give me a side of ketchup because she had heard ketchup wasn't gluten free. I quickly googled it at the restaurant, confirmed that it was okay to eat, but by the time I convinced her to bring me some, my hash browns were cold. She wasn't trying to be helpful, she was fairly rude about it all and it made me uncomfortable.

My biggest fear after my diagnosis wasn't figuring out what I could or could not eat, nor was it the fact that I had to change my lifestyle. While those were legitimate concerns I had, I was most anxious about telling people.

That was not an isolated event. Many people do not take me seriously. To be completely honest, I don't even think most of my friends take me seriously. After nine years of being vegan, I think they have finally figured out that I won't be eating meat anytime soon. But now I'm celiac. My biggest fear after my diagnosis wasn't figuring out what I could or could not eat, nor was it the fact that I had to change my lifestyle. While those were legitimate concerns I had, I was most anxious about telling people. It's not that I feel ashamed to have celiac, it's just that I had a feeling that people would not take me as seriously because I am also vegan. When I eventually did tell people, a lot of people asked me if I would remain vegan or if I would change my diet if it made living with celiac easier. I never gave this question much thought and always replied that being vegan is very important to me and is not something I will give up just to make my life a littler easier. Of course, I am immensely privileged and I have access to the right resources, therefore, there are no barriers preventing me from being both vegan and celiac. I am the first to admit that if I did not have the options that I do,

my response would likely be different. That aside, there were some people who seemed surprised that I would not forgo the veganism to truly focus on my gluten free lifestyle, or, as they saw it, to focus on my health. All of this is indicative of a larger issue: why are we so obsessed with what other people put into their bodies?

Don't Police Me

It's natural to care about what other people eat, and in certain cases it is important. As a vegan, I definitely care about the fact that people are ingesting living, feeling beings. Eating meat is so normalized that I don't think about it every time I see someone eat an animal or its by-products, but to say I don't care would be incorrect. I also care about where my food comes from, even if that cannot always be reflected in my grocery cart. Eating, and more specifically what we eat, plays a larger role in our lives than is often acknowledged. What we eat can become markers of identity; it can become a political statement, an act of protest in itself. Yet, for someone who is celiac, as I have come to find, what one eats is more than that. It can be the deciding factor in whether or not someone can get out of bed to make it to work and it can cause health problems later on in life. Therefore, we should care... right?

The problem with this incessant obsession with caring about what everyone else is eating is that it can result in someone losing their bodily autonomy. It also results in a lot of shaming and, consequently, feelings of shame within oneself. I have found this to be true in both vegan and gluten free communities. There are varying degrees to which someone can take their veganism, and how far they take their veganism is a matter that should remain in their control. Yet there have been times, which often take place via social media, when other vegans attack someone for not being careful enough or not being vegan enough. The same thing occurs in gluten

free communities, again, often online. I remember posting an article on Facebook about the fact that Ben and Jerry's came out with vegan ice cream. Someone from the gluten free community was quick to comment and make it clear that as a celiac, I really should not be eating that because it could contain gluten. Never in my post did I say anything about eating the ice cream, but I was truly embarrassed and anxious about the whole ordeal. Who, other than myself, has the right to police what I eat?

I remember when I first went vegan and people would joke that I probably snuck chicken fingers when no one was looking. I never did this, but I did sneak something with gluten once when no one was looking after a night of drinking. When everyone had left, I snuck quietly into my kitchen and ate half of a Tofurky sausage that was leftover from the barbecue. At the time, I actually felt ashamed. Years of baggage regarding my relationship with food came flooding back to the surface and it was horrible. And, I'm sorry Tofurky, but the rash and the stomach pains that resulted from my slip were not worth it, but they also were not the reason I felt ashamed. I was well aware of the consequences and in that moment I was ready to accept them. I was most concerned with what would happen if someone found out. Would they take me less seriously? Everything about that event was uncomfortable.

I think that is the best way to describe celiac disease: one big uncomfortable situation. It's uncomfortable if I accidentally eat gluten, it's uncomfortable when I have to tell people I'm celiac, it's more uncomfortable when they start questioning my health, and the icing on the proverbial cake is when people start policing my eating habits. Like I said, one big uncomfortable situation. But, at the end of the day, it's a situation that I have to live with. What I have learned from all of this is that it is my body, my disease, and therefore my decision. My actions or, in other words, whether I slip and 'cheat' once in awhile, should not alter how someone else responds to my disease or if they should respect it. I don't always know what I am doing, but my disease makes it my choice.

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WHEN IS FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY LIFE AND DEATH?

FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY AS ACTIVISM

Words and Photos by Marika Collins

Are you going to get emotional looking at a photograph of a piece of cake? Not likely, though that depends on your sweet tooth. But if it's a picture of vegan cake we're talking about, that photograph has potential. And lots of it. That vegan cake can send a message. A covert one. When vegan food looks as good or better than its non-vegan counterpart, a message has been sent.

A picture is worth a thousand words, right?

Photographs tell stories. Good photographs tell stories well. Since stories send messages and activism is about conveying a message, it's not hard to see the potential for a photograph to do the same.

A photograph can trump a written piece—it can speak louder than words. How? That aforementioned story stuff—and by sheer virtue of its possible reach. For viewers who don't have the time or inclination to read a piece at length, a photograph may be your only chance to make an impression.

Photographs inspire. How many times have you flipped through the pages of a cookbook, magazine, or website and chosen to make a particular recipe because the photograph(s) drew you in? Cookbooks alone are routinely judged on the merit of the photography contained within them.

The role of the photograph is often considered to be a supporting one to the recipe's lead role. I say it's more of a partnership. Clearly, the recipe is critical—but it's not the words that compel you to make the recipe. It's that great photograph. The photograph is the inspiration.

Photographs capture attention. So use that.

Dealing with pictures gives you an edge. A hook. A way to reel the viewer in. Now you have their attention. And you want them to think that vegan cake looks delicious. Professional, even. You want them to want to eat that cake.

Get the picture?

While most food aficionados appreciate good food photography, not all of them are going to watch Earthlings. Many of them won't be open to the most innocuous of vegan messages. However, a delicious looking photograph of vegan cake sends a message in a subtle and non-threatening way. This alone affords it the opportunity to reach a wider audience. That's the beauty of vegan food photography.

Let's say you've posted a mouthwatering photograph of vegan german chocolate cake on Instagram. Imagine that beautifully moist crumb and glossy icing in all its dark chocolatey glory. That cake photograph is ripe with possibility.

If that cake looks delicious, you have succeeded in making the viewer think vegan cake is delicious. That vegan cake is as good as non-vegan cake. That cake has been normalized.

It's no longer marginalized in the mind of the beholder. It's gone mainstream.

There's a slew of talented photographers working to raise vegan food photography to an art form. There are endless beautiful examples of this in the cornucopia of quality vegan cookbooks and publications available today. Elevating is impressive but not mandatory in terms of getting the message out. Normalizing is more attainable and within the grasp of most—normalizing vegan food can be even more powerful.

We've entered an age in which photography is open to many. In the past, not everyone owned a camera or knew how to use one. There was no internet or social media to share on. Now, with the advent of smartphones, a very large group has access to not only a camera, but sophisticated editing tools and a means by which to share their work with an audience. What was once merely a hobby or strictly for professionals is now commonplace.

Mainstream platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are often maligned by those who dismiss them as possible sources of photojournalistic merit. I



say they present a big opportunity to reach a wide audience.

What is getting a message out about if it's not about communicating with an audience?

Photographs of food are everywhere on social platforms. Take Instagram, the best example. Have a look around. Food photography is ubiquitous. It's popular. You want to make a difference? There's an opportunity there.

It is a dismissive and elitist attitude to claim the ubiquity of smartphones and social media somehow diminishes the value of a photograph—another claim circulating in the ether. I would argue that it democratized photography. The more citizen journalists the better. Bring it. Of course, volume is not without its pitfalls. Volume demands quality.

The rapid dissemination of information across so many channels demands that one stand out in order to be noticed. A quality feed is more likely to be followed. A quality photograph is more likely to be shared, and a photograph has to be seen in order to be heard. Someone needs to see that photograph and appreciate it to get the message.

What's the message? How about:

That vegan cake is delicious.

It's appetizing.

It's normal.

Vegans aren't missing out.

You can eat cruelty-free without compromise.

It's easy to be vegan.

In photojournalism, content is key. In food photography, aesthetics play an equal and undeniably important role. A well-executed photograph sends a stronger message than its poorly lit, unappetizing food counterpart. This is not to say the anything goes spirit of the food sharing movement so popular amongst vegans today isn't without merit. It's harmless. It's preaching to the converted. It's a different animal.

However, a little bit of care needs to be factored in when presenting vegan food to our non-vegan brethren. The food has to look good, it must be appealing, for the message to be effective. Sure, the value placed on aesthetics may feed the assertion that food photography is frivolous, but it remains a critical part. It's a powerful tool.

There is a clear connection between photography and activism. One needn't look further than the history of photojournalism to illustrate this. The role of the photojournalist is to highlight important issues. How is a picture of food like photojournalism? When the food is representative of a movement like veganism, it qualifies.

Is food photography life and death? For the animals, it is.

Marika Collins is a photographer, writer and longtime vegan who likes to eat.

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DAMN'DER IF YOU DON'T BATTLING A DEGENERATIVE DISEASE WITH ANIMAL-TESTED MEDS

Words and photos by Michele Truty | Illustration by Matt Gauck

"That won't work for me. Wednesday is my late day." I'm surprised at how often I have to use this line. It used to be Tuesday, and before that it was Friday, but doctor's recommendations happened, pharmacy mix-ups happened, and my life schedule had to be reworked. You see, Wednesday is my late day because on Tuesday nights, I inject myself with methotrexate, a low-dose chemo drug used to treat (among other things) rheumatoid arthritis. And it knocks me down hard, lasting well into the following day.

I can push myself if I have to, but I'm glassy-eyed, nauseated, and not as smart as usual. Nobody needs this version of me. So I rely on the understanding of others and work very hard every other day of the week to make up for lost time.

As someone who has lived in a very imperfect body—seriously, before modern medicine, no way would I even be alive now—I have been on and

quit maintenance meds for seizures, migraines, and endometriosis/cystic ovaries/fibroids. I worked hard to get off the seizure and migraine meds, and a hysterectomy put an end to my wonky reproductive system. I don't like the idea of being on a medication indefinitely, not to mention the constant bloodwork to make sure my medicine isn't killing me slowly, financial toll, and the feeling that I have somehow failed myself to the point that this is my only option.

Failed myself how? Isn't rheumatoid arthritis an autoimmune disorder? Sure, but I ignored signs of the disease for about a decade. It was gradual, as is age, and a combination of finances and stubbornness kept me from seeking help. And truth be told, I was afraid of non-veg-friendly doctors, as had been my experience in the past.

After 11 years of battling endometriosis and its pals—that's five doctors, seven surgeries, and two

6-month courses of Lupron injections—I couldn’t bring myself to see another doctor, especially for something as trivial as “getting older.” Then I went freelance, which meant giving up health insurance, which meant giving up doctors for anything as trivial as not actually dying right now.

So I wrote off my symptoms as arthritis and employed a series of workarounds. I put fluffy insoles in my shoes when it hurt to walk, and I dealt with the fact that I couldn’t bend or straighten my arms as I once did, so I made small adjustments, like hooking my bra shut around my belly then putting my arms

to rub it in people’s faces how the vegan was the only one in the office *not* sick, was working so hard that it was destroying my good cells as well as the bad ones. The lining at my joints was degenerating and causing lots of swelling, grinding, and breaking; as the series of X-rays proved, that pain in my elbow was indeed a fracture.

My blood work showed that along with stellar cholesterol, B12, protein, and iron levels (high-five!), I had acquired an incurable disease. After some squeezing, bending, and probing at the hands of my rheumatologist, we learned that the disease was



The hospital gown was threatening to become my uniform. Unacceptable, even if it showcased my winning sock collection.

through the straps and shimmying it up. I taped up my fingers when they felt like they were going to fall off. And I found a vegan joint supplement made from corn, not shellfish, which I’m pretty sure worked a bit, although I don’t know how the alternate-universe version of me fared, the one where I wasn’t taking it. I got by and didn’t inconvenience anyone else, so where was the harm?

The harm was that during those years—yes, the same time I went vegan—I was doing irreparable damage to my body. My immune system, the same one that kept me from getting colds and allowed me

rather advanced. Luckily, my lungs, heart, and eyes seemed to be as yet unaffected. The doctor was impressed but annoyed by my complaints/deformity ratio. That is to say, my neglected joints were so swollen he couldn’t believe I wasn’t in more pain. I had to speak up, stop ignoring the pain and all the things I wrote off as inconveniences—these were what was going to help us monitor and combat the disease. Because we were going to fight this disease.

He prescribed weekly methotrexate, in pill form. I expressed my concerns, since of course medications

in the U.S. are created and tested with lab animals. I said I’d like to not be part of that system, and I actually play for the other team. But my options were these: Stay the (declining) course, since I was already getting regular exercise, had a decent diet (pro-vegan doctor, what?!), was taking a joint supplement, and tended to the painful bits with care. Or stop the disease from making me worse. Because as much as you coddle or ignore your pain, the disease itself, the cause of the pain, keeps getting worse.

His argument was that at 41, I was too young to fall apart as quickly as I was. This is a degenerative

and I guarantee you I don’t always catch my brain in the act. That’s sort of its deal, doing stuff without my knowing it.

No question, animal testing is absolutely brutal. It is absolutely looking at one creature and deciding it is worth less than another creature. Animals are born and killed in labs in the name of science and safety, and it’s been that way for a very long time. At the core of it is a determination, a valuation, that says my human life is more important than that of another animal. I cannot be okay with that.

My particular medication was developed in the



These eight tiny pills would wipe out my appetite for days while fighting my disease.

disease that lands people in wheelchairs, causes scar tissue to form in lungs, and can sideline you from what you could otherwise spend your time and energy doing.

Noted. I took his prescription, did a bunch of research, and had a proper think.

Rationalization is a very powerful tool, and like many other tools it can do both good and harm. A hammer can be used to build shelter or hang inspirational artwork...or bludgeon an opponent. I spend a good part of my life questioning my beliefs, to find holes in my logic and prove myself a fraud,

1950s. I could argue that the harm done via the development and testing occurred 65 years ago. Not good enough—that reeks of rationalization. I had to further examine the issue. I read more. I talked more. I asked the internet. When I wrote a blog post about my dilemma, I received encouragement from vegans and omnivores alike. One friend commented that if anyone should be given a pass it was me, for dedicating my life to vegan causes. I cried. I know she was trying to be supportive, and I know her point was that I put so much effort into bettering life for other creatures that I could tell the vegan police to

fuck off, should they come a'knockin'. But she was presenting me with a balance sheet in which I could feel entitled, like I was owed the fruits of the animals' suffering. I could not accept that.

Other vegans came forward and shared their stories, being faced with this disease or that, and knowing their medication was animal-tested, or even sometimes animal-derived. They pointed out over and again the aspect of veganism about doing the least harm possible. Doing what you can where you can means sometimes a system is in place that prevents you from living an ideal, cruelty-free life. It would

before they assist a child with theirs. If the adult has enough in them to get one mask, and puts it on themselves, they will receive the necessary oxygen to get that second mask down for the child. If the adult puts it on the child first and passes out, it's unlikely that child will be able to reach the mask and assist the now unconscious adult.

I decided to put my oxygen mask on first. If the medication worked, I would continue to take it.

Turns out, the medication worked remarkably well. As my mobility increased and my pain subsided, I started to realize how much pain I had been in,

always have odd little protrusions around my elbows and wrists, and my left index finger will always be useless and rubbery, like that pencil illusion where you wave it back and forth really fast.

And then, of course, there are the side effects.

The side effects were two or three days of nausea every week. My appetite shrank to the point that I relied on juice and ginger candies—I'd have to leave the vegan cuisine cheerleading to others, since food smelled horrible, tasted like metal, and was just hard to force into my mouth and down my throat. My partner would make me eat at least something for dinner every day, and it was his bullying that probably kept me in as good of shape as I was. But a lifetime of this was not acceptable. I now take the same medication as an injection, and the side effects have decreased immensely without diminishing the effectiveness.

So as I am feeling better, am more self-reliant, and can be much more active physically—and no longer letting this disease try to dissolve me—I still have to consider the fact that not only were animals used, abused, discarded, and discounted for me, the lucky human, but I am supporting the larger system that allows the practice to continue. (Luckily, as an ethical vegan, my animal advocacy has never relied on perfect health claims, so zero effect there.)

My solution in dealing with my medication, perhaps born of rationalization, is to take that balance sheet idea my supportive friend put before me and give it a twist. I cannot simply balance the positive of my animal advocacy against the negative of these animals' lives and call us square. Complacency never helped spur change.

Instead, I'm taking the cost of these lives as a debt. I'm putting myself in the red. All the animals used for the making of me: testing for medications or other medical advancements, the body care products and food—I've only been vegan about 10 years, so this debt is deep—I owe it to all those animals to work

as hard as I can to spread a cruelty-free message, to encourage the FDA to explore and accept alternative testing methods, to speak against the development of new animal testing labs, to choose products from companies that do not test on animals, to let companies that do test on animals know why I am not purchasing their products, and to support sanctuaries and animal rights advocates.

We're seeing a growing tide of AR awareness, as technology advances and humans share their outrage over how we treat nonhumans for testing and entertainment, and that's exciting. Of course it's never fast enough, but it is happening. I never thought I'd see chimps make their way from crates to sanctuaries, but that is happening. And we have to capitalize on this momentum.

Tomorrow's children should be puzzled if not horrified by our testing methods. In the next generation or two, they should be able to look back at our lab animals the same way we now see the canary in the coalmine, as archaic and cruel. We wouldn't dream of using an animal today to test for dangerous gases. Of course, that's likely due to technological advances rather than compassion—we barely value the lives of the humans working in mines—but those technological advances result in saved lives, and I'll take it. I'll take it and push for more. 'Cause I don't know about your debt, but I've barely made a dent in mine.

Michele Truty is a Chicago native who made her way to Portland, Oregon, via New York and Los Angeles, because what fun is a straight line? A freelance word nerd and Managing Editor of Driftwood magazine, she is also a co-founder of Vida Vegan Con and the voice behind Vegtastic Voyage. When she's not neck-deep in editing, she's listening to records, drawing on herself, or singing ridiculous songs to her cats.

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My new Tuesday night ritual. Not ideal, but a vast improvement.

be foolish of me to not take this medication that could make me a healthier, more positive activist, and instead allow my body to degenerate further. This was the more compelling argument.

Now, I'm not a huge proponent of self-care. It sounds swell, but I've always been of the opinion that my body is disposable, and I'm just going to do what I can with it for as long as I can. I'm definitely a member of the "I'll sleep when I'm dead" gang. That said, I do quite like the self-care crowd's airplane example of an adult putting on their oxygen mask

that I ignored. I was now able to put my car in gear without using both hands—yes, that was a thing some days. I could walk 10 miles in a day and not swear my toes and knees were broken. I could type without a wrist guard or two of my fingers taped together. After two months, my doctor was amazed by my improvement. After a year, he's confident the disease has been abated.

That's not to say I am cured. Again, there is currently no cure, and much of my damage cannot be reversed. My shoulders will always be crackly, my range of motion will always be somewhat limited, I'll



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~how beautiful is a world that is healthy, well-fed, and kind all at the same time~