

T.O.F.U.

T.O.F.U. MAGAZINE

There is an alternative | Issue 12 | October 2017



What Do You See?

How addressing mental health in the
community is the yeast we can do.



Totally and Obviously Fucked Up is a vegan magazine that promotes 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

Arguably one of the most famous tools of Psychology, the Rorschach inkblots are easily associated with mental health by many. Plus, the concept of each inkblot providing various responses appealed to me in the sense that mental health issues can be expressed (and treated) in a variety of ways. Accepting and adapting to this concept is something that our community must work harder on, and being inclusive of those with such things as anxiety, depression, addiction, and more is one of the first steps.

On a bad note, I am sad to say that some nutritional yeast was spilled in the making of this cover.

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Reiner Beh



FROM THE EDITOR

“I’m depressed.”

If you’ve never been one to say this, it’s at least likely that you’ve heard plenty of other people make such a statement. Of course, it’s also very likely that whoever said it was really just having a bad day instead of experiencing actual clinical depression.

Unfortunately, it’s little things like this (as well as larger issues such as poor funding for mental health services and the ongoing stigma of talking openly about mental health) that add up to make living as someone with such things as anxiety, depression, ADHD, etc. a lot more complicated. Common phrases such as the one above help to minimize the experiences of those actually living with these issues, and they often feed into the idea that, if your cure for being “depressed” is a walk in a park, a couple squares of (vegan, fair-trade) chocolate, or shaking it off with the help of TSwift, then everyone else just needs to do the same

Sadly, when coupled with being vegan, it can be even more difficult to try and convince others that what you’re experiencing won’t just simply go away if you cut oil out of your diet or add a dash of nutritional yeast. In these cases, the usual reactions can be coupled with the accusation of not being “vegan enough” thanks to a great deal of ignorance and the continued promotion of the idea that veganism is the miracle pill we all need.

Hopefully, thanks in large part to the efforts of the authors, this issue will help to shed more light on the importance of refusing to swallow that pill, all while acknowledging that swallowing other pills is okay.

Ryan Rats

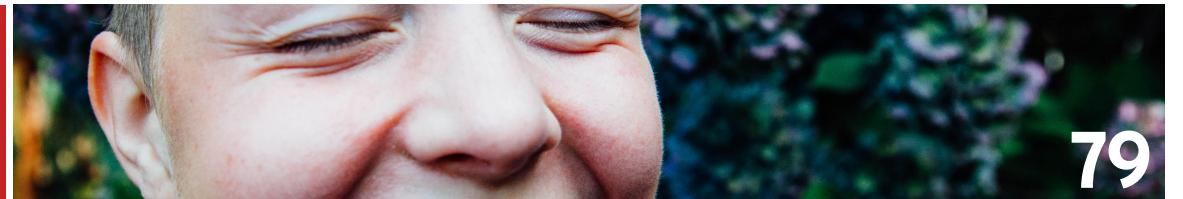
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Content Warning: articles within this issue contain references to restrictive or disordered eating, violence against animals, drug and alcohol addiction, racism, depression, and suicidal thoughts/actions.

SPOTLIGHT

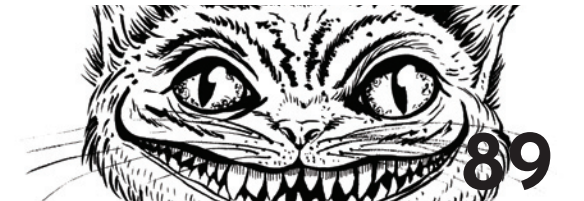


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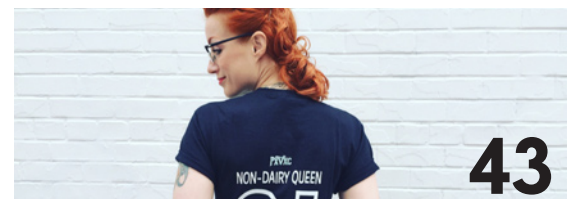


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MY HYPERACTIVE VEGAN MIND

Words, Photo, and Illustration by Julia Feliz Brueck

I have undergraduate and graduate biological science degrees and two illustration diplomas. I am a published author and illustrator, and most recently, I founded Sanctuary Publishers, a new vegan book publisher committed to raising the voices of nonhuman animals and all other marginalized groups. I am waiting to hear back on a research paper I just submitted for publication on invasive species, and I am fairly certain that, in a few years' time, I will pursue my doctorate degree in the field of biomedical research with an emphasis in the symbiotic relationship between plants and microscopic fungi.

CREDITS FIRST

It should not have taken me my listing of all those accomplishments before I felt comfortable enough to also tell you about my living life with

inattentive Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). See, this very real disorder is often viewed as an excuse used by “lazy people that should have just been spanked more as children.” Within the vegan movement, it is usually claimed that it is just a matter of adjusting our diets to get rid of the toxins or allergens causing the symptoms since it is just a fabricated illness invented by “Big Pharma” to sell us poisonous pills.

Someone with ADHD should not have to feel a need to justify that they are not unintelligent, “lazy”, duped by corporate greed, or self-blamed for how their brain works because they enjoy a piece of candy with red colour dye every so often. No one with ADHD should feel they have to prove anything at all, including their need to take medication (regardless of whether or not they're vegan). And yet, despite the extensively available research, which has established ADHD as a very real disorder, the

myths of what it is and is not still plague and shame those of us that experience life with it.

ADHD is a recognized heritable neurobiological disorder and diagnosis (National Institutes of Health; The American Psychiatric Association). Our brains are actually structured differently to someone without ADHD, and we are unable to release enough dopamine and norepinephrine leading us to experience cognitive issues such as inattention, impulsiveness, and the associated hyperactivity. People with ADHD often times experience comorbid (co-occurring) disorders as well, which means many of us also suffer from anxiety, depression, etc. which may be due to ADHD itself. We have different severities of the disorder and varying degrees of opportunities that also hinder us or help us find a unique place in a world not designed for people that think or act like us.

UNDERSTANDING MY STORY

I was 20 years old when I read my first book to completion. It was during that summer that I received my ADHD diagnosis. I had never heard of it before. After several sessions with medical professionals, I was sent home to think about whether I wanted to try Ritalin or not. I decided that I wanted to see if it had any effect on me and this so called ADHD thing.

Almost a decade and a half later, I often think about how much more I could have achieved before twenty, and I find myself grateful for the achievements that medication has granted me access to. Back to that summer, medication meant being able to still my mind enough to focus on every individual word in a book and actually remember, as well as absorb what I was reading. While reading a book cover to cover may be something you take for granted, it was then that I read my first book from start to finish. Of course, that was just one small yet meaningful example of how meds helped me.

What about the previous 20 years? As someone with inattentive ADHD, my hyperactivity tends to be inside my mind and not displayed outwardly unless you know what I am like when medicated or not. So, I was always seen as a very well-behaved and quiet student that was very much dedicated to their school work. Little did my teachers know, I was spaced out unless I was writing down every single word that came out of their mouths. I had developed hypersensitive hearing and religiously used a planner to remember every detail of my day. This is how I managed to get straight A's without ever opening a book or anyone noticing I went about my day... mostly inside my head.

That's just part of my story. As people with ADHD, the disorder tends to make us typically intensely passionate, highly empathetic, creative, leaders under pressure, problem solvers, adventure seekers, and risk takers, which at times makes it a superpower. Yet at the same time, ADHD can hinder everyday life in many ways and in differing severities depending on the individual. What does ADHD look like? It's not slacking off, rebelling, or not wanting to act as expected by society. ADHD can be not being able to focus in a conversation or on tasks. It is falling into something called hyperfocus, an inability to stop focusing intensively on things that interest us, which is a great gift, but also a curse in times when we can't snap out of it. It's not having a concept of time and never remembering appointments. ADHD is forgetting a question we have been asked in the middle of answering it (you may have noticed this happening to me if you have heard me on a vegan podcast or radio interview!). It is being unaffected by reward systems and compensations in order to complete uninteresting tasks, which is how the rest of the world operates. Motivation is hard to find for people with our disorder if we find something repetitive and boring. It is speaking too openly and blurting out nonstop thoughts before considering



what we are even saying because our brain doesn't stop. ADHD means typos because we type slower than the thoughts that want to make it out of our heads. It means having to write everything down before the next thought takes over and we forget an idea we had seconds before. There are just a few examples of what ADHD means for someone like me.

In essence, our brains work completely different to those without ADHD. We are neurodivergent people trying to find our way in a world that was not set up for the way we work and experience the world.

ACCEPTANCE & MOVING FORWARD

All those accomplishments that I listed at the beginning? They were made possible with the help of medication. Medication, for those that need it, is not perfect, but it is an established, effective, and safe resource available to help us achieve a more even playing field. If I had the choice, I would take medication that was 100% vegan, yet in the current time we live in, this is not possible. I do choose to believe, not that my needs are more important than nonhuman animals, that I am able to be a better advocate for them if my life isn't a complete struggle to stay in the present. This is where pro-intersectionality and a veganism that is defined as "is possible and practicable" come in.

Veganism is a movement first and foremost for nonhuman animals, and we are all individuals doing our best to navigate the waters of a very non-vegan

world. However, as individuals we do not experience the same exact oppressions or hurdles. Thus, we must be respectful of our individual struggles in our common fight to find liberation for other animals. People with ADHD exist in the vegan community, and dismissive and hurtful comments about our disorder make the movement unsafe and unwelcoming. Not only that, they also serve to further marginalize us.

Instead of shaming and targeting neurodivergent people for our needs, does it not make more sense to work against animal testing and towards changing the system of exploitation as a whole? Ultimately, a little understanding and respect of one another will help our movement raise the voices of nonhuman animals much farther while also improving the lives of those within our communities.

Julia Feliz Brueck is a decade long vegan, mother of two, scientist, and published author and illustrator. She is also the founder of Sanctuary Publishers (sanctuarypublishers.com), a vegan book publisher that gives back to marginalized communities with every book sold. Published under the Sanctuary Publishers label, sales from Julia's newest book, the Baby and Toddler Vegan Feeding Guide, which aims to help parents feed their babies and toddlers safely, simply, and through evidence based means, also helps support the work of Chilis on Wheels, an organization that helps to feed the homeless with vegan meals.

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OR RAISED EYEBROWS.

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MAKING ROOM AT THE TABLE

FINDING COMMUNITY & GREAT FOOD IN TAMPA, FLORIDA, USA

Words by Susan Gail Taylor | Cover Photo by Yourhighness Tafari (VeggdOut) | Other Photos as Credited

Sometimes I don't want to be The Nice Vegan. There – I said it.

To be the vegan who –

- quells the comebacks I so badly want to unleash when strangers, acquaintances, coworkers, and even loved ones feel the need to openly criticize my lifestyle;
- tailors my response so that I'm not seen as The Angry Vegan every single time omnivores recount to me in explicit detail the gourmet cheeseburger they had for lunch and why they could never give it up;
- avoids engaging in confrontation – both in person and in the digital world – from the never-ending, clichéd “Mmmmm bacon” level of trolling;
- and dines politely beside loved ones who are omnivores and who decide to cross-examine me and proclaim I'm insulting them when I answer their questions
- is exhausting!

Despite the tenets of my Southern upbringing that oblige me to be sweet and to engage politely, opting out of The Nice Vegan responsibilities is liberating, something every vegan deserves to experience as we face a world that often mocks and criticizes our every bite.

Such situations are nothing new to vegans or to vegetarians for that matter. In fact, you'd think everyone – vegans and non-vegans alike – would have realized by now how very outdated and unoriginal they are. Yet tune into mainstream media posts about veganism or sit down at family suppers or company picnics where vegans are in the minority, and BAM – those situations will find a way to rear their heads.

The Nice Vegan in me gets it – to an extent. Food is deeply ingrained in all that we are. Our culture is awakened with the seasonings of our pans. Our traditions move from lore to reality as

we dine on recipes handed down from those before us. Our memories are resurrected with the comfort of smells and tastes we've long enjoyed. So when someone else's habits and lifestyles challenge what we know, what we've become accustomed to, and what has become part of our identity, it can disrupt our comfort level.

Keyword: "our."

Most vegans understand this because most of us have been there. We once centred our understanding of food on the lessons of our childhood, not on whose lives and whose freedoms were being taken for us to eat. But then we transitioned. Suddenly, "our" meant something else. "Our" was not just ourselves any longer; "our" was a collective. The animals became a part of how we engaged with food - a concern that conjures up a whirlwind of views and that doesn't always find a welcome mat at family dinners and company picnics. The Nice Vegan in us all remembers what it was like before we had to look for those welcome mats.

But these days - and more and more frequently it seems - it is The Angry Vegan and The Anxious Vegan who battle for my reactions as I look for signs that I'm welcome, that I'm included. Yes, The Nice Vegan in me gets that food can be a sensitive subject, but so is what so much of this world does to animals for the sake of food (among other things). What should vegans do when Aunt Marie waves a turkey leg in our face for the 6th Thanksgiving in a row? When Coworker Nigel stinks up the entire floor by warming up last night's tilapia in the microwave again and then scampers over to our desk to gawk at our lunch while preaching about our lack of protein? When Good Buddy Rod laughs when we show up to his annual summer shindig with our own food in plastic ware and bellows that we should "Just lighten up and eat the burgers like everyone else"? When Cousin Alicia won't stop complaining about why we didn't show up to eat with the family at the local BBQ



Pure Kitchen's Curry Soup and Rice | Photo by Kyoko Faison

joint and just grin and bear it for their sakes? (Too often, we're damned if we show up, and damned if we don't.) What do we as vegans do when we've just had enough? There are only so many times we can ignore the jokes, the condescension, and the weight of the mask we too often wear to avoid confrontation before we:

- A. allow the confrontation to take place; and/or
- B. become so overwhelmed with anger and anxiety that we remove ourselves from certain social situations.

For some vegans, there may be other options, but it is at the crossroads of A and B where I landed a couple of years ago. Veganism has grown so much in popularity, accessibility, and affordability, but it seems that so have all the ways to browbeat those of us who live the lifestyle. Oftentimes, it is done at the hands of those we consider to be the closest members of our inner circles. When I first arrived at this crossroads, I didn't know if I should blame those who browbeat me or myself for allowing it to affect me. I didn't know if I could do more to mitigate my anxiety and frustration. I didn't know if I should do more to make others understand veganism, if for no other reason than to get them off my back about it. I didn't know if I was supposed to reach out to non-vegans about my lifestyle anymore. I never identified this magical person who deemed how vegans are supposed to react and not supposed to react either, so I figured I'd go at it my way. Even if I decided to take on the proactive role of The Education Vegan - you know, that vegan who listens patiently, rises above the jokes, and combats them with sound logic while forever remaining calm - I knew I didn't always have it in me to do so. It's much more likely that my frustration would consistently erupt and I'd be labelled as condescending or annoying or disparaging.

I took stock of what I didn't know and realized something: I needed to act in the name of self-care.

“I want to share the health benefits of veganism by making it accessible to many people. We try to offer a variety of food that even non-vegan people can enjoy,” Faison says. “Food is an essential part of veganism, so by offering good food that tastes good and that everyone can enjoy, we can spread the word about the benefits of veganism.”

My time spent at the crossroads of A and B disrupted the way I interacted with much of my community, and I needed to find a new one, one that soothed The Angry Vegan and The Anxious Vegan in me and that provided The Nice Vegan with the opportunity to eat and to exist and to maybe even make a friend or two. Simple on paper – much more challenging in practice at 37 years old with over 20 years of aggravation and anxiety and loss of acceptance on my shoulders. We vote the loudest with our dollars, so I decided to look for my new community in places that valued my vegan money and hoped to connect with folks there. Luckily, I live in Tampa, Florida, USA and this city is teeming with restaurants that are serving up amazing vegan dishes as well as reaching out to vegans who are seeking interaction and a stronger support system.

Some of my local favourites include:

**PURE KITCHEN
KYOKO FAISON, OWNER AND CHEF**

New to South Tampa in the spring of 2017, this organic vegan eatery prides itself on making food quick and accessible to all with its grab & go and weekly meal delivery concept. Visitors can expect bright smiles, a hearty “hello” from the entire staff, a comprehensive explanation of their concept and menu, and sincere gratitude for your business. I’ve enjoyed a variety of dishes here such as raw vegan macaroni and cheese, kale chips, coconut bacon, vegan pesto penne, and jerk fried rice, but what I’ve loved more than the food is watching vegan and non-vegans alike come in to experience the food together. Such a sight never fails; it gives me hope that The Nice Vegan in all those who visit will continue to have a space where they feel safe introducing non-vegans to the comforts vegan cuisine can provide.



| Pure Kitchen's Raw Vegan Nacho Cheese Kale Chips | Photo by Kyoko Faison



STACY'S GLUTEN-FREE GOODIES STACY RIFFEL, OWNER AND CHEF

This vegan, gluten-free, allergen-free bakery opened in 2011 in Carrollwood and wows vegans all over the city with every bite. Stacy recently opened an additional location in South Tampa where she continues to charm with vegan treats such as chocolate truffle cake, snickerdoodle cupcakes, coffee crumb donuts, and any custom sweet you can dream up. I've revelled in her Bellini cupcakes complete with peach Schnapps for my last three birthdays, and I frequently pop in during the workweek for the perfect pick-me-up. Stacy and her team always have a kind word for me and for their many fans on social media – even going so far as to hold dessert tasting nights to introduce customers new and old to their treats and also running a naming contest for a new line of cookies they cooked up.

"As with any special diet like vegan or avoidance of food allergens, it is important to educate people on the reasons we are vegan or allergy-free," Stacy says. "In my experience, most people are much less negative once you get an opportunity to talk about the lifestyle and the benefits."

She highlights the importance of businesses that cater to vegans to accept one very important responsibility. "The bakery is a safe place vegans can come to and be 100% supported in their choice to be vegan. Don't we all want to be respected and supported for our choices?"

| From Left to Right: Stacy's Chocolate Sunbutter Cupcake, Cherry Chocolate Cake, and Custom Cupcakes | Photos by Stacy Riffel



“[Vegan businesses] are seeking to benefit from local vegans’ hard-earned money, so they have a responsibility I feel to assist in creating an environment which allows vegan people to commune and foster new relationships, as of course this naturally establishes and builds a community.”
- Yourhighness Tafari

**VEGG'D OUT VEGAN KITCHEN -
YOURHIGHNESS TAFARI, CO-OWNER AND EXECUTIVE CHEF**

I don't like to play favourites, but wow – that is impossible when it comes to Vegg'd Out Vegan Kitchen! Inimitable offerings such as Nattiez Pattiez – a rolled dough patty that's almost as long as my forearm and stuffed to the brim with veggie goodies – and Juicez – N – Berries CupKakez – a dessert so beautiful it deserves to be displayed, not devoured – go a long way toward making this my stand-out vegan eatery in Tampa. What takes it that extra mile is how the team fosters a strong sense of community among local vegans. The dedication, love, and gratitude is poured into the eatery's Melodious Eats cooking show held in local libraries and broadcast on social media, the team's steadfast attendance in the local market scene, and their speaking engagements where they show the local community how to eat vegan and healthy on a budget.

About the acceptance of his veganism, Yourhighness says, “I only experienced a degree of negativity through the early years after I consciously changed my lifestyle.” He committed early on to surrounding himself “with like-minded, like-hearted people who exhibit a degree of caring” and on building his business, an opportunity he sees as a vital part of the vegan community.

Yourhighness recommends that vegan businesses become involved in the community by committing to do more than making profit. “Whether that's providing and spreading information among local vegan people, holding gatherings/organizing services that do not require cost to attend that increase the camaraderie among the community, being creative, or adding value to the community morally and ethically - this is what builds real bonds.”

| Right: Vegg'dOut Vegan Kitchen's Blizzowed | Photo by YourHighness Tafari





“Vegan businesses should be havens for the community, and I view the success of Farmacy as a sign that Tampa is catching up to bigger metropolitan areas like Orlando and Miami.”
- Tim Fedorko

FARMACY VEGAN KITCHEN AND BAKERY
TIM FEDORKO, CULINARY PARTNER AND EXECUTIVE CHEF

If this article were an awards show, Farmacy Vegan Kitchen and Bakery would win Best New Artist – hands down. The team tempts Tampa every morning on social media with photos of dreamy, creamy vegan cupcakes, muffins, and donuts, but those are just the concoctions that get you in the door. What keeps you coming back is how the team connects with each and every customer who follows the waft of delectable baked goods inside. Oh – and their tofu wraps, lasagna, lentil salads, acai bowls, and protein shakes don’t hurt either.

“I love to recreate savoury flavours and dishes that hit that umami taste sensation in a way most vegans only recall from their omnivorous days,” Tim says. “When I first went vegan, I was very much the militant type, but as time went on, I realized the best way to support the vegan community and spread the message was to package it as a culinary experience.” And what a pretty bow he’s put on that package! Tampa vegans are overwhelmed with what Farmacy offers up on our plates as well as to the community. “I mean that feeling of ‘Wait - I can order everything?’ is so amazing,” Tim says. He and his team look forward to becoming a bigger part of the digital vegan community, as well as the local Tampa scene at markets and other pop-ups.

| From Top Left to Right: Farmacy’s Strawberry Chocolate Cake, Strawberry Rose Cupcakes, and Avocado Vegan BLT Wrap | Photos by Charles Rumph

Of course, it's not just the vegan-friendly restaurants that have helped me here in Tampa; it's also the people. One of the folks I have met along the way in my quest for community is Allison, a Tampa local who has been vegan for seven years.

As a hip girl on the vegan foodie scene, Allison knows all too well the emotional whiplash that can come with first becoming vegan and then introducing your new lifestyle to your loved ones. "These days I just ignore most comments about it, I've come to realize that everyone has to come to veganism on their own," she says. "The first year or two I would often get really down, I didn't understand: I saw all this suffering - why couldn't everyone else?"

The idea that her veganism would elicit criticism held her back from identifying as a vegan in her early days. "When I first chose a vegan diet, I would be so anxious about going to restaurants," she says. "I would never say I was vegan, and I felt really ashamed. I'd just order something and modify to fit veganism and not eat it if they forgot the specific instructions. Also, sometimes it's bothersome to be eating in a group and it all turns to veganism talk. I don't want to talk about why I'm vegan when others are eating animals. I think over the years different types of diets and ways of eating (thank you gluten free and paleo) have made veganism more accepted."

Now, Allison consistently relies on her local and digital vegan communities. "I am always seeking out vegan groups on Facebook and following vegan specific tags on Instagram," she says. "Sometimes I just want to go to an imaginary world/safe space where everyone is vegan - and I can create that. I started a vegan group locally and attend any vegan/veg event around town. Also, if your store sells anything vegan, you bet I am buying."

Her local favourites include:

Mermaid Tavern

"It's a great local spot that isn't all vegan but always has a few AMAZING vegan offerings. I just hope that one day someone tries their veggie burger and thinks - 'Wow! This is vegan food?!'"

Farmacy Vegan Kitchen and Bakery

"They competed in the Mayor's Mac & Cheese Throwdown, an annual event here in Tampa. That was a smart move because that gave such widespread exposure of vegan food to a non-vegan audience. That is the kind of thing more vegan restaurants should do to develop connections outside of the vegan community."

Nitally's Thai-Mex Cuisine

"The Panang Mole burrito isn't just my favourite meal in Tampa Bay, but in the world - hands down! Nitally's is a Thai-Mexican fusion spot, and you are welcomed with a 'Warning: everything is spicy' sign on the door. I order my dish Thai-Mex hot."

Thanks to both the businesses and the people, Tampa has a thriving vegan community where I'm finding it easier to be myself and to eat and exist in peace. But for those vegans here who are still anxious about reaching out, and for those who live in places that don't have many (or any) welcome mats for vegans, here are some tips that have helped me:

- Bring in vegan food.

Find someone you feel comfortable talking to at work, at school, at your gym, at your church, or anywhere you spend time and suggest a mini potluck. Anything they can eat we can eat vegan - anything! Facing criticism at every bite in my past communities left me with a lot of anxiety and a lot of hurt feelings. When I was ready to dip my toe in the new friend pond, I did so with food. The Nice Vegan in me was appeased and so were my new friends when they tasted my vegan macaroni and cheese.

- Be firm with your boundaries.

I'd love to think that every new friend I meet will see the yummy vegan food I eat, have a taste, and instantly give up eating animals and products made from their death. Alas, I've accepted that is merely a pipe dream. When I hear talk of lunch plans among coworkers or friends and feel The Nice Vegan and The Anxious Vegan beginning to battle, I quiet them by remembering I have boundaries. My presence is not required at every outing, and my money will not be spent on food or products that come from animals. There's no need for confrontation when I'm upfront with where I draw the line.

- Know when to walk away - and then do it.

There will always be those who challenge what I eat and why I eat it, who crack jokes, who troll my social media posts, and who get a kick of being downright ugly just for the sake of being downright ugly. Some of these people have been and will be complete strangers; some of these people have been (and hopefully never will be going forward) those I once loved dearly. While I will fight until my last breath to save animals, I've accepted that there are more effective ways to do so than arguing with those who refuse to see the value in animals' lives. To protect myself so that I can continue to fight the good fight, I had to come to terms with knowing when to walk away from certain conversations, certain events, and certain people. It hurts, but the consistent confrontations and criticism hurt me more. I'd much rather focus on walking toward a community where I'm accepted and animals are valued.

I imagine vegans across the globe will find ourselves at one crossroads or another at some point - or at many points - throughout our lives. When and where we land at those crossroads will often be decided by the incessant battle for society - or at least the communities closest to us - to accept the value we see in animals' lives

and freedom. I've accepted that it will always be complicated, that there will always be some level of commentary or criticism about my lifestyle, and that the weight of criticism about making a choice that literally saves lives will always weigh heavy on my heart. What lightens that load for me is that there are businesses that care as much about cultivating a vegan community as they care about the success of their business. Their concerted effort as well as the effort of my fellow vegans - both in my digital world and in my real world - has pacified so much of my anger and anxiety and reassured me that it is OK to step away from those who put my choices down only to rile me up. The animals need The Nice Vegan in all of us, for it is that vegan whose patience and rationale wins over hearts and minds and changes the world one plate a time.

But The Nice Vegan can dish out a snappy comeback every now and then, right?

Susan Gail Taylor is a vegan, activist, animal rescuer, and fitness enthusiast who enjoys the creative process of creating content. Originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, USA and having called Las Vegas, Nevada, USA home twice, she now resides in Tampa, Florida, USA with her boyfriend Nathan, her Chihuahuas, Tallon and Casey, and her Staffordshire Terrier, Kane. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a Bachelor of Arts degree as well as a Master of Arts degree in Professional and Technical Writing from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Her current projects include launching a website entitled Greens Your Heart, focusing on plant-powered nutrition and fitness, and earning certification as a nutritional consultant.

w: greensyourheart.com | ig: [inkedveganfitgirl](https://www.instagram.com/inkedveganfitgirl/)



YES NO
CRYSTALS
CONDIMENTS,
AND
TIBETAN
KARAOKE



WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JENNY MARIE
ILLUSTRATION BY MATT GAUCK



GOOD-BYE

Acute, chronic depression was my secret shame for many years. My physical health was never particularly 'peak', but I had youth on my side. Until my late twenties, I smoked Marlboro reds, drank booze, ate rich dinners, and pretty much got away with all of it. I propelled my fragile mental health turbulently forward through nearly two decades fairly convincingly, as what you might call a 'high functioning' depressive.

It took a long time before acute depression stopped being my secret shame -something I could pocket and put to one side while I got on with life- and started being my chronic illness; rudely compromising my ability to function successfully. I've tried psychiatry, fluoxetine, citalopram, mirtazapine, person centred counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy, apps, bullet journals, mindfulness, etc., ad-nauseam. It took a long time before depression became something I accepted as a permanent condition with no sure-fire cure.

That's hard to do.

Depression is still my secret shame in some ways; I'm not 'out' with my family (though I'd be surprised if they didn't already know or suspect) nor at my full-time job. I'm terrible at sharing. I hide the really negative stuff away and I hold the brace position until the storm blows over. I've lost friends and partners that way. But I keep on trying to find new and better ways to cope.

When I hit 34, I started to experience symptoms of physical illness. There were gastro symptoms that merited a sigmoidoscopy (you can look that up, the same way the camera looked up my ass), fatigue and 'brain fog', cognitive difficulties, and numbness, along with other weird sensations in my hands and feet. I also had a long bout of tonsillitis (later upgraded to glandular fever) that just wouldn't quit in early 2016. I was diagnosed with a B12 deficiency, treated, and a barrage of other tests gave me the all-clear. With symptoms persisting, in September 2016 I was

eventually diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (or, *It's All In Your Head, Try Harder*¹), and since then I've been coming to terms with another chronic condition with no cure.

BUT HAVE YOU TRIED...?

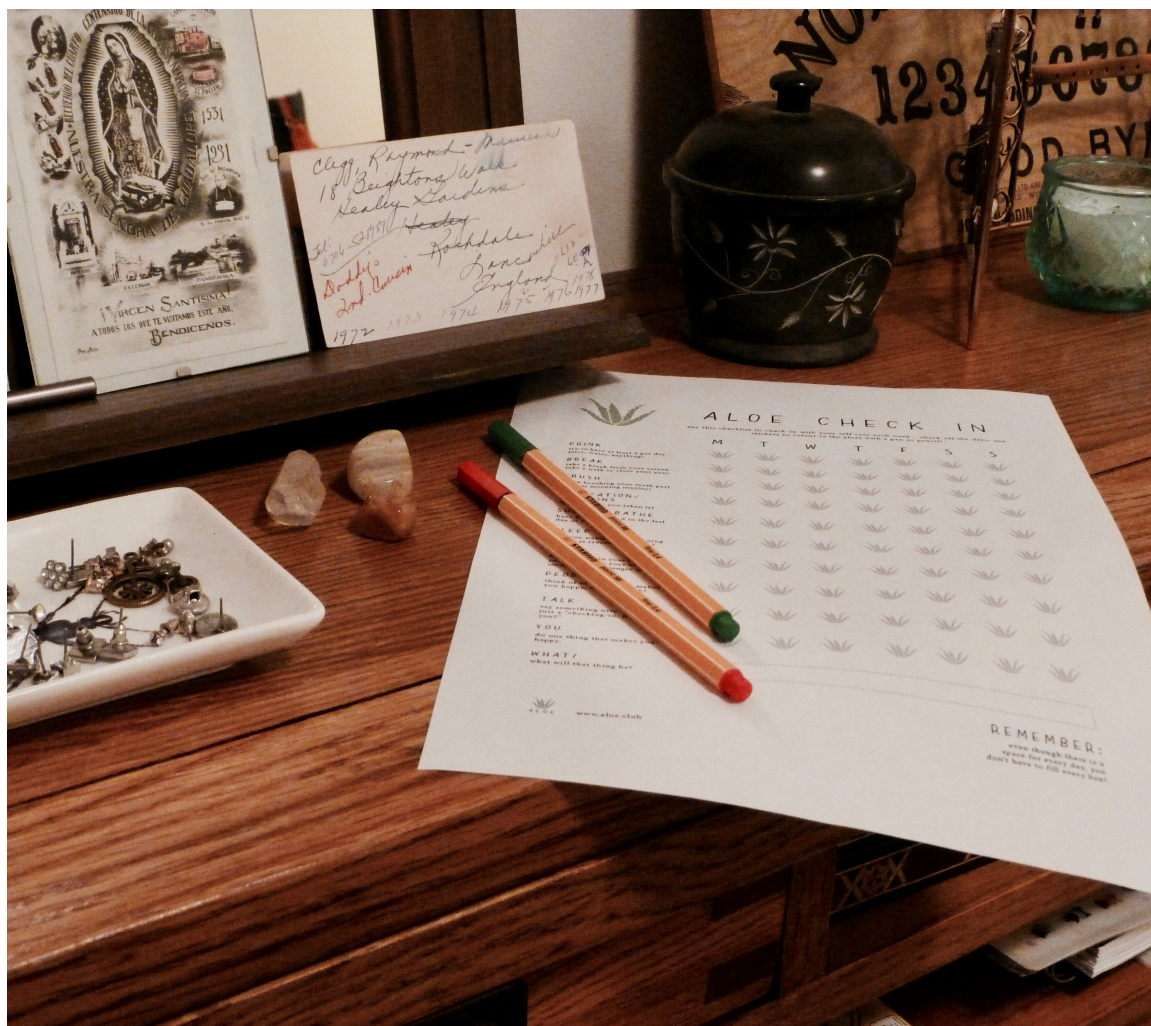
One of my most dearly-appreciated sources of catharsis is the Mental Illness Happy Hour podcast. To me, it's free therapy, and it provides me with more lightbulb moments than any real therapist ever has. Recently, a guest talked about the dizzyingly wide array of 'treatments' she'd tried in order to tackle the symptoms of a chronic condition: yoga, reiki, meditation, green smoothies, raw vegan, paleo, Atkins, you name it. Host Paul Gilmartin zoned in on this struggle instantly and mercilessly, "...but have you ever considered moving to Tibet, and visiting a karaoke bar?"

So here's the thing: can we talk about the ableism inherent in this rhetoric? Can we talk about suggesting that chronically or even terminally ill folks try yoga²? Can we talk about vegans who (like me) get sick, and/or stay sick? Can we talk about a positive mental attitude³? And can we talk about how, sometimes, no matter how much we wish it weren't true, just sometimes, the only avenue open to us is conventional medicine, drugs, science, and the knowledge that not everything can be fixed?

Veganism touted as a cure-all or an alchemically-transformative lifestyle is nothing new. In 2005, *Skinny Bitch* promised that veganism done 'right' could lead to nothing but thinness (and therefore attractiveness, and, of course, worth). Veganism as 'clean eating' is a very common trope, and one that is exclusionary and just plain wrong (let's not even touch vegan YouTube). So often we see efforts to convert omnivores to veganism relying on the promise that better (physical) health will follow, while a study has shown that those who go vegan for ethical reasons are much more likely to remain so⁴.

Can we talk about vegans who (like me) get sick, and/or stay sick? Can we talk about a positive mental attitude? And can we talk about how, sometimes, no matter how much we wish it weren't true, just sometimes, the only avenue open to us is conventional medicine, drugs, science, and the knowledge that not everything can be fixed?





More recently, Netflix-exclusive documentary *What The Health?*⁵ attracted criticism for its dodgy science and wild promises, showing that in many ways not much has changed in the last 12 years where veganism’s ‘clean eating’ bombast is concerned.

See, I don’t know, it’s tricky because I’ve been vegan for nearly 10 years, my mental health has been poor for 20 years, and my physical health has been an utter shit-show for about 18 months now. I still desperately search for correlations. I still get sucked in sometimes and consider returning to

that state of mind where the biggest propellant for treating my body ‘well’ is to despise and be disgusted by every excess inch of it, putting my mental health at serious risk, and more likely than not failing to achieve sustainable, long term weight-loss which is of course the cure for everything that ails an unwell fatty⁶. How exactly does one navigate this minefield that exists twixt the metaphorical rock and hard place?

But this is all old news, and I’ve ranted about such things before now. The focus of this issue is, after all, mental health, and its place in the sticky

mire of veganism, activism, and of course the promise that a certain sort of vegan lifestyle will not only save your body, but also your mind.

There is a very insidious brand of advice that has always particularly irked me. *Hyperbole and a Half*’s Allie Brosh captured this brilliantly in the second of her two-parter epic about depression⁷. As her cartoon avatar rests almost supine on a couch, robed in a grubby hooded top and looking distinctly angst-ridden (all rendered brilliantly in MS Paint by the way), a companion describes how she “should do yoga while watching the sunrise. it’s literally impossible to feel negative and sad while appreciating the wonder of the universe”. And of course, Paul Gilmartin of the above-mentioned favourite podcast of mine nailed it with his Just One More Suggestion of visiting a Tibetan karaoke bar. Because of course.

When I announced to my blog readers that I’d been diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, I was feeling so emotionally beaten-down that I couldn’t help but add a caveat, which went like this:

“Quick disclaimer that if anyone is of a mind to tell me that smoothies/yoga/positive thinking can cure me then please don’t because I won’t know whether to laugh or cry for a week LULZ.”

So you probably have a fair idea of my feelings on this certain sort of advice when meted out for either physical or mental illness. The absurdity of suggesting kale smoothies or hemp powder or mindful sunrise-watching to someone suffering from a chronic physical illness for which they have already sought conventional medical advice is often blessedly self-evident. But when one considers the stigma still firmly attached to mental illness, and specifically to the pharmaceutical treatment of mental illness, the burden of deflecting these supposed well-wishes can be doubly difficult to bear.

FROM CRYSTALS TO CONDIMENTS

I suspect that in writing this piece for T.O.F.U., I am preaching to the choir. I suspect that its readership, and of this issue in particular, would not be the type to recommend a forest reiki retreat as the answer to a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, for example.

However, assuming that many are on the same page as I when it comes to unsolicited woo, I thought it would be interesting to explore the rather new phenomenon of more ‘informed’ use of traditionally maligned ‘wellness’ activities, particularly among women and femmes^{8 9}.

I’m a lifelong atheist (though can I make clear that I am not in Dicky Dawkins’ camp), and I have a wonderfully eclectic collection of treasured items that most of my fellow non-believers would regard as anomalous. There’s the Ouija board that belonged to my Mum back when she attended the haunted English countryside boarding school in the early 1960s. There’s the Rider Waite tarot deck gifted to me by a very dear family friend more than two decades ago. There’s my wonderful collection of Catholic kitsch knick-knacks and artworks, including a foot tall wooden crucifix that I picked up in an Amsterdam flea market during one of my many hazy visits in the early 2000s. I still have all the wonderful crystals and semi-precious stones that are so commonly sold in the gift shops of rural England and Ireland for some reason. I love my crescent moon earrings, and my faded copy of Zolar’s *It’s All In the Stars*, which I simply had to have after I saw Little Edie squinting through a magnifying glass at her own copy in Grey Gardens. Over the years, I’ve settled on what I feel is probably the right explanation for this strange hobby of mine. I’ve always had an intense aesthetic appreciation of anything curious or unusual. Catholic imagery in particular I find arresting and beautiful, and at the same time I find the Catholic Church to be a harmful and regressive institutional power.

Putting these contradictions aside, I'd like to look at the adoption of non-conventional wellness activities as a form of self-care, used by folks who may well know 'better'^{10 11}. As someone who opposes vehemently any person or organization that knowingly and purposely sells, by whatever means, 'cures' that are not evidenced as successful by pretty hard science, this has been a challenging exercise. But I've seen writers and academics and bloggers I admire embrace elements of astrology, lunar cycles, tarot, crystals, and similar esoterica. Perhaps in much the same way I feel attached, reassured, and aesthetically pleased by my variously acquired curios, maybe these objects and rituals hold a potent purpose for those who make use of them. Perhaps in the same way that words can carry immense power (is there anything you find very hard to say?) there is a different kind of magic we can seek from these activities or ideologies.

There is a very generous part of me that delights in the reclamation (particularly by women or femmes) of traditions and/or beliefs that have traditionally been used to deride or punish (witchcraft, anyone?¹² ¹³). Above all, no matter what we seek, I feel that any wellness activity (whether conventional or otherwise) should not seek to exploit, harm, or deceive its adherents. Self-care should empower, soothe, and protect practitioners, but not at the expense of the wellness of others. It should be an honest and informed endeavour, but it should not claim to be for everyone.

In many ways, veganism is presented as a quasi-mystical transformer of physical health. To promise that veganism will 'cure' diabetes, heart disease, cancer, or even mental illness, is as irresponsible to me as TV spiritualists. Unsolicited advice-giving is rarely, if ever, the route to offering effective and genuine support. Whether that advice is hemp milk spinach smoothies, crystal-charged cannabis, or forest walks, we should all have respect for the ability

of any one of us human animals to seek out what sustains and empowers us.

I really wanted to have an issue with the rise of the crystal-charge flatlay. I wanted to have an issue with astrology-loving badasses who Should Know Better. But I'm also helpless to resist the aesthetic, and there's a part of me that loves the shameless and knowing appropriation of an activity that might have once been reason to exploit or mock, but is now used to empower and reassure. Coincidentally, much in the same way I love appropriating condiments intended for use with meat, as I marinate tofu with them instead...

I can't speak for all the 21st century alternative-wellness lovers out there. I don't know the true nature of their beliefs, whether their appreciation is aesthetic or spiritual, and that's probably none of my business. I feel that we should all engage in non-harmful activities that bring us peace, comfort, and power. Who am I to stop anyone from visiting that karaoke bar in Tibet? But please, let's not make wild promises about veganism. Let's not presume to know what's best for sufferers of physical or mental ill-health.

For sure the world is full of magic, like science, nature, words, feelings, and love. My favourite kind might just be compassion. What's yours?

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FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Words by Katie Remis | Photo by Nikki Duong Koenig

I was always the sensitive one. I would take bugs home from school to put them in my backyard so people wouldn't step on them. According to my teachers, I was "A sweet girl, but needed to reel it in" while in class. This was the foreshadowing of my future as I always seemed to have a hard time fitting into the box that society created. So, you might expect that me creating a vegan clothing line called V Apparel would mean I could do my own thing and not worry about what others thought, but you would be mistaken.

In order to understand just why that was the case, I'd like to tell you a bit about me before we talk business.

NOT SO HAPPY FEET

My parents had moved a couple times between kindergarten and the 8th grade, so I never had the

best friend who actually considered me as their best friend. Don't get me wrong, I had friends, but was always last on the list when it came to sleepover parties and who got picked in gym. To top it all off, I was always overweight and had what doctors thought was rosacea and acid reflux disease. Spoiler alert- I was gluten and dairy intolerant. Thankfully, it definitely got better in high school when I started dancing and competing with a dance studio that embraced my self-diagnosed ADD.

Sadly, dance eventually went from enjoyable to something I dreaded. Even though I was better than most of my classmates, I was bigger than them. I happened to have bigger breasts (thanks, genetics!) and wasn't naturally a bean stalk like some of the typical ballerinas at my studio. Getting teased because you aren't flat chested and you can't find the right jeans doesn't improve your self confidence in school, sports, or at home. However, it wasn't until

I was 14 or 15 that depression crept into my life. I would lie to my parents and therapists about taking my pills because they made me sick, but honestly they could have improved my angsty teen years. I was still struggling with my weight, which is still a challenge in my mid twenties, but was finally getting attention from guys. I was obsessed with music that wasn't mainstream and only felt at home when I was at concerts, plotting my tattoo collection. Having something to look forward to after the 3 o'clock bell rang definitely helped me get through the day, which always felt like torture.

RUNNING WITH SCISSORS (AND VEGANISM)

After high school, I managed to break this cycle by going right to beauty school to be a hairstylist. I was finally with a large group of high energy, creative people who all wanted to do the same thing. I moved out of the house and had roommates who were schoolmates. I had been wanting to do this for several years and my parents were very supportive of my dreams.

After graduating, I moved back home and worked for a local salon. I was doing photoshoots and fashion shows on my days off to build my portfolio and improve my skills. After a year of assisting more experienced stylists, I spent the next year finding the right salon. I ended up at an Aveda Salon with a girl from beauty school and a really great salon manager who didn't micromanage us at all. I didn't know it at the time, but working here would lead me to veganism.

A coworker of mine had multiple sclerosis, and was steadily improving her disease through superfoods and green juice. She also lost a significant amount of weight, which appealed to me. I followed her plan for the full 30 days and during that time I watched several plant-based documentaries including Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead, Food Inc, and Vegucated. While doing this cleanse, I had eliminated

so many foods that I started to feel better mentally and physically, once I got over the initial migraines from detox, that is. My skin was improving and my stomach didn't constantly hurt. After the 30 days, I tried some of the same foods I used to eat and got so sick. Due in part to this, I made the decision to give veganism a try.

Soon after making this life-altering decision, I decided to leave Southern California, where I was born and raised. I left family behind and moved to Houston, Texas. I know now it was to escape the place that haunted my past so I could change my future. I moved in with friends and immediately got into a toxic and unhealthy relationship. I had a very hard time the first six months I was in Texas. The salon I started working at set me up to fail. One of the top stylists, who was in charge of allowing me to take new clients from the salon, other than the ones I was finding, prevented me from progressing because she thought I was "a hippy". After becoming close with the assistant manager, she risked her job to tell me that I was being discriminated against. I immediately left the salon in tears with my bag of supplies and never went back. I didn't want to waste my time for another second in a place that allowed that to happen.

DIGGING AT MY ROOTS

After spending a few weeks completely lost and crying myself to sleep in this new place, I found out that a raw vegan co-op was nearby. I bought a produce box online, and, while I was there, I met the owner, Kristina Carillo-Bucaram. I started volunteering and became very close with her and a few volunteers. I spent three days a week getting dirty and sweaty sorting fresh fruits and veggies into boxes. Every Tuesday after co-op was therapy for me when Kristina took me into her home, made me a giant salad, and let me cry to her. I cried about so many things in my life, but it was mainly about not



My friend Nikki and I (right) sporting our V Apparel shirts at Texas Vegfest 2015 in Austin, Texas, USA.

feeling like I belonged and how I wish I looked like what I thought vegans should look like.

Soon after meeting her, she encouraged me to leave my partner and move out on my own. Doing this allowed so much growth that shaped who I am today. I was able to live exactly how I wanted. There was no hiding from myself, which is what I needed. During this time, even though I was growing, I fell into a deep hole of anxiety, depression, and an eating disorder emerged that I had been trying to suppress for ten years. I wanted to eat completely raw and my food obsession prevented me from accepting my mistakes. I would eat raw foods all day and then at night I would binge on cooked food. In order to make up for my mistakes, I would purge it all right after. I felt like I was making it all better. I was trying to get healthy by only putting raw foods into my body to heal and yet here I was, mentally unhealthy.

I went to a therapist who supposedly only worked with patients who had eating disorders. During our sessions, she told me I had orthorexia and that being vegan was exasperating my ED. She suggested I see a nutritionist who would help “balance me out” and add in all of the foods I was passionate about not having in my diet. I never went back to her. Instead, I admitted my issues to Kristina. Out of the kindness of her heart and our friendship, she took me on as a coaching client in exchange for me doing her hair for her YouTube videos. I spent several hours with her weekly, which brought so much love and happiness into my life. She was there for me and I was there for her. Not only did she help me, but I was able to help her with some of her struggles. This helped to show me that even those around us who seem to have it all, have their moments of sadness and weakness. It broke through the façade of Facebook and Instagram. It gave me peace knowing that everyone has a hard time and it wasn’t just me.

CUTTING OUT THE CRUELTY

About a year before I moved from Houston, I had decided to create a vegan inspired clothing line. I liked what was out there, but it all seemed to be geared towards men on non-organic materials. At this point, I had only been vegan for about a year and a half and hadn’t really looked into the cruelty in fashion. I am not just talking about animals, but human animals as well. In a lot of countries, slave labour is still common practice by the means of sweatshops and cotton fields. Along with that, every year billions of pounds of fertilizer, pesticides, and heavy metals are dumped into our water systems because of cotton production. Since cotton is one of the top GMO crops in the US, I knew that I couldn’t contribute to that industry. I chose to go the sustainable route by using only organic, sweatshop-free, fair trade, and USA Made clothing. Of course, this came with a hefty base price. After printing, you can spend almost twice as much as when you use the sweatshop, conventional cotton that most bands, sports teams, and yes- other vegan/animal rights clothing companies do. Due to this, I was charging about \$30 a shirt, which was only a few dollars more than some of the others. Even though it was only a small difference, it meant more complaints from consumers and less profits for me.

Despite the complaints, I worked full time to support this dream allowing for almost no time off over a couple of years. I spent most of my money after paying bills to fund the company. I wanted to make the things I would wear, and possibly be able to support myself while doing so. Luckily, I had many good friends to help make this happen by working with me at events and buying shirts whenever I released new designs.

After six months and a few vegan festivals later, I met my now partner. He went vegan for me before we decided to be in a relationship and supported me through the life of my business. He modelled my

men's shirts on his day off whenever I asked. He was my business advisor, my assistant at almost every event I brought V Apparel to, and also the one who listened to me cry when I was ready to quit. He told me to give it up way before I made the decision. He saw how rude customers were at events when we told them prices. He was there when I maxed out my credit cards to fly across the country to an expensive event, and he was there when I had no money. Without him, I'm not sure I could have lasted as long as I did.

That being said, four years after I created V Apparel, I let it go.

Although our decision to move out of Texas to Colorado was a big catalyst for closing the business, I had many reasons to do so. I was so sick of seeing tacky brands coming out with unoriginal designs and rip-offs of other established brands. Also, you would be shocked at the amount of people who come out of the woodwork asking for free stuff from you. Almost daily, I would get an email or Instagram message from someone saying that if I sent them something for free, they would post about my company. I would usually respond with "Thank you for your support, but we do not give stuff for free anymore." I would send them a coupon code and say if they post about their new shirt, V Apparel would give them a shout out in return. After four years, I don't think any of them ever bought a shirt or were nice back. Needless to say, if all of those people who asked for free items actually bought a shirt, I may have stuck around a bit longer.

Overall, I was unhappy, stressed, pissed off, and sick of feeling that way. I just wanted to have two days off and go hiking with my partner and dogs. Sadly, the biggest issue I had was that I lost sight of my original goal: to spread veganism.

So, when we decided that moving would be great for both of us, I took it as an opportunity to do what needed to be done. Plus, I would be lying

if I said that I wanted to move a bunch of boxes of shirts 800 miles away.

Lucky for me, the almond milk company, Malk Organics, that I had been working with for two years allowed me to transfer. Better yet, the wonderful owners of Rabbit Food Grocery in Austin accepted my offer to sell them my remaining inventory at a discount. They purchased about 200 shirts and five designs from me and gave me the freedom that I needed to focus on being happy and healthy.

MY HIGHLIGHTS

In hindsight, I know that I accomplished a lot for a 23 year old girl without a degree. It was a learning experience. I had very high highs and even lower lows. I was able to send free shirts to vegan athletes I followed and give free shirts to friends and family. Thanks to this experience, I now know what I am capable of. I always think of what I could do next. I have so many ideas but at this point, I think I am okay with simply having a basic routine: working five days a week, enjoying the weekend, and going to the gym. I'm learning more about myself and what I am capable of. Your past does not determine your future or your happiness. All I can do is be my best self and understand that does not mean I have to be happy all of the time or please anyone other than myself.

Basically, it's okay to fail because a failure doesn't mean you'll always fail. Breathing is success to those who struggle. So, try not to be so hard on yourself, my fellow animals. You are all you've got.

Katie Remis lives in Colorado with her partner and their two vegan rescue dogs. She is currently cooking up her next project and is focusing on her fitness journey.

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APHRO-ISM

*Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism,
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TAKING WHAT I NEED

Words by S.M. Rice | Illustration by Angie Carlucci

I consciously live a life where I try not to take more than I need. My desire to reduce the space I use and resources I consume are important factors that reinforce my veganism. I know my purpose and I work to fulfill it. I am here to do all I can to reduce suffering in the world, but I cannot commit myself to anything if I do not take care of myself.

Depression was such a constant in my childhood and early adult life, that I did not even know I was experiencing it. At the time, I was so profoundly unhappy that my mental health merely seemed to match my circumstances. The joys of falling in love, getting married, and becoming a mother allowed my issues to catch up with me. My happiness amplified my anxiety and forced me to confront my mental health. When I met my husband, life suddenly felt like the beautiful beginning of summer I was unknowingly anticipating. The warmth and happiness I experienced were overwhelming, but I still felt

cold - I couldn't shake the winter. Privately, I spent so much time feeling angry with myself for allowing fear and sadness to rule when I was genuinely happy. I was confused as to how my heart could betray my head. What I didn't realize at the time was that positive experiences could spark depression as much as the negative. My life was so much more wonderful than I imagined possible, but I still had days and weeks in which I was incapacitated by feelings of sadness, grief, and aching. How could I be so fulfilled and so full of pain? I blamed myself and believed I was sabotaging my happiness (that is what friends and society told me). It took me nearly a decade living a life that I loved to realize that I was not simply choosing to be anxious and depressed. Though I had finally acknowledged that my mental illnesses were not my fault, I was slow to hold myself accountable and take meaningful action to change my condition.

PLOTTING A COURSE

Last year, I spent much of my energy trying to stay afloat. I believed that the difficult situations I faced were actually constructive and brought me to a better place. I left a job with a vegan, social justice organization that I was passionate about and deeply fulfilled by to take my child out of a school where they were struggling. It came with so much fear and self-doubt, but I was also excited and hopeful. I had always wanted to be the person who taught my child to read and found myself increasingly tired of fighting against the colonialist framework of the education system. So, when the opportunity arose, I was grateful for the privilege and chance to participate and be the architect of their education with the ability to incorporate lessons on equality and social justice.

Soon after leaving public school, my child began to explore gender identity and changed their gender expression, which are not the same and also have nothing to do with sexual orientation¹. We tried out new names and pronouns and worked hard to break out of the binary boxes society forces us into. I dove into researching how to be the most affirming mom possible. I became active in support groups for caregivers who might find parenting a transgender child difficult or confusing. We found so much love, acceptance, and empowerment in the trans² community.

TAKING THE HIGH AND LOW ROADS

As my life stabilized, I learned that my mother had an affair for years during my parents' marriage, including around the time I was conceived. Most of my family knew for my entire life. They held onto doubts about my paternity and let it shape my identity before I was even born. My father's family allowed my mother's actions to poison my childhood, I was called a liar and always unwelcome. When my

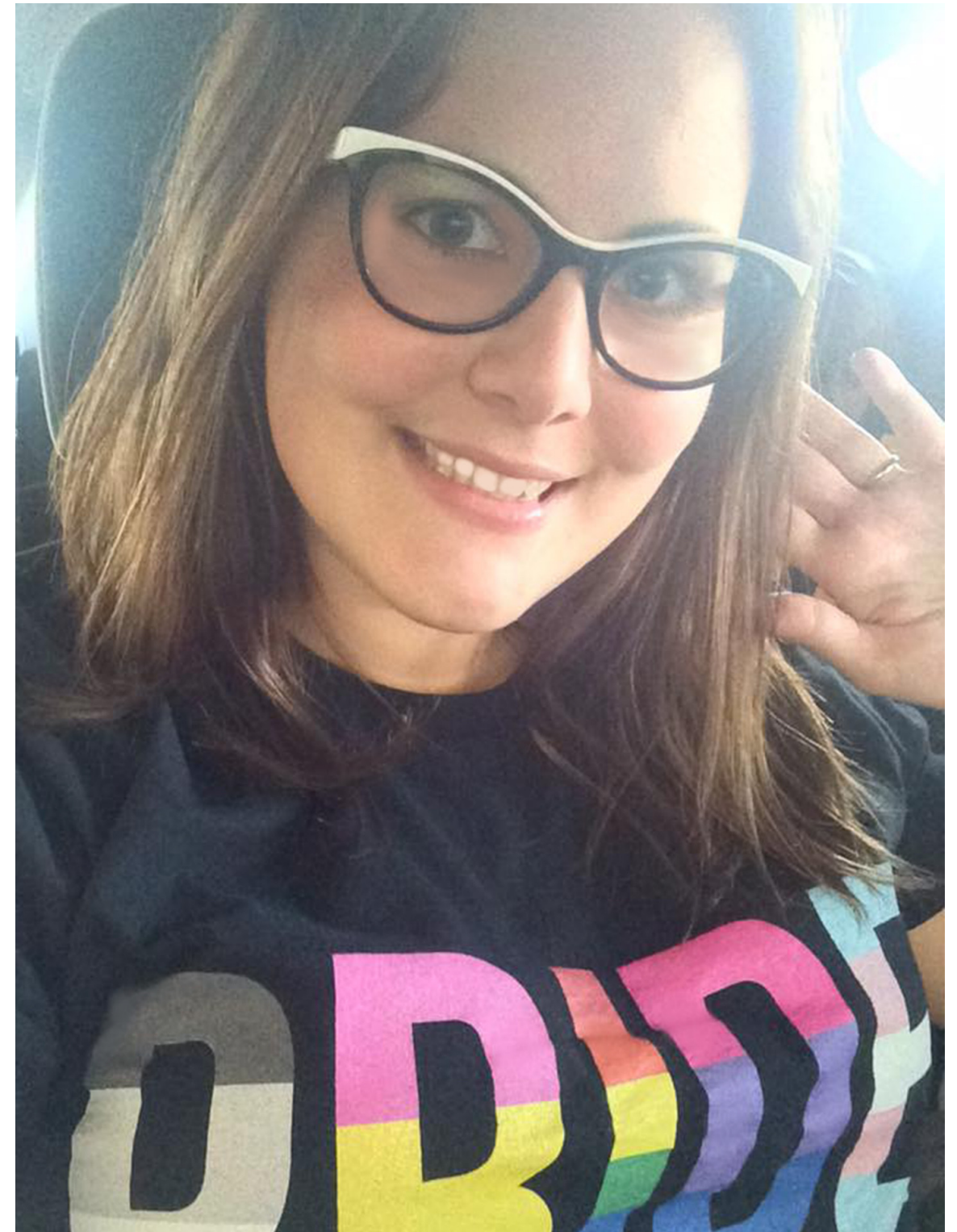
grandfather passed away, I was left out of family photos as people opposed my inheritance, the \$50 savings bond he purchased in my name when I was born. When I confronted my father, it actually healed our relationship. Casting him in a new light made me feel like he truly loved me for who I was. My black sheep status suddenly made sense. So much pain and anger melted away when I understood that I was not to blame. I came into this world out of betrayal and I was not responsible for the climate I was raised in. I may never wholly forgive those who kept my secret from me, but I appreciate their intentions. They thought they knew what was best and wanted to protect me. Now, their decisions no longer weigh on me.

With each challenge, I came to see myself as brave, fierce, and liberated. My self-confidence was the highest I had ever known. Every proverbial bone that was broken, healed stronger, but the internal dichotomy rarely faded.

Most days I woke up with a beautiful life and suffocating despair. With every week that passed, I spent more time debilitated and in hiding. I was losing control, as well as my ability to push through the pain. I could feel myself inching towards a cliff that I would not be able to step back from. My therapist believed that, with her help, I could get better. Sadly, my mental health situation was grimmer than even she realized. I worried that sharing my whole truth with her could result in an involuntary hospitalization, her doubting my competency as a mother, and, ultimately, full disclosure would result in a complete lack of privacy. I knew I still had control, but would she be convinced of that? I couldn't risk it. I had to refocus and find ways to cope, on my own.

THE END GOAL

My greatest tool to combat my depression was to concentrate on activism and volunteering as much



as possible. If I could reduce the suffering of others... if I could make someone's day better... if I could make the world a cleaner, brighter, safer place for a human or non-human animal- it was worth the weight of living. I might deserve to have physical, mental, and spiritual needs of my own. I could still laugh and love, so I was also capable of managing the fears, doubts, and sorrow that took hold too.

I quickly learned that when others (especially activists) insisted that I needed to do "self care," they were not actually concerned for my well-being. They did not want me to get burnt out, "The animals need you," they said. Maybe if I had a hobby, I would be happy. Maybe if I lost weight, I would be happy. I should go for nature walks, get a massage, join a book club, or eat more fucking quinoa. Every suggestion actually hurt more than it helped. I tried to convince myself that they were coming from a place of concern, even when it was obvious that they were just trying to end an uncomfortable conversation. Honestly, I couldn't blame them, I wanted it to end too. So I forced a half-smile and thanked them for their advice. All the while, I was screaming inside, "I AM SUICIDAL! THIS CONVERSATION IS ONLY MAKING ME WANT TO DRIVE OFF THE NEAREST CLIFF!" Only now, can I recognize how their lack of sincerity actually helped me. Had anyone picked up on my vulnerability, the loose thread holding me together would have been pulled free.

As 2016 came to an end, I floated through in a daze. Holiday obligations and distractions stalled the breakdown that was inevitable. I withdrew and avoided as many situations that would force me to feign joy as possible. I was incapable of letting even my closest friends in and avoided my usual openness, though my honesty was my most cherished trait. After nearly a year of the worst depression of my life, only my husband and sister knew that I was slipping away. It broke my heart to see them powerless and afraid, but my guilt morphed into a prison that

stripped away my humanity. I stopped feeling sorry for their pain and started looking for an escape for all of us. I owned my feelings and I was able to remind myself that everything was temporary

Until it wasn't anymore.

One afternoon, on a chilly January day, I forced myself out of the house and took my child to an indoor trampoline park. From my bench, I smiled every time we made eye contact. At the same time, I was on my phone searching for the closest mental hospital to admit myself to; trying to decide whether to go straight there or by my husband's office to drop off our kid first. I knew that I needed immediate help. I closed the Internet window and called my doctor's office. I told them that I wanted to discuss my anxiety and depression, and took their first available appointment. Having hope that we would find a solution allowed me to go on for one more day.

I walked into my doctor's office, holding my child's hand. I had explained to them, in 8-year-old appropriate terms, that my brain was sick. As I filled out the appointment questionnaire, I realized how dire my situation was. Everything indicated that I was experiencing severe depression and anxiety. I spoke openly and honestly with the doctor and answered my child's questions. I walked out of the office with a prescription, and more optimism than I had felt in six months.

ONE STEP FORWARD

Within a week of taking that little pill, I was feeling like who I was supposed to be (with only minor side effects). When a friend asked me how I was, I was finally able to tell her, "Better." I openly talked about my prescription with optimism, and then she told me that I should be careful whom I tell. She erased the relief in my voice. I was stunned to realize that someone would question my choice as not being vegan when I clearly needed the medication.

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I made sure I chose a medicine that did not contain any animal byproducts. However, I couldn't choose one that didn't involve animal testing. Not taking the pill was not an option either, and I refused to feel guilty for taking care of my needs.

I will take my pill as long as I need it. I will decrease or increase the dosage, based on my needs. I will not allow anyone else's judgment to affect my personal ethics, especially when it affects my very survival. We all have to make the choices that are best for us physically, mentally, and spiritually. The ableism that allows someone to question another person's medical treatment should not be tolerated in the vegan community. I regret that I did not voice my opposition to that attitude or encourage my friend to see how harmful that was. Individually and as a group, we need to fight for those most vulnerable and lend our voice where and how it is needed. With that in mind, I encourage anyone facing anxiety and/

or depression to seek out someone who you can trust. You deserve to be seen and affirmed.

REFERENCES

1. Gender Spectrum. Understanding Gender. Retrieved 4 August 2017 from <https://www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender>
2. Trans* is used here in an effort to include all transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming identities.

Sarah is a body positive, intersectional vegan, the proud mother of a gender expansive child, and wife to a dedicated coastguardsman. She is a long time human rights activist and volunteer with multiple organizations; tabling, marching, fostering, and more. Sarah has dedicated herself to advocating for the rights of our society's most vulnerable, both human and non-human.



"As with the rest of the world, the rug on my life was also pulled out from under me this week, though about a day or two beforehand. I spent the weekend and initial first half in sheer panic, wondering how I was going to make it through; mid-week, the world energy matched mine (thanks for the company). As an empath, my feelings were intensified, but at a certain point, my resilience kicked in and my powerlessness shifted to empowerment—the antidote to the changes before me hidden in my history.

How do we make change work for us? By embracing this transition, this new chapter. It can be terrifying, or it can be an adventure. We can resist it, or we can insist it. The former prolongs it, and requires an infinite amount of energy; the latter allows it, transmutes it, and serves to renew us because we aren't trying to push against the flow of life, but rise with it.

The true adventure that transition gives us is the path to discovering who we are, how strong & resilient we are—as a result of whatever life throws in our way. What we become, who we become, the skills, the resilience, that's what makes transition incredible. Instead of looking back and hoping for things to stay the same, we have the opportunity to embrace the new, and everything it brings us. "You never know how strong you are, until being strong is your only choice." Wherever you are in your journey, you've dealt with things before, you've faced challenges and change before—you've come through the other side: you are still here. This isn't your first ride, this won't be your last. You have all the proof you need in you to trust that you have what it takes to get through anything—to not only survive, but thrive. You are that proof. You have won the battle with change every time—because you have insisted and adapted. Seeing the transition and becoming adaptive to it, adaptive to all phases of life, flowing with it—you become untouchable. You know you can handle this, because you've been here before.

Faith in ourselves is the first antidote to transition & change; we each have reference points as to when we've dealt with difficult situations and come out the other side. Use them now to strategize (antidote #2) how you're going to move forward. Make a plan that has everything you've got, every ounce of energy—map the terrain, familiarize yourself with it (again), get to know everything there is to know about it. Hiding makes it more unknown, which generates fear.

We always find a way. We have everything we need to embrace what's ahead and not only survive it, but thrive through it. We are the answer."

I wrote that on November 13th 2016, a few days after the U.S. presidential election—fresh from a sobering meeting with bankruptcy trustees; I was going to post it on Instagram, but it got lost in my notes. ...Who am I kidding, no it didn't. I didn't know how to own it yet. I'm just getting used to owning it, without shame—my own shame, mostly. Barely having turned the mental corner from being a full-time business owner to being an unemployed former business owner, I was still trying to fuel the ambition monster and show everyone that I was a success. That I was fine. That I was keeping calm and carrying on (I fucking *loathe* that saying, though it's applicable), that I had my shit together, and no one had to worry about me because it was business as usual—except... there was no business. Aside from the tasks of closing down in the next two weeks, which I took on *like* they were my business, there was nothing. But I wasn't at the point of addressing that, not until the dust could settle. Until I could allow the dust to settle, is a more appropriate way to put it. The dishes were done, man—but I was still holding the gun. The wrap up became my new job, which kept the founder-failure at bay, and me spinning still in the hustle that, through my short four years with Pleasantville (PXV), I had come to internalize and unify as who I fundamentally was.

Our wounds are often the openings into the best and most beautiful parts of us.
- Davi Richo

I began my journey with veganism about nine years ago, in 2007, after a major health scare had me at a fork in the road (pun intended) with my well-being. I took the plant-based path to save my life. We all have that kind of story: girl has allergies her whole life, girl finds out she's a celiac at 19 and can't eat her mother's Christmas cookies, girl becomes determined to teach herself allergy-conscious baking to revamp those recipes; cookies are so good, girl starts her own catering company; girl personally goes on high-protein/low carb diet ("high paleo") for roughly eight years to solve her own issues, girl professionally goes to culinary school and privately focuses on 'substitution' food preparation; girl also becomes competitive eater because of the stupid amounts of animal protein she can pack away, girl starts working (too much) for a reputable huge grocery chain. ...girl's mom dies. Girl gets sick from working too hard, taking no time to cope with loss and grief and her own well-being through it all—girl gets her own terminal diagnosis. I mean, in a nutshell.

That punch in the face in 2007 was BIG. Life had me at a full stop. Keep going and die, or walk away. Learn. Live. So I chose the latter. I walked away from the culinary industry, away from my businesses that just weren't working (because they had no true underlying purpose... not yet) and right

into a nutrition college. In my rebuilding, one night I had a dream: that I would take the knowledge I'd amassed so far, and open an ice cream shop in my local Toronto neighbourhood. It'd kinda look like that candy store scene in the original Willy Wonka (my favourite movie). But my own personal timing was off still; I had thrown the energy from the previous hustle into a bad relationship, had unwittingly become pregnant, AND adopted a four week-old rescue puppy with lots of issues—hair-trigger biological (physical, emotional) sensitivity resulting in chronic colitis, allergies to conventional food + environmental toxins/chemicals (hives, sneezing, restricted breathing)—and a neurological condition, misdiagnosed as 'just his breed'-type anxiety that brought on all-too-frequent-for-his-age, life-threatening seizures—on top of my own three year old rescue pooch / sidekick who equally had his own stuff going on (colitis, genetic markers for pancreatitis, diabetes & renal failure)—who also felt responsible for me and was internalizing the emotions I couldn't (...if you have or have known a Miniature Schnauzer—aka, an emotional sponge with fur and teeth, you know what the fuck I'm talking about.) Through my need to stop the circus to figure out the root of my new pup's terminal issues,

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myself here had nothing to do with them, or you, and everything to do with me. I have to finally make time for me, which is super fucking uncomfortable, but also a tremendous relief. ...Not a story many entrepreneurs are willing to be so open about, but, like all things that need healing, it's imperative that I talk about it. That we ALWAYS talk about it, especially as vegans—with our hearts inherently woven into what we are seeking to actualize—most often at our own expense.

By July of last year, I had started to realize that something wasn't right. I wasn't 'well', my body started to feel like it had in 2007. Thanks to how hard my hustle "had to" be at that point—it all rested on my shoulders—I didn't know how to ask for help. I didn't have anyone to turn to, all of my colleagues had business partners or issues of their own, and they trusted I was "a smart cookie" and would figure it out myself. They depended on me too. Many didn't take my calls when I finally got up the nerve to make them, when I was screaming for help because the ship was going down—the animals and I on it. But my screams were unrecognized because up until this point I had always been overly self-sufficient. I had never asked for help. I ran myself into the ground for the new-found distributor I'd gotten (to trade in one devil I knew for another I didn't)... and seeking partnership at the time was more of a headache than a hope for relief.

In August, I even had the incredible fortune of getting ice cream and a selection of my other products to a few members of some of my favourite bands—Tony Kanal of No Doubt and Travis Barker & Matt Skiba of Blink-182 / Alkaline Trio, with the help of equally sweet colleagues & pals Mary Mattern (@nomyourself), Jackie Sobon (@veganyackattack), Charlie Fyffe (@charliesbrownies)—and, of course, my soul-sister ErinRed (@erinred_). Though not my first time getting products into the hands of vegans I admire tremendously (I apparently have a natural

knack for this...), I should've been on a complete career and personal high—in fact, Red was beyond excited for me (I have those celebratory texts saved!) ...but I couldn't find it in me to be present to acknowledge the achievement. I had already shut down completely. I closed myself up in my apartment for three weeks—not understanding how my purpose became so lost in the business, and vice versa. Where was I?

During September, I briefly got off the couch to make a batch or two to entertain the partnership that I knew wasn't right for me—simply because I wanted the business to continue for the animals. I wouldn't be another person letting them down again. My worth had tanked because the business was at a standstill, so if I could just do the deal then we'd both be back on top. Talks stretched out until early November—when the potential partner all of a sudden told me the business was valueless to them, that they were 'willing' to bankrupt it, buy the only thing of value—the corporate assets—back and continue it forward with them in 100% ownership and me on as a consultant at a very low salary for six months or until the transfer of information was complete. I lost it, completely insulted, that sinking feeling that I'd stayed at the party too long overwhelmed me, and I thought I'd lost all credibility doing so. I broke down anew, and then did what I always do: started googling for someone to talk to, to learn more about what bankruptcy (or receivership, as it's called for businesses) entails and what I was up against. I did anything I could to find a shred of leverage. Of dignity. The rip between the company and myself happened overnight in the dark, quiet hours—but I didn't yet have time to feel it so that I could heal it. The company, the animals needed me. I realized that walking away entirely—for myself, the integrity the animals needed me to maintain—was better than a

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partnership that wouldn't honour me, that wouldn't honour the business, and certainly had money in mind over the movement. Meeting with trustees to talk it out solidified this, and my ace in the hole was that I had never tied my assets (my intellectual property, or IP) formally into the corporation, so I could actually walk away from the business itself as it existed on paper with all that I'd created including the brand under my arm, to start again when the time was (is) right. The road ahead was cleared again, and as bloody and beaten as I was through this, I was newly bandaged and my battery renewed on a half-charge, ready to run the last few miles of this marathon.

You alone are enough. You have nothing to prove to anyone.
- Maya Angelou

I AM THE ASSET. This is the vibe from which I wrote my opening statement. To the shock of that partner (because I never took the time to explain any of what I'd learned to him in my deciding not to partner) and to partners since—I know what I bring to the table, I don't question it, and I'm not just talking about those physical assets, the book of scribbles and papers that are PXV's heart and sweet (and savoury) soul. That is where I act from now. In January, with the holiday honeymoon period out of the way and sobriety of the new year—questions of MY identity started to take shape, and I knew that above and beyond understanding myself as the asset, that that's when my true wellness work and rebirth was really beginning. I realized that I had to have an honest conversation with the company, the culinary activist, and the entrepreneur in me—the hustler—and put her aside at least for a while, because the human in me needed to learn how to live again. Not just recouping from small business failure, but from all that life had thrown at me since... well, since forever.



Fast forward to today: since making the choice to walk away (let's say as of June, because that's really where the dust began to settle)... I am more at peace perhaps than I have been in my entire life—not because my business is back up and running (it's not—YET), not because someone has seen worth in my IP or dream, or in something I can offer them necessarily—but because I've made myself a priority. I am the living embodiment of being 'the asset', no matter the subject matter. I faced all the questions. I came up with more, and faced them too. I've taken the advice my mentors gave to me, which was walk away for the duration of my bankruptcy, Nine months total, and heal my life. Learn to live again. Love again. Love myself. Appreciate what I have to offer when 'hustle' isn't even in my vocabulary. Strive to be better every day, but actually have the room to do it. Slowly taste food. Cut my hair finally (it's been part of the brand...), clean my house, ...purge my closet, my cupboards, my lists and feeds (online and off)... just purge, purge, purge. Listen to the trees in the wind. Meditate. Go to punk shows. Do yoga. Stop for a latte and spontaneous hangouts with pals. Learn a new skill, maybe one that isn't even that useful. Dream without definition. Journal and channel it into other types of creativity. Find out what those are, and allow there to be time for forgiveness and mistakes. Be messy. Do me. Explore my wounds with time and space to actually heal them. Give myself permission to, first—and put boundaries around this work, no matter what jobs I take on to pay the bills, so that it is always prioritized beyond any relationship, business or personal, that comes into play. To treat myself like the asset I am, no matter what service I put myself toward. If you read me writing that as, "God... she's being selfish. She's full of herself," ...I would say with kindness your work starts there. I don't come by self-worth or confidence easily. I feel guilt and shame in putting myself first. But

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All endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time.
- Mitch Albom

I also know by now that that's exactly why I have to. We have to. If I want peace, harmony, and freedom from harm for animals, it starts at home. This is what 'be the change' truly means.

When we allow what doesn't work to leave our lives, we make space for what is meant to be. I haven't killed Pleasantville, but I have put it into an induced indefinite coma. My entrepreneurial skills are more at use now, targeted and free to be what they need to be instead of what I think (or thought) they should've been. Pleasantville as a wholesale food manufacturer (which is what it was) was the form I believed my activism had to be funnelled through. I pushed, I forced. It didn't work. Folding up and walking away, being able to look back at the bad and ugly and good and beautiful—the dream never died, but it did need to evolve as a caterpillar to butterfly does, just as I did. As I do. As we do, again and again. Though I said I'd take some time off, consulting roles are popping up (because the tide is shifting!)... but I'm putting space between them and my needs, so that there is no chance of burnout. I'm curating, rather than chasing. This goes for social events, partners, and people too. Stepping back allows us to be deliberate about our lives, our human experience, and makes us more effective in our efforts no matter what they may be. That space

is what is most important here. We must always be mindful of preserving that space. We are no good to the animals, if we are not good to ourselves.

Recognizing something isn't working and being able to walk away before it's too late I think is the number three lesson in all this; number two, you are not your business, and number one—you are so much more than anything you seek to put into the world—are all invaluable lessons no matter what stream your pursuits lie in, but like your Why, they have to be carried along with you at each step to keep you in check. You do have to have both feet in whatever you do, your focus, to make it go—but you also have to have the mindfulness for self-preservation, even and especially if you are the brand (I was both the product maker and the service, woven into the brand as the face of it—my nickname around town 'Pleasantville', fun and endearing, but that's also not MY name...) If *Ahimsa* is our main tenet in this movement, then 'harm to none' includes ourselves, too. There is no lack of activism in self-care, in fact—that is where activism begins. Become the unapologetic energy you seek to expand outward, but not at the sacrifice or bifurcation of it in you; in order to be a success, to be financially wealthy, to be vegan—you do not have to sacrifice your happiness or your peace. Self-love and care is all love and care.

We must move in our circles, business and personal, with this in mind as central to our movements. In order to be a success for veganism, we must seek to embody exactly those concepts NOW.

When I decided to face what I was going through, I really had to take a hard look at the suffering I was in previously, the suffering I was in presently, and where I wanted to be. How I wanted to be effective. And if I was being truthful, really real—I needed to take a hard look at how I have been a host for suffering in general; I have always "just taken on" suffering in my life, a passive action passed down from my European family that I needed (and need, as this work is ongoing) to own to end that cycle for good. It needed me to end it. That is the only question I continue to ask myself now: Am I suffering? What is the root, and what does my body/life need me to know about it to grow from it? More, is this suffering mine or does it belong to someone in my environment, in my ancestry even? Much easier to send back (washed with loving energy)—but give it back, all of it, we must.

My current state doesn't mean I'm passive, that I'm skirting my activist duties—far from it; my history and experience has helped me to understand that my maximum effectiveness is infiltrating the world of big business (food, dairy). More, to be smart this round: I'm not jumping from one mode of activism (business) back into another (outreach) to only burn out again. I truly trust that those of you that are effective on the front lines are holding it down for us all; thank you for your service—I am here to support you on the sidelines with a hug, a handshake, and drive to keep going—ensuring you that I'm equally holding the line and working to get on the inside of the company walls we both seek to break down. In this aftermath period though, my activism comes in the form of a commitment to standing on my own front line, to managing my own suffering, to putting my needs first.

If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.
- Jack Kornfield

...what can I say specifically about Pleasantville, without its explicit permission to discuss the messiness of our relationship, thus far? I mean it when I say the downfall of what was, wasn't the business—it was all me. Without this head witch in full warrior capacity (which no one ever is, unless they are backed by endless pots of gold and support teams the gold pays for, and NO ONE builds that in a day...) the business was as ride or die as I was—hands clasped and going over the cliff daily together. Except, once the business became a brand that everyone knew about, I had a responsibility that extended past what I felt like doing 'that day', to keep it alive for everyone. For the animals. That is pressure no one needs to fully feel. ...In truth, there is nothing wrong with the business itself, per se. The realness of it is, in the end, I simply ran out of money and had racked up too much debt. I also ran out of personal energy, will, and drive (temporarily). I needed a break, and could've easily gotten back on my feet if I'd had even one pot of gold, even one support team to tag in so I could just. get some. real. sleep. Everything I did to keep it going wasn't working, because I wasn't acting from a full or even partial internal battery charge.

But before I got there, the business was flourishing. Big, shiny new facility of my own by March 2016 that I outfitted myself. Demand is a great thing when you can fill it—but when you can't, it's a major business-and-heart-breaking problem. That, in a nutshell, was the beginning of the end for me. Everyone kept saying, "...go on Dragon's Den. You'll kill it!" What they didn't know was 1) if you are going to go on any of those shows, the reality off-camera is very different (and equally soul-sucking), 2) you have to be prepared for the onslaught of demand simply from being on those shows (if you

make or break a deal, it's PR either way...) and 3) that in June 2016, after just getting on board with our provincial distributor, I was holding real-time meetings with Dragons off-camera to see who could fund and facilitate my dream. Nothing is ever for free—and aside from having to wear my scarlet V on my chest, I also had to navigate the aspect of being a strong woman in business, and all the partners interested in me up even until today have been male. I'd faced plenty of gender issues in my 18-year culinary career (which is an entirely different kind of article, though not dissimilar) and worked very hard to be on an equal playing field there—and so I saw going into the various boardrooms as no different than those experiences, but these views couldn't come into those spaces with me. It was back to scratch. The offers I got were always based on some sort of exchange, and because what I had to offer was tanking, and what they offered was considerable, the exchange was never equal; the majority of partner propositions I received did come with physical expectations (yet another reason I am where I am... NOPE.) My integrity as a human, as a parent with her baby company, as a vegan, wouldn't allow me to disassociate or disrespect my value any further, despite the degree to which fulfillment was being assured if I could just... again, this is why this boundary between company and who we are fundamentally is so important. We would never be put into that kind of a position (in fact, any position that feels off...) if the partnership is right—on any level, business or personal. The partnerships I had found didn't honour my worth because I wasn't honouring my worth before I got to those boardroom tables. This comes right back to my point about mental health and entrepreneurship nicely.

So, being in demand really is what killed me. AND that shiny new facility? It needed a new extraction fan that I couldn't afford, having just jumped to the distributor (wider customer base, YAY!) and all

my vendors ended up wanting to order from them instead of from me (loss of direct income, BOO!)... so while I was slinging pints at the Blink-182 show—I was secretly dying inside because my baby was on life support and I had no way of understanding how to save it. I kept the facade alive though (which I do not recommend for long—it only denies us the ability to allow the dust to settle and heal fully) and kept entertaining partnership possibilities as mentioned, until it came time to make a midnight decision in November 2016: you're out of money. You can't keep the business and yourself going. You have to pick one. You HAVE to. ...I consulted with my family. I sat with those trustees. And then I came home, and I looked into my (rescue) dogs' eyes. And they gave me the permission to stop. That's the truth. And that's when I lost it. ...Up until that point, I couldn't figure out what had happened, and where I got lost. There were a lot of twists and turns (ups and downs, amazing and horrible) that got me to that point, and if you'd asked me, I would've told you that all along I had it together and I was doing it for vegans and ice cream (etc.)... but in reality, I'd lost sight of my WHY. I will always say it was for the animals, and it was—but I knew then and there, the animals would not have wanted me to suffer like this. That this wasn't about PXV. This wasn't about anything but my inability to understand and change. My inability to be my own stand in the face of suffering and to say enough. To understand that, while my efforts were pure, the thing I was working so hard at wasn't "the thing" that was worthy of all my energy. That if it was for them, in their name, this isn't what THEY wanted for me. I needed their permission to stop. I still feel tremendously guilty for stopping, for giving in, and I don't think that'll ever go away—it's also turned the insistent drive that I have now, because I know my work isn't done—but what was couldn't keep going. The form had to change. The baby wasn't a baby anymore, it was a full-fledged teenager and



Life's like a movie, write your own ending. Keep believing, keep pretending.

- Jim Henson

needed to be allowed out to become whatever it was meant to be in the world. I couldn't see that, but now I do.

So yes, my dogs gave me the permission I initially needed, as they often do. From there, it was logistical; pack up, lock up, and walk away. Pretty much in that order. I won't bore you with the details of covertly dissolving a company, but the period after that until now has been a business of a different colour and taste. It took me awhile to get the bankruptcy stuff done because of the wrap up of the corporation with the Canadian government (tip: always use accountants)... and since being under certain limits there, I have to live pretty carefully until I'm discharged. Mostly, I've been learning how to be human again, as mentioned (it's not going well so far, and taking a LOT longer than this entrepreneur prefers!) It's not something you can force, like you can 'force' business. You can make a call, buy something, and get something done. Personal healing, though, doesn't work like that. So I am taking it day by day. The best thing I can say about this is that I am doing the work. Methodically. Painstakingly. We no longer live in a world where we can afford to spiritually sidestep our lessons. So I'm backtracking and going through my lessons, both business and personal, and doing the work, accepting and letting go of the last decade(s) of stuff that's gotten me here, because PXV—whatever it is to be next, needs me to do that. In the fine print there—in my downtime with bankruptcy (which, have I said it yet? Truly

one of THE best choices I've made in my life... don't be afraid! That's what the system is here for... my recommended firm is A. Farber & Associates...) I've really been able to see what the gift of PXV has given me as a person. The skills I've developed are helping to keep me afloat with consulting, and there are quite a few offers on the table to buy PXV as it is now. However, there's something telling me I'm not quite done with it yet myself. In any case... things are good. Great, even. I'm released from bankruptcy synchronistically at end of day on December 31st, 2017, ...but I'm not rushing to pin down for you what my evolution at that point is going to look like. The future is unwritten, as Joe Strummer said—and for the first time in a long time, I'm breathing into that, with peace instead of panic.

It's hard to put all this out there; we've been taught to pull ourselves up and show the best face even when we can't. Especially in times like this, and we never (ever) talk about the (other) b-word in business. We never talk about our failures. But the reality is businesses fail. Most of them do. Especially vegan businesses, which we can't afford to have happen now more than ever. One of the best things that happened to me, looking back at it (one of the many reflections) is that when I was going through the real shit last year, when I knew I was going down (and I was sinking into the couch) no one stepped up to help me as I said. NO ONE. That's not to say that a very small handful of pals didn't offer me support—it's no secret I'm a tough

cookie (I even have a fridge magnet from my mother that says so...)—but no one helped me when I was begging. Pleading with them. Crying at the doorstep of their own (flourishing) business. For a long time I harboured hate about that, but in truth—it's that kind of shit that makes us who we are, that helps us become the fucking master of our own lives. The girl who can take anything you put in front of her—reverse it, all the pain and suffering of it, and potentially win over (or take) your soul in the process. Very few things can hurt me now—I don't say that from an angry standpoint, but an observation; I will take what I am given, and with that resilient insistent drive I was speaking about, I will flip it upside down and use it for strength. I can't thank all those people enough—though in my down time I've also tried, because how you respond especially when you have nothing to lose is about you, who you are, and still—what you are building and creating for the future. Through the lack of community, the lack of outer support for this thing I was trying to put into the world (for the animals no less!)... for all of that—I had to dig deep to find my own drive. I couldn't fade away. I couldn't die. For the animals—for myself. That drive came through unwavering faith, that I knew I was trying to do good—not just for me—but that my plan had to include me, too. We are the proof that we have what it takes to make it through anything, because we are still here. We are standing up for those who can't, including us. Especially when we can't. That is why I am here today. I also suspect you've been or have done the same, and that's why you're here, too. Tap into your anger in a way that's controlled to leverage it (you don't always have to be happy, but I would suggest that your resentment is hurting you more than you think it's helping...)—it is so fucking powerful if you can use it sincerely for good. I'm learning to be comfortable being very fucking uncomfortable, and it's making all the difference. Tighten up; it's okay. Don't tap dance around it. Let

it out, harnessed and controlled—what are you going to do now that it's okay that it's productive? That is a journey worth taking.

So that's the truth about where I'm at right now. I'm taking my life back. I'm reclaiming it. I finally wore myself down, and got tired of my own bullshit. I'm doing the work; I'm willing and determined to do it, not with force, but soft power. There is nothing emotionally, physically, or mentally wrong—how nice to be able to say that for once!—I'm eternally grateful for being able to start to intimately put into words all I've been through, and even though these words are kind of still all over the place. I'm accepting that rather than trying to be perfect, and put myself immediately into a new business-like system (finally). I owe it to myself to heal this stuff up for good; I owe it to the animals, my animals, to do so for them too. It makes no sense running ourselves (or our dreams, our businesses) into the sky with success or into the ground through failed steps, if we simply aren't able to simultaneously practice self-care and self-love. That's really what veganism is about. Living and leading with Love, always. And Love is also inherent in our choices to back down from the podium, to take a break for ourselves if we need to. Just as the animals are central to our focus of this future we are working so very hard to create, we must be equally as driven to put ourselves first in every moment so that we are as resilient and strong as they need us to be, to create and cement this lasting change. Do not lose hope by making this shift. Do not feel lesser than by giving in. Do not feel bad for being self-focused. If you want to build it, own it. If you want to burn it, own that too. Own whatever you do, and you don't deplete yourself or the mission of vital energy. The spirit of the movement, of our community, the force of nature and all animals are with us, only if we are also with ourselves in each footstep we take. It is through these steps that we find our greatest strengths, we strengthen ourselves, and we sharpen and make it possible for all.

**We glorify survival, we do not
glorify the process of surviving.**
- Ijeoma Umebinyuo

[It's at this point that if I could insert a song, it'd be this: Dusty Trails, by Lucius just spontaneously opened & started playing—the spirits clearly want me to drive this home, so let's do this.]

I've given myself the deepest, most profound and real permission to not give one single fuck about any of the old things I used to care about (and to forgive myself if something pops up that musters one of the lingering old feels...), that kept me running and avoiding. That kept me caged. Suffering. (Meditation is key for this, finding space from it and understanding its lessons). Anything synthetic doesn't stick around for long, and I suspect you're finding that to be the case too. "I don't want to live like this anymore. I've had it with being broke. I've had it with being embarrassed, and I've had it with lying to myself", is the (rough) sentence that came out of me way back last November. I realize that as I prepare to hammer home this last nail, it's August 8th. One day and two months away from my 10 year anniversary with veganism—and exactly four years ago, I was in the very seat, learning photoshop, roughing out PXV's first logo and registering the business officially. Before I can get overly sentimental and wax on with another 10 paragraphs, a crow just landed outside my window. I know better than to overstay my welcome, so I'll leave PXV's future cloaked in that mystery that I spoke on earlier—soon and always continued in the etherworld of online connectivity, feeding the good wolf.



I am.

{ A well-seasoned red seal chef + baker, food innovator; a registered holistic restorative nutritionist (vRHN) for humans + companion animal s; an executive, personal + activist mentor / empowerment facilitator (HLC); a vegan life coach & educator (VLCE); an energy bodywork practitioner (HHP) + personal trainer (PTS); a holistic food + wellness entrepreneur + consultant, female business creator, owner + CEO of pleasantville, daughter of alchemy + goodxwolf; an unapologetic (whole food plant-based mostly raw) vegan for a decade; a meditator; a student of self-development; a white witch, an empath + light-worker of metaphysics, natural + practical esoteric witchcraft; a gym & yoga-goer; a tattoo collector; a rescue pup mum; an ethical activist; a writer; a public speaker + co-host; a defender of the faith, the sweet + sacred—doing all I can to encourage strong hearts to the front. }

All of this, none of this, so much more (or perhaps a lot less).

Always more love, not less—feeding the good wolf.

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Words by Marissa Hanson | Illustration by Matt Gauck

Anxiety, according to Google, is “A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.” They make it sound okay. I mean we all get nervous and worry, right? That’s just what being human is all about, everyone worries.

Well, from my experience, anxiety isn’t that. Anxiety manifests in different ways for different people. According to psychologists, I have severe social anxiety due to low self-esteem. It really is a catch 22. For me, anxiety can be anger or crying; loads and loads of crying. Anxiety is passing back and forth in front of coffee shops because you are afraid of asking for your coffee in a Keep Cup. It’s leaving a concert early because *there’s no way the building can hold that many people. What if there’s a fire? You’ll definitely end up trampled to death.*

It doesn’t even have to be something with an ‘uncertain outcome’, anything and everything can set off anxieties. For example, take veganism. I’ve been vegan for nearly two years. I am lucky enough to have some amazing vegan friends and role models, and I found the transition really easy. I volunteer for different groups, and feel like I’m a good member of the vegan community. That is, until the anxiety takes over and everything goes out the window.

I question whether or not I should even call myself vegan; if I’m doing enough; if there are secret animal byproducts in the food I consume that I just don’t know about; whether I should be a member of vegan Facebook groups because everyone seems to be a better vegan than I am. Then there’s the awful feeling that I’m not making a difference, and all that I am is being a burden.

Even writing this, I’m starting to feel anxious. My hands are getting clammy, and it feels like a storm is brewing inside of me. I’ve gotten distracted and I’m pressing next constantly on Spotify because that’s what anxiety is. It’s weird compulsive habits like checking the time over and over again, pressing next on Spotify, clicking pens, and chewing my poor, poor nails.

This sets off a cycle. A cycle of feeling useless, not good enough, and just worried. I chastise myself for feeling this way. It usually means I stop doing whatever it is that’s making me anxious or I put it off until it’s way too late. It puts my life on hold, and I never feel like I’m moving forward.

I’ve gotten off track. Another manifestation of my anxiety is nervous rambling. I don’t feel like I do enough for the animals. I want to be the voice of reasoning, I want to have great answers when people ask me why I’m vegan. I want to explain the facts about how a plant-based diet is the only sustainable way. That we have to protect the planet for future generations. That animals are amazing sentient beings that deserve love, kindness, and, more importantly, their lives.

I want to inform people of the atrocious things that happen to animals on farms and in slaughter houses before they hit the supermarket shelves. I want to show them that you can’t say you love animals, and then eat them with the same mouth. But I can’t say any of that. I get choked up and will brush the question off with some form of “I just really love animals.”

If for some reason an in-depth conversation happens about veganism, usually at the hand of someone else. I will take all comments to heart. I won’t defend the ideology, and I will sit in silence until it gets too much and I find myself at the point of tears. There have been times where the words “I don’t want to live on a planet that is full of hate and cruelty” have come out of my mouth, and I have been unsure what I was going to do next.

A lot of the time, I feel so useless that I can’t stick up for something that is so obviously right and that I believe in so much. I won’t even comment on Facebook posts because I’m so worried about offending someone else or receiving backlash. I couldn’t even communicate with my loving partner that I wanted our brand-new fridge to be an animal-

I don't know how to master anxiety. I've had an issue with it for as long as I can remember. Sometimes I can work through it, other times its cousin, depression, comes to visit.

free zone. I once showed him a magnet, which had the cutest cartoon cow that said "No dairy in here! Calf-friendly fridge", in the hopes that it would maybe get the message across. Of course, it didn't. How was he supposed to know, when I couldn't even have a proper conversation about it?

I feel anxious when I go out to eat. I hate taking friends to vegan restaurants because I'm afraid they'll hate the food. I hate going to other restaurants because I'm too afraid to ask what's actually in the food, if there is fish sauce, egg, or whatever odd thing that could be in there. I won't even ask for a replacement meal, if the restaurant has stuffed up, I will pick the stuff out and cry about it later. This is then accompanied by days of feeling guilty.

When I'm feeling good, I'll sign myself up for so many opportunities. I work as a store manager and have exceptional customer service skills, so on a good day, it's easy to convince myself that I can get out there and change the world. I'll volunteer at events to sell merchandise, chat about organizations, and all this other fantastic stuff. But when the time actually comes, I will be incredibly overwhelmed.

I don't care all that much about my job. I can do it, I do it well, and it's kind of cool, but it doesn't hold a massive place in my heart. However, I care about the organizations I volunteer for, I care about the animals, and I care about veganism. That makes me feel incredibly vulnerable and, to an extent, scared. It also means that before events I get anxious. On occasion, it also means wearing out my shoes pacing outside the front of the venue. A lot of the time, it's cancelling at the last minute. Then, because I'm so ashamed of cancelling, I'll avoid anything like it for months.

I don't know how to master anxiety. I've had an issue with it for as long as I can remember. Sometimes I can work through it, other times its cousin, depression, comes to visit. I've been through countless therapists, and different medications and therapies. I don't stick to therapy because I feel like I'm taking a spot that someone else deserves.

But I know deep down I want to be a better activist, a better vegan, a better person. I want to have the tough conversations, I want to push myself, and I want to feel like I'm making a difference.

Maybe this article is a step in the right direction? Maybe pushing myself beyond my limits is what I need?

Whatever I need, I still bail on things. I type this, unsure if I'll actually submit it. I wish I had the answers. I wish I had all the tips and tricks to help people overcome anxiety. But I'm really writing this so people with anxiety know they aren't alone. You deserve better, and you can stick up for yourself and your beliefs. I also want to show those who are lucky enough to have never experienced true anxiety some insight into what it's actually like. Anxiety is not something you can just get over. It may be irrational, it may be that we're just overthinking, but to someone who suffers with anxiety it is as real as it can be.

Marissa Hanson is a Journalism and International Relations Student from that place with the fancy bridge, Sydney, Australia. She has a weird fascination with seals and manatees, and can always find dogs when out in public.

t: @marissalee | ig: @marissalee89

"They would face at least two winters here. The howling swirl of dust wrapping them in an ever tighter cocoon. It hadn't been like this at first. No windstorms or unexplained power outages. No sense that the planet itself had begun to speak."

COLONY

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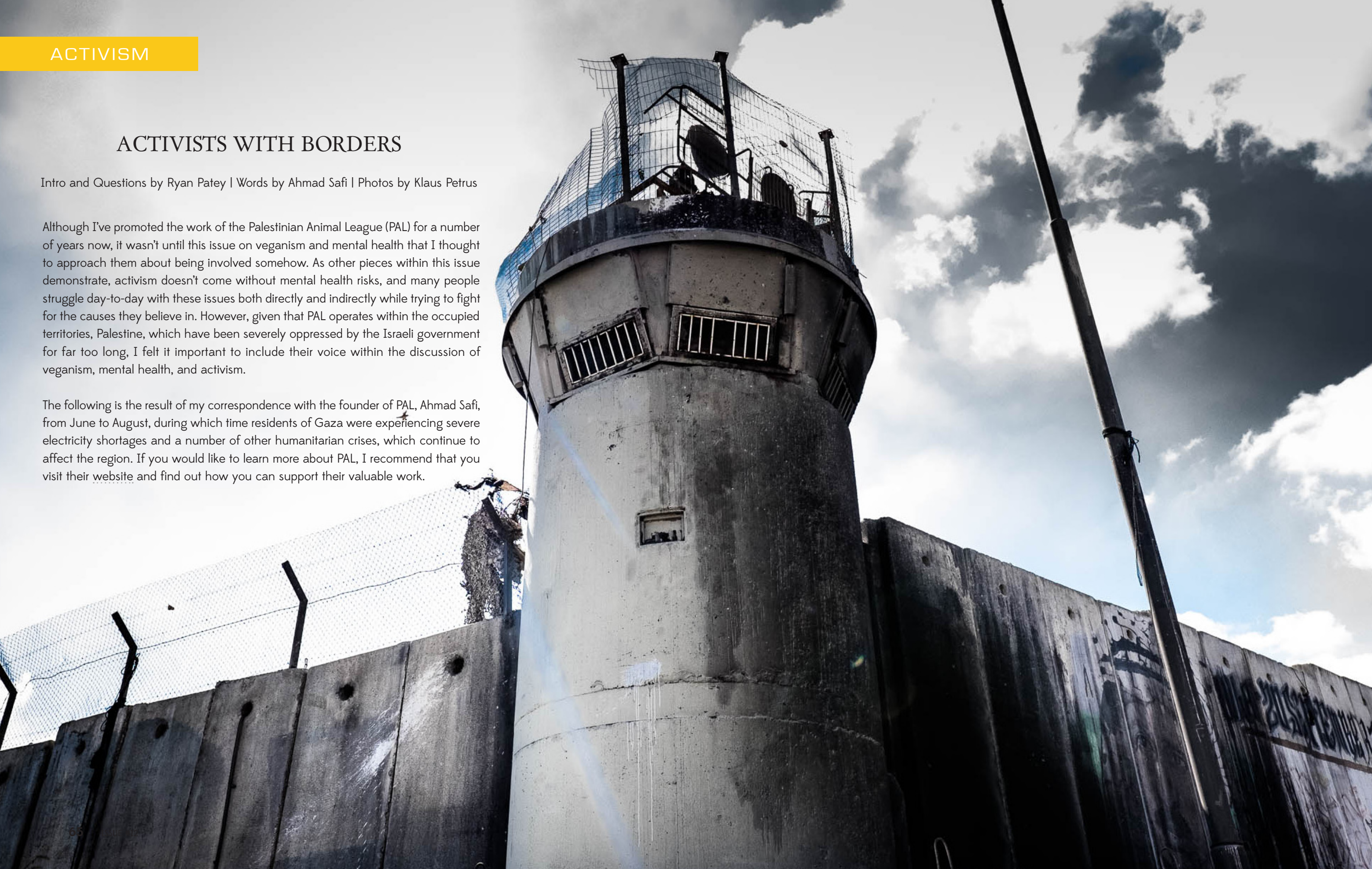


ACTIVISTS WITH BORDERS

Intro and Questions by Ryan Patey | Words by Ahmad Safi | Photos by Klaus Petrus

Although I've promoted the work of the Palestinian Animal League (PAL) for a number of years now, it wasn't until this issue on veganism and mental health that I thought to approach them about being involved somehow. As other pieces within this issue demonstrate, activism doesn't come without mental health risks, and many people struggle day-to-day with these issues both directly and indirectly while trying to fight for the causes they believe in. However, given that PAL operates within the occupied territories, Palestine, which have been severely oppressed by the Israeli government for far too long, I felt it important to include their voice within the discussion of veganism, mental health, and activism.

The following is the result of my correspondence with the founder of PAL, Ahmad Safi, from June to August, during which time residents of Gaza were experiencing severe electricity shortages and a number of other humanitarian crises, which continue to affect the region. If you would like to learn more about PAL, I recommend that you visit their [website](#) and find out how you can support their valuable work.



What does PAL do?

Established in 2001, PAL is a non-governmental organization operating within the occupied territories, Palestine. It is the first of its kind to promote the welfare and rights of animals. Veganism and peace are additional goals that are integrated in the main message of PAL. In addition to supporting community projects that advocate education and civil engagement, PAL's mission with public awareness is accomplished through workshops, events, and surveys. We also collaborate with organizations from around the world to increase awareness on issues that animals and people within Palestine face.

As an organization working within the occupied territories, how do you think your activism and projects differ from those in other places?

PAL's work is not solely focused on animal-based projects. Civic engagement is one of the goals to form solidarity with all the volunteers. Youth for Change is an example of one of the most successful initiatives in which college students teach children about such things as veganism and taking care of the environment. This project has been running for three years, and the ultimate goal of it is to break the cycle of violence. Beginning with the youth, it will spread to the community in the future.

Along with this, one of the things that PAL tries to promote is the struggle for freedom and justice of the Palestinian people. Through working with organizations from around the world and hosting people in Palestine, PAL is addressing the issue of animal welfare, which needs to be promoted despite the difficult political situation. At the same time, we are also increasing awareness on how it is to live and work under the occupation.

For example, we were recently forced to stop all of our activities and events for fear of the involved children's safety. Politics are a constant factor for our organization. Last year, an area called Wadi Al-Qilt

was declared to be a natural resort by Israel. This decision immediately exiled all the resident bedouins in the area. Their fields were burned, and their cattle were put in danger. PAL was unable to implement its principles with helping these people and animals. By law, trees cannot be planted, and shelter for the animals during the hot summers was not allowed to be built.

Another problem we face is restrictions on the import of materials, since we do not have control over the borders. We experienced this during the Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Release (TNVR) program we implemented. Basically, everything that comes into Palestinian territories is controlled by Israel. When importing cages for trapping the stray dogs, we were responsible for the importation fees of supplies, which took an extremely long time to be delivered. When they did arrive, personnel checked the materials with x-ray machines (due to security measures), and they were held by Israeli authorities until approved.

In addition, there are restrictions by Israel on permitted medications. Due to the inability to acquire certain anesthetics and drugs for procedures, the veterinarians working on the TNVR project had to improvise with a combination of human and animal drugs in order to spay and neuter the animals.

Overall, circumstances can cause our activism to take longer to be put into action and our goals may be harder to achieve. However, even under occupation, it is not impossible to create positive change.

Due to the occupation, what sorts of things do you have to consider when planning events, programs, etc.?

Location is one of the most challenging aspects. Even though the country itself is not very big, it is challenging to hold meetings with people from different areas in Palestine. For example, when deciding a workshop's location, figuring out

One must not show the suffering because it has persisted for so long, and many others have suffered even more. So, it becomes internalized, and that within itself can become dangerous.



how people can reach it is complicated due to checkpoints, as well as whether or not the city is currently being held. There are Israeli checkpoints not only between Palestinian territories and Israeli areas, but also between Palestinian cities. So, if a meeting is held in East Jerusalem, Palestinians from the West Bank will not be able to attend unless they have an Israeli ID. Also, if a Palestinian from Gaza wanted to attend a meeting outside of Gaza, he or she would have to request a special permit from Israel to be able to leave, which is often times not granted.

It is also extremely difficult for Palestinians to travel outside of Palestine for international conferences or meetings. It is challenging to acquire a permit from Israel for travel, and a visa from the destination country. Palestinians have to travel through Amman, Jordan, where they first have to sit through an Israeli checkpoint before crossing the bridge and enduring paperwork/security check on the Jordanian side before getting to the airport to travel. Security measures also need to be examined when volunteers enter the country. This makes collaborations much harder.

How do you think these conditions play a part in the mental health of those involved?

There is a big burden placed on the mental health of those living within occupied territories. Unfortunately, people have become accustomed to the difficult life here, so this issue is not adequately addressed in Palestine. Of course, constant violations of human rights eventually take their toll. So, there is a need for awareness and promotion of mental health care.

For most Palestinians, adapting is the most common self defense mechanism. Dealing with the given circumstances, people have to become accustomed to things that are not normal. This includes the occupation's violence towards

individuals, beating, arresting, kidnapping, and killing. This struggle is almost considered to be part of the bills that Palestinians have to pay. It is their form of taxes. Freedom is sacrificed and the typical expectation is for everyone to just handle it. One must not show the suffering because it has persisted for so long, and many others have suffered even more. So, it becomes internalized, and that within itself can become dangerous.

Due to the Israeli occupation, children are exposed to violence and oppression at a young age. They become prone to feeling as though they have to prove themselves in their society as strong and capable of defending themselves. This can lead to acts of violence toward animals.

Thus, one of PAL's goals is to break this pattern within the Palestinian community. Finding something meaningful to do with that energy, such as working for animal welfare can be extremely healthy. So, we try to channel it to the care of animals and each other. We encourage people to treat animals as an example of kindness, to break themselves out of the frustration from the occupation. Our youth are the future, so through working with them, we can make a positive and sustainable change in our society.

When working with people within local areas, how do you deal with talking with them about issues of animal welfare while also being sensitive to their situations?

It is difficult to promote the importance of animal welfare in a place where people's freedom and well-being are compromised. Within the occupied territories, people are faced with numerous human rights violations, including a lack of freedom of movement, inadequate access to food, water, and healthcare, discrimination based on nationality, and imprisonment without fair trials. So, when faced with the effects of occupation, many people feel that they have no energy to deal with animal rights when their rights are being violated.

Occupation does not need to end before facing these concepts and goals. It can start now, and PAL aims to do just that with each project it supports and with every future plan.



As well, keeping the culture of the location in mind is crucial when attempting to introduce the idea of animal welfare. In our community, for example, religion and tradition are extremely important. In Islam, it is stated that animals and humans are equal and compose a single nation. So, introducing animal welfare using terms locals may already know increases our chance of stopping violence.

That is why PAL concentrates on animal protection, but also tries to support all of the people and families involved. This helps to create a form of unity. People suffering from the same dire circumstances come together and build a project that is revolutionary and progressive. Finding this balance between the wellbeing of animals and that of humans is crucial to shed light on the importance of integrating animal and human care.

Occupation does not need to end before facing these concepts and goals. It can start now, and PAL aims to do just that with each project it supports and with every future plan.

What do you do to consider the mental health of those within your organization? Do you talk openly about your feelings, recent conflicts, things that happened during events, etc.?

Similar to our work within Palestinian communities, the common suffering shared by our organization members creates camaraderie. When all of those in the organization face similar obstacles, there is a sense of understanding. Along with this, animal welfare can be seen as a bridge to bring people together from different parts of the world, and within Palestine itself. It is work for joint struggle, and it also allows us to raise awareness for another struggle: the occupation.

Instead of remaining silent about things such as PTSD or other mental health issues, PAL attempts to face them head on. We want to help change the stigma seen with mental health within our society. Although addressing mental health is not commonly

seen in our society because it is sometimes considered a sign of weakness, we encourage openness with our Youth for Change project and with all our activities. We encourage the youth we work with to start conversations about experiences, feelings, and concerns.

It is through this openness that PAL also supports a number of initiatives. Each project reflects the needs of those who start them to change aspects of our society that they find important to discuss. Plus, even small projects can help those involved realize that they can accomplish what they aim for. They also teach responsibility and help to build a strong character. Fostering independent thinking also encourages talking about problems and helping others. For children, this is especially important since they can sometimes succumb to peer pressure and be forced to do things they do not truly believe in.

What projects is PAL currently working on, and how can people support the work that you're doing?

PAL is involved in many local projects to spread its message through all aspects of the community. With each project, we focus on involving our volunteers and the youth to encourage civic engagement.

As I mentioned before, one of our most sustainable projects has been Youth for Change. It revolves around facilitating the development of child led projects focused on animal welfare and the environment. Three demographics are involved: the adults serve as advisors and form part of the guiding committee; the university students serve as leaders and undergo detailed training to help coordinate the projects; and the schoolchildren are participants who benefit from every activity.

Through Youth for Change, a number of individual projects with certain messages have been produced. Whether it is through developing the first vegan cafeteria at Al-Quds University or creating vegan menus in local schools, members of the community learn that change can happen.

With another project called Sharing the Loads, PAL created the first manual for the proper treatment of working animals. It is filled with scientific resources that help farmers find solutions to common problems with animals. It is written in Arabic, but will also be translated into English so it can help more people.

Composing the manual was a difficult process, and it required PAL teams to visit a number of sites to identify common problems, collect the data, and find ways to introduce possible solutions with the help of veterinarians. Ideally, this manual will be used as a constant reference to ensure animal welfare in not only Palestine, but also the entire Middle East.

Another project includes a spaying and neuter program in Tulkarem, which was started as a humane solution to control the stray dog population.

Within our very own office, we are also currently building a small animal clinic for stray animals, and will offer discounted prices for animal care. Along with this, activities and awareness shops will be carried out in the office to involve kids and adults in the local community. PAL hopes to change the norm of animal care through this project.

Although the local community is the main target, PAL is also engaging the international community by holding the first international conference in Palestine called Defending Palestine: Liberating the People, the Land, and Animal from May 3 throughout May 6, 2018 at the Youth Village. It will focus on the shared struggle for land and the liberation for all species in occupied Palestine. Participants will attend important workshops and talks from international and local

speakers. Tours to three cities will also be included to integrate the participants in Palestine properly, and to ensure the introduction of animal welfare within the context of Palestine and the way it relates to the world. Ideally, a strong international activist network will be formed following this experience.

There is still a need for funding and sponsorships for this important conference, as well as our other projects. For those that are interested, more information can be found on [our website](#). As well, social media has become the most important factor in forming the international and local PAL family. It unites everyone who believes in the same cause and enables projects to be more sustainable and successful. Support can come financially or emotionally. Simply sharing, liking, and commenting will expand the mission to infinite possibilities and ensure we can accomplish even more, which is ultimately, what PAL truly aims for.

Ahmad Safi is the founder of Palestinian Animal League (PAL). He is an active member for social justice in Palestine. Father to three daughters, he is a refugee from the Jalazon camp. Stemming from his experiences as a refugee, Safi aims to work towards equality for humans, as well as animals.

w: [pal.ps/en](#) | **e:** [info@pal.ps](#)

t: [@palleague](#) | **ig:** [@palestiniananimalleague](#)

"You realize that you are mentally ill, right?"

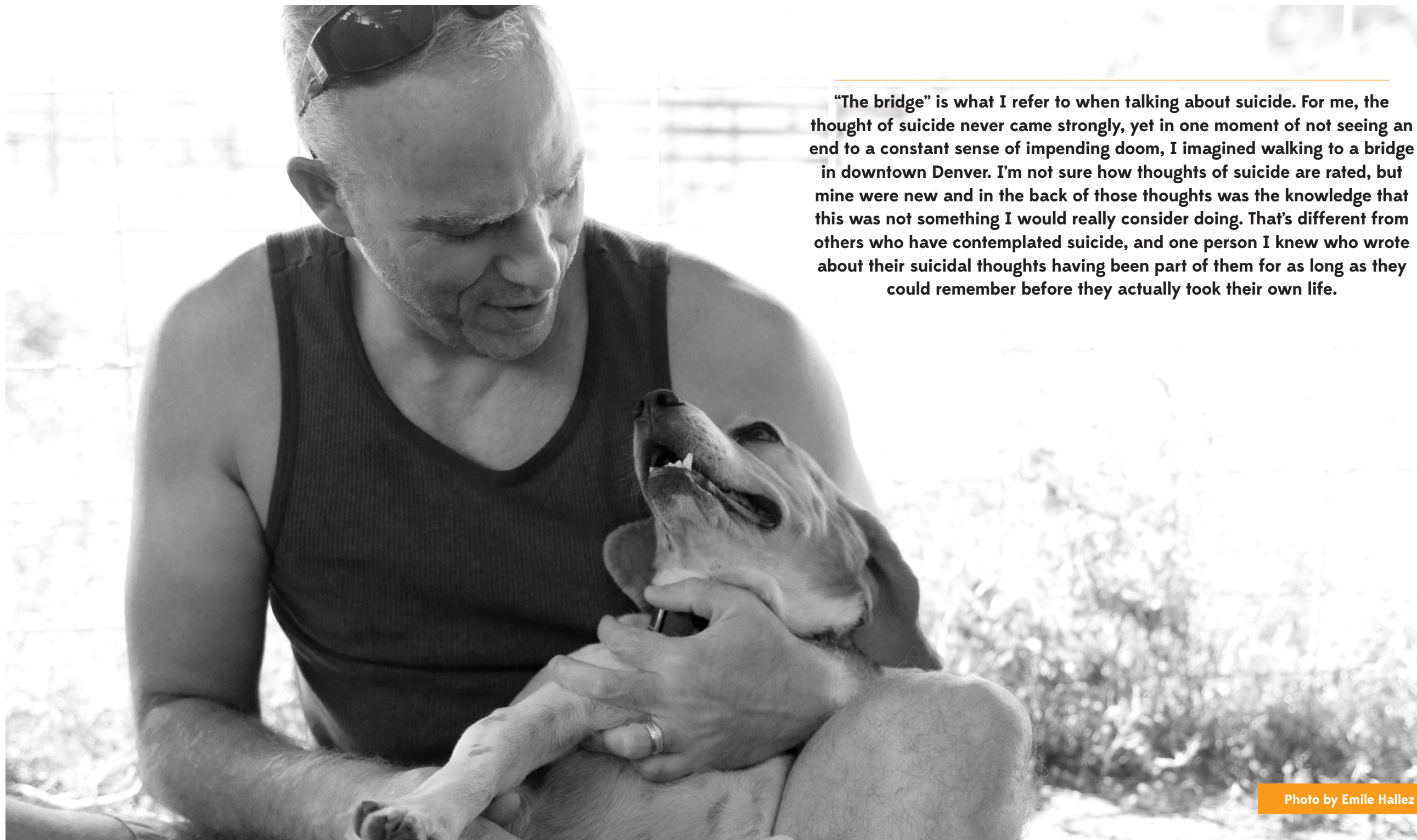
I was 18 and being processed into an alcohol rehab centre. The same staff member who had asked me to check a "yes" or "no" box as to if I was homosexual was now telling me I was mentally ill. It was the first time in my life that someone had had the nerve to speak of my demons. If alcoholism got me to mental illness, then I was going to have a list once they found out that I was gay. Homosexuality wasn't completely removed from mental-illness classifications in the US until 1987.

I came out in the late 80's when the only social opportunities for a gay man where I lived included a couple of parks and several bars. Drinking and drugs were big parts of the culture, and, because there was so much of it going on, seldom would one abusing or showing signs of addiction stand out.

Lucky for me, active alcoholism turned into recovery. Not in a magical moment of deciding that I would just not drink anymore because of moral reasons, but because I knew I was going to die if I continued the way I was going. Self-preservation. Forty-eight hours after I decided to stop drinking, I realized I had made the wrong decision and that I could try again to just take it easy with drinking. Before I picked up that drink, I went to a meeting and stayed sober one more day. I stayed sober again the next day, and the next.

Soon I was deployed with my military job, and I had large and small battles in my mind. I realized that the more I thought about things, about life, the more I went from doing well to not doing so well. Being alone with me was not easy in those early days of sobriety.





“The bridge” is what I refer to when talking about suicide. For me, the thought of suicide never came strongly, yet in one moment of not seeing an end to a constant sense of impending doom, I imagined walking to a bridge in downtown Denver. I’m not sure how thoughts of suicide are rated, but mine were new and in the back of those thoughts was the knowledge that this was not something I would really consider doing. That’s different from others who have contemplated suicide, and one person I knew who wrote about their suicidal thoughts having been part of them for as long as they could remember before they actually took their own life.

Photo by Emile Halez

I knew something was drastically different in my life the day I asked for help. It wasn't just the act of asking for help, but also the thought process that occurred before asking. I can't remember anyone ever telling me or teaching me that asking for help was a sign of weakness, yet somehow deep inside of me, I felt I had to always be strong on the outside, never letting anyone know that I was in trouble and in need of help.

Fear was similar for me, in that I couldn't speak of fear to even those I was closest with. In recovery programs, people speak of hundreds of types of fears. This was something I couldn't (or wouldn't) acknowledge at first, yet as I got settled into recovery and began an honest process of looking at myself in the truest manner ever, I realized that yes, fear was a large part of my life. Like many others I knew in recovery, it wasn't just one fear. I realized that fear controlled my life. Whether it was the fear of tomorrow, the fear of not being liked, the fear of violence (a real fear being openly gay in the Navy and in the south in the 80's) or the fear of losing what I had.

The fantastic thing about fear, and admitting that I was afraid, was that I wasn't alone, and it wasn't just in recovery. In later days, when I sought out professional mental health help, I learned that I was definitely not alone. Not only with a list of fears, but with being able to conquer those fears and not live in them constantly as well.

It took a long time to get to where I am today, where being lonely was very different than being alone. Today, I am happy to say that most times I am super comfortable with me and my thoughts. What a big change.

As I ponder this, it is easy to connect what goes on in my head with those in all of my communities, especially the activist communities. If you are my husband, or in my inner circle, you know the deal. If not, you may just think that I am this super happy

guy who tries his best to love everyone and to fight against animal cruelty, racism, hate, poverty, and so many other things on a daily basis. All of that is true, but at times I am also back in that sense of impending doom.

As are so many others.

The biggest challenge for me in recovery and in life is dealing with shame, one of my hidden demons. I doubt I was born with it (although it seems like it's been with me forever), and I honestly can't think of anyone filling me up with it. Alas, it was a stumbling block for sure. These days, the intense shame I felt in my teen years and while coming out in my twenties is gone. Shame for me now looks more like not being enough or not doing enough. I know this is common in activist communities because I hear it from others frequently.

Most of us have heard the old saying about never really knowing what is going on with someone, so be kind to them. This is so true. Don't get me wrong, I'm certainly not suggesting that we roll over as activists or allow an unacceptable action to occur. I simply mean that all of us can do a better job of being kind to one another.

In my life as an activist, I have definitely become the person that tries his best to support other activists. Shaming of other activists does no good for our causes or us. Within animal rights, I often wonder whether the pigs about to be slaughtered would care how many protests we went to or social media posts we created. I think that sometimes just being vegan is going to have to be good enough. This, of course, is an unpopular idea. The times I have said this to other activists are usually when they were completely burned out. I cannot be all things to all people. Or to all causes. There are times in my activist life when I have to slow down, and I honour those who decide to do the same thing.



'Project Intersect' is an anarcho-feminist zine focusing on ethical veganism, activism, & the collective struggle against white supremacy & capitalist patriarchy.

Now seeking submissions for issue four, which focuses on FUTURE UTOPIAS - linguistic, personal, social, & metaphysical.

w: cargocollective.com/projectintersect | fb: [projectintersectzine](https://www.facebook.com/projectintersectzine)

My amazing life journey has been filled with mental health adventures, most including alcoholism and drug addiction. As a blogger, when I write about "community" or "my communities", I am always including my friends and family who have been a part of my recovery.

I seldom meet someone who wants to share his or her private demons and struggles publicly. As someone who gives a shit about this world, there are more than enough battles to fight at any given moment to have to worry about what others think of me because of the stigma around mental illness and addiction. In my life, I have come a long way in living with and even thriving in all of my isms, and I include fighting stigma in my list of activist actions.

Regardless of the communities one is a part of, the stigma of mental health issues is present. Alcoholism and drug addiction, in the forms that present themselves in our communities, are brushed aside, gossiped about, or brought up in conversation as something negative about the person. Depression and suicide are hardly ever even acknowledged.

As a fundraising professional, I have spent a good part of my life working for non-profits that serve populations that have been affected by addiction and mental health issues. I spend a lot of time speaking about this in a personal effort to decrease the stigma that surrounds these words.

Whether one is a daily activist on the front lines or on the outskirts of activism, reaching out to others who might be having a tough time is important. Our movements have to be supportive of these efforts, and also supportive of those who undertake them. Although divisiveness due to judgment and petty gossip weakens our cause, caring for one another only makes us stronger.

RESOURCES

If you think you might have a problem with alcohol: aa.org

If you think you might have a problem with drugs: na.org

If you are a teen that identifies as LGBTQ or non-gender conforming and have struggles with suicidal thoughts: trevorproject.org

I purposefully am not listing a suicide prevention link as I do not have personal experience with one. There seem to be many, and I think if you would like support around thoughts of harming yourself or have experienced loss due to suicide, there are definitely options to seek help.

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

w: thegayvegans.com | fb, ig, & t: [thegayvegans](https://www.facebook.com/thegayvegans)



RAW EMOTIONS

AN INTERVIEW WITH EMILY VON EUW

Intro, Outro, and Questions by Sarah Louise

Photos by Emily von Euw

When Ryan first approached me to do an interview for T.O.F.U, I have to admit that I was a little apprehensive taking the role of interviewer for the first time. What would I ask?! What if my questions were boring?! Insert other self deprecating rhetorical question here.

However, when I discovered it would be Emily von Euw from This Rawsome Vegan Life being interviewed for this issue, I was more than happy to take the reins. I had stumbled upon Emily's blog before a few years ago, and recall marvelling over some of the delicious looking raw vegan desserts. However, their blog entered my radar again awhile back after seeing Emily interviewed on Viet Vegans Youtube channel in a great video titled Intersectional Chats: Is Veganism a Privilege? Hearing Emily speak about privilege, food security and accessibility, and intersectionality really resonated with me. Furthermore, seeing them address these topics, as well as mental health and self-care, throughout their social media and blogging presence, speaks to me even more.

While I myself am an experienced blogger, I am currently on a hiatus from food blogging and recipe writing, as I often find the amounts of privilege in the vegan community truly overwhelming, and mentally exhausting. I also find it difficult to talk about food, while also knowing the barriers that surround many folks regarding food security. Therefore, I find myself quite inspired by Emily, whom throughout the years, seems to have found a way to share recipes, discuss topics such as intersectional politics, self care, body issues, and mental health, while maintaining a self-awareness of their own privilege.

I'd like to thank Emily for taking some time to discuss their pro-intersectional veganism, bodies, feminism, gender identity, mental health, and all of the good good things we appreciate This Rawsome Vegan Life for. If you haven't checked out their blog before this, I really suggest that you do. But after you read this interview.

Alright, about those questions...

First off, I'd really love to know what motivated you to start This Rawsome Vegan Life, and how you got here. Reading through, you have such a great archive- how long have you been at it?

Thank you!! :) It started as a hobby back in 2011 when I was 16 and freshly vegan. I was so excited about all the new techniques, equipment, and ingredients, especially concerning raw food. I used to be passionate about [non-vegan] baking so once I went vegan, creating plant-based recipes became a fun everyday activity. My parents eventually nagged me to start a blog so I could share the recipes I was making on the web. Well: I did that. I put a lot of energy into streamlining the website's design right away, and improving my photography and recipe development skills. I made social media channels as well, and over the next year or so my blog started gaining popularity. It really took off from there and eventually I was offered a book deal and yada yada. Life is good.

Throughout your blog and social media presence, you achieve a striking balance of sharing your delicious recipes, while also discussing your experiences with body image, gender, relationships, mental health, etc. This seems to set your blog apart from others in the community. Do you mind expanding a little on where you're coming from with this personally, and what inspires your openness on such topics?

Thaaaank you! That's really nice to say and I am glad you appreciate that. I've identified as a feminist for as long as I knew what the word meant, and have been passionate about queer liberation and abortion access since I was a teen, but until a few years ago I wasn't really well-versed in the proper language and political ethos of anti-colonial, anti-capitalist movements, the fact of non-binary and agender identity, fat liberation activist work, or Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's concept of intersectional oppression(s). Needless to say: once I began to learn,

the importance of it all struck me immediately. Also in the past few years I have gotten more in touch with my own gender (or rather: lack thereof) and queerness. I have faced the reality of my mental illness, including anxiety, depression, ED, and body dysphoria. A year ago, I went through a very rough breakup that shattered my heart and my brain, so I had to deal with building THAT back together. I tend to talk about whatever I am feeling or thinking - with friends, strangers, and, evidently, on my social media channels - so that's why I discuss these topics. They are on my mind because they matter to me and they're relevant to my life.

Thank you for sharing your realities in dealing with mental illness, relationships, etc. I agree that talking about these things is important, if you feel you're in a place to share with others.. Do you find that this helps you to process said experiences and feelings as you're going through them? Are there additional things that you find helpful in coping with these experiences?

Personally, expressing my feelings as I am experiencing them usually helps me hugely. Otherwise, it's more challenging or sometimes impossible to reflect on my feelings and thoughts and why they are coming up in the ways they do. Telling someone else what I'm going through not only allows me to contemplate my perspective, but the response of the person I tell can also be reassuring, supportive, and occasionally even illuminating. If I don't feel like talking to someone (often), I write out my feelings. I keep a journal and write in there almost daily, plus I make little drawings and word art. I cannot imagine not having this outlet. I also recently started recording my thoughts via a free downloadable app on my phone. It's interesting to have that additional medium. I have a decent list of things that usually make me feel better too including bike rides, favourite albums or podcasts, certain friends, alone time, foods, hikes, walks, movies, baths, cooking, etc.

Personally, expressing my feelings as I am experiencing them usually helps me hugely. Otherwise, it's more challenging or sometimes impossible to reflect on my feelings and thoughts and why they are coming up in the ways they do.





Your size and shape are irrelevant to your value as a human being: we all are ALL worthy of love, joy, and freedom to live how we want.

Given your earlier answer, do you mind if we back up a little bit to the concept of intersectional oppression? You mention Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, but are there other resources that helped you discover the concepts you've mentioned such as anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism, body activism, non-binary and agender identities, etc.? I feel some of these materials would be of interest to other T.O.F.U readers too.

Of course. I am so grateful for all the people and organizations who have been doing and continue to do this important, unfortunately necessary, work.

The Health At Every Size (HAES) philosophy rocked my world. Obviously, your health is not my business and there should be no moral imperative to be “healthy”. Do what ya want! But in any case: to realize - through the concept of HAES - that the size or shape of my body has nothing to do with my health was very liberating. For many years, I was obsessed with eating and exercising in mentally- and physically-damaging ways in order to create this “healthy” body, and when my body wouldn’t cooperate (i.e. match the very narrow idea of what it looks like to be healthy in western capitalist culture), I thought I was failing. Bad Fat Broads and Bustle’s The Bodcast are two amazing podcasts. Both have taught me that ALL BODIES ARE GOOD BODIES! Your size and shape are irrelevant to your value as a human being: we all are ALL worthy of love, joy, and freedom to live how we want. Lindy West’s book, *Shrill*, is hilarious and glorious.

Everyday Feminism is a *fantastic* website devoted to excellent politics, their articles are constantly expanding my notions of justice and inclusivity. As is Bitch Media, a paper and online magazine; plus they have two podcasts, which are both nearly perfect (Popaganda and Backtalk).

In the context of decolonial feminism and veganism, Aph Ko is just the greatest. She founded Black Vegans Rock and is the co-author of *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black*



I cringe at a lot of my beliefs about veganism from that time. I was in denial about my own mental illness on top of that. I probably believed that enough green juice and sunlight could cure all my problems.

Veganism from Two Sisters. Project Intersect, a zine I found in Portland, seems wonderful too. In their own words: “Project Intersect encourages pro-intersectional analyses of oppression that are sorely needed both in activist circles and in general public discourse. The intent is to establish new spaces for anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-speciesist work and scholarship by engaging a multitude of voices in this renewed effort to make anti-oppression anarcha-feminist and/or ethical vegan critique accessible for all (from the ground up!).”

The Food Empowerment Project (F.E.P.) is another terrific resource. They have an extensive list of *actually* ethical vegan chocolate, which I refer to all the time, and in their own words: they “[seek] to create a more just and sustainable world by recognizing the power of one’s food choices. [They] encourage choices that reflect a more compassionate society by spotlighting the abuse of animals on farms, the depletion of natural resources,

unfair working conditions for produce workers, the unavailability of healthy foods in communities of colour and low-income areas, and the importance of not purchasing chocolate that comes from the worst forms of child labor.”

Oh my goodness, I LOVE Shrii. I am also so on board for all of these resources you’ve listed, so thank you so much for sharing with our readers. Do you find your own followers are generally receptive to this? I’d imagine these topics could create some pretty interesting dialogue and feedback to your posts. Have you ever heard from folks about how it helps them?

People email or message me or comment on social media posts pretty often about how something I have mentioned on gender, body image, or mental illness has touched them, motivated them to learn more about whatever topic, or simply felt relatable that day. This inspires me to continue talking about these subjects. People have told me they feel

deeply relieved to know my experience is similar to theirs; especially concerning mental illness, imposter syndrome, anxiety, ED, and depression. I am grateful to have received so many heartfelt messages from folks around the world. I get so much support from my readers. THEY GIVE ME LIIIFE. I have had hardly any negative comments or emails in all the years I’ve been doing this, and I am grateful for that. Sometimes someone doesn’t understand what I mean when I talk about gender stuff, privilege, or shutting down capitalism, but often other people will step up and explain in a friendly way. I feel very lucky my little corner of the internet is this way.

Oftimes while navigating the vegan corner of the internet, I find myself fumbling a little bit over images and reading generalizing veganism as a cure-all for physical and mental health. For example, I see this meme all the time suggesting medications can be replaced by fruits and vegetables for most ailments, or that NATURE is the only cure for depression and anxiety.

I think folks need to think carefully about sharing such materials, and who they may be influencing. Do you ever have similar feelings, or struggles in general with being part of the vegan community?

I thought you misspelled “oftentimes” but I googled it and “oftimes” is definitely a thing. Shouldn’t have doubted you. Okay so: YA, yikes. Vegan messaging can be mega problematic about many topics (for example: there is arguably a lot of fat-shaming in the mainstream vegan movement, visible in pro-vegan documentaries and campaigns motivating people to go vegan because it’ll mean instant weight loss). When I first became vegan, I was a teenager and deeply ignorant when it came to my own privilege as a white, upper middle class, settler person living on unceded Coast Salish lands. I just figured: “Hey, now that I’m vegan, I am saving the world and living the perfect, pure life!” Not so. I cringe at a lot of my beliefs about veganism from that time. I was in denial about my

What works for someone may not work for the next person, so while giving advice about veganism (when it's solicited) can be useful, it's important we don't structure our language to sound like the only right choice is to go vegan and get off meds.

own mental illness on top of that. I probably believed that enough green juice and sunlight could cure all my problems. Nowadays, when I see messaging like the meme you're referring to, I roll my eyes. Not only is that pseudo-sciencey, it's dangerous and damaging. Mental illness is not a choice and for many people, it can't be meditated or Master Cleansed away. It may require medication (*gasp* yes: PHARMACEUTICALS) and regular appointments with healthcare professionals. Suggesting that someone does not need medication, or that if they simply went for more nature walks their depression would evaporate, is ignoring the potential seriousness of their condition. What works for someone may not work for the next person, so while giving advice about veganism (when it's solicited) can be useful, it's important we don't structure our language to sound like the only right choice is to go vegan and get off meds.

Many of us bloggers do not have a background in psychology or mental health, but have a genuine desire for our readers and friends to be well, and have the power to make choices that feel right for them. How do you feel we can responsibly achieve the right balance of promoting a vegan lifestyle, while also being considerate of the important stuff, like mental health?

Do you recommend any resources for those of us who would just generally like to do better, as writers, or just as humans?

I think acknowledging our lack of professional, certified expertise is important when it's relevant (which, when we are talking about food and wellness, it is). Being careful about our phrasing and language matters. I don't want to claim that eating more raw and vegan foods will cure a disease or alleviate a mental health issue; but I do want to share my own experience of how raw foods have helped my mood, energy, and outlook on life, because maybe it will have that positive effect for another person. So, I try to keep it personal and simply share my own story, without wording sentences in a way that makes it seem like this lifestyle MUST be an absolute truth for all people and bodies. We are all very different (needless to say, but I said it) and thus each of us will feel well on a hugely different variety of diets and lifestyles. I believe each one of us knows ourselves better than anyone else can possibly know us, so I do not ever wish to TELL people what to do or how to live. They know what works for them, and if something I share inspires them to incorporate some aspects of my lifestyle into theirs and it's positive for them, yay! If not, that's cool. Finally, if we do want

to make health claims about food (example, 'turmeric can help prevent cancer') then that is best backed up with legitimate studies and scientific research. Just say no to pseudo-science, kids.

AGREED. BOO TO PSEUDO SCIENCE! Would you like to give a shout to any blogs you read regularly, or that readers who enjoy your blog might also take interest in? (These could be involved with vegan food, mental health and self care, or otherwise! Just anything you'd like to share or that you're really digging these days!)

Everything I listed previously. Plus...

TV shows: Broad City, Insecure, Golden Girls, and tbh... Game of Thrones.

Authors: Rebecca Solnit, Margaret Atwood, Maggie Nelson, Toni Morrison, Kai Cheng Thom, Michelle Alexander, Octavia Butler, Virginia Woolf...

Podcasts: The Read, Criminal, Strangers, Intersection, Making Contact, Reveal, Democracy Now!...

Blogs: The First Mess, Oh Lady Cakes, Wholehearted Eats, Golubka Kitchen, Sweet Potato Soul, Our Food Stories, Vegan Richa, Vegan Miam, Cocoon Cooks...

Alright, I'm loving our mutual respect for Broad City and Rebecca Solnit. "Men Explain Things to Me" actually totally rocked my world and left me wanting more, and I think that's what has gotten me into a lot of other writers now like Roxanne Gay, Lindy West as mentioned above, etc. You've left us

with a lot of good stuff to check out, and also a lot of important things to think about regarding how we approach veganism, trying not to be the worst, etc. Thanks again so much for your time, Emily, and I look forward to your next blog posts!

Emily von Euw is the creator of the award-winning recipe blog, This Rawsome Vegan Life, as well as the best-selling author of three cookbooks: Rawsome Vegan Baking; 100 Best Juices, Smoothies and Healthy Snacks; and The Rawsome Vegan Cookbook. Their passion in life comes from friendships, food, forests, mountains, meadows, and music. Em has presented at veg expos and festivals across Canada and the US, and lives just outside Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

w: thisrawsomeveganlife.com

fb & ig: [@thisrawsomeveganlife](https://www.facebook.com/thisrawsomeveganlife)

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:

w: bluerosevegan.ca

t: [@bluerosevegan](https://www.facebook.com/bluerosevegan) | [@sarahlouiseAF](https://www.instagram.com/sarahlouiseAF)

Alternate Realities

(OR, HOW THE ANIMALS IN WONDERLAND STAY MAD & FREE)

Words by a.b. Illustrations by Ryan Stanley

RABBIT HOLES

It is different for different people, but you just know it when it happens.

That lightbulb moment, tasting some epiphany, enlightenment, apotheosis, conversion; or whatever term fits your fancy. When your perspective on life broadens, deepens, dramatically enough for true insight to shine through – leaving no possibility of ever forgetting this meaningful revelation.

Think of Alice finding Wonderland: her curiosity about a mysterious white rabbit has her leaving behind the old for somewhere else, completely at odds with everything she thought she knew.

And this is what this writing is all about: new perspectives on old ideas.

Most vegans are familiar with this experience, in one fashion or another, witnessing their sense of self bloom with change. Our relationship to animals, other earthlings, and to ourselves undergoing a murky transformative process that is both beautiful and tragic. The whole trip demands of us to reassess core values, basic habits, and general priorities in life.

And it is the very same when one gets sick.

Our brain, a bodily organ, becomes unwell with an illness that forbids any possibility of ever returning to life as we once knew it. Sometimes this looks like experiencing new audio-visual sensations, paranoia or hallucinations, changes in moods like detachment or exaggerated feelings, or else just general difficulty coping and relating to people and situations. Whatever the precise symptoms, and whether manifesting as a mood disorder or psychological trauma, maintaining healthy emotional habits and relationships always requires a great deal of perseverance to rebuild and exist.

"I know who I was this morning, but I've changed a few times since then."

VEGAN DYSTOPIA

So for all its parallels, one might expect more overlap between efforts to challenge oppression across species and differently abled communities. Unfortunately though, unpacking anthropocentric privileges tends to remain predominantly steeped in ableist mentalities. Sick vegans, animal advocates, continue to be excluded from most community efforts struggling for earthling liberation. This may very well be itself a product of the complex and nuanced relationship between these two cycles of oppression, with their patterns of corruption and exploitation always mutually reinforcing one another. In the simplest of terms, the relationship between the two can be differentiated along lines of the practical and the playful – the former concerning how politics are negotiated externally with non-vegan communities, and the latter being about how basic priorities and identities are understood amidst vegan culture internally.

In other words, veganism is practiced and portrayed to the outside world in ways that abides by nearly every facet of systemic institutional ableism, conforming its cultural norms and activist tactics accordingly. Similarly, veganism is played out and imagined as a revolutionary perspective of existence only as far as the standards set by capitalist colonial society, thereby restricting its very potential before it has even begun.

Practically speaking, social change around animal rights is driven by a crisis-oriented agenda,



where petitions, workshops, and rallies all tend to be reactionary in tone and intention. Not only does this undermine its effectiveness, but it also enables more capitalist-based value systems where activists self-define those of us who are the most stressed and exhausted as the most committed and successful. This explains the origins of, more blatantly, incessant emphasis on marketing veganism as a happy-go-lucky “healthy” consumer alternative. When you’re sick, however, subscribing to veganism as a health-based solution to mental illness is both inaccurate and unhelpful.

Otherwise, veganism tends to be practiced as militant activism across social media – dominating public spaces and community forums, which tend to garner the most legitimacy and social capital among unique communities like vegans. But when you’re sick, entering high conflict spaces with many toxic emotions (all trolls aside) is as appealing as you might expect. Such aggressive, [self] abusive atmospheres forgo the possibility that one could “show up” with any vulnerability outside the thick skin required for guarding our emotional baggage and prejudiced assumptions that we all carry.

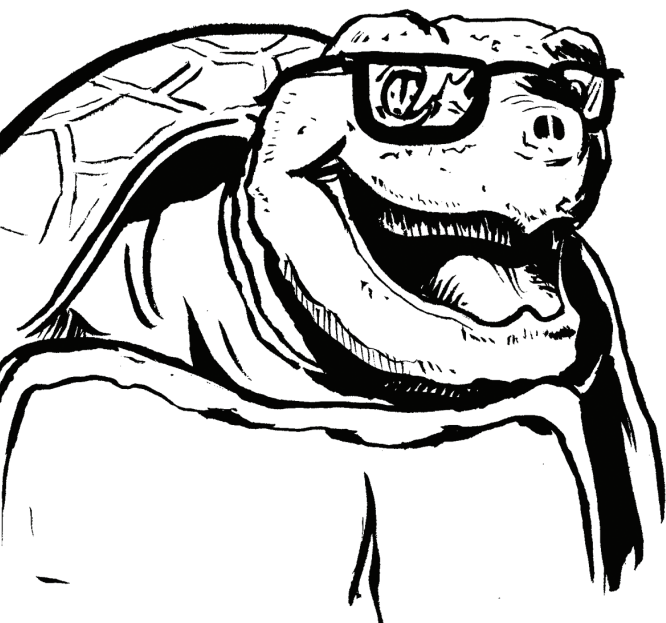
Playfully speaking, this dangerous dilemma is rarely recognized for the threat that it is, operating on

a deeper psychological level that thwarts expectations of what progress and success actually mean. As an example, dominant cultural narratives teach us that happiness and liberation exist in a physical place (an afterlife; a utopia; a gentrified immigrant-less city), a time (retirement; the rapture; a stable economy; a nostalgic previous era) or an identity (a white, able-bodied/minded person, adhering to eurocentric standards of beauty, achieving the amerikan dream). But none of this requires a fascist with a moustache or bad haircut, nor any ominously mysterious transnational corporation – because these narratives now operate with enough momentum, relying upon social forces designed to uphold a status quo, including us, the people, who are so naturally inclined towards routines, traditions, and the familiar. Through both formal and informal methods of socialization, we ourselves are the fuel source for oppression, unable to escape the cycle of actively participating in perpetuating injustices. Thus, regardless of how we identify along the spectrums, oppression clings to all of us, turning our realities dull and grim, and making self-loathing despair easier than it ever should.

And that is a scary honest truth: evil, or whatever way you describe oppression in its rawest form, is simply banal and orthodox. There is very little about it that is exciting or compelling – outside the occasional events of candid hate that bubble to the surface (only to provoke the same superficial reactions by mainstream media). This is why every vegan activist effort seems doomed to fail: because it ignores the foundations of oppression (which also support other pillars of violence, commodification, objectification, and mass consumption) and so ultimately cannot challenge the reality in which we, throughout every moment of our existence, deny, comply, and rely upon relationships of exploitation to feed a sense of privileged entitlement over animals, the sick, and others.



Rather, becoming Alice, so that we too can receive direction from magical Cheshire cats, is really about reclaiming imagination, coupling the naïve trust and curiosity of youth with the skills and wisdom of experience.



Any hope of some radical transformation, therefore, rests beyond token rhetoric about inclusivity or diversity, but somewhere deeper, among minds that are sick and animal.

"We're all mad here."

AMONG MAD CATS

Considering how society engineers conformity, to fit into boxes of control and labels of definitions, it becomes obvious how Wonderland is an antithesis of this – where people, animals, and logic naturally defy the predictable and ordinary. Their madness reflects the freedom inside this fairy-tale land, where a healthy chaos is nurtured to the delight of most children reading.

But for those of us still inside the matrix, these qualities are discouraged on the basis that unpredictability brings instability, because opposing versions of reality have a habit of inviting anarchy and collapse, and falling down rabbit holes is more empowering than we realize.

Unpacking this further warrants a firm clarification to not confuse this with trumpian alternative facts and the double-speak "war is peace" mentality of contemporary corporate tyranny. Rather, becoming Alice, so that we too can receive direction from magical Cheshire cats, is really about reclaiming imagination, coupling the naïve trust and curiosity of youth with the skills and wisdom of experience. Easier said than done, of course, because learning to wonder again requires a courage and intention to manifest such visions – by consuming less and creating more, activism can become art.

Accomplishing this feat – making it a regular habit of provoking new perspectives towards something familiar – is essentially the goal of every artist. Art itself is the expression of effort to make others become conscious of what we do not already perceive or pay attention to, helping us find clarity in the strange.

Whether channeled through spoken or written



word, still or moving pictures, acted or improvised performances, the emphasis is about creating space for exploring truth and subverting expectations. Sometimes experienced best individually and other times better collectively, the result must evoke transformation either on a community level or else as personal growth. Always, art is about engagement as much as it is escape or entertainment. It is trusting that we can turn inwards to confront our own fears, uncertainties, and contradictions, while still deserving to be seen, heard, and respected.

Meaningful art, while always needing to remain open-ended enough to allow for varied interpretations, aims to convey wholeness – teaching us to not resist change, but to leave behind what no longer helps us grow, to affirm our struggle and still keep hoping when we have every reason not.

Visionary art, the kind that deliberately seeks out and feeds alternate realities for more to find and join, requires abandoning the fast and straight yellow-brick highway, daring us to wander lost, to forgo fragile vanities and become reacquainted with creative anarchy.

Political art, whatever its context, is about

nurturing our own capacity to relate and empathize with the proverbial "other", exposing ourselves to different situations that compel us into adventures across both real and imagined boundaries.

Art in every medium begins with imagination, and the more radical the imaginings, the more transformative the results may be, both internally and in its capacity to change societies.

Art is activism when it inspires actions that bring our environments and ourselves closer to hopes and dreams – using abstract ideas to topple social hierarchies or telling stories to help us unlearn privileges borne of ignorance. Without the imaginations of peoples from other positions of privilege and oppression, there risks overlooking important insights, especially the assumption of a single truth existing. And there also risks continued failures of social activism seeking change through campaigns that imagine truth can be conveyed by appropriating traumas (like plantation slavery or genocides) and competing against other forms of oppression (like transmisogyny or Islamophobia).

Radical change of the basic social order is about destruction as much as it

is creation, simply because destruction has a habit of bringing fertility for change. But we know this already, in how you need ruins first to find treasure, need darkness to witness the night stars, need a phoenix to burn before they can rise from their own ashes.

This destruction looks like divesting from mainstream "art" more than anything else, because the system's media products always perpetuate dominant narratives. Even in the contemporary information age of youtube and twitter, there remains little need to ban books when people have stopped reading, or little need to censor information when we are constantly bombarded with more data than we can fully comprehend. The trivial and superficial elements of the mainstream seek to reduce us into identities of passive narcissism, imagining lottery wins and revenge fantasies. It preoccupies us with distractions that continue to hypnotize, misleading us with illusions of celebrities, make-believe dangers, and chasing after monopoly monies. Stop living in the dreams of the rich and powerful, where nightmares of hate and violence are assumed to be all part of the natural order of things, having "always been that way".

Learn again to see things as they truly once were (not the colonial histories of school textbooks), still are (not the panics spread by nightly news), and how they might otherwise become (not the hopeless futures of doom) – recognize that change is both possible and inevitable. The status quo depends on silence and fear, our isolation and apathy, because finding relationships that inspire and space to dream are the most powerful weapons we can ever conceive.

"How long is forever?"

"Sometimes just one second."





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UNCOMMON NONSENSE

Now, more than ever, a deep upheaval is required of ourselves – not by consuming one “cruelty-free” product over another, but by turning inwards to unpack the forces attempting to dictate our sense of self, attaching our ego to possessing material consumer goods and chasing lies that promise false security.

Release your own grip on beliefs and opinions about the way things are – try to become comfortable in the foggy haze, those lonely paths that take us across into new worlds. Watch the walls you made, to hide within, crumble and fall to reveal everything you need, both joyous and suffering. Trust yourself, your struggle, as legitimate enough that you can still honour other people’s experiences too.

Then, when you feel like you might implode with everything you witness, channel it into something – wild expressions of consciousness as it felt in that moment. And that is art.

But remember, whether you are the creator or the audience, the author or the reader, know that it is never about trying to “fix” something. Art is to remind us how what is happening now has already happened before, in some form or another, to someone somewhere at some time. Yes, your fear, anger, confusion, and more precede your existence and will continue long after your expiration too. So it becomes clear enough that the greatest challenges of our lives, the situations we so often try to elude, repress, and escape are precisely the same experiences that connect us with one another, across place and time, whatever our reality.

Find whatever makes you wake up, today, and do it without apology or hesitation.

Breathe out the fear, breathe in the hope.

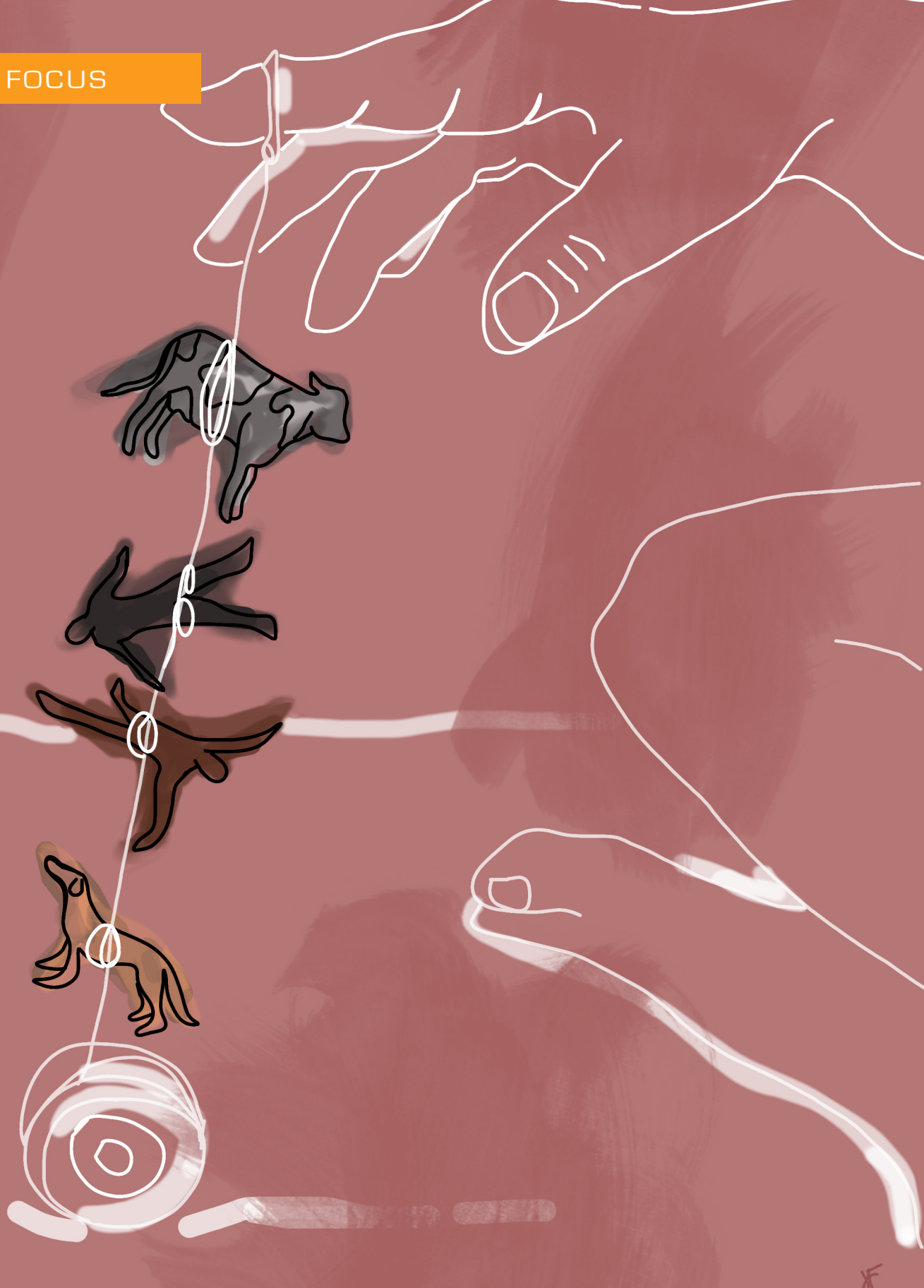
Breathe out the rage, breathe in the passion.

Breathe out – breathe in.

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UPS AND DOWNS

FACING RACISM IN THE ANIMAL RIGHTS/VEGAN COMMUNITY

Words and Photos by Dr. Linda Alvarez | Illustration by Julia Feliz Brueck

People are often shocked when I tell them that the animal rights (AR)/vegan movement is one of the most racist spaces I've ever been in. They wonder how and why racism is even an issue in a space where animals are supposed to be the focus. It seems counterintuitive because of the perceived altruism of people invested in protecting and advocating for non-human animals. The assumption being that such altruism logically extends to other species, namely humans. However, altruism toward a particular species does not equal altruism toward all. In fact, the animal rights movement is rife with contradiction. For example, there are individuals who have dedicated their lives to dog rescue, yet see no problem with hunting or factory farming. Others adamantly support wildlife conservation efforts, but do not think twice about animal testing. Some believe that no animal should have a human "owner," i.e., all animals should be free agents in the world, while others believe that

human guardianship (confinement) is the only way to protect certain animals. A growing group in this movement focuses on plant-based eating and social media posts of vegan food as their way of supporting animal rights, while others view veganism as a diet with no real connection to the issue of the rights of other sentient beings. Thus, there is no consistent ideology guiding the movement aside from doing no harm to animals, where "animals" are relevant and determined by individual perceptions of what animals deserve protection and what an individual may or may not classify as "harm".

The lack of a cohesive or guiding ideology means that many issues are subject to interpretation; boundaries are blurred in terms of what exactly the animal rights and vegan movements intend to accomplish. This is one of the reasons why I believe racism continues to be a pervasive element in the AR/vegan community. In this movement, racism has

been allowed as a tool to meet the goal of fighting for animal rights. Since the animal rights movement is not a human social justice movement, per se, it has not been checked along the way in a process of self examination with the goal of reducing problematic characteristics in terms of human (in)equality. Add to this the fact that the movement is dominated by white, privileged people whose worldviews and perceptions do not necessarily align, incorporate, or find useful the consideration of the experiences of people of colour, and you have a movement that suffers from not only racism, but also issues of classism, nationalism, and sexism, to name a few.

CONFRONTED BY EXAMPLES

Racism is a human issue, therefore the racism that exists in the movement is obviously not directed at animals, it is directed at humans of colour, as well as any person of colour who may be involved in activities or behaviour that is deemed problematic in securing the rights of animals. As stated above, racism and/or prejudicial and discriminatory content has also been used as a tool to advocate for animal rights.

Racism is nothing new to people of colour in the AR/vegan movement.

However the continued presence of this racism creates a significant problem for people of colour who are a part of this movement because we are not only confronting speciesism, but we must also confront racism, classism, nationalism, sexism, etc., since these oppressions are ultimately intertwined.

I can confirm that the entanglement of these oppressions that persist in the animal rights movement has often turned my activism and advocacy into a truly exhausting endeavour. Were it not for the fact that I consistently remind myself that I am doing this for the animals who cannot advocate for themselves, as well as for food justice, i.e. resistance toward the corporate food system that

is also replete with entangled oppressions and the maintenance of inequality, I would have ditched this toxic environment long ago.

I could write volumes on the racist experiences I have had in the AR/vegan movement. Volumes. Instead, I will focus on three specific incidents in three different contexts in an attempt to provide a broad picture of the varied yet consistent forms of racism activist and advocates of colour in this movement must confront.

IN WITH THE ANIMALS, OUT WITH THE PEOPLE?

I became a vegetarian 12 years ago and have been a vegan for the last 11 years. My decision to become a vegetarian, and later a vegan, was initially motivated by a concern for the welfare of animals. Once I learned of the horrendous existence animals in the factory farming industry endure, I could not fathom being a part of, or supporting that system. So, I extracted myself as best I could, first by not consuming animal products, and subsequently by eliminating all other products that were made of animals or negatively affected animals in any way. I felt good knowing that I was not supporting a system that treated sentient animals like inanimate objects in a grotesque chain of supply and demand. In this sense, my veganism was animal focused; it was driven by the animal welfare cause. However, in time, my veganism became conscientized to include other issues beyond that of animal welfare.

This is not to say that the animal welfare cause became any less important. I simply realized that there were other issues that were important to me as a person of Latin American descent, and they had to be incorporated into my concept of what it meant to be a “vegan of colour”. I began to realize that in many ways, the food industry exploited not only animals, but people as well, especially poor people of colour, both in the United States and in the rest of the world. As a woman of colour invested



This guy was just a little calf when I met him. After cleaning his barn, he spent a good five minutes grooming my face. Thats my kind of facial!

“...and I told those fucking Mexicans that if they didn’t start treating the animals properly, I’d call the INS faster than they could say ‘la migra’.”

in social justice, I could not ignore how the food industry, specifically U.S. corporate agri-business, negatively affected migrants, especially those from Mexico and Central America, as well as other people of colour in three principal ways. First, the industry had a historical legacy of economic, social, and political exploitation in Latin America. Second, in the U.S., as well other countries, workers continued to be abused by the monopolized corporate food system whose sold focus was profit maximization. Third, the unhealthy products of this industry were specifically marketed to poor people of colour who were then physically affected in negative ways by this food. From corporate farming, to the workers, to the final food product, the industry prospered from adversely affecting communities of colour around the world. As a person of Latin American descent who was vegan, my veganism could not solely focus on animal welfare because this system also exploited my community in very specific ways.

Thus, I am a vegan because I do not support the corporate exploitation and oppression of animals and of people, workers, and communities of colour. The oppression of people and animals in this system is so inextricably linked that to ignore this connection is to ignore one of the fundamental principals of veganism: compassion for all.

I was never really a big meat eater, so for me, the shift to veganism seemed natural and when I learned about factory farming, it seemed necessary. I began to volunteer at a local farm animal rescue to learn more about being a vegan, and to connect more with the magnificent, sentient beings, which the food industry commodified. I spent the whole summer of 2007 on that farm, cleaning barns, feeding the animals, and watching them play and interact as I read about their advanced cognitive

abilities. One day, as I read outside one of the barns, I pondered the millions of animals who would never nap in the sun, who would never stretch out their wings, and who would never eat fresh hay. They would never play and chase each other because they were enslaved by a system that solely viewed them as a source of profit, nothing more.

I was drawn out of my thoughts when the shelter manager approached me and asked me how my day was going. I told him I was great, and that I was just enjoying watching the animals. He started to tell me about a recent rescue operation he was a part of. He was working on an investigation of a stockyard that had been reported for cruel and inhumane treatment of animals. His description of how the animals were treated made me feel ill; the animals were being tortured and abused. My heart broke. Then he said something I didn’t expect, “I saw all of those suffering animals...” he began, “...and I told those fucking Mexicans that if they didn’t start treating the animals properly, I’d call the INS faster than they could say ‘la migra’. You bet your ass they started to clean up their act!”

I was shocked and disturbed. *What did he just say?* I thought to myself. I had some experience with this mentality because for several years I had been volunteering with the domestic animal rescue community in Los Angeles, California, which is predominantly composed of white females. Every weekend, I would assist at dog and cat adoption events. I attended meetings, I was on email lists, I became a part of the LA dog rescue social circle; I was very much a part of this community. In my interactions with people involved in domestic animal rescue, I would often hear, and read, racist, derogatory, and prejudicial statements made by animal rescuers that were directed at people of

colour. This anger toward “minorities” was based on the frustration of pet over-population, as well as the ill treatment of dogs, cats, and other domestic animals at the hands of what they believed to be mostly Latinos and African Americans. As a person involved in animal rescue, I understood the frustrations. As animal rescuers, we were invested in decreasing animal abuse as well as the number of animals that entered the shelters and were subsequently euthanized. Once you have witnessed buckets of dead dogs and cats in the shelter, the mere mention of a littler of unwanted puppies or kittens is infuriating.

However, I also understood that the animal issues that were present in communities of colour were not a matter of colour (race/ethnicity), but were directly linked to socio-economic status, and a lack of resources, access, and education on issues such as spay and neuter programs and the treatment and care of domestic animals. Further, there is a long and complex history that informs some of the ways in which communities interact and feel toward animals. This was a structural issue, not a race issue. Since I was a part of these communities of colour, I knew that the condition of animals in a given community often reflected the conditions present in the community itself. What the women in animal rescue were projecting when they made derogatory statements toward people of colour was a frustration with the treatment of animals. In this case blame for the negative treatment of animals was being attributed to race, ethnicity, and culture, rather than a lack of resources and education. This is not to say that culture does not play a role in the ways in which animals are treated, but I do not believe that is the primary reason that this problem exists within these communities, within my community. These racist conversations among dog/cat rescuers bothered me at my core. I am the daughter of immigrant parents. I am first generation. My mother is a domestic worker;

my father was a pastor, and then a gardener, a handyman, and anything else he could do to earn a living. I grew up in low-income neighbourhoods living and witnessing the struggle of my community on a daily basis. All of that shaped my identity and created in me a profound sense of social justice as well as a desire to better my community and myself. So for me, to hear these comments and read these emails between animal rescuers, people who were supposed to be very altruistic in nature, was very disturbing. I continued to rescue dogs and cats, but I distanced myself from the animal rescue community itself. I wanted to help, but I would not participate in the degrading conversations related to communities of color, especially by people who knew nothing about our communities.

So, when the shelter manager made the comment about the workers at this yard, I realized that this issue of prejudice was not just a problem with domestic animals; it was widespread in the animal rights movement. I began to think of similar conversations I had heard in different animal rights circles. My peaceful farm experience was jarred. In their efforts to protect and secure the rights of animals, the rescue community overlooked the fact that humans have rights as well. The shelter manager threatened the workers at this stockyard with deportation without considering his own privilege, the power hierarchy he was placing himself in, and without considering the fact that these workers, undocumented or not, were most likely also being exploited as they were simply doing a job to make a living and put food on the table. Perhaps some of the workers were treating the animals poorly, but, once again, that is a matter of correction and education.

As the shelter manager continued to spew his racist comments, I thought, *is it fair to trade the rights of an animal for the rights of a human? Shouldn’t we respect both?* This was a defining moment in

the conscientization of my veganism. Where did I, a female, a person of Latin American descent, the daughter of migrants, fit into this vegan system? I began to educate myself more on the food industry, agribusiness, factory farming, animal welfare, the international food industry, and the social, political, economic, and environmental consequences of this gigantic monster of a food system. I considered what my identity as a socially conscious person of colour meant in this privileged, white vegan world. The more I learned, the more my veganism was driven by a social consciousness rooted in social justice. Simultaneously, I became more and more detached from the mainstream vegan movement as it was absolutely not representative, nor were there any attempts to make it inclusive.

IT’S NOT CULTURE, IT’S TORTURE

After some time, I stopped going to protests and marches related to animal rights. My experiences had taught me that I was going to walk away disgusted and pissed off at the human behaviour I saw, and that did absolutely nothing for my work toward securing animal rights. Yet, against my better judgment, I recently attended a Yulin dog festival protest in Los Angeles, California. I should have known this protest would be no different. The theatrics upon my arrival induced a heavy eye roll on my behalf. A white woman (one of the protest organizers) was being escorted off the street by police after jaywalking. There were five police officers present; they chatted in front of an apartment building across the street from the protest. The officer that was escorting this white woman off the street, lightly held her left arm as she walked. “Let me go!!! I know my rights!!” she screamed at the top of her lungs as she flung her body around. Her screams induced a wave of phones to be aggressively pulled from their owner’s pockets and purses and turned into social justice tools, capturing this “brutality.” “Is someone getting

I love the way roosters' combs flop around as they go about their day. Sometimes their combs hang over to one side as they chatter away, and it always makes me laugh because they remind me of disheveled lawyers whose comb overs are frazzled after a long day of work.



this?” the woman screamed as the protestors began to chant “Let her go! We know our rights!” A minute or so later, the officer let her go, he warned her, again, not to stand in the middle of the street, and released her to a cheering crowd. Justice had been served.

Later, this same woman discussed what types of civil disobedience they would carry out next time, “Maybe we can lay in the street, that would be fun.” Fun? Is civil disobedience supposed to be fun? This made my stomach turn. Nothing was going to happen to this white woman. As a woman of colour, I knew this. White women, you are safe, trust us. In our communities, we don’t have the luxury of thinking of civil disobedience as “fun.” And we are all too familiar with the fact that people of colour who challenge police authority often don’t get a warning; challenging police is often a death sentence, especially if you are a black person in the United States.

After asking the police if I could cross the street, I joined the larger protest. What seemed to be the favoured chant was underway, “It’s not culture, it’s torture!” White people screamed, some with closed fists and furled brows as they faced the Chinese consulate. Again, my soul churned, *this doesn’t feel right*. These types of protests carry a lot of American exceptionalism, nationalism, and racism in them. Since historically white people have deemed, many times at the demise of entire groups of people, what should be defined as culture and what shouldn’t, or to be more clear, what qualifies as culture by white standards and what does not, I am uncomfortable in spaces where white people freely chant against another culture. Whether or not the Yulin dog festival is a cultural practice, the homogenization that is carried in this discourse is problematic as is the exceptionalism of chanting “It’s not culture, it’s torture,” in a country that tortures millions of animals on a daily basis in similar ways. The U.S. is no different. Is what is happening at the

Yulin dog festival torture? Yes, absolutely. But leave culture out of it, because there is a lot of complexity there, and when that complexity is not managed properly, it turns into blatant racism.

I don’t have to go too far to provide an example of this. A few minutes later, the leader of the group who organized the protest stated that he had an idea that would really make a splash, “Let’s march to the other side of the consulate and go in to really maximize the impact.” The crowd cheered. Again, against my better judgment, I marched alongside the angry white people. As we walked, a woman wearing red sunglasses walked in front of me, then, suddenly, this so-called activist turned toward a woman of Asian descent who was simply walking on the sidewalk attempting to get through the protest with her baby in a stroller and an elderly companion following her. Red sunglasses aggressively moved toward this woman and began screaming, “STOP EATING DOG MEAT!!! YOU BETTER STOP EATING DOG MEAT! YOU’RE SICK! YOU’RE SICK PEOPLE!” I was shocked. This woman literally accosted a stranger and accused her of eating dog meat because she was Asian. I lowered my “Stop Eating Dog Meat” sign, and moved to the side. The woman in red sunglasses had moved on, screaming, “It’s not culture, it’s torture!” I had so many thoughts racing in my head; flashbacks of the same thing happening at other protests, and anger. I felt a lot of anger. *Should I go find that lady, her baby, and the elderly woman and apologize?* I thought to myself. Instead, I settled on finding red sunglasses and confronting her on her racism.

By the time I moved through the crowd that was blindly following the leader of this group, most had already entered what they believed to be the back of the Chinese consulate. It was actually a Korean super market. (Just a brief geography refresher here: South Korea is not China, and it is nowhere near Yulin.) The protestors walked in unabashedly,

“That was a great talk, but I mean these people can’t keep coming over here. We have to figure out a way to keep them out and maybe the wall will do that.”

signs raised, chanting. They screamed at the people standing outside of the grocery store; they screamed in the grocery store. A visibly upset woman emerged from the supermarket on her phone attempting to explain to someone what was happening. I stood outside, as did several other people of colour. A few comments were exchanged: “This isn’t right,” “This feels weird,” “What the fuck? I didn’t come here for this”, and “Fuck this.” I spoke with a young Chinese woman who was also standing outside holding a sign that read, “I support Chinese activists: Stop Yulin.” We discussed the extremely problematic nature of “protests” such as these, and told each other that we were glad there were other people who felt the same way about it.

Eventually the protestors emerged and proceeded to walk back to the starting point. I searched the crowd for red sunglasses. I was intent on finding her because too many times we let racism slide, this was not going to be one of those times. When I finally found her, I approached her calmly and respectfully, “Hi, I noticed you screaming at a woman earlier as we walked down the street, and I wondered, do you know that woman?” “I sure did scream at her! And no, I don’t know her!” she snapped. “So how do you know she eats dog meat?” “I don’t, but I’m going to make damn sure these people stop this!” *These people*, goddammit, that phrase needs to be eliminated from our vernacular. I continued, “Do you understand that your actions today, accosting that woman, her baby, and the elderly woman that was with her and aggressively screaming at them because you assume they eat dog meat, do you understand how that is racist?” She turned and scowled at me, “I’m not racist!” and she walked away in that same “I don’t have to listen to you” privilege that white

people always use when they don’t want to hear something that challenges their worldview. “Your actions were racist. They were disgusting. They have no place in this movement. Do not come to these events to taint my movement.” I felt myself getting angry again, adrenaline rushing through my body. Then she turned toward me and said, “You want to know what I’m racist against!? Indifference!” I was ready to come back with something strong, but as I heard her statement, I paused. *What?* I thought to myself. I turned to a friend; we both exchanged perplexed looks. *What does that even mean?* I left the protest completely triggered. Bothered. Disgusted. Why does this happen every time? I leave so many of these events carrying so much frustration, anger, and sadness regarding the actions of other “activists.” And worst of all I was completely distracted from the animal cause, the dogs, the principal and only reason I was there- the racism robbed me of that, again.

DID YOU HEAR ANY OF WHAT I JUST SAID?

I was recently invited to speak at an animal rights conference where I presented my research on slaughterhouse workers, violence, and migration. This project explores the intersections of violence among migrants, workers, and animals in labour contexts such as the slaughterhouse. By explaining the ways in which Central American migrants are forced to flee their home countries, migrate north, and eventually end up in violent work places such as slaughterhouses, my goal was to present an alternative perspective to the dominant discourse in the vegan movement that demonizes and criminalizes migrant (in this case Latin American) slaughterhouse workers.



Connect with a pig and you'll connect with your soul.

After I presented my talk, a white woman approached me and said, “That was a great talk, but I mean these people can’t keep coming over here. We have to figure out a way to keep them out and maybe the wall will do that.” I sighed, the type of deep cleansing sigh psychological professionals tell you to practice when you don’t want a toxic situation to get the best of you. *Had she heard anything I had said?* She went on to rant about the stress Mexicans (because all migrants are Mexican) create for “our country” and the “drain” they create on “our resources.” The freedom with which white people feel they can openly blurt out racist and prejudicial statements without blinking an eye always astonishes me. This woman unloaded her thoughts and prejudices on me and then walked away. Leaving me in a position where I was forced to grapple with her comments. I often wonder, do white people realize that they do this? Do they even care? Do they understand that racism is like a stubborn stain. It takes a lot of work to wash it away; to cleanse yourself of each and every racist encounter. And while we, people of colour, do the work of clearing the filth of racism from our beings, we have to sit with it and face it. In the meantime, white people always get to walk away. Yet, racism has deep and long lasting effects; It penetrates the psyche. It terrorizes the soul. The normalization of racism means that aside from everything else, people of colour are constantly battling racism. And because white privilege and white supremacy are the norm in society, and in this movement, the burden of dealing with, working through, and addressing the racism in this movement falls on people of colour. We, the people of colour who are conscious of the presence of this issue in this movement, have been and will continue to do the work of rejecting and eradicating racism, but it is time that white people step up and carry their part of the burden in the fight toward eliminating racism in this movement.

At the same conference, my dear friend, Liz Ross, had just delivered a talk on racism in the movement. While we ate dinner, a white woman approached us about Liz's talk. She was adamant that she was not a racist and that yes, she had black friends. She was so unyielding in her position that the issues Liz had brought up as racism in the movement were in fact not. Why? Simply because she did not believe they were. That was not her experience. I'm not sure why she asked us questions as if attempting to engage in a dialogue on these issues because when we responded she incorporated zero percent of our responses in her never ending speech on how anti-racist she was. We discussed with her the ways in which the AR/vegan movement juxtaposes the racist image of a black man who was lynched (without ever acknowledging who that man was), with a pig who is hanging in a similar manner, and the ways in which those images are painful and frankly have no place in this movement for animal rights. Only individuals who have zero connection to the actual issues, the complexity, and the pain experienced by the communities these images come from would think it is ok to use these kinds of images to drive home a point on animal rights. It reminds me of the time PETA¹ and Compassion Over Killing² lauded the well-known racist Joe Arpaio for making a whole prison go vegan. Aside from the fact that we shouldn't be praising veganism when it is implemented as a punishment, as a person of Latin American descent, to see large animal rights organizations openly support a man who was at that time being investigated (and has since been convicted and subsequently pardoned by the current administration) by a federal judge of racially profiling Latinos during patrols, it became, once again, 100% clear to me that this movement had no interest in incorporating people of colour.

Eventually, I walked away from the conversation with this white woman. Liz bravely soldiered on;

Luckily, this conference took place at an animal sanctuary making it easy for me to retreat and engage with the animals, since again, they are the primary reason I am a part of this movement. As we drove to our hotel that evening, we were mentally and emotionally exhausted. Exhaustion of this nature is a variable that is often not factored into discussions of racism in the AR/vegan movement. These racist, discriminatory interactions are exhausting for us. People of colour who attempt to engage this racism and educate and create consciousness around this issue take on a tremendous weight. I will be blunt and say that many white people exhaust me with their lack of cultural competency, their privilege, and their unwillingness to simply listen and incorporate new information. Many people of colour feel like we always have to be "on," always defending ourselves, correcting erroneous and maligned assumptions about our people and our communities. It is draining. It very easily leads to burn out, and, in the end, who suffers? Ultimately, the movement suffers because it remains a homogenized space in which racism, prejudice, and discrimination are accepted. Along with this, the animals suffer because they lose advocates, too burnt out by human issues in the movement, to continue to fight for the animal cause.

I have felt severely burnt out by the racism in this movement multiple times. When I feel this way, when I know I'm out of emotional and psychological resources to continue in this space, what works for me is to connect with the animals and with nature. Yet, learning what worked for me was not an easy path. I spent many years being extremely angry and frustrated with the toxicity that lingers in this movement. I attempted many strategies for dealing with this issue; I tried to engage it head on, I tried to educate, I even stepped away for some time. I considered whether it was worth being a part of this movement, if many of my interactions with the people in this community were going to leave me feeling sick.

Slowly, and with the help of the animals, I learned that for me nothing reconfirms my dedication to veganism and animal rights more than spending time co-existing with my animal and plant family. Lucky for me, I've had the opportunity to grow a food garden in my backyard and most of my roommates are four legged and furry. We go on walks, we play, we laugh. I go to my local farm animal sanctuary just to be with the animals, to watch them, to listen, to take a back seat as a human, and let them show me their ways. The animals have a way of re-focusing me. Once after a particularly negative interaction with some women in dog rescue, I threw up my hands and decided to quit dog rescue forever. I was done, for real this time. Angrily, I opened my front door to pick up my mail and sitting on my front porch was a stray dog (stray dogs are not uncommon in my neighbourhood). I closed the door, *you've got to be kidding me*, I muttered to myself. I walked away, walked back, opened the door, and there he was, still sitting there, staring straight at me. I walked toward him, knelt down and began to pet him, he put his head on my lap. I laughed at how unreal the situation was. My eyes welled up with tears as I sat there and pet my new friend. *OK*, I said to myself, *I guess I'm not walking away today*. I'm not one for believing in signs and such, but this one time I let this experience be an indication to me that perhaps it was not my time to leave this movement and more importantly it served as a reminder to me that I'm not in this for myself, I'm in this for the animals.

If there is anything that can possibly unite the fractionalized animal rights/vegan movement with all of its issues, perhaps it is the belief that animals are a source of joy and that many of us feel blessed that after all humans have done to them, they still allow us to share in that joy.

Racism is a human issue. We have allowed the ills of humanity to infect the work of creating a just world for animals. In order for **all** vegans, not just white vegans, to feel comfortable, to be activists

for the animals, and to effectively advocate for food justice, we must rectify the defunct human conditions that taint this movement. We all must carry this burden. I hope that in my lifetime I am able to witness an animal rights and vegan movement that truly espouses the principals of compassion and equality for all.

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1. PETA. (2015, April 16). Pamela Anderson Visits Maricopa County Jail to Promote Meat-Free Program. Retrieved 18 August 2017 from <https://www.peta.org/blog/pamela-anderson-visits-maricopa-county-jail-to-promote-meat-free-program>.
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And so, that's another issue on the digital shelf. I know it's cliché to say, but I really do think this was one of the better ones T.O.F.U. has released. A big part of that stems from the fact that the idea of going to print had me experimenting more with layouts and thinking of things in a visual sense. Sure, the Patreon campaign still has a distance to go before I'm able to justify the expense of print, but just seeing folks subscribe to the magazine for the long-term has me feeling a renewed sense of energy to keep doing what I'm doing and take risks along the way.

With that in mind, I'll be starting on the new issue soon, and you can bet you'll be seeing things on social media about a call for submissions and all that other good stuff. If all goes well, I'm hoping it will be out in January 2018. What better way to start a new year than with another issue focusing on the things that we all need to address to make the world a better place?

Personally, it sounds like a good thing to me, and I'm excited to find out who else will join me in making it happen.

For now though, I think I might take a nap. As I said before, I'm proud of this issue and incredibly happy to have been able to work with the authors, artists, and advertisers who made it happen. However, I'd be lying if I said I didn't need a bit of a break.

So, bring on the Netflix and the critters!

Until next time,

Ryan Ratz





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