

This zine is dedicated to my mother who has always inspired me to be kind to animals.



Stories compiled & edited by:

Malcolm Klimowicz

MY VEGGIE STORY

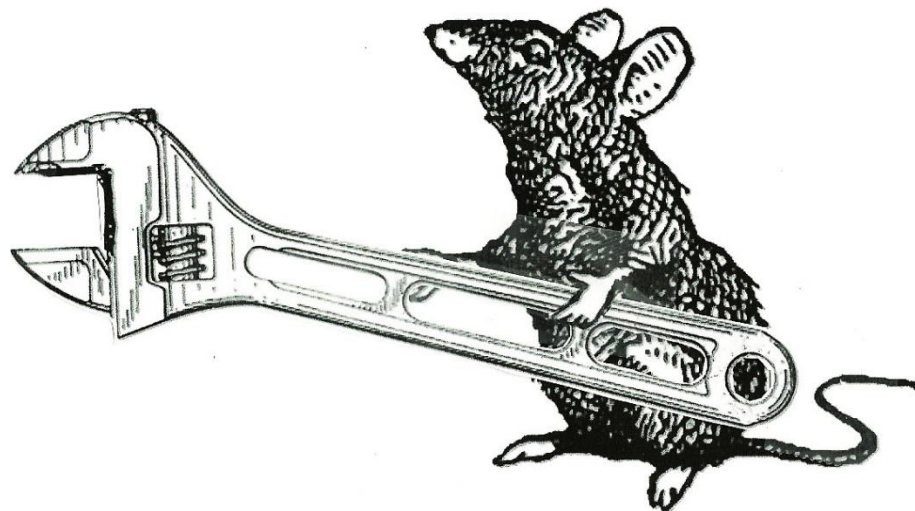
INSPIRING ACCOUNTS OF HOW AND WHY PEOPLE REPLACED THE ANIMALS ON THE DINNER TABLE WITH VEGGIES.



you can inspire everyone you meet. Vegetarianism and veganism are a political protest every second of every day. They are a refusal to participate in a terrible system of exploitation and cruelty. Every dinner table is a battlefield for the animals. When your family and peers start questioning why you are not eating animals they will eventually start questioning themselves.

“Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief.”

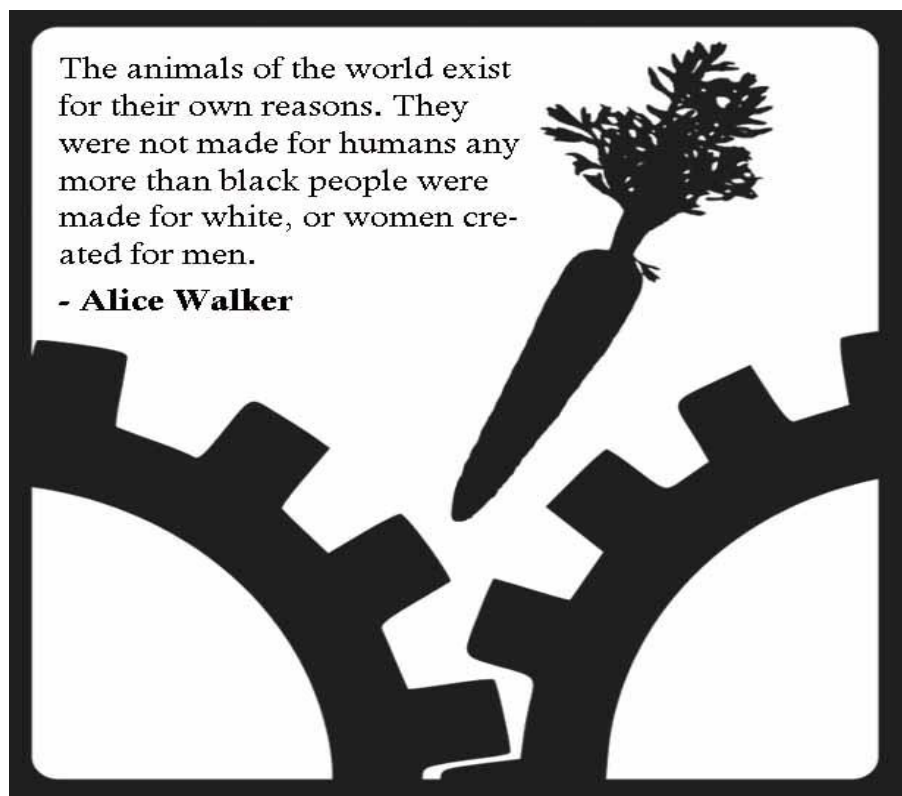
- Frantz Fanon



Challenging the dominant belief system in society is no easy task. When we call into question the foundation on which many of our peers have built their entire lives around, we are seen as a threat, dismissed as lunatics, or ridiculed.

Eating animals is presented to most of us from birth as being normal, natural, and necessary. This is known as carnism. When we are presented with an alternate way of thinking about animals where these claims are refuted with undeniable evidence, this will inevitably cause conflict within ourselves and amongst our relationships with others.

These stories articulate what many of us feel and experience when transitioning away from eating and using animals.



always impressed with the vegan meals I cooked for them. You can always win people over with good food.

Vegan Revolution:

A few years later I had a vegan partner and we had seen a billboard for the Shrine Circus which was coming to town. She had attended a circus protest a few years before and encouraged me to go to protest them. (I had been learning about animal abuse quite a bit at this point – watching the movie “Earthlings” and PETA videos. I was also reading books like “Fast Food Nation” and “Eating Animals.”) We looked on the internet and found there was no protest organized in our city so we made a facebook circus protest event and posted some flyers uptown. To our surprise, 70 protestors (including a grade 7 class), 9 cop cars, and the local news channel showed up to the demonstration. I thought this was pretty successful and later helped start an animal liberation club with some people from the demonstration. I suppose the thing snow balled from there. I watched and read as much as I could about animal exploitation industries and animal rights theory, organized anti-fur demonstrations at fur farms – blocking transport trucks. We took buses of people to protest animal captivity at Marineland, organized vegan potlucks, hosted letter writing nights to support Animal Liberation Front prisoners, screened animal rights films, did news interviews at zoo protests, and did endless vegan outreach. I guess you could say I’m an animal lover.

We are on the right side of history:

After all these years of experience with vegetarianism, veganism, and animal rights advocacy, my advice to people is this: find your inner strength, people will eventually let you down but if you rely on yourself and your passion for animals

for my friends and family (who couldn't understand why I just randomly stopped eating meat) than it was for me. There was endless ridicule from many of my social circles and everyone suddenly became a nutrition expert waiting for me to wither away with my vegetarian brittle bone disease (sarcasm). I also quickly learned that planning ahead was key. If I knew I was going out to eat somewhere where there weren't any veg foods, then I would eat before going there or pack some snacks for myself so I wouldn't go hungry and be tempted. I stayed vegetarian for several years mostly for health reasons. I hadn't really cared about animals during this time as much as I should have. It was more of a diet than anything. I still went fishing (catch & release) and went to zoos and stuff.

In Waterloo, I met a vegan who became a close friend of mine. She was eating a lot of new and weird foods that I hadn't been exposed to like quinoa (pronounced: "KEEN-WAH"), tempeh, and seitan. This vegan food always tasted surprisingly good and I decided to try a vegan diet to improve my health. It was a very interesting time because eating vegan is way different than eating vegetarian. I found myself tediously checking every ingredient at the grocery store and bothering every wait staff person if the meal I wanted was vegan friendly and subsequently having to explain to them what in fact a "vegan" was. On the flip side, I was learning a lot about nutrition and experimenting with new recipes almost every day. It was like a whole new exciting world for me to discover. You almost have to relearn how to cook. I will admit it was difficult at first but once you get it, it's like riding a bike. My vegetarian partner was unsupportive of this change – she was a cheese megalomaniac and meal sharing became a chore sometimes. My friends, family, and coworkers continued to poke fun at my "new ways" but were

My name is April Kranz.

I grew up with three brothers and a sister. My parents are very religious people, my dad was a Lutheran pastor for about 40 years. Growing up we moved almost every 5 years or so. I am German/Norwegian. Second youngest. Smartest. Funniest. Cutest. JK!

I'm a painter/artist. I love books and TV. I won't lie, TV is my biggest guilty pleasure. I can watch any old thing that's on. It's not a point of pride. I drink a lot of wine and I hate summertime clothes. I love animals and I loathe this society. It's backwards and cruel.

The first time it registered in my brain that eating meat might be wrong was when I was in kindergarten. I lived in a farm community and one of the parents brought in a cow's brain for snack time. I watched my teacher carve it up and slap it on paper plates, and I said to myself "um...."

On fishing trips with my dad I would go along just so I could comfort the worms and say a prayer for the fish. I let everyone know how horrible I thought the whole operation was.

I stopped eating meat when I was 13 or 14. I don't recall if there was a trigger point... I just remember saying to myself I can do better for these poor animals. I felt instantly more at peace with the universe. I was very vocal about my choice although no one else joined me in the decision. I was the only vegetarian in my family and amongst my friends. I rather enjoyed this though, angsty and rebellious, 90s kid that I was. I loved the discussion/arguments that came along with being so different.

The change from vegetarian to vegan was much more gradual. And of this I am ashamed. Ashamed I didn't do it sooner. I feel sad and dumb that I didn't figure it all out much quicker. I've been a full on vegan for almost 2 years. Friends of mine really opened my eyes to what goes on in the dairy industry and it broke my heart. Keeps breaking it.

I haven't found myself missing any of my old favorite animal foods (cheese) because my mind is so full of sweet suffering faces. I don't allow myself to miss anything that terrifies and tortures so many gentle beautiful creatures. I have no right. Nobody does.

One of the biggest challenges I've come across so far has to be eating out. I'm not a picky eater so I can always find something on the menu that is cruelty free or ask the staff to help me alter an item enough to turn it vegan. Another challenge for me is saying "no" to someone who made you something or bought you something that they didn't realize wasn't vegan. It's hard to hurt people's feelings when they are just trying to be nice.

My immediate family is very encouraging and hugely supportive. I am so lucky to have them. In fact, my parents just went vegan this year. My extended family and many friends are much less encouraging. The disconnect and brainwashing is quite strong in so many people that it's very difficult to get through to any of them.

A friend and colleague of mine who's a veteran vegan has been the best resource for me. It also helps that I made this decision together with my boyfriend, who is an incredibly supportive and empathetic person. Having a partner in vegan crime makes it much easier and way more fun.

the baby ducklings swimming around in our tub. Another vivid memory I have is one time when we were driving we came across a rabbit that had been badly hit on a busy road and my partner made me stop the car, put the rabbit in the trunk and drive the poor guy to a veterinarian. My partner missing work to do this. Reflecting on this now makes me think of this idea: Those of us who have *sympathy* for someone who is suffering feel empathy but do not act and those of us who have *compassion* are compelled to act to end that suffering. I didn't understand at the time but being part of the rescue of that rabbit is where I first remember making this transition from being a passive spectator to being an active participant – to being someone who cares enough to act.

In my mid-20's I had been struggling with substance abuse for some time. I was bouncing around in factories and living at home with my parents seeming to get nowhere in life. With some encouragement from a Christian, Straight-edge, vegetarian girlfriend, I did a complete 180 degrees - giving up drug use, going straight edge for a year, finding Jesus, enrolling in college, and going vegetarian myself. I'm not sure about the Jesus thing or Straight-edge anymore (I'm an atheist and I drink now) but they were important at the time. I was pretty unsatisfied with my life at the time and needed a drastic change.

Going vegetarian was hard at first. I was used to eating fast food, pork chops, hot dogs, and hamburgers. I didn't eat very healthy and was mostly eating soy hot dogs and French fries. I remember feeling hungry and weak a lot at first but I stuck with it and those feelings went away after the first couple months. I would recommend to any new vegetarians that you do some nutrition research and try to eat healthy foods if possible. The transition seemed harder to deal with

Hi, my name is Malcolm. I'm 32 years old. I'm covered from head to toe in tattoos. First impressions..... My friends would describe me as artistic, sarcastic, and motivated with left leaning politics. I've been living in Waterloo, ON for several years but grew up in Windsor which is a factory border town. I guess my background and history is working class 2nd generation white Canadian. I've been vegetarian for 8 years and vegan for 4 of them.

My first experience with vegetarianism was when my mother went "vegetarian". I grew up eating her meat loafs, meat balls, lasagna, and Kraft dinner with hot dogs. One day she just stopped eating meat. I don't remember exactly when this happened but what I do remember is her telling me about all the poor animals she had witnessed suffering at the farm where she grew up on near London, ON. She would recount how she had to hold the baby pigs while my grandfather gave them painful injections and many other stories about the farm animals that I could tell made her feel awful. She made most of the dinners my father and my brothers and I ate and continued cooking meat dishes for us despite not eating them herself until we were old enough to cook on our own. She is now mostly vegan.

Another experience I recall is camping with my family and my father stressing to us kids to not hurt any animals at camp. This gave me my first sense of being respectful to other living creatures. It seems perplexing to me now though how we were all eating campfire hot dogs while learning this lesson. Cognitive dissonance.

In my early 20's my first serious partner was a vegetarian and she cared for as many companion animals as possible – a few dogs, cats, rats, geese, and ducks. I remember watching one of

Plus I love cooking! It's much more exciting to make creative meals as a vegan! Anything you can do, I can do vegan! There are hundreds of incredible websites to help you figure things out. I love curry, Thai food, tacos, and falafels.... And on and on and on.

If I was to offer any advice for aspiring or new vegans it would be to join a group with like-minded people. Also, don't look away from graphic footage; it's much harder to lose sight when those horrific images are burned in your brain. Stay strong, read a lot, and know your facts, because naysayers are everywhere.



Hi! I'm a 22-year-old university student and I started my journey in vegetarianism over 2 years ago. I was born and raised in Toronto and come from a traditional Chinese family. We ate meat every day for lunch and dinner - each meal would consist of rice along with 2 or 3 dishes of meat and 1 or 2 of vegetables. I study math and computer science in Waterloo, relocating to various cities and countries around the world every 4 months for co-op. I think my friends would describe me at best as an active, excitable, dance-obsessed, risk-taking, open-minded dreamer and traveler.

My first memory regarding vegetarianism was when my vegetarian friend in high school refused to eat pepperoni pizza that already had the pepperonis picked off. I thought vegetarians were weird, stingy people who had a romanticized ideal about changing the world. Fast forward 5 years to my second year of university, I was noticing that my metabolism was slowing down and I could no longer be the girl who ate everything yet stayed skinny. After a year of experimenting with dieting, skipping carbs, and meal replacement shakes, I stumbled onto vegetarianism as a health option and decided to take on a 90-day vegetarian challenge in September 2012. Throughout this period I continued to do research, reading The China Study, experimenting with high-carb raw veganism (as promoted by Freelee the Banana Girl), and juicing. The 90 days had come and gone fairly easily, and I thought I hadn't felt a noticeable difference. So in 2013, I went back to eating meat for about a month or two, until I realized that eating meat made me feel more lethargic and bloated after a meal, and I just didn't enjoy the taste of meat enough. So at the end of February 2013, I became strictly pescetarian, but ate mostly vegan. Slowly I decreased my consumption of fish, until becoming fully vegetarian in September 2013. Since then, I have

people uncomfortable. It took a long time for all parties to learn to communicate respectfully about the topic.

The methods and strategies I used to become vegan aren't ones I'd recommend to others - the boot camp approach isn't for everyone and was very alienating. It wasn't hard for me as an individual to abstain from any animal based foods because I believed that all uses of animals are oppressive.

I have been eating a plant-based diet for 35 years. My advice to someone who is considering vegetarianism/veganism and/or animal rights activism is to read about the benefits of the diet/lifestyle and to research the methods and actions that many groups/organizations have used so that person can choose what is best suited to them.

My inspiration to get involved in animal rights activism and animal liberation struggles stemmed from activism I was drawn to when there were rallies against apartheid held in Canada. There was an immediate connection that the very same enthusiasm and dedication was needed for defending the rights of animals.

My favourite savoury vegan foods include hearty salads and grain bowls with a wide array of vegetables both raw and steamed. My favourite sweet vegan foods include bananas, strawberries, raspberries, and mangos sliced and topped with agave nectar.

At restaurants, I enjoy spicy Thai and/or Indian dishes.

www.animalvoices.ca

www.whichsidepodcast.com

www.theppk.com

www.happycow.net

I am a 42 year old person who identifies as female currently residing in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. My peers describe me as a radical thinker and activist. As an individual raised in Canada by immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia, politics and human rights issues were ongoing household topics. At a young age, I was taught to challenge dictatorships, celebrate culture, and stand up for persons who were being judged or bullied by elitists. As much as animals were not treated as "family", the animals I encountered and befriended during my childhood inspired me to become vegan and participate in animal, human and earth liberation movements.

Although veganism was a lifestyle I began to strive for at age eight, I didn't meet actual vegans until I was twelve. It was liberating to know there was a term for how I was choosing to live and what I would or would not consume.

The decision to stop eating animals was instigated by the impact that various farm animals I visited and befriended as a child had on me. The irony of feeling joy with the sight of new animals each visit in contrast to the ones who were slaughtered, cooked and eaten in the very same farm was hard to stomach. The event that triggered me most was the killing of a goat at a family friend's farm who was deemed the "favourite". From that point on, my convictions grew stronger, I stopped eating meat, and I began to question all the adults in my life about the treatment of animals.

There were many challenges in the 1980s to change to a plant based diet - the food system was lacking foods and beverages suitable for vegans that are common now. It was difficult to obtain food especially on the go. This created a great deal of stress at home and amongst my peers because there were no people in my day to day life who wanted to become vegan. My approach was all about self-sacrifice and it made many

maintained a high-carb, low-fat, strictly-vegetarian, mostly-vegan diet. I have also gotten more involved in the vegetarian/vegan community, learning about the environmental, economical, and cruelty aspect of meat consumption. I now list "health and environment" as reasons for my vegetarianism when asked.

Red and white meat was extremely easy for me to give up; I actually didn't ever miss its taste. Fish was a little more difficult to surrender. One of my favorite foods growing up had been steamed fish, and I also loved sushi rolls. One day I just decided that steamed fish was not so hard to give up, and realized that vegetarian sushi was just as delicious as regular fish-filled rolls. But by far, the most difficult part of becoming vegetarian is the social aspect. My traditional Chinese parents kept trying to tempt me with meat, yelling at me for not eating meat, calling me crazy to friends and extended family, and warning me that my health will deteriorate without meat. Luckily, my meat-eating boyfriend at the time was fairly supportive. Some friends thought it was weird but they didn't question any further, and I didn't eat out socially enough for it to have a big impact on me.

There was one time when I was over at a friend's place and her boyfriend happened to cook dinner for both of us. When he handed me the food he had cooked, I realized that I had forgotten to tell either of them that I was vegetarian. It was the first time I had experienced such an interaction and I just froze. Are they going to think I'm rude if I decline? Should I try to pick out the bits of meat and just eat the pasta? Are they going to think I'm too weird/crazy/hippie/idealistic for being vegetarian? Are they going to start a huge debate with me about how silly it is to be vegetarian? After determining that there was too much meat to pick out, I turned to them and awkwardly explained that I was vegetarian.

They were immediately apologetic, laughing and trying to make light of the clearly awkward situation by saying that my friend gets an extra lunch tomorrow.

Over the years as I have met more and more vegetarian friends, I've mostly lost this fear of seeming "crazy" because I'm vegetarian; the exception is when I travel. When I went to Namibia last year with a large volunteer group, having another vegetarian in the group made me significantly less stressed out during meal times. When I went to Mexico this year, a huge feeling of relief came over me when I learned that some friends of the family I was staying with were also vegetarian.

As I mentioned before, I felt that finding or making vegetarian food to eat was not difficult at all. There are so many different cuisines and styles of cooking that offer all the variety you can imagine: veggie burgers, tofu pad Thai, Chana masala (Indian chickpea curry), bean burritos, vegetable pasta, lentil soup, kimchi noodles, yam tempura sushi rolls, vegetable dumplings, etc. There are also many sites with recipes for delicious vegan desserts, vegan cakes, and vegan ice cream. The hard part about being vegan/vegetarian is when you're eating out, when you're offered food from a friend, when someone cooks for you, when anyone other than yourself has control of your food. I've learned over time ways to handle the different social situations (awkward, surprised, curious, offensive, confrontational, condescending) that come my way due to my vegetarianism/veganism.

Currently, I maintain a vegetarian diet while also doing my best to avoid dairy, egg, and other animal by-products. I feel healthier and more energetic than ever, and my level of athleticism went from almost zero to what I think is now considerably above average. Needless to say, I love this

is being vegetarian/vegan now than it was 8 years ago. There is constantly new vegan shops opening up, and restaurants are becoming more accommodating every day. I believe this is because the amount of people realizing the benefits of a plant-based lifestyle is increasing. It might seem tough, but with the right people to support you, it becomes so much easier. I have joined many vegetarian/vegan clubs, and gone to many events. These people are what can push you to accept that your diet may be different, but there are people out there that believe in it as much as you do. Hearing their stories and their advice on where to shop and what foods they enjoyed, has helped me a lot.

To this day I am still trying to become as committed to veganism as I was 2 years ago. However, now that I am going on dates and meeting new friends, I find it very difficult to keep up with a plant-based diet. I am however meeting more vegans in the city, which is really helping the transition. I do only buy plant-based products, and eat vegan 90% of the time. I hope someday I can get back to my plant-based ways, but for now, I am doing my best to live a healthy and cruelty-free lifestyle.

*My hunter buddy tells me "Don't worry, when I hunt I use every part of the animal." You know who else uses every part of the animal?
The animal!*

- Deepak Sethi

Later, in my second year of university I discovered Vegetation, the vegetarian and vegan society at the University of Waterloo. This was the first time I had come into contact with veganism. All through high school I said, “I will never go vegan, I like eggs too much!” However, the members of this club made it sound like something I would be able to handle, so I decided to give it a try.

June of 2013, I became a vegan. Throughout the summer and fall I had an amazing support system: the vegan club members, friends, and a fantastic guy friend that would even straighten me out when I strayed. The hardest thing about going vegan for me was discovering which vegan foods I enjoyed. I was constantly buying different kinds of vegan cheese, until I finally chose Daiya cheddar shreds. I bought all of the Happy Herbivore cookbooks and was trying lots of the recipes. I had never cooked and baked so much in my life! The way I started to look at myself was also very positive, because this was also when I started to work out more and my acne was disappearing. I lived a very healthy lifestyle; up until October 2013.

Starting in October 2013 I became very sick, very often. I was sick for 6 weeks straight when I was finally brought to the emergency room. No one could find anything wrong with me, my vitamins were shockingly amazing (even being a vegan!), and so I was sent on my way. This cold continued for 3 months, until I finally decided to try going back vegetarian. Transitioning back to vegetarianism was extremely difficult for me: I got horrible acne, my stomach ached, and still to this day I cannot eat dairy regularly. As a result, I have been an on and off vegan for 2 years.

My advice to others considering a plant-based diet is to not care what others think of your lifestyle choice. It is just that, it's a lifestyle choice, and no one should be judging you for something you believe in. I cannot believe how much easier it

lifestyle and don't see myself ever going back to eating animals.

-- Bonnie Zhou

I grew up on a small hobby farm. It was basically an antique, but our family fixed it up nice. There were horses and cows in the fields around the house. Chickens and ducks ran free during the day and would return on their own accord at nightfall. They would lay eggs, which we would eat. There was a huge wooden barn with a tin roof surrounded by crops. Another local farmer raised a small herd of livestock and we would barter.

At 18, I moved to the south end of Ottawa and started at Algonquin College for business. That is where I met some amazing people who introduced me to a new ways of thinking, eating and living.

My learning experience has been ongoing since then. By surrounding myself with good people I hope to continue to learn and grow as we work towards a better tomorrow. Making conscious decisions in the moment to live the change I want to see.

My advice to someone who is considering going vegetarian is - just try it! Want to get yourself involved? Try a vegan potluck. They are a great way to get together and share. Amazing food and good people.

Stay Proper,

Dana Edward Hunter

- Barber / Owner of “Proper Speakeasy Barbering Company”

My cultural background is Canadian, I was born here, and have lived here my whole life. I am a working and studying 22 year old. My friends would probably describe me as nice, although I sometimes long to be more forceful and opinionated, I tend to be pretty tame, and giving.

I can't exactly remember my first experience in understanding vegetarianism, and I think once I fully understood what it was I was already on the path to becoming one. It was through a family friend that I was introduced to vegetarianism. I was around 14 years old, and we immediately bonded over a mutual love for animals. He would show me the PETA calendar he'd received, and recount how he tried to help them by being a member. At this point I had no idea what really happened to animals in the process of becoming food, and I started to think about vegetarianism as an option. Before meeting him I thought vegetarians were 60's hippies, and I was not a 60's hippie, so therefore I couldn't be vegetarian (please forgive my 14 year old logic).

I began to think more about vegetarianism and explored some documentaries and literature. I watched Food Inc. which broke down any images of idealised animal agriculture I had, and listened to accounts of others who had chosen vegetarianism (probably the most influential group to me at that time).

I had learned, but I had still never acted. I spent many weeks continuing to eat meat products. I would eat bacon with my mother on weekends, and burgers and fries while working my part time job at Mary Brown's Fried Chicken. Many times I looked down at the food I was eating and didn't feel anything, I really didn't care, or couldn't care. I was 15 when I finally made the decision to try vegetarianism. How terrible must I be to not feel sympathy for those who suffer - animal, human or otherwise. My last meat meal was a hurry-we-need-to-eat-now McDonald's hamburger, and I knew as I ate it that it would be my last.

I'm Allison, I have been a vegetarian for 8 years and an on and off vegan for 2 years and this is my vegetable story! I'm a small town Canadian girl, currently living in Toronto, ON. I am coming out of my 4th year at the University of Waterloo, working towards a degree in Mathematics. As a Waterloo student, I spend half of my time in school at Waterloo and the other half doing co-op positions in Toronto. In my spare time I like to work out, watch nerdy movies, and go out with friends. Others would say I'm not what I appear, and I love that about myself.

I was first exposed to vegetarianism when I was 14. My best friend decided she wanted to become a vegetarian because her brother was a vegan. As all teenagers do, I followed what my best friend was doing and became vegetarian myself. This was not a big adjustment for me, as I had never liked eating meat as a child. My family was very supportive, though they struggled at first with finding meat alternatives, as this was new to all of us. I didn't notice any changes when I went vegetarian, as I wasn't eating much meat before this.

In grade 11 my best friend decided to start eating meat again, which was a big shock to me, as I wanted to continue being vegetarian and couldn't imagine my life any other way at that point. This made it a little more difficult for me, as we did everything together and now I was the only vegetarian of our friends. Being from a small town, there weren't many vegetarians, if any. However, I stayed with it all through high school.

Going into university, I lived a normal life eating wise, and gained the freshman weight just like everyone else. If anything there were more food choices available to me when I went to university. In the beginning of second year, I moved into an apartment with some friends and lost 35lbs all of a sudden. I was doing nothing differently, except that I was a terrible cook and this was the first time I had to cook for myself.

One struggle I will say I face is, the older I get, the harder I find it to eat with omnivores. I find it hard to relate to them on a compassionate level and I am saddened by their food choices. I'm constantly reminded why I do this and like I said, it's not for me, it will never be for me.

They're worth it to me, always, there's nothing in this world that could make me go back to a life other than this. I was born loving animals, I'll die loving animals and I'll die fighting.

For them, always.



Above: A protest in Italy against Green Hill, a breeding facility for dogs used in animal experimentation, spontaneously turned into a daylight rescue when dozens of activists rescued more than 40 dogs who would have been used in testing.

I waited a long time to adopt the name “vegetarian” (about six months), because I was afraid that I would stop. But after six months I just couldn't imagine eating it again. Even with no local vegetarian restaurants, there were options for me at the grocery store, and I could still eat my favorite food - potato chips :)

I was the weird one all through high school, but had always liked to be slightly different, so I learned to embrace it. There were times where friends parents would yell because I couldn't eat what they were serving, and when I would have to eat a million carrots to try and prevent myself from caving in on my cravings, but it became my norm pretty quickly and I learned to explain what I was doing in the friendliest and most understanding manner. Now it is just part of me to explain why I did it, it's who I am.

My mother was extremely supportive to me (and I am glad to report that, even though we have been talking about it since I was 15, she has now been vegetarian for three months!). Loads of my friends talked about their “one month vegetarian” experience and they had little faith in me keeping it up, as they had turned back to their meat eating habits. I however didn't find it that hard. Ultimately no one really cared about my decision and the only real challenge I faced was my own adjustment.

The internet became my friend pretty quickly - I had known it for its lovely Facebook, email and the occasional real research for high school, but now it was my recipe source. My mom and I began to explore webpages with new recipes, protein alternatives, and other health requirements. Some websites I used most frequently were PETA (it was the only really veg related site I knew at the time, although now I would suggest many better sites), Pinterest, and just google search. There are so many foods to try and love! I also ate a lot of bagels at the beginning, which I do not suggest. As I matured and learned

to cook I really discovered amazing recipes (shout out to my favorite vegan chef - Isa Chandra, you have made my life so amazing with your recipes and wonderfully quirky food descriptions).

I eventually moved to veganism, for the saddest reason possible but it is the truth. I had been vegetarian for about 4 years, and some of my friends had went vegan. HOW CAN THEY LIVE WITHOUT CHEESE!? Well it turns out, it's pretty easy. In my second year of university, frustrated at being mostly alone in my passion to help animals, I started a university vegetarian and vegan club, modeled off of the Toronto Vegetarian Association. I met one of the most passionate activists I know today, and we worked together to create events for my local community. We decided that it would be best to have an opening meeting so that everyone could get to know each other. I opened the first meeting with a quick intro, "Hi I have been vegetarian for about 4 years...." where every other person in the room started with "Hi, I have been vegan for ___ years..." How was the person who started this club the only one not willing to give up cheese! So it happened, one week later I was a fully committed vegan.

Since then I have been involved with many groups periodically to promote veganism and animal rights. I have attended fur farm protests, vegan food festivals, and even organized a conference with other local passionate individuals. Being a part of this community has also opened my eyes to the struggles that all beings face, animals being confined to cages too small for their bodies, but also Women's rights, Indigenous Rights and more. I enjoy bonding with my community, and it is truly a fantastic experience to spend time with people who believe what you do and support what I feel is right. I also try to speak with friends who are non-veg and interested, as it's still good to hear the opinions of others (and

Ghosts in Our Machine - a brilliant film by Liz Marshall featuring the always inspiring Jo-Anne McArthur. I think the film is a must see because it speaks on an urgency I feel that we need to do something about these issues. The film documents industries built on the exploitation of animals and it shows us what most people are so afraid to see. I have since then been to another screening with them both in attendance and have gotten to talk to both for a bit and just thanked them for what they are doing. I know they are still pushing the film and I think it will reach and influence so many people.

Vegan food though, LET ME TALK ABOUT VEGAN FOOD. You can keep it simple with things like beans, rice, legumes, potatoes - easy and very cheap foods. You can go medium with food like mac and cheese, grilled cheese and shepherd's pie. You can go all out with lasagna and homemade Caesar salad, meatloaf and homemade veggie burgers. Pick up a really good cookbook and just try! I'm a sucker for good mac and cheese, so for my fellow vegans close to the GTA, I'm talking Hogtown Vegan mac and cheese. If you can, PLEASE TRY IT. It's begging for you to try it. If you fancy yourself some desserts, why not try Bloomers or Through Being Cool, both in very close proximity to Hogtown. Vegan food is so amazing and abundant if you know where to look and honestly, you can always get a salad. Sometimes this life comes with a little bit of sacrifice.

All the sacrifices are worth it. I have made some amazing friends through this and some of my very close friends are now vegan, which is the biggest delight. I had my time, they needed to find theirs and I couldn't be happier.

questions, they WANT to know the answer. As far as animal rights, go on Facebook and look up your area and see if there are any local AR [animal rights] groups. If you live in a decent sized city, there is probably at least one. See what kind of things they do. Potlucks, bake sales. Some people aren't comfortable going to demonstrations, so maybe more positive, behind the scenes stuff might be a better fit.

I remember I had my first (and so far only) vegan tattoo before I had even gone to a protest. My first event I ever went to was part of the Open The Cages Tour held by some of my friends. It was the last stop of the tour, so it was definitely a banger. The demonstration was at University of Toronto where they do cruel animal testing experiments. Surrounded by people I knew and people I've come to know through the 'scene' for lack of a better word, we marched to one of the lab buildings and held our demo right outside the doors. I'll always remember that day as the day that I knew going to those sorts of events was right where I felt I belonged. That night was a music show. We went for some dinner and then two of my friends played in that show.

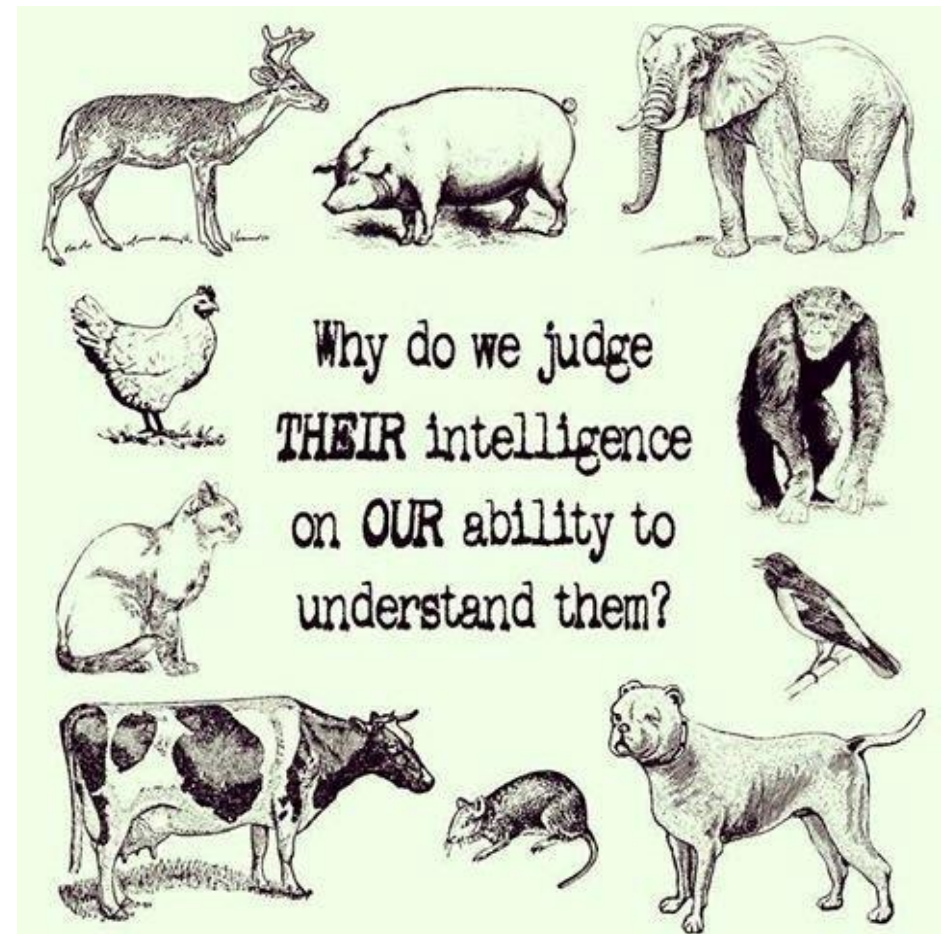
Since then, I have been involved in potlucks, I've gone to a handful of demos at Marineland (Niagara Falls, Ontario), a few Fur Free Friday demos, and local circus demos held in Kitchener, Ontario. A couple years ago, there was an Animal Rights Day held at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario that was put on by some awesome friends of mine. There was a day full of panels, free food, and lots of literature to pick up. I bought a few patches and a bracelet, which I still wear. That night there was a screening of the film The

I have successfully persuaded a few to give vegetarianism a try!).

I will end this off with some of my favorite veg foods - I am here to break the healthy vegan stigma, even though I encourage a healthy lifestyle. Chana Masala (Indian / curry), chips and Salsa, cookies, chili, and anything Isa Chandra thinks up - her cookbooks rock! (She is Post Punk Kitchen www.theppk.com).

Thank you!

Opal



Hey, my name is Rebecca and I am a vegan. I was born in Kitchener, Ontario and when I was nine, moved to the small town of New Hamburg, Ontario. I grew up a happy kid and having had cats and one dog in my house(s) growing up, I always had a love for animals. I am currently 27 years old, residing in Waterloo, Ontario, working full time as a hairstylist. I love what I do and I love to make others happy and make them feel good. I am a pretty outgoing and compassionate person. I think people would describe me as funny, loud and just a nice person. I try to spread good vibes to people no matter where I go, throwing a smile to a stranger walking down the street.

I think I had tried to go vegetarian when I was younger, but I didn't last that long. I think I came into it when I was ready. I had a friend in high school who was a vegetarian and I remember I always was 100% in agreement with what they were saying, but I always felt like such a hypocrite for still eating animals. I always agreed with them and thought about how messed up it was.

April 19th, 2007 I had my last hamburger. I had just turned 19 and my friend who had at that time transitioned into veganism, showed me a PETA video (cue ominous music). Don't get me wrong, I willingly watched it, I knew that night we were going to watch it. I don't think I knew it at the time, but that night changed me forever. As it came to an end, I just remember crying and saying "I can't do it!!" I was then a vegetarian. The next morning as we drove my friend to work, they ironically (or tragically) worked at a deli, I believe that job was short lived. I told my mom and she was so supportive from the beginning, which I am so thankful for because I hear and read too many stories of kids whose parents just aren't supportive at all. I've never looked back

from that moment, it was forward into the most fulfilling life. We went to the grocery store and my mom bought me all sorts of vegetarian alternatives that could be found in our grocery store of course. So, lots of veggie dogs.

I've never really faced that many challenges when I became a vegetarian. As I'm sure lots of people can relate just the occasional questions and small remarks. I've come to realize I was very passive as a vegetarian. I always thought of me being a vegetarian as something that was for me and I "Didn't care if people ate meat around me". Being vegan, I've come to realize it's not and should not and will not ever be about me, it's about them [the animals] and for them. I would just laugh at the jokes sometimes and never really get upset about it. My step-dad would offend me sometimes. I remember one time he got so mad when he thought I was being petty for not eating the mayo at home because it could have had tuna in it from making tuna salad. I really should have ditched the mayo too.

I got my PETA starter kit, with the stickers, some of which are still on my bed. I would sometimes watch a PETA DVD I had. I was happily living my vegetarian life. I didn't really find the food was hard to give up, I could still eat most of my favourite foods, just in vegetarian form.

I have been meat free for almost 8.5 years and vegan for 2.5. My only personal regret about vegetarianism, was doing it for so long before becoming vegan. My advice to anyone looking into a veg*n lifestyle would just be 'ask questions'. If you want to know something, ask!! Veg*ns don't have an 'agenda'. If you're genuinely curious about the lifestyle, ask your questions to someone who practices it. I find people are more willing to listen when they've actually asked the