

FROM

Veganism: A Truth Whose Time Has Come

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I'M A VEGAN Essay Collection ~ vegan diversity



The following **selected essay winners** that comprise the *I'm a vegan* collection were the result of an [online essay contest](#), and some were contributed for the book that will follow. The essays reveal that there are religious vegans and those vehemently anti-theist. This compilation exemplifies that vegans are Protestant and Pagan, Abolitionist and Anarchist, African and Asian-American, World-Record-Breaking vegan athlete and self proclaimed 'vegan-fattie', in-your-face activist and introvert, anti-natalist and mothers, punks and professionals, who come in all ages, races, and nationalities. However, there is a golden thread that binds them (and all vegans together). They have stopped their demand and support of animal exploitation, as far as possible.

I'm a vegan lifer. ~ Coby Siegenthaler, Northridge, CA. ~ 90 years old

When I was born in the Netherlands 90 years ago, my parents raised me vegetarian since birth. When I was in nursing school, I met an engineering student at a vegetarian club meeting. He too was raised vegetarian. We fell in love at first site. Together we took our love for animals to the next level and took our vegetarianism to the next level and became vegan. We got married, moved to the United States, and had two wonderful children. We began having vegan potlucks at our house every month for many years. In those days, the entire L.A. vegan community could fit in our living room. We have regularly had visiting vegan dignitaries like Dr. Michael Klaper and Howard Lyman stay in our guest room when they have been in L.A. for speaking engagements. Nutrition and fitness guru John Pierre lived for years in our home for free as he was building his career. We have opened our hearts and homes to so many through so many years. We carried picket signs and protested at circuses, fur stores, slaughter houses and other places where people needed to learn. We were active in spaying and neutering dogs and cats in the community. We even traveled across the country and to other countries to major vegan events. In our hearts, we were both vegan since birth. We were at least vegetarian since birth thanks to our ahead-of-their-time parents. We have then been totally vegan longer than most of today's vegans have been alive. My husband Hans was a vegan lifer, and I continue to be a vegan lifer. Last year at the

first Vegan Prom in L.A., I was voted Prom Queen. I do not like the attention, but it was a fun event and an honor. Almost everyone else in the crowd was young enough to be my grandchildren. I am so glad to have been able to see the world going more and more vegan during my lifetime. I was vegan before it was popular. I've tried to help others learn. Now, the world is much more vegan. When we moved to L.A., there were no vegan restaurants. Then there was one and then two. Now there are about a hundred. Veganism is really growing throughout this vegan lifer's life.

I'm a vegan kid. ~ Marc Bernstein, Encino, CA., 11 years old

I'm a vegan kid because I have a heart, and I feel hurt that animals are hurt for people. I'm a vegan kid because I have a mind, and I know that there are better choices than using animals. I am committed to doing what's right. My parents first signed me up for Camp Exploration when I was 8. They didn't know it was a vegan camp. The brochure said "healthy, conscious foods and programs." Well, mom and dad had no problem with that. They want me to be healthy and conscious, but sometimes they don't get what that fully means. I got it quickly and completely. It was great to realize at camp I was not eating or hurting animals. I decided then to do whatever I could to avoid hurting and using and stealing from animals ever again. I decided then to go vegan. Mom and dad didn't love the idea at first, but I shared with them health information from the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Seeing information from these doctors really helped. How could mom and dad not like me being healthy! As long as I don't push on them too hard and as long as I'm healthy, they let me do my thing. Hey, I don't really give them a choice anyway. I can be stubborn in a good way. I stand up for what's right. And, it's right to be vegan. I even choose projects and reports for school that help me teach and share vegan lessons. I bring extra vegan food to school for my friends. I bring extra vegan snacks to sports for my team. I have my family and friends go to vegan restaurants with me. I take them to animal sanctuaries. I'm not just a vegan kid for me, but I'm an active vegan kid helping make a more vegan world. I continue going to Camp Exploration's vegan camps. I help lead Veg Kids. I've even written articles on the Vegan Fair, on Vegan Cheese, and on Vegan Smores and had them published this year. I'm one of the leaders of the Veg Kids and Vegan Cheese groups on Facebook. I've been in touch with some vegan cheese companies and just put together a vegan cheese party at the police station. So, yeah, I'm a vegan kid, an active vegan kid, and proud of it.

I'm a vegan vegan. ~ Achim Stöber, Germany [Maqi - for Animal Rights, Against Speciesism](#)

At first glance, this may sound redundant. But actually, most so-called "vegans" are far from being vegan. For example, many vegetarians, some of whom practice a restrictive vegetarian diet without eggs or dairy, tend to call themselves "vegan". Some years ago an Australian study concluded that less than one out of ten self-proclaimed "vegans" were vegan. Meanwhile, while "eating a vegan diet" has become popular, it is probably worse. ~ Most of them changed their diet for health reasons. But veganism is not a diet, and no-one is vegan for health reasons. Whenever I state this, someone answers "but I am or I know someone who is vegan for health reasons". But that is just untrue. ~ Eating a slice of turkey corpse every Thanksgiving (like "vegan" Bill Clinton) or a piece of cake baked by grandma

"with love" (and eggs and butter) once in a while is not healthier than eating tofu instead (unhealthier for Clinton, not for the turkey). Eating food colored with cochineal dye, flavours made of cow fat, honey, visiting zoos, buying silken ties or furniture made from animal skin, vinegar, wine or juices fined with gelatin, horseback riding, shampoos that contain mink oil or other animal derived ingredients, clothes made of sheep hair, toothpaste that contains animal fat, etc. usually is not less healthy (for the consumers) than their vegan alternatives. Nobody would have to shun that for health reasons. Real vegans avoid this entirely, hence, they are not vegan for health reasons. Those who do not avoid it are not vegan, but (pseudo)-vegan-foodists at best; someone who does not care about the life of other animals, veganism, and animal rights. The same holds for those who are "vegan" for ecological, religious, economic reasons, etc. This has to come to an end. ~~ By the way it is usually easy to recognize these pseudo-vegans when they talk about real vegans: they use words like "militant", "dogmatic", "only caring about their purity", "vegan police", "religious", "stubborn", "smart-alack", "aggressive", and so on to describe us-and to justify their own unveganism. ~ The only reason to be a real vegan is ethics. So, yes, I do not infringe animal rights, I am a vegan vegan.

I'm a vegan human. ~ Fiona Oakes, U.K. (world-record-breaking extreme marathon runner)

Veganism has been my life for over 40 years - an athlete because I am vegan; not vegan because I am an athlete, a sanctuary owner because I care passionately for all animals and want to be able to offer some hand of comfort to those who suffer abuse, an ethical vegan because I believe any form of cruelty or exploitation is wrong. Not significant enough for my opinions to be considered important, learning this years ago, I reasoned my only hope to give a voice to the voiceless was to have a platform on which to speak. That "platform" I have spent the past 20 years 'erecting' through my running; breaking World Records. No way can people ignore the word, the fact, when it is displayed so visibly for all to see. I run to create proof positive that veganism is a viable option for all, to destroy the myth it is lacking in dietary requirements, unhealthy and inhibitive to sporting excellence. Breaking 3 World Records I hope I have achieved this coupled with my career's longevity and consistency of results. 'Results' being the important factor in the equation as, so often, words, opinions and ideals can and will be ignored, distorted or ridiculed. I am not a talented or gifted athlete, just a tenacious and angry woman, frustrated and desperate to find a way to encourage the masses to see the world as I do. To understand the reasons behind their reluctance or inability to open their hearts and minds to the suffering of others and equip them with the tools they need to do so. To give them the keys to unlock the door to compassion is the reason I run. Ethical veganism does not mean denial, instead it offers liberation from the slavery of mass marketing of corporations who simply wish to make money, very often through the exploitation of the vulnerable. Why I run my sanctuary is simple - animals need help. Why should animals be so different to humans? We seek so much for ourselves yet expect so little for them; I try to weigh up and make all my decisions based on what I believe will benefit the animals the most. I am not perfect, not always right, have my limitations, can't change the world, have a very limited time to make any difference, as I said above, I am just human!

I'm a vegan Asian-American. ~ Doris Lin, Esq., NJ, USA

I was born in New York City and grew up eating my mother's traditional Chinese cooking, which consisted of stir-fried vegetables with small amounts of meat, served with rice or noodles. We also ate tofu, seitan, and gluten, which are common, mainstream foods in China. Tofu was never a weird food reserved for dieters and health food aficionados; it was my beloved, delicious doufu. So when I went vegetarian, and later vegan, I never felt like there was a hole in the middle of my plate. ~ While we weren't Buddhist, we knew people who were, so I was exposed early on to Buddhist vegetarianism and respect for all life. The man my grandfather hired to get rid of the insects in his fruit orchard in Taiwan was Buddhist. Instead of killing the insects, he placed them in open jars and the insects all got out and came back to the orchard. My grandfather was furious. ~ Vegetarianism is so closely tied to Buddhism in Chinese culture, friends, relatives, and restaurant staff often assume that I'm Buddhist. My father didn't understand how I could continue wearing miniskirts (in conflict with Buddhist humility, in his mind) or how we could serve alcohol at our vegan wedding. And wait staff at Chinese restaurants still ask whether I can have onions and garlic after I explain that I don't want any meat, fish, eggs, or chicken broth in my food. ~ I got involved in animal rights and became vegetarian when I was 16, and then vegan when I was 20. Around that time, I noticed people saying that Asians are cruel and uncivilized for eating whales, cats, and dogs. Some were fellow vegan animal rights activists. I expect that kind of hypocrisy from nonvegans who eat steak while petting their dogs, but not from vegans who presumably know that eating a dog is no better or worse than eating a cow. ~ To say that people who eat dogs are inferior to people who eat cows is based in hatred, speciesism, and cultural imperialism. Veganism is the exact opposite. Veganism is the recognition that cows, pigs, chickens, and fish value their own lives as much as a dog, a cat or a whale values theirs. All are sentient, and all have a right to live free of human exploitation.

I'm a vegan antinatalist. ~ Marcus Dredge, U.K.; presenter of the Vegan-Environmental UK radio show [The Species Barrier](#).

Antinatalism is the position ascribed to those who oppose continued human reproduction. As a long time vegan I feel the most neglected animal rights issue is the pressures posed by the number of humans on the planet. ~ Although considered taboo and off limits to some, this issue more than any other impacts the environment and the other individuals who struggle to survive within it. ~ In the last 40 years wild animals have halved in number as the human animal has doubled. We add 230,000 new humans to the planet daily after deaths. The Sixth Great Extinction event in geological history sees us send 200 species extinct every day. ~ The idea of purposefully creating "vegan children" is sadly an act in self-deception. Veganism is an ethic that babies and children are unable to subscribe to. The many possible descendants the vegan parent is responsible for will all behave however they choose. These choices will be made in a speciesist society, surrounded by speciesist peers. Remember that most of us rebelled against our non-vegan upbringing. ~ Similarly, new humans will be born into a globalised system of capitalism. Each a vote for it's continuation, providing the workers and consumers the machine requires. We can't use the hope of reducing our consumption as an argument that humans are not overpopulated. ~ At best a human individual will always have needs that outweigh those of any other animal. We are but

one species among millions yet every human will require housing, land for agriculture, fuel/energy, remaining clean water, etc. All of which displaces and impacts other animals. Procreation is a huge gamble at the best of times but comes with fixed certainties for those who are concerned with other animals living freely of human encroachment. ~ We don't believe in breeding new dogs, when so many are already in need of homes. Adoption should be the ethical imperative for those who possess a strong parenting urge. ~ Suffering is implicit to life and as such I believe it wrong to needlessly throw another being into existence. This could be especially prudent given the dire warnings coming from scientific papers regarding life in an ecologically ravaged era of climate change and civilisation collapse. It is not compassionate to be laissez-faire regarding the adding of new humans into such a chaotic future. As I have shown, our concerns as vegans should be wider still.

I'm a vegan "Golden Rule-r" ~ Craig Cline, Oregon, USA

The great majority of people the world over are religious, and the majority of that majority are Christians. Christianity is the most influential religion in the world, with over 2 billion followers. The Bible sets forth Christianity's own "Golden Rule," found in Matthew 7:12. Essentially, it is a moral and ethical precept which instructs people to behave toward others as they would have others behave toward themselves. A corollary of the Golden Rule suggests that people not behave toward others as they would not have others behave toward themselves. If you think about it, the corollary has even more depth and meaning than the original. ~ The word "others" deserves special consideration in either case. Christians, and most other religious people could — and should — expand the application of the Golden Rule to all others, including both humans and non-humans alike. It stands to "Golden Rule Reason" that we humans ought not be party to the needless and unjustified suffering and death of other sentient creatures, just as we ought not cause such suffering and death to members of our own species. To do otherwise is to participate in speciesism, a practice which affects non-human animals every bit as adversely as racism affects us human animals. It is worthwhile to remember that humans themselves are in fact members of the animal kingdom — Animalia. ~ It's important to note that a person need not be religious in order to practice the spirit and intent of the Golden Rule. This is a maxim that is indeed universally applicable — regardless of whether a person is religious or not. Because there are over 2 billion Christians in the world, however, it seems reasonable to accord them eminent status. Christians should lead everyone toward extending the application of "their" Golden Rule to all others — including all non-human animals. What could possibly be better for us humans, and the non-human "others" that we share our fragile planet with, than to make this "Golden Rule Extension" an everyday reality? It should be clear to us humans that a higher and better measure of "mankind" can spring from our being Golden-Rule-guided in our behavior toward all beings. For humans to adopt a vegan lifestyle would be the "right" way to behave toward others. This lifestyle is beneficial for both humans and nonhumans. A vegan human being lives a life that is most in accord with the Golden Rule. May every human being evolve to "GOLDEN RULE-r" status.

I'm a vegan dietitian. ~ Amanda Benham, Brisbane Australia

I'm a vegan dietitian but it wasn't my first career choice. From the time I was very young, I

dreamed of being a vet. ~ But at age 18, as a vet student, my naivety was shattered piece-by-piece. I visited farms and the screams of the imprisoned animals, the disregard with which they were treated and the way they struggled for their life until their final breath horrified me. The realisation that I was expected to be complicit in this torture and commodification demolished my resolve to become a vet. Disappointed and disillusioned, I let my childhood dream go. ~ When I became a vegan at age 23 I was training to be an air traffic controller. But when I got involved in vegan activism I soon realised that there was a real need for more expertise in the field of vegan nutrition, as so many people doubted that anyone could actually survive on a vegan diet! So I returned to university and studied nutrition, and emerged five years later with my Masters in 1994. I'd been worried that I'd learn that my vegan friends and I might be on a path to poor health and an early death, but on the contrary, I learnt that the typical western diet leads many to an early grave, causing health problems like obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. A good vegan diet, rich in fibre and other beneficial plant components, should actually reduce the likelihood of these common health problems. ~ I also learnt that since the discovery and synthesis of vitamin B12 some 60 years ago, humans have been freed of any need to consume animal products. However, there is a lot more to a healthy vegan diet than simply cutting out animal products and taking vitamin B12. ~ For over 20 years I have been helping people to switch to a vegan diet, to stay vegan, to achieve optimal nutritional health and to have healthy vegan families. Research on vegan nutrition is ongoing, and a large part of my time is keeping up-to-date on the latest research findings. I also spend quite a bit of time making submissions, such as to government bodies, to help influence nutrition policy and to ensure publications like the dietary guidelines acknowledge the existence of vegans. ~ Recently I have been doing some writing too, as part of my goal of doing what I can to promote the vegan philosophy. Nothing is more important to me than helping humanity end animal use.

I'm a vegan abolitionist. ~ Keith Berger, South Florida, USA

I'm a vegan abolitionist, but that wasn't always the case. For my first 36 years, I engaged in the daily consumption of products of animal exploitation. I thought nothing of eating dead and dismembered animals, swallowing their secretions and wearing their skins like those around me. I mean, it wasn't as if my demand for animal products was a direct contributing factor in supporting a worldwide system of animal enslavement, injustice, suffering, neglect and, ultimately, the mercilessly brutal taking of their lives... right? ~ Wrong. ~ Once exposed to the truth of the system I've just described, I was horrified and desperately wanted to "do something" to end these horrors, so I engaged in what I thought was effective animal "rights" activism through animal welfare organizations and their single-issue campaigns. I was unknowingly caught in a wave of welfarism that often had little or nothing to do with promoting veganism. Organizations spoke about compassion and I couldn't articulate then that the problem isn't a lack of compassion but the presence of injustice. They promoted "incremental changes" and said "every little bit helps", so I bought into the defeatist attitude that "the world will never go vegan, so let's make cages more comfortable". I know now that when we advocate for anything less than living vegan, we engender, foster and promote speciesism. ~ After a decade of welfarism, I learned of Professor Gary L. Francione and the Abolitionist Approach to animal rights and my entire perspective changed. The unassailable logic and clarity of Francione's ideas rang true and

helped me understand that creative, non-violent vegan education is the most effective way to bring justice to animals by working to give them the right not to be used or abused by anyone as their property. ~ If we have the opportunity to educate people about veganism as the moral baseline for our treatment of individuals of other species, then as vegans I feel it is incumbent upon us to do so. Convince one person to become vegan and you eliminate support for dozens of animal exploitation issues. Convince ten and you multiply the effect accordingly. Convince one person that, for example, circuses are cruel (but not discuss veganism) and s/he may leave the circus only to arrive two hours earlier at the neighbor's barbecue and feast on slaughtered animals. Which sounds more effective? ~ I choose the abolitionist approach. I am a vegan abolitionist.

I'm a vegan bisexual. ~ Nicole Thomson, Alberta Canada

I love as indiscriminately as I consume discriminately. I am as picky about the sources of my food, clothing, and toiletries as I am unpicky about the vessel that holds the source of my attraction. I believe that it can be easier for people who have been on the receiving end of discrimination to feel some sort of comradeship to enslaved animals. Anybody who has ever been devalued and reduced to their sexual organs, their race, their age, or any part of their whole knows how painful that can be. We have reduced many animals to cuts of meat and the way they taste. We refer to them as leather and lard and protein. Words used to redirect the mind from blood and gore and the souls behind these beings' eyes. As an underrepresented and often dismissed part of the LGBTQ community, I am often not gay enough or straight enough to fit in anywhere. I have been discriminated against, made fun of, misunderstood, and told what I 'really am'. But I am never in danger of having a bolt in my brain or a blade in my neck. I am no better than my fellow earthlings but I am much better off. At least I have some rights. As a woman who sometimes loves women, I know what sexism is and I live with the residue of homophobia. I restrain myself. I don't kiss her in public. I keep my hair long and my skirts short. I fit into the straight group when it's safer and the gay one when it's convenient. We try to save farmed animals by cloaking them in companion animal camouflage. An irresponsible 'owner' may teach a pig to sit for treats but that won't stop his name from being Bacon. Everyone deserves to be valued in their own right. Comparing my situation to that of the billions of animals systematically murdered is like comparing a mosquito bite to a shark attack. But humans relate to commonality and I have high hopes that my community can lead the way in improving the lot of animals. All it takes is a moment of clarity to see the madness of speciesism and realize we are not that different. Our cohabitants on this planet are depending on us to change the world. We must fight for them as we do for ourselves.

I'm a vegan activist. ~ Mo Orr, Queensland, Australia

I'm standing in the supermarket 'meat' section. My heart is pounding, my mouth is dry. I hear the screams of the animals, I feel their fear, their suffering. And I know what I need to do. I raise my poster of a cow with her ear tag, high above my head. "Can I have your attention please. This is O693. She had no name. Her life was reduced to a number." I am still surprised, is this really me, standing shoulder to shoulder with activists, speaking out for animals? How did I get here? I grew up in a family where eating meat and eggs and dairy

was a part of every meal. We enjoyed barbecues most weekends, and the smell of food wasn't recognised as burning flesh. ~ Then, one hot, humid day, driving from Sydney to Broome, I saw a "cattle" truck parked on the side of the road. I had always lived in big cities, and until that day, I'd never seen a cattle truck, never given a thought to food, where, or who, it came from. I saw the cows inside the truck, and I understood they were going to be slaughtered. I'd always considered myself an animal lover, yet I had never connected the 'meat' I ate with the animals I professed to love. I became vegetarian. I was no longer responsible for the deaths of animals. Or was I? Cruelty to animals isn't only in the manner of their deaths. ~ Yet still I resisted becoming vegan. It seemed like such a big step. How could I give up cheese and eggs; all animal products? But I could no longer hide from the truth and, finally, I became vegan. Now, living semi rural, I see the death trucks every day, so many of them, and when the trucks are empty, I know their unwilling passengers are now dead. It overwhelms me. I realised being vegan wasn't an end, but rather it was a beginning. I could no longer be silent. Silence gives consent. ~ I stepped out of my comfort zone and crossed the aisle into activism. Now I stand shoulder to shoulder with other activists, and I speak out for the victims: "Can I have your attention please."

I'm a vegan introvert. ~ Jenny Chambers, Connecticut, USA

There's a pretty strong stereotype assuming all vegans will "let you know" their lifestyle choices without a prompt or second thought. While this probably isn't true of many vegans, not only do I not fit this stereotype - I'm the complete opposite. Don't get me wrong, I love educating those around me on the cause but... I am an introvert. In most scenarios that involve meeting new people, someone else will always be the one to inform our company that I'm vegan. I'm extremely proud of my choices and don't have an issue with people knowing, however, I don't always want this to be common knowledge among people I don't know. With it often becoming the main point of conversation, I'm left with a bit of a predicament; I should relish the chance to educate people on my vegan lifestyle... but I hate being the center of attention. ~ When it comes to the subject of veganism, the conversations I tend to have are predominantly a case of meat-eaters defending their own dietary choices. Despite being able to give justified reasons for not wanting to use or exploit animals, I don't always want to be under attack as people try to trip me up on my dedication. People analyse my shoes, banish me to desert islands or tell me how humane murder can be, and for someone like me, who struggles with confrontation, sometimes social events would be a much more enjoyable experience if no one knew. ~ When in a crowd, it can often feel like veganism is the easy target for some kind of comedy sketch. People see it as an opportunity to get a laugh whilst regurgitating witty one-liners about the joys of bacon or how "it's the cows fault for being so tasty." When an audience patiently awaits your response in order to set them up for their next hilarious anecdote, this is when I get tongue-tied and wish the ground would swallow me whole. ~ I wish I could be fearless and outspoken like the animal advocates I read about but the fact of the matter is, I'm not. I've come to realize that just because I'm not like them, that doesn't make me any less passionate, I just needed to find other ways to make a difference. That's why I turned to writing. For me, the pen is my weapon of choice.

I am a vegan ecofeminist. ~ Rachelle Howard, Humboldt State University, Eureka, CA.

The vegan movement and the ecofeminist movement intersect through the goal to dismantle the politics of domination. Men, throughout history, have sought to dominate animals, nature, and women. The vegan movement can be embedded in the current progressive, feminist, anti-racist movement, which can create a space of intersection between sex, species, and race. We need women leaders to deconstruct our social construct, and thus end dualisms of man/woman, humans/animals, humanity/nature and so on. Women leadership is essential to create a more acceptable movement, and vegan ecofeminist women, should be at the forefront. ~ Women are seen as a piece of meat. We see oppressed women and animals in mainstream media, advertisement, and even labels. For example, the famous Carl's Jr. ads are known for their sexual commercials, where women are exploited with their female nakedness and are seen sexually eating a burger. These commercials have gotten many reactions, but continue to produce new commercials with the idea that 'sex sells'—which it does in this case. Our societal norm of men's appetite has been engraved in our minds for decades. "Masculinity appears to require satisfaction and beef," which is exactly what the Carl's Jr. commercials are aimed to do (Adams, 1994). ~ In addition, feminists and vegan activists have been fighting for bodily rights since the beginning of their movements. Women and female animals are labeled as reproducers, and men have longed to control population. Female animals are constantly forced to become pregnant, give birth, and continue this cycle until death. The reproductive cycle of an animal under man's domination is cruel and inhumane; there are even platforms within factory farms called 'rape racks' where the animals are forcefully inseminated. The babies from these female animals are often taken away from their mothers at a very early age, degrading the very meaning of motherhood. This reproductive violence is entangled within women's violence; "to ignore that human women are abused and coerced is as nearsighted as when humans ignore the fact that non-human animals are abused to benefit the self-interest of people" (Adams, 1994). ~ These examples of women and animals are just a few of the many parallels between the movements fighting against man's domination. If the vegan movement can acknowledge social oppression, such as the oppressions of women, then the vegan and animal rights movement can open up as a more appealing space for everyone.

I'm a vegan philosopher. ~ Ashling McEvaddy, Galway, Ireland

I had been a vegetarian since I was very young, but it was not until I was introduced to a range of arguments for and against animal rights whilst covering the topic of animal rights as part of first year philosophy, that I truly became aware of the reality of what my consumption of dairy and eggs actually entailed. ~ Thus, I became vegan immediately. I realised that the standards by which we judge other species and their claim to rights are not absolute and objectively correct standards, but ones that are specifically human. As such, to judge other species based on our criterion of value is to assume without justification that it is possible for us, humans, to undertake such an evaluation objectively. ~ However, the standards by which we would conduct such an evaluation, standards of intelligence and such, are not absolute. They are human standards created and applied subjectively, and for that reason, cannot be applied objectively with any degree of moral justification. As such, there can be no reasonable cause for judging a non-human animal's right to life and to not be mistreated purely by the standards we have created based on our

subjective experiences and perspectives. ~ As such, it would seem to me that the most morally justifiable way in which human animals can co-habit with non-human animals is not to penalise non-human animals because they are not human, but rather to ascribe to them the basic rights we ascribe to ourselves, i.e. the right not to be killed and to not be abused. It is largely agreed that our very sentient existence entails our possession of these rights, and thus, it is not difficult to see why we should assign non-human animals such rights based on their sentient existence. ~ This is not to assume any knowledge of the subjective consciousness of these animals, or that the proposed solution is objective in the sense that it matches equally the conceptions of rights held, or not held, by different species. Rather it is to acknowledge that there is no such absolutely objective moral rule, but that if we are to assign ourselves rights based on our subjective experiences and perspectives, then there is no justification for acting in a way that would mistake that subjectivity for morally-justified objectivity, i.e. directly or indirectly supporting the abuse of non-human animal's equally subjective rights to be neither killed nor abused.

I'm a vegan egalitarian. ~ Hayley Howard, Columbus, Ohio

"How about we focus on saving the animals after we end human suffering?" ~ To compare the suffering of one group of individuals to another, and to place higher priority on the abolition of one unjust situation, is to miss the point of veganism completely. I am a vegan because I see no differentiation between human animal and non-human animal, between domesticated and wild creatures, between fish and fowl. ~ We come from the same consciousness, the same life-giving force. The root of our suffering is our inability to see the great contentedness of life around us. Life and death, sadness and joy, "man" and "beast". Are these not two sides of the same coin? ~ By choosing to "save the humans" before we consider "saving the animals", we are again delaying what is inevitable for our survival on this planet: Equality, fairness, the universal right to life. ~ I am a vegan because I look into the eyes of an abused dairy cow and see myself staring back. I am a vegan because I hear the screams of a mother orca, and feel the heartstrings attached to my own mother straining. I am a vegan because the pain and suffering billions of animals around the world are feeling is not separate from me, but is my own.

I'm a vegan rescuer. ~ Emily-Kate Robertson, Dunedin, New Zealand

I have always loved animals from an early age, which made growing up in a family of farmers particularly difficult. As well as seeing sheep killed for no reason other than economic gain, the precursor to my veganism, I found much anguish in the number of now unwanted domestic pets that were deserted at our property. These animals being discarded like trash and common property really resonated with me, and I believe was the reason behind my eventual dedication to the anti-greyhound racing movement, and adoption and fostering of ex-racing greyhounds. ~ I find my veganism to be an extremely important aspect of my life as an animal rescuer, and my personal integrity in these pursuits. Why? Because I find it very damaging to anti-racing and other welfarist causes when groups advocate rights for some animals, denying speciesism should exist in some aspects of their lives, yet seem fine to accept it in others. In my mind, rejection of speciesism needs to be universal to be effective - to rescue some, we must rescue all, as hypocrisy does nothing but undermine our

goals.~ Many of my fellow greyhound advocates do not feel the same about veganism. They say that greyhounds deserve to be loved like any other dog, and not exploited and mistreated purely for profit. I say, that just as this arbitrary line between greyhounds and other breeds is illusory, the line between dogs and cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and any other animals which are consumed or exploited is non-justifiable. You cannot call yourself an animal lover or an animal rescuer when you contribute directly to the death, pain and suffering of animals, through your actions, consumption, or your wallet. What is inflicted on greyhounds is horrendous, but so too is that which animals in the meat, dairy, leather industries, as well as animals bred for scientific testing, suffer for similar economic exploitation. ~ All animals are sentient. All animals can feel pain. All animals can feel love. All animals deserve to be rescued. Veganism is the only way that we can rescue animals. We as human beings caused this mess, and it is up to us to fix it - through our hearts, lifestyle choices, and through our consumer power.

I'm a vegan soul. ~ Suzanne Hanson, Fargo, N.D., USA

Merriam-Webster defines the word soul as the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life. The actuating cause of an individual life—what is veganism if not that which moves us to the core of our being? Today, we can be a vegan anything—doctor, lawyer, therapist, dishwasher, professor, artist, and so on. We do what we need to do in order to make rent. In that, we are no different than our neighbors, co-workers, and loved-ones. We have car payments, insurance plans, credit scores, and all of the nagging and mundane burdens of modern life. We have lawns to mow, snow to shovel, children to get to school, and errands to run on the weekend. What, then, separates those of us with vegan souls from the rest of the world? ~ The obvious answer is that we don't eat meat. We don't wear fur, leather, etc. We don't participate in activities that center around animal exploitation, such as rodeos and circuses. To many in the world at large, veganism is an extensive list of restrictions—a wet blanket on family cookouts, a reason to exclude people from activities that may offend picky vegan eaters. But to vegan souls, being vegan isn't a burden or a self-imposed restraint. It's the ultimate freedom. ~ Nothing is more freeing than living in accordance with your core values. Vegan souls know that there is something wrong with the way we treat our fellow beings. Making a conscious decision to opt out of the standard system of animal exploitation is liberation—for both human and non-human animals. Vegan souls aren't concerned with the immediacy of convenience or with fitting in at the expense of a life. What speaks to a vegan soul is that immaterial essence, a feeling of being at peace with the choices we make, because ultimately we are the choices we make. What we choose as individuals, however small it may feel, helps to move the scales of justice in the right direction—the direction of non-violence, respect, and compassion. ~ Franz Kafka is reported to have said, while observing fish in an aquarium, "Now I can look at you in peace; I don't eat you anymore." Just like Kafka, there are plenty of vegan souls out there who either have, or still do, consume and use animal products. Deep down, there is a discord in what they know, believe, and feel, versus what they do. The only path that will solve this disharmony is to go vegan; embrace being vegan as a way to look at the whole world in peace. A person can be many things vocationally, but they can only be one thing if they believe in living in accordance with their beliefs—vegan.

I'm a vegan human-being. ~ Georgia Scott, Queensland, Australia

Human beings are not born evil. Rather, we are products of the world that we are born into. Society has become such that it causes us to lose touch with our emotions and our innate sense of right and wrong. From the moment we are born we are thrust into a world full of propaganda and falsities. We are told that we are special; that we think more logically, feel more intensely and love with more passion than the creatures with whom we share this planet. We are brainwashed until we actually believe what they tell us to be true. ~ Shrouded in our ignorance, we take what we want regardless of the cost to others. We rape, pillage and plunder. We take life after life, ignoring the cries of innocence and pleas for mercy. We shut off from the pain and agony and torment that we inflict, hiding behind our walls of comfort, telling ourselves over and over again that our superiority justifies our actions. And ironically, it is through this process that we ourselves give up our souls and are transformed into the very thing with which we have labelled the creatures whom we destroy. ~ This path of ignorance that we are set on shelters us from acknowledging the monstrosity that is our species. It prevents change from occurring; to admit the truth is also to open up to the guilt. With no more lies to hide behind and no more justifications, the realisation of what we as a species have done sets in. This knowledge cripples and torments one's mind. However, this is what being a vegan human-being is about. The acknowledgment of these injustices is what drives us to fight, fuels our fire and ensures we will not give in until the evil that is humanity has been snuffed out. ~ Now is the time. Society as it stands needs to be dismantled. We cannot let these atrocities continue to occur while we hide and plead ignorance. Let the guilt in; feel the pain of our actions and help change the world. As a vegan human-being, I vow to bring about change. I will not stop fighting until every cage is empty and every creature on this earth is free from their human oppressors.

I'm a vegan multifaceted-person. ~ Joshua Melchizedek, Tacoma, WA.

There's so many sides to me, where do I begin? Compassion, and therefore veganism, affect everything I do, every area of my life. I'm not just a person, or just a vegan, I am many in one body. I am also a yogi. Yoga's philosophy of nonviolence only reinforces veganism. I am also a cook. My love and compassion goes into every morsel of food I make. I'm also a gardener, compassion and health leading me to use plant-only techniques. I am also a nutrition researcher. My desire for the well being of others pushes me to learn more. I am also an environmentalist; believing that taking care of our home doesn't require a special label like "environmentalist". I am also a minimalist; believing we don't need much to be happy. I am also a humanitarian, knowing my heart has more than enough room for all beings. I am also a volunteer, knowing there are things more valuable than money. I am also a scientist; having curiosity for all things and not letting it be squashed by society. I am also a nonconformist. I don't let pressure to betray my values phase me. ~ I am also a force for peace and love and kindness and justice. I am a speaker, listener, supporter, leader, follower, son, friend, best friend, partner, creator, artist, truth seeker, nature lover, sun gazer, part time raw foodist, paradigm shifter, dancer, anti-monetary slavery, music lover, petitioner, activist, photographer, learner, philosopher, reader, writer, visionary, messenger, coach, radical thinker, doer, demonstrator, revolutionary, liberal, Earthling, athlete, free-runner, recycler, baker, mentor, liberationist, rescuer, egalitarian, communicator, sign

language lover. There's no way you can put me in just one box. I, and this list, can go infinitely inward just as this world goes infinitely outward. I am uniquely multifaceted, just as we all are. And yet veganism has touched every part of my being. Nothing has resonated with me more than the "philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude - as far as is possible and practical - all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose."

I'm a vegan educator. ~ Andy Mars, Ph.D.

As a committed vegan since 1983, my mission is being the most conscious person I can be - thus, I'm a vegan educator. As a certified teacher since 1989, my mission is helping raise a more conscious generation of kids - thus, I'm a vegan educator. I am actively involved in educating in a vast array of formal and informal situations. I teach vegan lessons in schools, youth groups, camps, daily life, and synagogue too. In addition to educating within the secular world, I am a "Rav" ("Jewish teacher"). Veganism is the ideal in Judaism - the world was vegan back in Gan Eden - when the moshiach comes the world will be vegan again - when "the wolf shall lie down with the lamb" - there is, though, no reason to wait - we can choose to elevate our existence to such holier, more ideal ways in these days in between. That is why in 1990 I created the www.BnaiTov.org vegan synagogue. From religious to secular to informal education, children can learn well if we open their hearts and their minds together. For years, I brought veganism into various camps, and in 1993 I started www.VeganCamp.org to give vegan and non-vegan children a totally vegan oasis during school vacations. To continue these opportunities in between camp seasons, in 1994 I started www.VegKids.org to connect vegan and veg kids with each other and to help guide kids in going and support kids for being vegan. Realizing the importance of helping educate not just kids but adults, I started the Vegan Foodies in Los Angeles in 1995, on Meetup in 2006, and on Facebook in 2008. In addition to consulting and teaching in numerous non-vegan schools where I am pleased to share meaningful vegan lessons and good vegan food, in 2009 I started www.VeganSchool.org, a totally vegan K-12 school. I continue to be a vegan educator in countless schools and other settings. For decades, I have frequently been a speaker at Great American Meatout programs, VegFests, vegan conferences, teachers' conferences, family forums, parenting education seminars, etc. In some settings I speak on "Raising Vegan Kids," in some settings I speak on "Raising Healthy Kids," and in some settings I speak on "Raising Conscious Kids," but the bottom-line vegan message is always there. I am a committed vegan, I am a committed educator, and thus I am a committed vegan educator.

I'm a vegan boy. ~ Danny Cohen, Santa Monica, California

I'm a vegan boy. Eventually, I will be a vegan man. Being a vegan boy, dependent some on parents, can be challenging, but I can do it. As adults, I don't think anyone can have a good excuse not to do it. How any decent adult is not vegan boggles me. If I can be vegan even with parents who don't want me to be vegan, then anyone else can be vegan too. I went vegan at 7 after I found out about VegKids and opened my eyes. It really bothered me to think that I had been eating animals. That summer, I went to the www.VeganCamp.org which was like living in utopia. I decided then that I was going vegan. I feel much more at peace living this way. Both of my parents do try to fight me on this, but I handle it peacefully but

firmly. It can be hard sometimes, but it would be harder to go against good ethics. At camp, I learned to roll vegan sushi, and that is what I make to bring to lunch at school almost everyday. I bring extra to share with my classmates and even teach others to make it. I do what I can to help others go vegan or at least take steps in the right direction. The hardest, unfortunately, are my parents. With them being so antagonistic about this, I've learned to responsibly take care of myself. For my 9th birthday, I insisted to my mom that all I would accept as a present from her was a rice cooker. I told her that if I got Legos or Transformers from her which I love, they would sit wasted in the box unopened. For my 10th birthday, I insisted on a blender. For my 11th, I insisted on a dehydrator. For my 12th, I insisted on my parents (who are divorced) to have dinner together with me at the Shojin vegan restaurant. They did enjoy the food but are still fighting it and being closed-minded. While I wish my parents would go vegan too, I've become quite capable of making my own meals. I make my own rice, tofu, and broccoli for most dinners and my own sushi for most lunches. If I can successfully manage and be a vegan boy, then others can manage and become vegan too.

I'm a vegan pacifist. ~ Rose Elliot, New Zealand

The descriptive terms "pacifist" and "vegan" are inseparable in my mind, and in my understanding of compassion towards all living creatures. . . . animals of any species, and humans of any race, country, or creed. However, my pacifism pre-dated my veganism. In a pacifist (Quaker) family, one of my earlier recollections was that of meeting some prisoners-of-war, shortly after the Armistice and a few months before my 5th birthday. We 'discovered' these young men, 11 of them, housed in a tiny cottage in the depths of the English countryside. On this chance meeting, my father embraced and related to these men as family friends or neighbors, not as soldiers and enemies. They worked on the farm and were billeted there until 1952 by which time all prisoners had been released. During those years they were allowed out, 2 at a time, to go into town. They came to tea with us in our family home every Sunday afternoon, and I grew up knowing these delightful men who made wooden toys for us and in so many ways enriched our lives. After returning to Germany they continued corresponding with my parents for many years. This bonding, across conventional barriers of nationality and politics, set a firm grounding for the pursuit of an ethical, peaceful, and compassionate lifestyle. My father had been a conscientious objector in WW1 on the front-lines in France, with the Friends' Unit of the Red Cross. So the back-bone of my early life recognised 'peaceful' versus 'violent' choice. It was many years later that I translated 'pacifism towards humanity', to include 'pacifism to all sentient creatures'. My abhorrence of war, racism and nationalism then embraced anti-speciesism in the late 1970s, by which time I had become sickened by the torture and abuse of animals, and the use of them for furthering medical knowledge for human benefit. Now, when I travel, I use the excellent network "Servas", set up in the war by pacifists. Several Servas hosts are now vegan . . . or close to it. Meeting and staying with Vegan Pacifists world-wide and sharing a lifestyle of compassion, is an enriching experience, and helps to further the growing trend amongst all thinking people, that the ethic of 'veganism and pacifism' is the only way forward.

I'm a vegan broadcaster. ~ Bob Linden, USA

I am a vegan broadcaster because I can reach more people this way with a vegan message than if I stand on a street corner with a megaphone. On the street corner, people often react by saying "get a life, get a job", while the response to being on-air is often "wow, did you hear what THAT GUY ON THE RADIO said about eating 'meat', dairy, fish, eggs, and honey?" [GO VEGAN RADIO WITH BOB LINDEN](#), now syndicated by the Genesis Communications Network, has been broadcasting over 14 years, having been heard on the "Air America" radio network and CBS and Clear Channel radio stations across the country. It started when I was promoting a vegan event that I was organizing in L.A. in 2000 called "WorldFest". A producer at KRLA asked if I had considered doing a vegan animal rights radio program, considering my activism and my professional background in broadcast management as Program Director of various music radio stations around the country. I would have to generate advertising to pay for the airtime, and it was hoped that I wouldn't chase away all other radio station advertisers. ~ I thought that this vegan media experiment would last a month or two - so no one is more surprised than I that we approach 15 years. I do regard it my moral obligation to animals to continue the program as long as possible. ~ I didn't want the show to be found by Google search alone. I wanted to be the surprise visitor in the lineup of real talk radio and its usual topics - a show about the economy, then a show about the war, then, a show about - what, going vegan? ~ While the program has aired on conservative "right wing" radio stations where other hosts called me a "communist" for attacking 4th of July hot dog eating, and liberal "left wing" stations where I was accused of preaching weird religion, whatever anyone says - it turns out that this is the most important program in all media - he said, modestly - because it is the only one offering the practical solution for all of the world's major problems - from animal massacre to climate change, hunger, disease, water shortage, deforestation, war... ~ The show, and [GO VEGAN RADIO](#), the non-profit that produces it, have also provided a platform from which numerous special events have been launched, including the World Vegan Summit and Expo; a gathering for advancing vegan advocacy while leaving behind a compromised movement that has embraced industry partnerships and the wrongful concepts of "higher animal welfare", and "humane" and "sustainable" animal "products". The next World Vegan Summit will be on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley July 29-31, 2016 (www.WorldVeganSummit.com). ~ Times have changed - no more job interviews with radio station owners at places like "House of Beef", as I had to do in Washington, D.C. I don't even need a radio station anymore - plus now we can be global. Thanks for listening!

I'm a vegan, evolved. ~ Carl Scott, New Zealand

I'm a vegan, evolved. Why do I say 'evolved'? Because I worked in a slaughterhouse when I was a young man, and have also hunted and trapped animals. I am so glad now, that those days are behind me. I am not only vegan now, but even an animal rights activist. ~ So how did I become a slaughterhouse worker? Well my father was a sheep shearer, a hunter, and a 'pest control' worker. He later also became a slaughterhouse worker, and trapped animals. The sad thing is, those things my father did for a living are totally normal in rural Aotearoa/New Zealand. Many of our family's friends and relatives did those sorts of jobs too. I grew up immersed in that culture, and thought it was completely normal. I don't think I had even heard the word vegan. And so I followed in my father's footsteps. ~ At the age

of 40 however, I 'evolved' and went vegan. In actual fact, of course, nearly all vegans have evolved. Most of us once ate meat, dairy, and eggs, and wore wool or leather, and so on. Yet somehow each of us came to learn that an alternative exists, which meets our needs, and yet doesn't require any animal to be deliberately harmed. Once we learned that, we made the change. ~ So how did I evolve? Well, it took about 2 decades. I don't know exactly all of the sources that lead to my awakening. Two obvious ones would be the wonderful work of two Animal Welfare/Rights organizations in New Zealand. I also remember being affected by the song 'Meat is Murder' by The Smiths. Who knows what other messages I received as I was growing up, but there must have been some. A change like mine doesn't happen in a vacuum. ~ So just like I heard messages and subsequently my world-view changed, we must also spread the word so that others can change too. That can be as simple as talking to friends, family, neighbours, workmates, fellow students, etc. about veganism. Or you can go the next step and be an advocate or activist with an animal rights or vegan organization. If we really want to see an end to unnecessary animal suffering and environmental destruction, and appalling health statistics in humans, then as many of us as possible need to help others evolve too.

I'm a vegan atheist. ~ Barbara Noon, Decatur, IL.

Veganism and atheism join hands in my thoughts, my writing and my life. Even my "deconversion" from being a religious person was motivated by my love for animals! ~ I became an atheist and a vegan over five years ago. It was then that I happened upon an atheist woman on YouTube, and what she discussed in her videos about religion made sense to me. I continued to explore my thoughts about religion by watching videos. My full deconversion came from a video about animals in Africa. It began as a beautiful video, but all of a sudden, a pack of lions attacked an antelope, and started eating wherever they could grab a spot; munching on her thighs, pelvic area and shoulders while she was still alive. I was horrified! I had been overprotected my entire life with my mother telling me, "Oh, honey, the animals always go for the throat - they are killed in a second!" Once I saw the truth, I instantly became an atheist! No god with an ounce of love could ever allow such a painful way for animals to have to die. No explanations or excuses will ever suffice. ~ Another huge change in my life was about to take place. I challenged myself to become vegetarian, and then, when that felt very difficult I decided to try to be a vegan before giving up! Fortunately, my taste in food changed, but what cemented me as a dedicated vegan was when I forced myself to watch some factory farm videos. Again, I was shocked! I had no idea what has been hidden behind barn doors. ~ When faced with a decision between atheism and veganism, one takes precedence. Atheism is my reality; veganism is my passion. ~ Veganism puts morals into action and directly helps the innocent. If I have only \$20.00 to donate, it goes to a local animal sanctuary. My atheism never disappears, but there are times I need to work within the accepted culture of Christianity. I wrote a very touching church service about animal rights, emailing it to 46 local ministers. We can all work together to help animals regardless of religious affiliation, and that is a sign of true morals; bonding at a level above our differences in order to aid the innocent victims. "Vegan atheist" defines me perfectly: free in thought to help the animals.

I'm a vegan socialist. ~ Greg McFarlane, Director: [Vegan Australia](#)

I have been concerned about social justice issues longer than I have been vegan. Many of these social issues involve oppressions based on race, gender, class, ability or sexual identity. ~ One of the bases of these oppressions is capitalism, where corporations compete to make the most profit by taking the surplus product from workers. I came to realise that the quest for profit explained a lot of the ills I saw around me, that having the desire for profit as the main driver of world affairs led to poverty, hunger, environmental destruction and many other problems. ~ We need to find a better way to organise what is produced and how it is produced, to replace large undemocratic corporations with organisations controlled directly by those who worked in them. Rather than the means of production owned by a small minority, it would be in the hands of society in general, making decisions for the benefit of all rather than the few. This is socialism. ~ Like many others I had been brainwashed into thinking that using animals was normal and that the suffering of animals used as resources was justified. But when I discovered that I could live healthily without using animals, I became vegetarian and then vegan. ~ These became the two motivating forces in my life: socialism, to liberate humans, and veganism, to end animal exploitation. For years they remained separate. Most progressive people laughed at including animals in our circle of compassion and most vegans had little interest in "politics". ~ Recently these two areas have started to merge. People recognise that socialism and animal rights are both based on caring. Vegans are beginning to see that veganism is not just a personal choice but a political statement. Anti-capitalists recognise that all oppressions are linked: a movement for liberation must include the liberation of animals. ~ As an indication of these changes, I recently stood for the NSW state election for Socialist Alliance, the first time an active abolitionist vegan has been selected for an election. ~ The rights of animals can not be protected under capitalism. Multinational corporations hold more power than many national governments. While the world's riches are owned by a tiny minority, animals will be treated as mere resources to exploit. ~ Capitalism is destroying the earth's ability to support life, both human and non-human. Society has reached a stage of development where we can feed and clothe people without causing suffering to animals. I believe that the path to a more open and fair society is through socialism and veganism. Put animals, people and the planet before profits!

I'm a vegan pioneer. ~ Megan E. Gallagher, Esq., Sacramento, CA.

Children are born with compassion, but are often taught to disregard animal suffering by their parents, educators and peers. My mother tells a story where she took 3-year-old me to a neighbor's house to see some very skittish feral kittens who had been born in their garage. Within minutes, I was on the floor with kittens in my lap. My parents always said I had "a way" with animals. A few years later, when I was served lamb for dinner, 8-year-old me found eating a baby sheep shocking and unacceptable. I went vegetarian on the spot. It lasted only a year due to familial and other pressures, basically the lack of adequate support. I found my way back to vegetarianism at 13; and became the first vegan I knew at 17. I had no idea that such cruelty was involved in eggs and dairy, until I saw a picture of battery hens in a magazine. I went vegan the moment I read of these atrocities. Once I knew, I had no other choice. Back then, many people pronounced it "vedge-ann," and often asked me if I ate fish. There were few vegan resources or networking groups, and many

people thought my being vegan was very peculiar. ~ I have been vegan for 23 years and have explained veganism to hundreds of people in different countries over the last two decades. At 17, I moved to Ireland to attend college, where I studied philosophy. I stayed in Ireland to work on a Master of Arts in philosophy by research thesis on animal rights, environmentalism and ontology. My own department was skeptical about the validity of my philosophical endeavor, but one professor, with a chuckle, said he would allow it, although he was doubtful such research could earn a Master's degree. Quite fortunately for me, my department sent my thesis to England, for an expert to evaluate. That expert, a professor of philosophy at Liverpool, a pioneer in animal rights academia, validated my findings with an award of first class honors. I have since moved home to California, attended law school, married, had children, and thus have navigated pediatricians' offices, schools, other organizations, and the legal world, with the goal of raising awareness and integrating veganism into the main stream. I am hardly a pioneer anymore; I am in the good company of increasingly numerous vegans.

I'm a vegan anarchist. ~ Tessa Koekemoer, Cape Town, South Africa

I hold the state responsible for the mass murder of animals that occurs every second, every minute, every hour of every day. I believe governments enforce hierarchical societies that exploit the voiceless in order to supplement the mouths and pockets of the rich. As humans, we often forget that we are also, first and foremost, animals. From a very young age we are taught that humans are the top of the food chain, that all other animals are beneath us. From this ideology stems the belief that humans are entitled to abuse 'lesser' beings. Consequently, biology teachers tell little children that fish don't feel pain, that cows are supposed to be eaten and that countries that eat dogs are barbaric. I was one of those children. Yet now, if I speak up for animals, if I tell people that to purchase animal products is to support cruelty and abuse, I am treated as if I eat dogs for dinner. I blame governments for indoctrinating their citizens, for making them complicit simply because of the economic ramifications of preventing a cruelty for profit organisation. ~ If governments created laws that criminalised factory farming, eventually the socially accepted systematic torture and subsequent killing of innocent animals would cease. Animal abuse could be stopped as easily as signing a piece of paper. But not only does the system remain in place, governments also actively turn a blind eye toward gross violations of both animal and human rights within factory farms. Why? Because it benefits them. A small number of meat companies monopolise the industry, which generates huge profits because governments perpetuate the idea that people need to eat meat. These companies, in turn, pay large taxes, which fund governments. In some countries, like the US, the meat and dairy industries are even subsidised by the government, encouraging animal abuse in order to keep meat prices low and profits high, while consumers remain oblivious to the reasons their products are so cheap. This cycle is beneficial for everyone involved, except, of course, for the animals. ~ We need to disassemble the state in order to reassemble equality, for both humans and animals. No person, organisation or government should benefit from the exploitation of sentient creatures. I am a vegan anarchist because the system is harmful to its people and animals, and needs to be abolished.

I'm a vegan punk. ~ Mariana Cerovecki, Croatia; Founder of the Organisation Stop

Speciesism (in Croatian "Stop specizmu")

I am a vegan because I believe in equality and freedom. I am a punk because I believe in musical freedom and I don't want any compromise. And I won't apologize. I'll shout until you realize... the problems you try to disguise as "tradition", "taste" or "habit". It's time to admit we're the ones to blame and instead of apathy we should feel shame. Just like veganism, punk is not a trend, it's a way of life. It's loud and raw and honest and full of emotion. And in every song I can find something to relate to this exploitation in which I won't participate. And in every distortion I can feel an emotion, and I think of their screams, and tears and even silence. And I think of ways to end all that violence. ~ And I'm so sick of all this human aggression. That's why I need the musical aggression. ~ I want emotions behind the drums, bass and guitars; not the violence to animals put behind bars. ~ People say punk is disturbing. Well let me tell you what I find disturbing; it's the hunting, fishing, torturing, murdering - and that's why I'm worrying...every single day, I think about them suffering and I'm wondering, when will it end? I live punk like I live veganism, every moment filled with public skepticism, the same public filled with depression because they constantly live under oppression. And if you live under oppression, you'll oppress others too, but why should non-humans suffer because of you? ~ When you tell me you need the dairy, eggs and meat, Inside my head I get this loud beat. I can't and I won't be discrete. You'll hear my voice or else I'll feel incomplete. ~ Because I need to be their voice, and I'll speak for them at any rate, because they never had a choice, to be alive or served on someone's plate. ~ And if you ask me what's punk I'll say; It's being able to break away - from what society pushes you to think or even feel. It's living a free life, to others somehow surreal. ~ Thinking for yourself, but caring for others; human or non-human, we are all sisters, brothers. ~ I'm a vegan punk because I use the musical aggression - to smash the system full of oppression. ~ Let's use all this frustration. We're done with procrastination. It starts with self-determination, and develops into demonstration, activation and finally, animal liberation.

I'm a vegan atheist. ~ Robson Fernando de Souza - Recife, Brazil

As a vegan atheist, I believe there are strong ethical bonds between what I call "ideological atheism" (the merge of atheism, secular humanism, love for science and skepticism) and vegan abolitionism. This belief gives me the conviction of the fact that an atheist who declares himself/herself a secular humanist, skeptic and friend of science but defends the consumption of meat and other animal products is completely incoherent. ~ My atheism implies that, since I neither have any religion nor worship any deity, I do not subject myself to any "absolute" morals that consider more what is said by the god(s), through either revelation or tradition, than by human ethics. Therefore, no supposedly strict and unchangeable morals can demand me to believe that it is OK to exploit and consume animals. ~ Secular humanist is a very important starting point to my comprehension and adherence to Animal Rights defense. From it, derive the ethical principles that historically have been serving to humanity - the same principles that one can excellently expand to nonhuman animals. A speciesist person violates several principles of secular humanism, when neglecting moral consideration for beings as much sentient and interested for their own lives and physical integrity as humans. ~ Zeal to science, by its turn, embraces veganism when the

person keeps informed about the latest news from Zoology, nutrition and environmental studies. One does not ignore the increasingly abundant evidences on sentience of more and more animals, the nutritional safety of vegan diets and the latest discoveries about the environmental impacts of activities based on animal exploitation - mainly livestock and fishing. ~ Moreover, skepticism is a strong ally of veganism and Animal Rights. True skeptics can successfully refute myths from speciesism and carnism (ideology that defends consumption of animal products) and detect fallacies on every argument that treats nonhuman animals and vegans with prejudice. An individual who believes in speciesist and carnist arguments is never a really skeptic person. ~ When I take into account all these positive associations between "ideological" atheism and veganism, I perceive that being a vegan atheist is to be an atheist coherent with my ethical-philosophic principles and religious disbeliefs. Therefore, I can say veganism and a humanist and skeptic atheism are BFF - best friends forever.

I'm a vegan animal-rights-advocate. ~ David Cantor; Executive Director, Responsible Policies for Animals

I became a full-time animal advocate and a vegan in 1989. Hired at "the largest animal rights organization" I was told (1) purchasing nothing made from or tested on nonhuman animals (being vegan) helps nonhuman animals, and (2) helping animals would somehow lead to rights of nonhuman animals. Dedicating myself to animal advocacy ever since, and seeing all steadily worsen for human beings and all of Earth's other animals, I came to see that veganism, though a form of conscientious objection I will always practice, does not affect civilization's predominant animal-abuse policy. So the organization I run, Responsible Policies for Animals, promotes an all-animals-are-equal paradigm to establish the equal rights all animals need to lead a fulfilling life. ~ Many vegans know that the non-communicable diseases that kill and incapacitate most human beings are linked to eating from animals. Few realize that almost every infectious disease we can name - influenza, AIDS, Ebola virus, bubonic plague, and countless others (even the common cold) comes to humans from the totality of our species' direct contact with other animals, which is all unnatural, all a product of our species' wild imagination - and all abuse. Nor do many humans realize that prehistoric humans' authorization to injure, kill, and enslave ("breed") nonhuman animals is a major factor in war and genocide as practiced for thousands of years. In fact, this quarter-century of advocacy and study have taught me that animal abuse in its full scope - all contact with nonhuman animals, all destruction and contamination of their natural homes, "the whole nine yards" - is a root cause of nearly all human misery, even mental illness, the disintegration of families, and other seemingly unrelated problems. ~ So animal rights would be the best policy - not just a matter of "caring." In fact, rights are needed due to natural limitations on caring. Promoting the equal rights all animals need to lead a fulfilling life ("animal rights") seems impossible; Animal abuse is integral to all human economies and lifeways today. But promoting the concepts linked to equal rights of all animals - all animals' personhood, all animals' innate equality, and humans' biological nature as naked, weaponless, peaceable animals living naturally only on the African savanna foraging for plants to eat and avoiding predation - leads people to veganism more effectively than promoting veganism can help animals or persuade people to change their diets..

I'm a vegan multiverse. ~ Korina Knudson, Vashon Island, WA. USA

My vegan body is an orchestra, conducted by a disciplined maestro whose heart and soul demands only the best performance of my mitochondria. Each cell, a sovereign multi universal instrument, playing in concert with each other the music of highly complex bio acoustics. ~ My vegan body as an organelle effortlessly, lovingly, constantly co-creating positively structured vibrations, self-sustains its morphogenetic energy field functioning much like an umbilical cord, allowing my vegan body to adapt and interconnect both my micro and macro rhythms to the universal dance of all life forms. ~ My vegan body is a meticulously well-tuned truly miraculous ecosystem. There is as much eco diversity in my vegan belly button as any rainforest. Nerve endings like roots of trees reaching out communicating new information throughout my central nervous system in synchronicity, symbiosis, and morphogenesis. ~ My vegan body is deeply at peace. This peace that my body radiates, extends to all of nature. My breath as I inhale and exhale is both sending and receiving peace and this activity is part of a much larger integrative sequential biological action of the multi-universe peace process. ~ My vegan body is wise. Understanding my complex emotional inner workings like a beautiful timepiece, how the positive changes in my moods affect my energy, thoughts, words, word choices, actions and perception of my outer world. My vegan skin's neuro-endocrine system dances to the algorithms of drumming stardust. ~ My vegan body is soft. My skin is sensitive now, but so are all my senses and I'm good with that. It's not just that my skin is softer; my facial expressions are softer because I have become softer. ~ My vegan body is painless. For me it is anti-inflammatory therapy. Week by week my posture improves and I wake a little earlier in the day and find myself more productive. My body is able to retain its full range of motion and they say that keeps the body young. ~ My vegan body is love. My vegan body is my embodiment of love and compassion, for myself and all of nature. An epitome of impeccable symbiotic self-care for the earth and myself as I live my belief that my health is my forgiveness. ~ My vegan body is healthy. As I dance my earth walk, my vegan body thrives well nourished mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually in tune with local and global homeostasis humming in harmony and perfect pitch.

I'm a vegan student. ~ Danielle Gonzalez, Austin, USA

I attend a university, though my lessons come from all aspects of my surroundings, not just the classroom. My teachers come in a variety of species, each with wisdom to impart on my permeable brain. The beginning of my learning journey began with professors; they provided me with an array of literature and facts, historical or fictional, impactful or otherwise. With such an expansive amount of information tossed my direction, I began to develop a system for what I allowed to remain and flourish in my mind. I used my empathy. Though it made me a bonafide failure at mathematics and certain sciences, using empathy to decide what holds importance and worth led me to becoming vegan. This method originated when a professor provided me with literature pertaining to the sympathetic imagination. My heart told me this was worth remembering, while others' "rational brain" told them it was idealistic nonsense. And just like that, using my empathy led me down a path of eye opening understanding. Learning to place myself in the being of another was both painful and enlightening. I was taught to understand and truly feel what the other was experiencing.

Unfortunately, this meant the agonizing pain and suffering numerous species endure, all at the hand of humans' greed. And thus, this lesson led to a new one; I came to acknowledge all forms of life and give them equal importance, rather than putting the human species above the rest. As my intellectual journey continued, I found myself gaining insight in the most unexpected of places; from the birds that traveled above me, the ants that crawled below me, my loving dogs that lay beside me. They became my new teachers, showing me the power of endurance, strength and the ability to truly love another. I continue to learn from them lessons that no human can convey into words.

I'm a vegan sixteen-year-old. ~ Tikara Nothnagel, Pretoria, South Africa

"We all live in a yellow submarine, yellow submarine, yellow submarine," excuse me, this is my alarm, I shall be early out of bed without any doubt." Time for breakfast," my mother exclaims. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Therefore, I start with a fruit salad and then a healthy sandwich with vegan cheese. Normal breakfasts include bacon, eggs and yoghurt. I do not kill or hurt an animal for my food, I am not a tomb. I am vegan. ~ Where are my wool-free fluffy socks; oh yes there they are. Can you believe, I am the only child in my whole school without leather shoes. I am gobsmacked by that, are the students not aware that leather is cruel? I do not want to carry the poor innocent cow's skin with me everywhere. I love and respect animals therefore I do not kill them. ~ I squeeze the last bit of my vegan toothpaste out of the container. Vegan toothpaste is extremely difficult to find in South Africa - still this does not stop me from using it. Innocent animals are used to experiment whether the toothpaste is safe to use or not. Toothpaste and other products are smeared on them - often the product is harmful and burns or even kills the poor animal. ~ It is time to greet my lovely pets - six rescue cats and five rescue dogs. I know that they will be joyful when I return this afternoon. How do people hurt animals when they are so loving and loyal? Still people will ask me why I am a vegan; is it not a straightforward, obvious choice? Just think how many animals would be hurt or killed for just one person in a morning if they are not a vegan. ~ Therefore, I am proudly vegan.

I'm a vegan pagan. ~ Monica Lucas, Boulder Creek, CA.

I found my true soul when I became a vegan. Up to that point I had been practicing my spiritual path, but I was still living in a state of cognitive dissonance. How can one truly be connected to all life, while taking life on a daily basis? While consuming the products of suffering, and at the same time proclaiming an affinity with all of Nature? I found that it's impossible, and my magick was weak because of it. ~ But now, having shed the chains of indoctrinated consumption, I feel a light shining, deep inside me, in the knowledge that I can walk through the forest, and gaze at the river, and know that I harm no living being, directly or by osmosis, and thus, I have taken my destined place within the circle of life. What an epiphany it is, to be able to practice this wise and ancient path, and really see the wildlife around me as my sisters and brothers! When I see a raven now, I always say, "Hello, Brother!" When the skunks scamper away as I open my door to the morning light, I know they won't spray me - I'm tied to them, body and soul. And I know in my heart that I am truly one with the natural world, an herbivore that can tread peacefully and without regret. ~ I can project myself into the body of a squirrel, or a hawk, or a fish, and travel to places

with vantage points that no other human being can...unless they walk this gentle and complete way of life. Being a vegan pagan is the ultimate - it covers all of man's concepts of love, compassion, justice, honor, integrity, environmental healing, and animal guardianship. There are no toxic things in the world of a vegan pagan. Not unless we look outward, to the rest of humanity's activities. There be dragons. My rituals include visualizing a blanket of awareness over the entire planet, in hopes that people will awaken and begin to gather together in healing communities where inflicting suffering is a distant memory. ~ And now, when I call the four quarters, the Elements, the God and the Goddess, and invite Spirit into my circle, I feel the flow of energy so intensely, so divine, and I am at once aware that all mankind would follow me...if they could only see with my eyes.

I'm a vegan Buddhist. ~ Dunia Arcos, Barcelona, Spain

A sixteen-year-old girl is seeking for answers. "What is the meaning of life? Why was I born into this world?..." Despite her young age, she cannot consider life as a mere entertainment. She finds a path. It seems long but bright. She is promised to find answers, thus hopefully enters the path. She meets a mentor in life. She listens to the mentor carefully, thus finds some transcendental answers; a certain peace of mind. The mentor teaches her with great respect and concern: the law of cause and effect, the eternity of life, the dignity of life...- All living beings are intrinsically Buddhas. They all have the highest life state within. ~ All beings? Animals as well? ~~ Definitely! ~~ Then, why do we eat them? Why do we wear their skin? Why don't we respect them? They have rights, haven't they? They are Buddhas. You said. ~ She finds no answer. She continues listening. There may be some outstanding teaching the mentor has not revealed yet. She might not be ready to understand the unrevealed teaching. ~ I have taught everything to you. There is no hidden teaching. Everything has been already revealed. You must continue walking your inner path. Read the scriptures wholeheartedly. You will find the answers there. Trust me once again. ~ She reads the scriptures with profound seeking spirit. Finally, she finds an answer. Could it be the one she has been looking for? ~ "When Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world, he made compassion for living beings his basis. And as an expression of compassion for life, to refrain from taking life and to provide sustenance for living beings are the most important precepts." ~ It seems to be the end of the path. She meets a gathering of people there. They have been walking different paths but they have converged on that point. They speak these words she has been willing to hear for so long: animals have rights. They are sentient beings. They morally and ethically matter. They are not here for us to use and eat them. They are someone, not something. ~ She is no longer a teenager. Nevertheless, her sixteen-year-old heart fills up with profound joy. She has finally found the answer she has been dearly looking for. The answer is "veganism." ~ Although, it is not the end of the path. It is just the beginning. She joins her new companions and they walk on the path together.

I'm vegan social worker. ~ Sam Keaton, United Kingdom

Each day I work with people, each person living their lives in their own individual way. As a Social Worker, I am to accept others beliefs, morals and values, supporting and empowering them to make their own decisions. Yet I find the laws I am to work with, always stands out to me. The Mental Capacity Act principle 3, humans have the right to make: "unwise

decisions". But who defines unwise? By law, killing another human would be an "unwise decision" that we are allowed to prevent and punish with prison, but killing an animal, this is lawful. Some people are paid to do it. I feel it is unwise to breed and murder cows for their skin, there are so many more than suitable alternatives, and yet people still buy this. I feel it is unwise to breed and murder animals for their "meat" - bone, muscle, fat, flesh, there are so many alternatives, and vegetables are far better for you than any dead animal. Most do not think this unwise. ~ Pain, abuse, torture, suffering, no human should endure this in the United Kingdom, The Human Rights Act makes this very clear, but The HUMAN Rights Act, doesn't apply to any other living beings sharing this planet. Who cares if they feel pain? ~ Article 2 "freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment"...It is okay for geese to be force-fed for foie gras for they are not human. It is okay for chickens to walk in their own faeces and urine so much their feet burn and they cannot move, for they are not human. ~ Article 7, "Respect for your private and family life, home and correspondence". It's okay for baby cows, moments old to be torn from their mothers, because we want the milk, the milk she has produced to feed her baby sold for profit. ~ The most important one however, Article 1 - "Right to Life". Pain strikes my heart when I think of this... we have a right to live... Animals do not. So when I am offered milk for my drink... a seat on a leather couch... a biscuit...People think I am odd for being uncomfortable...But don't you think maybe they are for not?

I'm a vegan artist. ~ Karrel Christopher, Artist and Photographer

As a child I remember adults telling me that I was "artistic" and an "animal lover". These labels became a part of my identity (though I did not really comprehend what they meant until many years later). I felt content and joyous in the presence of nature and animals. And expressing those feelings through creative activities seemed so natural. Didn't everyone feel and act that way? Soon I realized that people played many different roles. The more I observed of the world, the more I started to find comfort in my labels. ~ Creating ART can be both tedious and exhilarating. Inspiration may sometimes become distracted and overshadowed in trying to achieve good technique, pleasing people and the challenges of making a living. Ultimately, I desired for my artwork to have some special meaning and purpose...not to just be decoration. ~ For years I had admired animals - was vegetarian for 30 years, worked with a veterinarian and animal communicator, was a caretaker, photographed and painted them. But my experiences had been limited to the usual companion animals and zoo exhibits. In 2010, my life was jolted by unsettling events and relocation but with it came some wonderful gifts. In my new situation, I have had the privilege of getting to know "farm animals". With them, I feel so completely at home, so peaceful and more inspired than ever. My curiosity and awareness grew - urging me to face and consider their experiences...and to change my choices and habits. In 2012, I became "vegan" and embraced the role of sharing my art, photography and graphic art skills to advocate for all sentient beings. With my new label, I had finally graduated into genuinely embodying the true meaning of "animal lover". ~ This was the turning point in my creative path. My art seemed to quickly evolve as I more deeply connected with my inspiration. Creations were not only about how animals looked - but how they felt and what they had to say. Being a "vegan artist" is more than choosing cruelty-free supplies, eating plants and painting animals. For me, it is about expressing the love I feel for life. It's about honoring

and celebrating my relationships with my Earth Family. It's about making art that communicates on a heart level - hopefully inspiring others to see, know and consider animals in new loving ways - building new traditions based on respect, kindness and compassion.

I'm a vegan writer. ~ Daria Zeoli, New Jersey

I'm a writer. I write because I must. I've done so since I was a child; thirty years of putting words to paper (real or virtual), of extracting thoughts from the nooks and crannies of my brain, of short stories, bad poetry, a first draft of a novel, and record reviews, of essays and blog posts, of think-pieces and simple sentences. ~ I'm a vegan. I'm vegan because I must be. I've been on this path since the end of my twenties, when something finally clicked and I realized my goal of doing the least harm possible logically meant ceasing the exploitation and use of animals. I've been vegan for almost six years of consuming countless books, documentaries, podcasts and blogs, of visiting farm sanctuaries and vegfests, of eating vegan meals at home and in my travels. ~ I'm a vegan writer. Most of the writing I do these days is informed by my veganism. My editorials for the award-winning website, *Your Daily Vegan*, allow me to wield my vegan voice in a way that I simply cannot do out loud. Public speaking terrifies me, but furious typing ignites me. I thought I would be a journalist when I went to college almost twenty years ago. I took a different path, but I am in some way, in fact, a part of the press. I am the part of the press who wants to end animal exploitation. ~ Writing gives me confidence, and ethical veganism is something that I am confident I was meant to ascribe to. These two facets of who I am come together in a way I'd never have expected; they complement each other. I could no more picture myself as a non-vegan than I could picture myself putting down my pen. ~ It's a privilege to be able to speak for the voiceless billions of animals we raise, eat, test on, skin, cage, and force to perform. I only wish I had made the connection sooner. I only hope that my voice will reach far and wide. ~ I am grateful for other vegan writers, speakers, and activists. Raise your voice. Someone needs to hear it. Tell your story. Someone will relate to it. Pose your question. We're in this together, and we will find an answer.

I'm a vegan abolitionist. ~ Tara Maher, United Kingdom

I have been vegan for 10 years and (and vegetarian for 7 years prior to that). I became vegan for the animals as I believe that all animals have a right to live their lives free from fear and intimidation; they are not ours to use. As a vegan I do not consume any animal products or secretions, nor wear or use any animal products such as leather, silk or wool. I do not use any products containing animal ingredients or have been tested on animals. In addition I avoid using any products associated with any animal-testing company. I do not engage in any activities that exploit animals. I live this vegan lifestyle and adhere to these rules as much as humanly possible; I do not find it difficult to live like this as these are my values and beliefs; I feel better knowing that I do not actively contribute to animal suffering. ~ I'm an abolitionist as my ultimate aim and desire is to end the incarceration of all non-human beings. I would like to end all farming of animals; I do not believe in free-range farming, animals want to be free from incarceration they do not want bigger cages or more space only to be killed for human pleasure. Females do not deserve to be forcibly impregnated in order to produce young and have them stolen from them so humans can drink

their milk, or for their young to be brought up in the same horrific conditions of their parents. They do not deserve to have chemicals injected into their bodies, put on their skins or in their eyes to try to cure human disease. Animals are not ours to use for pleasure, entertainment or for the vile act of hunting. ~ I do not understand the disconnect people have with non-human animals; this is a foreign concept to me. Decisions I make in my everyday life are made thinking if that decision would impact negatively on any sentient being. This is the way I live my life now, I do not find it inconvenient or difficult and it is part of my normal everyday living. ~ I am a passionate person who will keep fighting for the rights of all animals, I am their voice and for that reason I will not give up.

I'm a vegan anarchist. ~ Abhijit Muduganti, Irvine, CA., USA

I believe that no sentient being is more important than another. All sentient life matters the same. Therefore, to arbitrarily give some of them power over others is illogical and unfair. Power simply cannot exist without control, and controlling someone necessarily means restricting their freedom. Restriction of freedom is exploitation. Whether it is governments over people, men over women, capitalists over the working class, or human beings over other animals, social, political and economic hierarchies exist all around us, and serve no valid purpose other than to keep themselves intact while serving the oppressors. ~ The state, capitalism and religion are harmful not just to humans, but to non-humans too. They help keep the property status of animals intact while propagating an anthropocentric view of the world. The State and capitalism have a long history of putting profit over lives and of causing unimaginable suffering to serve the interests of a select few. Religion, on the other hand, propagates the idea that the entire universe exists only to serve Man. We can never hope to put an end to the systematic oppression of humans, non-humans and the environment without getting rid of such establishments. ~ Veganarchism aims to unite the struggles for human, Earth and animal liberation by challenging the very root of oppression itself. Veganarchists believe that all oppressive dynamics are interconnected including classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, patriarchy, ageism, ableism, speciesism, economic oppression and environmental destruction. All oppression is connected and the battle against it should be a united one. It is one struggle, one fight. ~ As a veganarchist, I support direct action, both violent and non-violent, as a means to achieve total liberation. I believe that direct action is absolutely essential for a social justice movement to succeed since it sends a clear message to the community and so in a way that it cannot be ignored. Whether it is political violence, economic sabotage, sit-ins, occupation or disruption, those who engage in direct action have the most impact in shifting the consciousness of an apathetic community.

I'm a vegan peacenik. ~ Butterflies Katz, U.S. citizen, New Zealand resident

The word that most correlates with my vegan ideology is nonviolence. I first read about veganism from the American Vegan Society's magazine (then) entitled "Ahimsa" (a Sanskrit word basically meaning nonviolence). It struck a chord with me; obviously, because I became vegan right then, unwavering and long term. ~ I had been beat up twice, at age 14 and 21 (the age I became vegan) which ingrained in me a position of non-participation in violating basic rights of animals or humans. I was born into a Jewish family who instilled Holocaust education. The one thing I retain from my heritage is a sense of empathy. If I lived 80

years ago where my ancestors lived, I would have been murdered for what ethnicity I was born. That has left me deeply feeling humanity's injustice. Feeling this racism has enabled me to empathize with other sentient animals who are similarly oppressed. I internalized 'empathy' and applied it to all others who are persecuted. ~ I'm too young to be a hippie, but I respect their nonconformity. I changed my name from Jewish (Marcia Katz) to newish (Butterflies). It's more fitting a peacenik; into flower power and creating ecosystems where butterflies flourish. If I lived in a country where serving in the military was mandatory, I would flee the country. I would not kill anyone else because someone told me to. ~ In a world where killers are celebrated heroes, where movies have normalized the act of killing, I will try never to end anyone's life. I don't defend the death penalty. What makes more sense to a peacenik, would be to instead put those who are a threat to society in prison (and to make room for them, rid the prisons of (nonviolent) marijuana "crimes"). Feed convicted murderers a plant diet to improve their temperament and better aid their reform. I'm not an "eye for an eye" supporter; as Gandhi said, that makes the whole world blind. ~ I don't believe in hitting animals or children to train them. Since youth, I have aspired to live without intentionally harming others and have been successful for nearly 4 decades. My life's stand is nonviolence.

I'm a vegan futurist. ~ Mark Turner, Chicago, Illinois

When history is written, it will chronicle that the unsustainable meat industry collapsed in the first half or the 21st century. It began with a 100% beef recall in August 2016 following a viral outbreak linked to factory farmed beef, caused more than 600,000 deaths worldwide. ~ "The Beef Plague" forced nations to adopt the "Meat Laws". These severely reduced herd size and imposed stricter sanitary conditions. Unable to comply, many farms went out of business. ~ Riding a new wave of support, a new U.S. political party, the Earth Party, formed in 2018. Their platform was simply that people can be best served by protecting animals and the environment. In 2020, the first seven Earthers were elected to U.S. Congress. The UK's Green Party was revived. Earthers successfully sponsored several bills aimed at animal rights, but most ran into enormous opposition. In late 2022, the largest of these bills seemed doomed. However, in December 2022, 30,000 Americans died from a bird flu linked to Thanksgiving turkeys; The Turkey Blight. Congress was forced into emergency session. ~ Comprehensive animal rights legislation became U.S. law on January 1, 2023. Other nations followed suit later that year. The centerpiece of this legislation was the Animals Bill of Rights. ~ Animal abuse laws now covered all mammals and birds. Zoos, rodeos and circuses were forced out of business, unable to comply with new 'living conditions equal to natural habitat' requirements. Sale of leather and fur-illegal. Laboratory testing-phased out. Mother and baby of any species could no longer be separated, ending meat/dairy/egg production. Government subsidies shifted from animal to plant-farming. States were required to set aside 2% of public land as free-range sanctuaries. ~ Monsanto bankrupt-2025. ~ McDonald's survived introducing the McVegan burger and Veggie McNuggets-2026. ~ Perdue and Smithfield converted operations to plant-based-2030. ~ Hunting illegal-2028. Fishing illegal-2031. ~ Home-gardening gripped the world. Garden Day becomes a worldwide holiday-2031. ~ Falling healthcare costs and rising productivity erased budget deficits. ~ U.S. obesity plunged from 40% to 8% in 2035. Vegans increased from 2% to 60%. ~ Nutritionists and fitness specialists replaced most doctors and surgeons. ~ Green

Party UK PM-2031. Green Earth Canadian PM -2035. Earther US President-2040. ~ World hunger eradicated-2045. Research shifted to medical and alternative energy. AIDS, cancer and most major illnesses cured-2055. ~ Green energy replaced fossil fuel-2060. ~ With growing compassion for animals and all life, and virtually free and unlimited energy, world-peace was declared on January 1, 2062.

I'm a vegan writer. ~ Lynley Tulloch, Faculty; The University of Waikato, New Zealand

I write as I feel the animal, the not-me, the you. You. Hen. Sitting there in your cage, I sense you in my veins, I see your bars from the inside, I hear your heart beat slowly, like it might stop any moment in the timeless air. I write to tell your story of prison to a dead audience. It's an endless circular prison. You try to stretch; as I write I can feel your limbs seeking, hen. But there is barely room to turn around. Your feet shift on sloping steel bars, grimly searching for Earth they will never feel. Your heart yearns for something, but you don't know what. So you stretch uncomfortably lifting wings that will never fly, shredding useless feathers against unforgiving bars, laying eggs. The prison becomes your mind; your mind becomes a prison. I am writing your prison. Putting your head through the bars you tilt your head to one side. An ancient song echoes on the edges of existence, I can hear it too, hen, it calls from my words. Rustling leaves, tinkling sunlight, gurgling water. Just out of your mind. Out of existence and out of your mind. A long night arrives, your feathers fall like leaves, your skin bleeds in tiny streams, your eyes turn dull like a dank pond. You stop laying eggs, hen. A death sentence. The song dims. Crouching and huddled. Then someone lifts you. I wrote them in to your story, hen, I am sorry. Desperately you claw at the cage. The ancient song has now stopped completely, you cannot hear it, and you do not know it anymore. You are yanked from one prison and into another. Briefly, you glimpse the sun; feel the air as you are loaded on a truck. The song begins again, I hear it too, hen. A slight hope is reborn. Your wing hurts; I feel it hen, I can, it is broken. I broke your wing with my words. Then you are hanging upside down, shackled. The knife slices your throat and blood now runs in a stream of pain, coats my written words. You flap your broken wing. The song of death is sweet, I can taste it hen, its melody is the dripping of the blood, forming rivulets, free at last. But the audience don't hear it, hen. They are dead too.

I'm a vegan mother. ~ Dorota Nocun, Liverpool, U.K.

Early morning, the day after I gave birth, still in the haze of pain and a bit delirious due to the lack of sleep, I finally took a quiet moment to look into my babies eyes. I admired his tiny, perfect face and the overwhelming feeling of love almost knocked me off my feet. He was so helpless, so lost in the big world around him. I tried my best to reassure him, that I was there for him, and I would be always. That he was safe and loved. ~ I changed that morning. With my partner asleep, my son in the wrap on my chest, I treasured every peaceful second of my new life. ~ Mother's love for her child is indescribable. It's powerful. The thought of my son being unwell or of being taken away from me is terrifying. I wouldn't be able to live without him. ~ Mother's love is indescribable. And that is also true for other species. ~ Every day, hundreds of thousands of dairy cows give birth. They love their babies just the way we love ours, completely. They want to nurse them and keep them warm. They

want to show them love and affection. They want to keep them safe. ~ But they can't. ~ Their babies are taken away from them within hours of birth, so humans can drink their breast milk. (Please, give a few minutes to appreciate how insane this is.) ~ ~ If the calf is male, he will be either killed on the spot (often with his mother present), or locked away in a tiny crate where he can barely move. Petrified, he will cry for hours for his mother to come back to him. Eventually, he will be killed, so humans can eat his body. ~ If it's a girl, she will face the same fate as her mother. She will be repeatedly, painfully inseminated (or should we be honest with ourselves - raped) and every time she gives birth, her baby will be taken away from her, so her milk can be stolen. After a few years, when her body gives up, she will be slaughtered. ~ The cruelty involved in the dairy industry is hard to comprehend. How can we do this is beyond me. What we became, what we are doing to this world, is devastating. ~ This is not the world I want my son to live in. ~ I am a vegan mother.

I'm a vegan vet. ~ Andrew Knight, D.V.M., U.K.

Once on a hike in America someone asked me what I did, and I replied "I'm a vet". She asked, in all seriousness, "What war were you in?" For a sun, sea and surf-loving creature from Australia, this was something of a shock. Wars are about as rare for us as rain. This was apparently not so, however, for the Americans. I am a vet; just the much more boring type. I've never fired sub-machine guns from the hip whilst charging enemy positions, nor rocket-propelled grenades at hostile tanks, from the smoking shells of burnt out buildings. I don't fast-rappel from helicopters into hot zones. The closest I get is when I occasionally fall out of bed. ~ And yet my vetting is nevertheless far from dull. I'm in academia now, but until fairly recently I was a small animal vet in London. Whether it was short-snouted purebred dogs collapsing from heat stress, cats hit by cars, caesarean sections on rabbits, hedgehogs attacked by cats, or giving injections to corn snakes, no day was ever the same. Less exciting but far more common were all the routine vaccinations, parasite treatments and neutering operations. Although less glamorous than the emergency cases, these routine preventative healthcare measures undoubtedly saved far more lives and alleviated more suffering than all the more dramatic medical and surgical treatments I ever provided. ~ Similarly, I'm a vegan because I can save more lives and prevent more suffering by simply not supporting the killing of animals for food and fibre, etc., than I ever could simply by being a vet. And when you look at it that way, veganism becomes pretty exciting indeed.

I'm a vegan visionary. ~ Karen Call, Gainesville, TX. USA

Each of my goals are crafted in order to see the dawn of a vegan world. This means, I ask myself: how will my action (or lack thereof) contribute to inspiring others to use the Golden Rule and treat all living beings, including themselves, with kindness as friends? I firmly believe that when people see health, happiness, and success, they want to know what the mindset is of the people living it. Why are vision-holders so important? Holding one's vision with feeling is what one's body preps to accomplish: if you believe that you can or you can't, you're right. So imagine, if you will, with all of one's senses, in full color, the Vegan World Vision. Cages emptied and converted into fruit cages. Free, human and non-human animals bounding in joy. Groups of volunteers working together to lighten burdens. We are motivated by beauty, pleasure, joy, health, creativity, and sustainable solutions to develop

our talents to fullest capacity, in increasing knowledge, in designing ourselves and our piece of heaven as we want it to be, in a way that makes us feel most alive, in loving service relationships and connections with others as our authentic selves. We restore beauty in the world. We reforest the Earth into the peaceful Garden of Eden, full of talent and diversity it was meant to be, where we non-violently communicate and express our love to one another in song. This Earth was meant to be magical, and moments of that magic often flow here when hearts are open, energy and consciousness is elevated. Everyone is meant to have companionship when they need it, and everyone ought to always have access to fresh vegan food and water--in the spirit of teamwork and volunteering, we Build Eden. Imagine how amazing this world could be if everyone were their happiest, healthiest, most peaceful selves. I want to inspire others to want that too, to stop all wars. I want world peace, which only comes from the bold who dare to let their light shine. I am blessed to be on Team Vegan, a Team of visionaries whose passion to see a vegan world pours into my own: we are seeing more and more scientific studies and evidence every day that this world is happening. We will see the dawn of a vegan world. Believe it.

I'm a vegan antinatalist. ~ Aaron, England, U.K.

For most ethical vegans the primary reason to support and practice veganism is to reduce the serious harms that are imposed on nonhuman animals throughout their lives, until they die. ~ In terms of trying to reduce harm, antinatalism shares much in common with veganism. As the term suggests, antinatalism is the negation of natalism - that which supports (human and/or sentient) procreation. Therefore antinatalism can be defined as that which opposes procreation. While there are different reasons why someone may be an antinatalist, compassion for potential future sentient beings is a prevalent and ethically significant one. ~ A thorough and articulate explanation and defense of antinatalism is given by Professor David Benatar in his book, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*, in which he argues: "Although the good things in one's life make it go better than it otherwise would have gone, one could not have been deprived by their absence if one had not existed. Those who never exist cannot be deprived. However, by coming into existence one does suffer quite serious harms that could not have befallen one had one not come into existence." ~ In addition to that, a case can be made that since we are neither able to gain consent from those who we bring into existence or foresee how their life will go and ultimately end, the safer and kinder option would be to not impose that risk upon them. ~ Another matter to consider is the large number of human and nonhuman animals that already exist and are awaiting adoption, whose lives may depend on fewer beings being brought into existence. ~ Being a Vegan AntiNatalist (VegAN) in this sense then is to simply take a hard but honest look at the serious costs involved with bringing into existence sentient beings, whether they be human or nonhuman, and to recognise that the most effective way to prevent unnecessary harm is by refraining from creating beings that can be harmed. ~ "They are called into existence by human artifice that they may drag out a short and miserable existence of slavery and disease, that their bodies may be mutilated, their social feelings outraged. It were much better that a sentient being should never have existed, than that it should have existed only to endure unmitigated misery." - Percy Bysshe-Shelley

I'm a vegan mother. ~ Marty Davey, East Stroudsburg, PA. USA

I am a vegan mother. ~ Seeing the Himalayas taught me awe, marrying my husband taught me true companionship, my son's giggle taught me unabashed joy. ~ When I became a mother I was overwhelmed with the thoughts that I was not good enough to raise my son. My love for him and the need to make the best future possible coursed through my veins like a tsunami. My husband and I would just watch him and bask in the wonder of who had we created? What would be his voice and his life? Hopefully, we would always be a part of helping him build his future. ~ Nursing my son was a physical connection that I will never forget. Not only would we stare into each others eyes, but his look at the end of feeding made me laugh almost every time. If you don't know, the fat in breast milk is highest at the end of the feeding. It is akin to having a heavy dessert at the end of the meal. He would roll his eyes back as if he ate the best chocolate ever and ease into sleep. ~ I am not a helicopter mom, but in hiring a sitter I thought about my son so much of the time. Going back to contract work meant I would have a number of people cover my long days. One time I did not get a phone call that a transfer from caregiver to caregiver went smoothly. My phone kept dropping the calls before connection. I tried not to panic. There was no reason to think anything went wrong, but all I did was worry. ~ Every mother has these feelings of care. Every mother wants this for her child. I became vegan because I could not take away any other mother's child. Taking a child away because someone wants ice cream or bacon breaks my heart. I have heard cows moan for their calves. It is the saddest sound I ever heard. It is not an accident that causes her pain. It is an inflicted pain with no thought of the bond that started from within the womb. ~ Being a vegan means letting all mothers love their children and learn the best sounds - their kids giggling, mooing, chirping and squealing with unabashed joy.

I'm a vegan Catholic. ~ Theresa Göttl Brightman, Akron, Ohio

My faith dictates much of who I am and what I believe. While I recognize that the Catholic Church's mention stirs up much baggage, anger, frustration, and even hate in some people, I love my faith and understand that those who feel that way don't see it as I do. It is a faith of life and love and light. The most central part of being a Catholic—to me—is a respect for life. I also recognize that in 2015, politicians, many people on the street, and even many church leaders interpret a respect for life as one, single, hot-button issue. But respecting life encompasses so much more. It is the protection of all human life, all animal life, all plant life, and ultimately the life of what St. Francis and his contemporary namesake Pope Francis referred to in his most recent encyclical as "Sister Earth". As I worked and continue to work toward understanding and embracing a consistent life ethic, espousing the philosophy behind veganism simply made sense within the context of my faith. ~ Becoming vegan and incorporating that philosophy into my world view has brought about marked differences, and I believe, has made me a better Catholic in turn. Because it was easy to extend compassion to blameless creatures who suffer for the sake of humans, I've worked towards extending that same compassion to people, understanding that such compassion was at the core of Jesus's teaching. ~ I'll say right now, it's hard. It's hard to extend compassion to those who remain deliberately blind to the harm they cause. It's hard to extend compassion to people who have been taught to value money over life, who have been taught—either by themselves

or others—that money is life. It's hard to extend compassion to those who refuse to see how their neighbors, human and non-human alike, suffer for their amenities of comfort. Sometimes it's even hard to extend compassion to my vegan brothers and sisters who show so much love for God's creation while simultaneously speaking words of violence about their fellow humans with whom they disagree. ~ Just as it will always be impossible to be 100% perfectly vegan, it will also always be impossible to be 100% perfectly Christian. But in both, it is the striving that matters, closing the gap between possible and perfect. We are getting closer. Shine your light.

I'm a vegan fruitarian. ~ Tuya Lenga, Onelago, Northern Namibia

I am one of a few vegans in Namibia and it has been a magical journey for me. My journey to vegan fruitarian all started when my second mother died of cancer in 2003. She inspired in me a love for plants and animals because we were always gardening and taking her dogs for long walks in the desert. She used to add greens to their food which was unreal in the community where I came from where dogs got scraps and left overs. I remember when one of them died, she cried and buried him, which was a very profound experience for me. I grew up in a culture where dogs get eaten when they die. I felt the sadness and the loss and the sincere respect towards animals for the individual beings that they are. ~ When she died followed by my grandfather a very short while later I was overwhelmed and I got very very weak at my grandfather's funeral and I only got my strength back on the day of his burial. The doctors couldn't explain it. I had no energy for the whole week before the funeral and the smell of cooking meat and the sound of crying made me feel weaker and I could only stomach fruit. I was convinced and I concluded that their spirits had only left their bodies and would manifest in flesh again so I decided that I didn't want to eat meat again. That was how I became vegetarian. The following year I became a vegan because I had decided after a few months of vegetarianism that veganism was logical but I said to myself that I would become a vegan when I meet a vegan and talk to them about veganism. I met the first vegan in August of 2004 and of course I was inspired. She was a very healthy looking vegan. She showed me the wonders of cooked vegan food. ~ I became vegan fruitarian in August 2005. I don't pick flowers, leaves or roots unless there is a necessity. I believe that humans can thrive on the fruit produce of plants including citrus, berries, nuts, seeds, rices, wheats, all beans and pulses and tubers without having to kill a plant. I believe in letting plants get as old as possible. ~ I have been blessed with ever expanding feelings of compassion, ahimsa and open-mindedness.

I'm a vegan hippie. ~ Norine Jameson, Los Angeles, CA.

The funny thing about that is that I'm not even sure what the definition of a "hippie" is. Back in the 1970's when I lived in the woods in Northern California with my 2 year old daughter, I am pretty sure I fit the bill. I built a house in the woods that if you were being kind you would call a shed. I lived without electricity and barely had running water; but with the little red hand pump I did have water in to the house. I had chickens, some in a coop and some running free and I had ducks and geese and goats. I grew a lot of vegetables and planted some fruit trees and tried to eke out a living off the earth. As I grew and evolved in that setting which included hunting and killing and eating the eggs and chickens, I started

to wake up and realize that I did not really have to be dependent on my fellow animals in order to survive and that maybe it would be a much more peaceable little place if I just grew my own fruits and vegetables and left my fellow creatures alone. I stopped eating all meats and "animal" products and felt just fine. This was before the advent of the Internet and I had no television and very few books, so I barely knew that there were other folks out there in the world doing this thing and calling themselves "Vegan". I was also very unaware of factory farming and dairy industry practices except to know that it existed and was very unpleasant. ~ I feel calm and peaceful living this way and the Internet has made it possible to communicate with my fellow vegans all over the world and I really love that. Reading Professor Gary Francione has been particularly helpful to me. I am an abolitionist hippie now! Being a hippie in the woods in the 70's involved drugs and "free love" and Grateful Dead" music which I still love. I just call myself an old hippie now as I am 70 years old and my life does not involve any drugs or "free love" anymore but the peaceful, loving feeling that I get from not participating in the exploitation, enslavement or use of my fellow creatures more than makes up for it.

I'm a vegan teacher. ~ Ida Koric, Rossland, BC, Canada

I'm a vegan teacher. By this, I don't mean that I teach vegans. Nor do I teach teens to be vegans, but the discussion comes up. I have gotten into arguments with colleagues and parents, who feel that one person's ideals should not be pushed onto classroom students - except that I agreed with them. I would never quell the natural curiosity of my students, and when they ask questions I do not preach answers at them, but pose questions of my own. This seems to upset some people. It upsets people who feel that parents, or the church, are responsible for instilling values. I disagree. I think that individuals are responsible for coming to develop their own values, based on as much evidence as possible, and critical thought about that evidence. I encourage students, always, to look closely at the logic on both sides of a debate, and to even question the reasons behind their own emotional responses to issues. "Miss?" one would say, "Is it true you don't eat meat?" "Yes." "Why not?" another would ask. I used to say "Many reasons - ethics, health, the environment; it's complicated." But it isn't that complicated. Now, my polished response is, "If I can live a healthy life, as long and happy as the next person, without causing suffering or death, doesn't that sound like an easy choice?" Invariably, someone would say, "But bacon tastes good!" and the class would laugh. "Well it comes down to that, doesn't it? How important are our small comforts in light of what they cost? Can you imagine what the world would be like if we made decisions based on how they affected someone other than ourselves?" When teaching science, there is always a unit on atmosphere and greenhouse gasses. Over the years, the books have slowly acquiesced that burning fossil fuels may have something to do with a warming of the planet. The books fail, however, to even hint at the impact that animal agriculture has. This is where I divert from the curriculum to inform the students of this additional burden on our planet. It is not propaganda, it is not some "crazy liberal vegan agenda" - it is merely unquestionable, scientific fact. I'm a vegan teacher, and I encourage my students to embrace evidence for what it is, and not discount it when it is inconvenient. I'm a vegan teacher, and I answer my students honestly and openly when they ask difficult questions. I'm a vegan teacher, and I demand that my students think for themselves always - because I have faith that when people make an effort to find the truth, they become

more responsible, altruistic and compassionate as they discover it.

I'm a vegan gardener. ~ Kate Bowry, New Zealand

I have been a gardener for most of my adult life, and a vegan gardener for over 30 years. I developed a love for a garden early on, as a place of peace as well as produce. My knowledge of the plant kingdom and soil chemistry was established in my university studies in botany, chemistry, and geology. This led to an aim at self-sufficiency, as well as a love of the land, with fresh air and sun to enjoy. A strong bond has always developed between myself and my various gardens, with a love of landscaping and attention to aspect for cultivation of different plants. Recognition of the seasons and the best times for planting and reaping; soil types; composting, and seed-saving, and no-dig techniques, have all been an integral part of understanding plants in their living environment in the garden. Veganic principles of soil care prove to be as efficient at maintaining mineral levels as do conventional animal manuring practices, without the negative risk of bacterial contamination which has so often led to gastro-intestinal disorders from eating unwashed produce. The veganic garden, even a small plot, can be a 'land-of-plenty', and provide a vast selection of seasonal food for the discerning vegan. A wide range of vegetables including roots, stems, leaves, and fruits can be produced all year round (in New Zealand), or with small cloches for protection. Tree crops including macadamias and walnuts provide excellent protein foods for the vegan diet, and soft fruits and stone fruit can be espaliered when space is at a premium. I use only rain-water in my garden, and my plants thrive and provide more than enough food for family, friends, and visitors. I count my blessings as a retired vegan gardener.

I'm a vegan all-around. ~ Dr. Moses Seenarine, L.A., California

I am a plant-based, nonhuman animal abolitionist, activist, advocate, anarchist, artist, blogger, critical-thinker, designer, educator, environmentalist, feminist, filmmaker, male, organizer, pacifist, parent, person of color, philosopher, retailer, scholar, speaker and writer. Even as a child, I wanted to help the world, people, animals and nature. And, being plant-based for over 30 years, I have embraced intersectionality and multiple identities, in part to fully express a deep compassion for other-than-human animals. ~ My interest in nonhuman animals started when I was a child and growing up in the 1960s into a culture of compulsorily animal carcass consumption. I was born in the small capital city of Georgetown, Guyana, in South America. Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America, with close ties to the English-speaking Caribbean, so culturally I am Caribbean. My house was not far from the Atlantic Ocean, but also close to the Amazon rainforest. Each summer, I spent weeks on my paternal grandparents' small farm in the rainforest, and each year, I would gradually lose my fear of the untamed nonhuman animals living in the forest. ~ In the early 1980s, soon after migrating to New York City, I made the connection between biodiversity, ethics and diet, and became an ethical vegan. I started Saxakali, an organization focused on environmental and social issues in South America and the Caribbean, and organized and attended numerous protests since on social and nonhuman animal issues. I spoke at animal rights conferences on race, class and ecofeminism, and conduct vegan outreach each weekend. I made several films on vegan activism, including From Light to Light and Nemesis, am a founding-board member of the Animal Advocacy Museum, in Los

Angeles, and started a company, MyLuv4Earth, to design and sell vegan posters and clothing. ~ I recently wrote two books based on nonhuman animals, *Meat Climate Change: The Second Leading Cause of Global Warming* (meatclimatechange.org) and *Cyborgs Vs the Earth Goddess: Men's Domestication of Women and Animals*. I see my work as serving the Earth, and all of the non-human creatures who are exploited each day by animal-based agribusiness, and the billions of even more lives that will be exploited in the future. I hope that my work and activism will help others from being indoctrinated into compulsory animal product consumption, to decolonize their emotions, and to develop the courage necessary to work on behalf of nonhuman animals and all life on Earth.

I'm a vegan politician. ~ Jessica McCallum-Miller, British Columbia, Canada

Greetings from planet vegan! I'm Jessica, and I'm a vegan politician and advocate for all creatures that walk, swim, and fly! To start, I'd like to tell you a bit about myself; when I was 5, I lived on a farm, we grew strawberries, cherries, tomatoes, potatoes, grapes, the list goes on, but we also raised goats, chickens and pigs. I grew up having animals as my most trustworthy comrades, and companions; my best friend was a 300lb pig named Alpie. He had 3 black spots on his rump and enjoyed being bottle fed as a baby as he was the runt of all his brothers and sisters. Alpie is the main reason I chose to be vegan. When I came home from school one day, I saw him being drained of blood, hanging on a chain in the barn. That moment traumatized my entire being. That moment never leaves me, how could my friend be "food"? Times were tough back then, we ate what we grew/raised, no one told me my friends were actually "food." I realized at that moment, that even the innocent can be taken... My parents were raised the same way, how and why did they repeat the cycle? ~ I've been vegan for 4 years this October, and was a vegetarian for 2 years prior; it wasn't until I realized I could die at any time-- that I decided what was right for myself and all creatures. With the support of friends and family (as well as the usual jokes) and understanding, I became more comfortable expressing my views on animal rights. My parents always supported me in anything I chose whether it be fighting against youth homelessness, protesting Monsanto and animal agriculture, rallying to form a province wide student coalition, or even getting into the arts, they were there for me. They told me, "honey, you could be anything you want when you grow up, even the Prime Minister of Canada!" So I took that notion and kept it in my back pocket until I was old enough to campaign and get into politics. I am 21 and am the youngest, female, Aboriginal politician in Northern B.C. I use my knowledge of the land to support organic food production, eco village housing, and safe practices when constructing near animal habitats, and as an artist, I can support and organize arts engagements and cultural projects in my home town. I write to you, not asking to win anything, but for you to know my story, where it has brought me, and to tell you that I believed, still believe there is a better way for animals and human beings to co-exist. Even though years have passed, Alpie is still with me, smiling, letting me know my path is true. Thank-you for reading.

I'm a vegan teen. ~ Xander Helmer, California, USA (age 13)

I'm a vegan teen, and I realize many of the world's ills can be cured by going vegan. Most people live in denial and ignorance stemming from their upbringing, not getting out of their

heads that their parents told them meat was "good for them." They developed an addiction to animal products and struggle to give them up. I'm fortunate that those who raised me saw things differently and taught me more compassionate living. First my uncle, then my grandparents, and then my mother all saw the light of going vegan. That made it easy for me to go vegan. I too realized that going vegan was good for the animals, good for the world, and good for my body. With the amazing support of my family, I went vegan two years ago. My generation will be the next leaders of the world. Our going vegan means that when we become adults we are more likely to have vegan offspring than nonvegan parents. A new era is beginning to dawn. Adults have become mired in their old and tired traditions making it hard to change. What better way to promote worldwide veganism than us kids! I am sooooo lucky to have a vegan family and to be vegan. I know that the compassionate future of the world starts with me. Water pollution, greenhouse gases, rainforest devastation, animal carnage, aquifer draining are all major world problems caused by raising "food" animals. Veganism solves ALL of these problems and aids in world hunger relief. The solution to these issues starts with me and my choice to go vegan. I'm proud to not be part of the problem and instead be part of the cure! ~ I can now look "livestock" animals in the eyes and tell them that I'm on their side! I'll never hurt them, and if I could just get away with freeing them from their captors I would! It makes me sad when I see "food" animals treated so inhumanely as society allows. Sometimes humans are just sick, cruel, ignorant beings, but us vegan kids are the future. ~ I'm excited for my vegan future. I will live a longer and healthier life because of it. I will save many animals by not eating them. I am truly blessed to be vegan and am proud of my choice to be a vegan teen.

I'm a vegan fashion designer. ~ Kirsten Hughes, Sydney, Australia

I'm not proud of it, but my path to veganism originally began 7+ years ago and was born of sheer vanity. One of the curses of designers is that we can value image above most other things. I'll spend hours agonising over positioning a single bead, just to make sure my design looks perfect. Another characteristic is that we work far too hard and don't look after ourselves, so 7 years ago, when I was working in a marketing role, the drive-through dinners after leaving the office late started to catch up with me. I got a little pudgy, so my solution was to become vegetarian...but only because I wanted to fit my skinny jeans again. There, I said it. I was the vegetarian that every other vegan and vegetarian hated. Admitting to my diet would always be followed with "...but I'm not like...a hippie." Yeah, I was a jerk. ~ Then, later on, I started to learn a few things about the fashion industry. Aside from the well-documented human rights issues, I learnt about the huge environmental impact the textile industry has. It's the second largest polluter on the planet. I was disgusted, I seriously considered walking away. This led me to wonder what the biggest polluting industry on the planet was, and it's animal agriculture. I spent the evening reading about the horrible mistreatment of animals in factory farming environments, antibiotics used in meat production and the fact that vast percentages of our land and water is used to produce meat animal feed while millions of people go hungry every day. I wouldn't call it a light-bulb moment, it was more like a niggling doubt that snowballed and swelled into the realisation that my lifestyle choices had far reaching consequences. I became vegan overnight, and funnily enough, those 6+ years of being a 'vegetarian-for-the-wrong-reasons' made it a really easy process for me, especially seeing as I didn't receive much support from family

and friends. ~ I suppose what I'm trying to say is the path to living a cruelty-free life doesn't always start out the right way, but the planting of any seed can grow into something big, in my case, waking up every day with a clear conscience, and working on my sustainable and cruelty-free fashion label. I refuse to be part of the problem.

I'm a vegan fattie. ~ Emma Henry, Ireland

Vegans come in all shapes and sizes and I'm 100kg and 164cm. I have been questioned by non-vegans as to how come I'm fat because vegans are supposed to be skinny. I have been berated online for being an unhealthy vegan. I have been advised that it would be better to not mention in public that I'm vegan for fear of putting people off. I have been told not to wear sleeveless t-shirts, or shorts or leggings. I have been told I'm not a proper vegan because I enjoy vegan cheese and mock meats. I have been disappointed by many in the vegan community with sizeist attitudes and body shaming words. I have judged and shamed myself for not being a healthy vegan, a slim vegan, a perfect vegan but...veganism is not about the vegan. It is not about me. It is not about those vegans that dislike my body or my processed food choices. It is about animals, specifically non-human animals and I never met a dog who didn't like me because I'm fat. I have met hundreds over the years and I cannot recall a single dog that refused a scratching because my fingers are short and stubby. A dog never withheld a face licking because mine is round with extra chins. A dog never refused a walk because they didn't want to be seen in public with me. The breed of dog doesn't matter, the tail wags just the same, and we see in each other all that matters. ~ A dog doesn't leave me sitting on the bench, she drops a ball at my feet to throw; trusting that I can and will. A dog doesn't care what clothes I'm wearing or that they are plus size just that we're going out. A dog doesn't care what make or model car I drive just that she rides shotgun and the destination is the park or the beach. A dog doesn't care what the nutrition to calorie value of my lunch is just that I'm willing to share. A dog doesn't care if my bum looks big or not, just that there is room for us both on the sofa. Think it is impossible to be the perfect vegan? Think again. Just ask a dog and she'll tell you this fat vegan is.

I'm a vegan artist. ~ Sandra Suárez Ramos, Mexico

When I ask people to think about Art, most describe a specific work, let that be a painting, a sculpture or a piece of design. But what most people fail to comprehend is that Art is a gateway to a world of emotions, an exchange between theirs and the artist's as well as to the history of mankind. It can be beautiful, impressive, shocking or simply a reflection, a way of viewing and understanding our actions through a different perspective. Overall it is made with the intention to move and deliver a message. ~ A piece of Art is made with emotion, with passion to either describe oneself or to create awareness of what and how we see our world. It expresses our dreams and desires of the kind of future we want and are willing to fight for. ~ I began painting at a young age and my works reflected my own personal struggle as a female born into a world and age where even though progress had been made in terms of equality, we were ~and still are in many cultures~ viewed as inferior in regards to our fellow male partners. However, I got to point were I felt that my work was empty, I needed to refocus and redirect the message I was attempting to let out. It was not until I got more involved in veganism from an abolitionist perspective that I understood

that this social problem had deeper roots. We have inflicted so much pain and suffering to other beings in the belief that they are inferior that we have accepted to do so to one another. It was this understanding that helped me regain the motivation I needed in order to work for a greater cause. ~ Art is universal, an image without words or the barriers of language can get through to any person. The message I choose to deliver is for a better world for every single being on this planet. ~ This is why I am a vegan artist.

I'm a vegan individual. ~ Jennifer Nitz, Montana, USA

As a vegan, I recognize that all beings are individuals and have a right to live a full, healthy, free, and natural life. As an individual, I can and do join others to speak up for the rights of all beings to live a life free of confinement, exploitation, suffering, pain and fright. I can and do refuse to purchase anything that contributes to any of the above. I can and do write letters, speak up at hearings, sign petitions, use social media, do volunteer work at animal sanctuaries, and speak to others one on one about the importance of veganism for all. I raise my best friend and companion as a vegan. I have done the research and am educated, and can educate others on raising a happy and healthy dog thriving on a vegan diet, and free of products that use other animals as products, or have tested on others. I volunteer and work in environments that benefit others. Unfortunately, not everyone I work with is vegan, so I take the opportunity to teach others and live as an example of how veganism can improve their lives, the environment, and the lives of others. It also shows we are not missing out on anything, we are gaining peace of mind and a healthier more fulfilled life. ~ I have been actively vegan for over 21 years, and will be the rest of my life! I know in my heart, soul, and mind, it is the right way to live. Seeing the wildlife wild and free, and the animals on sanctuaries living out their lives in peace makes living vegan easy and rewarding. I will never give up on any of them, and will continue outreach in any way I can, because finding the right words, to see others understand and become vegan themselves is worth it!

I'm a vegan empath. ~ Anne Kirkwood, Bradenton, Florida, USA

I'm a vegan empath. I feel the suffering of other living beings. I was taught at an early age to put myself in the place of others, and that comes naturally to me. I treat other living beings as I want to be treated, and go out of my way to avoid causing stress, fear, or harm to any living being. I connect easily to the feelings of others, human or non-human animal. "Do no harm" and "be part of the solution, not part of the problem" are phrases by which I live. Animals are innocent beings who often do not receive the respect or justice they deserve. The abuse they suffer for humans, whether it be for entertainment, fashion, taste buds, or vivisection for personal care products or medical research is abhorrent to any person of sound mind. All animals feel pain and fear. We can choose to allow and assist other beings to live as comfortable and peaceful a life as possible, rather than causing pain and suffering. We must put ourselves in the place of other living beings and practice compassion. If you were not born with empathy or taught empathy, it is very important that you learn it. It could save innocent beings from misery.

I'm a vegan lover. ~ John Ulvang, Seattle, WA., USA

A lady bug with its delicate little spotted shell of armour, a rat with its little paws and cautious ways, a pig enjoying a mud bath in the hot sun, a chicken rushing to scratch away in fresh tilled soil, a bee working diligently from blossom to blossom. Each creature with its individuality and fate on this lush gift of a planet. I'm an animal lover. ~~ Grazing peacefully in a pasture with their gentle eyes and peaceful ways, ever alert and quick to respond when they sense danger. They care painfully for their little babies, consumed with protecting, feeding, and coddling them. I'm a cow lover. ~~ Carrying their massive stature majestically through the Savannah, blasting out their important message, bonding socially displaying depth of self awareness and compassion, going berserk at a circus, fed up with years of exploitation, facing extinction as victims of sick greed... I'm an elephant lover. ~~ Content to munch up leaves and grass making every effort to reach seemingly unattainable morsels, leaving intact those plants they've sampled, allowing for a sustainable supply. Their kids are born covered in slime and after mom cleans them off they stand clumsily and determined. By the time they're a half-hour old they get to wandering around while mom tries to feed them, cooing with heartfelt joy as they jump up onto whatever they can, rearing up on their hind legs preparing to butt heads with form and style in the first few hours of their lives! I'm a goat lover. ~~ A vibrant group among the "human" species, having the ability to care for all members of the animal kingdom, unwilling to participate in the cruelty practiced by normal humans, refusing to support the torturous barbarism common among "people". They give hope to the entire earthling population, only eating plants, refusing to exploit their earthling friends in the countless ways done by other humans. I'm a vegan lover. ~ The animal kingdom fills the earth with literally millions of eco-friendly species, myriad life forms displaying intelligence, compassion, complexity, and determination to survive. To witness a small percentage of the most destructive species, the human, actually break free and realize the evil nature of its "kind" offers hope. To witness this small minority of understanding humans sound out warnings realizing the importance of ending the vicious cycle of violence, even in the face of ridicule from family, co-workers, teachers, religious leaders and media, is to witness a miracle and the reason I'm a vegan lover.

I'm a vegan transman. ~ Aiden Blight, Ontario Canada

In a world filled with labels, set binary roles and ideals, when someone challenges or deviates from such 'norms' they are met with a variety of difficulties. Being an individual who is both transgender and vegan presents some rather unique issues. ~ While I am often faced with questions which are posed sometimes for the sole purpose of undermining my identity as a man, I have noticed that these questions take on a different tone when the inquirers are made aware of my vegan lifestyle. For some who may have already discarded my male identity as farcical and an indication of some sort of nonexistent delusion on my part, the fact of me being vegan simply serves as further proof of this in their eyes. To some who think in such an unfortunate way, they make a point of determining a few things. ~ "You don't hunt or fish? Hmm...I see. You don't eat meat?!" ~ Apparently, for such people, the combined facts of me being transgender thrown in with my veganism presents a sort of equation. Born biologically female + No hunting/fishing + No meat = Not a real man. ~ Not everyone thinks in such a way regarding hunting/fishing, but I do find that many view meat consumption as akin to being a man. ~ I think it is delusional that one would view hunting/fishing, destroying an animal's precious life for 'sport', as a form of pleasurable

pastime indicative of being a 'man'. It is wrong to say that a 'real man' consumes the flesh of another, and while I can understand the root of such a delusional idea, it is a rather illogical point, since it's possible to gain muscle being vegan, and, simply, you don't need large amounts of muscle to be a man. In reality, none of these things are what truly compose a man. ~ If anything, a man, a woman, a human, is one who recognizes the value of life and strives to protect it. A human is one that should be compassionate, loving and respectful of other life. ~ I often find myself taking the stance of an educator, striving to inform the ignorant about transgenderism and veganism. Yes, some days, weeks, months, are difficult, but I will not give in to what is supposedly 'normal', and I will never cease to be who I truly am. I am, and forever will be, a vegan transman.

I'm a vegan sportsperson. ~ Andrew Begg, Romania

I'm a vegan sportsperson. I regularly play cricket, golf, tennis and I run, sometimes competitively, and have done since I was a child, and I coach cricket at a national level to both kids and adults, and work in a national sports body. Barely a waking hour passes when I am not playing sport or coaching, or thinking, talking, writing or reading about, or organizing or watching sport. ~ Since I've been vegan my sporting performances have improved - most emphatically in athletics. As I get older, when logic dictates that I should be slowing down, I'm running further and faster than before. But performance is one thing; recovery is another, and how quickly I recover from an endurance event - a marathon, for example, as a vegan, compared to when I was a non-vegan - is out of this world. As a vegan, I'm fine the very next day, ready to run again after resting for just 24 hours. As a vegan I can run two marathons in the space of a week, something I could never have done as a non-vegan. ~ I enter endurance events because I like proving to doubters that it is every bit as possible to perform well as a vegan as it is as a non-vegan. Inevitably, the questions come. If someone asks about how it is to be a vegan sportsperson, I usually respond that I don't know - and they eventually put two and two together and work out that my performance speaks for itself. I want them to think that if he could do it, then so too can they. When we go out to eat as a team, I'm noticing increasingly more team members are eating vegan meals. ~ The kids that I coach ask questions too, and I don't hold back on telling them what I think, because I want to be a positive influence in their lives. Once a kid came to a coaching session eating a KFC burger. "Get that crap out of my sight," I told him. "It's not cool, clever, or funny. It's not okay to eat (or use) animals. They have brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers. How would you like it?" Children often understand these issues clearer and are more open, because they haven't been subjected to the years of detrimental effects of advertising and other pressures that adults undergo.

I'm a vegan advocate. ~ Richard H. Schwartz, PhD., USA

I am a vegan advocate because being a vegan is the most important thing I can do for my health, animals, the environment, the efficient use of natural resources, hungry people, and efforts toward a more peaceful, just world. ~ I am a vegan advocate because the vegan lifestyle is the one most consistent with religious teachings on treating animals with compassion, preserving human health, protecting the environment, conserving natural resources, helping hungry people, and pursuing peace. I am a vegan advocate to avoid being

associated in any way with the horrific mistreatment of billions of animals. ~ I am a vegan advocate because I can spend time pleasantly and meaningfully without hunting, attending circuses or rodeos, or being involved with other activities that abuse or kill animals. ~ I am a vegan advocate because I can be comfortably and stylishly dressed without wearing clothing that was produced via the mistreatment of animals. ~ I am a vegan advocate because animal-based diets contribute significantly to heart disease, several forms of cancer, strokes, and other killer diseases. ~ I am a vegan advocate because animal-based agriculture is a major contributor to climate change, deforestation, soil erosion, deforestation, water pollution, rapid species losses, and other environmental threats to humanity. ~ I am a vegan advocate because animal-based diets require far more land, water, energy, and other resources per person than vegan diets. ~ I am a vegan advocate because, at a time when millions of people worldwide die annually of hunger and its effects and almost a billion of the world's people are chronically hungry, 70 percent of the grain produced in the U.S. is fed to animals destined for slaughter. ~ I am a vegan advocate because, in an increasingly thirsty world, with glaciers melting, aquifers shrinking, and lakes drying up, it takes up to 14 times as much water to produce the food for a person on an animal-based diet than for a person on a plant-based diet. ~ I am a vegan advocate because it is my way to protest against the "madness and sheer insanity" that animal-based diets represent, because they cause so much harm and wonderful alternatives are so readily available. ~ I am a vegan advocate because only if many people become vegans will we have a chance to help avert a climate catastrophe and other environmental disasters and help shift our imperiled planet onto a sustainable path.

I'm a vegan human. ~ Edmund Handby, ACT, Canberra, Australia

Above all socio-political and economic means by which we identify ourselves, either individually or collectively, we are all human. It is in our humanity that our capacity for veganism is, in my view, expressed. Although what it means to be vegan is different for each of us, veganism more broadly is, in part, an expression of compassion, respect and appreciation for all forms of life and the rejection of speciesism. These characteristics, and the many other justifications for veganism, are not however, exclusive to humanity. Many and varied are the instances where those animals we seek to protect express those same characteristics that we value so highly as vegans; be it the friendliness of dogs, compassion of elephants or intelligence of pigs to name a few. ~ Humanity has spent much of its history convincing itself of its 'enlightened' and superior status, that reason and science are what distinguish us from nature, and liberate us from fear, and installing us as masters. What makes veganism so uniquely human is that in the broadest possible sense, veganism is an attempt to counter the 'Enlightenment Project', to refute reason and science as the basis for what defines us, and instead to respect all beings on the basis of life. ~ I define myself in a variety of ways; ethnicity, gender, sex, family, occupation and so on. However, none of these defining aspects allows me to express myself as a vegan as much as being a human does. I admit that there is a contradiction inherent in my position: that in order for us to reject the enlightenment project, we have to rely on it as a means of expressing what makes us vegan. I would address this by relying on the belief that we cannot avoid or ignore our history, we can learn from it. History is, in my view, an inherently educative process, and the consequences of our history with respect to the way we have, as a species, treated other species is something that we must embrace as being educative. ~ My own journey towards

veganism, and of being vegan is one of learning. Our collective individual journeys of being vegan are an indication of how those journeys can be extended to humanity as a whole, and has the greatest potential to result in a world where our vision of compassion and respect is shared by all.

I'm a vegan proselytizer. ~ Melissa Keller, USA

I became vegan several years ago due to the horrors and atrocities that I learned were happening to animals every single second of every single day across the globe. I had no idea at first, so I sought out information. What I found absolutely and totally HORRIFIED me. I learned that pigs are kept in gestation crates for the vast majority of their lives without being able to turn around or see the light of day. I learned that cows on dairy farms are raped, become pregnant, and have their babies stolen from them and then killed when they are no longer of use. I learned the male chicks are of no use in the egg industry, so they are either ground up alive or suffocated to death, and the misery that the females endure is even more horrific. I learned how animals are used in research, used for clothing and for entertainment as well. This all led me to a way of activism, and that is to educate. This is why I became a vegan proselytizer. After all, I did not know initially what was happening to these animals, so I feel that it's my moral obligation to educate others about the choices that they are making. I do this by offering FREE vegan cooking classes, followed by an educational screening of how animals are treated and raised for food and clothing, medical research, entertainment, etc. I know what my purpose is and it is to educate the masses on the cruelty that animals endure on an EPIC scale.

I'm a vegan "parront". ~ Gina Seraichyk, U.S.

"Parront" is slang for parrot parent. My parronthood is perhaps more important to me than anything. I have cared for many types of animals, and adored them all. However, there's just something about a parrot. ~ In 1993, my then boyfriend, brought home a cockatiel we named Tweety. Tweety's behavior was so interesting and mysterious, like a magical little fluffy dinosaur alien. He sang, flew, and even managed to say some things that sounded an awful lot like English words, such as, "little tweety bird". Soon after, we got him a girlfriend, we named Girlbird. (I now know it's wrong to purchase animals). Cockatiels cannot be spayed or neutered, which makes family planning tricky. Many cockatiels later, I learned how to gently curb their reproduction. I now live with 7 cockatiels, some are rescues (cages are all open). Tweety is now 22. I'll always keep rescued cockatiels. I cannot imagine a life without their sweet fluffiness. ~ Meanwhile... in 1996, I adopted a Lesser Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo. I immediately fell in love. He was 5 and sweet, but as parrots mature, they become more difficult. As it turns out.....cockatoos scream, bite, chew anything they can get their beaks on, and require an unimaginable amount of attention. Parrots are not domesticated. They aren't meant to live in cages, alone and bored. In the wild, a bird like Mr. Peepers, my cockatoo, would spend the day with his flock, foraging, socializing, preening, and playing. Capturing these highly intelligent animals to stick in a lonely cage, is profoundly cruel. It's my responsibility to make Mr. Peepers happy. Every morning I'm awoken with a delightful, "hi baby"! I cannot even remember my life pre-cockatoo. ~ While It may not seem that my parronthood and veganism are related, they are actually poignantly connected.

In 2008 I read a book called Of Parrots and People by Mira Tweti which discusses keeping parrots as pets, and why it's wrong. The book may have been the beginning of expanding my consciousness in a very vegan direction, as its message is certainly a vegan one. As I read her words of respect, love and freedom for parrots, I knew what I was reading to be true.....they are not ours. The message of veganism is the same: respect, love and freedom for all the nonhuman animals whether in a slaughterhouse, marine park, laboratory, or pet store. They are not ours.

I'm a vegan bodybuilder. ~ Ally Cohen, Auckland, New Zealand

In 2012 I decided to take part in a fitness model competition at a local expo. To do this I decided I would need two things; a book and ethics. I found Vegan Bodybuilding and Fitness by *Robert Cheeke*. In those pages I found inspiration to GO VEGAN and never look back. ~ My journey began as an eleven year old child that chose to be a vegetarian since I wanted to be just like my big sister. I spent most of my life as a vegetarian. I refrained from using leather and products tested on animals whenever possible. Admittedly I was not perfect and often I would find horrible products in my possession! ~ When I was 20 I met the first ever 'vegan'. I didn't understand the difference between vegan and vegetarian. And while she attempted to educate me I was not at all ready to take on any new lifestyle. From the ages of 20-29 I lived as a 'flexitarian'. Sometimes I was a strict vegetarian, other times I would eat some animals. I was all over the show, paying more attention to being a young adult than my ethics. ~ In 2008 I met another friend. She transitioned from lifetime vegetarian to vegan. She insisted that I do it too! I gave up dairy happily, but my home had chickens and I continued to eat their eggs. But in 2009 when I moved to New Zealand I vowed to go vegan! And I did for about 18 months. I only did because I felt like it was an opportunity to try the lifestyle. It was easy and I was happy. But then I met a man. So for another year or so I ate like an omnivore! But that all changed when I decided to be a vegan bodybuilder! ~ Vegan bodybuilding has kept me focused and committed to veganism like never before. Being a strong compassionate person keeps me inspired and focused every day! The community of vegan bodybuilders is passionate and exciting. Vegan gains that I have made via a vegan fitness lifestyle keep me wanting more, and feeling empowered and happy every workout and every meal! Vegan bodybuilding provides a platform (even a stage) to promote veganism in a community that has very little experience with vegans. Flexing my muscles I say loud and proud "these muscles are plant built!"

I'm a vegan voice. ~ Stephanie Hazard, Gainesville, Florida

On a daily basis, everywhere I am, and everyone I come in contact with, I'm a vegan voice. I'm a vegan voice for the animals, for the environment, and for humanity. I'm a vegan voice for animals. All living beings have equal rights to be on the planet just as we do. The multiple species on planet Earth play a huge role in creating and sustaining our vast and dynamic food web and ecosystem. Without our animals, a livable environment would collapse. Animals deserve the right to be free and occupy the earth just the same as humans, instead humans have turned animals into a product, pushing them beyond their limits to be of service. ~ I'm a vegan voice for the environment. The earth, made up of land, sea, air, and oxygen work together seamlessly to sustain life. We jeopardize precious life on earth more and more

everyday by pumping fossil fuels, burning toxic gases, factory farming, deforestation, and the list goes on. I'm a vegan voice for the environment to solve the pressing issues our planet faces for livable and equal generations to come. ~ I'm a vegan voice for the benefit of humanity. Unfortunately, most people walk around with a veil over their eyes, oblivious to the horrors going on in the world. My voice, though small, leads others, leads to other vegan voices, educates, instills wisdom and bravery into everyday people wanting to make a difference. My vegan voice inspires a better tomorrow. In short, I'm a vegan voice to one day change the world we live in, for the animals, for the environment, and for humanity. As I know, when my voice goes cold, there will be other vegan voices after me.

I'm a vegan optimist. ~ Lana Holmes - Canadian, living in France

It is not hard to be a pessimist in the face of continued willful ignorance, lack of knowledge of, and compassion for, the enormity of suffering involved in using animals. But more and more I see hopeful signs.... people who are vegan, curious about it or on their way to making a transition.... celebrities, body-builders, athletes of all sorts crediting veganism for their success or actively promoting the lifestyle.... awareness of the suffering of farmed animals, and the health and environmental benefits of a vegan diet.... restaurants adding and even showcasing vegan options.... products and recipes proving that veganism is not about deprivation, but about celebrating peace, kindness and health. So yes, while there is a long way to go, I am optimistic that we are moving in the right direction and that every small reduction in animal consumption means less pain in the world. And I believe that a positive attitude and compassionate example, in all respects, including to those who have yet to understand, are the best motivators for change.

It's my intention to publish the above essays and many more wonderful and definitely publishable essays that I received as a book. I am still accepting (400 word or less essays) for inclusion in this book. If interested in submitting, send me an email to veganpoet@hotmail.com.