

Dear Animals

by [Shauny Jaine, JD, VLCE, MainstreetVegan.net](#)

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Boy and rabbit. Photo credit: Photobac/[Shutterstock.com](#)

Animals define us. We often self-identify using terms like “dog person,” “cat person” and “animal lover,” and [most of us share our lives and homes with an animal](#). Even children who live pet-free are innately drawn to them. My parents weren’t animal lovers but every summer throughout my teens I was welcomed into a ranching family in upcountry Maui. Inexplicably “horse crazy,” I was in my element. I worked as a trail ride guide, learned to rope cattle and competed in a rodeo. Although I no longer ride, I was then a bona fide cowgirl and my favorite horse was the herd’s alpha mare. It took me decades to grasp the significance of her communications. Back then, I regarded her only as a cool horse.



Herd grazing. Photo credit: Olga Rudchenko/[Shutterstock.com](#)

She almost never responded to her name, Pepe, but whenever I called “Pep!” to the herd, her head popped up and she walked toward me. Her coat was reddish-brown; her mane, tail, ear edges and lower legs were black; and her face was flecked with white hairs, including a splotch on her forehead that looked daubed by a paintbrush. Pep was brawny and often made to carry the largest customers. During rides when she reached the huge stock tank at the crest of our uphill trudge, the other mares, who had been sipping from the water’s veneer, stepped aside. She then would plunge her muzzle into the tank for an impossibly long drink. We all waited, steam rising from every horse’s body, air bubbles periodically and comically gurgling to the surface as Pep drank alone. She played a similar game when I saddled her.



Pep and me. Photo credit: Marci McClure

Disinterested until I approached with her fifty-pound saddle, Pep would take a deep breath, then hold it, so I couldn't pull down on the latigo, or tie strap, to fasten the saddle. I heaved the rig onto her. She stomped a front hoof when the saddle landed with a thud, then again as I tried to tighten the strap. "Come on, Pep." Stomp. Given this impasse, we moved from the hitching rail to the middle of the corral. There, left arm extended, I slowly pivoted and led her in tight circles around me. After several rotations, Pep's miniscule releases of breath coinciding with my right hand tightening the latigo, she sighed then finally inhaled. This happened every time I saddled her. Every time I unsaddled her, she pumped her head up and down. Once when a guest wouldn't stop drumming her with his heels despite my requests, Pep walked off trail to the nearest low tree branch. She ducked and walked under the branch, slowly clotheslined her passenger, then stopped and waited for him to clamber back on.



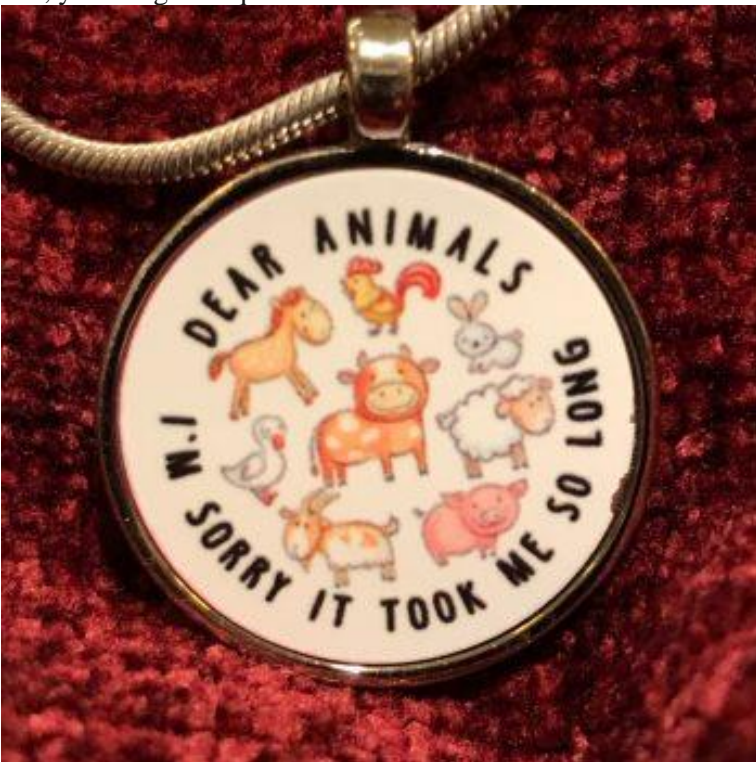
Woman and dog. Photo credit: Lucia Romero/[Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)

Ponder the animals who help define and timestamp your life. Pep was smart but like every pet we have loved and mourned, every animal on that ranch was unique. Just as we could describe each animal who was dear to us, I could elaborate on Nancy the Black Angus cow, who lived in a pen near the ranch house, or the nameless white pig I called Ziggy who lived in a kennel next to Nancy. Until, predictably, one day they were gone.



Cats lapping from bowl. Photo credit: Leungchopan/[Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)

Most of us deem deplorable the callousness and indifference of animal cruelty. Consider the ranch owner's daughter who placed a bowl of milk in the middle of her backyard then summoned Mary, the matriarch cat. When Mary and her kittens were lapping from the bowl, the young woman leveled her shotgun, fired one round of sprayed "shot," then tossed their bodies into the adjacent gulch. Consider North Korean leader [Kim Jong-un's recent ban on pet dogs](#), where animals have been confiscated and then either killed, sent to state-run zoos, or sold to dog meat restaurants because pet ownership is a "capitalist *decadence*." We find such conduct abhorrent, yet we consume animal products. We often observe *live and let live*, yet doing so requires victims.



Dear Animals pendant. Photo credit: Shauny Jaine

Pep's communications distilled to *See me* and *Don't hurt me*. It is the same with our pets, with every animal, with every person. Refusing to *see* others ultimately breeds violence—police brutality, sexual assault, animal slaughter. What if we instead do the inner work of flipping judgment into curiosity? What if we restore our innate empathy and equity for all via our daily decisions? When we say "yes" to something we're tentative about, it often leads to a breakthrough.

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“As in most cases when the truth becomes clear, you wonder how you could ever have seen things differently.”
~[Ruth Rendell](#), *Not in the Flesh*



Shauny Jaine. Photo credit: Leo Jaine

Born and raised in Hawaii, **Shauny Jaine** has lived in Seattle for 31 years and is a [Main Street Vegan VLCE](#), JD and BA *cum laude* in writing. She is a former full-time litigator and holds multiple certifications relevant to veganism, including as a graduate of the Yale School of Public Health’s program on Climate Change and Health, and the T. Colin Campbell Nutrition Foundation’s program on plant-based nutrition through eCornell.

Shauny and her spouse, Tana, enjoy raising their longtime vegan family: McKenna (16), Tyler (16) and Leo (12); pups Nikita and Kasbah; and cat, Annie. She serves on the board for [Heartwood Haven](#), a vegan animal sanctuary in Gig Harbor, Washington, and is an affiliate member of the [American College of Lifestyle Medicine](#) and the [Plant Based Foods Association](#). Find her on [LinkedIn](#) and on Instagram [@shaunyjaine](#).