

an EVEN exclusive interview –

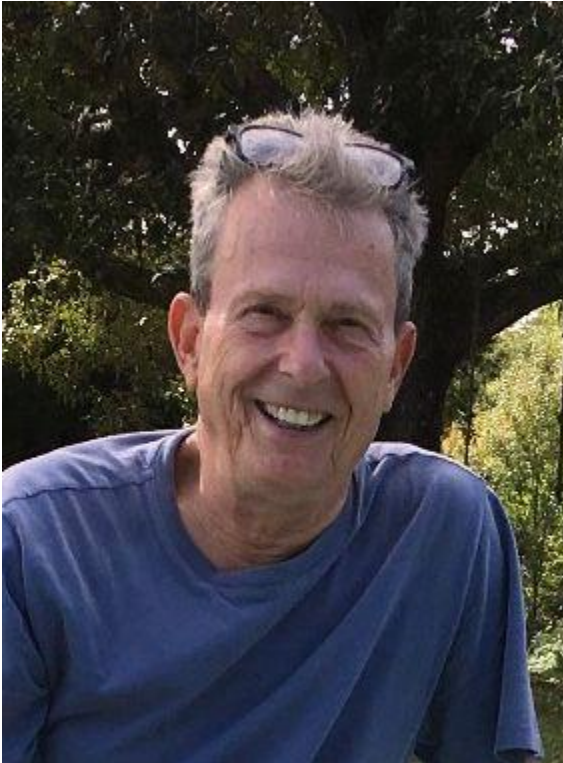


Photo courtesy of: Hattie Buchholz

with

Jim Mason

Author, Attorney,
Animal Rights Activist,
Environmentalist

**40 Years of Activism for
the Animals**

Jim Mason is an author and attorney. His latest book, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (co-authored with Peter Singer), explores the ethical questions involved in modern food systems.

Mason's book, *An Unnatural Order: The Roots of Our Destruction of Nature* (Lantern Books, 2005), traces the making of the ideology of human supremacy. *Animal Factories*, his 1980 book with Peter Singer, was the first to document in depth how factory farming harms animals, environment, and consumers.). He is a contributor to *A Cultural History of Animals*. and *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*. His writings have appeared in *Audubon*, *The New York Times*, *New Scientist*, *Newsday*, *Country Journal*, *Orion Nature Quarterly*, and other publications. More of his trenchant insight can be experienced in his [essays and articles on his webpage](#).



Exclusive EVEN Interview with Jim Mason, May 2018

EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Jim: Vegan living became part of my life in the mid-1970s when I was researching factory farming for my book, *Animal Factories*, with Peter Singer.

EVEN: Who was an influential person in your life earlier on that led you to veganism?

Jim: Peter Singer.

EVEN: What, in your opinion, is the most misunderstood idea about veganism?

Jim: I think a lot of people see veganism as extreme, as some sort of cult practice. Although, I think this has more to do with the meat-eater mentality than it does with any behavior on the part of vegans. You know, the eye of the beholder...

In my view, the reduction of animals to tools, slaves, and resources was wrong to begin with and it has been taken much, much too far by factory farming. By reducing animals, we have become unable to accept them as fully living beings entitled to autonomy and respect.

EVEN: What do you think makes veganism hard for people?

Jim: Two things: geography and social relations. As for geography, being pure vegan is easier in some urban communities than it is in, say, rural America. In places like Brooklyn, San Francisco, Berkeley etc. you have a variety of vegan food sources, restaurants, shops etc. as well as a substantial community of vegan people.

As for socializing, it's obviously easier to date, party, go out to dinner, and do other social things with other vegans than it is if you are the only vegan in a vast sea of meat eaters— many of whom are intolerant of or downright hostile toward vegans and vegetarians.

For myself— for family and other reasons— I have spent many years living in poor, backward, rural regions. Twelve years in the Missouri Ozarks where I was raised and now another 12 years in rural Virginia.

EVEN: What one thing from your thinking in childhood do you wish you could change?

Jim: Let me address this question because I've dealt with all those regrets about religion, hunting, eating animals, etc. I changed my ways on all that decades ago. But I'm glad you brought up hunting. I did have experiences with that as a Missouri farm kid. Hunting, like meat eating, was never questioned by anyone around me. They were not issues in my rural community back there. Nor were all of the cruel things we did to the farm animals— like dehorning, castrating and killing for food. I still have horribly vivid memories of doing these "chores." I still feel the pain of remorse, and it gets worse because of the way I feel about animals now. So, the one thing I wish I could change from my childhood? Not to have done these things to animals and to be relieved of these memories and the remorse.

Factory methods of animal production are not, as some agriculture experts claim, the inevitable result of a ‘natural tide of history’. They are the product of decades of government policy and corporate profiteering.

EVEN: If you were to mentor a younger person today, what guidance might you offer? What encouraging words might you share with a newbie?

Jim: On changing to vegetarian or vegan, going “cold turkey” scares a lot of people. The all or nothing approach seems impossible to them. Fine for you if you can do it that way, but many can’t and won’t. So, I say phase yourself in to the diet. Go vegetarian one day a week. Then two days a week. Then vegan one or two days a week. Many who do that tell me that they find the transition more satisfying, more rewarding than the stress and pressure of all or nothing overnight. Do that and be proud of yourself for your stand against the relentlessness of the meat-eating culture.

The surest way to start working against factory farming is to stop consuming its products.

You can refuse to eat ‘milk-fed’ veal, factory eggs, feedlot beef and other factory-farmed animal products. Of course, you can stop consuming animal products altogether, as is recommended by an increasing number of health experts.

EVEN: Do you have a favorite vegan meal or food you can tell us about that really makes veganism work for you?

Jim: My favorite is my morning smoothie: banana, pineapple, blueberries or raspberries, chopped kale, and watermelon puréed with tahini or peanut butter in coconut milk.

EVEN: What advice would you give to a vegan advocate wanting to become more of an activist?

Jim: My advice is to study the sciences of our kinship with the other animals. There shouldn't be a separation from our kindred animals. There is more to this than food choices and avoiding animal products. Study evolution. Study biology. Study our human origins from the other apes. Practice a sense of kinship by seeing behaviors that we share with other animals. For example, watch animals gathering food, grooming themselves, grooming each other, playing, avoiding danger, etc. and see these as your own experiences. Dwell on that---emotionally and spiritually. Feel that sense of the things we have in common with these others.

The vegan movement has become all about food, food, food, but where is the most basic focus on our lost kinship with animals? It would broaden our movement to join forces with some of the environmentalists and regain our sense of kinship with other life.

Seeing and feeling our kinship to the animals will do more to strengthening our resolve than just changing our diet. Once we have a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all life, we can be passionate about going vegan and advocating for the oppressed animals. And it will be easy and natural!

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Jim: The main thing is the good feeling I enjoy at mealtimes and the other such daily observances of my kinship with other living beings. These feelings help me feel grounded in the living world around me. They help me heal the alienation that the dominant culture has inflicted on me since childhood.

It's the meat-eating culture that forces these attitudes. Meat is addictive!



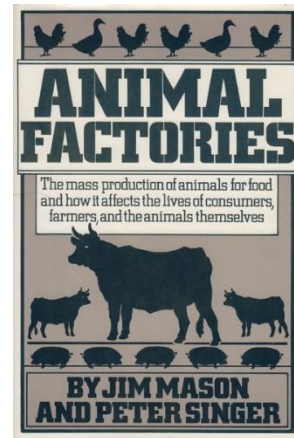
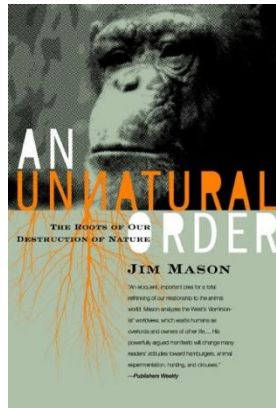
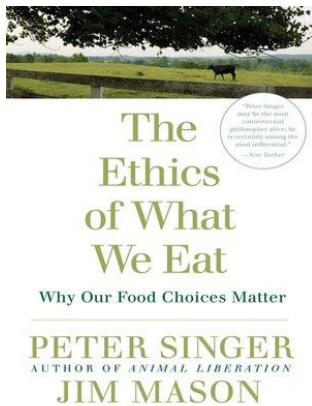
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If only we could regain our respect and kinship with other animals. We need to keep on talking to gain more people to join us and embrace veganism. There is not enough of *that* conversation going on instead of always talking about food.

When did we lose our sense of kinship with other life and become so alienated from the natural world? Alienation from the natural world is the greatest problem we are facing.

EVEN: Any opinion or insight on the future of veganism in today's world?

Jim: The vegan outlook is already a wave and is surely the wave of the future. More and more people are sensing the alienation from the rest of the living world and are doing their best to turn that culture upside down and re-join the rest of life on this planet.



The factory farm is one of the more inappropriate technologies of this century: it requires high inputs of capital and energy to carry out a simple, natural process; it causes a costly chain of problems and risks; and it does not in fact produce the results claimed by its proponents. Moreover, the animal factory pulls our society one long, dark step backward from the desirable goal of a sane, ethical relationship with other beings and the natural world.

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