

# an EVEN exclusive interview – with



## Christina Pirello Chef, Educator, Activist, Author

***Christina Pirello, MFN, is one of America's preeminent authorities on healthy living with natural and whole foods at its core. This free-spirited, vivacious redhead with a radiant personality delivers her much-needed message to the world in an inspiring and engaging way. She's made it her purpose in life to show the world that everyone can look their best, and feel great, too, by understanding the impact of food on day to day wellness.***

***Christina's love affair with food began at a young age when she spent many happy hours cooking with her mother, who centered the family life in her Italian kitchen. That joy of cooking prepared Christina to understand the healing power of food; an understanding she would put to its test at age 26 when she was diagnosed with terminal leukemia.***

***By the time her illness was identified, the cancer had already advanced to an acute stage. Her doctors gave her little chance of recovery, and her options with conventional medical therapies were limited. She was told she had only months to live and to prepare herself for the inevitable.***

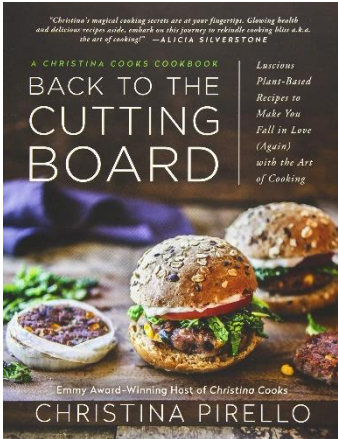
*She was devastated and uncertain about her future. A chance meeting with (her now husband) Robert Pirello would change her life forever. Robert, a whole foods macrobiotic advocate, helped Christina change her lifestyle and diet based on healthy eating by incorporating whole and unprocessed foods which ultimately saved her life! Christina overcame the odds and, in the process, developed an expertise in cooking with whole natural foods.*

*From that time, utterly convinced of the close relationship between diet and health, she found her life’s purpose was to help others discover the importance of this relationship in their own lives.*

*Christina studied and became an expert in Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, acupuncture, macrobiotics and earned a **Masters Degree in Food Science and Nutrition.***

*She has authored eight cookbooks on the subject of healthy eating and natural living. The latest, “**Back to the Cutting Board,**” is designed to inspire us to get back in the kitchen and nourish ourselves well with simple, easy, luscious recipes.*

*Today, almost 36 years after her illness, Christina is a glowing example of the power of food in creating health and well-being.*



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**It’s time to change the health of the world,  
even if it’s one meal at a time. - CP**  
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**EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?**

**Christina:** I became a vegetarian at the age of 14 when my butcher father couldn’t bring himself to do the work that a

slaughterhouse wanted him to do. I remember him, six foot of Irish muscle, weeping at the kitchen table, telling my mother that he just could not look into the eyes of these animals and murder them. At the age of 26, a health crisis took me the rest of the way, to vegan macrobiotics, which saved my life.

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

**Christina:** I would have to credit my dad for leading me, without meaning to do so, to vegetarianism, and my husband, Robert to veganism with his wisdom of macrobiotics and the power of food to create health and wellness. Between them, I had all the motivation and inspiration a person could need to make this change.



Christina with husband, Robert

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

**Christina:** Where do I even begin? Even in 2020, there are misconceptions about what it means to be a vegan.

One would think that by now, vegans were no longer the butts of jokes in bad sitcoms, but we are.

You would think that when Beyonce used a vegan diet to lose weight, it would have become more hip and trendy. Even with celebrities trying vegan eating (for whatever reason) and big events like the Golden Globe awards serving vegan meals, that people would look on veganism in a better light. And yet, when Joaquin Phoenix gave his acceptance speech and spoke about caring for the lives of other creatures, the press called him “quirky” and his speech “senseless.”

While not a misconception per se, it is my deep belief that veganism is very threatening to people. Even if we say nothing, people take exception with you if they know you are a vegan. No one likes the boat rocked and let’s face it, we rock the boat big time. And proudly!

So rather than a misconception, I wonder why it’s still ok to trivialize us, denigrate us and laugh at us. The answer is simple.

The very idea of what we stand for---  
kindness and compassion for all creatures,  
making a lighter footprint on the planet,  
wasting less,  
standing for peace---  
all threaten the status quo.

Vegans make it impossible to turn your face away from cruelty and waste because we are living proof that it can be done by any and all people.

By simply living our lives, we are in the faces of those who eat animal flesh (and justify it in any number of ways). I don't know what it will take for people to feel differently about it. In a world where we struggle to be politically correct and not offend people, vegans remain the exception.

We are asking people to turn their backs on their lifestyles. They have worked hard to create the illusion of affluence and no one wants to see that it's really a delusion built on the suffering of other creatures.

It's like when people squirm after finding out that their cheap tee shirts were made by child labor in a sweat shop. They don't want to give all of that up, but it's in their face and who wants to be the one allowing for child labor? It's the same with meat-eating. People grow uncomfortable with the idea of factory farming and animal abuse but they just soooooo want that steak.

Veganism on a grand scale is a true disrupter of the status quo, so society needs to make fun of it; portray us as weak and pale, living a life of deprivation, nutrition deficiencies and no fun. Which is most definitely not the case.

Wow, that was a fun rant!





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

**Christina:** I think people are self-indulgent and they want what they want. It's hard for me to believe that there's a person in America today who doesn't understand that animals and the planet are abused just to get their steak, burger or chicken wings on their tables. And that's not even beginning to talk about the impact of those foods on human health. We are being devastated by epidemic levels of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer. Experts link it to food but stop just short of saying people should eschew animal products. Why? Because we would face economic consequences if people skipped meat, dairy and poultry and as a result, experienced fewer instances of illness.

There is a lot of money to be made when we are ill. From pharmaceutical companies to healthcare networks to insurance companies, not to mention junk food manufacturers. All of these factions are deeply invested in people struggling with illness.

Think about it. How many people would lose their jobs if fewer pharmaceuticals were needed by humanity? Look, we will always need medicine, but maybe not to the extent we do now. And food? The cheaper the food, the poorer the quality, the more profit is made. Factory farms make more money than small family farms. There's a lot of complicated economic dependence on the status quo and a lot of special interest dollars dedicated to keeping things as they are.

Massive systemic change would force us to create a new economy, a new way to serve each other.

That said, however, abandoning meat and dairy is emotionally challenging for people. Culturally, traditionally and societally, we are conditioned to eat meat. We can't imagine meals without it. We feel as though we are insulting our ancestors by abandoning the foods they cooked for us with love. So it's multi-layered. People are torn between their ancestry and a desire to be on the right side of history.

Finally, people don't know how to approach this change to their diet and lifestyle, which seems drastic for most people. They don't know how to plan balanced, plant-based meals so they get all the nutrients they need to live well and not struggle with deficiencies. They struggle with creating delicious food that everyone loves. Which brings us to cooking.



To live well as a vegan (or anyone else for that matter) we need to cook fresh, whole foods in our homes. Even vegans committed to compassion and giving a voice to the voiceless must contend with that.

We cannot be sustained in wellness eating junk food, vegan or otherwise.

Many people are daunted by the idea of cooking, but need not be.



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

**Christina:** Eating veal as a child. I hated meat, but my family could get me to eat veal because it was not meaty. However, once I understood what veal was, I knew I had lots of karma to heal. I often wonder if I owe a double debt to those baby cows for helping me find my path in this world.

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

**Christina:** Be as kind and compassionate to yourself as you would to any animal. Make the process and the journey enjoyable and fun as well as delicious. And don't be discouraged...by anyone. Many vegans, especially those new to this community feel the need to stand on a soapbox and preach to all those they know and love. That never wins anyone over.

My experience has been that by placing the focus on my wellness and working hard to do no harm, people began to ask about my lifestyle. And once the door is opened, you can walk in and make your case for change.

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

**Christina:** Learn to stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves with kindness and compassion. If we want to be perceived as kind, we can't be yelling and pointing our fingers.

Make sure people feel welcome into this community of loving people. And don't judge people who only want to dip their toe in the water of this lifestyle to see if they like it or if it makes sense to them. Don't reserve all your compassion for animals.

Remember that most people are doing their best in life, so take care not to judge others for not being as far along the path as you might be. Veganism is not all or nothing. If people can gently and peacefully make the transition, that's great. We are no better or worse than anyone else simply because we don't harm animals.

Most importantly, remember that our primary reason for being here is to lift each other up; to serve each other.

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

**Christina:** I have been a practicing vegan for 36 years. All vegan food lights my fire...whole grains, beans, vegetables, healthy desserts, pasta, fresh fruit. Shall I go on?

I will say that soups are my favorite foods to cook. Thick lentil or split pea soups with lots of veggies and great whole grain bread make for simply heavenly meals.



My exception is vegan junk food. It's no better for our wellness than any other junk food. Ugh. We should treat our bodies with the same compassion and respect we reserve for animals.

**EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?**

**Christina:** Only one thing? If that's the case...

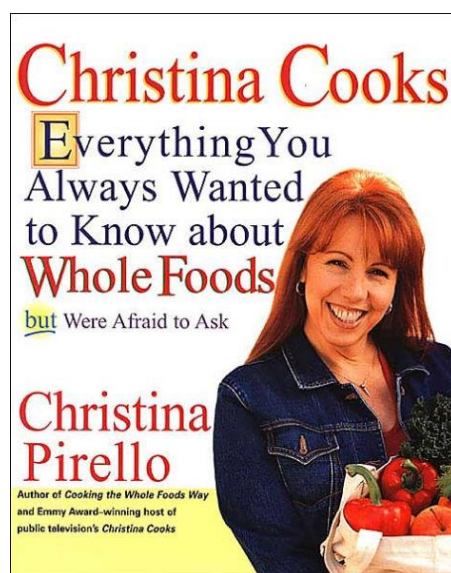
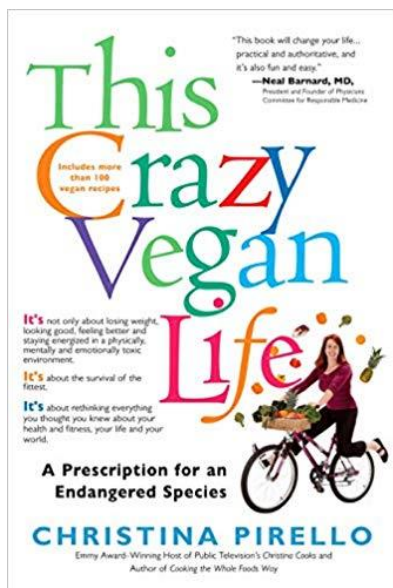
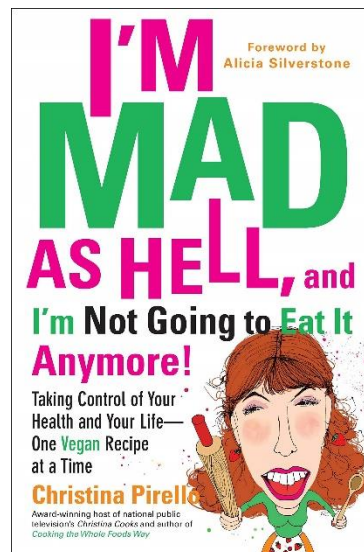
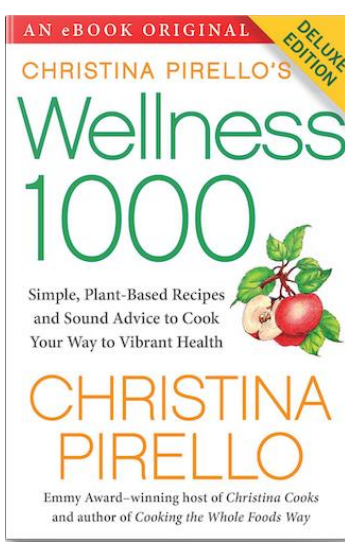
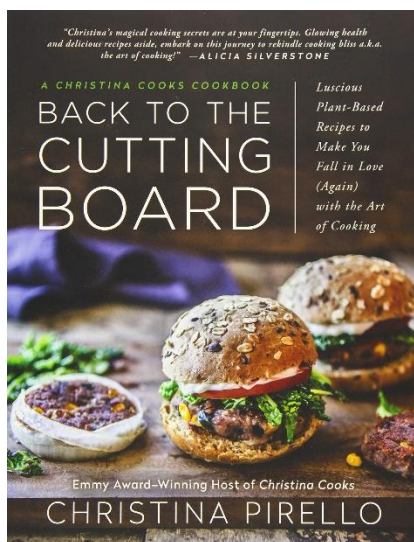
...then let's go big picture and say that veganism makes us kinder to each other and to the planet, which could help create world peace. And if *that* doesn't motivate and inspire us, I don't know what will.

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

**Christina:** Who knows? If someone had told me 36 years ago that I would host an Emmy Award-winning cooking show dedicated to healthy vegan cooking, I would have laughed myself silly.

I think we will see big food manufacturers take advantage of the market and continue to peddle junk food in a vegan package to us, because that's capitalism. We need to be smart consumers who demand better so that manufacturers are forced to sell us better quality.

I would love to say that in the future everyone will live a compassionate, vegan life, but I'm not that optimistic (although I am pretty optimistic by nature). I see a bright future for vegan life with many more people joining the effort to be kind to animals and to work to save our planet.



Find all of Christina's books on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and [www.christinacooks.com](http://www.christinacooks.com)  
 Instagram - @christinacooks  
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