



EVEN Interview with Dan Piraro

**Cartoonist, Comic, Painter,
Ethical Vegan**

*Award-winning cartoonist, fine artist, and stand-up comedian, **Dan Piraro** is best known for his daily syndicated newspaper cartoon, **Bizarro**. BIZARRO was first syndicated in 1985 and has built a steady and loyal following in the United States, Canada, as well as in parts of Europe, Asia and South America.*

*Appearing in over 300 newspapers and on six continents, Bizarro has won an unprecedented three consecutive “**Best Cartoon Panel**” awards from the **National Cartoonists Society** and in 2011 won their highest honor, “**Cartoonist of the Year**.”*

*Over his 27-year career, Piraro has published 16 books of his cartoons as well as three books of prose. He has also toured the country as a stand-up comedian and performed a one-man stage show about his life as a cartoonist. His performance in the 2002 **New York International Fringe Festival** won the festival’s “**Best Solo Show**” award and **The New York Times** called it, “**A shrewd tour of an artist’s imagination...wildly applauded.**”*

“I find humor in all aspects of life and am a firm believer that it is the only thing that separates us from other animals. Without it, we might as well be groundhogs. Come to think of it, some of us are.”

Piraro’s cartoons appeal equally to the “average Joe” and the “independent thinker” alike, with irreverent undertones of biting commentary on the human condition and life in 21st century America.

*Audiences and reviewers alike have routinely given Dan high marks and rave reviews for his speaking and performance skills. He regularly spends time after his presentations mingling with audience members, signing autographs, taking pictures, and drawing sketches. **The Onion** called Dan, “**One of the best cartoonists that has ever played the game.**”*

*Piraro has appeared on **NPR**, **CNN**, and **HBO** and he is currently negotiating a half-hour, animated comedy show for television.*

Dan was raised in the Midwest and currently resides in Los Angeles.

In this exclusive interview, Dan recently sat down with EVEN to share more with us.



EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life? And who was an influential person in your life earlier on that led you to veganism?

Dan: I'd always been the sort of person who considered himself to be compassionate to animals. I helped stray dogs and cats, attempted to save injured birds found in the yard, etc. But, like most people, I was raised to ignore the "animalness" of the animals I was eating.

In 2002 I met my second wife, who had been a vegan since her teen years. She didn't preach, but made information available to me if I wanted it. As I read about factory farms and other types of routine cruelty that "food" animals endure, I softened to the idea of not eating meat fairly quickly. Reticent to make the leap entirely, however, I cut back quite a bit but did not commit to anything permanently.

A few months later, my wife asked me if I'd be interested in a trip to Farm Sanctuary in upstate NY. I agreed. And by the end of the first day of meeting rescued cows, pigs, chickens, goats, sheep, and turkeys, I was vegan.

I realized that day that these animals were no less emotional, intelligent, independent, full of personality and the will to live than any cat or dog I had ever known. I would never victimize a cat or dog because I wondered how they would taste, so my philosophy of blind ignorance fell apart instantly. I could no longer ethically justify victimizing *any* animal just because they tasted good.

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

Dan: I don't consider myself much of an activist actually. I'm not good at talking to others about my diet or handing out pamphlets or protesting. Because I have a public platform in my cartoon feature and I tend to write jokes about anything that is in my head, animal rights/vegan/vegetarian

messages sometimes make their way organically into my work. That has been an effective way to change the way some people think and I've found that very gratifying, but I can't say that I set out to do that. In my private life, I mostly just go about my business and if people ask, I'm happy to drop a line or two about why I am vegan---or more, if they want it. I'm more the sort to just live by example and let others follow if they wish.

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

Dan: I've found that most people naturally incorporate their childhood diet into their belief system and world view, much the way they do with religion. "If my grandmother fed it to me, it must be the right way to eat."

There are also ancient ethnic and religious traditions tied to food, so to ask someone to give up a way of eating is like asking them to give up their religion, nationality, or family traditions. It can seem overwhelming to many people and some just can't bear to tell their parents they've abandoned the way they were raised.

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

Dan: It might be the erroneous notion that veganism makes a person weak. We've been told for years that to be an athlete, you must regularly eat large portions of animal protein. More professional and world-class athletes all the time are becoming vegan because of the added benefits to strength and fitness, and the added years of life after they retire.

If you look at the rest of the animal kingdom, you'll quickly notice that the largest and strongest animals on earth are mostly herbivores: all types of cattle and bison, elks, moose, elephants, gorillas, hippos, etc. Clearly, there is no reason that eating meat should be considered the only way to be strong.

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

Dan: I tend not to dwell on what I would have liked to have changed about my past. The important thing to me is to change the things I can change now and for the future. I've always been an independent thinker and ready to toss out traditions and beliefs if they don't actually serve a purpose or are not founded on truth. Just because my parents and their parents were convinced of a falsehood does not mean I should perpetuate the ignorance.

Accordingly, the idea that animal flesh and the milk of another species is "good" for me is one that I had no trouble tossing out as soon as I had sound evidence that it was not true. For health reasons, I wish I'd been vegan since birth, but that didn't happen and there's no sense worrying about what I can't change.

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

Dan: Be your own person. Use the incredible and incomparable computer that your brain is and think for yourself. Search out knowledge and put it to use in your own life, regardless of what your friends or family might say. In the long run, people will admire you for your courage and you'll be happier as the owner of your own life.

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

Dan: I can't resist seitan tacos in a crispy shell. The spicier the better. Before I was vegan, I used to eat Tex-Mex food a couple of times a week. When I became vegan, I worried that I'd be giving up my favorite foods. When I discovered how good seitan can be if prepared properly, it became a lifestyle of substitution instead of sacrifice and I breathed a big sigh of relief.

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Dan: To victimize another being for pleasure is not something I've ever been able to live with. I've never been one to steal from someone to get something I want, lie to a girl to get her to go to bed with me, or shoot birds for target practice. It is important to me to feel that I'm being true to my own sense of ethics, and veganism does that for me.

When I realized that by eating meat I was causing pain and suffering to other beings who were, in their capacity for suffering, more like me than unlike me, I could no longer justify that decision to myself anymore. And I found out that I didn't even *need* animal flesh to be healthy.

So while I enjoy the health benefits of a vegan life and the knowledge that I am drastically lowering my carbon footprint, of course, it's the ethical principle of not subsidizing cruelty to animals that means the most to me.

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

Dan: I don't kid myself into thinking that in my lifetime the world will ever be mostly vegan, or even vegetarian, but I find the battle worth fighting. I remind myself that people who advocated the abolition of human slavery in the United States did so over a hundred years before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. John Adams, in 1776, believed human slavery to be unethical and advocated abolishing it, but most of his colleagues who signed the Declaration of Independence owned slaves. I'm sure they thought he was the 18th-century equivalent of a touchy-feely hippie, but he did not abandon his principles.

To my mind, when something conflicts with my sense of right and wrong, I don't do it, even if almost everyone else does. This is a great way to foster self-esteem.



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