

# EVEN Interview with Julia Butterfly Hill



## Activist, Writer, Poet

*An exclusive EVEN interview with joyous vegan, **Julia Butterfly Hill**, who brought international attention to the plight of the world's last remaining ancient forests when she climbed 180 feet into the branches of a 1000 year-old redwood tree and refused to come down. Her historic protest to the environmental destruction caused by the clear-cutting of ancient redwoods culminated after 738 days with an agreement that provided permanent protection for the tree known as Luna and a 3 acre buffer-zone around it.*

*Julia Butterfly Hill is an activist, a writer and a poet. She is the author of the national best seller **The Legacy of Luna** and the co-author of **One Makes The Difference**, both published by Harper*

*San Francisco. A new book, titled **Becoming**, with poems, artwork and short non-fiction stories, is being released October 1<sup>st</sup>, self-published by Julia.*

*The audio release, **Spiritual Activation**, captures Julia's vital message as it is given at standing-room-only appearances across the country. All of Julia's books (and the packaging for the CD) have been published with 100% post-consumer recycled paper with soy-based inks and chlorine-free processing, pushing the publishing industry to a higher standard of ecological sustainability.*

*The recipient of numerous prestigious awards and distinctive honors, Julia Butterfly Hill is one of the most internationally recognizable figures in environmental activism.*

*Julia founded the non-profit organization, **Circle of Life** and was the visionary of **We the Planet**, setting the standards for green festivals, events, and tours in the US. She co-founded the **Engage Network** and is the inspiration behind **What's Your Tree**. She acts as strategic advisor for numerous other organizations. Julia speaks regularly on university campuses, has addressed the United Nations, lobbied congress, and has continued to stand on the front lines of environmental and social justice issues all over the world. Her courage, conviction and profound clarity in articulating a message of hope, empowerment, and love and respect for all life has inspired millions of people worldwide.*



**EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?**

**Julia:** i was 14 years old and riding my bike out in the countryside, and saw a baby calf out in a field. Riding a bicycle was one of my favorite things to do growing up and helped me get out of my home situation which was often times not very safe or positive. i got off my bike and walked up to the fence with my hand out. The calf came right up to me, nuzzled my hand, and looked me right in the eyes with its big beautiful eyes. i realized in that moment, that this being had feelings and was trusting me and showing me care. i had immediate empathy in that moment for the pain and suffering animals go through when they are killed for food. i went home and told my parents i was never going to eat animals again. i didn't even really know the term vegetarian at that time. i just knew i didn't want to cause unnecessary harm and suffering to animals anymore. So, i became vegetarian at age 14. At the time i lived in Arkansas where there was almost no one at all vegetarian, and this was before the take-off of the internet, so i had no way to research it either. But over time, i was able to find out information and the more i learned about food, nutrition, and the reality of even what happens on most dairy farms, i slowly eliminated dairy and eggs as well.

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

**Julia:** As mentioned above, it was a baby cow, not a person. i never had any influential people in my life growing up who exposed me to vegetarianism or veganism. i know many, many well-known vegans (and not well known : ) now and they are all very inspiring.

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

**Julia:** Be clear, courageous, committed, compassionate, curious, and remember to laugh and love. Anger is the automatic defense mechanism to pain, but anger ends up eating away at us and at those whose views and

behaviors we are trying to shift. To be on the front lines of any kind of activism, means to be exposed to a lot of pain. We have to be as vigilant about doing the internal work as we are about doing the external work. Be curious about other people's views and perspectives. Even when we don't agree with someone, if we don't do the work to see them, truly "see" them as human animals (we humans ARE animals!) and get to understand how they came to their views, our capacity to change their views and choices is much, much more difficult. When we show an interest in other people, they are more likely to show an interest in us. No one likes to be lectured to. It doesn't feel good. Be kind and compassionate, even when (and especially when) a situation also calls for fierce stand and action. Being fierce and courageous requires being loving at the same time if we are to truly make lasting change, not just momentary fixes.

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

**Julia:** i always tell people i am a Joyous Vegan! i never just call myself a "vegan" because so often when people here that word, they think angry activists; bland, boring food; and sacrifice and lack. "Joyous Vegan" immediately begins to dispel that way of thinking which is the foundation of what makes veganism hard for people and often times misunderstood. Also, we live in a cultural paradigm that makes it challenging to do anything that is not part of the status quo. There are not a ton of resources that support vegan lifestyles unlike the meat and dairy industry which is everywhere.

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

**Julia:** i think the most misunderstood idea about veganism is actually within the vegan community itself. Veganism is about compassionate living, not rigidity of thought. The rigidity of thought within the vegan community keeps it from looking at every choice made by themselves and by others through the lens of compassion. As a result, there is a ton of unhealthy and unconscious, choices being made.

For example, all the vegan belts, shoes, purses, etc. that are made from petroleum synthetic derivatives. Petroleum KILLS!!! Trace that toxic

process that made that "vegan" product and realize how absolutely unvegan it is! i am a Joyous Vegan, but i actually choose to buy a shoe made from leather because i know, number one it is going to last a lot longer thereby reducing my ecological resource footprint, and number two, the toxic footprint of it is much lower (although of course there is still toxics associated with it.) Is that a "perfect" choice? No, of course not. But for me, looking through the lens of compassion and awareness, buying something made from an animal that is going to last much longer than synthetic product is the more conscious choice-- and i use everything until it falls apart and then often times fix it myself or have someone else fix it.

Most recently, my sandals fell apart in the piece that goes between my big and second toes. The fabric tore (the rest of the sandal is leather and rubber). Most people would have just thrown them away at that point. i got an industrial needle and thread and i sewed the piece back together. So far, i have gotten three more months out of them and they are still going strong.

Also, for me, the amount of toxicity in the synthetic "vegan" world is horrifying and is not even close to vegan just because an animal wasn't used in the making of the product. Petroleum and toxins kill---human and non-human animals alike. There is no way those products align with a vegan lifestyle that is about lessening the harm we cause.

Also, look at all the tons of packaging in most vegan homes. Where does that packaging come from? How far was your food shipped? The packaging comes from trees and petroleum for the most part. That means forests were cut down and oil was drilled to create the packaging for your "vegan" lifestyle. How many animals were displaced or killed because of all that packaging?

And finally, i am a vegan who is also an advocate for the rights of indigenous people to eat the way they have for as long as they have lived; eating from the land, and sometimes taking animals lives for food. i am also an advocate for focusing on local. It is not a good option to be a vegan year round in places like Alaska. The distance your food has to be shipped to get to you is incredibly harmful and destructive and actually kills more animals than someone eating a salmon or elk. i am still a HUGE advocate that ALL people EVERYWHERE eat as much locally-sourced, vegan options as they possibly can. i want to be clear that this is not a

justification for people to go out and eat "sustainably" and "humanely raised" animals. That whole movement is really challenging for me and my commitment to compassion. ; ) What i am saying though, is that veganism for me requires that i look at every single choice to see what choice causes the least amount of harm, pain, and suffering that i can possibly choose given all the different variables.

It is also really important for me to remind people that plants also have feelings and communicate as well! i lived with an over 1,000 year-old tree for over two years. i am 100% clear that non-animals have feelings and communicate as well. Read *The Secret Life of Plants* if you doubt it! i am very aware that every time i eat a salad, i am taking life. Every time before i eat anything, i say a prayer in my mind, "May my life live in honor of this life that has been taken so that i might live." i am very, very clear that to be human means i am going to cause pain and suffering along the way.

For me veganism is about looking at the whole picture always, doing research, constantly striving to learn more and incorporate that learning into my choices, and into the way i think, speak, and act.

i am a Joyous Vegan who chooses to not eat animals, even though sometimes i choose to wear them, and when i do, i say i am sorry and thank you to the animal and then i do my best to honor its life by giving as much respect and care to that item as a way of honoring the life of the animal that was taken. i am a Joyous Vegan who advocates for localizing, simplifying, and looking through the lens of diversity not rigidity. For some people who call themselves "vegan" they feel i am not a "real" vegan because of some of my views and choices. i honor their view. Compassion demands that i honor people even when i do not agree with them or they with me.

i am a Joyous Vegan on a constant inquiry and exploration. i am a Joyous Vegan because i LOVE looking at how i can best live my life causing the least amount of harm and the most amount of kindness, compassion, love, and care.

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

**Julia:** i LOVE quinoa! i LOVE sprouts! Anyone can grow sprouts!!! Super healthy and nutrition packed and with little to no packaging. Buy in bulk and sprout away. Loaded with protein, vitamins, and minerals-- super food in a seed! i love nuts for making dairy alternatives. i know that quinoa and some nuts i use are not local. But i do buy in bulk and use my reusable bags, so there is no wasteful packaging and I make my own milks, cheeses, dressings, pates and spreads with them.

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

**Julia:** Joy, Love, Compassion, Courage, Growth, Community, DELICIOUS and NUTRITIOUS!!!

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