

EVEN Interview with **Robert Cheeke**



**Vegan
Bodybuilder,
Motivational
Speaker, Author**

Robert grew up on a farm in Corvallis, OR where he adopted a vegan lifestyle in 1995 at age 15. Today he is an Amazon.com best-selling author of the book *Vegan Bodybuilding & Fitness - The Complete Guide to Building Your Body on a Plant-Based Diet*.

As a two-time natural bodybuilding champion Robert has been considered one of *VegNews Magazine's* Most Influential Vegan Athletes. He tours North America regularly giving talks about his story transforming from a skinny farm kid to champion vegan bodybuilder.

Currently, Robert works full-time for Sequel Naturals as a national representative for Vega, a line of vegan whole-food products, as a representative of the new pro-vegan film *Forks Over Knives* and also works full-time running www.veganbodybuilding.com, which includes writing books and filming documentaries.

Robert lives in Los Angeles and continues to spread the vegan way of life leading by example as an accomplished vegan athlete. Visit www.veganbodybuilding.com



EVEN: How did Veganism become a part of your life?

Robert: I grew up on a farm in Corvallis, OR and from an early age I developed a level of appreciation for farm animals that was surely different

from those who didn't have daily interaction with them. I was active in the 4-H program, raising animals that would become friends. In some ways my relationship with farm animals would grow to be similar or perhaps even stronger than the relationship a child has with a dog or cat. I found that same bond many find with common domestic pets, to be possible with calves, chickens, rabbits, and other animals frequently considered as food rather than individuals. Observations of feelings human and non-human animals experience as a result of actions and situations they were exposed to, were made at a very young age, shaping how I would live my life.

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

Robert: It wasn't until I was 15 years old that I decided I no longer wanted to eat animals or contribute to animal cruelty and suffering, and I adopted a vegan lifestyle. That was in the winter of 1995 and by the influence of my older sister Tanya, who has become one of my all-time greatest role models and best friends. Tanya organized an Animal Rights Week at Corvallis High School and I attended every day. I listened to speakers, watched videos of animal testing and factory farming, read literature and shared ideas with others, while listening and learning all along the way. I was a teenager and my sister was my primary role model. Other role models in the vegan movement didn't come into my life until years later with last names like Robbins, Lyman, and Brazier, who have all, in their own way, shaped the way I view the world.

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

Robert: I've been involved in the animal rights movement for the past 17 years, and the best advice I can give after all my interactions and observations is to simply care a lot, work hard to make a difference, and lead by positive example. Follow your passion, live with purpose, smile as much as possible, and do the little things that make a big difference. If you are an advocate and feel compelled to get more involved within an area of the movement, explore options and pursue those that produce the best return. One can be a passionate activist and completely ineffective if their activism is not carried out properly. There are many ways to be effective just there are an equal number of ways to be ineffective. Find meaningful work that is also impactful. Learn from those who have made the greatest positive impact in our movement and who have accomplished what you aspire to achieve.

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

Robert: I don't think veganism is hard. In my observations, the people who seem to struggle with the vegan lifestyle all have a few things in common: The animal rights component wasn't a prime reason for adopting the lifestyle, they were convinced by peers and media that it was a bad idea for one reason or another, usually involving fear, risk or scare tactics, they didn't have a support network to share ideas and common interest with, or they ate a poor diet of refined carbohydrates and high sugar and fatty foods and didn't feel very well and gave it up.

There is a clear distinction between someone who is vegan for ethical, moral and logical reasons and someone who follows a plant-based diet, avoiding all animal products. A true 'vegan' lifestyle is not hard because it

is a lifestyle that is in line with a belief system, and an understanding of real issues and how our behavior impacts those issues. Therefore, it isn't a challenge, a trial, or experimental diet program, which can all be difficult, but a way of life that should be purposeful and rewarding.

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

Robert: By far, the most misunderstood idea about veganism is the perception that certain nutrients or components of nutrition such as protein are hard to find on a vegan menu. There are also misconceptions and misunderstandings about why veganism is important. Veganism gets portrayed as though it is a personal decision or choice. It is looked at as if veganism is right for some, but perhaps not for others, that it is up to each person. In a way, it is a personal choice, but I see it as a personal choice in the same way that someone may have the choice to commit violent crimes, to take the stance that he or she is a racist and act upon that stance, to bypass the thoughts, wishes and desires of others to put one's own agenda first, etc. While we see this every day around the world, it still doesn't make that behavior logical, practical or sensible and I argue that we should evaluate our personal decisions regularly and think differently in a way that causes the least amount of harm and does the most amount of good.

Your decision to eat a specific preferred meal could cost another being its entire life, simply to fulfill a desire of a specific taste. That kind of behavior is misunderstood by the rest of the world in far greater capacities in comparison to the small scale misunderstandings of a fringe subculture, even if it goes unrecognized by the very people perpetuating it. Rather than trying to convince others of the whereabouts of plant protein and other misunderstandings within the vegan movement, I suggest we start questioning the misunderstandings we have about the eating and lifestyle

behaviors that are globally the most destructive force we've ever experienced. The farming, confinement, harvesting and eating of animals is killing all of us, and the planet, and we have observed this in factual form, in our brief time on Earth. That data cannot be misunderstood.

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

Robert: I don't think about the things I can't go back and change. As someone who is astutely aware of how actions impact others and observant of human behavior in a detailed manner, I would critique my past behavior so meticulously that it would likely be counter-productive rather than productive. Of course I wish I would have come to the decisions I came to at age 15 earlier in life, and wish I would have begun my activism and outreach earlier, interacted with certain people differently and handled situations more productively. There isn't one thing that stands out from my childhood thinking that I would change. There is, however, an awareness of my own actions daily that is my focus to make myself a better activist, role model and citizen in a life, dedicated to stewardship, supporting those in need of support.

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

Robert: What I would tell a young person today is to follow your dreams and pursue your passion, regardless of what others may think about it. Find

the courage to believe in yourself wholeheartedly and live without limits. The world is magnificent and life is a miracle and should be appreciated and lived with incredible passion. Find what you love to do most, the thing you can't wait to do the moment you have a second of spare time, and do that as much as you can until some other new passion tugs at your heart, then do that. Live selflessly and make it a priority to lift others up and contribute greatly to the world.

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

Robert: I believe that true veganism works, period. But I also believe that many people have tried a vegetarian or vegan meal plan and have, to their own admission, failed. The reason a vegan meal plan may not work is when it is comprised of refined carbohydrates, heavily processed foods, sugars, oils, junk foods and is void of plant-based whole foods. When a vegan meal plan is based around plant-based whole foods as the absolute foundation of the nutrition program, it should work well for everyone, providing all necessary components of nutrition.

I appreciate delicious and hearty flavors and unique creative dishes almost as much as the next person, but I also have a deep appreciation for food in general, knowing that billions of human and non-human animals go hungry and don't wake up to the options I am privileged enough to enjoy anytime I want. Therefore, I am grateful for any and all foods that allow me to be nourished and pursue passions unique to my own interests in athletics and in life. Staples in my diet are whole fruits, burritos, and ethnic foods from many cultures, including Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Ethiopian, North African, Indian and Mexican. Many of those are fairly basic including rice and vegetables with various sauces, beans and other flavoring components. Fruit is my all-time favorite thing to eat. A bright colored,

sweet, tasty snack I often pick myself, directly from the tree or bush is optimal for me to enjoy and share with others.

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Robert: One thing that makes veganism worthwhile is looking into the eyes of a rescued animal who gets a second chance at life, free of fear, pain and suffering. Another thing that makes veganism worthwhile is the fact that it is a real, tangible hope for a viable future.

EVEN: Do you have any opinion or insight on the future of veganism in today's world?

Robert: Living in the media-centered world I live in as an author and filmmaker, I see the amazing platform for activism and outreach that we've never had access to before. With books, films, television, and the internet in general as means of spreading ideas, we are in the beginning of a social shift at the grass roots level, all because of accessible media. Once controlled by large companies with their own agendas trumping those of the common person, we now live in an age where free speech is more free and accessible than ever.

I see the personal health of humans on the decline as a by-product of food and lifestyle choices, and I anticipate a massive shift, perhaps even mandated by the government, in the coming years. We may see government mandated nutrition policies preventing the production or selling of specific animal-based foods because we simply won't be able afford to manage the growing illnesses that sweep across the world, almost without notice by the general public.

The glass can be viewed as half full, or half empty in regards to the future of our movement, but I choose to see it for what it is; a transparent shell that holds us together. Bonded together by the underlying reasons that compelled us to rise up and take a stand for something worth standing for is what makes us brothers and sisters in arms, reaching out to lend a helping hand, to unlock a cage door, to feed a hungry mouth, and with arms wide open, embrace a hug signifying freedom and hope for a brighter future for all of us.

"Looking at Robert, you can clearly see his big muscles. Hearing him speak, you can clearly see his big heart. This man is a powerhouse of passion, dedication, and determination."

Rory Freedman
Author of the #1 New York Times
Best Selling Book *Skinny Bitch*

VEGAN BODYBUILDING & FITNESS



The Complete Guide to Building
Your Body on a Plant-Based Diet

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The World's Most Recognized Vegan Bodybuilder

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Robert is also very active on both
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