

—an **EVEN** exclusive interview —



with

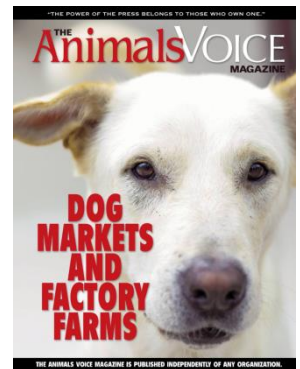
Laura Moretti

**Founder/President,
Animals Voice**

*From the age of 10, **Laura Moretti** has been active on behalf of animals in every way possible — from an undercover agent for the New Jersey SPCA, to a lobbyist for animal protective legislation in every state she has ever lived in, to hands-on rescue of wild horses, to magazine and web site publishing, to serving on the board or advisory boards of various organizations and/or designing and producing material for them.*

*Laura is also currently waging a campaign with **Starsky and Hutch** star, **David Soul**, to end the dog meat trade in Asia.*

*She was inducted into the **Animal Rights Hall of Fame** in 2004 and is still the founder and publisher of **The Animals Voice** and **Earthlings** web sites and magazines, as well as **Horse Nation** and **Animals India** web sites.*



Laura has been an activist for animals for nearly 50 years.



EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Laura: When I was in high school, I discovered a book titled *Animal Machines* by **Ruth Harrison** — and was an instant vegetarian even before I read a single word. The pictures of factory farming, of veal crates and battery cages, were all I needed to see to stop eating animals — right there and right then.

I had empathized with animals all my life and didn't need words to convince me of the wrong I saw in those pictures.

Up until Harrison's book, I had been an activist for animals in general from the age of nine, when I watched in horror as a dog was strangled to death for a family's meal on the streets of La Paz, Bolivia, and my activism was furthered when we returned to the states to the unimaginable images of grown men beating hapless seal pups to death across that frozen ocean.

But I didn't equate street dogs and harp seals to the flesh on my plate till I saw the pictures in *Animal Machines*. In fact, I honestly thought activists went too far when they protested against the dairy industry itself. It struck me as absurd to be against cheese and ice cream, for example, so much so that I didn't even want to know what their argument was.

Fast forward two decades...

I was an established ethical vegetarian and animal rights activist-at-large, publishing every known medium I could master on the subject of animal rights, including newsletters, posters, pamphlets, leaflets, bumper stickers, books, magazines, and the list goes on! And I had been doing that work for 20 years by the time I went undercover at the local university animal farm (having already been an undercover agent for the New Jersey SPCA). But this was my first time in a pig factory and I hurriedly photographed sows in gestation crates, as well as others in farrowing pens. I also photographed dead piglet piles and barrels of severed calves' legs in slaughterhouse freezers before I wandered outside and encountered the dairy farm.

Interested in the plight of calves raised for veal, I photographed newborn calves chained to what looked like doghouses. The calves were covered in flies, were without food or water, and sweltered in the 100-plus degree heat.



When I accidentally got close enough, one calf desperately reached out to me — to suckle my hand, I soon discovered. I sincerely didn't understand it till I noticed that the calf still wore her umbilical cord. She could only have been two or three days old. I also didn't realize that these calves weren't being raised for veal, but were instead 'replacement heifers' — calves who would eventually replace the milked cows after they were spent and sent to slaughter.

I knelt in the dirt and took this newborn calf's photograph, pausing occasionally to let her suck my hand. It was only when I exhausted my film roll that I was able to BE in that picture, rather than outside it. I was a player; no longer a spectator.

The pause enabled me to hear the monotonous bellow behind me, an earthy rhythmic, rolling sound, deep and low and somewhat hoarse and pained; a groan, if you will, one that played over and over and over again, so deliberate and rehearsed in its delivery that, until that moment, I had assumed it was only background farm noise. But, like those pictures in Ruth Harrison's book, the image that met my stare when I turned around to investigate was all I needed to see to change me from a vegetarian into an instant vegan.

There she was, a lone cow, across the narrow driveway, on the opposite side of the fence, separated from her herd, facing me. Well, separated from her calf and facing her calf, I realized. She'd been there for days. The effort-filled groan was all she had left in her; a cry, an unanswered, relentless plea I shall never forget.

And in that moment, though I hadn't literally taken her baby from her, chained the calf to a crate just out of her reach, I understood how I was responsible for both their suffering.

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

LAURA: I would have to attribute that to two people: the first was **Tom Regan**, whose book, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, validated what I had already grown to believe but couldn't put into words; I knew what was morally right and wrong when it came to animals, and I had instinctively known it since I was five years old, but how to put that into words? Regan put it into words — and, in doing so, he gave me permission to BE who I was born to be.

And, of course, **Ruth Harrison**, to be more specific about the veganism connection, because she opened my eyes to the treatment and plight of farmed animals.

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

LAURA: To be steady-as-she-goes, but patient; to remember that not everyone arrives at the destination at the same pace. There I was, founder and publisher of *The Animals Voice Magazine*, an award-winning, international, leading animal rights magazine, while I devoured cheese pizzas and ice cream sundaes — and LONG into my activism on behalf of suffering animals before I finally made the connection between the 'benign' foods (animal secretions) and the flesh foods — and that unforgiving pain is just as much a part of the overall process of animal byproducts as the electrocutions and the head-bashings and the dismemberments-while-conscious and the deprivation and the separation and the live boils all are.

I advise to be a teacher, to spread the word, to educate, or, as I like to say: to plant seeds. Like flowers. Plant them and water them and give them time to grow. But spread those seeds far and wide along the way.

And to never forget that you, too, once relished animal flesh and animal by-products — and what it took for you to make the connection. And how long it did, too.

We all have blood on our hands. And the time distance between when we actively participated in the exploitation of animals, in all its various forms, till this moment in our lives, doesn't erase that fact.

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

LAURA: The disconnect. People are disconnected from the WAY food is made — and by food, I mean food in general, REAL food, living food, not just dead food (though, personally, I have a hard time calling anything made from the bodies of animals as food). Until I owned my own acreage and planted my own fruit trees and vegetable garden did I grasp the beauty and the connectedness of eating WITH the earth, as opposed to against it.

I don't say this with any embarrassment, but I sing to my fig tree while I water it and my fig tree nourishes me in return.

People are also disconnected from the animals whose flesh and whose secretions they consume. They're appalled by those who eat dogs and cats and horses, because dogs and cats and horses are somebodies they KNOW and can relate to, but the disconnect between themselves and farmed animals (cows, pigs, chickens, etc.) is so great, not the least of why is because of the brainwash we've all been subjected to, that "these animals were made for these purposes," that they can't even make the connection between dogs and cats and horses to cows and pigs and chickens.

I have yet to meet anyone who finally grasps the concept that ALL living beings share the same emotions, thoughts, behaviors, wants, fears — as purely a matter of degree and not kind — and then finds veganism a hard way to live.

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

LAURA: Ha. Just that: that it's hard.

My mother is 79 years old, overweight, and was recently diagnosed with cerebral vascular disease, which is somewhat like heart disease, except its effect is on the brain. She long ago gave up eating mammals, and she rarely ate chicken and other birds, but she was big on dairy products. After nearly stroking from a completely collapsed artery in her neck that supplies blood to her brain, she got her wake-up call. Just yesterday she and I went to Trader Joe's together for her first time. I noticed how adamant she was about reading the ingredient labels on every package to make sure there weren't any animal products in them. Did I tell you she's 79 years old and ate a diet rich in dairy products?

It's never too late. And it's not hard — once you've made up your mind to stop eating death and pain, and to live instead on life and living, it's the easiest thing in the world.

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

LAURA: The belief I had then that people would instantly change when presented with facts. Had I believed in reality, which is that people don't really care (or don't want to care) if it means they have to change, I could have been spared decades of disappointment. I would have given up my endeavors to make everyone I personally knew be a vegetarian or vegan and instead spent that time throwing those seeds further out instead.

The lives I've seen change over the last forty years of my activism have come from the most unexpected places and from long after I scattered their seeds. You simply don't know, and can't know, where a flower takes root. But I was young then and believed the world was all good and would do good if presented with the facts.

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

LAURA: I would impress upon a younger person that the world is as it is, and not as it should be (my childhood mistake). Therefore, it's going to be a long and difficult journey if you choose to want to change it.

Or maybe it's *not* a matter of choice. For some of us, it IS the way it is, who we are, who we were born to be. In either case, however, I would mentor that person into understanding that life is terribly short and the task at hand is terribly formidable and that, because of those things, if you don't ENJOY your life, you'll have wasted it. You are but a cog in the wheel that is time — more time than you have.

We, today, do the work started by those hundreds of years ago, and those, tomorrow, will be doing the work we continued. It's a passing of torches, in a way.

By enjoying your life, I believe, you can stay on course. It's easy to be demoralized and feel defeated, to feel sorry and depressed, to be angry and enraged. I know. I've been all those things. More than once. As I said, the task is terribly formidable. Change is hard and change is slow (even, as you've seen, for those of us who want to and have changed!). But this is no task for the faint of heart. This is a lifelong commitment — and every day, we bury someone. Or hundreds of someones. Or millions of someones. Every day. Day after day. For the rest of our lives.

That is the reality of activism on behalf of animals — mainly because animals aren't the activists in their own cause (like women are for women's rights and gays are for gay rights and blacks are for civil rights and so on).

Every day, we grieve. Every day we get set back. Every day we watch the madness play out before our eyes.

So, if you're going to be in this for the long haul — and if you want to see change happen, you **HAVE** to be in it for the long haul — then take time for you, too. Smell flowers. Enjoy hugs. Eat living foods. Watch the stars in nighttime skies. Listen to beautiful music. Replenish your soul.

And then get back to work!

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

LAURA: That's kind of a trick question. In a way, it's asking me to put some sort of value on a way of living that I have no right to measure. Veganism **IS** life — life as it should be. It's similar to people who thank me for doing the work I do for animals. Thank me? For doing what must be done? For doing what is right to do? I have a hard time with such gratitude. I do this work because it must be done. If someone wants to thank me, they don't have to pass those words my way; they simply have to join the living. The same applies to veganism.

To echo **George Bernard Shaw**, *"Oh, come! That boot is on the other leg. Why should you call me to account for eating decently? If I battered on the scorched corpses of animals, you might well ask me why I did that."*

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

LAURA: I just read that a child born today, having lived a lifetime of 85 years, will see a human global population of 12.3 billion. We have already endangered life throughout the planet. Altered the climate. Rendered species extinct. Polluted our water. Toxicified our environment. Devastated our oceans. And the list, sadly, goes on.

My vision of the future is: either it goes to one extreme or it goes to another, but it can't go to both. Either we kill all and everything, including ourselves, or we save all and everything, including ourselves. The latter, in my opinion, can only be done in two ways: we stop reproducing beyond the system's capabilities to survive us AND we adopt a sustainable way of living in the world — and that is to be vegan.

We may not be able to stop human population growth in time to save the planet, but if a vegan world is the only sustainable world for us, why not begin today?

Just don't forget two things:

1) to scatter those seeds of knowledge — to teach a better way, to alleviate the suffering of animals, to turn the tide — right up till the day you leave us,

and

2) to enjoy the journey along the way.

What else is there?

###



(Laura Moretti)

THE Animals VOICE  www.animalsvoice.com

 **Earthlings**
A PROJECT OF THE ANIMALS VOICE

HorseNation 
A PROJECT OF THE ANIMALS VOICE

 **ANIMALS INDIA**
A PROJECT OF THE ANIMALS VOICE

David Soul
