

“BECOMING VEGAN: My Story”

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My primary reason for transitioning to a plant based diet began out of compassion for animals; however, the health benefits I have experienced have been dramatic. My cholesterol level, which had risen over the years to a point where my doctor wanted to prescribe cholesterol lowering medication, has dropped to normal. I had also gained a few pounds over the years, and tried many diets along with exercise. Since becoming a Vegan, I have lost 12 pounds without ever feeling hungry or deprived. It's amazing. I can eat all of the fruits and vegetables I want, as well as other filling and nutritious unprocessed “whole foods” such as healthily prepared potatoes, corn, grains, whole wheat bread, beans, nuts and delicious soups, casseroles and healthy desserts and wine! When people ask what a Vegan eats, my husband and I tell them, “Anything but animals!” And that includes an amazing variety of foods.



Culture has such influence over what we choose to eat. It's not even a conscious choice. It seems normal, and is simply all we know.

Growing up in the South as a part of the “Baby Boomer” generation, I had never known anyone who was a Vegetarian. Every meal centered around meat. When I met my husband, he shared the conflict he had created with his family one Thanksgiving, when he announced that he would not be eating turkey or dressing. This was during the time in his life when he had been searching spiritually, and had been drawn to Buddhism out of his compassion for animals. However, his actions reminded his family of his rebellious teenage years. So they viewed this as a new phase of nonconformity, rather than true conviction.

Being a non-meat eater was hard back then, before all the options we have now. And there was very little research on the subject. Sid tried hard, even making his own soy milk. But the thinking then, was that it was very complicated to abstain from animal products. Nutritionists believed you had to carefully combine the right foods in every meal, in order to ensure you had a diet complete in amino acids.

By the time I met Sid, he was a meat eater like everyone else. So I didn't give much consideration to his previous diet, viewing it as part of his past involvement with Eastern religions.

The next time I was confronted with this concept was when my daughter Amy announced that she and her friend Jess had become “Vegans”. I was horrified. They were freshman at LSU and probably just caught up in a fad. As a Registered Nurse, I was convinced that their diet would be nutritionally inadequate. Worse, my concern was that they were manifesting signs of an eating disorder with some sort of severe dietary restriction.

Whenever Amy would try to share her convictions, I have to admit I was pretty closed minded. Nutrition has always been very important to me personally, and as a mother. I

considered myself well read on the subject, and skeptically viewed any “new” nutritional findings through the lens of science.

Nutrition aside, Amy’s main reason for not eating animals, like her Dad in the past, was concern for the animals themselves. I could not face this at first. My concept of a farm was like my Uncle Honeyboy’s dairy farm in Kentwood, where I spent time at as a girl. His cows had a wonderful life. They roamed his acreage freely from the barn to the creek, and the babies were with their moms. He also had free range chickens who were well treated.

I’ve since learned from The American Humane Society and other animal welfare groups that this was typical for the small family farms of the 1950’s, but no longer. Horrific abuse takes place on large “Factory Farms”, where production is based on profit. And underpaid animal handlers become hardened to the animals’ plight, who not only undergo intolerable conditions, but are often treated cruelly during their short miserable lives, existing only for our pleasure. Undercover agents who attempt to expose the abuse not only risk their own safety, but as a result of powerful meat and dairy lobbies, face jail time for filming the horrific conditions.

When Amy tried to show me some of these videos, I couldn’t watch. I emotionally had to shut it off. I reasoned that any abuse of animals in this day and age was probably rare. The meat and dairy industry surely was held to standards and governed by legislation. And even if this type of abuse of animals did exist, and was widespread as these groups maintained, what could I as an individual do about it?

It is amazing how easy it is for us to rationalize and look away, especially for someone like me. My husband Sid is the passionate crusader. I am like the ostrich, who prefers to stick her head in the sand, avoiding conflict or action.

Don’t get me wrong, I have always been an animal lover. My mother was forever rescuing animals placed in her path, teaching us from an early age to feel for God’s creatures, especially for those who needed our protection. Neither my dad nor my four brothers were hunters, which meant a lot to me. In fact, I had a list of ten criteria I was looking for and prayed for in a husband. Top on the list was empathy for others, both people and animals.

So, on our first date, a picnic to the Audubon Zoo, Sid with no knowledge of my convictions or feelings on the subject, did something that let me know his heart. I noticed that his cooler had a typical outdoorsman picture of a hunter with a gun slung over the shoulder. Sid had taken a permanent marker and changed the gun to a Christmas tree!

I later learned that Sid had grown up, like most Southern boys, enjoying being out in nature, learning to hunt and fish, and sharing quality time with his dad. He has a great story about how he became personally convicted that he could no longer hunt. As a boy, while sitting on the hood of his dad’s car, Sid was so excited that he was able to aim and shoot two rabbits as they ran in different directions. Later that night, however, he began to think about the reality of what he had done. They were probably mates, or at least buddies. And if they were mates, were there babies now orphaned and starving? For Sid personally, since we no longer need to hunt to survive, he decided to trade his gun for a camera, in order to enjoy wildlife. He still loves shooting guns, but uses targets for practice, instead of live animals.

However, just like what we choose to eat, it must be a personal decision. We are not called to judge heart motives, but we can voice our convictions. Like me growing up, most people have never thought about things that have been so culturally conditioned and accepted.

Health is sometimes the best way to initially approach the subject. Heart disease and strokes run on both sides of my family. My dad had quadruple coronary bypass surgery, and later died from a massive stroke. My mom and most of my brothers are on cholesterol lowering drugs, even though they live relatively healthy lifestyles. As I shared, I was alarmed as I watched my cholesterol reading climb each year, and am thankful to see my serum lipid levels return to normal without medication.

Becoming a Vegan is a journey, and I often share that Sid and I, for health reasons began cutting out red meat and fried foods years ago, as well as limiting sugar. Then, for the inhumane treatment of chickens, as well as concern over the added hormones causing unnaturally large chicken breasts muscle, we became Pescatarians (seafood eaters) who also ate free range chicken eggs and dairy.

As I got older, I became lactose intolerant, and learned that most of us produce less of the enzyme needed to digest milk and some cheeses. I learned that despite the advertising that “milk makes strong bones”, research show just the opposite. If you google “milk intake and Osteoporosis,” you will find that high milk intake is actually associated with the disease. A prime example is my mom. She has always believed the slogan, and drinks several cups of milk daily, but her bone density tests showed severe Osteoporosis, causing curvature of the spine as the vertebrae collapse due to bone thinning.

The turning point for us was watching the documentary, “Forks Over Knives,” which our daughter Amy was required to read, in book form, as a freshman at LSU. She had encouraged us, but we had never taken the time, until now, to watch. The documentary highlights the research of two respected physicians, Dr. Campbell, a cancer researcher at Cornell University in the 1960’s and Dr. Esselstyn a surgeon at the world renowned Cleveland Clinic. Each worked separately, yet reached the same conclusions. They called into question the SAD (Standard American Diet), already recognized as the worst diet in the world in terms of health, but for unknown reasons. I highly recommend watching it on Netflix or at least the preview on You Tube. There are also many excellent books we have read and have listed on my husband’s website.

When you become a Vegan, you will inevitably be asked questions. Sometimes it’s fun to share, especially if the person asking is interested and open. Sometimes it’s awkward, because no matter how humbly the information is shared, it can be heard as personal judgment. Yet with time and sensitivity, someone can be lead to the same convictions and actually change. I have to remind myself that once I was blind to the evidence, which seems so obvious to me now. And because I am healthier and happier, I naturally wish everyone could see and believe as I do.

The parallel between sharing my personal convictions leading to becoming a Vegan, and my path to becoming a sincere follower of Christ are so similar. In each case, I try not to push, remain humble and compassionate, while recognizing new ideas can be threatening. I once was in their place. So, I sometimes feel like I’m a Vegan evangelist. But the irony is that my husband and I believe our new way of eating, which my husband likes to call “the compassionate diet”, truly fits Our Creator, The Good Shepherd, and should bring honor to Him.

God originally created a perfect world in the beginning, according to Genesis 1:29-31, giving us, “every green herb to eat.” We now live in a broken world, filled with selfishness and suffering. But one day, He promises to restore things as in the beginning, where there is no death or suffering, and “the lion will lay down with the lamb”! Isaiah 11.

Until that time, we have a choice. God has given us an abundance of foods with taste buds to enjoy them. Research has shown that plants contain all the nutrition, including protein, which we need. For the best health, we should eat a variety of foods as close to their original form as possible, known as “whole foods.” Processed foods often much of their nutrition removed (through processing), have added fats and sugars and are low in fiber. As a result, unlike plant based foods high in bulk and fiber, processed foods are not filling or satisfying unless consumed in large amounts. Meat, which has no fiber, if consumed at all, should make up a much smaller part of our diet. The meat and dairy industries, through slick advertising and funded research, have convinced most Americans otherwise. Combine that with our fast food lifestyles and love of unhealthy processed foods, and it is no wonder that wherever the American diet goes, obesity and disease follow.

We can do much to stop the abuse of animals, and also reap the health benefits, by changing the way we eat. As with everything else in life, with choices come consequences. We can “have it our way”, or a better way. I encourage you to look at the evidence, be open to what may be the truth on the subject, and like me be amazed with what you find and experience.



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Super Hi-Protein
Vegan Chili