

EVEN Interview with Victoria Moran



- Author of
Main Street Vegan

- Director of
**Main Street Vegan
Academy**

*Victoria Moran (www.mainstreetvegan.net) is the prolific author of eleven books, including her latest, **Main Street Vegan: Everything You Need to Know to Eat Healthfully and Live Compassionately in the Real World**, which VegNews calls "the vegan Bible, New Testament," and of which President Bill Clinton writes: "I'm delighted that you're helping to make the vegan lifestyle more accessible and achievable for as many people as possible."*

A vegan of thirty years, Victoria raised a vegan daughter, Adair, who helped with the writing of Main Street Vegan, and she's maintained a 60-pound weight loss all this time.

*Moran hosts the weekly Main Street Vegan radio show/podcast on **Unity.FM** and she is the founder and director of **Main Street Vegan Academy**, an exciting program to train and certify vegan lifestyle coaches and educators.*

Follow her on Twitter @Victoria_Moran



EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Victoria: I always loved animals and first attempted to go vegetarian at thirteen. I lived on cottage cheese and fruit cocktail for a summer and finally went back to meat out of sheer hunger, but I knew that someday I'd learn what I needed to know and do this again.

That time came when I was eighteen and living in London for a fashion course. I was getting into yoga, which at that time strongly suggested vegetarianism, and London was veg-friendly enough that I was able to get off eating land animals there. Fish came next, but veganism seemed impossible.

I was a practicing binge eater then and veganism just seemed too hard, even though it fascinated me enough that I used a fellowship I later received in college to return to the UK and study vegans there. The resultant paper I wrote became ***Compassion the Ultimate Ethic***, my first book, and, as far as I know, the first book on vegan philosophy and practice ever to come from a major publisher. (It eventually went out of print but the **American Vegan Society** continues to publish and sell it.) I still wasn't able to take the full vegan plunge until I got into recovery for compulsive eating. Once I had the power of choice over what I would eat, I chose vegan, and it's been a great blessing.

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

Victoria: She was a non-vegetarian named Adelene DeSoto, the grandmother-aged woman my parents hired to live with us and take care of me since they both worked and this was in the days before daycare centers. Mrs. DeSoto (I called her Dede) responded to my three-year-old's boast "I killed a red spider with my bare hands!" with "And what had he done to you?"

It was one little question, but it changed my world view: just because I could exert power over some weaker being, didn't mean I was supposed to.

Dede told me about vegetarianism the day I came home from 1st grade proudly reciting the 4 Food Groups. "There are people who never eat any meat," she told me. "They're called vegetarians and I could take you to the cafeteria at Unity Village and get you a hamburger made out of peanuts. You'd think you were eating beef." (Unity Village is the headquarters of the Unity movement, a prayer ministry founded by vegetarians in the 1800s. Later generations left the vegetarian teachings behind, but it's interesting the Unity Online Radio people came to me last year inviting me to do the Main Street Vegan radio show for them, and adding, "It's time we got back to our roots.")

Dede also raised me to rescue baby birds (although we tended to fail miserably with them) and collect money for the animal shelter and adopt all our pets. She was my inspiration and I took her love and wisdom a bit further than she'd been able to do in becoming a vegan. I see my own daughter, Adair, a lifelong vegan, taking it further than me: she's a licensed wildlife rehabilitator who takes in injured and abandoned pigeons, sparrows, squirrels, and yesterday even a little baby rat who'd washed out of his nest during a rainstorm.

I believe in karma and I see it working for Adair: she and her husband, young actors without trust funds or anything like that, managed to buy a condo in East Harlem with a yard. A yard in Manhattan--- a bona fide miracle---but they have one, and it's both play space for their two dogs and the site of the flight cages and bird feeders and other accoutrements of Adair's wildlife work.

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

Victoria: I think activism takes many forms and it changes over time. If you want to be a sign-carrying, leafleting kind of activist, there are dozens of reputable animal rights and vegan groups who'd love your help. If you're a person of means, use those resources in creative ways to further this cause. But always remember that as a vegan you're being an activist every day of your life.

Every time someone asks where you got your shoes, you get to carry this message. Every time you go to lunch with a friend or colleague and order vegan, someone is seeing how this way of life works. And as you get older, if you avoid the common pitfalls of midlife and beyond -- overweight, diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol -- you have a platform to share about your diet and lifestyle.

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

Victoria: It goes against the cultural norm. We're basically telling people that their mothers didn't feed them right, and that's a tough pill to swallow. Sugar, salt, fat, and dairy foods are addictive, and the ice cream, pastries, pizza, burgers, and other foods Americans enjoy are largely mixtures of sugar, salt, fat, and dairy: 'just say no' is a pretty weak message to give to someone who is physically and psychologically addicted to a substance.

Then there are the social issues. They seem to weigh heaviest in people's returning to animal foods after a stint of veganism. Most of the people who go back don't do it because of any health issues or even because of the inconvenience sometimes inherent in living and eating differently from the societal norm. Most people who give up do it because they got a new boyfriend. Or they moved to a place where they had no support for their lifestyle. Or their mom says one time too many, "It's just so hard to cook for you anymore. I don't know why you can make an exception for your own mother."

Eating is a social event and when you eat differently, people in your social circle can feel rejected. I think that vegan activists and influencers need to take this very seriously and do all we can to help vegans and would-be vegans fit in with their longstanding social groups and also develop so much pro-veg support that a little razzing from non-veg friends and family won't faze them.

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

Victoria: That it's a diet. It is *not* a diet.

Veganism is a moral conviction. Even if you do it primarily for your health, there has to be a moral conviction or the risk of giving up is too high.

Is this the best diet on earth? Maybe. No one really knows because there are no large, long-standing vegan societies we can study and compare to their non-vegan counterparts.

What the researchers *do* know is that those communities that eat very few animal products are healthier than those that eat more animal products, but whether eating none is better than eating a few has simply not been determined.

What if it were determined that eating a largely plant-based diet with a little fish, meat on the holidays, some low-fat dairy, and the occasional egg-white omelet was indeed the healthiest way to eat? Would you stay vegan? Probably not. Unless it was for you a moral conviction.

Diets come and go. I know from being the overweight child of a diet doctor that they cycle in and out and show up as the latest thing, when really they're just some rehash of something from years before coming back with a new name and fresh packaging. But there's money to be made in diets, so they keep on coming. Right now, the vegan "diet" is trendy. One day it won't be. It will show up on those 'What's Out' lists. For compassionate, sustainable living to grow and change the world, we have to see our veganism as far more than a diet.

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

Victoria: I wish I'd known then that there was more to my overeating and obesity than weak willpower and some inherent flaw in my character. Those beliefs crippled my self-esteem for years.

I wish I'd known that food addiction and compulsive eating is a disease syndrome that comes from a combination of processed foods and lack of guidance for the filling the spiritual emptiness we all show up on this planet seeking to fill.

It would have been great to have discovered this at thirteen, but I discovered it at thirty, and there's a lot of life after thirty.

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

Victoria: What a terrific time to go vegan! These days with vegan foods, cosmetics, and clothing more easily accessible than ever, you can spend the energy people used to have to devote to making their own tofu into being a shining example of the vegan ethic.

The most important thing you can do is build a strong social network of other vegans. This can be a combination of a local veg and/or animal rights group, meet-up groups and vegan drinks; finding a yoga studio where vegetarianism/veganism is encouraged; and getting a vast online network of friends and supporters. Listen to vegan podcasts when you run or when you walk your dog. Follow your favorite bloggers. Read books. Consider this a grand adventure and a life's commitment.

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

Victoria: I really enjoy huge salads, especially in the warm weather. I make 'whole-meal salads' with beans, some steamed veggies, seeds, and a dressing based on tahini or raw cashews. It's my go-to lunch all the time unless I've just come in from 20-degree weather and go for soup or chili instead.

What makes veganism work for me is, first, I believe in it. I'm over the doubts --- Am I really getting enough protein? Might I be missing some nutrient my Paleo friends talk about? --- and I am convinced that this is a healthy, life-affirming way of living. Having a lot of vegan friends helps a great deal.

And health wise, my background in Ayurveda is invaluable. Ayurveda is an ancient health system from India still recognized by the World Health Organization. It has lots of wise suggestions for healthy living and it suggests a slightly different approach to diet and lifestyle for the three different Ayurvedic body types. When I do what I'm supposed to do Ayurvedically, I feel fabulous. (If you've interested in this, a book I recommend is *The Ayurvedic Vegan Kitchen* by Talia Lutzker.)

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Victoria: I know I'm doing the best I can to mitigate suffering. The amount of suffering in the world, both human and animal, is beyond comprehension and my ability to do something about it as one mere mortal is very small.

Being vegan, however, is something I can do, and it makes me feel every day that by making the choices that I do, I'm thanking God and Life and Nature for the privilege of being here.

And remember how I said that I believe in karma? The vegan lifestyle pays me back: I've kept off sixty pounds for nearly thirty years without dieting or deprivation (my book, *The Love-Powered Diet*, is all about this); I'm at the age where relatives on both sides of my family had heart disease and diabetes and I don't have any degenerative health problems at all; and I enjoy my life so much today.

Nobody ever said that being on the other side of sixty would be this fabulous, but I enjoy fashion and looking good and socializing in the dazzling milieu of New York City as much as people decades younger. A whole-foods vegan diet and lifestyle is like an infusion of youthfulness and vitality. It's partly from the nutritional oomf factor of the foods we eat and, I believe, it's partly the universe saying thank you.

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

Victoria: I think that those of us working on behalf of veganism and a new attitude toward non-human animals are like abolitionists in the early 1800s. There was history to their movement and they had right on their side, but slavery was still legal and still thriving. Many of them would die before they could see the end of humans owning humans, but it was inevitable. I believe that a vegan world is equally inevitable, and we're laying the foundation for that great day.

As long as we stick to veganism for what it truly is -- a way to live in harmony with all life -- and not be swayed by what's in style or what celebrity just jumped on the bandwagon and which one just jumped off, we'll keep making inroads. And I believe that one day we will have a vegan world.



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