



## **EVEN Interview** **with** **Krissi** **Vandenberg** **Executive Director,** ***Vegan Action***

*Krissi has been Executive Director of [Vegan Action](#) since 1998 after starting out as*

*a volunteer when the organization was still in Berkeley, California. When she moved back to the East Coast, she brought the organization with her where she currently lives in Richmond, Virginia. While serving for Vegan Action, Krissi received her Masters of Science in Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University, is currently working on a Certificate in Non-Profit Management and is a Certified Tree Steward for the City of Richmond. She enjoys spending any possible extra time with her husband Nick, her son Arrow, and four rescue dogs.*



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

**Krissi:** It was an evolution of vegetarianism that I had wanted to do for several years. The turning point for me was stumbling onto literature and videos of factory farm footage. I wasn't seeking it, so I am grateful to have discovered the information when I was in high school. I knew immediately that I had to make a change in order to feel like I was making a difference by not supporting the industry, and to live with a kinder conscious. I also realized how important it is to share this information with people. So many folks just don't know.

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

**Krissi:** I was in undergraduate school and was in a Race, Class and Gender class and was reading about Alice Walker. Her views on feminism, racism, human rights, and activism added to the strong emotions I was feeling about animal rights. I then went on to read Carol Adams who added speciesism into the discussion and that really put it all together for me. She became a true inspiration and still is to this day.

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

**Krissi:** Real change, in my experience, comes one person at a time. People try new things and make changes in their lives most often by being inspired by another person, especially someone they admire. Share with others how great it is to contribute toward a better world and show them how to do it. Share recipes, share food, share information.

***Be the person others want to be!***

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

**Krissi:** The main issues seem to be a lack of family and friend support, less access to vegan options, and desire of the animal-based comfort foods that many of us grew up with. Another significant issue seems to be with having the “label” of vegan. It gives people the impression that it is an all or nothing proposition and if someone wavers or chooses to eat something not vegan then they no longer can be considered vegan and may give up.

***I like to remind people that they can define their diet however they want to, as long as they are striving to live by their beliefs.***

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

**Krissi:** I would say the thought that people are vegan to be purists instead of just living life day to day being as conscientious as possible. The few judgmental vegans out there have given the general impression that we are always judging others who are not vegan. In actuality, the majority of vegans are happy about their personal choices and are happy to answer questions and share recipes with omnivores. I remind people all the time that I grew up a meat eater and currently some of my most favorite people are meat eaters (my mom, for example).

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

**Krissi:** I would change that I grew up to believe that I had to eat animals and drink milk to be strong and healthy. Also, I would change the fact that I was raised to eat animals without giving it any thought or consideration. I was an animal lover since I can remember and wanted to be a veterinarian for all of childhood until I began college. I have a memory of feeling conflicted about being so passionate about animals but then eating them.

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

**Krissi:** I find myself saying things I judged people for saying to me when I was a new vegan in my early twenties. Now, it rings true! I remind people that we have more strength and can effect change by being kind and open, even when it might sometimes be very hard to do.

Even when we feel anger and hatred about what is going on in the world to animals and to the Earth, I believe we can make true change happen by influencing people to make positive choices---these last much longer than when people make choices out of guilt or fear. I know it is ideological, but I want people to change for the right reasons.

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

**Krissi:** One of my most favorite meals is lentil loaf with good ol' mashed potatoes, homemade biscuits and sautéed brussel sprouts. (I am a southerner after all.)

I love cooking and especially baking. Two ingredients that make vegan food really work for me are nutritional yeast and ENER-G egg replacer.

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

**Krissi:** Knowing that the choices I make directly affect the supply and demand of raising and slaughtering animals for food. I have pictures of pigs and cows in my home office that make me smile every day.

And working for *Vegan Action* every day with the main goal of **improving the welfare of farm animals throughout the world,**

specifically, by encouraging people to make a crucial diet change of no animal products.

*Vegan Action* works to **promote environmental stewardship** by educating the public about the negative impacts on the environment directly from factory farming (fueled by meat consumption).

Third, we work to **promote good health for humans** and a plant-based diet is critical for optimal health. Essentially, if each person makes better choices when they sit down to eat their three meals a day, it can have a powerful impact on the well-being of farm animals, the earth and our personal health.

***Our work at Vegan Action is important because we aim for a happier, healthier, cleaner world. If the quality of life for animals and humans were greater and if our environment were cleaner and greener, wouldn't the world be a better place for all?***

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

**Krissi:** I truly see veganism continuing to grow because of the multitude of benefits it offers. Although some view it simply as a popular diet (which indeed it is), it actually is much more than just what one sits down to eat every day. It has become more of a culture in our society and it is no longer on the fringe. I see a trend of people thinking more about what they eat and where it comes from, and that has to be a good thing. More people are eating local animal products and report that they are eating less because they are paying attention to what it is and where it comes from.

While *Vegan Action* does not endorse the consumption of local and labeled "humane" meat and dairy products, we do encourage people to visit farms where animals are raised for food so they can see what is involved. Granted, the factory farms, which are what we primarily are objecting to, do not allow public visits and they are the worst of the worst. But seeing an animal live a natural life and then seeing it slaughtered can have a lifelong impact on some people.

It is the lack of knowing the truth behind all that is involved in the consumption of animals and animal products that keeps people doing what they have always done. We have to break that cycle and get the information out there.



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