



Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization

Interview with Derek Goodwin

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **DEREK GOODWIN** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 196.*

MARIANN: People are doing these horrible, horrible things to animals in order to make themselves hideously ill. It just is crazy.

JASMIN: Well, you know what I say to that?

MARIANN: No.

JASMIN: I say thank God for Derek Goodwin.

MARIANN: Oh, that's true. That's exactly, exactly who we need right now.

JASMIN: We do. Derek, we need Derek Goodwin. We actually interviewed Derek a while ago when we were at Farm Sanctuary for the Hoedown. It was in August, but because we've had so many authors coming on with new books, Derek said that just -- it's fine, it's fine. So, I feel bad we kept bumping his interview. And it's ironic too because as soon as we finished doing this interview, we both talked about how excited we were about it and how much we completely adore the work he's doing. And I'm just really excited that he's out there connecting the dots in these truly artistic ways, about what's going on with animals. And he not only is a brilliant musician, and he not only is a yoga master, but he has some very interesting ideas about how to change the world for animals. And it's really my honor, both of our honors, to have Derek Goodwin on the podcast today.

Derek Goodwin is a photographer and media-savvy artist as well as a certified Jivamukti teacher and the web editor for the recently launched version of the Jivamukti Yoga website. Derek, who went vegan on New Year's Day in 1996, has served on the Board of Directors of the Rochester Area Vegetarian Society. He's also a photographer for Farm Sanctuary, the photographer advisor for VegNews Magazine. And when he's not doing that, he has worked as a vegan chef. In 2005, Derek founded Vegan Radio, and was one of the originators of the Vegan Bus. You can find out more about Derek at derekgoodwin.com.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Derek.

DEREK: Hello.

JASMIN: It's good to be here. I'm so excited that we're here with the most beautiful backdrop in the whole wide world. And you are not a stranger to a microphone, are you?

DEREK: No. I thought you were gonna say "the most beautiful vegan in the world."

JASMIN: Well, that too. So...

MARIANN: Yeah, but were you talking about me or were you talking about Derek?

JASMIN: You know, I'm just gonna move on to the next question now. Let's actually just go there since we started it. Let's talk about Vegan Radio, what is it?

DEREK: Vegan Radio, well it's a podcast we started in 2005. Actually, it went back to 2000. I was a web designer, and it was like the internet boom, and I bought veganradio.com, thinking someday I would start -- originally my idea was just to have like a internet radio station that just constantly played vegan propaganda and music. But in 2005, I was living in Northampton, Massachusetts, and we had a nonprofit low-powered FM radio station start that was community-based, so I saw this opportunity to get a vegan radio show on FM radio. And I signed up and got that going and then used the veganradio.com, so we called ourselves Vegan Radio. And that was right at the dawn of podcasting too, so I figured we'd make every show into a podcast. So, that's how it started out. And I think we were one of the first vegan podcasts. There was Vegan Freaks, who mysteriously disappeared.

And around 2009 I started going down to New Orleans in the winter, so we couldn't keep doing the FM radio show. So, at that point it just kind of became me randomly putting out podcasts. And probably in the years since 2009 we've put out about maybe 20 episodes. But now we're in New York City, I have a new cohost Lo Vee, and so we're trying to do it more and more regularly.

JASMIN: That's very cool. So, people can find you at veganradio.com, is that right?

DEREK: That's right, and it started out as more of a radio format with a news segment and interviews and things. And now it's kind of -- we have creative license to do whatever we want, so some shows are interviews. Lo Vee and I are both musicians, so our latest thing is that we write a little song about everybody we interview. So, there's a song about Jo-Anne McArthur, and we've got an interview with Ingrid Newkirk about to come out that has a song.

JASMIN: That's so cool.

DEREK: And yeah, so...

JASMIN: That's great.

MARIANN: I love the idea of people doing more music. Do you feel as I do that there's just not enough focus on music in this movement?

DEREK: Yeah. I think music, it's very -- it gets things into people's heads too, if you can come up with a really good rhyme. Like, so the Jo-Anne McArthur song, "Jo-Anne McArthur, the Canadian/ She went from wearing touks to saving toucans/ We animals you photograph all over the world/ Revealing the Ghosts in the Machine, a magical girl."

JASMIN: That's amazing. See, if I wasn't vegan, that would make me go vegan.

DEREK: Yeah, so I think, for me, vegan activism -- I've been a creative person all my life, so trying to figure out ways to creatively promote veganism that are -- kind of draw people in instead of shocking them with scary pictures and things. It's more just showing how diverse and wonderful veganism is has been my focus.

JASMIN: Well, you've been doing this for a long time, and you've been doing so much more too. There's a lot to chat with you about. Let's talk about your photography. It's unique, Derek, and it's gorgeous. And you take photographs -- you're really up there with the best of the best. And I particularly love that your photographs of farm animals really tell their story, just from a one-second glimpse into a still photo. Can you tell me how you make that happen? Because when I take pictures of, like, a pig, for example, I get half the pig's butt, and, like, my finger in the photo, and that's about it.

MARIANN: They always look away the minute I'm gonna take the picture, so I have a lot of pictures of animals looking in the other direction.

JASMIN: Yeah. It seems like it's difficult. How do you make it work and how do you really capture their essence?

DEREK: Well, I don't know if I can give all my secrets away, but... No, I've been doing it since -- well, I started working with Farm Sanctuary in 2001. They hired me to photograph a gala, or didn't actually hire me. They just asked me; I didn't -- I never get paid for any of this. But--

JASMIN: Really? I thought that's like why you had your podcast and why you did your music, and why you taught yoga.

MARIANN: It's for the money, yeah!

JASMIN: Right, I mean, that's why I'm in it.

MARIANN: That's why we do it.

JASMIN: Exactly.

DEREK: Yeah. Yeah, it's not a -- I've sold some prints here and there. Funny, I actually photographed Peter Singer here at Farm Sanctuary in 2006, and that's been my most lucrative photo shoot for Farm Animals because he put it on his website and I get all these publishers of philosophy books and things that ask me for pictures. And if it's a nonprofit vegan group, I always give them for free, but if it's like a school textbook then I charge them. And so I've probably made two or three thousand dollars off that, but...

JASMIN: You know what you should do? You should see if that photo has ever been used by animal agriculture criticizing Peter Singer, like they just sort of used the photo, and then sue the bastards.

DEREK: That sounds like a great idea.

JASMIN: Yeah.

DEREK: I'll get my research department on that.

JASMIN: But when you're photographing an animal -- I guess Peter Singer, it would be easier for him to sit still than a goat, for example. So, how do you do it?

DEREK: Well, there's a couple of him with animals that are very popular. But, so I started coming here like at least twice a year and just spending a week here and sitting with the animals for a long time, just really trying to understand them, what their habits are and what they enjoy. And getting down, I think from just a purely photographic side of it, you want to be down at their level, like eye level with them, like you're another, like you're one of -- if you're a pig, you want to pretend you're like one of their pig friends, and what would you see? So, you want to have that eye level experience.

The same thing with photographing children, by the way. If you want to photograph a child, you don't want to be above them looking down. You want to get the perspective of being at their level, just showing them as beings and not someone you're looking at, but somebody that you're having a conversation with or somebody that is -- you're spiritually connected with. So, I try to feel that spiritual connection, and the eyes of course are very important.

JASMIN: This is very zen of you, so peaceful.

DEREK: Exactly.

MARIANN: Well, it's more yogic, I feel like.

JASMIN: Well, I mean, that's appropriate.

MARIANN: And I know that yoga's a big part of your life, Derek. And I'm interested to know how that connects with your animal activism.

DEREK: So, back in 1994, I was in college for photography. And in the summer, they had a special program, it was a month-long trip through the desert southwest, where we camped and just took photos everywhere. And that year I had been kind of slowly cutting off of different types of meat for what I considered to be health reasons, the red meat, then the chicken, and then the fish. And I got out there, and there were some people who were actually vegetarian, and I was like, "oh that's interesting, people are vegetarians." And then, so, on that trip I decided to become a vegetarian. And also on that trip, one of my teachers was a Kundalini yoga teacher as well as a photography teacher, and so he led some early morning yoga sessions in just some of the most beautiful places I'd ever been. And so I had this whole like spiritual awakening during that trip, where I became vegetarian and I did yoga for the first time, so they've been connected always.

But I didn't really get back to yoga for another long while. But when I did, that came back to me, and -- or I guess it always has been in the background. And then, but now, I feel veganism is a spiritual undertaking. To really deeply be vegan, to consider other beings, and to be vegan because of ethical reasons is a spiritual thing. Whether you're atheist or not, I feel like, to me, spirituality isn't about God or religion; it's about honoring the mystical and the mysterious things in life and your connection to other beings. And so, the veganism or the getting back into yoga seemed like a natural thing, and especially Jivamukti yoga, where veganism is such a emphasized aspect of it. And the idea of ahimsa, which is the

Sanskrit word for nonviolence, it's the first step on the yogic path, as according to the Yoga Sutras, one of the main scriptures of yoga.

And so, they're very deeply connected if you really study yoga as it was passed down through the ages, the idea of nonviolence being the first step, because how can you really realize your oneness with everything else in the world if you are harming other things, other beings or other -- even plants and the earth itself, I feel.

JASMIN: I think that's really beautifully said. You have a very -- I feel like I want to like, I don't know, have some kind of cathartic moment with you and just tell you about my life and have you fix it.

MARIANN: No, I -- what you said really resonated with me, and I really liked the way you don't seem to be pushing people into anything more than a very simple concept. And I think that can really resonate with a lot of people, no matter -- regardless of what tradition they're coming from. I think that's really important. We also wanted to hear about the Vegan Bus, don't we? 'Cause I don't even know what the Vegan Bus is, and I really do want to know.

DEREK: All right, so the Vegan Bus, basically it started in 2006, another spiritual -- the other side of my spirituality is more of a shamanic path. And I went to Burning Man in the Nevada Desert in 2006 and it just blew my mind wide open. It was a -- you go there and you're in a desert. Everyone's dressed up in crazy costumes, there's art everywhere. Art is, it's an art festival, so all these amazing things. And a lot of them are structures that people spend a year building and then they just get burned down, including the man, the burning man, the man of Burning Man, which is a big effigy of a man that gets burned at the climax of the festival.

And at that point I'd been vegan for over 10 years, and it was a big aspect of who I was. And so I saw this place where people were so wide open; your mind is just opened to a different way of living, because also there, there's nothing for sale. It's a gift economy, so people are giving each other things, helping each other out. And so there was this sense I had that veganism could really take root in this place, where all these people come, they have this experience, their minds are opened, and then they take it back to where they come from.

And so, because there were all these art vehicles, crazy like giant boats and things driving around in the desert, I was like, okay, so maybe bringing some kind of vehicle back here would be the way to go. So, I had the idea for the Vegan Bus, and went back, started raising money. We bought a full-size school bus. And we bought it in 2007, the end of July. Burning Man started at the end of August, so we basically had a month. We converted it to run on waste vegetable oil, which means that we go around to restaurants, get their used deep-fat fryer oil...

JASMIN: Awesome.

DEREK: ...and filter it out, and then use that as the main fuel, which you can do with a diesel engine. It's a bit of a process, and you should Google it 'cause I don't want to take up your whole podcast describing it.

JASMIN: "I heard on the Our Hen House podcast that we could pour some olive oil in our car, and it'll run; it'll drive us to Nevada."

DEREK: Well, if you bought fresh olive oil, it would be very, very filtered and work pretty well. But I wouldn't recommend doing it without researching. Anyway, so that, so we got the bus there. It was a miracle; it was like the voyage of a lifetime because none of us had ever done anything like it. And I had taken on this leadership position and found myself in all these crazy situations. The diesel stopped working, so we had to run vegetable oil the whole way there. And driving through Kansas or wherever in the middle of the country, there's less and less places where you can find oil. And the places that you do, it turns out that actually the animal agriculture industry reclaims the oil to feed back to the animals, and it's also used in the cosmetic industry, so there was a lot of trouble finding oil. But we made it. And then we made it about halfway home after the festival before the bus finally broke down.

Well, so it got used for a couple more years. We've been featured on the Supreme Master TV, and had all kinds of other smaller adventures. But it never really reached the vision that I had for it, which has evolved over the years. So now, what I want to do, I'm going back to Burning Man this year without the bus. And once I get back from that, I am gonna start my campaign to resurrect the Vegan Bus. So, you guys have the scoop here. This is the first time I've announced it publicly.

JASMIN: Wow, this is exciting. How can people stay on top of what's going on with this and send you our old used oil?

DEREK: Well, I'm not quite ready to start collecting oil. But theveganbus.com is the website. Right now, there's -- well, maybe by your podcast I can get something up. But the first thing I want to do is get some vegan artists to help me. All right, so here's the vision, are you ready?

JASMIN: I'm totally ready, I am so ready.

MARIANN: Yup, I'm so ready.

DEREK: Okay, so the bus is like a snub nose, so it looks kind of like a pig. My idea is to make a flying pig out of it. I want to put wings on top that have solar panels on them.

JASMIN: Oh my God.

DEREK: And that when it's parked, the wings can open up. And so it'll be the whole, "When pigs fly, everyone's gonna be vegan."

JASMIN: Oh, I love this, Derek!

DEREK: And then the other thing I want to do with it is make it into a portable stage system that can host different events. So, I want to have the side of the bus open into a stage when it's parked, with a sound system powered by the solar energy, and that'll be it. So, we could have yoga classes, vegan speakers; we could have music, go to festivals, go to towns, set up in the town square and put on an event.

JASMIN: This is incredible! I love this!

DEREK: And maybe get the Cinnamon Snail to come with us to serve food.

JASMIN: Yeah, I think that may be--

DEREK: 'Cause everyone thinks it's gonna be a food truck, but that's not really what I want to do.

JASMIN: I think that maybe there's something in it for you if the Cinnamon Snail comes. I'm sensing that you have a little ulterior motive. "Yeah, I mean, it's for the greater good of animals!"

DEREK: It's for the greater good of vegan bellies.

JASMIN: Yeah, exactly. Well--

DEREK: So, the first thing that I'd like to do is get a bunch of artists to do some renderings of what it could look like. And so I'd like to work with some artists, get that all done, and then have a kind of a Indiegogo or Kickstarter type of fundraiser to try to raise the money to make it happen.

JASMIN: Well, something tells me that if you can get this bus all the way to Burning Man, you can raise some money on Indiegogo. This is very exciting. I love everything Derek's up to.

MARIANN: I love all of it. I'm so excited. I feel like I'm kind -- it's kind of revisiting a little bit of the past and yet turning it into something new. And you're so right. Like, the people at Burning Man, these kind of people, these people should be moving in this direction of veganism. And it's heartbreaking to see that people who think very progressively and creatively and artistically are not. And bringing that message to people who should be open to it, I think is just the most amazing thing. And to bring in this artistic vision at the same time? I think you're really onto something here.

JASMIN: And you said, Mariann, that it's bringing you back to your past. In a way, it is, but what Derek is doing that is so exciting is he's also making full use of new media, and making it go viral, and not just reaching the few hundred or few thousand people who were at Burning Man, not just reaching the few hundred or few thousand people who might see one concert. But you're doing photographs, you're doing audio. Are you doing video?

DEREK: Yeah, well, that's the other thing I want to do is document this whole process and then -- we have some existing video of the bus, but really starting with this new -- maybe we'll call it 2.0 or whatever, we'll document the whole thing and then try to take it back to Burning Man next year and make a movie out of that whole experience.

JASMIN: So amazing, so exciting. I'm just really glad that--

DEREK: Maybe bring it to the Hoedown next year too.

JASMIN: Yes! I'm really excited, Derek, that you sat and chatted with us. In the time that we did this interview, the weather has changed 35 times.

DEREK: Yeah, it's pretty crazy. We got a little sunshine right now.

JASMIN: It's because--

MARIANN: Yeah, we had a rainstorm in the middle of the interview.

JASMIN: And now the sun has come out. It's like an omen.

DEREK: It's the rebirth of the Vegan Bus right here.

JASMIN: Thank you, exactly.

DEREK: God showing us his blessings for the bus.

JASMIN: Something like that. Derek, thank you so much for all that you do to change the world for animals. And I hope that you'll stay in touch with us and maybe invite us onto the bus 'cause I just want to be on it so much, so bad!

DEREK: Yeah, well, I think next we have to do an interview with you guys about the Hen House.

JASMIN: Okay, I'll hand you the mic now.

DEREK: Okay.

JASMIN: Thanks, Derek.

DEREK: Thank you.

JASMIN: That was the fabulous Derek Goodwin.