



# Our Hen House

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## Interview with Steve-O

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **STEVE-O** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview was conducted by telephone on August 9, 2013.*

JASMIN: Steve-O has become a household name, and it all started when he snatched a video camera from his father's closet when he was 15 years old. His homemade skateboarding videos featuring dangerous stunts mixed with comical behavior eventually led to his role in "Jackass," which started out as a TV series on MTV and went on to become a series of three wildly successful movies. He has also worked as a stage performer in his "Steve-O Don't Try This At Home" tour, as a star in "Wild Boys," which ran for four seasons on MTV, and he competed for six weeks on ABC's "Dancing With The Stars," despite what he characterizes as a complete lack of dancing ability. Most recently he has delved into stand-up comedy and has had some successful runs at prestigious comedy venues such as LA's Laugh Factory, and New York City's Comedy Cellar. All of which led to his current tour performing stand-up, stunts and bar tricks across North America, Australia, and Europe, which he has dubbed "Steve-O's Entirely Too Much Information Tour."

Steve-O's autobiography, *Professional Idiot: A Memoir*, was released in 2011. And in 2012 he hosted truTV's wild competition series "Killer Karaoke." Steve-O has been clean and sober since March of 2008 and lives a healthy vegan lifestyle in the Los Angeles area. For a list of his upcoming tour dates, which include shows in Winnipeg, California, Mississippi, Missouri, Arizona, Illinois, Washington and Wisconsin, and to learn more, visit [SteveO.com](#).

Welcome to Our Hen House, Steve-O!

STEVE-O: Well, thank you for having me.

JASMIN: So excited to have you here, Steve-O. You've had such an incredible life, and we're really enjoying reading your book right now, but, of course, what we want to talk to you about primarily is animal rights. So let's just jump right in. Most people like animals, but they don't seem to take responsibility for what's done to them, and I know for you that really changed. Can you start with telling us a little about your "going vegan" story?

STEVE-O: It depends on how much you want to hear about it. But, I would just say that, it just started weighing on me, the idea of animal cruelty. I mean, the first time when I ever really thought about it would have been back when I was in Clown College. I was with the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Clown College and they had some people from the Public Relations Division come to talk to us and they said, "Now some of you will end up

working in the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus, and that means that you'll be doing a lot of press to promote the shows. If you end up in that situation and anybody ever asks you about animal cruelty, you shut up! You say nothing! You have to have no opinion! You fall down! You're a clown!"

They were kind of talking to us like that and I remember thinking "Wow!" My reaction was, "Wow, why are they mad at me?! I didn't do anything." And I think it occurred to me at that time, I may not remember it exactly the way it happened, but the general sense I got from that was that "Wow! They must actually be doing something wrong," because, just the way they were acting, it struck me that way. Again, that didn't really hit me -- this was many years ago, it was 1997 -- that didn't spark me off to really go do anything. It was a very gradual process.

Many years later I was doing an interview with Tom Green for his Internet talk show that he used to do out of his living room. This would have been, maybe 2006? Yeah, I think 2006. I went off on this sort of intoxicated rant about when I worked in the circus, and the animals, the elephants, how they were terribly abused. The tiger, how it was blatantly abused, and I just went on and on about that on Tom Green's show. And as is the case when people speak about animal rights issues, it quickly traveled back to the animal rights community, my little rant. And I got reached out to by somebody who's a great friend of mine now, at PETA, and she reached out. She said "Hey we saw what you were saying at Tom Green's house, about animals in the circus. We thought that was really great, so could we get you to say that for PETA?" and my reaction was, "I'll never turn down an opportunity to get attention. Sure!"

So, I did this whole interview. It was actually more of a campaign thing -- there was a video testimony thing that they put out. They did this whole thing with me speaking out about animals in the circus. I remember when they came to the interview at my apartment feeling like kind of a major hypocrite because... Well I'll get to my hypocrisy again, trust me we'll talk about this, but -- I remember feeling like a hypocrite at this time because here I am talking about animal abuse and I was sitting on a leather sofa. So I feel like a hypocrite for doing this interview -- while I'm doing this interview with PETA -- while I'm sitting on a leather sofa in my apartment.

This is sort of in between takes or after we got done filming, and I said to my friend at PETA, in my defense, I told her that I could somehow rationalize having a leather sofa and wearing leather because at the time I still, I was very much a meat eater. I said, "I eat beef so it only seems right to me to use every part of the animal, and to use leather as well." In any case, I told this lady from PETA, "But, at least you'll never see me wearing fur. I have a leather sofa, but you'll never see me wearing fur, because I would never. I don't eat mink or fox, or anything like that, so because I don't eat those animals, I have the common decency not to wear them."

So in that conversation a light bulb went off in my friend's head and she said, "Hey, can I get you to do an "I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur" ad?" So, that was the next thing. First, it was animals in the circus, then I said, "Well okay, yeah I don't wear fur so I'll be happy to do that." And so it started out that way -- my involvement in animal rights issues was sort of supporting PETA campaigns on an issue by issue basis. It started out there. I became very good friends with my friend Michelle, and when the road to vegetarianism

started, I guess I could, at this point I was really actually kind of thinking in those terms. Just thinking about the fur and getting involved -- I think that started to plant the seed, and raise my consciousness about that.

And that must have been going on because I had it in my head. And where I was in a really dark place, particularly in 2007, early 2008 -- and I guess it actually started in 2006 -- when I started just hearing voices because I was doing just so much drugs. To the point where there would be these spirit voices in my ears -- they were talking to me and they were telling me stuff. These voices would say that I'm going to have to answer for things I do to cause... to harm people, and I was a kid, "You're going to have to answer for this."

I remember sort of researching the spirit world online and coming across this YouTube clip where this Krishna Consciousness guy in India just said point blank, "How can you expect to be saved if you eat meat?" And I remember just kind of putting it together -- what the voices were telling me -- that I'm going to answer, and how, and I just thought "Oh no, I'm gonna be terribly punished if I eat meat, if I continue to eat meat, I'm going to be punished." So initially it was out of fear of some kind of punishment in the afterlife that I decided to stop eating meat. Initially my motivation was fear, but, shortly thereafter, I had my intervention, I was locked up in the psych ward, I went to rehab, I remained in a halfway house.

I'd been sober living -- I'd been sober for 2 years. And over the course of that time I found I was less motivated by fear. I felt rewarded, I felt like, "Wow this is something rewarding, I'm really benefitting from this. It makes me feel good about myself." And with the position I was in -- with my history and behavior -- having something to feel good about myself for was really helpful to me. I remember one day I was shopping for -- I was going to buy a new pillow for my bed in my halfway house. And then I was in Target, and I was looking at the different selections of pillows and I thought to call Michelle to ask her if feathers are cruel. She said "Yes! they're very, very cruel," and so I picked a pillow that didn't have feathers.

And I never once ever since have felt hard done by her, that I made any sacrifice at all. I just made a choice to buy a pillow that wasn't, that didn't have feathers. I felt good about that too. So, I gradually kept ramping up, doing more. Considering animals made me feel good about myself, so I would make more decisions based on that and as a result I felt better about myself. And ultimately I can do one more, and I became fully vegan. Even though this year I have eaten some shellfish -- clams and shrimp -- and, for a little while there, I was eating cage free organic eggs. Other than that I've been 100% vegan, and I'm back to being 100% vegan now, too.

MARIANN: That's great to hear. That's such an amazing story. It kind of has every element in it. I've read pieces of your "going vegan" story, but I've never heard the whole thing put together like that, and the fact that it was such a long process that started with awareness about other animals, but the time it takes one to realize one's own participation, and to give up that -- that takes longer than it does to come out against the circus or against fur. And I just love the way it interacted with your sobriety as well. Those voices in your head were giving you some good stories.

STEVE-O: Yeah. It did for sure. It's been great, and I've been pretty active and so obviously what we need to talk about because there was such a drastic -- and for me really, I mean, I

should just say devastating -- this television show that I was on recently, with the snakes and stuff. This show was this karaoke competition show where people are subjected to various tortuous challenges while singing karaoke. They sing while terrible things happen to them. And when this show was presented to me I thought, "Wow! Here's a great opportunity for me to work in the capacity of a comedian host. Which for me -- my background had been a guy known for hurting himself -- I thought this was a really important opportunity for me. I've been branching out. I've been doing stand-up comedy, and just really felt like it was important. It was an important opportunity for me, for my career. It didn't really occur to me that animals were going to be a big issue.

Even when we were taping this show. The snake thing in particular was really upsetting for me, because I saw the reaction when the show came out. What I didn't realize -- no, I didn't like it, if it was up to me I never would have had any animals involved at all. It really wasn't up to me. And when we were doing the thing, the challenge where the person's singing and we lower them into this big vat of water. The water had ice cubes in it and everything, and then they'd dump all the snakes in there. Now, to me, I thought it was like, "Okay well here we have snakes that swim, and so we're putting them in water for less than one minute, and then taking them out." To me, it didn't seem like they might not like it. It didn't seem that terrible. So I was just kind of like "Just work through it." I didn't give it much thought. Of course, once the show came out, the outrage was so intense.

I guess because I'm online reading all the comments, and all the comments are saying "Oh, wow, you're such a hypocrite, here you're exploiting animals for your own personal benefit, for your own financial gain, to further your own career," and, "You're terribly cruel to animals." And the hardest thing dealing with that was that I agreed with every single word of it. I absolutely agreed. I can say that at the time I didn't understand the fact that that the snakes in particular that were being placed in the tank -- I didn't understand that those are not water snakes, making it actually really, really, distressing for the snakes. They're not supposed to swim. I thought that swimming was what they did. Now, I probably should've known better, but I just didn't.

JASMIN: It's an unfolding thing. We're constantly learning about how we're contributing to exploitation. It's sucks, basically.

STEVE-O: Right! And then what's even worse, that I didn't even realize at the time, the snakes are cold blooded, and to put a cold blooded reptile in ice water is apparently even worse -- just terrible! What I came to realize after that, once the show aired, is that the snake thing was really terribly cruel. And all the backlash! My friends from PETA told me there were thousands of complaints about that. And I agree -- and I've got to say -- I agree with every single one of them. I feel terrible about it.

And if it were up to me, I wouldn't have animals involved at all. I don't even know that I really should be talking about this, and I also don't even know that it makes a difference. It's important to me to just speak up about it. That's why I really wanted to do this interview with you guys, just to put it out there. Since this all came to light, when I realized the extent of the cruelty that I was involved in on the first season of that karaoke show, I really *really* was just devastated, and I spoke up immediately. I made it clear, like very *very* clear to the production company as well as the network, that in the future I would have no part

whatsoever in anything that I perceived to be even remotely cruel to animals, and that I have zero sense of humor about that issue. I made myself that clear.

Since then, most recently -- I haven't said this to anybody anywhere -- I got a call from my lawyer. He said, that the network had decided to go find another host. So in the future, I'm not going to be hosting. There will be another season, and it will be with a different host. Unless I'm completely mistaken, and there's other information that I'm totally not aware of, I can say -- at least, I believe -- the only reason for me not being the host in future seasons is because I'm unwilling to participate in what I perceive to be animal cruelty.

MARIANN: I just find that horrifying. I hope the show goes down the tubes. One thing that story really brings out for me -- and from reading your book too -- is that you seem to be an incredibly honest person, including about things you've done that you regret. Which I think is very empowering for people to hear. Do you think that's helped you? I was thinking particularly of a story that may be painful for you -- the story in your book about your hamster -- but you told the story and you talked about how bad you felt, just like you're telling this story. I just think that's so empowering. Do you think that's one of the things that's helped you face the truth about what happens to animals? That basically you're just an honest person?

STEVE-O: I, I guess. I mean, I don't necessarily know another way. I can't really compare the way I am to another way because this is the way I am. But, I do appreciate the compliment, and it's definitely worth it, being honest, and speaking up to you guys, about this. I mean, I don't know what kind of reach we have here, or whether this is going to ...

JASMIN: Billions! Billions and billions!

STEVE-O: I don't know if this gets me in trouble. It's just all facts! I'm not saying that it wasn't an entertaining show. A lot of people really liked it, and a lot of people were really happy to see me on it, but I know that I would rather have it happen this way than to continue to be involved in stuff that I'm not okay with. If there was that conflict in the future, then I'm glad it's been avoided.

JASMIN: You've said that you don't like to be pushy or preachy about being vegan, but you've also said that people work really hard to stay ignorant. I think that's something that everyone who cares about animals struggles with. How do we get past people's defenses in a way that doesn't piss them off?

STEVE-O: Right!

JASMIN: What do you think is the best way to help people wake up to what's going on with animals?

STEVE-O: It's interesting, because when you say that, you very accurately point out that I said that I like to stay off the soapbox and not be preachy, but then again, there I go being a hypocrite all over again because, I did make an exception for that because I just felt like narrating the factory farm documentary...

MARIANN: You mean the one from Farm Sanctuary?

JASMIN: "What Came Before," by Farm Sanctuary, right?

STEVE-O: Right, exactly. I thought, that really helped so, in general I don't know. It's a fine line. You do want to carry the message. You do want to further the cause. You want to help animals, but you don't want to be that guy, or that girl, that's just really annoying. There's that joke that I personally find hilarious. They say "When you're at a party, how can you tell who's vegan?" and, the punch line is "You don't have to; they'll tell you."

JASMIN: It's true! Yeah, it's true.

STEVE-O: It's funny because it's true. And, there really is -- I guess you could compare it to religion -- there's sort of degrees. There are degrees of militancy about it. Nobody likes the guy that comes up to you and says, "Hey, have you ever lied, have you ever cheated, have you ever stolen? I bet you have, and you're destined to go to hell unless you take Jesus as your savior!" I mean I don't like to be talked to that way, and I know that's what that guy believes when he comes up to me and says that. He genuinely believes that he's helping me, but he's really just pissing me off!

So there is a fine line. There are religious people who personally benefit from their beliefs, who don't bludgeon others with their beliefs, and those people are a lot easier to get along with. But, in our case, I don't know. It really is a fine line, and there's a lot of grey areas. I suppose I live in different grey areas. I mean, I try to stick to being extremely outspoken and candid about the ways in which I have benefitted and my experience as a result of being more conscious of animal rights.

JASMIN: Steve-O, obviously you have to be in great shape, both professionally and personally. You're an incredibly active -- maybe hyperactive? -- person. What do you eat to stay fit?

STEVE-O: If I'm in good shape right now, I would attribute that to having fallen in love with surfing over the last year and a half or so. That's just been -- for me I consider that one-stop-shopping. It's so much exercise, and it's so rewarding, and it's just so incredible to be just out there in the ocean like that. It's really good -- body, mind and spirit.

As far as my diet, I've been pretty healthy in general. I've finally chopped out all the mock meat. I think that the faux chicken -- like the Tofurky kind of stuff -- I think it's really kind of helpful for people that are just transitioning. But the more I've learned and educated myself -- all that heavily processed soy and wheat -- I think it's difficult for the body to digest. I feel like maybe I'm more low energy when I'm eating that stuff because my body is working so overtime trying to digest it. And I'm learning more about nutrition -- as a result I'm trying to really limit or steer clear of soy and wheat. I'm just eating more beans and stuff. Lots of vegetables and beans and grains, and that's just what I eat.

MARIANN: It's funny how so many people who aren't vegan seem to forget that vegetables are an important part of the vegan diet. They think that all we eat is mock meat, but actually vegetables are where it's at. There was an article that I encourage anyone listening to look

up. It's in Grub Street LA, and you go through what you eat in a day, and I love that article. There's lots of great advice and a few indulgences, which is always good. and I love that you said...

STEVE-O: Right, yeah.

MARIANN: I love that you said, "Fuck three meals a day, you've got to eat at least four or five meals a day." And I think that brings up something a lot of people – and it's especially annoying when it's celebrities -- they try veganism and then they say, oh, they didn't feel well, they were always hungry, instead of finding a solution, like eating more. Did you struggle with some of those issues shifting to eating vegan? Because you were doing it for spiritual and ethical reasons. Did you find a way around them?

STEVE-O: I never really felt hard done by it. Just because, in the beginning, when I did it I was still not sober. I stopped eating meat about one month before my intervention, and over the course of that I was just so out of my mind and so crazy I was really kind of, I don't know -- I wasn't going to say preachy about it -- but it just felt like I was going the path of being saved. Being the guy, that was everything that I think sucks. Like I said before, the whole shift from fear to love was really the ticket. It's just rewarding for me. I really just genuinely love it. For me it's almost more of a little game I play, I'm going to seek out. I mean, I do that with everything -- I've been leaving animal products out of my life entirely.

Most recently, it's a big to-do to find a vegan leather sofa, "fake leather" sofas. I remember going to the big furniture outlet, I don't know what it's called, but the guy promised me in the store that it was absolutely polyurethane, or whatever, "fake leather." And then I got these sofas delivered and when they showed up I looked on the box and it said like "leather mix" or something. I just got really pissed. I was like, "Put these back on the truck! I want my money back!" I called about the whole thing and it was just really frustrating. Then I, again, I called Michelle from PETA and said, "Hey, I'm really having trouble finding these," so then she got the PETA interns to track it down. Right now, I'm sitting on a vegan leather chair that came with the set, and I love it. It was a really involved thing. Tracking it down, sending back the one sofa. I kind of enjoy it.

And then, I did it all over again when I decided recently that I wanted a pair of Bluetooth headphones. I was checking out the Beats by Dre. I just thought it would be cool to not have a wire – not leashed -- headphones. So then I decided that I liked it, but then, of course, the padding over the ear is made out of leather.

MARIANN: Oh, annoying.

STEVE-O: I was like "Fuck!" I called up Michelle and I said, "Michelle, I really want these Beats by Dre headphones, but they're fucking leather!" And she said, "We're going to go ahead and *not* buy those." Of course I wasn't. She's like, "A cow was slaughtered for those headphones." Which is 100% true. So, she again unleashed the interns online to figure out what -- I found a pair of SONY headphones, where only the ear cushion was not leather, but the they had leather on the band that goes over your head! I mean, why would they have part leather, part fake leather?! It's so frustrating. But I wound up with Sennheiser. The

Sennheiser 550-X headphones are Bluetooth and faux leather.

JASMIN: Wow. Okay!

MARIANN: You're lucky to have Michelle!

JASMIN: Actually, I love Michelle. We were able to have dinner with her in New Orleans and I have to say, Michelle for Empress! We clearly have to get her out there making every single person have the ability to text her when they're about to buy a pair of leather headphones!

STEVE-O: I really like her, she's really good. I love how I've been trying to keep her anonymous. But yeah, she's so great. I think she does a really good job of sort of finding that balance between being preachy and, I guess, "tolerant" would be the word.

JASMIN: She's also hot, which does not hurt the message.

STEVE-O: Yeah! I know! I've been trying to convert her for years.

JASMIN: Oh, come on.

MARIANN: Forget it!

JASMIN: She's on our team, Steve-O. Sorry about that.

STEVE-O: No, it's all good. I know that, that she and PETA catch a lot of slack for working with people who aren't... And I think that they do a good job. I don't support PETA in everything, in every stance they take and every philosophy that they have. I really am careful to support PETA on an issue by issue basis. Of course, over the years I've become much more aligned with them. There's fewer and fewer things that I disagree with them on. But I know that there are animal rights organizations out there that just want to condemn anything. It's just unrealistic.

I think that if you can devote just one area of your life or lifestyle to helping animals then that's the area of your lifestyle that PETA will be supportive of and they can sort of disregard the rest, and I think that that's a good approach. Because especially in my case, if they were like, "Fuck this guy, he eats meat!" Or, "Fuck this guy, he's got a leather sofa!" Or "Fuck this guy," for any of the other things. For all the animals involved in "Jackass" over the years. "Fuck these guys for going in the pens with these animals." If they were to condemn me, then I wouldn't have had this path.

MARIANN: Yeah.

STEVE-O: It really, it was my relationship with Michelle, in particular, that, like I said earlier, that really planted the seed, and then it started growing, and I've been on this journey that's really just been great. And it's because they're able to just support me in what I was capable of at each step of the way.



JASMIN: Yeah, I totally hear you. I think it's frustrating when people throw an entire organization under the bus because they don't agree with one aspect of them, or two aspects. PETA has done more for animals than anyone, or any group in the history of the world, so...

STEVE-O: Yeah! And I'm not interested in slinging mud. Whatever they're into that I don't agree with, it's fine. If I can just adopt the same approach that they did with me, and really get behind them in the areas that I do agree and that I do want to support, then we're all better people.

JASMIN: I guess, finally, Steve-O, do you have any parting words for our listeners, most of whom are either vegan, or on their way there and want to get more involved in changing the world?

STEVE-O: Yeah! I just think for the animal rights community at large, it was just so important for me to speak up about having been such a hypocrite with that karaoke show, and the hardest thing about it was that I was looking at all the comments online, on Facebook, Twitter. I saw probably every last one of them and I didn't respond to any of them because, I don't think that I could. It would have caused more trouble. I shouldn't say it would have, I felt that it would have. And that made me feel cowardly, and obviously I felt fairly hypocritical and, like I said before, I agreed with all of the scathing remarks that people made against me. And it was difficult.

Having that so fresh in my mind makes it a lot easier to deal with letting that job go. I didn't mean to let it go as much. I said I'll do it, but I won't have anything to do with any cruelty. For whatever it is, I'm glad I have this opportunity, whether it gets me in trouble or not, to speak up about how I feel. Just to address that. And if I do have any words for all the animal rights community at large, it's just to say I'm sorry that that happened. And moving forward, it's not going to happen more, so that's good. Like I said, I just want to thank everybody who said terrible things about me because it really got to me, and it helped me make what I feel is the right decision now.

MARIANN: God, I just love you! You're an amazing person, and the fact that you're still evolving is such a powerful message to everyone. Some people will hear this who haven't gotten as far as you have in their journey, but we just have to remember that we're all on a journey. I just so much respect that you're willing to be so honest about where you feel you say you've been a hypocrite, but there are very few people in the world who aren't inconsistent in some way about animals because it's so embedded in society.

STEVE-O: Sure, it's really hard not to. It's certainly difficult not to. And I remember -- that show, the show that we're talking about -- I remember the date, it was November 23rd. It was the day after Thanksgiving. I had Thanksgiving dinner with another animal rights -- the V-girls, V-guys and Melissa. Her and a bunch, it was like a G7 summit of animal rights people at this party. Everybody had their own foundation, their own organization. I went there for a vegan Thanksgiving dinner after a meeting that I went to. I walked in there, sat down, met all these people I hadn't met before. I lasted about maybe three minutes before saying "Guys, I feel like a terrible hypocrite," and I just shouted it all out and told them how I felt. Again, I don't think that justifies or mitigates how bad I feel about what I was involved in.

There are people are out there, that -- I don't know -- that helped me with that. Of course, ultimately I had to not continue with that show.

JASMIN: Well I think that what you're doing now to turn that around, and to use these experiences to raise people's awareness about what animals go through, and to take a stand against something that I'm sure would have given you a fuckload of money. I think this is really *really* fantastic and I'm really grateful that the animals have you. Steve-O thank you so much for joining us today on Our Hen House!

STEVE-O: For sure, thank you, and, sorry for rambling as much as I did, but it really helps to get that off my chest. I appreciate the opportunity, and you guys. Thank you so much and have a great day.

JASMIN: You too, Steve-O, take care!

STEVE-O: Bye.

JASMIN: Bye bye!

That was Steve-O! Go to [SteveO.com](http://SteveO.com) to learn more and also to see what his upcoming tour dates are for his comedy show. I wish it was coming around here in NY because I would love to see that, it sounds like it's amazing. He is an incredible person. I really like him.

MARIANN: I know. He's a very likable guy. He's really just so evolved. We're always told that we have to be so careful with celebrities, and that harsh comments will just put them off. It's just so interesting. I think if I'd gotten all those harsh comments I would have gotten my back up, but he just didn't at all and he's just so thoughtful and he just approaches everything from such an honest point of view. I was really impressed.