



# Our Hen House

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## Interview with Joanna Rohrback

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **JOANNA ROHRBACK** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 212.*

JASMIN: Joanna Rohrback graduated Westchester Community College with an associate's in science degree, after which she attended the University of Miami School of Nursing. She went on to graduate with honors from Florida Atlantic University with a bachelor's degree in health services. Joanna worked as a social worker for the state of Florida for several years, and then founded the Vegetarian Advocates Group in 1989, and later went on to facilitate a food addiction support group. She does wellness coaching and teaches her aerobics as well as donates time consulting the elderly and disabled on the benefits of holistic medicine. Joanna supports environmental issues facing her community, and is currently the owner and manager of Prancercise LLC and prancercise.com where you can learn more about her.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Joanna.

JOANNA: Oh, I'm excited to be here with you guys.

JASMIN: We're so excited to have you. I feel like you're just such an icon for so many people. For our listeners who for some reason are not familiar, can you start off by explaining what prancercise is?

JOANNA: Yes. Prancercise is a movement which is -- by definition, it's a springy, rhythmic movement forward similar to a horse's gait, ideally induced by elation. It's a form of a movement that can be used for fitness or pleasure. It's more of a recess, is the way I like to look at it, not a workout. It can be used for fitness or just for pleasure as I say.

MARIANN: So, you've already also referred to prancercise as a form of self-expression.

JOANNA: Absolutely.

MARIANN: Can you explain that and talk a little bit about the role of self-expression in a good life?

JOANNA: Yes. I believe that our society is inundated with regimentation and people that look to each other and the doctrines that exist for their way of life. And part of the problem with the livestock industry and our carnivore ways, I believe, is linked to this. And through self-expression, as through my fitness, which I look to revolutionize fitness with, you, as a

person that wants to keep in good health and good shape, would be able to use your own music, your own gait, your own way of moving a little bit, and be outside in nature or wherever it's convenient to do this. You're going to be expressing yourself because you're gonna move a little bit differently and you're gonna have your own music which induces movement when you do prancercise. And in that sense, you're not imitating people in a gym, you're not regimented, and I believe this is in line with what we need to put a damper on all the violence and mistreatment of each other and other creatures.

JASMIN: I completely agree, and I think that that is beautifully said. How did you first come up with this program, Joanna?

JOANNA: I was a vegan at that time, but more so, I was challenging myself to get in the best shape I could get in. And I always did my own thing, and I was experimenting with cross training. And in that experimentation, one of the things I did was I power walked along the beach area with ankle weights on, and my Walkman at the time -- this was back in '89. And I happened to hear a very good song on my Walkman and just naturally started to move in a unique fashion. And that fashion became the first mode of prancercise, the walk. And it was incorporating my arms and my head, my legs, going side to side on the balls of my feet. It was really a lot of fun, so I focused on this and developed all the four modes and just really enjoyed myself to no end.

MARIANN: So, do you feel any kind of -- is there a special connection to horses? I mean, the gaits that you talk about are very relevant to horses. Is that part of how this came about for you?

JOANNA: Not really, in and of itself. I had experience as a child growing up riding horses at camp or whatever, which I would never do nowadays. I think it's -- I'm against forcing my will on another creature. And part of that is horseback riding, where a bit is put in a horse's mouth, his head is yanked from side to side, whatever direction you want him to go in, you're kicking him and forcing your will on him. So, that is not what I envision in life, okay, as beautiful and as pleasant. No, as far as how I developed the exercise and why I came to that name and definition, I started to feel like I was a horse in a parade, the way I was moving. I envisioned that. And I looked at horses as a model of beauty, strength, endurance, and vegetarians. And I said, when I started to play with the definitions of "prance" and "dance" and "exercise" and put it all together, it became "prancercise." But I did like the idea of a horse as a model, and I did imagine myself moving alongside a horse.

MARIANN: So, here comes the really mind-blowing question. Can you tell our listeners how many people have seen the original video?

JOANNA: Yes. Right to date it's like over nine million. It's like nine million, two hundred and something thousand at the moment. And I do have a couple other videos. I did make the John Mayer video, which has over 4 million hits on it. Yeah. I think people are just fascinated with this type of movement. Not everybody is a *fan*; they're just amazed and fascinated, which is fine. That's a start to get my message across.

JASMIN: Yeah, exactly. Did you ever anticipate that prancercise would have the huge viral following that it has, and how do you account for it?

JOANNA: When I created the program back in '89, I literally wrote my book over the course of four and a half years by hand. Of course, I didn't have an internet, didn't even get a computer until after 2000, okay? I never thought, when I brought the video out, necessarily that it would become viral. I didn't think about it. I didn't even have a social network. I am a little on the archaic side, technology-wise and as far as social networking and all. But what I did know was I had a program like no other, and I believed in it a million percent. And all the years that I kept it undercover because I didn't think I had the support systems to bring it to the public, I knew I was sitting on something big. Deep inside, I knew that the potential was there. Whether I would ever get my message out, I didn't know.

When I decided, and I turned 60 years old, that I had to do this for my own sake or I would die bitter, it was on top of my bucket list. I went ahead and I got my website up and I got a demo video done and I got my book published. And as it started out, I was not getting much response at all. But what happened was, with the way the social networks work apparently, someone had passed it along to a very large following, I think in England, to someone who had a blog there it was pretty renowned. And it just really took off because they just saw my spirit coming through, you know, my soul kinda shining through the video or my character or the way I talked or the way I moved. It was just all kind of fascinating and interesting, I think.

JASMIN: Yeah, definitely interesting. We all love it.

JOANNA: Oh, thank you.

JASMIN: And I know that you take a very holistic approach to exercise. You've talked about that a little bit already. And you pointed out that it has to have a spiritual component. Can you explain?

JOANNA: Well, everything we do is connected, whether if we eat as vegetarians and purify ourselves in that sense. By eating a vegetarian diet, we have less pollution in our body. It's my belief that we're not compounding toxins in us like we would through eating an animal-based diet. And I believe that the lighter we are by having joy in our life, by eating light, by thinking light, by being self-expressive, this is all connected to a sense of spirituality and higher consciousness. And when we live more in line with our true natures -- our teeth aren't made to tear. They're vegetarian teeth at this point in development of evolution. And our digestive tracts, too, are longer, more like a horse's. They aren't meant to have meat in them that toxifies. There's just so many things that are more spiritual, from everything that's connected through self-expression, the way you eat, the way you think. I believe that when I get into a zone and I'm prancing, I'm getting closer to a higher consciousness too.

MARIANN: So, as you mentioned, you've been vegan for quite a long time. You were one of the early adopters. Can you tell us what you were thinking then, what was your motivation and what led you to veganism?

JOANNA: Well, I read a lot about diet and therapeutic nutrition my whole life; it's been a hobby of mine. And although I've woven in and out of veganism, I most of my life have been definitely off animal meat. How I connected with that, you're saying, what made me first connect with it? I read a book. I'll tell you, I remember it. It was called *Radical Vegetarianism* by Braunstein. And let me tell you, I don't know if you're familiar with it, it's eye-opening. And there was one phrase in it that really got to me: If you had to look an animal in its eyes and say, "I'm going to kill you for my lunch," you know, how many people

would do it? People are very cowardly in their carnivorousness as far as I'm concerned. If they had to firsthand deal with the pain and suffering that we put animals through to consume them, which is unnecessary in this day and age, with all the choices we have, I think they'd think twice.

JASMIN: Yeah, absolutely. Now tell us about the Vegetarian Advocates Group, which you founded in 1989.

JOANNA: Yeah. Around the same time when I developed pranic exercise and I was really of a higher consciousness -- my life has taken many turns. I've had many hurdles to get over since then. I just knew I wanted to be the healthiest I could be, and from all my reading, all my research, my way of thinking, wanting to be light, wanting to spring off the ground, and just feeling like all things were connected. I didn't want to carry the karmic debt of animal suffering and consume them and have that pollution mentally and physically in my body. I turned to veganism, and I really enjoyed that commitment, tried to teach others of the benefits to the earth and to each other and to the animals for having that. And that was part of my group, my ability to teach that.

MARIANN: So, how have things changed regarding attitudes towards vegetarianism and veganism since then?

JOANNA: Attitude from people I know or from myself or what?

MARIANN: Well, just in the world at large. Do you find that people are more receptive to these ideas than they used to be?

JOANNA: Yes! Yes, they absolutely are, I think. The Whole Foods Market is thriving because people are taking more responsibility for their health, and I think the internet has helped to educate them on the benefits of a vegetarian diet. There's been a lot of information out there, studies done that have proven the benefits of this. John Robbins has done tremendous work on *Forks over Knives* and *Food Revolution*. And the internet, I think, has been a great tool, like your website, to inform and educate people. And all the suffering that we're going through with high rise in cancer and heart disease and all, I think, is making people think a little further with their diets.

JASMIN: Now, I couldn't agree with you more. And I know that you do work with the elderly and disabled. We are very interested in what seems to be a growing interest in veganism among the elderly. Do you encourage people to adjust their diets in a more plant-based direction, and what kind of responses do you get?

JOANNA: I do, for their sake of survival. And I have a woman in mind who went on a totally vegan diet and saved her life, didn't require gallbladder surgery as a result, and to this day has gotten a new lease on life and is going to be 95 next month. And I'm going to her 95th birthday party, which I'll celebrate with great cheer. And people can change, but she's a very disciplined woman. She's one of the people that could make the transition. Not everybody's in the same character.

JASMIN: Now, in your book, you take on the meat and dairy industry. Can you give us just a glimpse of what you have to say?

JOANNA: About the meat and dairy industry?

JASMIN: Yeah.

JOANNA: Well, just like John Robbins says in *Diet for a New America*, if one was to travel throughout the country and see, experience and see, the suffering and mistreatment and toxicity of the livestock raising industry, they would definitely question their carnivorousism. I believe, if somebody like John Robbins that was an heir to the Baskin-Robbins dynasty went totally against the dairy industry, which he got his inheritance from, people that are researched will see that it's just a very cruel, cold, dispassionate, and very toxic environment. And it becomes toxicity for us to ingest the remnants of how livestock are raised. And people -- this is all karmic debt. Everything's connected. What we do, what we think, what we eat, it will come back to haunt us if we're not doing the right things.

MARIANN: I'm totally with you. I know Jasmin mentioned that was part of something you talk about in the book. Can you tell us a little bit more about the book and the different topics that you tackle in it?

JOANNA: Yes. I tackle self-expression. I compare my life to Isadora Duncan, who was the mother of modern dance, and she took dance away, evolved it away from regimentation, which was ballet, which was hard on the body, and not self-expressive. It was controlled. And she took it to modern dance, which was free and natural movement, and loved to take her dancers to teach them in nature, moving naturally. This is the way I see prancercise being able to benefit people in the fitness industry and people following that. I also talk about stretching and yoga and keeping your body subtle to avoid injury.

I talk about the meat and dairy industry in chapter five in its entirety, and how it relates also to the pollution of our planet and the tremendous waste of resources that are connected to the removal of animal excrement from livestock raising. And all the water you need to produce livestock -- I think 50% of the US water supply was used, if not today, was used for livestock production. This is a tremendous damper to our resources. There's just so many reasons, which I outline in my book, to the deforestation of land, which doesn't allow us the ability to purify our air and our water, just to raise livestock, which is not an efficient use of the land use for growing crops. There's just so many reasons.

MARIANN: So, what is more important to stay fit as we age: diet or exercise?

JOANNA: I believe they're equally as important. We have to prevent injury, and the only way we can do that is to be flexible and to tone ourselves. So, I always start my day off with yoga flow, the salute to the sun, and do a yoga flow at least a couple of times, and then spot exercises before I prancercise for about 45 minutes, and then do spot exercises in the evening. I feel that this will help me prevent injury, and believe me, it does.

And as far as diet, it's just absolutely imperative to watch your diet and consider the medications you take because they're full of toxicity, a lot of them, especially from a laboratory. I only take herbs and natural supplements. And in order to prevent suffering and to really enjoy the quality of our golden years, we have to not just consider the money in our bank -- it's what we put in our body and how we treat our body.

JASMIN: Yeah, couldn't have said it better. And you must be quite the celebrity. You are certainly a celebrity well beyond just your community, but how has your community been reacting to your newfound fame? You're everywhere.

JOANNA: Well, I get approached for pictures a lot, and I get congratulated. But people -- I haven't done a whole lot here 'cause I've been traveling to all over the country doing appearances. I hope that 2014 will allow me to embed myself again more into the community, which is just so rewarding for me.

JASMIN: And how can people find you and stay up to speed on your happenings?

JOANNA: Well, I'm on Facebook. I haven't been doing too much there. I don't have a support system for my company yet. I need people to help me with social networking, with representing me. I don't have a celebrity agent yet. I just am trying to hold the fort up myself and with my attorney and a couple of people part time. But as I get my house in order, I will certainly have more on Facebook. On my website [prancercise.com](http://prancercise.com), there'll be more. And people can certainly contact me. All my information is on my website.

JASMIN: And what is your website?

JOANNA: [Prancercise.com](http://Prancercise.com).

JASMIN: Excellent. Well, do you feel like prancercise is for everyone, Joanna?

JOANNA: Everybody who can walk!

JASMIN: Excellent.

JOANNA: I can't tell them that if they've got a walker, they can prancercise. Certainly there's arm movement involved, and you gotta be able to move rhythmically a little bit to really enjoy the benefits of it. But as far as age spectrum and gender spectrum, it crosses it all.

JASMIN: Excellent. Well, we can't thank you enough. We fell in love with you before we even knew that you were an animal rights advocate, and then we fell even more in love with you. So, we're just so grateful to you for joining us today on Our Hen House and sharing your story with us and with our listeners. And we'll continue to stay on top of your amazing prancercising. And we hope that you go out and spread compassion as you're doing it.

JOANNA: I certainly will try. And I do want to bring to your attention that on my website, there's a link to IAKA, International Aid for Korean Animals. It's quite an amazing opportunity for people to understand the culture differences and what goes on and the torture that cats and dogs go through in Korea, and how these two Korean sisters have done so much work to try to change the laws from allowing torture and animal consumption of dogs and cats there. I donate to them, and I also would like to mention that I am totally for the free will of animals, that they should be admired in their natural states, moving the way they do freely, just like we want to express ourselves and move freely, and not be used like racehorses and chained up and whatnot.

JASMIN: Absolutely. Well, Joanna, thank you so much again for joining us, and we are just so happy to get to know you a little bit. And keep on fighting the good fight and prancercising and inspiring all of us.

JOANNA: Thank you so much. My pleasure, entirely. Take care, and I will help you. Bye-bye.

JASMIN: Take care. Bye.

That was Joanna Rohrback.