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Interviews with Martin Rowe

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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Following is a transcript of an interview with **MARTIN ROWE** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 229.

JASMIN: I'm very excited to welcome back to Our Hen House today Martin Rowe. Martin runs Lantern Books, which you can find at lanternbooks.com. And Lantern is your source for books on animal advocacy, vegetarianism, religion, and environmentalism. They publish books for all wanting to live with greater depth and commitment to the preservation of the natural world. Today, Martin is going to be talking to us about one of their brand new books, *Running, Eating, Thinking*, which just came out from Lantern. And Martin is going to also be reading an excerpt from one of his chapters in it. I'm excited to also be a contributor to this important anthology.

Welcome back to Our Hen House, Martin.

MARTIN: Thank you very much. It's good to be back.

JASMIN: We are such big fans of Lantern, as you know. You really publish work that no one else is publishing, and we are so honored to be able to now share a borough with you. And I even stopped by the other day and surprised you, which is the kind of things people in Brooklyn do.

MARTIN: We are constantly surprising each other, aren't we, in Brooklyn?

JASMIN: Exactly. And you're constantly surprising us with the next amazing new anthology and you have so many other books too, many of which we will be featuring on upcoming episodes. But today I want to focus specifically on a new anthology that's coming out this month called *Running, Eating, Thinking*. And I'm lucky enough to actually be a contributor to this anthology, and I've been very, very excited about its publication, and it's here! It's finally here. Can you tell us briefly about this book?

MARTIN: Yes. About 22 years ago I read an anthology from the University of Indiana Press called *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, which was edited by Deane Curtin and Lisa Heldke. And I was completing a graduate master's thesis at the time on religion and the Bible and food and ecology and all that kind of good stuff. And I read this and I thought it was a fascinating anthology, and what made it very interesting for me was that it was an anthology that tried to establish the idea of food being a philosophical subject. Up until then food had been the very thing that one flees from as a philosopher. The things of the body and the things that the body requires to keep going are not as important as the

mind and the abstract. And so what this volume was trying to do was say, “Well, no, in fact there’s a lot of thinking that needs to be done about food, the sort of thinking that has been done about food, so let’s start the conversation.” And it came out in 1992 and that was sort of the decade where a lot of interest in food began, the Slow Food movement, CSAs, green markets, et cetera, et cetera. So when I was thinking about my twin interests of running and veganism I thought, why don’t I sort of model *Running, Eating, Thinking on Cooking, Eating, Thinking*? Not only because *Cooking, Eating, Thinking* was one of the reasons why I became a vegan, but also because this anthology likewise says, “Well, hang on, nobody’s really thought about running and veganism together. Let’s see if we can begin a conversation and see if there is anything sort of philosophical or at least mental, something to do with thought, that surrounds not just veganism, but running, and running and veganism, to see if there’s some kind of connection there. So I put this idea out there, and you and others who had been writing about being a vegan and running all joined in and we’ve got 14 terrific pieces from very many different perspectives, all from vegans who happen to be runners.

MARIANN: So you mention in the intro, and I’m curious to know more about what you mean by it, that you say that both veganism and running are “fully embodied activities.” What does that mean exactly?

MARTIN: One of the things that we do automatically is we eat and we move as animal beings. But what running and eating vegan can do is that they are intentional activities that are focused on the body. In other words, obviously veganism is about sustenance. It’s about what you wear on your body. It’s about recognizing that every meal you take is a decision. In other words, you are not eating animals, as well as eating plants. It’s a conscious act. Running, of course, is something that when we’re kids we do a lot of without thinking, but as we become adults we have to think to run. We have to train to run. We have to plan to run. So in that regard both are intentional acts, and they’re very embodied because they require the recognition of the body. They are recognizing that the body needs sustenance, that the body needs movement, that the body moves through space and requires energy to do so. So that’s what I thought, I meant, by “embodied.”

JASMIN: Well, I think that’s a really fascinating way of looking at it. And also another thing you mentioned in the intro is that running faces dilemmas about its identity. Can you expand on that?

MARTIN: Yes. I’ve noticed this in reading the running literature and also reading sort of the philosophy about running is that, just as veganism 20 something years ago was a minority activity before it became less of a minority activity, so running 40 years ago was a pursuit for the maverick loner. And now running, as you see from the numerous marathons and half marathons -- I mean, for instance in May this month, the Brooklyn Half will have 20,000 people running it. Now, a few years ago it was actually only 2 or 3. So both veganism and running have had a large impact certainly in public consciousness. The word “vegan” and the word “running” or “marathon running” are sort of buzzwords about health and identity, even though actually still relatively few people do either. So running has had to really try and work out whether it’s sort of a popular activity that anybody can do, or it’s sort of a hardcore “unless you’ve got bloody toenails, then you haven’t really run” kind of identity. So it’s got this sort of change that’s also happening in society.

MARIANN: You do refer to the discipline required for both running and veganism, at least in people's minds. They think of these as activities that are basically marked by a need for discipline. But it strikes me that you don't necessarily think that discipline is the essence of either of these activities. Is that right?

MARTIN: Well, I don't think I have a particular perspective. I mean, one of the issues that *Running, Eating, Thinking* tries to look at, and this actually reflects *Cooking, Eating, Thinking*, is that there's absolutely no one way of looking at veganism or at running. Some people may look at both and think, "God, that is too extreme, that's too intense, that's not something I want to do." Other people may look at running and veganism and say, "It's a natural expression of who we are. When we're kids, we love running. We don't give it any thought. And when we're born we're all vegans!" And so running and veganism could be seen as a return to the natural, a return to a kind of innocence where the sheer joy of movement and the sheer pleasure in food without harming the animals that we care so much about as kids is something that we do naturally. But I think as we grow older both of these activities seem somehow to be about punishing oneself or disciplining oneself or removing pleasure from one's life. And one of the aspects of these essays that appear through *Running, Eating, Thinking* is that instead of denying pleasure, both running and veganism have enhanced pleasure, have not only given pleasure to the people practicing them, but have made them aware of the need for other animals' pleasure and freedom of movement and wish to be outside and to breathe fresh air.

JASMIN: So what do you mean when you say that running and veganism offer an existential expression of being in the world? Is that kind of what you were going for with that, that we all inherently crave this freedom and this expression?

MARTIN: Yeah. But I also mean by existential the kind of notion that, I mean, we're all animals and we're all gonna die eventually, and some might see veganism and running as sort of desperate efforts to avoid our mortality. What I would say is that every time we go out running or every time we eat a vegan meal, we're actually saying, "My existence and the existence of other beings is important to me, and even though I know that we're all on a trajectory towards death, nonetheless I will do whatever I can to honor the breath of myself but also other animals, and reflect on the wish for us all to remain alive for as long as possible in as healthy a body as possible."

MARIANN: I find that really interesting, the many links you're talking about between veganism and running, because Jasmin's piece, of course, which was our most familiar, actually talks about some contesting feelings about her running and her veganism. I'm just gonna read a little piece here from her piece:

I am vegan because it is a moral imperative, a direct extension of my worldview, because there is absolutely no way to justify exploiting animals ever. I do not run because I find it a moral imperative, and I do not have any intention to convert those who choose not to run. Unlike the way I see veganism, I think running or choosing not to is a completely personal decision. It works for some people; it doesn't work for others. It's certainly not the only way to improve yourself or your health. And all sorts of activities can make you a better, stronger, happier, more thoughtful person and thus a better activist. These might include adopting healthy habits, meditation, and for some people -- not me particularly -- spiritual practice. Like running, all those

things are fantastic if they work for you. But unlike veganism, they do not directly reduce the harm one does to others.

I think that perhaps Jasmin's point of view here seems to be in the minority in not finding intense connections between these two activities. Many other vegan runners seem to find a very specific link, an almost emotional link between their veganism and their running. Can you tell us where you stand on that issue and perhaps some of the perspectives of the other writers?

MARTIN: I can, but I would acknowledge that Jasmin's piece is in the minority in that regard, but it is absolutely not unique and it is certainly part of the process of thinking about the connections or lack thereof, and that's why I was very pleased to see that expressed there. I mean, yes, you can be very healthy and not a vegan or a runner. And so these issues are not necessarily essential.

I think probably my particular feeling about the connections between veganism and running is that more of an intuitive sense that somehow they are connected, which led me to want to explore the ideas in an anthology and bring in other voices. Gene Baur, who begins the anthology, the cofounder of Farm Sanctuary, feels very strongly the connection between his running and his activism, even though he only took up running recently, as a way for him to connect with the work that he does. It's a way of him honoring the fact that the animals who didn't make it to the sanctuary had their lives entirely curtailed and hemmed in by bars, by terrible air, by an ill ability to move, as well as the fact that many of the animals who arrive at Farm Sanctuary have been so genetically modified that they cannot express themselves physically in the way that they would do so naturally. So for him the running is almost an attempt to embody the breath and experience of the animals that he has at Farm Sanctuary, but also the animal that he is, a sort of honoring of the embodied creature who needs to move. So here running is more an expression of movement, of breathing, and of having a body capable of moving, and then also the issue that he expresses it of looking after those who are disabled, the animals who are no longer able to move and how it makes him feel grateful that he can, as an ambulatory able-bodied human being. So there are many ways of intersecting with veganism and running that don't necessarily mean running but mean movement, but mean breath, but mean embodiment.

JASMIN: Mm-hm. Now, the final addition to *Running, Eating, Thinking* that, I would imagine the final chapter that you put together, was your chapter called "A Body in the Park," which is a very beautiful tribute to the late Rynn Berry. Can you talk a bit about this chapter?

MARTIN: Yes. When Rynn Berry, who was a historian and writer of *Famous Vegetarians and Their Favorite Recipes* and *Food for the Gods: Vegetarianism & the World's Religions*, died at the end of last year following a heart attack in Prospect Park, I think I was, I find myself, surprisingly moved, not because Rynn was a friend of mine, which he was, and that I'd known him and he was a fellow writer and publisher and I'd known him for 20 years. It was that his passing was in some ways very anonymous. He went out without any ID, and for more than a week actually he lay in Methodist Hospital on Seventh Avenue in Brooklyn unknown. He was John Doe. And runners tried to sort of communicate with other runners by sending a photograph out to see if anybody could recognize him. And a photo entered my inbox from somebody who thought -- she didn't know I would know him through the vegan community -- because I was a runner I might recognize him. And I didn't know and sort of clicked off the photo and moved on. And when his half-brother did recognize him and

identified him and then it became known that it was Rynn and I saw the photograph again, I felt very disturbed that I'd so quickly sort of clicked off the photograph and I hadn't really seen Rynn, hadn't paid attention to him.

And I think it was that lack of attention, the fact that you could just go down and nobody would know who you are, that moved me. It made me feel very much that we need to pay attention to each other and to literally see and recognize one another, whether we're runners or we're vegan activists or whoever, animals included. And so I really wanted to kind of honor that notion of seeing somebody and what it meant to be a vegan runner. I also wanted to do the obvious statement that veganism and running are both very important for physical health and they obviously offer a chance, veganism certainly does, of environmental conservation and caring for the animal welfare. But they aren't panaceas for one's health, and that Rynn was very fit and yet he died of a heart attack, as did his brother who was also very fit, 10 days later.

MARIANN: Yeah. Wow.

MARTIN: So we need to not over claim the notion that running and veganism are going to help you live forever because they won't.

JASMIN: But there seems to be a growing consciousness about veganism in the running community in general. As a long distance runner who has I'm sure met many, many different stripes of runners yourself, do you find that to be the case?

MARTIN: I do. I mentioned in my introduction to the book that back in the '90s it was good enough just to breathe and be a vegan and that was it. Now you have to be a long distance Ironman Triathlete power weightlifter to be a proper vegan. You have to be climbing mountains and doing all sorts of athletic things. I was mortified when I ran the Brooklyn Marathon last year to see that the jogger -- that's a man who juggles three balls as he ran around 26 miles of Prospect Park -- was also a vegan. So not only are you a long distance runner but you now also have to be able to juggle as you circumnavigate the park. So there are vegans everywhere. I was actually -- I just ran the New Jersey Marathon last weekend, and one of the contributors who was running the race with me, she told me that in her corral, in her group of people, there were three vegans running. And they obviously struck up a conversation, so vegans are running. Vegans are on the march, yeah, definitely.

MARIANN: So there's certainly a consciousness about veganism in, as you say, the kind of super athlete world but there's also a consciousness about veganism I think increasing, and about running, among people who are aging. Do you see connections there?

MARTIN: Yes. One of the people who I profiled in this book but also mentioned in *Lifelong Running*, the book I co-wrote with Ruth Heidrich, was Mike Fremont, who broke a world record in half marathon the other day, aged 91, and he was a vegan. And he said, "Listen, I can be as fit as possible, but unless I'm maintaining a plant based diet, there's no way that I'm gonna have the body to be able to do the kind of training that I need to do in order to run these world record times." So I think there's definitely a recognition that over the long haul, as it were, both in terms of age and also in the run, a plant based diet is an exceptionally good way of maintaining one's weight and maintaining one's healthfulness and that this, the more you do it, the longer you do it, the better it will be for your continuing fitness as you age. Ruth Heidrich herself is approaching 80; I don't think she'll mind me saying that. And

she is incredibly fit and well and healthy and very positive. And so yes, I would agree with you that it is. I think people are becoming more aware of the benefits as one ages.

JASMIN: And with that in mind who do you hope to reach with this book? Do you hope to reach people who are just in the running community in general and might be kind of veg-curious, or do you hope to reach people who are in the vegan community and might be running-curious, or both? What do you hope?

MARTIN: Well, yeah, both of those, but also people who'll look at it and think, "What a crazy idea. Why on earth is there any connection between veganism and running?" and who are interested in the ways we can think about these ideas. And who knows? Maybe *Running, Eating, Thinking* will be at the cusp of a real move towards fitness and wellness and veganism just like *Cooking, Eating, Thinking* was to the food movement back in the early 1990s. So yes, vegans who are interested in running, runners who are interested in veganism, thinkers who are interested in neither but just want to see how one might think about these embodied activities from a philosophical perspective.

JASMIN: Now do you have an excerpt to share with us from one of the pieces you wrote in it?

MARTIN: I have a short excerpt that takes place from the introduction, and so I will read it now.

[To read more from *Running, Eating, Thinking*, [visit Lantern Books](#).]

JASMIN: That is beautiful and so well said, as always. And I just am so excited about this book and I know a lot of people listening to this podcast, they listen to our podcast while they're out on their runs, so this will be a nice synchronicity with that. And I, just on a personal note, I know we were chatting about this the other day when I surprised you, Martin, but it is our 10-year anniversary. And I know this because it's my 10-year vegan anniversary this month, and you were the first person I met with really in the animal rights movement. You gave me lots of great advice and I went to your office and you were very intimidating because you're British. But you're not at all intimidating; you're a teddy bear. So I am just very excited to be a part of this project. I'd love to hear about some other exciting projects that are coming up at Lantern?

MARTIN: Okay! Well, we have a number of books coming out. We're very excited that finally after many years of working on his autobiography, Kim Stallwood is producing *Growl*, which is his memoir, his analysis of the animal advocacy movement, and a history of the animal advocacy movement in the UK and the US since 1973 or 4 when he got involved. It's a very wry and pungent and piquant memoir. It's called *Growl* and it should be out next month. We're also looking forward to a book of essays and speeches by Matt Ball, the founder of Vegan Outreach, and a bunch of other titles that are moving along. So those are the two immediate ones that are coming out, so yeah. We're excited about that.

JASMIN: Very, very exciting. And I'm sure we'll stay up to speed on everything going on at Lantern, and people can get *Running, Eating, Thinking* either in e-book form or in hardcopy. And I really appreciate your taking time today to talk to us, Martin, and I hope to see you around, maybe running around the park sometime.

MARTIN: Absolutely. Now that you're near Prospect Park, you need to be out there all the time!

JASMIN: Exactly. Well, now that it's spring I think the time has come. All right, thank you again Martin. We'll talk to you very soon.

MARTIN: Thanks a lot. Thank you both.

JASMIN: Bye.

MARTIN: Bye-bye.

JASMIN: That was Martin Rowe. Learn more at lanternbooks.com.