



Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

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Interview with Rose McCoy

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **ROSE MCCOY** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 202.*

JASMIN: Today's guest is Rose McCoy. And Rose is a lifelong vegan, who has probably in her life done more protests and activist events and leafletings, and written more about animal rights and inspired more people to go vegan than most, if not all of us, could claim to do in our lifetimes. And Rose is 12 years old. And as Mariann said earlier, I have no doubt whatsoever that after hearing this tremendous activist talk about her own activism and her own views on the world, you too will find hope. So, here is Rose McCoy.

Rose McCoy is a 12-year-old seventh grader, a lifelong vegan, and an animal lover. She has been attending demos since she was a baby and leafleting since she could walk and talk. She has formed an animal rights group at her school with a fellow student to talk to others about animal issues. Last spring, Rose had an article published in her school newspaper titled "Should Meat Be Taken off the Menu at Clinton?" Rose has addressed McDonald's shareholders, New York City council members, and the media regarding animal issues, and she has appeared in the HBO documentary, *An Apology to Elephants*. She donates half her cat sitting money to PETA's SNIP program to spay and neuter dogs and cats in Hamptons Road, Virginia. She also received the Nancy Alexander Activist Award. Rose's aspiration is to work for PETA after she's done with college.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Rose!

ROSE: It's great to be here.

JASMIN: It's funny to say, "Welcome to Our Hen House, Rose," because I think most people probably think we're talking about our dog.

MARIANN: Yes, and they think she's suddenly learned how to speak English.

JASMIN: Well, if Rose could speak English, I hope she would be even half as articulate as the Rose we have on, because I remember this Rose from when she was a very little kid leafleting and protesting, and you really grew up in that scene. How old are you now?

ROSE: 12.

JASMIN: So are you in seventh grade?

ROSE: Yes.

JASMIN: Cool. And how long have you been vegan?

ROSE: My entire life.

JASMIN: That is great. I love when I meet people who've been vegan their whole life. Are your friends really surprised when you tell them you've been vegan since birth?

ROSE: Sometimes I don't think people fully understand when you say that. I've had a few times where some people don't know what vegan means, and then when I say I've never eaten meat, it's like, "oh wow, that's surprising." But most people who are friends, they generally are more compassionate and they understand those sort of things.

JASMIN: Yeah. Well, I would imagine that once they're around you, the whole compassion thing would be a little catchy and they would feel like that too. How long have you been an animal rights activist? Your whole life also?

ROSE: Yes.

JASMIN: Cool.

ROSE: I've been raised that way by my two very amazing parents.

JASMIN: So, tell me about your parents. They're animal rights activists also, right?

ROSE: Yes. My mom is probably more active, but my dad has to work, so he does what he can in his time. And they're both vegan, so they're pretty awesome.

JASMIN: Yeah. No, I know your mom is definitely pretty awesome. So, when I think back to my first memories as a little kid, I think about just dumb stuff, like falling off the chair and skinning my knee. Do you have memories from when you were a little kid of protests and different types of activist events?

ROSE: I do. There are memories of debates that I've had that I thought were very effective, so I try to take parts of those debates and use them in present or future debates. And some protests where there was a memorable event, maybe meeting someone who I'm friends with now who's an activist, we've worked together well and in other years past, those are sometimes good memories.

JASMIN: I love that you're so passionate. And like I said, I remember you, we were all just kind of walking, doing this protest, and you would go up to people's cars and knock on their windows and hand them a leaflet, which I'm not sure you could get away with if you're like a 34-year-old person like I am. But when you're a 4-year-old like you were at the time, I think it's probably more accepted. But we heard that you started an animal rights group at your school. Can you tell us about that?

ROSE: Oh yeah. It was most likely from my elementary school. I started a group where, at lunch, four girls and, well three other girls and I were just handing out literature at school and letting people know what was going on at the time for issues on animals. There were actually a lot of kids who went vegetarian, and then only a few of them actually stayed vegetarian, but there was a while when kids were really affected by the images in some of

the anti-meat PETA leaflets. But now I've actually come out of that elementary school. I'm in junior high now, and I started a group that has the same purpose, except it might be more effective because we can possibly make it an afterschool program and something that's more widespread across the school.

JASMIN: That's great. That's wonderful.

MARIANN: That's great. That sounds really exciting, and I think too you'll have more effect because I think the older kids get, the more likely they are to really stick to their guns, and when they learn this information it'll stick with them. I heard you also wrote an article in the school paper on an animal rights issue or on a vegan issue, is that right?

ROSE: That's right. I wrote an article basically listing all the reasons why meat should not be on the menu at my school, Clinton, where I listed the environmental issues and the health issues and the animal rights issues too. So, it just kind of outlined everything that needed to be outlined.

JASMIN: And how did you do on the paper?

ROSE: Oh well, I was amazed it actually got in because I don't work on the newspaper, so I had no guarantee that it would get in. But it did, and I had a lot of kids afterwards come up to me and ask questions. I actually had one of my teachers ask me a few questions. And that's when I met a girl who was not vegan at the time but she was vegetarian, and she said, "oh, I totally agree with you, this is an amazing article, I'm really glad to meet you," and she's the one who helped me start up this other group, so she's also pretty amazing. She's gone vegan now over the summer.

JASMIN: Well done, Rose! What kinds of questions do they ask you, after they read your article, for example?

ROSE: Some want to hear more details on what happens to animals in factory farms. Others who didn't want to hear so much the gruesome facts, they asked more about what alternatives there are. And also, there was one boy who was interested in the environmental effects of the meat industry.

JASMIN: That's amazing. So, where do you learn all of this stuff? Do you read it for yourself, or do you go over it with your mom, or a little of both?

ROSE: Well, PETA is extremely useful for me. I read, when I'm looking up certain things for a project that I might be doing to try and help animals, I'll maybe see another headline and go and read something else, or flyers where I'm not entirely aware of a new issue that's being brought up, but that I see another protester on the street who tries to hand a leaflet to me, I say, "oh I understand," but then I gather information from them. And then the PETA Activist Network is also helpful for that, where it's, yeah, I read a lot on the -- just by myself on the website, and sometimes with my mom. But the Activist Network also is useful for learning stuff because, I don't know if you know but there was recently undercover footage taken of Linda Bean, the company, was ripping apart live lobsters and crabs, and I didn't know about this issue before. I mean, I knew that people ate lobsters and crabs, but I had no idea what exactly was going on. And then I got an Activist Alert, and that was helpful too, so when I got that alert I read up on it more, and I watched undercover footage.

MARIANN: Wow, that's great. It sounds like you really put a lot of work into this, and it must be upsetting to have to learn all of this. But sometimes that's what we have to do in order to convey this information. I'm wondering like what kind of reactions do you get? Clearly you're getting a lot of positive reactions and a lot of kids are asking you about how they can take next steps. But most of us who do this are also used to getting some hostile reactions or being made fun of. Do you get any of that at your school?

ROSE: Well, overall, the people at my school are fairly nice. Being on the street is a different matter. It's some people who don't want to be told that they can't do something, or someone who works at a company that they might have a slightly hostile reaction. There's only two kids who I've ever had real issues with, with trying to make fun of me for the animal rights issues. But they don't have any support from any other kids, so they're not getting very good reactions. And I try to ignore them because it's pointless to get upset about it. What they have to say is really stupid, too, so...

JASMIN: Yeah. Exactly. It's really stupid. And do you know Ruby Roth, the children's book author? She wrote like *That's Why I Don't Eat Animals* and *The ABCs of Being Vegan*. Are you familiar?

ROSE: No, I'm not.

JASMIN: Well, she writes books for little kids who are just really looking at picture books. And she's gotten a lot of bad press by people who say you should not expose your kids to this kind of thing because it will traumatize them. And I'm wondering what you think of that because you're sitting here, very articulately explaining that you learned what's going on with lobsters, and I'm sure it was not pretty to see. Do you think that kids should be shielded from this kind of thing?

ROSE: No, I don't, because being a child, you're more likely to be thoughtful about bad things going on 'cause you know, the kids, they see birds flying around and they're fascinated, and they love dogs and cats and stuff. And then as you get older, it's kind of like harder to make that comparison and that connection. And also, a lot of story themes and stuff that you read, those books, it's like people trying to protect their kids from the evil world and stuff, and though it might not be about animal rights, always it ends up that people are better off knowing what's going on. And I think it's the same with animal rights, is that you need to know, so that you know what to do. Otherwise you're going to make the wrong choices.

JASMIN: Yeah. You know what always annoys me? When you see a little kid run up to a flock of pigeons. And this actually isn't the kid's fault at this point. And they kinda scare the pigeons away and the pigeons all fly away, yeah, like a toddler. And I understand why, it's fascinating for the little kid. But then the parents kind of laugh it off and sort of encourage them to do it. I always just want to be like, "What are you thinking? What is this instilling in your kid?" But I'm wondering, Rose, what animal rights issues your friends at school are most interested in, 'cause there's so many different issues. There's like factory farming as you mentioned, there's dog and cat issues, there's sea life. What are kids most interested in, do you think?

ROSE: There's mixed emotions at my school about, or mixed opinions at my school about what is the most important issues. I know that there's one girl who feels that fur is the most

important issue. I've had other students who say that they think meat is the worst industry. And in terms of what they think is most important, I mean, one of the two people who I've had trouble with feels that zoos, that's the most important thing to talk about, but he feels that zoos are good, and that's kind of always the issue with him. But I think overall people are mainly concerned with the meat and fur industry.

JASMIN: Yeah, I guess that represents everyone. Something calls to everyone, and hopefully it's an inroad to discussing other issues and veganism, and people who are interested in fur maybe will get turned onto issues of factory farming.

I have a kind of weird question for you. I'm not even really sure how to ask it. But I have some friends who have kids who they're raising vegan, and I often think, it was really awful when I learned what was happening to animals and then ultimately I went vegan, and it was the most wonderful thing ever in the whole world, and I can't imagine that I wasn't vegan ever. But I can't imagine what it would be like to be growing up vegan and then one day realize that people, the vast majority of people, eat animals. And I'm just wondering if you ever had a moment where you were like, "Wait, what? People do *what?*" Or if, like, how does that affect your psyche?

ROSE: Well, I probably have had that moment, though I don't remember it now. It probably has been a few years ago. But there are often times when I stop and I think to myself when I see someone eating something like chicken or wearing something like a chinchilla coat where how they don't understand that they've taken a life for something as trivial as a taste, or like a style. So, often times I have like a moment where I'll take a step back and kind of, like, "whoa, what's wrong with the human race?" But I don't remember the first time that I had that moment.

MARIANN: Yeah, every once in a while -- I guess it's all the same for us -- that every once in a while it just completely freaks me out that people eat animals. But then I remember that that's how the world is. You just keep going. I know that you've done a lot of things outside of school as well as your activism in school. I heard about a McDonald's shareholders meeting, is that right?

ROSE: Yes. When I was, God, it must, it was a few years ago now, it must have been in fifth grade, so two years ago now, I went up with my mother to, I believe it was, we went, my mom and I went over just like outside of Chicago, and we went over by a place called Hamburger University, I mean, how stupid can people be? But there was a load of people just, there was, I was astounded, I knew that McDonald's was bad for the animals, and very fattening for people, but I didn't realize how many issues they had. Yeah, so we went up there, and I presented the idea of controlled atmosphere killing for PETA, where even though it would still be a bad situation for the animals, it would be a lot better. It would prevent chickens from being scalded to death in de-feathering tanks or having their throats slit while they were still alive, so that was the idea that I was presenting. And the shareholders voted against it, so it didn't end up passing, but yes.

MARIANN: Well, that was really, really great work. And I can tell just from the way you're talking about it that you really know your stuff. I also heard a story about, that you addressed the New York City Council, what was that about?

ROSE: Oh. Well, often, there's protests outside of City Hall, which is practically across the street from where I live. And there's two things that have been issues that animal rights people have gone to stand outside of City Hall. One was the gassing of geese in New York City parks, and the other was the carriage horse industry, which is luckily going to be going out of business soon.

MARIANN: Yay!

JASMIN: Yes. Yes, yes.

ROSE: So yeah, so I presented a short thing there about the carriage horses.

JASMIN: And you're also in the HBO documentary *An Apology to Elephants*?

ROSE: Yes.

JASMIN: What was your role in that?

ROSE: It was a documentary on elephants that are killed for... well, for elephants in circuses and zoos and also there's a bit about the ivory industry, and my part was just simply saying that I don't, as a child relating to the baby elephants, I couldn't imagine what it would be like to be away from my mother and that I think it's wrong for people to go to circuses. And that was just, I gave a short statement in that.

MARIANN: That sounds great. I mean, it really is true that as a child you have a really special role to play in opening people's minds. People may be more willing to listen to you than they would to an adult. And I'm wondering if you still get out on the street and leaflet, and if you do, what do you say to people to get them to take a leaflet?

ROSE: That depends on the issue, and yes, I still do. In fact, I'm going shortly after this down to a protest outside of City Pups. So today, I'm going to leaflet. And if it's something that's, like, last weekend I was protesting outside of Macy's about the fur, then I'd say something maybe like, "Would you like some information on how Macy's gets its fur?" When I'm protesting outside of City Pups or any place that sells puppy mills, I say, "Information?" just plain and simple. But if someone takes it and doesn't fully understand what it is and then goes to look in the window, I say, "This place buys their dogs from puppy mills, so you shouldn't buy dogs from here." And just it depends, it varies from issue to issue, but oftentimes I find it effective to just say "Information?" 'cause then they'll take it and read it without fully knowing what it is at first, and they'll get the issue, 'cause some people don't want to see gruesome images or something, but then they take it, and they're forced to look at it 'cause they didn't realize at first, so they read the first couple lines and then they get sucked into it because they'll, "Oh my God, this is horrible." Even though they knew it was happening, they just don't want to fully get it. You have to kind of trick them to some degree.

MARIANN: That is a great strategy; I love that.

JASMIN: Yeah, it's really a good strategy. Do you ever get scared? Like, I know a lot of people who leaflet. They just, especially for the first few leaflets before you've kind of found your flow, it's a little nerve-wracking.

ROSE: Well, I think actually for me it was the other way around. When I was little, I don't think I understood that people would have negative reactions, and they didn't really towards me so much 'cause I was little and I don't think they, they probably thought, "oh my God, I'll look bad if I confront this girl." But then, as I've gotten older, there's been a few times when -- I'm not generally afraid to approach someone, but sometimes they'll say something that I'm like, "okay, I've gotta go somewhere else." I mean, it varies from person to person.

JASMIN: Yeah, definitely. Tell us about your cat sitting jobs.

ROSE: Oh, well my dad is the super in our building, so he knew these two women who, they needed a cat sitter, and he said that his daughter was really good with animals. And so, they hired me to watch their cats. And half the money that I get from cat sitting, I give to PETA, they go to SNIP, the spay-neuter program.

JASMIN: That's great. That is so cool. I wish more people were more charitable about their giving. That's a really good example. And tell us about the Nancy Alexander Activist Award.

ROSE: Oh, well that was an award that I got for simply doing the things that we've been talking about. I think one of the things that I think Nancy Alexander really liked was that my mom and I, when we see someone wearing fur, we confront them all the time, doesn't matter who it is. We confront them, or we talk really loudly about what happens to the animals behind them, so that they have to listen to us.

MARIANN: I can exactly see your mom doing that. I have an image in my head.

JASMIN: That's great. That is so cool.

ROSE: And in the winter, my favorite thing to do in the winter, my favorite snow activity, is throwing snowballs at fur-wearers. It's so fun.

JASMIN: That's awesome.

MARIANN: I don't think I could get away with that.

JASMIN: No, I don't think. Actually, Rose can only get away with it for a few more years, and then we're gonna have to come up with a new strategy, or maybe not. I don't know. Something tells me her mom--

ROSE: I don't know, my mom does it.

JASMIN: Your mom does it, yeah. I was just gonna say, something tells me Emily McCoy still does that. So, it seems odds to ask you, what do you want to do when you grow up? Because you're already doing so much and you already seem so grown up. But that aside, do you have any plans for the rest of your life after you get out of school?

ROSE: Oh. Yes, I do. I have a very exact idea of what I want to do, is I want to, when I graduate from school, I want to join Sea Shepherds for a while, and after a few years maybe quit and then work in the Virginia offices of PETA.

JASMIN: Excellent.

ROSE: PETA is definitely my main thing. If I'm not going with Sea Shepherd, I'm going with PETA. And even if I went with Sea Shepherd, I'd have to leave and go to PETA soon too.

JASMIN: That's amazing. Yeah, something tells me that they probably already want to hire you there. So, let's get a little more philosophical. What kinds of changes do you want to see for animals in your lifetime before you die?

ROSE: Oh, well, what I want to see is no animals being treated as anything lower than a human would be treated. I want people to look back on animal abuse like we do on slavery and on women not being allowed to vote. But what I expect to see in my lifetime is an increase of vegans, a decrease of industries and industries' presence like the fur industry, like circuses, like zoos, like the meat industry. And I've seen it already happening. I mean, four years ago I went to Germany for a short while, and Berlin was vegan-friendly, but Munich had no place to go eat. And then this past summer, I went again to Europe and Munich had multiple vegan restaurants, vegan, not just vegetarian. And we only went to three, but there were more. There was a shop that was called Veganista, it was a clothing store, and it was a woman who had gone to America as an exchange student, and she was vegetarian already and she got a leaflet and went vegan, and she went back and opened up a shop now and she spread the idea as much as she can, and that's what I love to see.

MARIANN: Yeah, it really is. It's growing so much, and I know you're going to be seeing it grow more and more in your lifetime. And I'd just like to ask you what kind of advice you have. You know, a lot of people weren't born into a family that had your folks in it, and weren't really introduced to this work, and might have just gone vegan, so what advice do you have for kids or adults for that matter who want to stand up for animals?

ROSE: I think that at least, the least that you need to do is just to not eat them, not wear them, not go see them in any form of entertainment, but that if you want to take it up a step, you can just go to protests. You don't even have to be very active; just stand there and hold a sign. It's very effective. Handing out leaflets, if you want to take it a step further. And if you want to go really far, you can work for an organization as your living, so that might be taking it up more than some people want to go.

MARIANN: And then there's the snowball thing.

ROSE: Yeah, yeah. Well, you could always do that too. Just, you might want to be careful when you're doing it.

JASMIN: You might want to run really fast afterwards, depending on where you are.

ROSE: Yeah, you should probably be pretty physically fit if you want to do that.

JASMIN: Exactly, that's excellent advice. Well, all of this is excellent advice. Rose, you really do give me hope for the future. I mean, there's so much all around us all that gets us so depressed, and it can make you feel really overwhelmed. And then I hear from someone like you, and I think, well, if you're out there, things can't really be all that bad.

ROSE: Thank you.

JASMIN: So, I just want to thank you so much for joining us today on Our Hen House. I'm sure our listeners are wildly, wildly inspired as we are. And we only live like practically a few

blocks away from each other, so I hope to see you sometime soon again, and I thank you again for everything you're doing to change the world for animals.

ROSE: Okay, thank you.

JASMIN: That was the fabulous Rose McCoy.