



EVEN Interview with

Colleen

Patrick-Goudreau

**Author and Educator on Living
Compassionately and Healthfully**

*For over 11 years, **Colleen Patrick-Goudreau** has guided people to becoming and staying vegan through sold-out cooking classes, bestselling books, inspiring lectures, engaging videos, and her immensely popular audio podcast, “Vegetarian Food*

for Thought.” With a Master’s degree in English literature and a command of traditional and new media, Colleen is an exhilarating speaker, a powerful writer, a talented chef, and a persuasive advocate, whose success can be measured by the thousands of people whose lives have been changed by her compassionate message.

*The award-winning author of five books, including best-selling **The Joy of Vegan Baking, The Vegan Table, Color Me Vegan, and Vegan’s Daily Companion**, Colleen also contributes to National Public Radio and The Christian Science Monitor, and has appeared on The Food Network and PBS. Her 5th book, **The 30-Day Vegan Challenge**, published by Random House, is due out on August 23rd 2011. Visit colleenpatrickgoudreau.com for more!*



EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Colleen: I grew up eating every kind of animal---anything that walked, swam, or flew. My father owned ice cream stores and would bring tubs of ice cream home to store in our separate ice cream freezer. At the same time, I, like most children, had a deep sense of compassion for animals, suffered when they suffered, and intervened when I was able. My parents and other adults supported this compassion, but they also taught me to compartmentalize it. I was taught that some animals were worthy of my compassion (the stray dogs and cats or wildlife I helped) and some animals were “here for us” and thus deserving of our compassion only to a point. And these were the same animals all over my wallpaper, my pajamas, my childhood books and games, my

bedspread, my favorite television shows and movies: lambs, calves, pigs, ducks, geese, turkeys, and chickens.

Although at some point I had started raising awareness about animals in labs and puppy mills, when I read John Robbins' *Diet for a New America* when I was 19, it started me on a path to learn everything I could about the exploitation of, and violence against, animals for human consumption. I stopped eating land animals immediately, and several years and several books later, I stopped eating (or wearing) anything that came from an animal. I just did not want to contribute to violence towards animals or people --- violence I would never participate in directly. So, when I became vegan (11 years ago now), it was a very natural and joyful decision that has had many unexpected gifts.

EVEN: Who was an influential person in your life earlier on that led you to veganism?

Colleen: Well, as I said, John Robbins' book was the first seed, but it was really Gail Eisnitz, who wrote *Slaughterhouse*, that truly opened my eyes. I was in awe of this woman who had the courage to visit slaughterhouses and talk to the men and women who killed and dismembered animals. I appreciated her strategy of asking the same questions to workers in whatever slaughterhouse they were in so that her expose wouldn't be accused of just focusing on "a few bad apples." And what struck me most by her findings was the violent culture we're all supporting by paying people to kill for us. These men and women were desensitized to the animal suffering and also to their own compassion. Aside from the slaughter, which is horrific enough, they hurt and torture the animals --- because they can. So, thanks to Gail Eisnitz, I became vegan upon reading her book, and it changed my life completely.

EVEN: What advice would you give to a vegan advocate wanting to become more of an activist?

Colleen: I think it's so important to participate in something you're good at and something you love. For some, that might be leafletting, for some it might be teaching cooking classes or vegan workshops, for some it might be protests or feed-ins. The more you enjoy what you do and the more it reflects your own passion and skills, the more effective you will be. And these days, there's no need to be a lone activist creating

your own materials (like the lonely activist I was 20 years ago!). There are so many wonderful organizations and activists ready to bring you into their fold! And if at first you try something and don't feel like it's for you, try something else. You have a contribution to make, you have a unique voice. As long as you keep looking for it, you'll find it.

EVEN: What do you think makes veganism hard for people?

Colleen: I think there are a few things, but mainly I think we live in a culture that doesn't support us making the most healthful and the most compassionate choices. We know how easy it is to make harmful choices, but our society isn't set up to help us make the best choices for ourselves and others.

What saddens me more than anything is how we do support compassion in children (before we start compartmentalizing animals into those we love and those we eat/hurt/experiment on and thus begin desensitizing children), but we're suspicious of compassion in adults.

So, I think that's what makes it so hard for people --- social pressure to conform. The solution is not necessarily to expect society to change but to give people the tools and resources they need to feel empowered and confident enough to make the most healthful and the most compassionate choices --- even when, and especially when, they feel pressured to do the opposite. And to help people do this, we need ambassadors of compassion to help provide guidance.

EVEN: What, in your opinion, is the most misunderstood idea about veganism?

Colleen: That it's about being perfect and pure, and that stops people from even attempting it. That's why people try to "catch" you. They want to somehow prove that you can't be a perfect vegan, but what they don't understand is that being vegan is not about being perfect. It's about doing everything we can to prevent violence and suffering. Instead what happens is that they figure since they can't do everything (i.e. be perfect), they won't do anything. I help guide people out of this when I say, "Don't do nothing because you can't do everything. Do something. Anything." And what's remarkable about this is that you'd think it would actually make people complacent to do "only just enough," they actually wind up going all the way and becoming vegan. It's

pretty awesome. It gives them permission to not be perfect but to be honest with themselves about what they're capable of doing. When they see their potential, they go all the way.

EVEN: What one thing from your thinking in childhood do you wish you could change?

Colleen: Gosh - I was such a protector of animals, but I was indoctrinated into eating them without even being aware of the process. So it's hard to remember exactly when I became unaware. Of course I wish my parents were consistent in their support of my compassion. While they helped me when I intervened in animal suffering, they still fed me animals. Even my dad (who abhors cruelty in every way) but still eats them. But I'm just grateful I woke up when I did, and I remember with fondness the large heart of that little girl who wanted to help animals in every way. Of course, I wanted to be a veterinarian when I grew up, but so do so many children who adore animals.

EVEN: If you were to mentor a younger person today, what guidance might you offer? What encouraging words might you share with a newbie?

Colleen: I do feel like I mentor young people through my work, particularly my podcast. And I give them the same encouraging words I give to everyone: be true to your values, be unapologetic about your compassion, speak your truth, and trust that whatever resistance you receive from friends and family when you're first awakening to your compassion will get better. That I know for sure. When you stand in your truth consistently and joyfully, people around you invariably change, though they might resist at first. Give it time, don't take it personally, and be an ambassador of compassion.

EVEN: Do you have a favorite vegan meal or food you can tell us about that really makes veganism work for you?

Colleen: My favorite vegan meal is probably so boring to most people. I eat kale salad every single day - massaged with a little blood orange olive oil and sprinkled with some salt and nutritional yeast. But honestly my favorite meal changes from season to

season - loving soups and stews in the colder months and salads in the warmer months. I eat so differently than I did when I first became vegan 11 years ago and even differently than 5 years ago or 1 year ago. Being vegan is about being open and evolving, and that includes being open to changes in your palate and desires. There is such a vast array of choices out there, and it is such a pleasure to crave and eat good, wholesome, colorful, cruelty-free food.

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Colleen: Knowing that every day I'm able to manifest my deepest values of compassion and kindness and nonviolence. Living fully awake can be painful sometimes (after all, only an open heart can break), but I wouldn't trade it for all the world.

EVEN: Any opinion or insight on the future of veganism in today's world?

Colleen: There is no doubt in my mind we are approaching a tipping point. It feels like we're there now, but we're not. People's hearts and minds are opening, and I foresee not only behavioral changes but paradigm changes as well. The more we keep raising the bar, the more people will rise to it. We need to expect people to act from their highest self. When we do, they will.

