

“So how long have you been vegan?” I was asked while attending a local Ringling Brother’s circus protest. I stumbled to find an answer considering that morning for breakfast I had my favorite, a bacon egg and cheese sandwich. The irony was not lost on me as I looked down at the sign I was holding depicting a disturbing image of Ringling Brother’s baby elephant training methods with the words BOYCOTT THE CIRCUS plastered across the photo.

At the recommendation of fellow activists, I watched the documentary “Earthlings” that same evening. That bacon egg and cheese four years ago was the last I would ever have. The graphic footage was horrifying, traumatic and all that I needed for the foundation of who I was and what I stood for to crumble. I can still remember the tears and the shame I felt for my ignorance at having had contributed to the level of suffering endured by the *most* vulnerable. The billions of animals hidden in the shadows, a level of cruelty I could not comprehend, all at the mercy of humanity for the most trivial and selfish reasons, taste. I had spent so many years of my life rescuing dogs and advocating against animal abuse all while being blind to the mass scale torture and suffering underlying the food industry that I was supporting with my own dollars and choices.

For the next year I immersed myself in learning everything I could on factory farming. From the brutal common practices, current animal welfare policies, facilities notoriously violating regulations, key players in each industry, to the obscene amount of money funneled into lobbying efforts. It became explicitly clear that litigation and policy work could offer a way for me to aid in successfully creating real change for animals. Advancing their protection and highlighting the plight of farmed animals is the reason that I left my career in finance and chose to pursue my JD.

Having seen first-hand the surge in main-stream veganism and the public’s awakening to animal suffering in recent years has been incredible. Unfortunately, our current administration’s rollbacks of wildlife protections, proposed extermination of America’s mustangs, elimination of the animal welfare rule, and an appointed agricultural advisory committee filled with special interest factory farming proponents are all sobering reminders that the fight for animals is just beginning.

*So-what motivates me to protect animals through the legal system?* The sow spending her life lying on a concrete floor in a gestation crate so small she is unable to move. The dairy cow collapsing from exhaustion and slaughtered for cheap burger meat after years of having her calves taken from her. The veal calf crying out for his mom desperately licking the fingers of slaughterhouse workers looking for milk. The chicks being ground up alive simply for being born a male and of no use to the egg industry. The footage of animals who are too sick to move that are kicked, punched, and beaten before their miserable existence ends on our dinner plates.

*They are my motivation.*

To the activists and animal lovers I have stood next to on countless street corners with, holding signs to educate the public on these industries that are cloaked in secrecy. To the compassionate shopper choosing a cart of produce over the neatly packaged carcasses. To the person sharing the undercover video footage on their Facebook page. *You are my motivation.*

A layperson has the power to change public perception and hearts with their passionate voices. But to change the system, the laws and regulations, to fight big money industries, *capable voices are necessary.*