

BARFEE & THE VEGAN

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Animals &
Elders
Together forever

Full
Flavor
Vegan
Milan Ross

Holistic
Cancer
Treatment
With Dr. Ruby Lathon

Cattle Ranch
to Veganic
Farm
Rowdy Girl

Shaun Monson

The Writer & Director of *Earthlings* & *Unity* talks
Inspiration, Consciousness & Effective Outreach...




ROWDY GIRL
Sanctuary



After experiencing a profound awakening in late 2014, Renee King-Sonnen convinced her husband to convert their 96 acre cattle ranch, right in the heart of Texas, into a vegan, animal sanctuary. Renee was able to save around 30 of their cows from slaughter and news of Rowdy Girl Vegan Sanctuary went viral.

Now with the animal sanctuary sorted, Renee is starting plans on incorporating the sanctuary into a veganic permaculture farm; proving to farmers everywhere that animals and humans can co-exist peacefully and in a mutually beneficial way.

Working so closely with the animals on your ranch allowed you to really get to know them. Would you say that helped open your eyes to veganism?

Yeah, that was a big catalyst. I mean, that's exactly what happened. When I came here my life completely turned upside down. I always fancied myself an animal lover, I just didn't understand how ironic it was that I was eating them and claiming to love them. When I became vegan I started seeing just how horrible it is that we're taught that we can love some animals and eat others.

So was there a defining moment for you?

It all started when Tommy wanted me to have my own calf.

Rowdy Girl was a calf, didn't have a mother, I don't know what happened to her mother. I had to give her milk every day and that was like my baby; that was my calf. I bought her for 300 dollars and I fed her and she became my little bouncing calf out there in the pasture. She'd always run toward me and want to be fed and then when the first trailer came to take the calves away I don't know what I thought. I don't know what I expected. I wasn't prepared for the emotions that I had when the mothers started crying and I wasn't prepared for the sight of the mothers running after the trailer screaming for their young. I wasn't prepared for the baby calves that were betrayed to be trying to get out of the trailer with their eyes bugged out, tears streaming-



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down their face. I wasn't prepared for any of that and I don't know what I thought about the food on my plate but I never was taught how it got there. I knew something had to die but I never was taught that cows had feelings and they wanted to be with their babies, you're just not taught that. That's kept from you and so I started feeling betrayed.

So when I first experienced that I was trying to redeem myself. I did rituals; I made little crosses for each one of them. I put it in the ground. I said a prayer. I knew that they were someone. Even though I was still eating animals, I knew that those animals were someone and it started my journey to becoming vegan. I didn't go vegan that day but it started me asking questions, it started me trying to redeem myself somehow, it started my quest.

How was it with your husband during that time?

The ranch wasn't our entire livelihood but it was a huge investment. It's Tommy's retirement fund which he had invested into this ranch so he didn't want it to fail. When he bought this place he put all of his money into it. It's his baby and so I was messing with that. I was messing with his nest egg and I wasn't doing it on purpose. I was asking him stuff like, "*How do you sleep at night?*" I wanted to be the good wife, a good rancher's wife where I was tough and rough and could be able to help out there, corral the cows but we got to the point where he couldn't do it with anybody around because I would cry and scream and I would say ugly things to him. At the end of the day I started calling him a murderer and I was

accusing myself of being an accomplice to murder. I started seeing it that way, I started seeing us as slave owners and it really hurt his feelings because he's such a man of integrity. He didn't want to see himself doing anything wrong or bad and certainly not the way I was colouring it but that's the way I was seeing it. I really, really almost lost my mind. Tommy and I almost divorced. It got to the point where I couldn't stand it.

So what did you do to try and change things?

I went so far as to try to do the whole humane meat and milk thing. I went into all of that trying to redeem myself. I thought "well, if we get our milk from a local dairy then we're doing things better, if we eat our own chicken's eggs we're certainly doing things better, if I buy grass-fed beef...". Then I started asking my husband why we were buying all this grass-fed beef and organic chicken when we had our own cows and chickens here. We never slaughtered them. My husband said he couldn't kill anything here because he knew who they were; he couldn't eat his own animals. I used hard language; I used cussing words at that point because there's something screwed up about that. That's when I really started putting two and two together because I saw that it was alright for him to eat cows but it wasn't alright for him to eat his own cows. That's when I knew it was all about the money, it was all about the business, and it was all about treating animals as a commodity. It began to make me sick to my stomach. I really started seeing these animals as if they were my

family and when I was eating I would be saying things like, “well heck, I could be eating my cousin for all I know, I could be eating a long lost niece if it came like that to me”.

I've read that you started watching every kind of documentary that you could get your hands on, from *Earthlings* to *Forks over Knives* and you showed those to your husband as well...

He watched everything I put in front of him. I deliberately didn't put *Earthlings* in front of him until just recently but he watched that too. What encouraged my husband to go plant-based was *Forks over Knives*. *Cowspiracy* really helped him see what was going on in the business and the environment. *Forks over Knives* is what did it for him as far as being willing to change his diet and he's lost weight, he feels better. He's still got some room to grow as far as being completely vegan in his mind.

So you've now got the animal sanctuary up and running, but you've also got some great plans to integrate the sanctuary into a permaculture farm...

At the moment we are in the research and development stages, looking into how we can create a veganic permaculture farm. Obviously with all these animals on the property we've got manure in the ground, so we've got a

good basis to build upon. What we want to do in the spring is to start an organic garden, a plot where we can experiment so that we can eventually grow into a complete veganic farm long-term. We can't do that right away, so we'll work in stages but you have got to have a dream; you've got to have a vision to have it at all. We've got a plan, we've got a model and I am all about it, I mean I will not let this go. I believe it's necessary and I just keep putting it out there that we're looking for a veganic project manager for our farm. We are looking for that person, that team, or a couple, that wants to come here and spearhead this. We've got the place, we've got the passion, the vision and we certainly have the momentum and publicity to propel this forward. There certainly is a promise of sharing in the bounty of the produce and also a salary as we move forward. We want to be able to pay that person, we just can't right in the beginning.

So is the long term goal to be able to sell the produce at farmer's markets or to become a big supplier in the region?

Oh absolutely. We'll have a farmer's market right here. We're located on Highway 35 in Angleton so it's handy for people to get to. I know the right person or right family is going to come here and help us get the veganic farm up and running. I know it's going to happen, I believe it with everything in me that it's going to happen. -



FYI - The Rowdy Girl crew is going to be featured alongside many other inspirational vegans in [The Vegan Movie](#), which premieres this summer...



Have you been talking with your neighbors, other farmers about what your plans are, and if so what kind of response have you had from them?

I started going to a small Presbyterian church up the road and a lot of the ranchers go there, some of the old money ranchers, and they know what we're doing. They look at us like we're from Mars but they're not mean or anything. It's just they just don't understand and what we try to do is just be an education source. Tommy sometimes gets embarrassed with me when I start talking to folks because I don't criticise or put folks down but I'm real blunt about the things that I've witnessed and what I've changed and what I've seen. It makes people uncomfortable. When

we're going to buy materials at a lumberyard to do a project, a lot of the ranchers are in there and I'm always on about animal rights everywhere I go. So it's not that people are against us, they just don't understand. Tommy seems to sometimes think that we have enemies, but I don't see it that way. It's just people have a hard time talking to us about it.

Well you could just be planting little seeds and once people see what is happening with your ranch, they might want to follow suit...

People are thirsty for the truth straight up. They're thirsty for it straight up and without criticism. I think that's one of the big problems in our movement is that some of the activists that I've come across, in their desire to help, they can't find their voice without being critical, without being judgmental, without being hard. I mean I'll talk to folks and I'll laugh and I'll cry in the same session because I do understand but it's just not acceptable anymore. I understand where you're coming from but now that I know what I know it's not acceptable. These cows have serious feelings. They are the most amazing beings on the planet. I think cows are really spiritually highly evolved and I never saw that before because I never tuned in to them that way.

FYI - Laura Keats, the producer of "Pitbulls and Parolees" is shopping the Rowdy Girl crew to networks. Watch this space for a reality TV show!

Yes, they're very forgiving.

They are. I can lay down in a field with Rowdy Girl, put my head on her neck and she'll put her nose on my head. I just cry when I'm with them. I can't believe that I ever ate them.

You've also had a lot of interest from corporate sponsors with the sanctuary. What kind of opportunities do companies have for their CSR (corporate social responsibility) projects when working with Rowdy Girl?

We have the most amazing sponsors that give us all kinds of stuff. For example, *Follow Your Heart* wants to be a partner, and help us financially in the coming year. They've got vegan eggs coming out so they want to maybe have a chicken coop in their name. *LUSH* gave us a grant for eleven thousand one hundred and eighty five dollars so that we can rescue more animals. Using that money, we're going to be putting in more infrastructure; electricity, water and more buildings so that we can add more animals. They're also coming here with their employees next week volunteering.

That's great that the vegan community can support each other like that, because as we've seen in the media lately, there's some serious bullying from the animal agriculture sector who feels threatened by veganism...

And I think most of the time what goes on is hidden; you don't even know that you're being bullied. We've had some bullies. We've had some folks bullying us online and we even had some folks try to get us to go into

'humane' animal farming. I was so upset. I was livid when they approached us with the money. They literally laid it just right at our feet. They don't get it. That's why I know once you go vegan there ain't no going back. I mean, I don't care how much money somebody lays at my feet, it wouldn't matter. There ain't no doing that. I'm not selling my soul to the devil, never. **BV**

For information on the Rowdy Girl Vegan Sanctuary and Vegan Farm, including information on how to donate and volunteer, [please visit the website](#). If you're interested in the volunteer permaculture position please contact Renee through the website. You can also connect with the Rowdy Girl team via [Facebook](#) and follow Renee's story at [Vegan Journal of a Rancher's Wife](#).

Rowdy Girl is raising funds to winterise the sanctuary and keep the cows, pigs, horses, chickens and turkey safe and warm this winter. [Click here to donate](#) to their crowdfunding campaign.