

The cruelty of animal farm trade revealed

KAREN WATKINS

It was an article about Global Warming in Biophile magazine that made Karen Johnson of Bergvliet do some soul-searching. Having made a decision which was to change her life, she realised the easiest thing she could do to make a difference was to become vegan. "I was on the Body for Life Diet, eating protein four times a day. Imagine all those animals," she said.

Karen grew up on a farm and went to an abattoir at the age of 10, so she was used to animal death. "It was later, after seeing how farm animals are treated that I realised I have a choice.

"I felt betrayed and cheated by producers, the government and society for keeping me in the dark for so long. I couldn't sit at home with the images and the sounds of the animal's cries in my head. They still wake me in the middle of the night. I just had to get out there and share this knowledge. I feel that consumers have a right to know the truth, and then they can truly make an informed decision," said Karen.

"After I'd made the decision to become vegan I felt like grabbing people and making them aware of what I knew," she said. Instead Karen started handing out pamphlets in shopping centres every week, on her day off, since August 2007.

Three months later she founded ELATED (Enhancing the Lives of Animals Through Ethical Decisions).

It is an information resource with pamphlets from various organisations showing information covering three topics: the truth behind animal farming, the link between animal farming and environmental devastation and information on how to go vegan, with recipes, health advice, how to make the transition, where to get protein etc.

"We distribute 300 pamphlets and 300 flyers every week with funding covered by donations from those who come to the table," said Karen.

"I've realised that Elated needs to become a nationwide information table network but this will require serious funding. Vegan education is vitally important on so many levels. Our planet cannot bear the consequences of animal farming at this rate. Our society is rife with violence and crime, people are dying from cancer, heart attacks and strokes while billions of animals are literally suffering to death on animal farms and being dragged kicking and screaming to slaughter. Veganism is the logical, rational requirement for the evolution of a compassionate society," said Karen.

To honour World Farm Animals Day Karen organised an event at Bergvliet High School on Thursday October 2. World Farm Animals Day was started by Ghandi who is known to have said: "Be the change you want to see in this world".

Speaking to people at the event who had become vegan, they all



■ Patricia Glyn, left, with Karen Johnson of Elated.

had one thing in common, the same as Karen: "The peace that came afterwards made it all worth it. Before, I was filled with so much anger."

Celebrated radio and television personality Patricia Glyn gave an illustrated talk on why her worldview changed so dramatically during a 2 200km walk into the interior, from Durban to Victoria Falls, three million steps, taking 19 weeks.

Patricia followed in her ancestors footsteps who travelled the same route 142 years ago. They travelled by three ox-wagons but Patricia, who described herself as "a Joburg chick on endorphins", had two Isuzus.

Passing through the Free State she remembered how the area was home to lots of wildlife. She showed video footage of animals wiped out for skin with carcasses left to rot.

But it was reaching Botswana, one of the driest places on earth, that she found it was not only the sand that was character building. She was shocked that livestock had replaced wildlife.

"Not an insect, not a bird, only cattle to satiate our need for meat. Botswana is the epicentre of Global Warming in our part of the world.

In my ancestors' day there were pools and vleis, now there is nothing. You soon learn to watch every drop, it's like liquid gold."

One of the video clips shows Patricia using graphic sign language asking local people for eggs. "It's shocking that I couldn't converse with them," she said adding that she is now attending lessons to one. It was in trying to converse that she came across the word 'footing'.

"It's a nicer word than walking, that's why my book is called Footing with Sir Richard's Ghost."

Another life-changing moment was sharing drinks in a camp with Italians.

"There were elephant's feet and tusks, one of them still had the eye attached - which will haunt me forever." She went on to say that she realised that the hunting of the past was barbaric and revolting, "but it's unwise to judge man out of his time, but we know now."

Next morning she realised what a hypocrite she was, tucking into her bacon and eggs. "It's just not right, animal flesh will not pass my lips again," she said.

"Walking is a wonderful refuge from life, a kind of self-meditation. I learnt a lot about myself, the planet, life... Any journey in life is about staring down your demons, for sweet rewards," she said.

Back home again she cleaned out her cupboards and now thinks before she buys anything. "What impact is it having on the earth? There's peace for me now, in my mid-40s, that an animal hasn't died some horrific death because of me."

During the interval, vegan snacks and organic wine were enjoyed as Patricia sold copies of her book.

After the break the audience watched an award-winning documentary The Witness, a story of how Eddie Lama tells, with humour and

sincerity, how he realised how animals are treated.

Eddie is a tough construction contractor from a Brooklyn neighbourhood, brought up to fear and avoid animals, his mother telling him they are dirty.

One day he was asked to look after a kitten and, thinking: "I'll get a date out of this," he agreed but got more than he expected. He fell in love with the kitten and, while stroking her realised that animals have skin and are killed for it.

He started to rescue abandoned animals and even advertised for a secretary whose office duties included animal duties. He also gave up smoking realising his cat had no choice but to breathe in the secondary smoke.

"I smoked heavily, non-filter Camels. I swear the cat coughed one day," he said in the video.

Another trigger was feeling the cat's leg and thinking it resembled a drumstick. "I went to dinner with friends that night and guess what we had?"

This was a humorous sketch where he described his definition of a hippie - a vegetarian, which is what he became.

"We don't understand how animals are killed, the process they go through." This was followed by gruesome scenes of animals having their tails docked, their snouts

smashed, being prodded, pigs going mad penned in cages unable to move.

"They can't express themselves. They know they're going to die, they feel fear," he said as the graphic scenes continued and a number of people in the audience left, while others cried.

But the scenes got worse, the fur trade - animals writhing in pain for days until they are clubbed.

"The fur trade is huge and they misinform us, talking of ranches," as scenes show animals in open cages, in the cold so their coats will grow thicker.

"Some animals go nuts or, if they're lucky, die prematurely. If not, a probe is stuck up their anus and a muzzle covers their mouth as they are electrocuted. It may be painful but it's effective and doesn't damage the pelt. And then there is gassing..."

Afterwards, Karen informed that, contrary to public opinion, it is easy to follow a vegan lifestyle. "All it takes is a change in consciousness to see what lies behind the food on your table," she said.

All funds raised at the event go to furthering the awareness of animal suffering.

● Elated operates as a project of Animal Rights Africa, who funded the World Farm Animals Day. Visit www.elated.co.za

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