



Carol Leifer

A comedienne gets serious about veganism and animal rights

PETA videos aren't usually laugh-out-loud funny—unless Carol Leifer's doing the talking. "I recently became vegan," she says in her online testimonial, "because I felt that as a Jewish lesbian, I wasn't part of a small enough minority." A stand-up comic, Leifer, 53, is one of Hollywood's most revered TV writers, with *Seinfeld* among her credits. Last year, she published *When You Lie About Your Age, the Terrorists Win*, offering reflections on life, love, food, and family that manage to be both touching and hilarious. Leifer has welcomed seven rescue dogs into her Santa Monica, Calif., home, where VT caught up with her.

Q You went vegan after emceeding a benefit for Southern California animal sanctuary Animal Acres. Can you talk about that experience?

A It was an "aha" moment. I never thought much about where the food on my plate came from. I didn't know what a factory farm was. When people at the event talked about "abused farm animals," I thought, "Well, there are some pretty freaky-deaky farmers out there." I was so naïve. Learning what I did that night, and seeing videos like PETA's "Meet Your Meat," helped me commit.

Q What's your advice about making the transition to veganism?

A The biggest challenge when you become vegetarian or vegan is feeling isolated, like you're the only one out there. A book called *Vegan Freak* [by Bob Torres and Jenna Torres] helped me enormously.

Q Your book waxes rhapsodic about the health and beauty benefits of a vegan diet. How has your body changed?

A The best thing about my going vegan is that I lost 15 pounds. To women, that's the Holy Grail. People say, "Oh, my God, you look fantastic, you've lost all this weight." When I tell them it's from eating vegan, they go, "Hmm. Something's going on here."

Q How would you handle it if your 3-year-old son, Bruno, decides to eat meat when he gets older?

A I will have a heart attack. I don't know how or if I could ever handle that. The day I see my son biting into a hamburger, you're going to have to revive me. It's easy now. He loves tofu and edamame. And your kids really do want to eat what you want to eat. Hopefully, we'll have inundated him with so much knowledge that he'll make the connection between visiting Animal Acres and recognizing that those animals were spared from some place, but who knows.

Q You're working on TV pilots for Showtime and CBS. Are you planning any creative projects with veg characters?

A I'd like to put a vegetarian or vegan character into one of my upcoming projects. From a creative standpoint, it has all the elements of good writing: it makes a character unique, and provides for a lot of conflict. I'd also do it to get the word out. There are so many people who are new to vegetarianism and veganism. They don't really understand it. What better way than through the medium of television?

Q Can you tell our readers a good vegetarian joke?

A I can tell you an animal joke I tell at benefits: "You know, animals, in many ways, are better than people. A dog can lick his privates and yet not feel the need to post it on YouTube." ●

New York-based writer Michael Kaminer hopes to soon see witty vegetarians on TV.