



THE CHANGING FACE OF THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

article by Cynthia Morgan
photos by Brad Klopman

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.
-Margaret Mead

I'm guessing I heard about my first animal rights demo (short for "demonstration," which is what we called protests, some thirty years ago) from being a subscriber to *The Animal's Voice*, a ground breaking animal rights magazine that began in the early 80s. Pre-Internet, *The Animal's Voice* felt like a hand-delivered gift from God in my mailbox, reassuring me that I was not alone. Come to think of it, much like *Vegan Health & Fitness Magazine* is for many today.

The demo, organized by Last Chance for Animals (LCA), was for anti-vivisection and it was to be held in Los Angeles, a city I had just moved to. I didn't know anyone in LA except my boyfriend at the time, who I convinced to move there with me. All I can remember about the information on the upcoming protest was that it said, "Bring your own sign."

I hustled down to the craft store and bought a piece of poster board and a few bright magic markers. My boyfriend was beginning to feel like he no longer understood me—becom-

ing a vegetarian was one thing, reading a subversive animal rights magazine instead of what other young women were reading at the time was another, but going to an animal rights protest by myself in LA? He sat me down to lovingly say that things were getting out of hand and that I shouldn't be so focused on animal issues. Maybe he sensed I was moving outside of my comfort zone. If he did, he was right. Thoughts of "Would I get lost? (pre-GPS worries) Would I be an outsider? Would I get arrested?" entered my mind. I didn't know how these types of demonstrations played out. I was a nice Midwestern girl. The only thing we ever protested was the winter, come February.

I hunkered down to make my sign anyway—that I was good at. Memories flooded in from fourth grade when I ran for Secretary Treasurer of my school and each candidate had to make a sign to sway votes. I hung mine proudly in the school hallway: I had drawn a big bunny rabbit (an animal, of course) and wrote my slogan, "Don't

hop around, stand your ground! Vote Cindy Morgan for Secretary Treasurer." And I won. The sign was the clincher. What else would 10-year-olds have to measure the qualifications of their Secretary Treasurer?

At least I would have a sign at the protest, so as not to stand out.

The next morning, I found my way to the demo. I was nervous and excited by what I saw: about 25 people were lined up on the sidewalk holding signs, shouting in unison. News trucks were scattered about. People were being interviewed. The leader of the protest was a man in his 40s who had arrived on his motorcycle. With longish hair and chiseled good looks, he was an authoritative, passionate nonconformist carrying a bull-horn to rally the troops. He turned out to be ex-soap star, legendary animal rights activist Chris DeRose, Founder and President of LCA.

I grabbed my sign and sheepishly wedged myself between two kind-looking women,

not saying a thing, just clutching my cardboard like a life raft. As I looked down the demo line, I noticed I was the only one with a homemade sign—cue the uncomfortable hot flash feeling—everyone had professionally printed signs from the organization. In comparison, mine seemed like the scribbles of, well, a fourth grader. Though terribly embarrassed, I continued to hold it up. *What's a girl to do?*

I also noticed something else: there weren't any activists my age. Everyone was older by at least 15-20 years—the baby boomers. And most of them were women, very few men attended. The ratio was at least 5-to-1, women-to-men. My generation of rebellious X-ers were known for their anti-authoritarianism, so where were they all? Earth Day rallies? Protesting Apartheid on college campuses? I'd like to think so, because I didn't find them at animal rights protests. And Gen-Xers certainly weren't slackers—the moniker unfairly given to us by the baby boomers due more to the economic circumstances of the time, rather than our natural state of mind.

That first demo changed me. I had arrived an unsteady neophyte, and left a few hours later a more confident woman, ready for the next protest. I had found my tribe, and I had used my voice for the voiceless, stood up to injustice, put my passions and my morals into action, and was now part of something much bigger than myself. The train left the station that day. And it left my boyfriend behind. My relationship broke up shortly after.

So began a journey that would include years of demos—at construction sites of new animal research buildings, to Sea World (yep, we were there 27 years ago), to joining the Green Party in order to introduce animal welfare issues into legislation, to the houses of animal abusers, as well as tabling each weekend on Melrose Avenue. (Tabling is when you set up a table in a high traffic area with brochures and petitions for people to sign in order to change policy and educate people on an issue.)

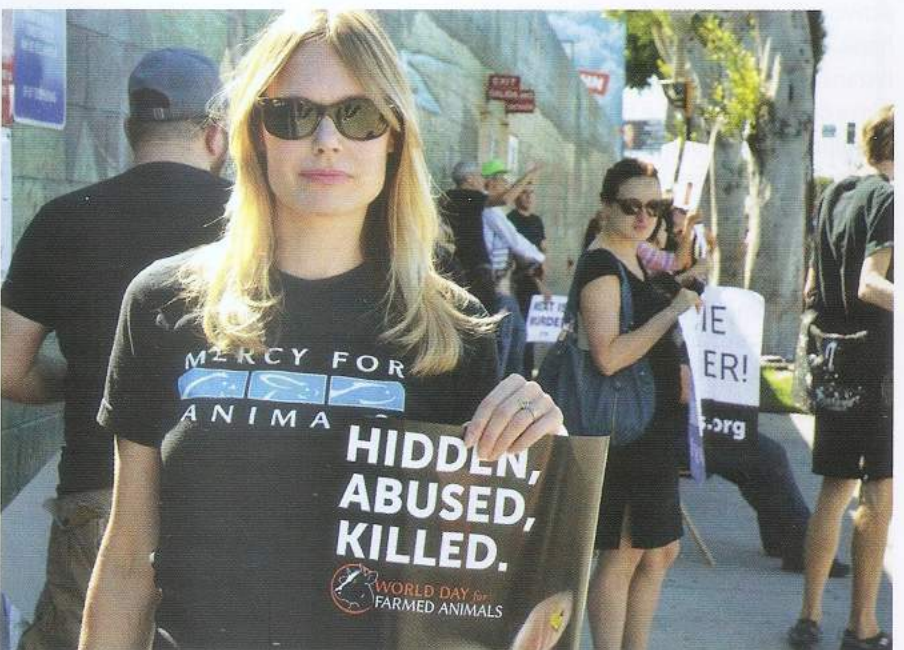
Fast forward to today as a 50 year-old, and once again I find myself a bit of an outsider. The majority of activists that now make up "The Movement" (that's what we used to call it) are Millennials, and even a growing number of Generation Z-ers (the generation after the Millennials). They are equal parts young men and young women, they're much more vocal (and louder!) than we were. As a whole, they're more fiercely determined and outspoken, and they come out to protest in the hundreds where there used to



The author, then and now



Chris De Rose speaking at a protest decades ago



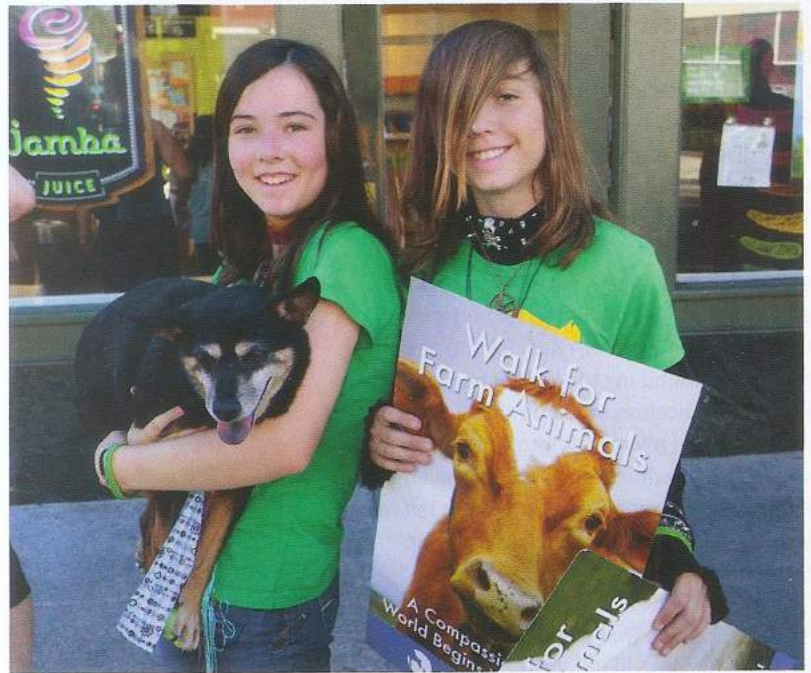
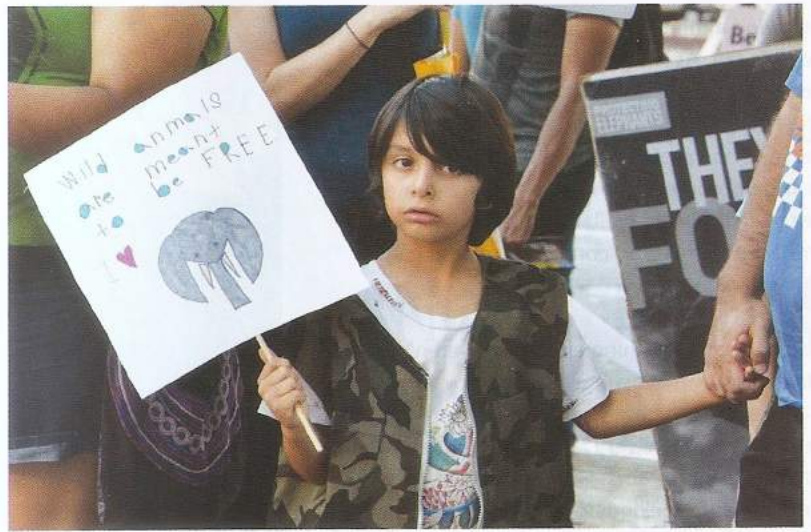
be tens. The prolific use of social media has replaced “the media.” News trucks are relics as Twitter spreads the news globally at lightning speed.

There also isn't one charismatic leader as Chris was (and though he doesn't lead demos anymore, he is still a very active authority figure in the movement). Younger people are taking the reins and upstarting their own animal rights organizations, whether for factory farming and vegan education or opening vegan bake and butcher shops—anywhere around the world that animals are abused there is an organization subverting it. Where there used to be only a handful of animal rights organizations spreading themselves thin in what seemed like an endless battle across a long board of animal abuses, there are now organizations whose sole focus is on a specific area of abuse: factory farming, animal testing in medicine or beauty products, circuses, puppy mills, festivals, horse carriages, wildlife culling, dolphin slaughter, the list goes on.

Something has happened in the last five years or so. The other day I emailed my longtime friend Chris to ask him what change he has seen in the last 30 years of the animal rights movement, and he wrote back one sentence, “Progress, but slow, long overdue progress.” I love the word “progress.” Progress is progress. Slow, yes. Overdue, yes. But progress means it's no longer what it once was. The collective consciousness is finally awakening to what I believe will be the next big social justice movement—animal liberation.

For those of us who have been around animal activism for awhile, all of this translates to hope. No, scratch that. We always had hope. It translates to an optimism that was lacking. We're optimistic that the brighter future we imagined is becoming a reality. We trust that a kinder, more compassionate world is unfolding. There is an anticipation that one day all sentient beings will know freedom, and there's a certainty for a healthier population of people. Progress—something only hindsight can reveal.

I don't attend many demos anymore, but every now and then you'll find me out there with all the young revolutionaries on the right side of history. I have a knack for spotting a newbie activist. I smile and tell them I like their home-made sign.



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