



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 652, Interview with Jane Velez-Mitchell

Jasmin Singer: Welcome back to *Our Hen House*, Jane.

Jane Velez-Mitchell: Woo! I'm so glad to be here, Jasmin!

Jasmin: I am so excited to talk with you! It's hard for me to not just wanna catch up though, because I miss you so much! And I am excited to talk about what's going on with UnchainedTV and this incredible new show of yours. But I also just wanna know what's going on in your life so we'll have to plan a catch up soon outside.

Jane: For sure, for sure.

Jasmin: So first, Jane, just explain for those who aren't yet familiar, what UnchainedTV is and where people can find it.

Jane: Well, UnchainedTV, one word, is a global streaming network and it is available globally 100% for free.

It is super easy to download. You can download it on your phone. If you have an iPhone, you just go to your app store and write in UnchainedTV, one word. You don't need to put your email in; same thing with Android phone, just go to Google play store, download it. Now, you can also get it, if you have an Apple TV device, on your television.

So just type it into your apple TV device, ditto for Amazon Fire stick, ditto for your Roku device. And if you have a Samsung or LG smart TV, there's a search that says streaming channels. You just type it in there and voila! It is on your TV, just like HBO Max, or Showtime. Essentially, it's the same technology.

While they have spent billions of dollars creating their apps, we did ours for tens of thousands of dollars. And one of the reasons is that we aren't doing multi-billion dollar shows and paying people millions of dollars to act in them. We're using the creativity, ingenuity and content of vegan and animal rights

content creators. However, if you think about it, most of the major networks have been made by one hit show. Whether it's *House of Cards* or *The Morning Show*, usually they're put on the map by one hit show.

So we knew we needed to do some original content to get people in the tent. And that's why we came up with the world's first reality show starring a family of pigs, *Pig Little Lies*.

Jasmin: Which is the best name of any show on UnchainedTV, or network, whatever. And I wanna get to that in a second, cuz I'm obsessed with the show, but I wanna first go back.

I wanna ask you. Is this right? Did I read this right? You recently surpassed your 1,000,000th view. Is Unchained already exceeding your expectations?

Jane: Totally. In fact, we got more views than an unnamed major network recently, which then shut down. And here's the thing, streaming device users, okay?

They're all over the world. They've paid 25 bucks for a little device and they wanna watch TV for free. Okay, that is the number one search term for all streaming device users, whether it's Amazon fire stick or Apple TV device or the Roku device, unless you're offering them something that costs millions of dollars to produce, like *Succession*, that involves exotic islands, mansions and jets and helicopters, you really... people don't wanna pay, right? Do you wanna pay? So we are offering it 100% free and making it very easy because a lot of these free platforms still asks you to put your email in. They try to get information, we're not doing any of that. We wanna make it as easy as possible.

And our aim is to hit the non-vegan audience. So we are a 501c3 nonprofit, I do not take a salary. This is simply a mission that I've had all my life because I spent 40 years in mainstream media working in national cable news. I had my own show on CNN Headline News. In syndicated news, I worked at *Celebrity Justice*.

I worked in local news at WCBS TV and KCAL TV in Los Angeles. And it was always very hard for me to get anything about animal rights and veganism, the most important issues of our time that offer the solution to the biggest problems we have societally/globally. Good luck getting the ability to talk! And it was so frustrating being right there and then having to just, by hook or by crook, get these stories out there and then getting the blow back and getting the unpopularity and the ridicule and the condescension.

And I finally said, “Screw this, let's take the power back instead of asking for permission.” If I had a nickel for every single filmmaker or TV show, cooking show wannabe producer who tells me, “I've got a sizzle, I've got a cooking show. I'm gonna pitch The Food Network, I'm gonna pitch Amazon Prime, I'm gonna pitch Netflix.”

Yes, there are some people who get on there, like Kip Anderson, but the vast majority of people end up either not producing the content or just showing it in film festivals to family and friends who are already vegan or just not making it, or making it and not having an audience. And our whole mission is to get to non-vegan audiences.

We wanna get out of the vegan bubble. So what we raise funds for primarily is to place ads. So we have an ad right now for Amazon Fire stick users to download our app and that has been very successful. These are people all over the world. It's not just here in the United States and Canada and England. It's also Istanbul and Rio de Janeiro and Argentina and Vietnam. And when I see some of the places where people are watching this, it blows my mind. The potential audience is in literally the billions because everybody's switching to streaming. So we're getting in on the ground floor and that's our strategy.

Jasmin: Well, I really think you broke the glass ceiling here, Jane. I mean...and I do wanna give credit where credit is due that even though it was super hard to get these issues onto the cable networks, you did accomplish it! But now you have taken that and it has basically exploded with *Unchained*. I absolutely love *Pig Little Lies*.

This show features so many stars, but I do wanna focus on Dante and Beatrice. So, tell us the story of when you first heard about them.

Jane: Well, what happened was we started to see, we have more than 600 videos on, *UnchainedTV*. Serious documentaries, like *Earthlings* and *Dominion* and *Vegucated* and *Countdown to Year Zero*.

And fun cooking shows from great celebrities and chefs. From Chef AJ from *Wicked Kitchen*. Music videos, travel vlogs, and even *Our Hen House* has their own talk show. But we started to see that, “Hey, a lot of this is serious stuff. So if you're a non-vegan and you're popping on here, are you going to, after a hard day of work, want to have a serious lecture about why the world's falling

apart?" No. You want entertainment. So we realize we have to get people in the tent first. So I thought what's a great format that people enjoy? Reality TV.

So I called my one of my best friends, Simone Reyes, and I was like, "Simone, listen, we need to do a reality show. You've been on reality shows before, you've gotta help us."

She goes, "I can't talk right now. I'm trying to rescue two pigs who are scheduled to die in a high kill shelter and they've only got a couple of hours to get out!" I said, "Oh my God, that's our reality show!"

Jasmin: Yeah, no kidding. That's incredible. Simone was on *Our Hen House* many years ago when she was working on the reality show she used to be involved with.

And I like that story kind of unfolds in real time on *Pig Little Lies*. So what happens from there? You're on the phone with Simone, she's dealing with a pig situation... Is it common for pigs to end up in the shelter in Los Angeles?

Jane: Well we uncovered a horrific, horrific thing that's going on is that breeders are breeding pot belly pigs, and then they take the babies who are beyond adorable and they claim that they're teacup or mini pigs, and they sell them as fully grown.

When in fact they're just babies and they're gonna grow very rapidly to be 90, a hundred, 150 pounds. And so what happens is well-meaning, presumably, people, "oh, how cute!" And sometimes they're paying thousands of dollars for these micro or teacup pigs. They get them and they bring them to their apartment or their small home and all of a sudden they start realizing this pig is a baby and growing. Meanwhile, the breeder is vanished. So when they get to be a hundred pounds, what happens? They get dumped at a shelter and then euthanized because it's very hard to adopt out these animals.

When we made the commitment to participate with Simone to get the animals out, UnchainedTV raised funds. We got a philanthropist, who's featured in the TV show, to donate several thousand dollars to the UnchainedTV foster center. Because the other thing that we realized very quickly is that, "Yeah. Okay. We're gonna get this pig out. Where do we take the pig?" Because of zoning, there is... it's hard to find a place to go with, not to mention one pig, two pigs, a bonded pair, which means they love each other. So we saw the love story here.

When you hear about a bonded pair, that means two animals who love each other. Just like people love each other, just like couples love each other. Dante and Beatrice, named after the famous poem *Dante's Inferno*. It's one of the classic love stories of all time.

So we spent...we raised money and we spent money to build. I mean, we ordered it on Wayfair, we got it delivered and then it was still too cold. And then we had to have volunteers come and build a house within a house. Then our producer, who's an Emmy-winning producer who also produced our cooking shows, which also won awards, *New Day New Chef*, he actually just donated, himself, solar panels and a whole solar system which he installed. A solar heating system because it was cold at night for these pigs. They don't have fur, these little piggies.

Jasmin: So tell us about that struggle and where they finally ended up and how they somehow turned into a whole lot of pigs. Because you're saying two, but it wasn't two ultimately...

Jane: Well, we got the pigs out, we found transportation. And when I say we, it was Simone Reyes, there was a woman named Terry down in San Diego. In fact, I still have two awards for her to give her cuz she was very instrumental. We found this lovely woman, Cindy Brady, who was a wildlife rehabber who had an area, literally a laundry room in her home where she said Beatrice could go. And then a little pen area, not very small, nice little space for Dante.

And at first they were separated because as soon as we got them out, we found out Beatrice was pregnant! And that was a shocking development. We were honestly like, "Oh, my God. What do we do now?"

Not only was she pregnant, she was pregnant with 13 pigs. I mean, oh my God!! It was, it was a...

Jasmin: Yeah, I don't even understand. Like, that's a real plot twist and meanwhile, you have a volunteer who has taken them in. To what? Her laundry room?

Jane: The mother went to the laundry room and that's where she stayed. The Papa had to be separated because you don't want two animals in a small space when one is pregnant. You've gotta give her a safe space to rest, right? And pigs are big and they move around. So she had to be separated and it's very emotional as she went into labor and these adorable babies come out.

Now, is this just entertainment? No, the idea is for non-vegans to see this and bond with these animals and realize. “Oh, my gosh. Look at their quirks. Look at their love for each other. Look at their desire to be with their families. Look at their fear when they're even transported from point a to point B!”

That's one of the...episode three, we have to move the mama and the babies from the laundry room to the front where there's a nice yard with a pool and everything, like a little wading pool, everything waiting for them. Well, good luck!! It took us four hours at least! And the drama, I'm telling you, it's not made up. We...I had this vision that we'd go, “Woohoo, come on. Let's go. Let's go!” No, they go wherever they want. They're like cats, they're not gonna listen to you. And it was cute, but it was really nerve wracking cuz they can squeal too.

Jasmin: Oh, I'm sure. And you know, one thing that I think our listeners are probably wondering is, “is this going to show graphic footage?”

And I know that so many shows about animals are sad and some are heartwarming, as is this one, but this one is also at times hilariously funny. Like, why is it important to have animal media that makes people laugh?

Jane: Because they watch it! Whereas if you just lecture and finger wag...I mean, if we don't have fun stuff, people are gonna stumble on our network and go, “Wow. I just walked into a crazy cult!” Because that's how people view veganism. We're trying to normalize veganism.

Why is it that the bad guys are so good at creating all this wonderful content that makes eating animals look so appetizing? We have to use some of those techniques, being earnest is not enough. We are dealing with high level...the top manipulators in the world, work in advertising. I've heard them at work. Okay, I come from an advertising background. My dad was the president of an advertising agency on Madison Avenue. I grew up in the advertising world.

Does anybody ever ask, “Is this product good? Should we be promoting it?” No! You get the account and then you do whatever you can to associate this particular product with: family values, upward mobility, patriotism, keeping up with the Joneses, sex appeal...umm, I mean...status. It's insidious.

Well, we have to use certain clever techniques to get people to see our side of the story. We can't just be earnest. Being right is not enough.

Jasmin: In addition to introducing people to these pigs, who are total characters, you're also introducing them to the wonderful wacky, sometimes weird world of animal rescuers. Let's face it, it's not the pigs who are just the quirky ones. As you yourself acknowledge, everyone on this show is a bit of a character, in the best sense of that word. Is that an important part of this story?

Jane: Yes, because we have fun! And it was wild when a healer came, who's a good friend of mine, and she also happens to own a recording company. She's a very successful person, but she's involved in doing sound baths and healing. Melissa Breslow. And she led us in a healing ceremony because the pigs were quite high strung after being moved from point A to point B. We wanted to calm everything down and so she led all the volunteers in a healing ceremony. And it is kooky, but it worked, everything chilled out and all of a sudden we turned around and the pigs were bathing in their little wading pool and having a good old time!

Jasmin: Oh, my God, I love that so much. I could have used that healer when I was relocated. Well, I'm using the passive voice, I guess I wasn't relocated. I relocated myself. Okay, so I'm only three episodes in and there's already been a lot of drama. So without giving away any spoilers, can you give us some hints about what's been happening or what's to come?

Jane: Well, a surgery and that's a serious part, but again, this is a heartwarming story. And the truth is that it is extremely expensive to take care of these animals. Because if they're not spayed and neutered they have more! Just like cats and dogs. And so all of this costs a lot of money. Which is why what these breeders are doing is so wildly irresponsible.

They are literally breeding animals who are destined to die because it's a scam. And we have talked...Simone Reyes, who is the vegan country singer, who is one of the stars of this, the human stars, and she's been in other reality shows in the past. But she's also Vice President of Social Compassion in Legislation's communications.

And we've been talking about, we need legislation to stop these breeders. This is happening all over the country, where people who think they're getting a little tiny micro pig are getting just a baby pig. There is no teacup, tiny pig that stays the size of a football. And so we need to...we need to have some laws to prevent this from continuing.

And they're being sold on, you know, various platforms. It's an abomination. So this will inform people, certainly, but then we can follow it up maybe with some legislation. I don't know.

Jasmin: Yeah, that was going to be my next question. Like, is there a campaign element to this? And obviously I know that the media that you create is activism, but what about when people are hearing this story right now and they wanna get involved, whether it's people listening to *Our Hen House* right now, or people who tune into the show; how can people get involved in helping this situation? Maybe these pigs or similar situations?

Jane: Well, the woman who rescued these pigs had a wildlife rehab operation where she rescued squirrels and raccoons and, uh...I don't know exactly which animals. I don't wanna get her in trouble because there's a lot of laws, but I know she does some wildlife rehab with a squirrel, let's put it that way.

But it wasn't a formal thing. Well, as a result of taking these pigs in she's now created an official 501c3 nonprofit. Okay? So we're getting that paperwork together. In fact, we just published a story...we're about to publish a story about her efforts. She's in the process. So, we're hoping that each one of these baby pigs, some of them have been fostered out to great homes.

I mean, she can't keep 15 pigs, that's asking a lot for somebody. So while we wanna keep the animals together, there were certain people who came forward and said, "I have a perfect place." And those pigs are very happy and we feature them on the show as it happens.

So everybody is doing great. Everybody's happy. These are happy animals. I mean, Let's put it this way. Oh, were it only that every pig has such an outcome, right? Because pigs are being killed by the billions right now, as we speak, they're being trucked to slaughter houses and massacred and...terrified baby pigs, six months old. And we do show that on UnchainedTV, but that's not all we show.

If that were all we'd show nobody'd watch. Right? You know how hard it is to get somebody to go to a vigil? I mean, I had a couple who claimed they wanted to go and at the last minute, "My husband can't go because he thinks he'll get sick." Well I hope if he doesn't have the courage to go watch a vigil, he shouldn't then feel entitled to eat these animals.

But that isn't always working. We've got to use every technology and every approach, right? It spokes in the wheel. So I think psychiatrists will tell you

when people connect the dots on their own, it sticks. So let these people watch this and connect the dots. And hopefully when somebody hands them a hot dog, they go, “Ugh. I, I can't, I can't take that ride.”

Jasmin: Okay. I wanna zero out a little bit on, on UnchainedTV, you gave us a little bit of a glimpse of what type of programming you have. And you mentioned that you are, first and foremost, a news person, you're a news woman. So how do you cover the news on, on UnchainedTV? And what types of stories do you cover?

Jane: Yeah, well, we do stories all the time and a lot of times they're sent to us like Donnie Moss of Their Turn just did a Nike protest because Nike has kangaroo leather in its soccer shoes.

And it's become a global scandal because so many wild animals are being killed and they have the babies in the pouches. It's abominable. I mean, it's the 21st century. We don't need to be killing kangaroos for soccer shoes. So he did a big protest. In fact, when I get off this call, I'm gonna upload that video.

So we get videos from people. I have a meeting today at three o'clock with somebody in Australia who covered the live export demonstration and their video, which they're gonna upload. So again, while a network, a news network, would have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars flying people or having special reporters in these various locales, we're talking to people who are there, who shoot this. The democratization of media, everybody with a cell phone has a potential network. Now I just got the iPhone 13 Pro Max because they have this cinematic version that you can use when you're shooting. And it's better than some high quality ginormous cameras. So, people can go out and create this content and put it on UnchainedTV. And so that's one way we're doing it.

We had...when I first started it, I was like, “you get a show, you get a show, you get a show!” Then I realized it was a learning experience. Zoom doesn't work that well. People want to have an experience of watching a network and Zoom takes it sort of in the YouTube direction. So we had to ixnay on the YouTubes.

So that was a learning experience, but we did it pretty quickly and we're kind of eliminating those videos now. Occasionally, when I get a chance to interview... the other day, I went to an event where New York City mayor Eric Adams was speaking here in LA and I literally whipped out my phone and I shot it, but I wasn't doing it on Zoom. I got him speaking on camera.

He talked about his health journey, how he was going blind, he was terribly sick and in desperation. Somebody said “go vegan,” he did and it reversed all of his illnesses. And he's actually plant-based, he's not 100% vegan all the time because he said he occasionally has fish, but he says he's...you know, pretty much like 99% vegan and he really speaks passionately about it. And he's brought the vegan Fridays into the public schools.

So I have that up there and the quality is good. So it's like that, we grab it whenever we can. And then there's the original content. It's not just *Pig Little Lies*, we have plans for...I don't wanna jinx it, but there's a chicken who lives in a home with three people, who pretty much rules the entire place, including several dogs. We are, I don't know if you know the filmmaker Bobby Sud, but he has agreed to go videotape that family. And they are hopefully gonna put another little series together on that.

Jasmin: *Chicken Little Lies*. Okay, it doesn't have as big of a ring to it, but maybe you could call it like *Ruling the Roost* or something. I love that. That is so exciting.

So I wanna talk about something that I know both of us care a lot about, and it's a very important focus for you, which is climate change. Both what's happening and helping people find the ways to fight it, such as going vegan. On a scale of 1 to 10, how freaked out are you about climate?

Jane: Totally freaked out. I'm...I mean, I went to The Valley...I happen to live at the beach, where it's usually 10, 15 degrees cooler. I went to The Valley yesterday to have a meeting with somebody about a possible show. It was a great meeting and it's another possible original series that is very exciting! But it was so hot.

I mean, I literally came home and had to take a nap because it was like baking. I felt like I was baking. Imagine what it's like in Arizona, I have friends who live in Palm Springs and they have to come to LA for the summertime because they literally say they can't...your dogs are walking and they can't stay on the cement because their paws are bouncing off from the heat.

See, it's not theoretical anymore. It's happening in real time. We also continue to do a podcast, *Voice America Radio*. We had a water expert on, Thomas Schumann and he said, “You know how people are gonna go vegan? They're gonna have to choose between a hamburger and a glass of water.”

Because people can only survive a few hours without water, like right after oxygen, water is the next thing. And because of climate change, he said, people use the term drought, but it's really aridification, where it's a state of permanent drought, and this is happening in parts of the world...all over the world. And while he is not a vegan advocate, per se, he's a water advocate. And honestly, I don't even know if he's vegan...I know he's very vegan friendly, but he was talking about the extraordinary amount of water that the animal agriculture industry uses. And there is so much water that is used to make a hamburger or a piece of steak. And then additionally, the animals are polluting the water. So you have that situation as well. It's a crisis.

I went with again with Simone Reyes a couple of years ago when there were the Malibu fires. We went there to help some people who were concerned about their animals up there. And we were literally surrounded by flame and the palm trees were up in flames.

I put the scene in *Countdown to Year Zero*, our documentary, which is also available on UnchainedTV, *Countdown to Year Zero*. It's won numerous awards. We won like 16 awards and we were the official selection in like 26 film festivals and growing. But the point is that when you're surrounded by flames and you're looking and literally a stone throw away an entire palm tree is in flames it's not hypothetical anymore. It's like "holy bleep. We are in trouble!" And I said to Simone, "I'm making an executive decision. I'm behind the wheel. We're getting the hell outta here." And I turned the car around and I just shot out of Pacific Coast Highway because we could have died! And this is happening not in some remote place, this is happening in Malibu! I mean, homes are going up!

Jasmin: Yeah, it's really hard to wrap your head around. And I guess my last question for you before bonus, Jane, is; do you have hope? I mean, you've seen so much in your career, in your life. You've seen climate change being talked about in a theoretical far away kind of way, and then you've seen it emerge.

Do you have hope? And if so, how do you get it?

Jane: Here's my hope. I went to the Vegan Women's Summit, okay? Cause I come from a protest background in the sense of, I was a journalist, but as soon as I was Unchained...cuz when you're a reporter, you can't go and participate in protests, you're supposed to remain objective.

So that's how I came up with the Unchained. But of course, obviously it applies to unchaining your mind, to unchaining animals. And I would go to protests and

I started seeing that, "Hey, what's the point of having a protest? If it's, you know, 12 degrees out and nobody's watching and you haven't documented it."

So that was the genesis of this whole network, almost 10 years ago now. Anyway, protests are great and keep protesting. And I love PETA and I love all these organizations. However, when I went to the Vegan Women's Summit in downtown LA and I saw 800 high-powered business women from around the world who are literally looking at this as a business opportunity and they are coming up with cell-based meat and, get this, cell based human based breast milk!

Because one of the things that you have to realize about the animal agriculture industry, there are a lot of things propping it up. Baby formula is propping up the animal agriculture industry. Dog food, American dogs, according to some reports would be like the fifth largest meat eating country in the world. Something crazy like that. I may be off, but it's a lot.

So if we start with cell based and I've interviewed Ryan Bethencourt of Wild Earth, who's our corporate sponsor. Wild Earth is our corporate sponsor for 2022, they're the vegan dog food, but they're also investing and working on cell based meat. So, now there's been some controversy and I know some vegans are not in favor of cell-based meat, but I'm sorry. We all have those people, in our families even, who are militant meat eaters. You can talk to them till you're blue in the face. And, you know, I can walk around my neighborhood and see the barbecues going all summer long and then see the ambulances pulling up and taking people away who've had heart attacks.

Talking to people and telling them the logic isn't working. So first we gave them, and we are giving them, all these plant-based alternatives that taste like the real thing. And some of them say, "no, I need my meat. It's a choice." Well, first of all, everything's a choice, driving the wrong way down the freeway is a choice, it's not just a personal choice, but nonetheless...for those people who will not listen to logic, now there is cell-based meat.

You can have your meat, if that's what you want, it just doesn't come from an animal. And now some, I even had like a little dust up with somebody who was arguing with me and I love to debate so that was great. And we hugged afterwards, but we had a dust up where she's like, "still involves animals and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

I said, "you know what? As gene Bauer says, whatever causes the least suffering." They are going to have literally libraries of the cells that make up

certain body parts. In other words, their...it's not like a constant use of animals once...This is my understanding and I'm not, I'm not a scientist. You know, I checked out on math when we hit logarithms.

But what they've explained to me is that it's getting more and more sophisticated and they're getting basically the molecular, cellular, genetic markups and they create a library. So they take this chip, they put it in a vat and suddenly they're fermenting ginormous, ginormous vats, just like beer, of this particular thing, whether it's the chicken breast or whatever.

And because all animals come down to certain basic components like heme and water and blah, blah, blah. There's very few of them. Basically, we give people their meat, their pound of flesh, but animals don't have to die. That to me is the solution. It's gonna happen. And the last thing I'll say is that there are predictions that when it starts being produced at scale, it will be cheaper than even the heavily subsidized meat and dairy.

And it's gonna be like the cost of sugar water. And that is gonna be the big game changer.

Jasmin: Well, that's all very hopeful. I completely agree with you that the hope lies in the entrepreneurs and the hope lies in the cell grown meat. So it's UnchainedTV, for people who are currently downloading it. I like to watch it on my phone, by the way, I also have it on my TV, but I like to watch it on my phone when I get out of the shower. I prop my phone up against the sink. It's like my daily thing that I do. And I'm like, "what's going on on Unchained right now?" It's a great, easy way to just stay on top of what's going on. There's a lot of entertainment value as well, if that's your thing. There's a lot of food programming for people who are interested in that.

And, Jane, thank you so very much. I am just constantly, endlessly inspired by you and I love you. And I'm so glad that you joined us today at *Our Hen House* again.

Jane: I love you, I love what you do and thank you. You're always so generous and you've helped me so many times and I so appreciate you. Jasmin!