



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 665, Interview with Zoe & Sherstin Rosenberg

Jasmin Singer: Welcome to Our Hen House, Zoe and Sherstin.

Sherstin Rosenberg: Hi! So good to be here!

Zoe Rosenberg: Hey, thanks for having us!

Jasmin: I'm really excited to talk to you and I admire both of your work so much. Zoe, let's start with you. You've been a passionate activist for years, but I want to start with your latest exploits at the Timberwolves game.

Can you tell us why you and others chose to target these games and what happened? Let's just jump right in.

Zoe: So the owner of the Timberwolves basketball team is Glen Taylor. He actually also owns a giant factory egg farm and this factory egg farm, due to avian influenza, roasted millions of chickens alive.

And this was because there was just one, or a few, chickens who tested positive for avian flu. So they decided to brutally kill every single one of these millions of innocent birds. Which is just a response that we would never see for humans, or for dogs even. But because they're chickens, they're often considered disposable and this kind of violence is considered acceptable.

So, at one of the big Timberwolves games, my friend Alicia actually super glued her hand to the basketball court and she had a shirt that said "Glen Taylor roasts animals alive." And it just got so much media attention around this issue and around the investigation that had been done exposing the violence that Glen Taylor had done on his egg farm.

Then, a couple games later, I actually chained my neck to the basketball hoop at a Timberwolves game in Memphis, Tennessee. And I was arrested and taken to

the Memphis jail, but it was all worth it because we were able to get the word out about what happened even more.

Millions of people saw that action on social media, millions of people saw it on TV and in press coverage following the action. So it was just a really great way, I think, to get the word out by disrupting these games.

Jasmin: Amazing. You are so badass! Like, I feel like that's just the perfect word to describe you.

So what happened after you were arrested?

Zoe: Yeah, so I was taken to a women's jail in Memphis. Well actually first I was taken to the back of the stadium, taken to the security rooms, very immediately. The security and the police there were very upset.

Throughout this whole incident, I would say, the police continually violated my rights, which I'm used to in California. I've been arrested prior to this, and all my other arrests have been in California, also for doing activism. California police are jerks also, and also violate your rights, but I don't feel like my rights have ever been violated to the extent that they were in Tennessee.

Jasmin: Can you elaborate a little bit on what you mean?

Zoe: Yeah, so I mean, the first thing that happened was the owner or maybe he was the head of security. I'm not exactly sure who he was, but he was an individual with the stadium. He immediately started going through my personal belongings, trying to get into my phone, pulling my ID out of my stuff and looking at my ID.

And I said to a police officer, like, "Excuse me, this person is going through my personal belongings. This person's not a police officer. They don't have a right to be going through my belongings." And the police officer said, "Shut your mouth!" So that was one of the very first things that happened when I was brought to the back of the stadium, was taken to the security room.

The police were trying to find a terrorism charge to charge me with. They were like talking with the security at the stadium. They were looking, they were literally Googling laws on their phones, on their cell phones...

Jasmin: Oh my God.

Zoe: Trying to find a terrorism law that they could hit me with.

And then they were finally like, “I don't think there's one because she didn't do anything violent.”

Jasmin: Oh my God. Wow. You're reminding me, when my wife was, I think 19, she was arrested in Jesse Helms' office for doing a kiss-in and it was around 1990 then. And when she got taken to the jail, she has asthma, they took away her inhaler and then, it was 1990 so they were still smoking inside, and they would blow smoke into her face repeatedly. This is what it's making me think of. Wow.

Zoe: Well, they actually tried to take my medical device away too, when I was at the jail.

Jasmin: Wow. Huh!

Zoe: Yeah, I have a medical device that I cannot live without, even being without it for an hour would have really severe consequences. At the jail, they threatened to take it away and I called my lawyer, or I called folks from the jail phone, and I let them know that they were trying to take my medical device away. Just so that if I was literally dying that hopefully someone could try to help from the outside.

Yeah, so my lawyer called the jail and said like, “You cannot take away her medical device. If you do, we will sue.” And then the woman at the jail, at the front desk, was pissed. And she calls me over, she starts screaming at me, telling me that I'm a liar and I lied to my lawyer and told my lawyer that they were trying to take my medical device when they weren't, and that they weren't going to take my medical device, and that I was banned from making any more phone calls.

So they banned me from making more phone calls from the jail and then they tried to take my medical device again after banning me from making more phone calls. I refused to give it up, because they wanted me to just like hand it over. And they wanted me to disconnect it, it's attached to my body.

They wanted me to disconnect it from my body and hand it to them and I said I wouldn't. So then they took me to the emergency room and they asked the emergency room doctor to remove my medical device. And the emergency room doctor was like, “No! Under no circumstances are you going to remove her medical device, she could die without it!”

I was really scared the emergency room doctor would just do it because you never know, when the police are, as a person with authority, telling a doctor to do something you don't know if they're going to defend you or not.

So I was really relieved that she was willing to stand up to the police and tell them not to do that.

Jasmin: Totally. Wow.

Sherstin, how does it feel hearing all of this? And how did you feel about the protests?

Sherstin: It's tough as a mom because my perspective is maybe different than it would be if Zoe was not my daughter,

I worry about her so much, with her medical issue, and it scares me. When I heard that she had been arrested and gone to jail, all I could think about was whether they would take away her medical device. Because this has happened before, we've been down this road before. I guess I would say, I would not urge her to be doing these things because it's very scary for me.

I just feel protective because she's my daughter, but I'm very proud of her.

Jasmin: Oh, of course. I'm sure...you're here with us now. I'm proud of her! She's not my daughter but I'm happy to like be a stand-in parent for you if you ever need one, because if I had a kid, I'd want them to be just like you. But yes, I would also be terrified. I mean, all of the things!

But, okay, let's go back to the beginning. I believe, Zoe, that you founded Happy Hen Sanctuary when you were only 11 years old, which was how many years ago?

Zoe: Yeah, that would've been nine years ago.

Jasmin: Okay. Wow. So how did all of that come about?

Zoe: Yeah, so when I was, I think, nine years old, my family got chickens and that kind of, I think, was the starting point of it all. We actually bought chicks from a feed store, which I will say you should never do. We were very ignorant and we did not know that the chick hatching industry is so terrible. And obviously you should always adopt animals regardless of whether the breeding industry itself is cruel. But yeah, so that was a mistake.

But once we had the chickens and we were raising these chicks, it really shifted my perspectives on chickens and also all animals. Because I think like most of us, I was brought up to believe dogs and cats and rabbits are kind of traditional pets and maybe more smart than a bird.

And I think, in society we're constantly given these ideas thrown at us that chickens are stupid, that maybe they don't even feel pain. They're not like us, they're not like dogs or cats. And so getting to know chickens, I immediately pretty much was like, they seem pretty smart to me.

They seem pretty amazing to me. I don't really see why their lives are any less valuable than mine or than the dogs and cats that I already love. And I just kind of became obsessed with chickens. I joined this online forum called backyardchickens.com, which is mostly people who use chickens and exploit them in some way, but it's also just a lot of people who have and love chickens.

And I was just obsessed. I would be on there for hours, talking with all of these chicken people all over the world about chickens. And yeah, it kind of became my whole life. And then one day while I was online, I stumbled upon the website for NSW Hen Rescue, which is an animal rescue in North South Wales, Australia.

I saw a video on their website of them going inside of a factory egg farm where hens were being held in battery cages and opening up those cages and taking those hens out, and then bringing them back to their rescue and giving them the care that they deserve. This was both the first time I'd seen someone rescue a chicken, and also the first time I'd seen a video inside of a factory farm and it really shook me. Because I was imagining all of the chickens in those cages as the chickens that I had such a special connection with at home.

And I immediately knew that I wanted to do something to help chickens because I just couldn't imagine all the suffering in the world that the chickens endure. I mean, chickens endure suffering on such a massive scale, even more than some other farmed animals.

And I actually ended up emailing the woman who runs NSW Hen Rescue, at the time she didn't know I was 11. She just thought, probably an adult was emailing her, and I asked her, "How can I start a chicken rescue here in California?"

And she gave me a bunch of advice and I asked my mom, "Can we start a chicken rescue?" My mom said, "Maybe." And I was expecting a flat out no so I was very excited that she didn't say no and started building a website. I

actually called it Happy Hen Chicken Rescue because at the time we just rescued chickens.

Now we're Happy Hen Animal Sanctuary because we rescue all species of farmed animals used in the food industry. And yeah, after seeing the website and how much this meant to me, my mom agreed we could rescue 12 hens from a local factory egg farm. She was very clear, just 12. But after we rescued those 12, I think we both kind of realized we had to save more.

Because it was a really powerful thing seeing these 12 hens, who'd been so abused by this industry go from that to being at a sanctuary and living a beautiful life. And we knew we had to give more animals that chance. And now we've actually saved over a thousand animals from factory farms and slaughter houses and other abusive situations, so.

Jasmin: That's amazing! I was serious if you need a stand in, but I kind of feel like it would be like a stand-in like aunt or something, because I'm pretty sure that Sherstin is mom of the century.

Okay, so let's go back to that moment, Sherstin, because when I was 11, I constantly had ideas of things I wanted to do, and they were nutty. You know what I mean?

And so you have this very precocious, I imagine, child who's like, "I want to start a sanctuary. I want to rescue animals." What was your reaction? What was in your head at that time?

Sherstin: Honestly, I wasn't really that surprised. And the truth is I always have wanted to start my own animal sanctuary, anyway. I just was planning to do it after my kids grew up. And Zoe has always been extremely passionate about animals. I mean, all of her teachers and all of her friends all through school, everybody knew how much she loved animals. She was known as the chicken lady in her middle school classes.

Jasmin: I love that.

Sherstin: So people started calling her Zoe Rooster and that was her nickname.

So I think what surprised me more than the fact that she wanted to start the sanctuary was just the fact that, at the time she asked me about it, she had already created a whole entire website. And she had been working on nothing else for an entire month but just her website. She was back at the computer, I

think I thought she was still on backyard chickens, but she was working on the website. And I was blown away because I can't make a website, but here was my 11 year old designing her own website.

Jasmin: That is so cool.

So sticking with you for a moment, Sherstin, I know that you're currently the ED of the sanctuary and you are also, of course, a veterinarian. So if I'm correct, as a result, I believe Happy Hen is able to accept animals who other sanctuaries might not be able to accept because of their disabilities.

Can you tell us about that and also tell us a little bit about who is living there now?

Sherstin: Yeah. It is a huge advantage to have a veterinarian here. Especially with chickens that are having reproductive issues or possibly mobility issues, things like that. I feel very comfortable being able to help those animals.

And for example, not so long ago we accepted a hen named Hope, who was unable to stand when she arrived here. Her peritoneal cavity was so filled with fluid that she couldn't walk or stand or do anything, and she was literally about to die. And the people who had her were not planning to take her to a veterinarian.

Luckily one of our supporters who was friends with that person, convinced them to let Hope come to us. So I was able to treat Hope and drain the fluid out and within a couple hours she was standing and walking around.

Jasmin: Wow.

Sherstin: That's the kind of thing that probably would cost quite a bit of money if you took your hen to a veterinary clinic. Which, I recommend all people should do, if they have sick hen, please. But it's great because we're able to do that at very low cost.

And then we had a pig named Edna, who recently passed away. She, amazingly, lived to be more than six years old, which when you think about all the things that she went through, and it's a very long story and I'm not going to get into all that here, but she had major issues throughout her life with bone infections and various, you know, arthritis in her hock joints, different things that really immobilized her. And at the end, she was unable to use her back legs.

It was even difficult for me, as a veterinarian, having to manage everything. I don't do surgery here, we're not set up for that. So we found a veterinarian down in Southern California who was willing to surgically remove her infected bone. It was a major procedure and so after she returned to the sanctuary, she had casts, her bandages needed to be replaced every week. And I had to anesthetize her. I mean, she's a 600 pound pig, so it's not like she would just hold still. She had to be anesthetized every week to have those bandages changed. And that's something that would've been really hard to do if I wasn't a veterinarian.

Jasmin: Yeah, I can imagine. And also just the fact that you're around these farm animals who were basically bred so that they would die as babies. And you are seeing them live out either their full lives or many more years than they were quote/unquote intended to live. It must be amazing to be around these physical issues, that it's probably new territory for every sanctuary owner to have to navigate through.

And I imagine for a veterinarian, especially, it would be like, "Okay, what's today gonna bring?" What's that like for you?

Sherstin: Even though I went into this knowing that these animals come with genetic issues and, like you said, they're not bred to live long term. I've been truly shocked, even as a veterinarian, at the level of poor health that they suffer from, just purely based upon their genetics. And it's professionally challenging to keep them with the care and quality of life that I believe they should have because they do suffer from so many issues. Particularly foot issues in turkeys, is one of the big ones that we deal with.

Yeah. Just a lot of arthritis and various issues that are very challenging and it's so frustrating to think that humans would actually breed animals that ultimately end up having to pay the price of ill health in the long term, it's obviously morally wrong.

Jasmin: Right, yes, absolutely.

Okay, well going back to Zoe for a moment. Zoe, you certainly didn't stop once you founded the sanctuary. I was looking at some of the most important moments that you have had, in your childhood, in your teenage years. Can you tell us about some of them, some of the most important moments fighting for animals since you were a child?

Zoe: There's been a lot of moments that I feel have been important and some have been ones that have drawn more attention and others probably less attention, but still feel like very pivotal moments. You know, just as simple as getting chickens and having that connection that kind of drove everything to be what it is.

It wasn't necessarily like the most widely viewed event but I think a very pivotal moment, for me, was participating in the first broad daylight open rescue in US history in San Francisco several years ago, and carrying a chicken away from a slaughter house. The chicken, her name was Laro, and it was just a really powerful moment because taking her into my arms and carrying her away and feeling like I was the only thing that stood between her and slaughter. I think that kind of feeling that we all have the power, that I always have the power, that everyone listening to this has the power to be that body between an animal being saved or being slaughtered.

We all have the power to completely change the course of an animal's life. You know, we can determine whether or not they're going to die. And yeah, that's a really powerful thing, also very scary thing. So I just feel like that was a very pivotal moment for me and hardened my resolve even more in wanting to keep continuing on with this fight.

Some other big moments that maybe have more been widely viewed is I gave a TED talk. Actually the TED Talk was largely about another big thing I did, which was the first time I got arrested. I ran onto a baseball field, the Dodgers game in LA, when I was 14 and that was to protest Farmer John and animal cruelty that had been exposed at Farmer John's pork supplier.

So at that time, the Dodger dogs that were being served in Dodger Stadium used pork from Farmer John. So I ran onto the baseball field with a banner. And then, about a year after that, I guess I was 15, I gave a TED talk about that and the sanctuary, which is a really great opportunity to spread the message to even more people.

Yeah, I think those are two moments, but there's definitely been a lot.

Jasmin: Yeah, I have also, I was like crossing them off as you were saying them, I have that you were the first keynote address at age 12 for National Animal Rights Day in San Francisco. You mentioned at 14 you and a few other activists ran onto the field during a Dodger game in LA in protest of the stadium's Dodger dogs and the cruel treatment of the animals killed for hotdogs and that you were arrested. Then, you mentioned your TED talk, which we will

link to that in the show notes for this episode. So that was in San Louis Obispo when you were 15.

At 16, arrested on live TV at the 2019 NCAA Football Championship to draw attention to animal abuse in factory farming. And Levi Stadium, as I understand it was specifically targeted due to its ties to the poultry producer, as you're talking about. And then at 16, Tell me about this.

I have on my notes that you learned a major university in California had a working slaughterhouse on campus, and students in certain animal related majors were required to take a class. Tell me in your own words, what was the class and what happened?

Zoe: Cal Poly University, which is a university in my hometown, and also just a major university in California, has a literal slaughterhouse on campus where they slaughter animals and then sell their flesh.

And I was absolutely horrified when I learned this. And then I was even more horrified when I learned that if you basically do pretty much any animal related major, if you're on track to become a veterinarian, if you're majoring in animal science, you are required to take what they call a meat science class.

Which is a class at the slaughterhouse where you have to go through the process of slaughtering multiple animals. So, I actually know many students at Cal Poly who were going to become veterinarians, who completely changed course and shifted their entire major because they didn't want to take that class. They didn't wanna hurt an animal.

So it's just very disturbing thing. And I found out from a student there, what their schedule was of when they were going to be slaughtering these animals for these classes. Found out that they would be slaughtering a pig one afternoon so I went to the slaughter house and they had the pig, we called her Dana. They had her held in, I guess it was a holding pen, but it was like connected to the shoot that they used to drive the animals into the slaughter house. So she was like being held right there ready to be pushed into the slaughter house. And I climbed into the shoot slash holding pen. I sat with her, I begged them to let me save her.

We had a room for her at the sanctuary. We offered to provide her a forever home instead of having her be killed for this class. And they refused to spare her life. And I was ultimately escorted out by the police and banned from Cal Poly for a week.

Jasmin: *laughs* Banned for a week!?! Sorry. That's hilarious!

Zoe: Yeah. *laughs* For a week. But just like a few days after my ban was lifted, they were slaughtering a cow at the slaughterhouse. You know, I really had a lot of regrets about not fighting harder to save Dana. And so I wanted to go all out this time and do everything I could to save this cow.

And so I chained myself to the gate of the shoot before they could bring the cow into the slaughter house. So I basically put my body in the way and blocked the process. And I was chained there for over an hour. We called the cow Justice. They drove Justice away from the slaughter house and they wouldn't tell anyone where the cow had been taken to. We assume that she was eventually slaughtered, probably not that day, as the class was canceled that day. But they probably rescheduled the class eventually. They cut the chain and I was arrested. Yeah, we kind of started a campaign framed around, "Where is Justice?" which kind of had the double meaning of, literally where is the cow because we want to save her, and also where is justice in the other meaning. And also campaigning to shut the slaughter house down.

And unfortunately the slaughterhouse is still there. But I think probably the most important thing that came out of that full event was that the slaughterhouse was kind of like a dirty secret of the university and, unless you were in the department, in like the major departments where you had to take that class, even as a student, you didn't know that this slaughterhouse was on campus. So most of the students in the social sciences departments or whatever, had no idea that this slaughterhouse was on campus.

Basically, in the course of a few hours of me chaining myself there, it went from hardly anyone on the campus knowing about this to pretty much every single person on the campus knowing about it. That was probably the most powerful thing because we really just made something that they didn't want anyone to know about very, very known.

Jasmin: That's incredible, and I know that as a result of that, there were also direct conversations between the university president and the student government and other members of the community. So you not only lifted the veil on this, but you also instigated a lot of dialogue about it.

So, I mean, I think that's incredible. And I also have here that in 2021 you spoke with California Governor Gavin Newsom about your concerns regarding factory farming. Tell me about that.

Zoe: It was basically me just kind of forcing myself up to Gavin Newsom and saying, “We're gonna talk about this.” So he was actually doing a volunteer appreciation event, kind of as a showy thing for the press, where he was just going and shaking the hands of the volunteers who'd been helping to call voters and stuff.

And we'd found out that this event was happening from someone who was signed up for the volunteer alerts from Gavin Newsom's campaign. And Gavin Newsom, we had a campaign within Direct Action Everywhere for a while, asking both the legislature in the state of California and the governor to take action to place a moratorium on the construction and expansion of factory farms and slaughter houses.

Obviously we want to see factory farms and slaughter houses also shut down, but at the very least, we should not be building more or expanding existing ones when we know what a terrible impact these institutions are having on basically everything and on everyone. So we'd been campaigning and calling on Gavin Newsom to really take factory farming seriously for a while, and to take animal agriculture seriously. And he'd basically been ignoring us for a very long time, largely ignoring this issue.

So I went to this event and I kind of just tried to blend in with the volunteers and I just went up to him and I just shook his hand and I said, “Animal agriculture is destroying our environment,” kind of laid out the situation. Some of it he probably already knew, of course, but just saying, “What are you gonna do about it?” You know, he gave a very politician answer.

Jasmin: Yeah, yeah. I'm sure.

Zoe: Kind of just saying, “Well, you know, I've gotta deal with other things like COVID and whatever.”

Jasmin: Yeah. Wow. That is so cool though that you were able to do that.

Zoe: Yeah. But I'm glad he heard the message and knows that it's something people care about.

Jasmin: Definitely. So you mentioned DXE. What is the role of DXE in your activism?

Zoe: I became an organizer with Direct Action Everywhere when I was 12. So I've been organizing protests with them since then and participating in protests

with them. Direct Action Everywhere has been a huge support in making a lot of the awesome actions I've been able to do happen. And I couldn't do most of them without DXE. They've provided legal support and resources and training, it's just been really great help to making these things happen. And I'm also the social media coordinator for Direct Action Everywhere, and I've also led a couple undercover investigations through Direct Action Everywhere as well.

So yeah, it's definitely been a huge part of my work.

Jasmin: Well, DXE does incredible work.

Sherstin, speaking of DXE, I know you are also involved with DXE's legal work. Can you tell us about that?

Sherstin: Over the years I've been given undercover footage from various investigations. I have written about what I've seen in that footage, which has been really great for me to just be able to be very factual and truthful about what I'm seeing, which is horrific, right?

But to be able to have the opportunity to get that out there because it's something that the public doesn't usually get to see. And I'm able to, as a veterinarian, let them know what's happening on these farms and how egg-laying hens are being treated, or turkeys, or pigs, or how cruel ventilation shut down is to the pigs and the chickens that are being killed through this horrible means.

And yeah, so I've written many reports based on undercover footage, but I've also had the opportunity to testify as an expert witness on behalf of Direct Action Everywhere as a veterinarian. The first case I testified in was a restitution case having to do with a very large egg laying farm.

Jasmin: Wow. That's incredible that you're able to step in in that way.

I have a question for you, Sherstin, that you're definitely not going to be able to answer, but I have interviewed two other veterinarians, out of like a thousand people that I've interviewed, who embrace animal rights. And so, how do you account for the fact that there are so few veterinarians who embrace animal rights?

Sherstin: Yeah, that really is a great question. I think it really comes... Well, I guess it's actually a very complicated answer and like you said, I really don't have the answer, but I think it kind of starts through our educational process

because part of the weed out process to become a veterinarian is demonstrating that you're tough and you can handle doing surgery on animals and you can handle different things that happen and you're not squeamish and kind of a machismo thing.

Past that, it's an economic issue too because when it comes down to it, veterinarians are tasked with serving humans and the animals that belong to humans, rather than animals. Which is one reason why I would really like to see a change to the veterinary oath that we take when we graduate, where it's more animals centered.

Because, I view my commitment to animals as more like the human physician's commitment to their patients, but in truth, veterinarians are paid by the humans who quote "own" the animals. And so if the humans are exploiting the animals for financial gain and the veterinarians are being paid by those humans, it doesn't really benefit the veterinarians to speak out against, especially these large industries like the pork industry or the egg industry. It's really frowned on, to be honest.

Any veterinarian, basically, that talks about what's going on on these farms is really going to face backlash from fellow veterinarians and the industry too.

Jasmin: That's very well said. You were able to answer it a lot better than I think anyone else has. Everyone else is like, "I don't know, because of cognitive dissonance?" Which, you know, is the reason why all cruelty happens.

Or maybe, I guess psychopaths are the exception to that, and probably a lot of humans are psychopaths, probably a lot more than we realize... Why am I taking this interview there?!

Okay, before I go back to Zoe. Sherstin, when you were in vet school, you were already an activist. Can you tell us about that and did that make you stand out from the crowd?

Sherstin: Yeah, I mean, it's funny because I definitely did not think of myself as an activist when I was in veterinary school. In fact, I wasn't even a vegetarian when I started veterinary school. In fact, I wasn't even really aware of the fact that there were animal rights activists. You know, I was so ignorant when I went into it.

Honestly, I was very naive. I just loved animals and I wanted to work with animals. Kind of a typical thing, right?

But I had been primed by an experience I had in an animal physiology class that was required for veterinary school. And I won't get into the things that I did to these animals as part of this class, which I will never forgive myself for.

And that experience really, in large part, shaped how I feel about animal cruelty and also it made me realize that when authority figures tell you to do something and it's condoned, it's amazing what people can do. I mean, this was a course that I was required to take to go to veterinary school, and we killed quite a few animals in that class. And it was horrific. I mean, I still have nightmares about it.

So anyway, then when I started veterinary school, I was still eating meat, but I was kind of ready and open to new ideas. We had a lecture given by Dr. Ned Buyukmihci. He's a veterinary ophthalmologist and an animal rights activist who had actually been fired from UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine because of his outspoken views in advocating for animals, but had sued and gotten his job back.

And as part of the conditions, he was allowed to speak to the freshman class once each year. And so he talked a lot about, I remember him saying, you know, "An animal is not an object. They're not equivalent to a chair." And I mean, that sounds very simplistic, but it was a great talk and it opened my eyes and it was really great to hear what he had to say.

And then a good friend of mine lent me a video tape. She was vegetarian and in vet school and it was called *The Animals*. And literally within the first five minutes of watching that video, I became vegetarian. That was 1994 so veganism wasn't really a thing, but vegetarianism was, it progressed from there.

I mean, honestly, I don't think I could get through veterinary school now with the way I'm able to allow myself to feel compassion for animals now. I don't know if I could get through veterinary school, it would be very difficult. So the one thing I did do, just to kind of wind this up here...in veterinary school that was activism, I guess, in retrospect was that a friend of mine had saved the dog that she spayed in surgery class and had found this dog a home, and the dog ended up escaping from the new home, getting back to the shelter, and then showed up for the terminal surgery class. To be killed in a terminal surgery class.

And in that class I wasn't killing a dog. I refused to do that and a friend of mine and I convinced the administration to let us use cadaver dogs that had been

ethanized at the teaching hospital for medical reasons. So they weren't killed for us to be able to learn surgery. They died because they legitimately were sick.

The clients had very compassionately and generously allowed us to use their bodies for our education to save a dog from being killed in a terminal surgery. And so anyway, I was just so appalled when my friend's dog, who she had adopted out, walked into our surgery lab and I begged all of the other students in the class to help spare her life.

I offered them to use the cadaver that I had ready for the class, and I would just take an F and we could save Betsy, the dog. None of the students would help. Nobody would help. She ended up being killed, and I have regrets about that too, because I, without getting too much into it, there are things that if it happened today, I would've taken much stronger action.

Jasmin: I think we all feel like that. I mean, I totally understand what you're saying about, "I can't believe I did X, Y, Z," but I genuinely feel that everyone listening to this right now would say that sentence about something that they have done. And I can also understand why you would say, "I don't think I could go through vet school again," but I mean, God, I'm so glad you did because now not only are you making a living amends to all of the animals who were part of your past at that time, but you made a Zoe!

I mean, and that activist spirit. I honestly believe we, of course we're autonomous when we're old enough to talk and we figure out what we want and how we wanna go about the world. But that activist spirit is something that, to a large extent, I think is passed down.

It's inherited. We get our fight from generations before us that either were fighting themselves or had to develop some kind of survival mechanism that resulted in our generation fighting. So your story is one that ultimately leads to, you know, Zoe being this incredible activist and you too. I mean, what you, what you're doing too, Sherstin is really amazing.

Even at the beginning, before we were recording, you were like, "I'm fine just sort of taking a backseat to Zoe." I understand why, Zoe's extraordinary, but like the background work, like the work you were explaining that you're doing at DXE, the sanctuary work, all of that is worth celebrating.

So if you're not going to sing your own praises, we'll sing them for you!

Sherstin: Thank you.

Jasmin: I know it's hard to like be a...I would have my head in a paper bag now, but take it, you know what I mean?

All right. So Zoe, you're a student at UC Berkeley now, is that right?

Zoe: Yes.

Jasmin: And so I'd love to know what you're studying and if you're involved in activist work there.

Zoe: Yeah, so I'm trying to create my own major. You have to apply for this program, and I have not applied officially yet, so it's still to be seen, but this is my plan. UC Berkeley has a really cool program called the Interdisciplinary Studies Field, where you basically can design your own coursework and major. So I'm hoping to design something kind of combining social change strategy and social change theory with animal justice and build a major there.

As far as my activism at Cal, yeah. I've been doing a lot of work here at UC Berkeley. I started my first day at Cal by releasing an investigation I conducted at one of the Seaboard Foods factory pig farms.

At the time, Seaboard Foods was the pork supplier for the UC Berkeley Dining Hall System, Cal Dining. And we released this investigation and myself and two other activists and students at Cal, we chained ourselves to their gate. Which is, if you look up pictures of UC Berkeley, their gate certainly going to come up.

It's like basically this big grand entrance when you get on campus. And so we chained ourselves and super glued our hands there. That was the same morning we released our investigation, but within a few hours UC Berkeley made an announcement that they were dropping Seaboard Foods and so we unchained ourselves and went home.

Jasmin: Wow. You're like, "This isn't how I expected today to end!"

That's amazing. Holy crap.

Zoe: So they, yes. And the first year, really first year and a half, UC Berkeley was working with us and really taking our feedback about the suppliers they were working with. Obviously, you know, I don't support any of their animal agriculture suppliers, or believe there's a humane way to hurt an animal or to kill an animal.

But we were at least trying to point out like the absolute worst ones and just trying to make change where we could. And so, well initially we asked, when they dropped Seaboard, we asked them not to replace it with another pork supplier. We asked them to just not serve pork because whatever supplier they were going to replace them with would surely also be terrible, which it is. They replaced Seaboard with Hormel, which is another awful company. And yeah, it was really disturbing cuz when we asked them not to serve pork, their response was to say that they couldn't do that because the Chinese students would be upset. And in the moment I wish I had responded to that better, but looking back I feel like it was actually a very racist thing for them to say to blame this marginalized community for having to hurt animals.

That's pretty not cool. And yeah, they just kinda continuously bring up this whole idea that we have to hurt animals because of this marginalized group and everyone I've talked to from those marginalized groups has been completely outraged that they're saying that, because they feel like they're like putting it on them.

You know, they're blaming this marginalized group for this. Yeah, just very disturbing. But that aside, we've got them to drop several other suppliers in addition to Seaboard. We got them to drop Butterball Turkey based on the fact that Butterball is co-owned by Seaboard. And then, we basically, after this whole first incident with chaining ourselves to the gate and everything, we got them to provide us a full list of all the suppliers they were working with, which they had previously kept secret. And we basically just sent every investigation that's ever been done at any of the suppliers, every single supplier that they buy from. And we got them to drop several more.

They dropped Terrace Ranch. That one took a little bit of convincing. Um, but they, we got them to drop Terrace Ranch. They dropped Diestel turkey, they've dropped a few. And then where we've kind of come up to a barrier is Tyson Foods has been the real big fight here. So Tyson, as a lot of people might know is the largest meat supplier in the world.

Absolutely massive company. And they're the number one water polluter in agribusiness. They're ranked five in terms of all companies for the most workers injured on the job and if it was actually broken down based on how many workers actually work at each of these companies, Tyson would definitely be number one because compared to the other four companies, Tyson has significantly fewer workers.

So yeah, a lot of worker injuries, a lot of human rights violations, and obviously a lot of terrible animal cruelty. Some of the worst animal cruelty investigations

you can find on the internet are at Tyson facilities. So, we sent all of this to UC Berkeley, and they were very unreceptive about dropping Tyson, where they'd been a lot more receptive with some of the other companies.

And I think it's likely that Tyson being the largest meat producer in the world, sells cheap meat and Cal dining doesn't want to buy something more expensive. And they don't want to take the political risk of not serving dead animals at all.

Due to their lack of response, myself and two other students bike locked our necks to the largest dining hall on campus, demanding that they take immediate action and drop Tyson Foods, as well as Hormel. We definitely want to see them drop Hormel as well. And just, ultimately make a commitment to transition away from factory farming.

And 99% of animal agriculture is factory farming. So not buying from factory farms would essentially mean that they could not serve animal products in the dining halls. And yeah, so we sat there, bike locked to the dining hall for 12 hours. UC Berkeley does not like to arrest students. By several hours in, having your neck bike locked to something is not comfortable. And so we were to the point where we honestly wanted to beg them to arrest us because we were so miserable.

But yeah, we sat there for 12 hours. Finally they actually sent someone down from the chancellor's department. So the chancellor at UC Berkeley is Carol Christ and she's like the president of the whole university.

And they sent someone from her office down and we got a written agreement that if we un bike locked ourselves, she would meet with us. And she very rarely meets with students. So we're like, "Okay, we'll take this opportunity." So we left and we met with her, the executive director of Cal Dining was also in this meeting.

In this meeting, the chancellor was, I would say, pretty rude and kind of very much did not seem to care at all about the issues we were raising. The most disturbing thing that happened in this meeting was the executive director of Cal Dining, Christopher Henning, told us that Tyson Foods does not use factory farms, that they use small family farms.

And I was trying to be super nice and professional in this meeting, but I said to him, "That is a blatant lie, like Tyson supplies to McDonald's. And you're not gonna tell me McDonald's uses small family farms." So then that summer I went and I investigated a factory farm owned by Tyson Foods and sent my

footage to him and I said, “Hey, it's definitely not a family farm. It's factory farm.”

They've not emailed me back since then, I have heard nothing from them. But we've been campaigning really heavily. We've gotten hundreds of letters from students, we've gotten hundreds of petition signatures. We've gotten students to protest and march and take action and voice their disgust with UC Berkeley's use of Tyson and their use of factory farms and animal agriculture in general.

And I actually met with the sustainability director of the entire UC system over the summer and she told me that she knows from folks that Cal Dining is very much feeling the pressure and is considering kind of shifting course because of our protests. So, we'll see what happens.

Not holding my breath, but we're gonna keep campaigning and see where everything goes.

Jasmin: Wow, that's incredible. Well, I have one more question for you, Zoe, though I do hope that you'll both...I know you've been with me for a while, but I do hope you'll stay on a little bit longer for our bonus content.

But I have one more question for you. I know that the other side of doing the extraordinary work you do is that you also get haters and people who might say that your activism is too flamboyant or might put people off. I am not one of those people. I am like, Team Zoe. Zoe for President. Zoe for Empress.

I'll be your campaign manager. How do you deal with the hate and what would you say to respond to that kind of criticism?

Zoe: I get a lot hate, obviously, from people who might support animal rights and disagree with the tactics, and then also from people who just don't agree with animal rights in the first place and just hate animal rights activists in general.

The people who just kind of hate animal rights and that kind of realm of things, that doesn't bother me at all. You know, I'm kind of like, “Yeah, you're not gonna support me. So whatever you say doesn't really matter to me.” It can be disempowering when people who you expect to be on your side, expect to be your allies in this fight for animals hate on you because they disagree with your tactics.

And often, I will say, it is often people who don't do any activism at all, don't do anything for animals who are the most vocal about their hate. Which I just like to point out because I think regardless of what anyone thinks about tactics, the most important thing, in my opinion, is just that you're doing something to help animals.

I think the main thing I would say is I genuinely believe that most people who view a protest and think, "Oh, that's too extreme, that's too radical. That's gonna push people away" or whatever when they see a protest for animal rights. I want the people who think that to question if that's coming from a place of speciesism. When you see a protest for disability rights or women's rights that's structured in the same way as our animal rights protests, do you have that same response?

And I think most of the time people don't. I think a lot of this comes from people don't truly believe that animals deserve a social justice movement. And I think if we really see animals as deserving of a social justice movement, we will see them as deserving of these radical actions, of these protests, of getting arrested for.

And so, yeah, I just would encourage people to question if speciesism is coming into to that and also to just look at history. Look at any social justice movement that's been successful in history and you can see that it's, 99% of the time, been fought through radical protests like the ones that I'm using, Direct Action Everywhere and other groups are using, to currently fight for change for animals.

Jasmin: Well said. And very hopeful also, which I do have a question about hope, but I'll save it for the bonus content.

So before we go, Sherstin, tell us what's next for you and how people can support your efforts or your sanctuary.

Sherstin: In a couple of weeks, I'm going to be testifying at the Smithfield trial as an expert witness.

Speaking of hope, I'm very hopeful that I'll be able to talk about what's going on or what happened to the piglets in this case, and that Wayne and Paul will not get jail time. That's what I'm very hopeful for.

And as far as the sanctuary, it's an ongoing labor of love every single day. I work seven days a week at the sanctuary, both providing veterinary care and

also just every type of care that the animals need. From cleaning and feeding, fundraising and dealing with staff issues and we have six part-time staff members right now. And I would say our biggest area of need, honestly, is funding. So if anybody would like to donate, that would be great.

Jasmin: What's your website?

Sherstin: It's happyhen.org.

Jasmin: Amazing. And, Zoe, how can people find you online and support your efforts?

Zoe: Folks are welcome to follow me on social media. If you want to, you can also follow Happy Hen Animal Sanctuary on social media. My personal Instagram is @Zoe_rooster.

Happy Hen Animal Sanctuary is @happy..It's basically every word of Happy Hen Animal Sanctuary with an underscore in between each one. Is our Instagram handle. (@happy_hen_animal_sanctuary) So yeah, you can follow us on there and we appreciate all kinds of support. And I appreciate all kinds of support, whether that be sharing things online to help us get the word out, coming to protests if you live in the Bay Area. I organize protests out here, we'd love for you to join us.

Even if you don't live in the Bay Area, it's not me directly, necessarily, it's not necessarily my specific campaign you'd be supporting, but you'd be supporting the same fight. It would mean the world to me to see people just fight for animals wherever you are in the world.

And it supports me by giving me hope. So yeah, wherever you are in the world, get out there and fight for animals. Join an animal rights community near you. Build an animal rights community near you if there isn't one. I just think we all have the power to change the world, so why waste that power?

Jasmin: So true, so true. Okay. Um, so both of you, thank you so much for joining us today. I know that you have been so generous with your time, but I do want to keep you on a few more minutes. I am so beyond inspired, like we need a new word for inspired. So I'm your newest, biggest fan, Zoe and Sherstin.

I think you're doing truly remarkable work and I'm just so grateful that both of you were able to share some true wisdom with Our Hen House listeners today. So thank you very much.

Zoe: Thank you so much.

Sherstin: Thank you so much.