



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 691, Interview with Kate Nash

Mariann Sullivan: Welcome to Our Hen House, Kate.

Kate Nash: Hi. Thank you.

Mariann: We're so thrilled to have you. I am really thrilled to have you because I've seen the movie. The movie's so good!

I mean, it's good just as a movie, but, if you've been vegan for a while, you're not used to seeing good movies about vegan characters, that's for sure. *laughs* So it was really exciting.

But for people who haven't seen it yet, can you give us a little intro about the movie and about Jo, the main character?

Kate: Yeah, so the movie is *Coffee Wars*, and I played Jo. I own my own coffee shop, and I'm a vegan coffee barista who's obsessed with coffee and extremely passionate about her views, about veganism.

And the movie is based on these real coffee competitions, like world championships, that exist and was inspired by the 2018 first female winner. And so, she's running a vegan coffee shop that's not doing as well as the normal milk establishments. And so she enters a coffee competition to try and win money for her business.

Yeah, it's quite a whirlwind.

Mariann: So, how did it all come about? As I said, it's not very often or kind of ever that a movie gets made with a vegan main character.

Kate: Yeah, it was really exciting when I got the audition because I just felt like, "Oh, I could definitely do this role. And I feel like it's very similar to me."

I could really see myself as the character because she's very headstrong and running her own business and kind of everything is about her passion and what she believes in, and it's all her. Opinions come flying up. She's not necessarily thinking before she's acting, but all of her actions are based off of what she thinks if that makes sense.

So yeah, I got the audition, and I was just like, "Oh my God, I really wanna get this because I really feel like I could do this role." And I actually turned vegan because of a movie as well. It was when I watched *Okja*, that's what kind of changed me from just being vegetarian to vegan. And so I know the impact that a movie can have because it has actually personally impacted me. So, yeah.

Mariann: Was this a passion project for other people, or has now veganism become so in that people are just gonna be starting to make movies about veganism all the time? I kind of imagine it's the first. There must have been other people involved who were passionate about getting this messaging right.

Kate: Yeah, definitely. The messaging was very important, and all of the profits from the movie are being donated to animal welfare charities because the guy who funded the movie is a very passionate vegan, and he kind of wants to be impacting global veganism in all these different areas.

So he'll be rescuing cows from a dairy farm and then funding a movie because he's just trying to reach as many people as possible in all these different sorts of areas, which is, I think, so cool and unusual.

Mariann: Yeah, I think it's amazing, and I think it's a great use of...I mean though I'm sure making a movie costs a hell of a lot of money, it's a great use of money.

There are so many different ways that people can be activists, but getting this message across in this way that people can actually hear it. I think it's very, very powerful.

I just wanted to revisit for a moment. I love that movie, but I also happened to...I used to live in a town in upstate New York called Germantown, and some people moved in across the street, and the guy who moved in across the street was the screenwriter of *Okja*, Jon Ronson.

Kate: No way! Really?

Mariann: So, it's kind of one of my favorite movies for so many reasons. And, if people haven't seen it, I just really encourage them to do so. You know, fiction is underused in this movement. Do you agree?

Kate: I agree. And I also think comedy because I feel like people are so often bombarded with so many political messages, especially these days more than ever.

It's like we have to keep up with so many causes and terrible things that are going on everywhere. You know, we've never had so much awareness about all of the most horrible things happening in the world, and it can be really overwhelming. And I think what's really refreshing and welcoming about this film is that it's comedy, and so you don't feel like you're being judged when you're watching it, even though Jo is very brash, very opinionated, very in your face.

She's also the character that people are kind of like...she's making mistakes. She's not always right. She can't really control her temper, and she gets herself in trouble as well because of how she acts before thinking. So I just think that the messaging of the film is really welcoming.

It's saying like, "Think before your next order. Think about your contribution to the planet. Like what can we all do as an individual?" And everybody trying... you know, like for me, I've chosen to be vegan, and it's very important to me to be vegan, but if everybody does a little bit, that's going to make some kind of difference.

And I think that inspiring people to feel not overwhelmed, but next time they get a coffee, they might get an oat latte instead of a dairy latte. Those little differences can make people think and change their minds about how they're living, which I think is so great.

Mariann: I think that's absolutely true. I think sometimes you have to change behavior before you change your mindset. And we always tend to think that we have to change people's minds completely before they'll change their behavior, but getting people to just try it and try it out.

I think comedy is, I totally agree with you, it's so important. And you know, vegans are pretty famous for having absolutely no sense of humor, which I don't think is entirely fair. *both laugh*

But, at the same time, we don't like to be made fun of, and we don't want the cause to, you know, we don't want the animals to be made fun of or the idea to be made fun of. It's kind of hard to draw that line, and I thought this movie drew it really well. But were you worried going in whether it was going to be possible to be vegan and funny at the same time?

Kate: Well, no, because that was the thing I loved about Okja.

I loved... Is it Dev Bostick's character? Who is so vegan, he doesn't eat anything. And I just love that. That made me... And he keeps like fainting because he doesn't eat anything.

And I think when you start making these efforts, like sometimes you can just feel like, "I know too much, and everything I do is wrong, and everything that we do as humans is doing something terrible." You know, when you really start going down the rabbit hole.

During the pandemic, I tried for a while to not use any plastic, and that was so intense to stop doing that because I realized that basically everything I bought has some kind of little bit of plastic. And so you start freaking out and panicking, and everything can get too big. So I think that comedy is so important.

You're a human being; you're gonna be flawed. Nobody's perfect, and we have to be able to laugh at humanity and ourselves. And that doesn't mean that you are being laughed at for what you believe in.

And I think that this movie making Jo the person who actually makes the mistakes in a way that kind of affects her friendship and puts everything in these higher stakes. And she has to really connect with who she is and why she's doing it and go back to her roots and go back to her beliefs and go back to her passion for coffee to kind of figure it out, and use her brain as well.

I think that she has to come back to just using her smarts to get there. But she's also the one that you are laughing at a lot during the film as well. I think that we have to laugh because otherwise, life is just too painful.

Mariann: I totally agree. And it's like people misunderstand humor when they think it doesn't deal with pain. It's one of the most important ways to deal with pain.

Kate: I completely agree. I'm Irish, so to me, there's nothing more depressing than a funeral where nobody's laughing. I'm like if I die and no one's laughing at my funeral, I did everything wrong in my life. Because my granny's funeral, it was filled with chat and stories and laughter and tears and food and conversation.

I remember someone leaving my granny's funeral; my mum always tells this story that they were bursting out laughing and saying, "Oh my God, I've had the best time." And then they felt terrible for saying that, and they were like, "Oh God, I can't believe I just said that." And my mum was like, "No, this is exactly what my mum would've wanted." You know?

And I think that we have to lighten up. We have to laugh because life is this like... there just is... You can't feel all the pain of what's going on at once. That's not the purpose of your life. I think laughter and memories and connection and good experiences whilst trying to be a good person and whilst learning about the world and trying to contribute to the world as best as you can in a conscious way is sort of the key to feeling content in some way. Because then you feel like, "I'm contributing, I'm doing something good, I'm caring for others. And I'm also having a good time." And that's why veganism, I think for me, is one of the simplest ways to contribute to the world in this positive way because I know that I'm choosing to live my life in a kind way, and that helps me sleep at night.

You know what I mean?

Mariann: Yeah. I know exactly what you mean. All of that was really well said. And as Mariann Bernadette Sullivan, I've been at those funerals, and those wakes too, and yeah, I know exactly what you mean. It doesn't mean it's funny, but there are lots of funny things going on all the time, and identifying with them, it's not just making us able to get by and get through the day; it's also good activism, don't you agree?

Kate: Oh, definitely, because we're just trying to reach people. Activism is trying to reach people. It's trying to get people on board with the way that you think and what you think is good for the world. And isn't laughter the biggest connector?

Mariann: So you said that the funder was vegan and a passionate animal activist, and you clearly are.

Did you have company on the set?

Kate: Not everybody, but there were massive efforts put into the hair and makeup. Everything in the hair and makeup was cruelty-free and vegan brands. And all the clothing, we used a lot of really cool ethical designers and vegan designers, and vintage clothes.

And so even people that weren't vegan were making efforts in the film to make it a cruelty-free environment, which was really great.

Mariann: Oh, that is really great because it's very rarely that any of us are in situations where we are the majority. Or maybe you weren't the majority, but you were the dominant force because the funder was vegan, the movie was vegan, and it was a vegan place.

And sometimes, that can bring out people's hostility. I'm glad to hear that it mostly brought out people's cooperativeness.

Kate: Yeah, definitely. And it also inspired me when I made two short films with my friend Rebecca Johnson, who was on *GLOW*, a TV show with me that we did. We made two short films, one went to South by Southwest and one was for Hulu.

And we had entirely vegan catering for the movie. And I think being able to be in control and having had the experience of being on *Coffee Wars* gave me the confidence to kind of create that environment and then not feel like it was a hostile thing or that it was something to be apologizing for. It was just something that I could ask for, and everybody...because as long as people are being fed...

Mariann: As long as you give people good food, you somehow get through to them.

The movie managed to be very, very funny and there was a lot of making fun of Jo. But never making fun of...you know, there were aspects of her veganism that were funny, but the concept itself was never the subject of the humor. That's so powerful here. But I did feel like coffee aficionados actually kind of substituted for the figures of maybe ludicrous behavior. *both laugh*

Kate: Oh, totally, because those competitions are real. So there are some crazy drinks that they're making, and people are obsessed. It's another thing that people get very, very passionate about and very opinionated about. So I think using those two things, veganism and coffee. Those are two things that people can be very snobby about and very entitled about.

And I think that you are right, we got to use the coffee really as the bigger joke with the way, like how seriously both Rudy and Jo are taking it and kind of using their hatred of each other in these little underground secret championships that they have. It's so fun, and I did learn as well, for any coffee snobs out there, which I am one, that the best milk to use in coffee is oat milk because dairy affects the taste of the coffee. So if you are a true coffee connoisseur, then you shouldn't be using dairy in your coffee anyway because it will affect the taste of the coffee too much.

Mariann: That was totally on my list of questions, which was your favorite milk? Assuming that you were...that the coffee love was real and not just adopted for the movie. *laughs* I do generally order oat with coffee, I must admit.

So tell us a little bit about your personal vegan journey. You mentioned that the movie had something to do with that, but you had, you were vegetarian for a long time, right?

Kate: Yeah, I was vegetarian for eight years. Actually, my vegetarianism was connected originally to my OCD because I was struggling with OCD in my early twenties, and I got a pet bunny rabbit, and she just kind of blew my mind.

I mean, that was the whole gateway, I think, for me into, like, I always cared about animals. I always loved animals. I stopped eating pork when I was like three or four because I asked my mum, I was eating a ham sandwich, and I asked, "What is this? What is ham made of?" And she told me, and I started crying, and I just couldn't believe I was eating a pig, and I loved pigs.

But then I sort of went in and out of eating meat, you know, in my teens and early twenties. And then I got this bunny rabbit, and she just blew my mind because she was so...I just thought I was getting a pet rabbit, and I just underestimated animals other than dogs, like I think a lot of people do.

And I was just like, "Oh my God, I love her so much. And she has so much personality, and she's got these emotions, and I feel so connected to her." She had such a strong personality, and I think that even someone who considered themselves to be an animal lover had underestimated a small bunny.

And she became so important to me. And then my OCD was really triggered at that time. So, I was doing all these things for her. Like if I didn't do this, then she wouldn't be okay. And she had to go through surgery, and if I didn't do all these things, then she wouldn't make it through the surgery.

So it kind of got really crazy. And then I had an argument with someone one night on the way home after a few drinks, and they were like, “You should be vegetarian; you love animals, but you still eat meat.” And I was like, “No, I can still eat meat. It's fine.” And then the next day, I woke up, and I was like, “If I don't eat meat, my bunny rabbit's going to be okay.”

And it felt like this deal with the universe. It was definitely my OCD, but the longer I did it, the more it evolved into something that was for me and for my ethics. And I really remember the first time I walked into a restaurant, and I saw meat, and I was like, “Oh my God, that's dead. That's a dead body.”

And it was...I'd been vegetarian for months, but it just suddenly clicked. And I was like, “Oh, wow. Why would you eat that? It's dead. That's so crazy. That's so gross.” And I just never, ever craved it again after that. And then, as I was vegetarian longer, I started to feel like, “I think I should watch some of these documentaries and really be aware of what I am participating in.”

Kind of because I was avoiding it for so long because, obviously, those documentaries can be so disturbing. And then people would talk to me about veganism, but I felt like it was a step too far. And then I watched *Okja*, and I just...There's that scene at the end of that movie where...because it's action and it's exciting, and it's comedy, and then all of a sudden there's that scene at the end of the movie where all those pigs are in that massive farm.

And even though it's a CGI, made-up pig, that is what it's really like, which is very clear in that moment in the film. And I was sitting next to my dog and crying, and I was like, “Okay,” I think I even said out loud, “I get it.” And from then, I was like, “I'm gonna be vegan.” Because I just, obviously, had been shutting off the cruelty factor in the dairy industry of how the cows are treated and calves being...like babies being ripped away from their mothers, which is obviously just evil.

It's obviously an evil thing to rip a child away from its parent when they care for each other. But not only that, but I just don't want to participate at all in the whole thing because we have gone so far away from our relationship to nature being about food. You know what I mean?

It's not even about food. Some of this meat that's being produced is not edible because it's covered in its own feces because of how they're next to each other. And, once I learned that, I think it was just like, “What are we doing?” Like humanity is just...I just feel really good that I don't participate in it now at all.

It just puts my mind at ease because I know that, even when I'm overwhelmed by learning about how messed up things are, I'm like, "Well, at least I don't contribute to it." And now, being in a film that's also spreading awareness, I feel like that's such an amazing thing to be a part of because, hopefully, I can inspire other people to think about these things and consider it when they're making their next choices. I hope people watch *Coffee Wars*, and then when they go to a coffee shop, they're like, "Oh, maybe I'll get an oat latte."

Mariann: That's a really moving story, and there's so many aspects of it that I love. I've never heard of anybody whose OCD led them to being vegan, so that's a first, but it kind of did what we were talking about before.

It made you change your behavior really before you looked into all of the issues. And once your behavior changes, you open up. You don't feel so blocked about finding out what's really going on. So yeah, that's an amazing story. Why do you think that story doesn't happen to more people?

Like so many people care about animals. I mean, I know you really loved your bunny, but let's face it, a lot of people love their pets and their companion animals. It's certainly not uncommon. What is it that blocks people?

Kate: I think people disassociate. I think that...like my mum always used to talk about it because she's vegetarian, she's not vegan, but she used to eat meat, and she would always say to us that our generation...like she grew up in Ireland and she used to go and stay at a farm and she knew that...it was a small farm in Ireland and animals were killed, and it wasn't a secret. And you ate the animal, and you might know the animal, and there was a relationship to the food. Which obviously, some people are personally against, but like politically, you can understand that is way more healthy than what's going on now.

So, now you can eat a chicken nugget, and is it that different to eat a vegan chicken nugget? No, because you've got no connection to the animal in that mush. There's no bones; there's no clue that it was ever an animal apart from maybe if it's in a fricking chicken shape, which I always think is so weird. But like we are so disassociated from the food that we eat because we consume a lot of processed food, and most of us don't have to work that hard to get our food.

And I suppose even if you do have to work hard to get your food, not many of us are hunting our food. Do you know what I mean? Like that's a specific lifestyle that's not like the way we live. And I think the easier it is to get cheaper meat, fast food, it's like the less connection we have to what we're eating and where that has come from.

And we do a really good job, I think, now of distracting ourselves from the truth because some of those truths are just too extreme to see. So you don't want to watch footage of pigs being killed because it's horrible. But if you are eating those pigs that are being killed, then you probably should accept that truth. You know what I mean?

But, I think we are just so disconnected from the process, and that's because factory farming and massive farms that...I mean, you go past chicken farms, and you won't see a chicken. So, the more hidden it is, the less connected we are, the less we understand it, and the less we have to think about it when we eat that food, I think.

Mariann: Yeah, totally. I mean, it still perplexes me, but clearly, there are many, many, many, very, very fine, good people, who just don't get it.

Kate: And like, the timing of it, it's like, I remember the argument so clearly where it was like, "You shouldn't eat meat because you say you love animals." And I was like, "I do love animals, but I can still eat meat, and that's fine."

You know? But now I don't think that, and it took a while for me to understand what is it that I...Because people always ask you like, "Why are you vegan? Is it the animal thing, or is it this?" And it's like, I think the longer that you are something, it, it can become more than one thing.

You know? Like, yes, it's the animal thing, but yes, it's also like there's so much awareness about climate change now. Well, here's a really easy way to be involved in like making a change to that. I've learned more about what all this stuff is doing to the environment. I also just have my very strong feelings that I'd rather like not kill a cow. I would not be comfortable doing that. I would hate to do that.

Mariann: We shouldn't hire other people to do our dirty work.

Kate: Right. And I think that it's really interesting to look at the bigger picture and why this stuff is happening for us to understand what's really happening at government level.

It usually is coming down to money, isn't it? It's poverty, and these foods are causing disease and cancer and all sorts of illnesses in people, and there's a lack of education about that. And who is it affecting the most? Usually, the least privileged people. So I feel that's why I feel like education and outreach and

connection with people and really just trying to talk about what it means to you personally, but also what are the other options?

And one of the good things I think about going vegan now is- it's so easy, really. A plant-based burger in McDonald's. I mean, I don't think you should eat McDonald's, but if you can, it just shows you...

My boyfriend, who's 38, went vegan when he was 15, and he was like, he could never get anything.

Mariann: When you think of the history of people and getting food, the amount of food we have now is so unbelievably abundant. We can eat any way we want, and yet we choose to eat in some of the worst ways possible. It's really ironic.

So I know you're active in a lot of causes. Do they all kind of mesh together for you?

Kate: I feel like there are certain things that you just are born feeling. Like I loved animals, and when I found out I was eating that ham sandwich, I really remember that memory of being so upset. But then there are things that I've definitely gotten from my mum because she's very passionate, and she was a nurse, and she was a feminist. And I have two sisters, and we grew up with dogs, so I feel like there are lots of things that are from my background that mean I care about the things that I do. But yeah, I really like being vegan because it just puts my mind at rest because the world is a very big, scary place, and ever since having my bunny rabbit and going, "Oh my God, like you can really have a connection with any animal."

And I think about my dogs and how much I love my dogs, but someone might see them as food. It's like, I can't imagine that. It's just like you start to feel like you're doing something good. Which is hard to feel these days.

Mariann: Yeah, I always say it's the best thing I ever did. I love being vegan. It's my favorite thing about me. It seems so sad that other people are missing out on it.

I noticed that the movie, and one thing I liked about the movie, it kind of like just interspersed the issues about animals. There were definitely a lot of sympathetic (moments), particularly about the character's childhood. And there was also just throwing in a lot about climate when people were talking about it. There was even a little health messaging. And how do you communicate with

other people about veganism? Do you emphasize the animal issue? Do you kind of throw them all together? What do you think really, really reaches people?

Kate: I mean, it's always funny because you often get asked about it when you're eating.

And, and I'm like, "Well, you asked," you know what I mean? "Because you don't really wanna hear what I'm gonna say, probably, because I'm probably gonna put you off your food." And I think I used to feel a bit more guilty about it and sort of apologetic, whereas now I just say the truth, and I don't feel like I'm...I don't...like if someone's eating meat in front of me, I'm not gonna say, "Oh, I think you're disgusting," or, "I think that's disgusting." But if they're like, "Oh, why are you vegan? Is it the animal thing?" I'm like, "Yeah, it's the animal thing. It's because of mass production of farming and what that's doing to the planet, but also what that's doing to the animals and what that's doing to the food that I don't even think is edible."

And they're just kind of like, "Oh." *both laugh*

And I'm like, "Well, you shouldn't ask a vegan why they're vegan when you're eating meat in front of them."

Mariann: Really, really, unless you really wanna get an earful. Yeah, I totally agree.

I'm assuming you live in London, is that right? And, you know, here in the US, we hear a lot of amazing things going on about how far advanced the UK is in veganism and in the food.

So is that really true, and is it as amazing as we're hearing? Is the food just unbelievable?

Kate: I just actually moved back to London. I was living in LA for nine years, and I've just moved back to London because I have so much work in London this year.

And LA is obviously like veganism is very acceptable and very easy to get healthy food. It is very expensive, but if you can afford it, it's there. But I actually am so impressed by London in the past few years, every single supermarket...I feel like even though LA is the health capital of the world; there is so much good vegan food. But in terms of accessibility, I think London has impressed me the most because you can go into the cheapest supermarket and

there's a vegan aisle, which is so cool because it's for everybody and it doesn't feel so exclusive. And even these really cheap, affordable pubs called Weatherspoons that are kind of in every high street and even Weatherspoon has a vegan dinner menu, vegan breakfast menu.

So I've been really impressed with London. Yeah, I think that there is so much kind of happening in terms of vegan accessibility here.

And do you know where else is incredible? The best vegan cheese I've ever had in my whole life was when I was working on this film, and we shot in Colombia.

Mariann: Oh. Interesting.

Kate: In Columbia, there's this mozzarella that's unreal. It's like the best melted. I took some of it home and gave it to a friend that isn't vegan, and they were like, "I could turn vegan if I could get this mozzarella all the time. This is insane."

And there's actually a vegan hotel in Columbia in Bogota called Casa Lelyte... let me just double-check... I'm looking it up. It's called Casa Lelyte; it was so delicious. And it's in Bogota. They have such amazing vegan food in Bogota. Which I was blown away by; I didn't expect that, honestly.

Mariann: Yeah, I have never heard that. I mean, I've heard people talk about other cities. I've never heard Bogota. Now I want to go to Bogota.

Kate: Yeah. The almond mozzarella in Bogota is like... And they just have such fresh food, like such fresh fruits and amazing food there.

Mariann: Well, that makes total sense. Don't you love this conversation with vegans when you get to talk about like...

Kate: I know I'm really hungry.

Mariann: Well, I'll let you off soon, and you can go have something to eat. So, what is next for you? And, then, I'll ask you more about where people can see *Coffee Wars* because that's what's current for us. But I know it's over for you.

Kate: But it's finally out! Yay!

I've got a lot of festivals. I'm a musician as well, and I have a lot of festivals this summer in the UK, so I'm going to be playing a lot of shows, which I'm very excited about. I'm putting out some new music, and yeah, *Coffee Wars* is available to watch on Amazon, Google Play, and Apple.

Mariann: Okay. Right. Very exciting. I know everybody listening is going to want to see it right away. They've probably already turned this off, and they're gone to watch the movie. *laughs*

Kate: I hope they love it.

Mariann: I'm sure they will! I can assure everybody that I totally loved it, and I'm not making that up.

Thank you so much for making it, Kate, and for your role in it, and for joining us today. It's really been fun!

Kate: Thank you so much. Yeah, it was really nice to meet you, and I hope all the listeners enjoy *Coffee Wars*!

Mariann: I'm sure they will!