

**20 Years Vegan: Jo-Anne McArthur Reflects on What it Means to Her**  
From [Jo-Anne McArthur, Medium.com](#), [WeAnimalsMedia.org](#)  
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It's April 1st, my 20th veganniversary. No joke! This is an anniversary I love celebrating for myself and animals. If you know me, if you follow my work, you know they are my reason.

What do I want to say? Will I make use of this day and hard-earned platform for a grand lecture? Tell you why to be vegan too?

**I think the best I can do is tell you of my own experience on this path.**

In 2003 I applied for a one-month internship at [Farm Sanctuary](#). One of the stipulations was that interns be vegan during the internship out of respect for the animals in their care.

I loved animals and couldn't wait to spend my days mucking barns, feeding birds, petting pigs. I was a vegetarian at the time and felt that veganism was extreme, but I wanted the internship badly and figured I would suffer through it and return to vegetarianism upon my return.

Twenty-four hours into the internship, I found myself in a pasture brushing my new friend Arbuckle. He was an old and contented blind steer. I was in heaven. I had my camera with me as well, and noticed our feet next to one another in the mud. His two front legs and hooves, and my (only) legs, and boots. How sweet. I took a picture.

The only non-vegan thing I had with me at the sanctuary was a pair of boots. Leather boots. And I was wearing them that day.

It hit home for me. There was no way, absolutely no way, that I wanted to be wearing beautiful animals like Arbuckle. He'd narrowly missed the slaughterhouse, and I pictured him there.

Additionally, I had now been vegan for twenty-four hours, and I experienced this overwhelming and surprising moment of feeling so happily aligned in all the right ways: intellectually, psychologically, emotionally, ethically.

**That did it. I knew then that I was going to be vegan for life.**

Honestly, there was some dread mixed in there. Would I feel deprived? Would I be ostracized? How hard would it be on my family? And most importantly, WHERE WOULD I GET MY PROTEIN!?!? 🙄  
These questions were all inevitably addressed and solved in time.

It was a journey. A good journey. Anyone who doesn't eat animals knows there are conversations to navigate, and that we often suck at those conversations in the beginning but they improve with time. Ultimately, the benefits for us and the animals far outweigh any issues that have arisen. I feel the social issues we navigate as vegans are small compared to what animals go through because of us.

**Of course, this journey is inextricably entwined with my professional life as the founder and as an animal photojournalist at [We Animals Media](#).**

It is all rewarding. The steps to reduce suffering for others each day. The incredible extended family of vegans, animal rights activists and supporters that I have all over the world. The animal teachers and motivators I've met and carry close. Arbuckle. Mayfly. Duke. Ron. Kiska. Elsie. Bolly. Banjo.

Happy veganniversary to me!  
May we all strive towards peace.  
Thanks for being with me on this journey.  
For the animals, always.  
— Jo

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*Jo-Anne McArthur documenting conditions inside a pig farm. Taiwan, 2019. Kelly Guerin / We Animals Media*



*Family photo of Jo-Anne admiring Jersey cows as a child.*



*Jane, a rescued pig at Farm Sanctuary. USA, 2012. Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media*



*Gene Baur and Opie at Farm Sanctuary. Gene rescued Opie from a pile of dead animals when he was a calf. USA, 2007. Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media*



*Animal photojournalist Jo-Anne McArthur smiles as Bronco the pony sniffs her hand in search of treats. SAFE — Sanctuaire pour animaux de ferme de l'Estrie, Pottou, Quebec, Canada, 2021. Victoria de Martigny / We Animals Media*



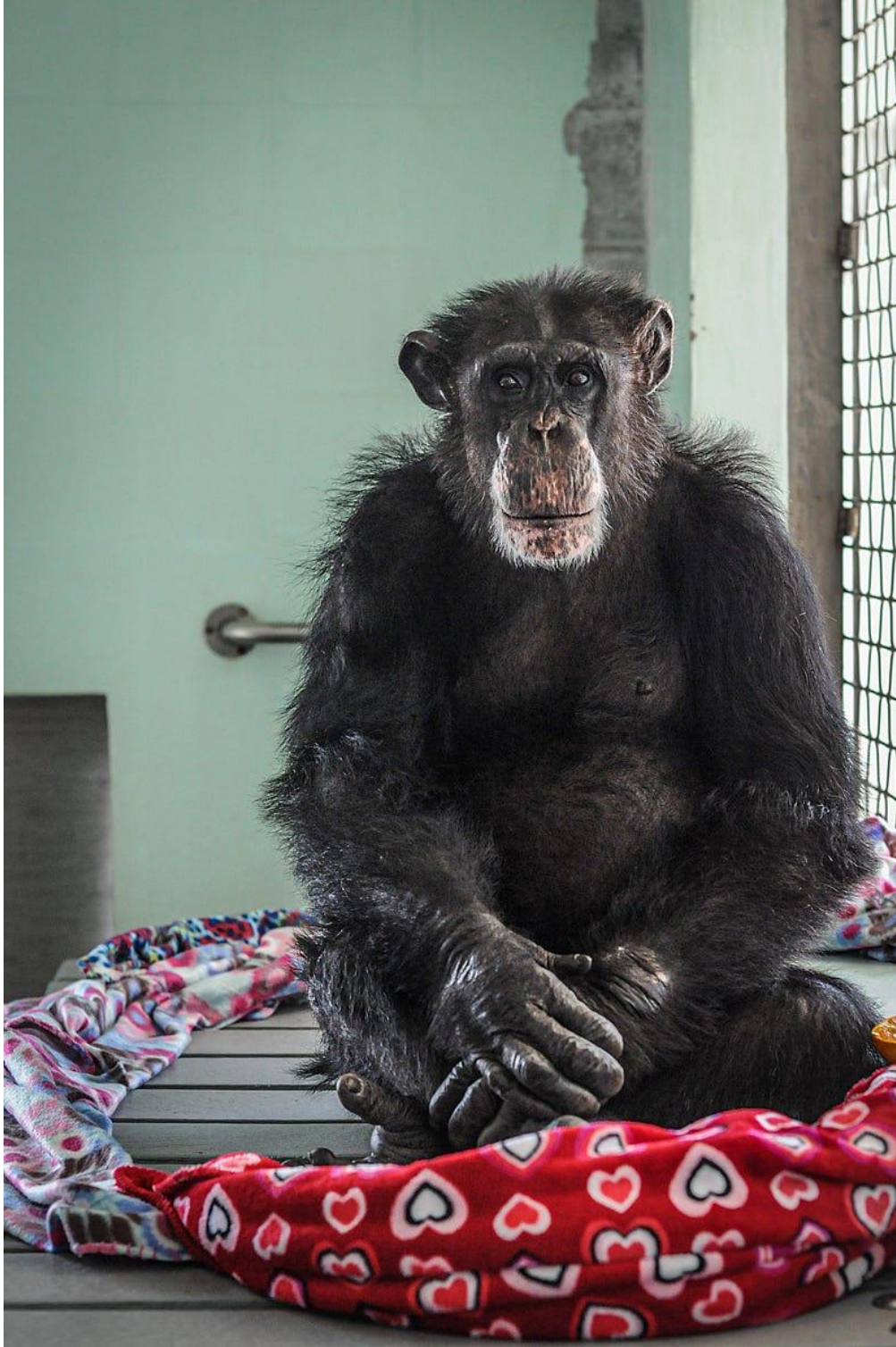
*Still wet from birth, a calf is wheeled away from her mother to the veal crates at a dairy farm. Spain, 2010. Jo-Anne McArthur / Animal Equality / We Animals Media*



*A red fox at a fur farm in Quebec, which has since been closed down. Canada, 2014. Jo-Anne McArthur / #MakeFurHistory / We Animals Media*



*Rabbits next in line for slaughter. Spain, 2010. Jo-Anne McArthur / Animal Equality / We Animals Media*



*Ron, a chimpanzee rescued from invasive research, in his nest of blankets at Save the Chimps. USA, 2011. Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media*





*Kiska, a lone orca at Marineland. Canada, 2011. Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media*



*6000 piglets in a truck on an 8-hour journey. Canada, 2022. Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media*



*Documenting a calico or marble fox dwelling inside a barren wire mesh cage at fur farm in Quebec. Foxes raised on fur farms spend their entire lives in cages such as these. They are used for breeding or will eventually themselves be killed for their fur. Canada, 2022. We Animals Media*