

“For a mouthful of meat ...”. A veterinarian student in a slaughterhouse. A report by Dr Christiane M. Haupt

From [There’s an Elephant in the Room blog](#)

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Because I feel not only terror and revulsion towards a murder committed upon a human being, but also towards those committed thousands of times upon animals, in one single week and in one single abattoir.

Being human, doesn’t that signify saying no and refusing to be a silent partner in murder on a grand scale, for a piece of meat? Strange new world. It is possible that the tiny calves inside their mothers’ torn uteruses, dead even before they were born, had the best deal of all.



Image by Tommaso Ausili from <https://www.tommasoausili.com/the-hidden-death>

Introduction

I have been vegan for 12 years. It’s been 12 years of discovery and despair, of grief and frustration. The one thing that hardens with every day that passes, however, is my resolve to advocate for the rights of our species’ defenceless victims, the victims of nonveganism, until my dying breath.

Over the years, a number of writers, articles, and advocates stand out as having been hugely influential at the start when I was just discovering the true meaning of veganism. This is one such article. The chilling, matter-of-fact description of a student undergoing an obligatory period of six weeks in a slaughterhouse in order to obtain their professional qualification left me shaken and with indelible images in my mind that still influence me these many years later. Grim, and indeed lengthy, as it is, I’m sharing it with you.

Sometimes we all need to strengthen our resolve and remind ourselves why we must fight relentlessly against the atrocity of nonveganism that pervades a violent and bloodthirsty species where most mistakenly consider themselves to be ‘animal lovers’. This is a completely unforgettable reminder of why we can’t give up.

A veterinarian student in a slaughterhouse

‘The inscription above the concrete ramps reads: “Only animals that are transported in accordance with animal protection laws and that are correctly identified are accepted”. At the end of the ramp lies a dead pig, pale and stiff. “Yes, some die already during transport. From cardiac arrest.”

Luckily I have brought my old jacket. At the beginning of October it is already freezing cold. That, however, is not the only reason for me to shiver. I bury my hands in my pockets and try to keep a friendly face as I listen to the director of the abattoir. He explains that for a long time there has been no complete health check on animals, only an inspection. 700 pigs per day – how else could they cope? “There are no sick animals anyway. They would be sent back immediately, and the supplier would face a stiff fine. They only try it once and then never again.”

I nod obligingly – stay calm. Keep a stiff upper lip. You have to get through these six weeks somehow – and wonder what happens to sick pigs. “There is a special abattoir for them.” I hear about transport regulations and how important the protection of animals is these days. These words, pronounced in a place like this, have a macabre ring to them. In the meantime a double-decker lorry has pulled up at the ramp. Screams and grunts emerge from it. It is difficult to distinguish details in the dim morning light; the whole scene seems surreal and is reminiscent of sinister television reports from war zones – rows of grey train wagons into which terrified, pale-faced people are being driven by armed men.

All of a sudden I find myself in the middle of the horror. This is the stuff nightmares are made of, from which one awakes in a cold sweat, terrified – surrounded by fog and icy cold, in the dirty half-light of this repulsive building, this flat anonymous block of concrete, steel and white tiles at the edge of a frozen wood: it is here where the indescribable happens, that nobody wants to know about.

The cries are the first thing I hear when I arrive to start my practical training. It is obligatory; a refusal to participate would have meant five years of studies gone to waste and the end to all my future plans. Nevertheless, every fibre in my body, every thought in my head screams rejection. I am disgusted and shocked and feel utterly helpless. Being forced to watch, being unable to help. They are forcing me to participate, to soil myself with blood. As I get off the bus, even from a distance the screams of the pigs cut through me like a knife. For six weeks this sound will be in my ears, hour after hour, without respite. Stand firm. For me there is an end to this ordeal. For the animals, there isn’t.

An empty square, some refrigerated lorries. From a brightly lit doorway, half pig carcasses hanging from hooks are visible. Everything meticulously clean. This is the front. I am looking for the entrance, which I find at the side. Two cattle trucks pass, yellow headlights in the morning mist. A dim light shows me the way, brightly lit windows. A few steps – and I am inside. White tiles everywhere. Nobody in sight. A white corridor – there is the changing room for ladies.

It is almost seven and I change: white, white and white again! My borrowed helmet is wobbling grotesquely on my straight hair. My boots are too big. I shuffle back to the corridor and almost run into the responsible veterinarian. A polite greeting: “I’m the new trainee.” Formalities before the start. “Put on something warm, go and see the director and hand over your medical certificate. Dr. XX will then tell you what to do.”

The director is a jovial man, who first of all tells me of the good old days when the slaughterhouses had not yet been privatised. Then, unfortunately, he stops and decides to personally show me around. I find myself on the ramp. On my right, some concrete holding-pens with iron bars. Some of them are already filled with pigs. “We start here at 5 o’clock in the morning.” The pigs are scrambling, a few quarrels here and there, a few curious snouts poke through the bars; smart eyes. Some animals are nervous and bewildered. A large sow insists on attacking others. The director grabs a stick and hits her several times on the head: “Otherwise there will be serious fights.” At the bottom of the slope, the loading ramp of the lorry is lowered. The pigs nearest to the exit are frightened of the wobbly and steep passage but the animals at the back are pushing because a worker is hitting them with a rubber hose. In [the] future I will not be surprised anymore when I see red marks on pig carcasses.

“It’s against the law to use electric prods on pigs”, explains the director. Some animals make the first steps, hesitant and stumbling. The others follow. One pig slips and its leg gets caught; the animal gets up and limps forward. All of them end up between iron bars leading them to the holding-pens. At every corner the animals get stuck and blockages result. The worker is furious and swears as he lashes out at the animals in the last rows. They panic and try to jump onto the backs of their fellow sufferers. The director shakes his head: “Brainless, simply brainless. How many times have I told you already that it’s pointless hitting the ones at the back?”

While I stare at this horrible spectacle – this can’t be real, you must be dreaming – the director greets a lorry driver who has just pulled up next to the others and is getting ready to unload. This procedure takes considerably less time but with far more animal cries and I quickly see why: behind the stumbling pigs, a second man has appeared and when things aren’t going fast enough, the animals receive electric shocks. I stare at the man and at the director who shakes his head again: “Really, don’t you know that this is not allowed anymore for pigs?” The man looks incredulous but then puts the gadget in his pocket.

From behind, something nudges the back of my leg. I turn around and look into two intelligent blue eyes. I know many animal lovers who enthuse about the deep sentiments one can read in the eyes of a cat, or the unfailingly loyal and faithful regard in the eyes of a dog. But who has ever talked about the intelligence and curiosity in the eyes of a pig? Soon, I am going to see quite another expression in these eyes: quiet screams of fear, overcome with pain, empty eyes torn from their sockets, rolling on the blood-stained floor. A sharp thought hits me and it will continue to haunt me in the coming weeks: Eating meat is a crime – a crime: ...

A tour of the abattoir follows, starting in the staff room that has an open window towards the slaughter hall, disclosing a never-ending parade of pale and bloody pig halves. Indifferently, two employees are having their breakfast: sandwich and cold meat. Their white gowns are covered in blood. A bit of flesh is stuck to one of their boots. Here, the hellish tumult is somewhat muted, but that changes immediately as I am led to the slaughter hall. I retreat hastily when a pig carcass swishes around the corner and hits another. It brushes against me, warm and doughy. This can’t be true – it’s absurd – impossible.

Everything hits me at the same time. Piercing cries. The grating of machinery, the metallic sound of tools. The penetrating stench of blood and hot water. Laughter, casual remarks. Flashing knives, hooks in twitching animal halves without eyes.

Chunks of flesh and organs fall into a gutter where blood flows in abundance so that the disgusting liquid splashes over me. Slippery lumps of meat on the floor. Men in white, blood dripping down their clothing. Under helmets and caps, the faces are just like any other that you might see on the metro, in the cinema or in the supermarket. You expect monsters but instead you meet the nice granddad from next door, the

funny young man in the street, the well-groomed bank manager. Friendly greetings. The director quickly shows me the hall where cattle are slaughtered. It is empty. "Tuesday is the bovines' turn." He introduces me to a lady and disappears; he is busy. "Feel free to have a look around in this slaughter hall." It will take three weeks before I have the courage to do so.

I am allowed to enjoy one day of grace by sitting next to the staff room cutting small pieces of meat from a bucket, samples that a blood-stained hand from the slaughter room refills regularly. Each piece – one animal. Individual portions are chopped; hydrochloric acid is added and boiled – for the trichina test. The lady introduces me to the system. Trichina is never found, but the test is obligatory.

The next day, I find myself part of the gigantic killing machine. A rapid introduction: "Here, you remove the rest of the pharynx and cut knots of the lymphatic glands ...". I cut. I have to work fast because the production line keeps moving. Above me, other pieces of carcass are cut out. When my colleague works too fast or when the bloody mess blocks the gully, the broth hits my face. I try to move to the other side but there, an enormous water-cooled blade cuts the pig carcasses in two: it is impossible to stay there without getting soaked to the bone. Gritting my teeth, I continue cutting. I must hurry and don't have time to reflect at all on this horror. Furthermore, I have to be damned careful not to cut my fingers off.

The next day, I borrow a metal glove from a colleague who has already gone through the ordeal. And I stop counting the blood-dripping pigs that parade before me. I do not use rubber gloves any longer. It is absolutely repugnant to plunge your bare hands inside still warm carcasses, but because you get soiled with blood up to the shoulders and the sticky mixture of corporal fluids seeps into the gloves anyway, they are useless. Why does anyone bother to make horror films, when all this is right here?

The knife is soon blunt. "Give that to me, I'll sharpen it for you." The nice granddad, in reality a former meat inspector, winks at me. Having handed me back my sharpened knife, he starts to chat about this and that, and he tells me a joke before going back to work. From then on he takes me under his wing a little and shows me a few tricks that make the work on the production line a bit easier. "You don't like all this, do you? I can tell. But it has to be done." I do not manage to find him unpleasant. He goes through a lot of trouble to reassure me. Most of the others also make an effort to help me. I am sure that they find the endless parade of numerous trainees amusing, to see that we are shocked at first and then grit our teeth in order to complete our training. They are well-meaning people, there are no petty squabbles. I must admit that I cannot consider the workers as monsters, apart from a few exceptions. They simply become indifferent, just like me, as time goes by. It is self-protection.

The real monsters are those who order this massacre each and every day, and who, because of their greed for meat, condemn animals to a miserable life and an appalling end, and force other humans to do a job which is degrading and which transforms them into rough, coarse beings.

Me, I am progressively turning into a small cog in this monstrous automatism of death. The hours seem like an eternity but at some point the monotonous movements become routine – and exhausting. In danger of being suffocated by the deafening racket and presence of indescribable and omnipresent horror, comprehension retakes the upper hand on the dazed senses and starts functioning again. Differentiates, tries to make sense. Impossible.

When, during the second or third day, I become aware that burned and torn animal bodies still move and tiny tails are still wagging, I freeze. "They're ... they're still moving!" I stutter when a veterinary passes by, even though I am well aware that the nerves are bound to still be twitching after a while. He grins: "Damn, someone's made a mistake, it's not quite dead." A spooky pulse makes animal halves tremble, everywhere. A place of horror, I am frozen to the very marrow of my bones.

At home I lie down on my bed and stare at the ceiling. Hours pass. Every day. People near me get irritated. "Don't look so miserable. Smile. After all, it was you who insisted on becoming a vet." Veterinarian, yes. Not a butcher of animals. I am cracking up. These remarks. This indifference. This matter-of-fact murder. I want to, I need to speak out, to get it off my chest. I am suffocating. I want to talk about the pig that couldn't walk anymore and was crouching with spread legs and was kicked and battered until it was in the killing box. I have seen the animal again when both its halves dangled in front of me: The muscles were torn on both sides of slaughter number 530 of that day. I shall never forget that number.

I want to speak about the days when cows are killed, their gentle brown eyes filled with panic. Their attempts to escape the blows and the curses, until the hapless animal is finally imprisoned behind iron bars from where a panoramic view shows where the cow's unfortunate companions are being skinned and cut into pieces. A deadly shot. A chain on the hind leg pulling the wriggling body up while the head is severed. A stream of blood spurts in profusion from the headless but still writhing body and its kicking legs. I need to talk about the atrocious munching noise when a machine rips the skin off a body, the automated rolling movement of a finger which pulls and twists, a bloodied and protruding eyeball from its socket before it is thrown into a hole in the ground where "waste" disappears. There is the aluminium waste chute, where the internal organs torn out of huge headless corpses, with the exception of liver, heart, the lungs and tongue, which are all destined for consumption, slide into some kind of rubbish collector.

I want to report that again and again in the midst of these sticky, bloody mountains a gravid uterus is seen. I saw tiny calves, already fully-formed, of all sizes, fragile and naked, their eyes closed inside the uterine envelope which can no longer protect them, the smallest as tiny as a new-born kitten, but nonetheless a miniature cow, the biggest with a silky coat of brown-white hairs, with long silky eyelashes, only a few weeks away from birth. "Isn't it a miracle, what nature creates?" remarked the vet on duty that week, whilst throwing the uterus with the foetus inside it into the gaping throat of the rubbish mill. I am now certain that no God can exist because no lightning came down from the sky to punish the crimes committed down here, crimes which will be perpetuated interminably.

There is no God to help the pitiful skinny cow that on my arrival at 7 o'clock in the morning is lying in convulsions in the drafty and icy corridor in front of the killing box. Nobody has enough compassion to put her out of her misery with a quick shot.

First the other animals need to "be taken care of". When I leave around lunch time, the cow is still [lying] there, twitching. In spite of several appeals, nobody has helped. I loosen the rope which was cutting into her flesh and stroke her forehead. She looks at me with her huge eyes and I learn then and there that cows can cry. The guilt of watching a crime without reacting is as difficult to bear as the crime one commits oneself. I feel immensely guilty.

My hands, my gown and my boots are soiled with the blood of her species.

I have been at the production line for hours, cut hearts and lungs and livers. I had been warned: "To cut up cows is a messy business." I want to talk about all these things, so that I don't have to carry this burden alone. But hardly anyone wants to listen. Yes, people had asked me: "What is it like in an abattoir? I couldn't do it." My fingernails cut into my palms so that I do not hit these commiserating faces or throw the telephone out of the window.

I want to scream but the horror I have experienced each and every day suffocates me. Nobody has asked me if I cope. Embarrassed reactions to short answers show uneasiness: "Yes, all that is absolutely terrible. That's why we eat meat only occasionally." Often people encourage me: "Bite the bullet! Keep a stiff

upper lip. It will soon be over!” This is one of the worst, most heartless and ignorant remarks! The massacre continues, day after day. It seems that nobody understands my problem is not to survive these horrible six weeks, but that monstrous mass-murder happens millions of times – on behalf of those amongst us who eat meat. Now I consider all those who pretend to be friends of animals and still eat meat as fakes.

“Stop, you’re making me lose my appetite!” More than once this remark stopped my report, followed by the escalation: “But you are a terrorist! Every normal person laughs about you”. One feels so terribly lost and alone at these moments. Now and then I look at the tiny cow foetus that I took home and which I put in formaldehyde. Memento Mori. Let them laugh, the “normal people”.

Perspectives change when one is surrounded by so many violent deaths; one’s own life seems infinitely insignificant. When I look at the anonymous rows of ripped up pigs being pulled across the hall the question springs to mind: “Would things be different if humans instead of pigs were hanging there?” In fact, the anatomy of the hind part of the animal, fat, dotted with pustules and red marks, reminds me strangely of what squeezes out of tight beach clothes in sunny holiday places. The never-ending screams that fill the slaughter halls when the animals feel death could also stem from women and children. Callousness is inevitable. At one point I can only think that I want it to stop. I want it to stop. Hasten with the electric stunning so that it stops. “Many don’t make any noise”, said one of the veterinarians, “others scream their heads off, without any reason”

I look at the scene – how they stand there and scream “without any reason”. More than half of the time of my course had passed before I finally ventured inside the slaughter hall to be able to say: “I’ve seen it.” Here is the end of the circle which started with the unloading ramp and the dismal corridor with capacity for 4 or 5 pigs. If I had to portray the concept of “fear” in images, I would do so by drawing the pigs huddled up against one another in front of the closed door, and I would draw their eyes. Eyes I shall never forget. Eyes that everyone who wants meat ought to see.

The pigs are separated with the aid of a rubber cudgel. One of them is pushed in the direction of a space enclosed on all sides. It cries, and tries to back up and escape from where it came, but there is no escape. At the press of a button, the floor of the pen is replaced by a kind of moving walk-way leading to another box. There the butcher – I secretly called him Frankenstein – activates the electrodes. A three-pointed stunning device, as the director explained to me. We see the pig bucking as the moving walkway is brusquely withdrawn and the twitching animal slides over a blood-covered slide. A second butcher plunges his knife under the front right of the pig; a flow of dark blood spurts and the body slumps forwards. A few seconds later, an iron chain closes around one of the animal’s rear legs and the animal is swung upwards. The floor is covered with a pool of blood at least a centimetre deep – a dirty, blood-spattered bottle of cola in the middle. The butcher grabs the bottle and has a drink.

I follow the carcasses that, swinging from their hooks, and bleeding abundantly, are directed towards “hell”. That’s how I denoted the next room. This one is high and black, full of smut, stench, and smoke. After several bends during which the blood continues to flow into pools, the row of pigs arrive at a kind of enormous oven. It’s here that the pigs’ bristles are eliminated. The animals’ bodies plunge into a crater in the interior of the machine. One can see inside. Flames flare up and for several seconds; the bodies shake and seem to perform a grotesque sort of jumping dance. They are then taken to the other side on a large table where butchers remove the remaining bristles, scrape the eye-sockets and separate the trotters. All this happens very rapidly: work on a conveyer belt. Hanging from hooks by the tendons of their back legs, the dead animals are then directed towards a metal flatbed containing a kind of flame-thrower.

In the deafening noise, the body of the animal is subjected to a jet of flames which, in the course of a few seconds, envelope it entirely. The conveyor belt then moves on again and transports the body into the next

hall, the same one in which I found myself during the first three weeks. There, the organs are removed and placed onto another conveyor belt higher up. The tongue is examined, the tonsils and the oesophagus severed and thrown away, the lymphatic ganglions cut, the lungs put in the waste, the tracheal artery and the heart opened, the samples for the trichina analyses taken, the gall bladder pulled out and the liver examined for any sign of the presence of worms.

Many pigs have worms and if their livers are full of them, it must be thrown away. All the other organs, like the stomach, the intestines, the genitals, are scrapped. On the lower conveyor belt, the rest of the body is prepared: divided into pieces; the articulations cut, the anus, the kidneys and the fatty parts surrounding the kidneys taken out; the brain and the spinal cord removed, etc., and finally a mark is imprinted on several bodies that are prepared, weighed and transported towards the cold room. The animals judged unfit for consumption are “provisionally confiscated”. The marking is a difficult operation for the newcomer because the warm, sticky carcasses hang very high up at the end of the line and care must be taken that the dangling animals don’t knock the workers out.

I can’t say how many times my gaze strays to the wall clock in the staff room. But it’s certain that there is no other place on Earth where the time passes more slowly than it does here. A break is granted in the middle of the morning, and with a sigh of relief I rush to the toilets and do my best to clean myself of the blood and chunks of flesh; it seems as if these stains and this smell will cling to me forever. Get out, just get out of here. I am unable to eat the smallest mouthful of food in this building. Either I spend my break-time, as cold as it may be outside, running around the perimeter fence, where I regard from afar the fields and the beginning of the woods and watch the crows. Or else, I cross the street and go to the shopping centre where I can warm myself up by drinking a coffee in a small baker’s shop. Twenty minutes later – back at the production line.

Eating meat is a crime. Never again will I be able to accept those people who eat meat as my friends. Never, never again. I think that all those who eat meat should be sent here, and be made to see what happens, from the beginning to the end. I am not in this position because I want to become a vet, but because people insist on eating meat. And not only that: It is also because they are cowards. Their escalope, whitened, sterile, purchased at the supermarket, no longer has eyes that pour tears of fright before death, it no longer screams. All of those who consume these corpses of shame take great care not to face reality: “Really, I cannot watch things like that”.

One day, a farmer came and brought meat samples to be analysed for trichina. His small son who was with him pressed his nose against the window. I thought that perhaps if the children could see all this horror, all these animals being killed, then perhaps we could hope that things might change. But I can still hear the child call out to his father: “Daddy, look over there! What an enormous saw!” That evening, a television report talked about a “mystery still unresolved of the young girl who was murdered and cut into pieces.” I remember the general outcry and the disgust of the population in the face of this atrocity. I say: “The same atrocities, I’ve seen 3,700 of them in just one week in the abattoir.” Now, I am not only a terrorist, but I am also sick, up there, in my head. Because I feel not only terror and revulsion towards a murder committed upon a human being, but also towards those committed thousands of times upon animals, in one single week and in one single abattoir. Being human, doesn’t that signify saying no and refusing to be a silent partner in murder on a grand scale, for a piece of meat? Strange new world. It is possible that the tiny calves inside their mothers’ torn uteruses, dead even before they were born, had the best deal of all.

In one way or another, the last of these interminable days has finally arrived and I have received my training certificate, a scrap of paper, for which the price paid was so high. I have never paid so much for anything. The door closes behind me; a timorous November sun accompanies me from the heart of the abattoir as far as the bus stop. The cries of the animals and the sound of the machines fade. I cross the

road as a large wagon transporting animals rounds the bend to enter the abattoir. It is filled on two levels with pigs, crammed one against the other.

I leave without a backwards glance because I have borne witness and, at present, I want to try to forget and to continue to live. It is up to others to fight now; myself, it is my strength, my will, and my joy of living that have been taken away from me and replaced by a sentiment of guilt and paralysing sadness. Hell is amongst us, thousands and thousands of times, day after day. There is one thing left however, and forever, for each one of us to do. Say, “No!”, “No, no and no again!”

(End of Dr Christiane M Haupt’s report)

Please note – I have been unable to link the original source or indeed the author, but will do so if I discover more info.

UPDATE with thanks: The author Dr Christiane M. Haupt is a German vet who runs now the amazing [Swift Clinic](#) in Frankfurt / Main. I don’t now the original source, but her article has been printed in German and Swiss media, for example here: <https://www.emma.de/artikel/mein-praktikum-im-schlachthof-263625>