### THE WASHINGTON POST

# The Insider Animal Advocate Envisions a Vegetarian World

Bγ Dan Zak Washington Post Staff Writer

should've eaten my ham sandwich before picking up Karen Dawn's "Thanking the Monkey: Rethinking the Way We Treat Animals." After reading her description of how the deli meat got to my Tupperware container, I put off lunch until late in the afternoon. But I was so hungry I had to eat the sandwich at some point. With each bite into the ham, I heard the shrieking of pigs in my head.

When will the pigs stop screaming, Karen Dawn? When?

When the world converts to vegetarianism, she writes in the book. This will happen eventually. She's not militant about this point. She's logical. She's levelheaded. She's funny. That's why her message is so . . . darn . . . persuasive.

"Thanking the Monkey" is a glossy, nearly 400-page, eminently readable book that's not just about forgoing meat; it's about fur and animal testing and the merits of hunting and fishing and the badness of pet stores, circuses and the Navy sonar systems that make the ears of gray whales bleed. It celebrates the

progress of the animal rights movement. It provides sensible rationales for treating animals with near-absolute equality. It criticizes the National Wildlife Federation (for protecting hunting interests), the organic food fad ("organic" doesn't necessarily mean animals have been treated well) and Jack Hanna (for supporting dove hunting and glossing over problems in horse racing).

Jack Hanna, for crying out loud. The woman's got some nerve.

A native of Australia, Dawn is the founder of DawnWatch, an e-newsletter that calls attention to animal rights coverage in the media. She works from home in Los Angeles and started work on "Thanking the Monkey" (\$19.95, Harper Paperbacks) two years ago.

We got her on the phone last week to talk about the book and her connection to Montgomery County's Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary, where she will be appearing Monday.



This book is heavy. What is it, like, three pounds?

[It's] 2.2. The reason it's so big is because it's got so many pictures. Being so heavy makes it scary, but when you open it up and have one fun photo — celebrity or cartoon — on every page, it doesn't look so heavy.

You pursued a science degree in Australia that involved experimenting on rats, something you're obviously against now.

I didn't feel good about doing it but didn't let myself think about it. I sort of closed my heart. It never occurred to me how much more badly those rats needed their lives than I needed a degree. It's not a matter of rats versus people. It was a matter of a degree I didn't really need. I really think that it's helped me as an activist. You're not a bad person if you're not thinking about the animals. I don't believe in bad or good people. I think people make choices, and you can always choose again.

TREAT ANIMALS

You think humanity is evolving toward vegetarianism.

We're going to have a choice. As there are more and more and more of us, it takes an awful lot more land and resources to feed people with meat than it does [with] grain. The Earth could feed about 2.5 billion people if

everyone ate the standard American diet, or it could feed 10 billion vegetarians. The fact that China is starting to eat our diet — the more meat people eat, the more impossible it will be to eat at all.

The book makes the subtle point that the mistreatment of animals leads to all kinds of mainstream problems, such as pollution and cancer.

It almost makes you believe in karma. We're raping the Earth and the animals, and we're paying the price. I'm not a purist. The only answer is to leave all animals alone? No. Even though I am a capitalist, eventually we'll get to a place just as we did with human beings: that you don't deal monetarily in owning and selling them.

What's your least favorite animal?

Personally, I don't relate well to the carnivores. Not fond of our local hawks because they kill my squirrels. I would never want to see them killed, but my eyes don't light up at the sight of a hawk. The poor bastards: They have to live, they have to eat, but I don't have much affection for them.

So let's say I'm an omnivore who simply cannot go without eating meat or eggs now and then. Is there anything I can do to still be as animal-conscious as possible, even though I'm eating them?

**MEET THE AUTHOR** 

Karen Dawn will host a reading, book signing and vegan-food reception Monday at 7 p.m. at Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary (15200

Mount Nebo Rd., Poolesville, 301-428-8128, www. animalsanctuary.org). A tour of the sanctuary starts at 5 p.m. Free admission; proceeds from sales of the book go to Poplar Spring. RSVP is optional but appreciated at www. thankingthemonkey. com (click on "Readings").

Every single time you sit down at a restaurant, you make a choice. If there's a veggie burger on the menu, don't order the turkey burger. My vegetarianism happen overnight. ... I'm still a cheating vegan: If I'm dying for Doritos — and I know they have a bit of whey in them — I still eat them. But I think if I wasn't a cheating vegan, I might not even be engaging in this lifestyle at all. It's not an all-ornothing thing.

But what if I want to order or buy meat?

Some things are better than others. . . . At least if you're buying meat that has met some sort of welfare standards, you're not contributing to hei-

nous torture. And it's better to eat an occasional piece of steak than an omelet every day, both health-wise and also because of the amount of cruelty involved. Six eggs — what those six hens went through!

Why do you think animal rights activists developed a reputation for being crazy people? Was it a matter of not communicating the message effectively, or other people just not understanding what the big deal was?

It's like the beginning of any movement. Activists throughout history are seen as crazy because they're trying to bring ideas outside of normal thought into the mainstream. There was a time when feminists were seen as a bit loony.

You adopted a turkey named Olivia on one of your visits to Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary in Maryland. What made you fall in love with a turkey?

I was sitting on the grass, and this turkey — whose beak and toe ends were sheared off when she lived on a turkev factory farm — comes hobbling over to me. And I put up my hand to stroke her, and she crawls into my lap. was just flabbergasted. She was so soft and so clearly loved being stroked and petted. She fell asleep in my lap. And I don't think people expect that of turkeys. That's why a visit to Poplar Spring makes you rethink things.

It's interesting when you meet chickens: They are sentient beings and not particularly stupid at all. And you suddenly don't want to be contributing to the battery cage industry. It's easy to do these days and makes such a difference. People just swap out the cow's milk in their lives for soy milk. Every single Starbucks has soy lattes, and they taste good. I'm not a martyr. I won't make myself miserable to do the right thing, but it's so easy to get a soy latte instead of skim. It's better for you, better for animals.

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### **Your Take**

Tell Us About Your Recession-Proof Splurges

These are hard times. We average I folk have dispensed with the buying of luxuries to save money or redirect it to necessities. Or have we? There are some things we don't scrimp on, no matter what. Maybe it's a daily habit of Godiva chocolate you can't live without. Or a monthly gas-guzzling road trip to the Outer Banks that, in your mind, is priceless and essential. Or maybe it's super-premium cable. You don't need it, but you do, you know? If there's one non-necessity you won't give up - recession or not — we want to hear about it. E-mail us at sunday source@washpost.com with "scrimp" in the subject line.



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