

Real life interviews: Veggie parents & kids

Veggie mum, GL Troubridge

GL Troubridge is an author and mother of two children; a daughter aged 19, Sas and a son aged 13, JD. She raised her children vegetarian, having been a veggie herself since she was 12 years old, although her husband does eat a small amount of meat.

More than Mushrooms: How did you explain vegetarianism to your children when they were young?

GL Troubridge: I explained in children's language to both of them exactly what they were eating and what other people eat. Also what an animal may or may not have gone through in its life to become a meal for one of us. I have never forced my opinions onto them but gave them open and honest answers to any questions. I believe that with the correct information given to them, they then had the right to choose for themselves. Both children now have different opinions and think for themselves when it comes to eating!

MTM: Have your children remained vegetarian?

GL T: My eldest has remained a true veggie and still finds the idea of eating "one of her friends" revolting. My youngest has turned into eating small amounts of meat, like his father.

MTM: Did you or your children encounter any problems?

GL T: It has not always been easy for them with one parent as a meat eater and one as a veggie. But being a veggie is a way of life and has become easier over the years with great produce on the market. When I was 12 it was all very different and I was faced with horrified parents who dragged me to the doctors because they thought something was wrong with me!

GL Troubridge is from the UK but currently lives in the Alicante region of Spain. She is the author of **Kidan and the Pendant of Isowana**. The main character, Kidan, is a 12 year-old girl who is also a veggie. www.gltroubridge.weebly.com

Veggie ‘mom’, Julie Loveless

If ever you think you have trouble getting other people to accept your child’s vegetarian diet, spare a thought for some of the mums and dads in the US.

While writing this article I heard from 32 year-old mum, Julie Loveless from Asheville, North Carolina. When she contacted me Julie was in the middle of a storm of phone calls, emails and meetings, desperately trying to arrange clearance for her 4 year-old daughter, Emma, to receive a ‘special diet’ at preschool.

Julie told me that by law, public schools in the US require a doctor’s note in order for children to receive vegetarian meals. Unfortunately Julie had only recently moved to Asheville and didn’t have this information beforehand, so she then had a frantic dash to try and get her daughter a last minute doctor’s appointment.

So, you’re probably wondering why if she couldn’t get to the doctor’s in time, Julie didn’t just send Emma to school with a packed lunch instead. She did. And in with her daughter’s lunch she included a note explaining the situation and reassuring the school that she had a doctor’s appointment arranged for the following week. But when Julie got home she received a phone call from the school informing her that without a doctor’s note they could not allow Emma to eat the packed lunch, and that by law they were required to feed her the same foods as the rest of the children – meat included.

Thankfully, Emma has now been able to see a doctor and has got the notes required for her to eat a ‘special diet’. Julie meanwhile, expects to have to go through this process again when Emma starts kindergarten next autumn.

Veggie father, Shel Horowitz

Shel Horowitz and his wife, D. Dina Friedman are both long-time vegetarians. They have a 22 year-old daughter named Alana, and a 17 year-old son named Rafael, who were both raised vegetarian. They live in Hadley, Massachusetts, in the US.

More than Mushrooms: Did you have any fears or worries about raising your children vegetarian?

Shel Horowitz: We didn't, but our parents (especially my mother) did. She thought it would stunt their growth, or they wouldn't get sufficient protein, etc. They were the same arguments she used against me when I first wanted to become a vegetarian, in 1969!

We did make sure in the early years that they were getting a balanced diet, especially during those picky-eater years where it was hard to get many foods into them.

MTM: How did you explain vegetarianism to your children?

SH: It didn't really come up. I think when they were about 8 or 9 we may have had conversations about our reasons, which centre on world hunger, not wanting to kill animals, and health. The 'not killing animals' argument was very convincing to them, as they are both animal lovers.

My son gives us grief every time we kill a fly!



Shel Horowitz & family

MTM: Did your children ever raise the issue of eating meat?

SH: We raised the issue. When each of them was about five, we told them they could eat meat outside the house if they wanted to. Both of them tried it a couple of times and quickly decided to stay vegetarian. My son is a stricter vegetarian than we are. He's been boycotting a local ice cream shop ever since he found out they use gelatin.

MTM: What were the positives of raising veggie children?

SH: They learned early about foods from many cultures and both of them are actually foodies. My son is a gourmet cook (he even has a very occasional catering business under the name The Gourmet Oboist) and my daughter is a gourmet baker. They both love fine food and good restaurants.

MTM: Were there any negatives?

SH: In certain restaurants it used to be somewhat challenging to find vegetarian choices, but this is less and less an issue.

Shel Horowitz is the author of the e-book *Painless Green: 111 Tips to Help the Environment, Lower Your Carbon Footprint, Cut Your Budget, and Improve Your Quality of Life-With No Negative Impact on Your Lifestyle*. D. Dina Friedman is the author of *Escaping Into the Night* and *Playing Dad's Song*. <http://shelhorowitz.com>

Are you a veggie parent? Or were you raised a veggie?
 Would you agree with the experiences of our interviewees?
 If you'd like to share your feedback contact us at
hello@morethanmushrooms.co.uk

Veggie kid, Cathy

Cathy, 23 from Galway, Ireland, was raised a vegetarian by veggie parents, along with her brother and sister.

More than Mushrooms: Did you ever feel like you were missing out on some of the foods that other children were eating?

Cathy: No, I never wanted to eat any meat or meat products as a child as the idea was so foreign to me. The only thing that ever came up was maybe jelly sweets containing gelatin and such things. I'm sure not many children were as avid readers of ingredient lists as we were!

MTM: Did your parents ever ask you if you wanted to try meat? Or, did you ever ask your parents about trying it?

C: We were told that if we wanted to eat meat we should feel free to do so. I never wanted to, so I never did. Although, according to my mother, when I was at a birthday party once, as a toddler, I bit into a sausage, then spat it out!

MTM: Did being vegetarian ever cause any issues at school or with other children?

C: I did feel I was occasionally looked upon as being different. This was a combination of things though and not solely my being vegetarian. I wouldn't necessarily consider it a wholly negative thing, though for a child it often can be. I think I liked being that bit different from other children. If my peers sometimes found me odd or 'weird', it was rarely in a hostile way. Mainly it was just incredulity over me never eating burgers or chicken nuggets or any of those things that often feature on 'kids menus'.

I think my vegetarianism was sometimes a positive thing in helping me make friends. If you come across another vegetarian it invariably gives you something to talk about. It's actually quite interesting that throughout my life I have on several occasions become close friends with someone then later found out they are also vegetarian. This happened a lot in secondary school. I think at one point the three main friends I had were all vegetarian but this was by no means a conscious act. It just turned out that way.

MTM: How did you being vegetarian affect you in social situations with other children e.g. going to another child's house for dinner?

C: I can't remember any specific situation where it may have been awkward, though I'm sure it must've caused difficulty at least once or twice. It really depends on the parents and whether their child has told them their friend is vegetarian. In my experience, most parents were unfazed by having to provide for a vegetarian. Again, it was always the sweets that caused problems! I was never sure if I could eat them unless I saw the packet.

MTM: How did your parents explain to you why you didn't eat meat?

C: I can't remember particularly well how it was explained, but that may be because not eating meat was so normal for me I may not have paid that much attention to an explanation that in my view wasn't required. I know that my parents became vegetarian as they both disliked meat generally (in terms of taste) and saw fit to raise us the same.

MTM: How did you feel about being vegetarian as a child? For example, did you ever feel that it wasn't your choice to be vegetarian, and that you would have liked a say in the decision?

C: Being vegetarian was never imposed or enforced upon us, though had we decided to eat meat I'm not sure if our parents would've been willing to cook it for us. We were told we could eat meat if we wanted to and that there was no obligation. None of us ever did though.

I actually really liked being vegetarian as a kid. I thought it made me more interesting! The label reading was kind of awkward but other than that it didn't bother me. It also meant I never got a taste for jelly-ish sweets, which is probably a good thing.

MTM: How do you feel about being vegetarian now that you're an adult, looking back?

C: I like it, I think it has given me a better appreciation of food and where it comes from. I am more mindful of my nutritional needs than I would be otherwise, I imagine. I really enjoy cooking and find vegetarian cooking endlessly interesting. That said, I don't know any different!

MTM: What made you decide to carry on being vegetarian even after you could make your own food choices?

C: After a lifetime of never eating meat, the idea of suddenly starting is completely outlandish to me. It's an extreme example, but I sometimes use the notion of eating insects to explain to people who question it how weird I'd feel if I started eating meat. Most people would have a complete aversion to eating insects and think the idea repulsive. If, however, they had been raised to regard certain insects as a food source (and I believe that in some cultures this can be the case), they probably wouldn't find it odd at all. It's a kind of mental conditioning, I suppose. That and the fact that I like animals and I would never want to eat them! Whether this in itself is a result of me being a lifelong vegetarian though is something I'll never know I guess.

MTM: Do you have any siblings? Did they carry on being vegetarian too?

C: Yes, I have a brother and a sister, both older than me. They are both still vegetarian.

MTM: Would you raise your own children vegetarian?

C: I would, definitely, in that I would cook them vegetarian meals. Besides, I have never cooked meat and if I attempted to do so I would probably end up poisoning someone! I have no desire to learn however, as the sight and smell of uncooked meat can actually make me gag. Even the smell of cooked meat is unpleasant at times, but only sometimes. It was actually worse as a child, I'd find the smell outside butchers nauseating. There was also a particularly unpleasant school trip to some kind of fish factory! As I got older and found myself having to be around meat more - whether through omnivore friends or from working in restaurants and such - it lessened considerably.

I would do the same as my parents did with us though, making the vegetarianism a choice not an enforced rule. I could never cook it though.

MTM: What would your advice be to any parents reading this article, who are raising their children vegetarian?

C: Well I wasn't the parent in this situation so I'm not sure how reliable my advice would be, but I would say to not push vegetarianism on your children and not to put it on a pedestal as a kind of virtue. It is just a diet after all; we have to eat something, we're just lucky enough to have the luxury of choice. I think all children should be taught to embrace diversity, also. It sounds clichéd but there is no shame in being different.

MTM: Is there anything else you would like to add?

C: I actually find nowadays there is more of a stigma attached to veganism, mainly because it is perceived to be something of a nutritional extreme. For this reason I'd imagine there would be more issues facing parents considering raising their children vegan rather than vegetarian.

I turned vegan (or upgraded to vegetarianism plus!) a year ago and have found people sometimes react with a great deal more shock to this fact than would've happened when I was vegetarian. There also exists this caricature or stereotype of vegans as being militant, arrogant types who impose their beliefs on others. There are people out there that fit this description and therefore account for the stereotype but it is definitely not the norm. However, this possible preconception is the reason I am often not forthcoming in telling people I don't know very well that I am vegan. I don't want people to think I'm going to start spitting in their face about animal welfare when they're trying to enjoy their dinner!

I think ten or twenty years ago this same image would've been occasionally painted of vegetarians but this is no longer the case, for the most part. Vegetarianism is becoming more normal, which is nice!•

With thanks to all of the interviewees for sharing their experiences.