

Spreading the Joy of Vegan Living

By Carole Audet

Known as the Joyful Vegan online, Colleen Patrick-Goudreau beautifully demonstrates what it means to be vegan and live a compassionate life. Colleen's way of being in the world fully embodies her chosen name. She's knowledgeable about a variety of topics, a gifted communicator, a committed advocate, an enthusiastic teacher, and an all-around authentic human being. She brilliantly teaches us how to communicate with those who have yet to make the connection and helps us stay committed to our values.

Colleen's work is infused with etymology. It's one reason why her content is unique. If you've read her work or listened to her podcast *Food for Thought*, you'll know her way of explaining language helps us deliver the vegan message to others with more ease. "I've been talking about issues of veganism and animal protection through the lens of language and etymology for a long time. It's something I'm passionate about, and the response has been very positive."

She mentions others in the vegan space who talk about the negative expressions that are commonly used, such as 'kill two birds with one stone' or 'not enough room to swing a cat'. But she goes beyond this in her work. "There are a lot of words that we don't realize have animals in their roots. That's what's so fascinating. That's not to say we need to change our language because we're using words that are violent toward animals. That is one part of the conversation. For me, the bigger part is

that animals are so connected with us that it's evident in our language. We need to celebrate our connection to them, and I think you can see that when you start looking at the words we use."

Colleen feels that we should be more deliberate about using language that demonstrates our values. An example of this is a recent reel on Instagram showing a father taking a photo of his young daughter. When he says, "Say cheese" she responds, "I can't say cheese, I'm vegan." She proceeds to smile for the camera saying lettuce.

"My message is if you're using language and words that don't reflect your values and your thinking, then it's something to think about? Food for thought." Which is one reason that's the name of her podcast.

Colleen was vegetarian by the time she was in grad school. She became an animal advocate, speaking out against vivisections, puppy mills and testing on animals. Once she became aware of any injustice against animals, she shared the message.

Also while attending grad school, she realized she didn't want to pursue an academic profession as she originally intended. She didn't have a clear vision of what she wanted to do, but she knew it had to involve helping animals—and people—in some way. "I wanted it to be something related to guiding people toward living a better life. *I knew it had to do with writing, and I knew it had to do with animals,*" she reflects.

"My message is, if you're using language and words that don't reflect your values and your thinking, then it's something to think about? Food for thought."

This new direction didn't make itself known right away. Colleen and her husband took a year off, then moved to California in 1999 where she worked as an editor. Upon doing some research, she discovered that working for an animal organization would not likely pay the bills. During this time, she experienced what she calls "a monumental shift" after becoming fully vegan, which launched her work as a street-level activist. She points out there is a difference between vegetarian and vegan, and many of the latter spend time in the former way of eating before they transition to fully removing all animal products from their lives.

"I was raising awareness, leafletting, and I started doing street TV where I would stand on the streets of Berkeley and show Meet Your Meat and hand out vegan pamphlets. It was those encounters with people who were so moved but didn't know what to do and didn't know where to start that led me to ask the question *What do you need that I can help you with on this journey?*"

People would ask her how to tell loved ones, what to do when it came to holidays where food has historically played a major role, such as Thanksgiving, or how to



Photo courtesy Maria Villano Photography

navigate vacations as a vegan. And of course the number one question all vegans have heard at one time or another: Where do I get protein?

Colleen thrived when she was engaging with the public, ignoring the naysayers who walked by making unkind comments and telling herself they aren't the people she was meant to talk to.

As her knowledge and reach expanded while doing her advocacy work, her natural inclination to want to share kicked in once again and she began teaching cooking classes, carting everything she would need with the help of her husband. She readily admits that she doesn't have a culinary background, but she figured she knew more about cooking plant-based dishes than those she was teaching.

This was the start of what was to become her successful online presence as the Joyful Vegan with many products on offer, including her books and cooking classes, which went virtual due to the pandemic.

Before the internet exploded with creator-generated content, Colleen was doing things the old-fashioned way. As she started moving more into the world of all things vegan, she raised money to make a cooking DVD. This was almost 20 years ago when this was the only option. There was no such thing as YouTube and cell phones with cameras were not in every pocket in North America.

In 2006, she branched out into doing a podcast, when podcasting was just starting, and it didn't catch on in popularity until several years later. She borrowed her musician husband's soundboard and microphone, wrote her script, and pressed record. Even today, she writes her scripts before she hits the air. She calls them essays, and she has a lot more to say even in her 17th year of producing this podcast, but she hopes to also invite more guests to the conversation.

"I wrote the first one on protein and I put it out there. Then I started getting responses from people, and I just kept doing more episodes on the nutrition, the food, the cooking, the social aspects, the animals, the protection, the advocacy, the words, the language, all of it. People started responding beautifully."

This was followed by books. "It has always been the answer to the questions: *What am I good at? What do I love? What's the need? What are people asking for and where I could fill it?* It was in my sweet spot." Colleen's popular book titled *The 30-Day Vegan Challenge* was



Photo courtesy Maria Villano Photography

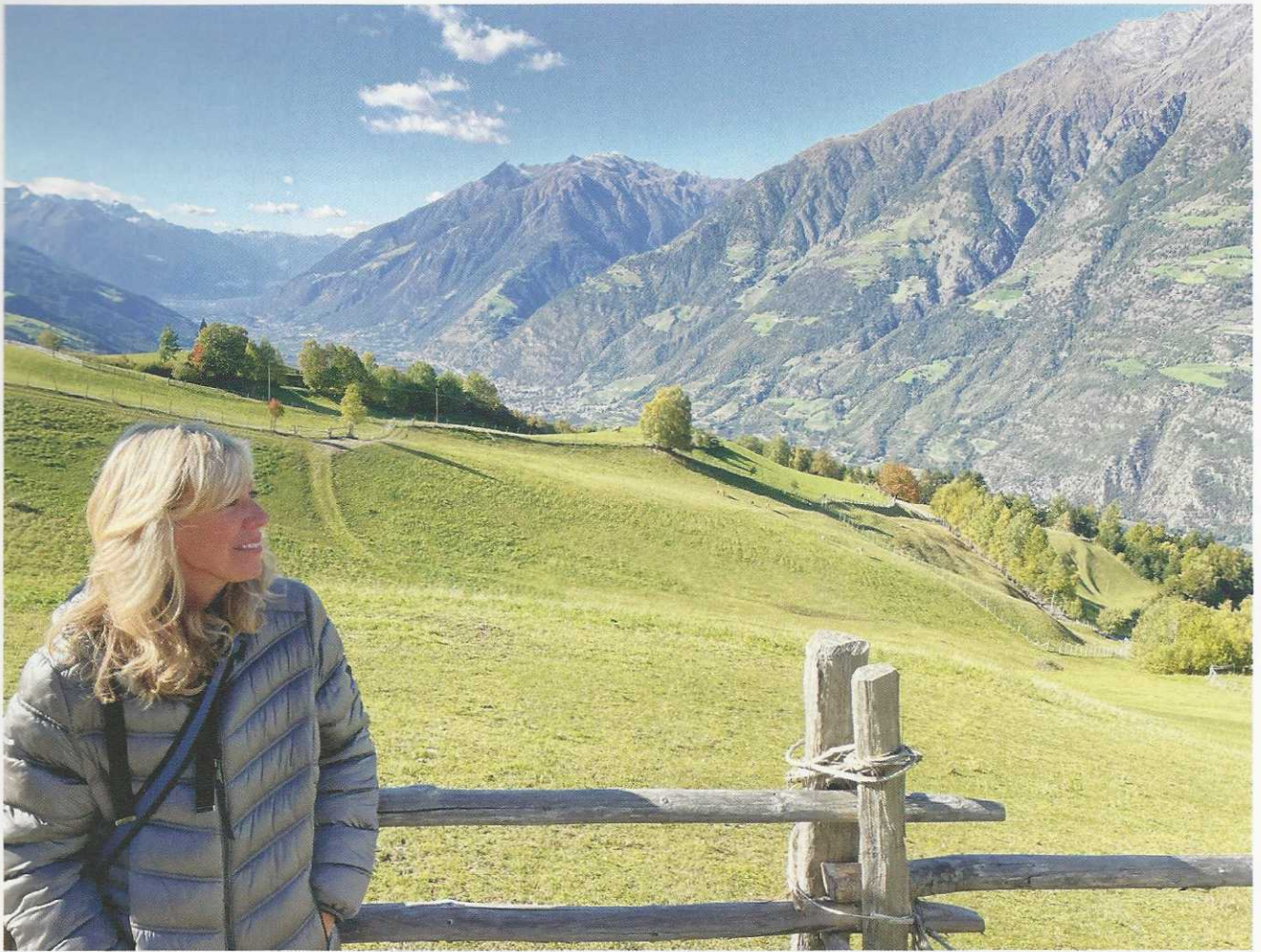
"My work has always been about the joy of living in a way that reflects your values deeply. When I think about my job, it's not to tell someone that they should be compassionate. It's to remove the blocks to the compassion that's already there." —Colleen Patrick-Goudreau

recently re-released, published by Girl Friday Books. Today, Colleen still asks herself those questions, but what she creates is now in a different form with social media and technology playing a major role in how she delivers her content.

One thing that has always been different about Colleen's work is that, not only does she help new vegans with all those questions they inevitably have, but she also helps new and long-standing vegans continue the journey as *joyful vegans*. "My work has always been about the joy of living in a way that reflects your values deeply. When I think about my job, it's not to tell someone that they should be compassionate. It's to remove the blocks to the compassion that's already there. That's how I talk to people, that's how I see people and it's how I see this

process. This journey is removing all the excuses, all the justifications, and all of the hindrances to what is already there. I'm encouraging people to reflect the compassion that's already in them. And that works because, psychologically, we don't like to be told what to do."

Colleen wants vegans to live authentically to their values, what she calls finding our voices. When loved ones notice our joy of the vegan lifestyle, they may eventually want to share in our enthusiasm and healthful living. "I've said that I don't take credit for people becoming vegan because of my work, and I don't take the blame for people not becoming vegan despite my work. All we can do is plant seeds, and we never know how they are going to germinate. When I say my work, I mean showing up."



Colleen in the Dolomite Mountains, Northern Italy

As Colleen shared, how we show up in the world makes a difference, we simply need to question whether our actions have a positive or negative effect on those we share the planet with and the planet itself. Colleen may not admit this, but she made a considerable difference in someone's life about 12 years ago. A listener of Colleen's Food for Thought podcast, Brighde Reed was not only inspired to transition from vegetarian to vegan, but she launched a business as a result of reaching out to Colleen.

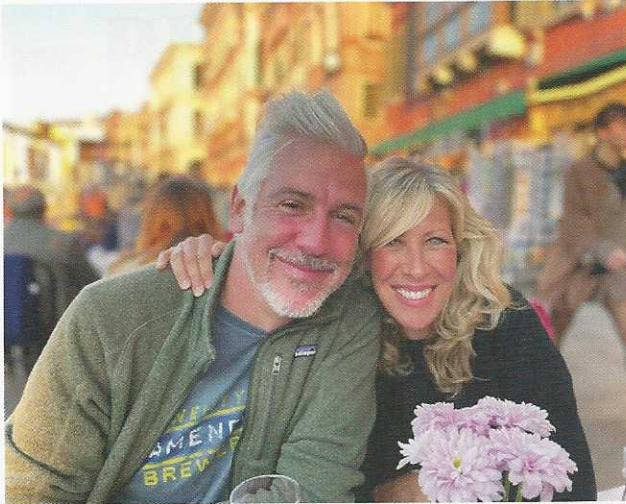
Their friendship started with Brighde volunteering her time by answering what Colleen calls the "love letters" she receives from followers and listeners. Brighde was living in Thailand at the time with her Canadian partner, Seb; she was teaching English, and he was working remotely. When they travelled to British Columbia to visit Seb's parents, they made arrangements to meet Colleen and her husband in the US. The two couples became instant friends and thus began their travelling adventures.

At the time, Colleen was leading vegan trips with a tour

company, and Brighde and Seb joined Colleen and her husband on the first trip to Southern Italy in 2014. This trip was not without glitches, so Colleen provided the tour company with notes to improve future trips for vegan travellers. A second Southern Italy trip took place in 2015 with the two couples again travelling together, during



Colleen in Rwanda. A baby gorilla plays in the background.



Colleen and her husband David in Venice. Photo by Sebastien Ranger.

which it became apparent that the tour company was not a good fit for Colleen's community to whom she was promoting the trips.

The couples continued to travel together, visiting 17 countries, and during that time Seb, who's a bit of a master at logistics, was planting seeds about putting their own tour together to promote to the Joyful Vegan community. After some time, Colleen realized Seb's organizational genius, and the first tour to Thailand was organized in 2016; it was fully booked in short order.

The Thailand travellers became interested when they got wind that a tour to Rwanda was potentially in the works, and when it was finally organized and promoted in 2019, it sold out within 48 hours. So, they added a second Rwanda tour immediately after the first. The success of these trips made it clear that this was a viable business and that Seb and Brighde's extensive travelling experience, coupled with their desire to work in the vegan space, made this venture a natural fit for them. That's how World Vegan Travel was born. There are seven trips planned for 2023, four of which are Joyful Vegan tours with Colleen.

Colleen says of Brighde and Seb, "They wanted to do work that reflected their skills and their passion and was vegan related, and they're doing it. We still love being together and travelling together, and there's no one else that I trust with my brand and my people than Brighde and Seb."

There's a reason Colleen's work resonates with so many people, and it's a joy to gather with her wherever she may happen to be in the world. In describing the niche she's created for herself she says, "Compassion has

always been the foundation of my work, my life, the way I see the world. And compassion is about connection with ourselves, other human beings, and other non-human beings—with anything larger than ourselves. The problems we have in this world are because people aren't living according to their own values of compassion and kindness. If we woke up every day and said, *What do I believe in? What do I deeply care about—I'm going to reflect that in my behaviour, I think it would be a very different world. For me, vegan is the means to the end. I don't aspire to live as vegan as I can. I aspire to live as compassionately as I can, and vegan is the easiest way for me to get there.*" ●



Photo by Sebastien Ranger.

Learn more about Joyful Vegan!

If you'd like learn more about any of Colleen's books, you can find them on her website and learn how to participate in her online cooking classes. Each monthly class is 90 minutes, and you get access to all the recipes and resources in perpetuity.

www.joyfulvegan.com

If you're interested in Joyful Vegan Trips, you can find more info at www.joyfulvegantrips.com

   @joyfulvegan  colleenpatrickgoudreau

Food for Thought podcast on Spotify