



Interview with Will from Viva!

Just in time for Christmas we bagged ourselves an interview with Will Sorflaten, a campaigner for the wonderful charity Viva!

Myself and Will met via zoom for a chat about his vegan journey and what it is like being a campaigner for one of the biggest animal charities.

Viva! Was founded in 1994 by Juliet Gellatley, and very quickly gained momentum and followers. In 1997 the charity was instrumental in UK and Australian supermarkets taking kangaroo meat off their shelves after they launched their campaign.

Continuing on from this they launched several other campaigns and began gaining a host of celebrity support. Their 'Not in my name' campaign featured celebrities such as Joanna Lumley, Paul McCartney and Jerome Flynn, speaking out about factory farming.

Most recently their documentary Hogwood: a modern horror story, has received critical acclaim receiving nominations for 'best British short' and winning the 'wild animal award' at the British documentary film festival.

We asked Will what prompted this path in his life? How did his vegan journey begin? *I have been vegan since 2011, nearly ten years! Initially I became vegetarian for one month as my partner at the time was vegetarian. Honestly, I did it to prove that you needed meat in your diet and I fully expected to feel worse for this change. However, I was pleasantly surprised when I felt healthier. Therefore, I continued on with*

vegetarianism as I was pleased with feeling fitter.



My dad, who had struggled with his weight for a long time, had read the China study and decided to go vegan, for health reasons. He asked me if I wanted to try it with him so I gave it a go. Admittedly, I was initially plant-based for dietary and health reasons and had given little thought to the ethical and environmental reasons, as I had not been exposed to any footage of factory farming.

However, in 2013 I saw a video of a dairy cow being slaughtered because the farmer deemed her spent. This means she was not producing enough milk.



Two years of being vegan had proved to me that I did not need animal products in order to live a healthy life.

Whilst at university my passion for veganism grew and I joined the vegan society, of which I eventually became president. I also worked part time for animal charity, mercy for animals, and it was during this time that I decided I wanted to work full time for a vegan charity.

I became a teacher for two years after leaving university then joined Viva! As a full-time, campaigner.

We are super impressed with the journey Will has been on so far and it is amicable that he is so honest about how his journey originated.

Now working full-time as a campaigner for Viva! We asked him what this role involves? *Pre-Covid the role involved a lot of visits to UK cities, holding high street events. My specialty is university work. There is a lot of potential in universities as there are so many students who are passionate about the environment and animal welfare.*

Part of my role was to visit universities and deliver talks about effective activism. Most people know the facts and horror stories about veganism, but my job is to advise on how best to convey this to others, without being threatening or confrontational. It is about the art of explaining without creating rifts.

During lockdown job roles changed and Viva! Has taken the opportunity to develop and launch a new website. So, a lot of work has been done to write website copy, source photos, plan our 2021 actions with Covid contingency plans. I have also been conducting and participating in zoom sessions. Recently, I took part in a zoom debate with WWF, a nutritionist and a beef farmer to discuss whether or not the world

needs to go vegan and I've got a few zooms lined up with university vegan societies.

As a campaigner we know Will is heavily involved in the making of the charities expose documentaries. This often means he has to sit through hours of torturous footage to ensure the documentary will have the desired effect.

We asked Will how he deals with this heart wrenching work?

The hardest part of my job, is logging investigation footage. With hundreds of hours of footage to watch and log, and taking time to ensure we've logged everything. Such as pig mutilation, then screen shooting it to make sure it is seen by the public.

What keeps me going during these two to three weeks of work is anticipating the impact the feature is going to have. Like Hogwoods, having their red tractor label removed. I remind myself of the overall impact the work will have. We can't finish a campaign and physically count how many people have become vegan as a result, but we can know the economic impact it is having on these companies. Another expose we did was Gravel farm, which was a turkey farm. This campaign was released around Christmas and the farm was dropped by the supermarkets it provided meat to.

So, during these weeks I am always kinder to myself, I exercise, take walks, regular breaks and speak to people about what is on my mind, to ensure I stay mentally well.

We think it is admirable that the team of people at Viva! Conduct these operations and ensure the truth is exposed to make people aware of what is really happening. As well as, like Will said, causing disruption to these companies who are treating animals in such an appalling way.

Will told us about a zoom event he attended recently where a student asked about watching these documentaries. A lot of



people will find it hard to even consider watching, so this is what Will had to say. *I would say watch them if you are doubting your choice to be vegan. Remind yourself of the reasons for choosing this lifestyle. Also watch them to educate yourself. If you want to become involved in activism then definitely research and watch the documentaries. However, I wouldn't recommend watching them over and over again, upsetting yourself and becoming distraught. This is not going to help you or the animals. The documentaries are to expose these companies and to educate the public.*

Great advice, we personally have not watched Hogwoods, as we are already vegan and believe fully in this way of life. We are completely aware of what is featured in the documentary and others like it. However, I personally would find it too upsetting to watch but fully support these wonderful campaigners who are working tirelessly to expose these factories/farms.

So, next up, with Christmas around the corner, and more vegans than ever gracing dining tables, some are sure to be met with cynicism and mockery, (not all but some), we asked Will what he would recommend when it comes to dealing with these attitudes?

Cynicism around veganism with inevitably happen more and more as veganism is growing. The key thing is to remember, a lot of the time the remarks made are coming from a place of envy or these people may be grappling with an inner conflict. Most times the comments made are not targeted at you because the person thinks you are ridiculous, but because they think you are doing the right thing and they may be dealing with feelings of guilt. The aggression towards you is possibly as a result of conflict within themselves.

As a vegan community we do not want to shame or trigger guilt in others. Some people have a misconception that all vegans

behave this way. While some do trigger guilt in others, most do not and would much rather encourage and discuss their options. Shame is not the way to change minds. Viva! Always advocates that baby steps are the way forwards when progressing through a vegan journey. If someone is thinking about proceeding then support and encourage them.

If comments of ridicule are affecting your own transition then just remember don't let doubts and fear take precedent over the health and environmental benefits. If someone does try to make comments towards you regarding veganism then don't give them ammunition or rise to it.

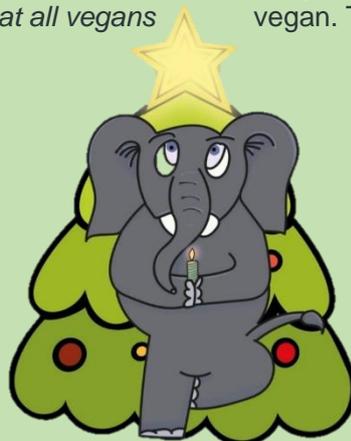
Brilliant advice! Sometimes it can be hard to listen to negative comments about something you feel passionately about, especially when it is targeted at you. However, as Will said, this person may be feeling guilty about their own life choices and you being there may remind them of that. Stay strong and confident in the knowledge that you are making a positive impact on the environment and welfare of animals.

Lastly, as we always do with guest features, we asked Will if there was a certain recipe/food that he particularly loves? *It's a complete comfort food for me, it's mac & cheese. Made with loads of nutritional yeast and violife cheese, it's hard to go wrong with this combination.*

We were extremely grateful to Will for taking the time to chat with us and to give us an insight into Viva!

The team work tirelessly to ensure that animal welfare is paramount and their campaigns team are always ensuring there is enough information out there to educate people.

They have recently launched seven days vegan. This is a guide to help people follow



a vegan diet for seven days. Including recipes and hints, there is absolutely no obligation to become vegan after this, but it is an insight into the lifestyle for those who are curious.

So, if you are considering a vegan lifestyle or are already a fully-fledged vegan then get on over to Viva! Website at <https://viva.org.uk/>

There is something for everyone, regardless of where you are in your journey. There is also a wealth of knowledge to access as well as more information about their campaigns and how you can help.

If you have any questions or queries about anything, we have discussed during this feature then please contact the team at info@soyoi.co.uk

Or via our website at www.soyoi.co.uk

We would like to thank all of the team at Viva! For all their continuing hard work and tireless campaigning, it truly is admirable. We wish them all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

