

Q+A with Simone Reyes: Social Compassion in Legislation's Board Member

Q: When did you realize animals were important to you?

A: I have, as most children, always loved animals. I realized that I was an activist when I was in sixth grade and began to see commercials on TV about stray and abused animals. My friends and I started the I LOVE ANIMALS club in response to those ads and raised money to send to shelters and animal organizations. I remember carrying around a photo of a dog named "Red" who was skin and bones and showing it to my homeroom teacher, Mr. Geller. He handed me a five-dollar bill to send to an animal rescue organization. I remember thinking first that he had a compassionate heart and second, that he must be rich. I was eleven at the time and that seemed like a lot of money to me.

Q: Can you share a special animal memory with us?

A: I suppose this is a special memory because it helped to awaken the activist in me, but it is a bad memory. I grew up in NYC and in the summer, there are a lot of outdoor block parties. I must have been about five when my mom and I came upon a baby elephant. Someone popped me up on top of this poor motherless baby and took my photo. I was so little but something in me told me sitting on this animal was wrong and unnatural. I felt bad sitting on this poor animal and always got a sick feeling whenever I came across the photo in the family album long before I became vegan and an activist.

Q: What is your spirit animal and why?

A: I would say my spirit animal is the pigeon. Pigeons are so misunderstood and are often considered to be pests in urban environments. I find this so offensive. As a native New Yorker, I have never understood why proud New Yorkers don't rally around helping our birds! Pigeons live among us and share the city we love. They are wild and intelligent. Pigeons are true survivors. They embody everything about New York that makes the city what it is and yet, people can, for the most part, walk right past an injured rock dove and think nothing of it. I love them so much and even have a few tattoos of them. I am proud to say I have rescued many of them. It was an honor to keep them in my office and in my apartment back when I lived in Greenwich Village, NY while they recuperated from various accidents or injuries. They are a big love of my life.



Q: What animal movie is important to you and why?

A: THE COVE is a very personal movie to me because I served as a Cove Guardian and traveled to Taiji, Japan with Sea Shepherd. There I witnessed the absolutely heart-crushing drives – where dolphins are chased to shore, corralled in a cove, and then selected for marine parks and aquaria, or killed for their meat. In September of each year, the dolphin drive hunting season begins in Taiji, Japan where over 2,000 small whales and dolphins are horrendously captured or killed annually. A variety of dolphin species are taken in a brutal process that can last for days. I have serious PTSD from this experience, but being able to live stream it from the shore hopefully convinced members of the public to never buy a ticket to a swim with dolphin program or an amusement park.

Q: What is the law you are most proud of passing and why?

A: It is difficult to say which of our laws I am the proudest of because each one has potentially saved countless lives. I will say that vivisection (the practice of performing operations on live animals for the purpose of experimentation) makes my blood boil. It is incomprehensible to me that it is still legal. Therefore, when we banned the sale of cosmetics and personal care items tested on animals here in CA (the Cruelty-Free Cosmetics Act), it made my heart sing. It is also a huge thrill to see our bills duplicated in other states.

Q: Who inspires you?

A: Every activist inspires me. Every person who uses their voice, their wallet, and their vote to speak up on behalf of animals gives me hope.

Q: How did your passion for animals turn into full-time animal advocacy?

A: Animal abusers don't take any time off so we, as activists, must work around the clock and twice as hard to fight for the choice-less and the voice-less. There are ways to speak up for animals with every personal choice we make- from what we eat to what we wear to how we entertain ourselves to where we give our money. We have dedicated our lives to being that voice.





Q: How do you incorporate your love for animals into your music?

A: As a country singer, I understand country culture often glorifies hunting, rodeos, BBQ etc. You will never see any of my music videos showcasing any of that but instead, I use my platform to highlight alternatives. If you really must have those cow horns over your mantle, my video shows one made of natural cruelty-free materials. If you want to tailgate and fire up the grill, my videos show veggie burgers and not dogs, etc. If you really want to ride that bull, you can always ride a mechanical one just like Travolta did in 'Urban Cowboy'. Everything can be veganized...there is always a cruelty-free option.

Q: Is there any legislation that hasn't been introduced yet that you'd like to see?

A: There are SO many bills that need to be signed into law. Animals do not have personhood rights in this country – they are still at the mercy of humans which unfortunately is seldom a safe place for them to be. That is why SCIL exists- we have so much work to do.



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