

What is a political label or identity if not just another number within a sea of political categories?

In moving from politics to anarchy one actualizes revolt beyond the realm of mere theory and ideology. What theory and ideology fail to represent is the fluidity of life in motion – the transformation of one's political ideas into material action.

To withdraw from intoxication culture and from the collective normalization of human supremacy is to confront the existent world with individual negation. Without the guidance of politicians or patience for any future revolution total liberation means obtaining freedom here and now, led by a burning desire to destroy the conditions of ones confinement.

The present is all we have.

Even without hope we continue to fight for our lives.

We understand that no authority will ever give us freedom... so we create our own through reclaiming our lives.

With sabotage we weaponize our minds and bodies against all cages.

Without taking action in our individual lives words become nothing more than empty political rhetoric in the graveyard of history.

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## **STORIES of TOTAL LIBERATION**



*In 2015 a cell of five vegan, straight edge anarchists known as “SXE MADRID” were arrested for having been accused of carrying out attacks with incendiary devices on four bank branches in Madrid, along with a bank in Barcelona. A search of the individuals homes led to the discovery of material for the manufacture of explosive devices, various amounts of gunpowder, fuses, as well as manuals for preparing home-made bombs.*



### C. XVX

I became vegan when I was 15 after learning about the horrors of factory farming and vivisection. Animal liberation ideas immediately resonated with me because of my own experiences of abuse and confinement at the hands of the psychiatric healthcare system. I knew on a deep and existential level that life was not meant to be put in cages and needed to be free. I stopped consuming animal products almost immediately and started reading everything I could about the ALF and direct action. Picking up a ton of zines from folks distroing at punk shows greatly helped the process along by providing invaluable amounts of information and resources on veganism, nutrition, cooking, direct action, and of course, anarchy.

I became straight edge later on when I was 20. The decision was the result of spending my later teen years in punk communities looking for others who shared similar ideas about animal liberation and anarchy but sadly getting caught up in the all too common trap that is the intoxication culture that is so prominent and glorified within so many punk scenes. Eventually, after witnessing many of my friends succumb to drugs and alcohol, I realized that substance use was not a path to self-liberation, but rather a dead-end, and that a sober mind was a dangerous weapon in the fight for total liberation and revolutionary change and so I stopped using and claimed edge, understanding now that a vegan straight edge existence was the most direct path towards liberation and anarchy.

To me, veganism, straight edge, and anti-civ anarchy are all compatible and complementary. Domestication and civilization have so far removed us from the sources of the food we eat every day and how it gets to us and the suffering involved in that process. Anti-civ veganism takes a closer look at this and draws the connections between industrial animal agriculture and colonization, civilization, ecocide, mass incarceration, and exploitation, and how perpetuating violence toward animals is used to justify violence and control of humans and life in general. Industrial civilization tells us that any life, human or non-human, can be bought, sold, caged, killed, and commodified; veganism breaks this pattern of thinking and says that one's life belongs to them and solely them and that they should be able to exist without the need to prove the utilitarian value of

their existence solely to justify being alive.

Straight edge and anti-civ anarchy also complement each other insofar as since the dawn of civilization and government, intoxication has been used by those in power as a tool to control and manipulate life and deny freedom and autonomy and suppress revolt. Straight edge is taking one's life and mind back from these forms of control in favor of a more liberatory existence. Intoxication culture and addiction are symptoms of civilization and colonization, and living a sober and liberated life allows one to break free from these restraints and live a freer and more subversive existence.

For a Free and Wild Existence...

For Total Liberation...

For Anarchy...

VEGAN STRAIGHT EDGE FOREVER!

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### Dave XVX

They said I had Oppositional Defiant Disorder when I was young. Even at the time, hearing there was a diagnosis for a child who hated authority sounded ridiculous, like drapetomania for kids. But maybe it ultimately enabled me to escape my own upbringing.

Growing up the way I did, I made a very unlikely candidate for being straightedge, or vegan, or even left-leaning. Grew up in poverty. Spent the first couple of years in a Catholic school. Parents were abusive addicts, ranging from alcoholism to crack. My father literally raised us with a Nazi flag hung up and confederate memorabilia as decor. I guess there's really only two options when it comes to growing up: you either go with how you were raised, or you go against it. My brother and I chose the latter, or rather it came inexplicably natural to us.

I was a curious, inquisitive kid. "Why?" was a reasonable question to me, I thought. By the time I was 12, I already knew about anarchism and straightedge. I'd read a crime book in Middle School that included the Sacco and Vanzetti case, and their story really resonated with me for some reason, leading to me printing more information about anarchism at the library. Soon enough, I had binders adorned with crude circled A's.

I discovered straightedge through music, but not quite hardcore or punk like most; rather, a Canadian alt-rock singer named Bif Naked, who wore X's on her hands in her music video and CD booklet. I read in an interview with her that it meant she didn't drink or do drugs, and I instantly thought that was cool. Up to that point, I'd never seen anyone take an outspoken stance *against* drugs.

Needless to say, my parents had scared me away from it all, and from cigarettes wreaking havoc on my asthmatic lungs, to alcohol igniting domestic violence around me, I wanted nothing to do with any of it. At that time, it was just common sense to not participate in the same poisons that had disrupted my entire life.

I'd seen videos of animals being killed on rotten.com, but it wasn't until it was put into context by a peta2 tent at a music festival that it finally clicked I was eating that gore and suffering. There was this visceral feeling of guilt, shame, and disgust realizing what I was supporting. I went fully vegetarian on my 14th birthday, but it wouldn't be until a couple years later that I'd finally go and stay vegan, for the very reasons I'd stopped eating meat in the first place—veganism was a logical conclusion if I truly didn't support the systematic torture of non-human animals.

All of these things just made sense to me, but it wasn't until my 20s that it all came together, thanks to a more thorough understanding of anarchism and critique of capitalism, mostly through various zines and CrimethInc books. Naturally sensitive to abuse, injustice, and exploitation, I had reached a "boycott everything" mentality once realizing just how inherently corrupt and cruel every industry out there was. I put this extreme boycott into practice as far as was possible. I thought deeply about all of my decisions, regardless of a purchase, and I really just wanted to say "NO!" to everything everyone around me was doing.

Today, it all just boils down to anarchism as a philosophy to me, and living in alignment with my ideals as much as possible within the oppressive parameters of this death machine. How could I fight for a better world, let alone personal freedom, if I allowed myself to be enslaved by the drugs that kept people too pacified and stagnant to ever be a threat to this system? The same drugs that historically had become one of the most effective tools for colonizing the planet and neutralizing resistance? How could I profess reverence for sentient life, promote a truly egalitarian world, and encourage the dismantling of all hierarchies if I were continuing to participate in a system that turned all sentient life into disposable commodities, and placed the species responsible for the planet's doomed trajectory at the top of a man-made speciesist hierarchy? All of these things intersected to me, and these three core philosophies that interrogated and opposed it all served as a sturdy foundation for not only true personal accountability, but also personal liberation.

I'm almost 40 now, and I'm still asking "Why?" and regularly saying, "No!" I feel free and forever young, empowered by the guiding lights of anarchism, veganism, and straightedge that taught me why and how to resist all gods, all masters, and all hierarchies. Everything I do is informed by these principles, and I believe them to be a prerequisite for any meaningful overthrow of the system

that imprisons us.

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### **Laszlo (from the band xESCALATEx)**

It all started with straight edge.

I remember seeing those videos as a kid, where people were X-ed up, and it was all so alien to me, that there was a heavy music subculture that was totally abstinent, while we were listening to all these punk and hardcore bands drunk and on drugs at a very young age. But I really liked the idea, and thought that yeah, that was true rebellion and not doing what everybody else does, including my family members, causing me so much trauma with their behavior over the years. It took me some time after going down the road of self-destruction to claim edge at the age of 18. It was not political at first, I just wanted to make a change, to make sure, I'll never be like those people that fucked up my life.

Going down into that rabbit hole of straight edge bands, I soon came across the ones that were focusing on animal liberation, vegetarianism, veganism, and that you should not stop at claiming edge, once you liberated and empowered yourself, you should use that in the fight for animal, human and Earth liberation.

It really struck a chord with me, because I always felt that it was not right to cut one animal's throat, while petting the other. Who are we to decide who's worthy and who's not? So I went vegetarian, but it was my intention to go vegan, with some transition phase, because by then, I already knew that consuming dairy products, eggs and any kind of animal products is just as bad as eating meat. If not worse, considering the hypocrisy.

Ever since I've had a political identity, I've always identified as a leftist. I'll never forget my grandfather's words, who used to work in the mines: son, the place of the poor working-class kid is on the left. There were some years, when I read the classics like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, etc. Growing up listening to punk bands really made me sensitive of social issues, and I couldn't not see the injustice among humans, how the few accumulated insane amounts of wealth, and still blaming everything on the most vulnerable of us, that the right-wing clowns are always ready to support.

It was time to put the pieces together.

I was really happy when I came across literature that saw animals as another class in the society, that classic anarchist writings just neglected, and a lot of anarchists still think that including them hinders the fight for human liberation.

As I dug deeper in the subject, I learned how animals were the first to be

enslaved by mankind and how that was the cradle of all oppression amongst humans too, so it cannot be separated in the fight for total liberation, doing anything less is what hinders that.

Anthropocentrism, human civilization is what ruins our planet, its sole purpose is to grow and exploit everything that it can lay its hands on, building a throne for the upper few from dead bodies of non-human animals, human animals and the ruins of the natural world, hence we must be anti-civ, to put an end to this madness and dismantle this depraved capitalist system and find ways so we can all mutually grow and heal, together with nature and the non-human animals, not at the expense of each other.

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### **Matt Gauck (Vegan Patches)**

My experience with straightedge, veganism, and anarchism all felt like a very natural progression of things I was already considering on some level, I just needed an educational ‘push’ to really help me make better sense of each of them. For example, the late 90’s to me were expressly about skateboarding and listening to punk music. It really was that simple. I gravitated towards punk (and skating for that matter) because I absolutely detested peer pressure to do, like, anything. I wanted as many decisions of mine to be decisions I made myself, that I had considered and thought through, rather than something I felt like I was doing to appease anyone else. I was a fairly shy and quiet kid, so being introspective was kinda my default anyway, so this all worked very well.

So right, well before I’d heard anything like a hardcore band (I started my punk journey with Voodoo Glow Skulls and Less Than Jake) I was effectively straightedge. I hated the idea of drinking, smoking was disgusting and everyone knew it, and harder drugs seemed so bizarre to me I couldn’t really even wrap my head around the idea. I was really surprised when I met a kid at my high school who’d moved from DC and was perpetually wearing a “drinking sucks” hoodie who explained to me what straight edge was. I was thrilled! This was like, a subsection of punk that I was already a part of, and I didn’t even know it! I sorta meandered through listening to some hardcore, but I gravitated to the less “tough guy” type of stuff (think Catharsis and Reversal Of Man rather than anything on Victory) so I didn’t get the vegan/vegetarian messaging that I have come to see influenced a lot of friends of mine back then. I did, however, work at a grocery store part time, and I watched unreal amounts of food being thrown away, and I quickly worked out how wasteful the food system in this country is. THAT was what got me thinking about the “so wait, exactly how did this GET here...” type of mentality, which led me to first boycotting fast

food, and then jumping into being a freegan well before I think that term even really existed either. I literally lived on dumpstered food for 3+ years when I was in college; I even kept a tally of everything I found every week. I basically put together that, in a capitalist system, money is direct support, so if you DON’T use money to get something, you’re not supporting that thing; therefore I would always (and I mean ALWAYS) go around back. I had a eight-stop, two hour bike ride in Savannah I would do every Sunday afternoon and come home with so much food/etc bungee corded to my bike it was absurd. I later learned there was a rumor among some bike hipster types that hadn’t talked to me yet that I was homeless since I always biked around with like 30 pounds of stuff attached to my bike. Classic. Reading the book Fast Food Nation also struck me, mostly the chapter titled something “the most dangerous job”, about the workers in these slaughterhouses. I knew the animals had it bad, that part was obvious, but it really opened my mind just how destructive this was to everyone when I learned more about the human experience working there.

I went full vegan essentially when I moved to Portland and dumpster diving wasn’t as feasible; (all the grocery stores are staffed by people willing to take food home instead of throw it out) so if I was stuck buying things, I’d buy the “least bad” things I could. As for anarchism, or really any sort of directionality in politics, once again, I had some of my own small ideas that grew from practical experience. Again, I have to cite social pressure to do things “a certain way”; in this case, get a job, get married, buy a house, have kids - I recall being in high school and it dawning on me that I might not have to do all of those things if I didn’t want to, which was a VERY freeing idea. I could choose my own reality! Like, all of it - and there was no timeline attached; it was a very personal “no gods, no masters” sort of moment for me.

I was lucky enough to grow up and hang around North Carolina until I was in my mid 20’s and I read a LOT of Crimethinc stuff, given that it was an NC thing, which made me feel very connected to the scene, especially when it felt as though all the “really cool” stuff was happening out west. But I was dead wrong; we had loads of great things happening here, and that was maybe the most illuminating idea about all of it - the possibility wasn’t predicated on anything relating to geography; it was just about actually DOING SOMETHING; it didn’t matter where you were. Sure, a rally in Portland may bring more people, but a smaller rally in one of the Carolinas will feel a lot more accessible, like there’s a place for you to bring something individual to it. The thru line of all of this is feeling like if something is DIY, then I can understand and interact with it; if it’s

“too big” and NOT adhering to a do-it-yourself/ourselves ethos, I am immediately turned off, much like my initial reaction to peer pressure. Food Not Bombs wants to hear what I think we should make with 4 boxes of peaches? I’m in! Critical Mass needs traffic corks? I’m down! The show space needs folks to stay and clean up? I will ALWAYS be ok getting home late. I try to maintain an open mind, and I am very interested in growth as I move through life, but veganism, straightedge, and anarchist politics just make so much logical sense to me, I often have trouble seeing the sense in the arguments against them.

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## Scotty Spitz

### STRAIGHT EDGE IS POLITICS

My introduction to straight edge culture was nothing out of the ordinary. As a teenager in the Midwest United States, identities often developed out of one's circle of friends, and as skateboarding was the primary interest of my circle, punk music was never far away. My friends and I soon found ourselves connected to other kids who had taken straight edge as an identity, and we did the same. But prior to even knowing what straight edge was, I had separated myself from my drinking peers earlier on. I had intuitively found a sense of safety and uniqueness by rejecting the behavioral norms of those who seemed to unthinkingly give in to self-destructive behaviors. In some way, I think I was seeking agency over my actions, defining my boundaries, against everyone else's desperate adoption to find acceptance. Putting an identity to what seemed simple and rational to me came later.

The deeper I got into straight edge culture, however, I found another separation between myself and those around me. Although straight edge was a dominant identity in the scene where I lived, a general backlash against judgement and self-righteousness was part of the conversation, compelling many to claim straight edge as simply a personal choice. "My straight edge is just for me." As straight edge is an outward expression of identity and intent, I couldn't square why anyone would even take the identity if it was confined solely to oneself. It was at this point I realized I was drawn to straight edge culture out of political interests, and as an outward expression of rejection to oppressive entities, not just as a selfish way to align myself with my immediate peers.

Rejecting self-destructive substances was not just self-preservation, but self-defense. It was a realization that external institutions were consciously seeking to exert their interests upon me, to utilize me as a means to their economic ends.

From there, my consciousness of drug culture and its actors began to expand. I learned about the CIA and the introduction of cocaine into the black community as a pacifier to social resistance. I saw the predatory locations of alcohol stores in poor, working class neighborhoods. I watched a rape culture use drugs as mechanisms for sexual and gender exploitation. Straight edge was a niche cultural identifier for me, but it also transcended basements and show spaces as an attack against dominant culture. Straight edge became a part of my political foundation, my worldview to find greater and greater liberation from the confining forces of the Western way of life.

### DEVASTATE TO LIBERATE

There was no separation between my awareness of straight edge culture and the vegan ideology, but where I had already put up boundaries against drinking and drug use, veganism was a behavioral change that was going to take a little more time. While still in high school, and with very little education outside of band lyrics, I started literally looking at the food on my plate and seeing the consciousness behind the flesh. It didn't take much more than that to start me on the path of both rejecting meat and widening my sphere of empathy.

About half a year later I entered my freshman year of college and found a new sense of personal freedom that allowed me to both build upon my developing ethical worldview and live those ideals all the same. With full control of my dietary choices, I began attempting to remove myself from the supply chain of animal bodies. This act, however, seemed so isolated to my personal life, and the more I was exposed to the horrors of factory farming the more I felt compelled to spread this awareness to others.

On the surface, my veganism seemed very liberal. Even though I began calling for a complete liberation of sentient animals, I didn't really see this demand as a complete restructuring of "society" or defining an entirely different form of decision making. That would come later. In the moment, I was only concerned with removing animals from the most extreme physical and psychological suffering I could imagine. It was at this juncture that my liberatory ideals began to translate into liberatory action.

Allowing you to read between the lines, I will simply state that my actions towards animal liberation escaped the confines of economic choices (food, clothing, etc.) and entered the realm of immediacy, agency, and attack. The recognition that the animal-abusing institutions held all the power of persuasion and control compelled me to move further from a liberal approach of social

influence to more radical acts of agency. These acts, I would come to understand, were a double-edge sword of liberation. On one side, animals benefitted from circumventing the traditional and culturally-accepted forms of protest and grievance, while at the same time I was experiencing what it felt like to break from the spell of liberalism and achieve genuine victory against institutions of control. My relationship to power and capitulation to subservience would never be the same.

## FLAGS CHARRED BLACK

Although anarchism seemed inseparable from the hardcore/punk music culture of which I was a part, it was barely part of the cultural conversation where I lived. Even other political single-issues (feminism, gay liberation, etc.) seemed secondary to the expressions of vegan straight edge. If there was ever a crux to our scene, it was the excessive reliance upon vegan straight edge as an identity, to the detriment of other political considerations. Over time that began to change, fortunately, but anarchism still didn't hold much influence. With the passage of time, however, and what seemed like us spinning our wheels in regard to social change, bigger ideals were bound to become a part of our worldview.

All it took for the anarchist appeal to enter our scene was a few people experiencing it elsewhere and bringing the ideas back for conversation. I remember a few moments when trusted friends began speaking to me about understanding power and control not just through narrow single issues, but as foundational components to the ways our lives were structured and how all the oppressions we fought against had a singular psychology. But even beyond the nuances of anarchist thought, the understanding that the agency we had found through straight edge self-defense and vegan action synced perfectly with the demands of anarchist realization. Many of us, unwittingly, had adopted anarchist action by directly attacking institutions of control in the drive for physical liberation. And isn't this the unspoken dynamic of anarchism itself; our intuitive and instinctual motivation for personal agency and genuine freedom is a part of our biological makeup. It isn't necessarily an abstract ideology or personal struggle to overcome. It is how we exist in the context of boundless behavior, free from external institutional influence.

For me, once anarchist thought took hold, there was no turning back. The idea of capitulating to politicians and priests and police, who had already been defined as our enemies to freedom, was a non-starter. I wish I could say the same for so many others who gave lip service to ideas of justice and liberation,

but the pull for social acceptance and finding a safe appeasement instead of a life of integrity and uncompromising struggle was too powerful for some. That is a conversation for another day.

Anarchy lays waste not just to moments of control, but to the material possibility of control itself. The various political propositions others put forward (socialism, communism, libertarianism, etc.) all retain the material context for human and non-human animals to remain in a state of confinement, subject to the moralist whims of politicians and the forces they acquire to carry out their agendas. I don't believe in a socialist veganism any more than I believe in a capitalist veganism. Both propositions simply try to reform the current context of control into something mildly different. Anarchy, however, demands the eradication of a singular political relationship and leaves us, as communities, to develop a myriad of ways to live a liberated existence. That liberation encompasses every dynamic of our survival including our reliance upon each other, the dictates of the land, and a recognition of sentience among all our non-human animal kin. That, of course, is the future demand. First, we must find our way out of the cages.

It was not a sustainable strategy to keep pleading for politicians and police to hand mercy down to the oppressed. The very survival of these managers of control depends upon the political infrastructure to continue as is, to provide them the privilege of protection, to maintain the capitalist, hierarchical order upon the backs of every being it was built upon. A society of sobriety will always be a threat to the ruling class, as psychological and emotional clarity allows us to experience and evaluate our confined, material reality. A society of veganism, although an amusing mental exercise, can be coopted into the same machinations of a grow-or-die economy that guarantees the tragic future we all are coming to inhabit. So, although I retain the vegan straight edge identity as components of my worldview, they are held within the borders of a flag set on fire and burned to black.

Anarchy never relies upon political appeals or performative protest, but rather demands nothing short of direct attack. Within the already established gestures of liberatory action defined by a vegan straight edge worldview, anarchy demanded a widened sphere of attack to achieve the same ends. Half-measures and reformed societies never gave me the promise of a life liberated and fulfilled. It was only the anarchist promise of material, psychological, and emotional liberation that held both my desires for unfettered agency and the lives of non-human animals in consideration. From the moment I began organizing with others or acting without restriction, horizontally, holding to

impossible dreams; the realization of a new, liberated existence became an imperative from which I could never let go. There was never a need to abandon my rejection of drinking and drug use, to stop seeing sentient non-human animals as inherently free beings. These acts were always grounded in the struggle for liberation of which anarchism gave the imagined context.

For an existence absent of flags and cages. For an existence defined by agency. Hands off the animals. Strong hearts to the front.

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**Jv**

As a child, when my dad used to take me to the grocery store, it wasn't uncommon for him to mention that "one day we will look back at what we do to animals and we will condemn it as an atrocity" as he loaded the cart with ham and bologna. What we do to other animals is almost never treated with the seriousness it needs. The ways we interact with them are too often associated with a personal preference or dictated by our culture. Like many before me, it wasn't until my first hardcore show that I heard about veganism without the usual distortions from the mainstream media. A small, local band from my hometown, VidaxLivre, played a song called Especismo. The lyrics really resonated with me, planting a seed that would eventually grow into a serious commitment. A few lines really stuck with me:

“Para derrubar as fundações do especismo  
Um compromisso de justiça inquebrável”

Which translates to:

“To tear down the foundations of speciesism  
An unbreakable commitment to justice”

This was probably the turning point. It was the first time I ever thought of veganism not just as a diet or a lifestyle choice, but as a matter of justice: a fundamental, unbreakable commitment to fairness and equality. I didn't have to just sit around and wait for some distant future to condemn the suffering happening right in front of me. I didn't need to wait for society to catch up or for my immediate surroundings to transform. I could take a stance right here and right now. The power, and really, the responsibility, to take a stand was right there within me. It became clear that I had no good reason to take away someone's freedom, their ability to act, or their life in order to lead my own life. Growing up, I saw firsthand how much damage alcohol could do to the people around me. Even before I knew what "straight edge" meant, I just knew I didn't want any part of that self-destructive lifestyle. It wasn't some deep thought; it

was a gut feeling that I needed to be totally in charge of my own choices. The thought of letting a substance control me or mess with my head was just completely against who I was becoming. I really wanted to be clear-headed, make intentional decisions, and always be sure that I was the one responsible for what I did. That early realization convinced me that real freedom comes from mastering yourself, not from giving in to outside influences that could mess with your ability to think clearly and act responsibly.

Both veganism and straight edge emerged within me as attempts to be authentic to myself and make choices that aren't just the product of my environment. They are both refusals to comply with systems that normalize harm, domination, and passivity. Anarchy, at its core, is about rejecting imposed hierarchies and reclaiming the capacity to make decisions based on conscience, not coercion.

It's responsibility without domination. It's the belief that we can organize our lives and communities without rulers, without masters, without institutions built on exploitation.

Veganism refuses the domination of non-human animals. Straight edge refuses the self-destruction sold to us as pleasure, escape, or rebellion. And anarchy connects both by refusing to accept that this is just the way things are. It's about imagining – and building – a world where no one is treated as property, no one is disposable, and no one is born to obey.

Living vegan and straight edge in a deeply commodified world is a daily resistance, an act of sabotage against a system that profits from death, addiction, and obedience. It's about solidarity, liberation, and living in alignment with the world I want to see.

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**Kyle VVX**

When I was in my single digits I never really questioned the things presented to me and my little world. Most of us don't. We aren't intellectually or cognitively developed enough yet. And by the time we are, it's too late. Our impressionable minds have already been impressed upon. So we are at the mercy of our environment—our parents, our schools, our televisions; we see magazines in the grocery store selling to us what's "cool" or "normal;" we see commercials between our cartoons selling us ideas and products and beauty. We never stand a chance. We are born straight into a maze that we are very lucky to find our ways out from.

God existed, I was told, so I just accepted it at face value, without ever even considering the profundity of something so fantastical or extraordinary. What

was put on a plate and told was nutritious and technically edible was food—it was salty enough and I could slather it with enough (plant-based) condiments that it seemed good enough—it’s beef, not a cow; it’s pork, not a pig; it’s... a chicken? Yeah, that’s just chicken, they’re just dumb birds. Nutrition? Health? Vegetables? What’s all that if not something green hidden beneath a pile of yellow glue, or the thing presented to us and our now salt-assaulted taste buds as a chore to consume; allowing us to exit the dinner table, a can of soda, a sweet treat. The food that grows from the earth to nourish us is a punishment, an obligation, not a gift or naturally medicinal miracle.

When my parents would wind up in weekly drunken fistfights, with either others or each other (but really themselves; really the world), stabbings, hatchet wielding, cracked heads (crackheads), blood-drenched bright-white towels, staggering adults, howls for help, stapled wounds, broken bones, excessive sexuality and deranged dialogues at max volume bolstering from blistering and blown out voice boxes; police making regular stops to our 2residence, the “Gunn” name a recognizable brand of domestic and drunken disputes called into the station; screaming, smashed household belongings, etc etc etc.

It became routine. Days of school were missed, fleeing our state for a couple weeks to hide out with relatives down south (just to party more) to hide from a drunken dad with a death wish (from so much partying) was, honestly, for a kid who didn’t know better, kind of exciting, but planting seductive seeds in the shape of chains wrapped around my perception of the world and the future of my own life.

We found solace in the television screen. Me, in particular, separate from my other siblings, found escape in horror films and extreme music. Only looking back now do I recognize the symbolic release of those artistic outlets. The violence on screen, the fantastical ferociousness of genre films, the horror, the aggression in the music, it helped me confront the immediate fears in my everyday life that I then-lacked the intellectual tools to understand the severity of. The ignorance to truth and the complexity and horrors of adulthood was a fantastic shield of armor. Unfortunately, that armor only holds, though, until a higher sense of self-awareness begins to rear its ugly little head as teenhood commences.

Before then, and even a while into then, I didn’t wonder much if it was normal or not. I just had no concept of what, “normal,” was, really. You only really know what you know; normality is relative to the life you are primarily exposed to during your most formative years, the years of a wet-clay brain (in my case molded by a wet-brained environment). My father staring out the window with attentive paranoia, the closed doors, the muffled sounds, the freaky folks who’d stop by for mere minutes in whispering conversation, locked doors, foreign substances in baggies tucked in drawers, suspicious white dust staining surfaces

like powdered sugar. Glossed over eyes, half-opened eyes, stampedes of white trash and racial slurs, power outrages, dad being passed out on the floor for days, mom getting her head kicked into a wall, KKK costumes. It was... just life. You know no better. A child stares blankly, no one aware of the impact it’s quietly having on a young mind.

But for as little as I neglected to question the reality of it, I never really considered it—the non-reality of it all—at all. Not until 2003. The year that all consciousness seemed to suddenly form for me. As if a second half of my brain had inflated like a crinkled plastic bottle being blown into. All in one year I was abruptly gunned down with... life. That year I would begin to become my own person and form an identity in extension to my childhood interests and experiences. I had my first sexual interactions already. The first person I kissed was the first person I had sex with. She was three years older than me and already, by thirteen, my social life was awash with the same intoxicating and chaotic activities I had spent the last decade witnessing from people triple my age.

Everything was a bumrush of exposure. It all came crashing down, and only then could my upbringing begin to be challenged by my own individual experiences in the world. Only then could the questions I didn’t know I had start to form more clearly in the fog of adolescent ignorance and premature preconditioning. Just a year or so prior, my older brother had attended a musical festival. There he discovered the band Freya, a side-project of the band Earth Crisis. While the band playing that day was Freya, it’s worth mentioning the significance of Earth Crisis, maybe the single most influential band in the progression of vegan straight edge as a cultural phenomenon. As a response to the intoxicated college culture of Syracuse, New York (which was a mere three hours from my hometown), Earth Crisis formed to address the ruinous flood of drug use and animal agriculture in our society. There had been mean straight edge groups. There had been outspoken occasional songs from earlier punk groups discussing the concept of vegetarianism and animal rights. But no band before had quite tackled these themes and made such a violent battlecry for change as they had.

They were the spirit of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) expressed through essay-like lyrical content, avoiding vague poetic lyricism and instead directly discussing numbers, statistics, the brutality of these practices, and solutions often in the form of a violent insurrection required to combat these injustices, all matched with the stripped down, aggressive sound of their metallic take on hardcore music. They formed a new breed. They defunct the discussion of vegetarianism and jumped right to the only real personal solution: veganism. Direct action, total repudiation of animal consumption and exploitation. No half-measures, no excuses, no uses. Animals were their own beings and didn’t exist for our gain.



I'd might even make the argument that Earth Crisis may be wholly responsible for definitively drawing that bridge between veganism and straight edge, ie the vegan straight edge—absolute freedom of self and all other beings. The two together walk hand-in-hand, encapsulating and promoting total autonomy and peace for all. Not just self revolution, or non-human animal revolution, but consciousness and consideration of all life, all color, gender, and species. Veganism and straight edge were both very intersectional lifestyles. The pleasures of one should never be at the expense of others, human or non-human, nor ourselves. We didn't need to live this way. We couldn't live this way. Earth Crisis set out to dedicate their entire lives to spreading this message, even as recently as this year (forty years later) releasing a new record "Vegan for the Animals."

Now I hadn't quite come under the wing of Earth Crisis, XVX, the clasped hands of a vegan and straight edge life. Not yet. But the seeds were being planted, and they were quick to grow into a substantial life path, a complete shift and development of a lifelong identity that provided something like an X-ray set of glasses (spexvx?), a lens of truth that would make it difficult to prevent my eyes from remaining on the surface of our society. The term, like a sperm, had reached the zygote of my consciousness. Once introduced to the ideals of the straight edge lifestyle, it instantly connected. I had spent life up until then drowning in the mess of alcohol and drug abuse, not realizing an alternative. Like the blind acceptance of a mystical figure playing with our fates from the clouds, I had until then assumed nature was intoxication, aggression, struggle, stagnation, and agitation. It gave a face to the conflicts of my environment; or rather the names. The brands. The corporations. And the intentions behind them. I quickly realized—once exposed to an alternative to a Man upstairs, or realizing your every night didn't need to be a brawl or stumbling stupor masquerading as a "good time," or that I could eat well without contributing to systematic genocide—through this newfound subcultural community bound together by music, independent thought and ideas that promoted individuality, self-consciousness and personal responsibility; a freeform but firm foundation to stand and confront life from, in all its beauty and horror, that the life I had till then primarily come to know wasn't the only option, and one I didn't only not want to live, but didn't need to, either.

Truly, until then, I hadn't even questioned it all. I thought maturity was a mixture of mind-altering substances and media. But then an idea is planted in your mind that sprouts and sprouts and sprouts, seeing seasons and collecting experiences, and becoming a sturdy Redwood of identity to withstand all social storms and cultural pushback.

It took one term, one exposure, and my life path had been made. Straight edge didn't just introduce me to sober living, or the concept of a personal promise or a lifestyle commitment, and it didn't just induct me into a small musical

movement (one that would continuously shape and add to my life forever). Most importantly, and most recurrently rewarding, it gave me the strength and ability to question things, wholly; to self-reflect and assess my surroundings from a more objective perspective; it fortified my confidence as an independent thinker unafraid of social ostracizing. And once you relieve yourself of that generational, cultural, assimilative peer pressure (something that nobody admits really only doubles into adulthood), you're free to do anything.

Clear eyes, clear mind. When you strip away this societal numbing agent, the acceptance of everything at face value, the fear of questioning things and being alienated, you begin to peel back the layers of a society that has been being meticulously structured against the majority for centuries. Without straight edge allowing me to recognize the repression of me and my own kind, my family, my friends as we moved into our teen years (many of whom completely burned out or dead before hitting our thirties), my mother victim to overdose, my father a homeless crackhead—the endless ills of society's good time never ceasing to peripherally or directly affect me, even still, despite my own rejection of active participation—it gave me an upper-hand.

Straight edge helped me recognize the fire that burns through our history, and then it gave me the clean sight to see a sinister system setup solely on slavery and exploitation. It was freedom and awareness beyond that of my peers and even those my senior, but it was never a matter of mere competition and superiority, but a weapon against oppression and an opportunity, greater access to truth, and a power to perceive things more clearly, more selflessly; it's what gave me the keys to more critical thought. And with a more conscious mindset, and the messages being chanted and slammed to in hardcore/punk, I quickly discovered animal rights.

The definitive push, after my brother's introduction to vegetarianism, was PETA's Meet Your Meat, an unflinching collection of undercover camera footage inside factory farms, zoos, the fur trade, and animal testing facilities. It changed my life, even before I could even fully process it all. I just knew I couldn't be involved anymore. I went vegetarian. My older brother had already left home and therefore wasn't at the mercy of a white trash family dinner menu consisting solely of the Standard American Diet (SAD)—not even dabbling in Chinese or Mexican cuisine—those who never considered the weight of their actions, or ever questioned the habits and traditions they practiced.

Into adulthood, they never had that ah-ha! moment, that epiphany that enlightened them to an alternative to what they were taught early on.

This is me sympathizing, this is me acknowledging my privilege in exposure to information. But even then, there's a level of responsibility, self-awareness, curiosity, exploration, and strength that allows you the willpower to challenge

and push past the norm. To accept ridicule, alienation, even aggression. It's an integral part to forming a lifestyle and strong personal identity—make sure you're doing things for the right reason. I have met many people that costumed themselves in concepts that never truly resonated with them. People who spoke the words but never felt them. Those who attached themselves to ideologies for (sub)social clout, romantic pursuits, to fit a scene, an image; anything to feel accepted or loved, even if only by a minority community of people. Those people never last, oftentimes ultimately equating these movements with youth culture and immaturity—because somehow the majority has been convinced that bodily destruction, clouded judgement, impaired thinking, absent inhibition, murder, critical thought and empathy is the product of maturity. Convenient.

Even without directly addressing the link between vegan straight edge and anarchism, the connection becomes abundantly apparent when you break down the wider, all-encompassing personal and social value of these values. Like we've been trained to believe individuality and independent thought is anti-social and immature, that thinking outside the hive mind and prioritizing your critical thinking abilities and choosing conscious living is self-destructive, boring, a buzzkill, a bummer, etc. the concept of anarchism has similarly been conveniently co-opted by the mainstream media and mutated within the public eye to be a mere symbol of chaos, violence without repercussion, primitive counter-productivity to an advancing society, and, again, youth angst and immaturity, effectively dismissing its legitimacy to the media-minded majority. Like veganism and straight edge, with anarchism, or really any alternative political ideology that thinks outside capital and material gain in trade of labor and law, we have been convinced that we can't trust ourselves; that freedom isn't safe; that without someone in charge of our morality, always enforced with fear instead of empathy and humanity, we are not to be trusted with ourselves, by ourselves, or with each other. We must be reliant on some greater structural force or leader(s)—like God to give us a greater sense of purpose, direction, morality, etc. or else you go to Hell—to inform our humanity and sense of community, or else you go to prison.

It honestly didn't occur to me for a long time that these things were connected. I was just living day-to-day and practicing what seemed most ethical and humane and, to the best of my meager ability, rejecting all forms of oppression and repression. Only much later did I give a conscious thought to the fundamental link between them. The realization of their mutual goals and advantages has continuously rewarded me and empowered me to continue living the way I have. I recognize why these things are so important, especially in a more blatantly fascist America; especially within a generation where apathy is being pumped into our consciousness at such an aggressive excess, attention spans are deliberately dwindling, and we are being constantly pitted against each other through irrelevant social surface differences. Although everything is, in a sense, political, at least within our abstract perception and approach to sentient,

structural and communal living, I don't actually believe or generally choose to present or discuss these subjects or ideas from within a political sphere. I instead choose to, and encourage others to, process their thoughts less within the confines of how they contribute to a functioning system, and more so how things coincide with your ethics and worldview. Politics are everything and nothing; philosophy is just everything.

We are ultimately nothing and our time here is finite. No second, let alone day or year, is guaranteed. We will all die, and this world and these moments we took so seriously and yet so much for granted, will be washed away in a flood of blackness and indifference. This is no reason to live your worst kind of life, or a life that is at the expense of any other lifeforms, but it is every reason to reject a life in which our experiences are chipped away to mere moments outside of shopping, getting fucked up, working a fucking job, treating each other and ourselves like shit. Only in a world in which we are all given the space to live freely and autonomously can we finally experience a life potentially worth having. We as individuals are essentially useless, defenseless, powerless. And we may never see a day where we all unite to a point of significant change within our lifetimes (or any). But with the understanding of how brief and pointless it all is; with the understanding we are all suffering and being forced into the same system of involuntary slavery and/or slaughter; understanding we all exist just to exist and therefore should be able to in the most peaceful, pleasurable, and enjoyable way we can... we need to set ourselves and each other free.

## XVX

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*“May direct actions multiply. Sabotages, propaganda and liberations. May words transform into deeds, and may these deeds speak for those who aren't able. No day passes during which we don't miss freedom, but neither does a day pass in which we don't smile remembering the hot embrace of fire. Because we're prisoners but they'll never be able to subdue our vision and spirit.*

*Always against all authority and symbols of submission, and with an immeasurable love: anarcho-nihilist vegan straight edge prisoners. Susoron 4 C.D.P. Santiago 1. Colina 1 Prison. August, 2024”*

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