



# Our Hen House

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## Interview with Amanda Riester

By OUR HEN HOUSE

Published December 21, 2013

*Following is a transcript of an interview with **AMANDA RIESTER** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 206.*

JASMIN: So, we have an interesting guest on today. Amanda Riester is a vegan bodybuilder, and an award-winning one at that. I'm so thrilled to talk to this woman because I know absolutely nothing about bodybuilding, and Amanda really comes at this from an ethical perspective. And it's just so cool that she is able to raise awareness about veganism within this very interesting circle of bodybuilders. So, here is Amanda Riester.

Award-winning bodybuilder, Amanda Riester, grew up in a family of professional boxers. She was a four-time Golden Gloves champion and trained for the 2000 Olympics. She is a certified USA Boxing coach, judge, and officiant. Amanda traded boxing for bodybuilding in 2011, and won first place at the National North America Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship. She shares her life and home in LA with her husband and three dogs. You can find out more about Amanda on her Facebook page, [facebook.com/stronghealthyvegan](https://www.facebook.com/stronghealthyvegan).

Welcome to Our Hen House, Amanda.

AMANDA: Thank you so much. It's my pleasure.

JASMIN: So exciting to talk to you. We hear that there's a lot going on for you right now. We understand that you just won a major bodybuilding competition. Congratulations and mazel tov, and yay! That is so exciting, and I just want our listeners to know that we actually booked you on the podcast before you even did the competition, so it's like gravy for us that you won. I'm so excited. Can you tell us all about that?

AMANDA: Yes, yes. It was very exciting for me. I actually started competing in 2011, and I won the Natural North America, and that was a really great, exciting opportunity for me, as a vegan, to showcase what a vegan body can look like. And I took about a year off after that and just focused on my business and came back again this year, more muscular and a little bit more defined, and I won first place, so it was a great experience.

MARIANN: That is wonderful, congratulations. And we just love the way that vegan bodybuilding just destroys all those stereotypes that you can't get muscular on a vegan diet or that vegans are wimps. What do you eat while training for a competition?

AMANDA: I eat a lot of edamame. I love edamame. And also, I really rely heavily on supplements. I'm sponsored by Garden of Life, thank goodness. And a lot of their meal replacements and protein powders, I incorporate into my diet. They're raw and they're gluten-free, and I actually have Celiac Disease, so I can't have gluten, so that really limits my options.

JASMIN: Wow.

MARIANN: How does your fitness regimen work?

AMANDA: I do a morning cardio. I usually go jogging with my dogs about four times a week in the morning, and then at night I lift weights about five nights a week.

JASMIN: And how long have you been vegan, Amanda? I'm really curious about what motivated you then to go vegan and what continues to motivate you now.

AMANDA: Well, I've been a vegan for about five years successfully. I failed at it several times prior to that. But I've been a vegetarian my whole life. I've been a vegetarian since when I learned what meat came from when I was about 5. I believed growing up that it was the ethical thing to do to drink milk. I was taught that cows produce milk and if you don't milk them, they're actually in pain. And when I found the truth out -- I actually read *Skinny Bitch*, and it literally was a game changer for me. I vowed that day forward that I would never consume dairy or eggs again. So, it really changed my perspective on the truth behind the dairy industry.

JASMIN: Isn't it amazing how all of us, we just thought that dairy was natural? And I was also a vegetarian a long time before I was vegan. So was Mariann. And when the light gets switched on, it's like, "How could I not have realized this before?"

AMANDA: Exactly.

JASMIN: Especially for someone like you who made this decision so young and from an ethical point of view.

AMANDA: Yeah, exactly. And I never wore leather; I never wore fur. Even when I boxed competitively for many, many years, my boxing gloves weren't even leather. So, I felt almost guilty that I was so in the dark for so many years about milk and dairy in general.

MARIANN: Yeah, I think that that kind of guilt can really get in a lot of people's way. They just don't want to face what they've been doing for all those years. But I want to take a step back and go back to that -- did you say you were 5 when you became a vegetarian?

AMANDA: Yeah.

MARIANN: Was the rest of your family interested in vegetarianism?

AMANDA: No...

MARIANN: How did that work?

AMANDA: ...totally the opposite.

MARIANN: Were they helpful?

AMANDA: No. They were very opposed to it actually. I had an older cousin. I have a really large family, and we all lived together in one really big house. And my older cousin, she was 11, and she just liked to tease me. And so every time I would eat like a hot dog or a piece of chicken, she would say, "oh, the poor hot dog, that's so sad; it was a baby piggy and it got killed and its mommy and daddy are crying for it, 'cause it's in heaven 'cause you're eating it." She ate meat. She was just torturing me. But it worked. I stopped eating meat. I remember asking my mom, "Is it real animal?" and she said, "yeah, honey, but..." And anything she said after the "but" didn't matter, just that was it.

MARIANN: How did you get them to cooperate? Did you just insist and they managed to come up with food for you?

AMANDA: Yeah. I ate a lot of bread.

MARIANN: Jeez. How did you grow up to be so strong? Actually, I understand that you have a background in boxing and that goes back to your family as well. Is it true that you grew up boxing?

AMANDA: Yes, I did. Both of my father's fathers, my grandfathers and my dad, my uncles, every man in my family was a professional boxer. So, I kind of grew up in a boxing gym, and when I was 12 I decided I really wanted to join the family in the gym, and I started training and sparring. And by the time I was 16, I won the Golden Gloves, and by the time I was 18 I was ranked #2 in the country and I trained for the 2000 Olympics. Unfortunately it did not pass as a sport until this past year, so every year I kinda held out. Maybe next Olympic year, maybe. And finally, it's time to hang up my gloves.

JASMIN: How did you transition from boxing into bodybuilding?

AMANDA: Well, I worked in a boxing gym as a boxing coach for many, many years, and I trained Golden Gloves fighters. And it was kind of difficult for me to watch people really excel at a sport -- I felt like I was kind of getting too old to keep getting hit in the face to be honest. And I just started lifting weights. And when I transitioned from vegetarian to vegan, I lost -- I always used to joke and tell my husband, "I don't know why but I have cheese fat; it looks like cheese on my abs." It just looked, it looked like melted mozzarella. I just couldn't get rid of that little bit of excess fat. And when I cut out the cheese, I just had a washboard stomach. And so, people would tell me, "you look like a bodybuilder, do you compete in bodybuilding?" And I thought, no, but I should. So, that's it. It's pretty simple.

MARIANN: I'm wondering how much does your diet differ from the other folks in the bodybuilding world? I mean, we hear about the vegan bodybuilders, but is veganism actually catching on there as we see it doing in other sports?

AMANDA: No, it's not. The last two competitions I've done I was the only person that was there as a meat-free athlete. I actually met another woman who came up to me and she said, "are you a vegan?" 'cause I have this big "go vegan" logo on my training suitcase. And I said, "yeah I am," and she said, "I don't know how you do it." She said, "I was a vegetarian for four years and I started eating meat so that I can compete in bodybuilding." And I was really proud to win first place and she didn't even place in the Top 5. I know that sounds horrible, but...

MARIANN: Nothing succeeds like success. Do you expect that your wins will encourage people to move in the direction of veganism?

AMANDA: I certainly hope so. I definitely feel like it's so far the best way that I've found to advocate for animals.

JASMIN: Now, in addition to your bodybuilding, you have pursued a role as an animal communicator, which I am fascinated by, Amanda. And I don't think any of our listeners has any doubts that it's possible to communicate with animals. But what do *you* mean when you talk about communicating with animals?

AMANDA: Well, I work with animals intuitively. So, just like animals communicate with each other -- if you see two dogs initiate play or guard a food bowl, they are not doing anything. Their body language doesn't really change much, and then all of a sudden they start playing or they start fighting or whatever it is. They're clearly communicating. Anyone that has animals in their home could definitely agree that animals communicate with each other on a nonverbal, sometimes without even body language. And so, through my mind, I do the same with animals. And I teach classes and I have an extremely high success rate. No one has ever left the class not able to communicate. I don't have a special gift. I just tap into what we're all born with. Just, I like to give people the analogy, it's the same as doing push-ups. I'm no more capable of running a marathon or doing a bodybuilding competition than anyone else. I train my body to get in that physical shape, and I train my mind to quiet, to open up, to receive messages from animals.

MARIANN: I'm wondering how your veganism relates to your work in animal communication. I once read this site of an animal communicator, and she wasn't vegetarian, and she was talking about how she intuited from the animals that they wanted to die for humans or something. I don't know, it was just awful.

AMANDA: That's terrible.

MARIANN: How does veganism relate? Do you think it would be possible to do this if you weren't vegan?

AMANDA: Many, many animal communicators -- I've taken so many classes and I've met many other animal communicators over the past six years. And many of them are not vegetarian or vegan, and it's something that really bothers me on a core level, and I think it's a sorry excuse to say, "oh, all animals want to die for us." That's a terrible, sorry excuse. The animals that I've communicated with -- I work at the Gentle Barn, and that's a sanctuary for rescued -- most of them are farm animals that were once in factory farms or with backyard butchers. And their intention of their life was to be slaughtered and killed for meat, and so many of those animals are so deeply scarred. And of course they're so healed from being at the Gentle Barn, but they still have those underlying issues and sadness and pain of feeling like they had no other purpose other than just being bred to die.

JASMIN: I just think that is such an inspiration, especially to know that you came from a background of making these decisions from an ethical perspective and that that's what ultimately made you go both vegetarian and then vegan. And now you're doing such great things, both with your business and with your bodybuilding. So, this is a great example of how we can bring the message of animals and animal rights to all of our circles, even if

they're circles that involve communicating with animals and even if they're circles that involve competing in bodybuilding on a professional level. So, we will definitely be following you and your career, Amanda. And I'm just so grateful to you for doing all that you do and for joining us today on Our Hen House and sharing some inspiration. Thank you for joining us--

AMANDA: Thank you guys.

JASMIN: --and for sharing some insight with us today into these two worlds that we know very little about but we all have common ground on our desire to change the world for animals. So, I appreciate you joining us today, Amanda.

AMANDA: Thank you. I genuinely am so honored to be a part of this program, and I thank you guys so much for what you do in getting the word out there, saving the animals one bite at a time.

JASMIN: Aw. Well, thanks Amanda. Let's definitely stay in touch. Take care of yourself.

AMANDA: Thank you; you as well. Take care.

JASMIN: That was Amanda Riester. Learn more at [facebook.com/stronghealthyvegan](https://facebook.com/stronghealthyvegan).