



Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

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Interview with Omowale Adewale

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **OMOWALE ADEWALE** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 218.*

JASMIN: Join us for our interview now with the amazing Omowale Adewale, otherwise known as Wale. And he's just a phenomenal vegan boxer who is winning competitions and is on this mission to change the world for animals by making 100 people go vegan this year. I love everything he's about, and I'm excited to bring you this interview with Wale.

Omowale Adewale is the cofounder of Grassroots Artists Movement, or GAME, which you can find online at [kickgame.com](#). GAME strengthens youth leadership, builds healthy resources, and empowers artists. Wale is a champion vegan boxer, MMA fighter, track and field collegiate gold medalist, accomplished bodybuilder, and certified USA Boxing coach and fitness trainer right here in New York City.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Wale!

WALE: How are you doing? Thank you for welcoming me.

JASMIN: So great to talk to you. We've been following your work for some time and we're excited about the opportunity to dig in a little bit deeper. Let's start off by having you tell us about your "100 vegan" goal for this year. What is it and how does it work? And how's it going?

WALE: It's going pretty well. And the entire goal is basically to bring more people into veganism, make people healthier, but also kinda understand from a compassionate point of view that it's not about being self-righteous. It's about really understanding that there's rights, not just for humans but for all living things. And it doesn't have to be a sacrifice, so I really try to take people step by step through the process. And the whole idea of having a campaign in doing this is so that I can really find out all the real questions and issues, not just people who are just on the street and who happen to be omnivores and want to have debates and discussions about omnivores versus vegans or paleo versus vegans, but people who genuinely want to be vegan. They want to be healthier. They understand that it is a problem that they are basically relying on another living animal.

So essentially it would be through online media on different -- people text me, people inbox me on Facebook. They ask me all types of questions. I see them offline, and we have discussions outside, so I'm gonna do more of that. I write articles. Anything and everything that I've heard from people in terms of what makes it difficult to become vegan, I try to

address that as much as possible. But I also bring other vegans into the force on that battlefield, and they basically try to give people more insight on how to become vegan with different recipes, workouts, so on and so forth. So, for instance, they might have veg fests that are going on in their city, because I'm in New York, I'm based in New York, but it's also just -- it's global, so whoever might be part of our group who has already been a vegan or who has been on a path to becoming a vegan, they might have insight as well. So it's more building a community of vegans that are not just campaigning but also engaging people who are not vegan and trying to help them the best way possible to become vegan.

MARIANN: I just really love this idea. I love the idea of setting a goal like that, of 100, 'cause that can really motivate you. Can you tell us how and when you went vegan personally?

WALE: Well, I went vegan actually just about 18 months. I haven't been vegan really that long.

JASMIN: Wow. Hit the ground running, huh?

WALE: Exactly. I've been vegetarian for a while, for about 21 years, and so within that time I felt that, you know what? It made no sense that I don't just go all the way and just essentially eat products that do not have the eggs and do not have the milk if I know that there are alternatives. It's not something that is difficult. I can't just go ahead and do it. It's a lot of things in my life that requires discipline, right, just in everybody's life that requires a certain amount of discipline. And so, some things are easier than others. But I felt that it made a lot of sense for me to go ahead and say, you know what? This is not as difficult as me training for a boxing match. It's not as difficult as so many other things, and then also this is going to have more impact on me and other living things as well. And it has already, just spreading to other people. People love the idea, they love it, people who are not vegan because it opens their eyes in an incredible way that they feel like they're having more of an impact on the environment, also on themselves. And also I come at it from a different point of view which I would love to get into a little bit more.

JASMIN: Yeah, tell us. What's your different point of view? We always like to hear a new perspective.

WALE: Well, one of the main things that I've seen, and understanding in terms of talking to some of the omnivores, right? And they'll say, well vegans are aggressive. And then I say, since people are like -- well, there's two things. Well, one is that the marketing that you get every day in terms of maybe a KFC or McDonald's or Burger King, that's really aggressive. And I kinda go into how much money is put in towards that, and you compare that to the money that vegans might put into trying to get the word out about veganism and animals and living creatures in general trying to live better, then there's no comparison, in terms of what's more aggressive economically. But also, what are you seeing marketing wise on a regular basis? What's more aggressive?

And then also, it is aggressive in the sense -- I mean, if it's radical that you want to help something live, then that makes sense to be radical in that sense, but it doesn't make that much sense that you want to be radical because you want to profit over something else that is also living. So you kind of -- and I think they get that a little bit more, but I also try to come at a point of view that's not to knock them and break them down because people who don't know, they just don't know. So you have to sometimes differentiate between who's ignorant

and who is just lashing out out of stupidity because they're trying to toe the particular ideological line. So I believe that a lot of people, I would have to say a lot of vegans, sometimes might turn some people off. And obviously they don't want to do that because they want people -- I mean, we're gonna have -- I mean, the whole idea of campaigning and politicizing a lot of times with veganism is to win people over. And so if I'm trying to win someone over on anything, I'm trying to educate them as much as possible so that they stay with me.

Okay, a lot of times I talk about health, and I go into eating properly, how're you gonna look. And I'll say, look at this athlete. This athlete doesn't eat any meat, so therefore clearly it can be done, and they're doing great. So that's the kind of point of view that I'll try to take. And sometimes they may have a pet, and then I might have to expound a little bit on that. What's the difference between that pig and that dog that you have? So it's just kind of trying to win people over in a way that's not so aggressive, which is kind of at the same time ironic because I'm a fighter.

JASMIN: Yeah.

MARIANN: Well, everybody who cares about the world and who cares about helping people and animals, we all have to become as good at marketing as those Burger Kings. And they're the ones who are doing the evil marketing, not us. But yeah, we have to become skilled at it, and it sounds like you're really working at that. I like that approach. Can you give us an idea actually of what you eat? Like, what are your basic foods? What forms the vegan backbone of your diet?

WALE: Well, great. I post a lot of stuff on Instagram. And I have to say that I'm really trying to -- my cornerstone a lot is greens in terms of chard, kale, spinach. I really -- those are the vegetables, the foods that I really love. I just have to have those on a regular basis. But some of the things that -- I love to bake a lot. So I'm generally using a lot of different grains, a lot of different types of oats, so I might do granola. I might just have just rolled oats. I also might do steel cut outs. And for breakfast I might have steel cut oats with bananas and I'm gonna get a lot of protein and a lot of iron and a lot of other vitamins and minerals just for that breakfast. And I might do some pancakes as well.

MARIANN: We'll be over!

JASMIN: Yeah, you're making us a little hungry here. I think we're coming over tomorrow for breakfast.

WALE: And that's just my breakfast!

JASMIN: That's just breakfast. Jeez!

WALE: I might do wild rice. I might go ahead and do -- jasmine brown rice is huge. A lot of times people say they don't like brown rice, but there's different types of brown rice. You could do sweet brown rice as well, long grain, short grain. And I just try to encourage them that you can buy a lot of these foods bulk.

MARIANN: I know you work with children a lot. And are they surprised by what you eat?

WALE: They're surprised all the time. But the amazing thing is that they *are* surprised, because when they find out, it's like they have something special. They've discovered something amazing. I have this conversation with young people all the time. See, I work with some kids that are five and six and seven, but I also work with some teens that do have a background in which they've been adjudicated, they've been in the process in terms of being arrested.

And so I work with those kids, those teens, and I ask them every day -- I work with them twice a week, and the question I always ask them: What did you eat today? Sometimes they come, and just like what you were saying, in terms of trying to be healthy, it's not just being vegan. It's also understanding and knowing what you eat and how you prepare your food. Sometimes they get to me at four o'clock and they haven't eaten. Those who do eat, bacon, egg and cheese happens to be the preeminent breakfast for them. And one of the big problems with that is because just the lack of education, and also they don't cook. They don't have the access to that kind of understanding that cooking your food kinda opens you up and makes you more powerful and more resourceful.

And I explained to them in terms that I don't eat any meat, and they're always shocked by this. I can still pick up more weight, about twice as my weight. That's 300 pounds. I'm only about 170. That's what they want to do. A lot of times, this is what they want to do. They want to look great, and that's the beginning of the conversation. And usually for young people I start there and then go into being compassionate later on, and I think that's the building block in terms of helping people not to go back.

JASMIN: Yeah, I love that idea, and that's a great thing to do with kids. And talking about kids and about food, I know you also talk to them about bullying as well. What do you tell them and how does that relate to your vegan outreach?

WALE: When I talk to them about bullying, it's a lot of an easier concept for young people to understand because they -- for an adult, they might have been bullied, but a young person is more likely to have been bullied that week, that day, school, on the way to school, from school, or in the home. And I explain to them a few different ways on how they can combat bullying is that -- one is being sure of yourself and really taking care of yourself because at the same time, what kind of complements that is self-defense. And the best self-defense is a self-defense that you do not have to use when you're very secure with yourself, and just understanding and just having a number of different ways to get out of certain situations where you don't need to be. Basically when I train them in boxing or kickboxing, it's about not being afraid of being prepared to block and counter. You'd be surprised how often that they're on the right track and they know exactly what to do. With bullying, they don't have to use any physical strength if they can just show that they have more confidence in themselves.

MARIANN: Yeah, I think that's great advice, and it's great advice for kids to do anything to speak up for themselves and to speak up for others and to speak up for animals and to be the person they want to be, which might include being vegan. Let's hope it does. I just want to get back a bit to your fighting. Do you change your diet a lot when you're in training, and do you ever have any trouble getting enough calories or enough protein to keep you strong?

WALE: You know, I've never had the problem of protein. You know, I've actually -- the times I've ever been in a match, I've always been the stronger person. I haven't always been the

best or tactical fighter, but I've always been the stronger one. And you could ask my opponents. When you fight, guys at the end generally become good pals or everybody's -- this sportsmanship, and it's very real. So, they have no problem at the end when it's all said and done in saying, wow, you're very strong. And then when they know that I'm vegan -- I have a fighter who actually -- he's beaten me, but he said that I was stronger. But he was better in terms of grappling. But now he wants to be vegan. He just told me that, listen, I'm vegan for a week now. Isn't that incredible?

MARIANN: That's great. That's really great to hear.

WALE: People who do -- who have been relying on meat for power are now coming to me about how to actually remain powerful and be able to reduce the weight.

MARIANN: That is such a great thing to hear. It's a very unique form of activism, getting into boxing matches with people and then they go vegan as a result. But a lot of people out there, they think of boxing as a violent sport and they can't put it together with veganism, which is based in nonviolence really, and is for you as well. I hear you saying that. How do they go together for you?

WALE: Well, I do want to clarify one thing is that this is -- I was talking about MMA fighting. I do both, but the scenario I was bringing up is the MMA fighter. But in terms of both, I've had, both in boxing and also in MMA fighting, they're both a very -- well at first they're very surprised that I'm vegan. It just doesn't make any sense to them until I start going into it. But in terms of me making sense, I mean, it is violent. At the end of the day, it is something that can be very violent, but it's something that is sanctioned. And when I say sanctioned, I mean there's a referee, there's a doctor on hand. And the difference between fighting and just going out and killing or having somebody else kill an animal for you to eat is that the fighter then volunteers. The pig is not volunteering, the cow is not volunteering to be slaughtered. And we're not fighting to the death.

One of the big things that I really try to teach with fighting is, as tough as it can be, it really helps you deal with fear in a very real way. And you'll hear a lot of fighters, if you ask them like, what is the toughest part? It's training. Training is more difficult than getting in that ring. You talk to somebody else, everybody thinks that the actual fighting is tougher than the training, right? How can the training be more grueling than the actual fight? But people who are training, we're training for two months on end and that fight is gonna be maybe -- it *might* be eight minutes, nine minutes. That's gonna be over soon. But it's our way of really kind of dealing with a lot of stresses. And some people go to boxing or different martial arts, usually it'd be striking martial arts as opposed to grappling or wrestling, to get out a lot of frustration, to get out a lot of the stresses. And I feel like that helps me a lot tremendously just in terms of just, even when I'm just working out, I'm just sparring, but it's very helpful in terms of being able to relax. And then at the same time I feel really just -- I feel like myself. I feel like I can deal with things a lot easier, a lot calmer. I mean, it just feels great to me.

JASMIN: Yeah, I could see. I mean, I love the way you're putting this together, and I cannot believe you've only been vegan for 18 months. It just blows my mind. To think of all that you've accomplished already just makes me feel so hopeful about all you will continue to accomplish in your career. And you are such a passionate advocate for the cause, and as Mariann just said, you're doing it in such unique ways. And we're just thrilled to have you in

the movement, in the corner of the animals. Thank you so much for joining us today on Our Hen House.

WALE: Thank you so much in having me. I appreciate it. Thank you, Jasmin and Mariann.

JASMIN: Learn more about Wale at kickgame.com.