



As an only child growing up on the ninth floor of a Manhattan high-rise, Jane Velez-Mitchell had one constant companion: her little dog, Mr. Monday. But when her parents decided to move to a better apartment with wall-to-wall carpeting, her father found the beloved pet another home.

"I think I became an animal activist right then," she says. "I was like, 'This is not right. Animals are part of the family. They shouldn't be just given away like this.' It just devastated me. And ever since then I've been fighting for animals."

Over the years, the award-winning TV journalist has brought worldwide attention to a range of cruelties—from wild horse roundups to dolphin slaughter. Every Tuesday, the Jane Velez-Mitchell daily show on HLN (formerly CNN Headline News) includes an adoption promotion segment. Rico's Rescues—named after a Chihuahua Velez-Mitchell's mother adopted in Puerto Rico—showcases dogs available at Southern California shelters. On Fridays, the show tackles a hard-hitting topic in animal protection; recent episodes covered the use of great apes in invasive research, government-sponsored wolf killing programs, and gestation crates in the pork industry.

Her work has garnered three HSUS Genesis Awards, but Velez-Mitchell doesn't view herself as a hero. "The real heroes in our movement are the ones who cannot accept awards," she says. "They are the ones who go undercover, often risking their lives, to expose what happens to animals behind closed doors."

In this edited interview with senior editor Julie Falconer, Velez-Mitchell discusses why animal protection is a calling and a professional responsibility.

"I'M AN ANIMAL ACTIVIST BECAUSE I CARE ABOUT WORLD HUNGER. I CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT. I CARE ABOUT CHILDREN'S HEALTH. I THINK [ANIMAL PROTECTION] IS GOING TO BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST ... SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS OF THE 21ST CENTURY."

At what point did your concern for animals and your career begin to intersect?

As I was evolving, as I became a journalist, I started to realize more and more what was going on behind closed doors, whether it was laboratories or factory farms. I remember when I was a reporter in Philadelphia looking at some horrific footage of animal experimentation. And I said, "This is morally wrong; I have to do something about it." I feel journalists are obligated to speak for the voiceless and the helpless. So on my show, we speak for voiceless children, we speak for voiceless seniors, we speak for voiceless women, and we also speak for the voiceless animals.

What message do you have for your fellow journalists?

I don't have all the answers, but the one thing I do know is that these stories are worthy of serious coverage. I would like to urge all journalists to expand their circle of compassion and their circle of responsibility to include all sentient beings. If we simply renege on our responsibility as journalists to cover these stories, we're going to have problems. And it's not just about the animals. It's about human health. It's about our tax dollars and what they're being used for. There are many animal issues that impact humans.

People want to see these stories. They're hungry for information. Just today I got four or five requests to cover different animal is-





Velez-Mitchell carried a message of compassion at Farm Sanctuary's Walk for Farm Animals.

sues. It breaks my heart because I can't do them all. That's why I'd like other journalists to step up to the plate.

Which issues do you think you've had the biggest impact on? We did a story about attempts to build a monkey breeding farm for experimentation in Puerto Rico. Most of the people of Puerto Rico were completely unaware that this was happening. We kind of broke the story. The Puerto Rico Bar Association's animal rights subcommittee got involved, and then a state senator started questioning the permitting process. It was a battle that went all the way up through the courts, and the facility did not open.

If you could make the world aware of one animal protection issue, what would it be? Factory farming. That's why my TV show covers the undercover investigations by The HSUS, Mercy for Animals, and other groups that reveal what is really going on inside these giant facilities. About 9 billion cows, pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, and other farm animals are raised and killed for food in the U.S. every year, and the way that is being done is an abomination. It must change, and it's up to consumers to say: Enough.

Are you seeing any progress? I think there is a speed change in the United States. Americans are decent people, and when they see something that's morally wrong, they take action. And Americans are looking at factory farming, and they're saying, "No, we don't want to see pigs in gestation crates where they can't even turn around. We don't want to see male baby calves ripped from their mothers and put in crates. We don't want to see hens kept in battery cages where they can't even stretch their wings." So things are changing.

Factory farming also has a huge negative impact on the environment and is a major contributing factor in the obesity crisis, which is causing our health costs to soar and impacting our deficit. I'm an animal activist because I care about world hunger. I care about the environment. I care about children's health. I think this is going to be one of the biggest, if not the biggest, social justice movements of the 21st century. When it comes to animals, we're behaving in an unsustainable fashion, and we have to change. And that change is going to be good for us on many levels. And I look forward to doing these stories.

You were a speaker at The HSUS's Taking Action for Animals conference last year.

What advice do you most want to share with young activists? My advice is to do something for animals every single day and stay out of the results. Just keep plugging away. Every office potluck is a chance to showcase healthy, plant-based eating. Every holiday is a chance to adopt some animals through a sanctuary and make that your gift. Get on email and write your elected officials about supporting legislation like the Great Ape Protection [and Cost Savings] Act. Stay positive. Remember that old saying—"Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed individuals to change the world." And we're not that small any more.

▶ **JANE VELEZ-MITCHELL** airs on HLN at 7 p.m. EST (4 p.m. PST); visit hlnv.com/jane for more. **ON THE IPAD:** Watch Velez-Mitchell at the 24th Genesis Awards.

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