



Ben Shaberman

## Mainstream Messenger

**What do vegans and Eve Elsner** have in common? Ben Shaberman. In his collection of essays, *The Vegan Monologues*, Shaberman explores veganism like Elsner explores vaginas. Shaberman's work fits neatly into the sometimes malleable category of creative non-fiction, and just as Elsner's smash hit brought attention to ladies' parts and brought a discussion of female sexuality into the mainstream, Shaberman aims to not only explore his own veganism, but also engage his audience. "There's a tight bond that occurs between writer and reader, and it is a great opportunity for the writer to deliver a message. There's no soundtrack or special visual effects. The reader builds the images and the story in his own head, and that makes the reading experience personal and empowering," he says.

The relationship between writer and reader isn't the only one that influences Shaberman's work. Social responsibility is at the forefront of his thinking, and the myriad ways that social-justice movements influence one another come heavily into play. About why he went veg, he says, **"I became vegetarian in 1991 after the first Gulf War. I was looking for a more non-violent path in my life. That was about the same time I gave up TV, which had tragically glorified the mass devastation in Iraq."**

Veganism came as a tribute to his girlfriend's cat, which further lead Shaberman to rescue work, and he's a self-described peacenik. So, we've got women's rights, veganism, rescue work, peacemaking, and non-violence all vying for space on Shaberman's pages. This makes sense considering his original inspiration for becoming a writer. "Kurt Vonnegut was the first writer to capture my attention. I was about 14 years old when I read his classic anti-war story, *Slaughterhouse Five*. While Vonnegut was fearless about criticizing the violent absurdities in our society, he was also clever, sardonic, and very imaginative."

**Year went vegan:** 2004

**New Year's resolution:** Don't get so miffed by the stupid things people do

**Favorite author:** Russell Banks

**Favorite book:** 2001: A Space Odyssey

**Personal hero:** People who rescue animals 

VN associate editor **Abigail Young** is making a promise to read more this year.