

Tracye McQuirter:

When it comes to health, it is no surprise that African Americans experience the highest rates of chronic diseases that are preventable and in particular, black women have the highest rates of heart disease, stroke, certain cancers or diabetes. We came into the pandemic with that, the pandemic has made that worse, so if you are already coming in with these preexisting conditions, you are likely if you get the disease to get sicker and die in the highest numbers from it. What do we do about that? Well, there are lots of things that can be done about that. One of the things is to take back control of our health by changing the way we eat.

Rip Esselstyn:

If you haven't purchased your ticket for Plant-Stock 2020, make it happen. It's going to be a doozy this year, as my family and I give you a virtual front-row seat to the Esselstyn Family Farm and you're going to be rocking and rolling with the Plant-Strong rock stars who will be making appearances like Dr. Michael Greger, Michael Klaper, Dr. Neal Barnard, Jean Bower, and today's guest, the ageless vegan herself, Tracye McQuirter. Tracye is, without question, one of the trailblazers of the plant-based movement, who has spent the last 30 years coaching people to go vegan for life.

Rip Esselstyn:

She's the author of the book *By Any Greens Necessary* that came out around the same time as the *Engine 2 Diet*, as well as her most recent book, *The Ageless Vegan*. Today we reminisce about her own journey to veganism, because of one inspirational lecture she heard 35 years ago, while at Amherst College, from civil rights activist Dick Gregory. We also dive into her role as author and nutrition coach from the perspective of a black female and her own worldwide initiative, *10,000 Black Vegan Women Movement*. Her goal, empower people of color to improve their health, the ultimate social justice.

Rip Esselstyn:

Everyone has their own motivating and inspirational moment that one thing that finally lights to spark to inspire real change within. Tracye's epiphany inspired her life's work to help others fall in love with the vegan lifestyle. Perhaps this episode with Tracye will be your spark for lasting action.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want to welcome Tracye McQuirter to the Plant-Strong podcast. This is season two. Our theme is *The Heart of a Hero* and you, young lady have a huge heart. You're doing so much good in this plant based movement. I think back, Tracye and I really consider you a kindred spirit of mine. We'll dive into this, but I think you and I have both been eating this way for 33 years. I feel like we've been on parallel tracks. You wrote your first book in 2010, I wrote mine in 2009. This is a cause and a movement that burns very deep within both of us.

Tracye McQuirter:

Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

And me, obviously, as a white male, you as a black female, and I think we're just trying to do our best to get this word out and this message to as many people as possible. It's long overdue that I have you on the podcast, so welcome.

Tracye McQuirter:

Well, thank you for those lovely words and it's always great to be with you and it's fabulous to be on your podcast. And yes, we have been at this a very long time. Haven't we?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yes, we have. I think the last time... It pains me to say that that I think I've only met you once in person, and I could be wrong and that was in Washington, DC in 2010.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, I think you're right. It feels like it's more than that, but I think we physically met when you were on book tour, and then there was a movie that you were in.

Rip Esselstyn:

Forks Over Knives.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah. That was Forks Over Knives?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

Wow. That was a while ago. I think you're right but we know we know each other and each other's work.

Rip Esselstyn:

Exactly.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

People always ask me, "Rip, what inspired you to go plant based?" Obviously for me, it was my father and his groundbreaking research at the Cleveland Clinic for you, and it's right around the same time period, the mid '80s. What in the world inspired you way, way, way back then?

Tracye McQuirter:

Right. What inspired me? First, the first person that really inspired me to think about healthier eating was my mom. We were omnivores growing up in DC and my mom, I'm the youngest of three daughters. There's five years within a range of the three of us, three girls. When my mom was pregnant with my oldest sister, she just started reading about how to have a healthy pregnancy. We were omnivores eating the standard American diet. This is the mid '60s or early '60s and mid '50s. That's what got her started. Although we were omnivores, we didn't have sugary cereals, we didn't have sodas in the house, we didn't have candy jars.

Tracye McQuirter:

We had whole wheat bread, skim milk, total cereal, I hated it. Fortunately, I had cousins who had lots of junky food. We got to eat over there, but I was familiar with the concept of healthier eating. Fast forward, and I'm a sophomore at Amherst College in 1986. Our Black Student Union brought Dick Gregory to campus to talk about the state of black America political, economic, social state of black America and he decided to talk about the plight of black America and how unhealthfully most folks eat and he connected to the same dots politically, economically, culturally, socially.

Tracye McQuirter:

We knew Dick Gregory as a political activist and comedic genius, but we didn't know that he had been vegan for 20 years by that point, and that was because of the practice of nonviolence during the Civil Rights Movement. He was a right hand person to King and he extended the practice of nonviolence to compassion for animals. This was in 1965, and he was also though a self-professed overeater, he weighed more than 300 pounds, he drank and smoked excessively. There was a woman named Dr. Alvenia Fulton who was a naturopathic physician, a black woman on the south side of Chicago who had opened the very first vegan establishment on the south side of Chicago in the 1950s.

Tracye McQuirter:

She introduced him to veganism for health reasons in 1967. By the time he came to my campus in '86, he'd been vegan for 20 years, gave this speech and it completely rocked my world. And I have to tell you that my first year in college, I gained 25 pounds because I was away from home, and I didn't have to eat any of that healthy food and I ate hot dogs and pizzas every day. You can imagine how powerful his talk was for me to decide that I'm going to change the way I eat based on a lecture. I immediately gave up hamburgers and hotdogs for a week and then I was like, "You know what, Dick Gregory is crazy." But I couldn't get what he said out of my mind.

Tracye McQuirter:

I just started to read everything that was available at the time. This is 10 years before the internet, so we had to go to the library and my mother and one of my sisters read them with me. Just to bring it to a close, there's a year and a half from the start [inaudible 00:09:09] do it to actually doing it. Going from vegetarian to vegan. Within a year and a half, I was fully vegan at that point.

Rip Esselstyn:

You said you were rocked to the core by his talk. Did you go up and talk to him afterwards?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, I did. I remember vividly sitting there after his lecture for a few minutes, just silent, just silently sitting there shocked. It was a huge lecture hall and there were people going up to him and I just remember sitting there just stunned. I remember that. I remember where I was sitting, everything. I think he stayed on campus for a while and he may have had lunch with us or whatever. I do remember vaguely that but it was really just a vivid memory of sitting there in silence, stunned. Lunch was next, so I was like, "What am I going to eat? I don't know what to eat." I was just devastated.

Rip Esselstyn:

How many people were part of the, I think you said the black soc-

Tracye McQuirter:

The Black-

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, the Black Society at Amherst because...

Tracye McQuirter:

Well, it was the Black Student Union of Amherst College that brought him to campus, but it was a lecture for the whole five college community. There's Smith, Mount Holyoke, Hampshire, and University of Massachusetts at Amherst. It was a big lecture hall; it was open to... It was primarily black students from these colleges because it was a BSU event. This is what he was doing. I later, much later found out he was going around to college campuses, speaking about, we called it the umbrella term of vegetarianism at the time, but he was talking about veganism around the country to college students, as he should.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, it's obvious that that lecture and what he said had a profound impact on you. In fact, you dedicated your second book to him. Ageless Vegan, and if I'm not mistaken, he passed away in 2017.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Did you ever get-

Tracye McQuirter:

Right before I believe I was writing the book, the second book and it came out in 2018. I did want to dedicate it to him.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Did you ever get a chance to meet him?

Tracye McQuirter:

I did. After that, several times. In fact, one of his sons was my chiropractor. My mom's chiropractor. Dick Gregory had a residence here in DC, so I would see him at events. His daughter, Ayanna Gregory is a singer and a performer. He would be at her events; I would see him there. I would go up and talk to him and let him know he changed my life and he was always very gracious. I remember one time I was at his son's office for a chiropractic appointment. He was my mother's chiropractor too. I had never told his son this story, so I just decided that day to tell him that story.

Tracye McQuirter:

And he said, "Okay. I want you to go back to my office." And I said, "Okay." He's like, "Wait for me there." I open the door and there's Dick Gregory.

Rip Esselstyn:

Ha ha ha.

Tracye McQuirter:

I was thrilled. I sat in the office with Dick Gregory, I happened to be carrying around my first book at the time. There was a period, you may have experienced this. Sometimes you just think, "I'm going to take my book today, somebody..." You know what I mean? "I'm going to talk to my chiropractor. I'm going to show him this book." That's all I was thinking. I had my book, and I showed it to him and I told him the story and we got to sit and chat for about an hour. It was fabulous. We just talked and talked, I mainly listened and he said, "Your next book should be a children's book about vegan." And I was like, "Got it." It wasn't. I haven't done it yet, but it's still in my mind.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

I have had this experience.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, good. Love it. Love it, love it, love it. How do you describe yourself when people ask you, "Hey Tracye, how do you eat?" Do you say you're plant based? Do you say you're vegan? Do you say you're plant-strong? What do you say?

Tracye McQuirter:

I say I'm vegan.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, definitely. When I write about veganism, when I'm doing a lecture or something like that, just for variety, I will say vegan and plant based. Sometimes I'll say plant exclusive. I think when your book came out, one of your... Maybe when your first book came out, I was like, "I love that term plant-strong." I would say, "As Rip Esselstyn says, plant-strong." Then there was plant rich, somebody was saying. I've used different terms, but mainly it's vegan and plant based, and I use them interchangeably for variety.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. No, I guess I'm wondering, it seems like one of your plights is to try and get as many black women as possible to go vegan. Correct?

Tracye McQuirter:

Wow, plight is a negative term.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay.

Tracye McQuirter:

One of my passions if that's what you mean.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, yes. My bad. Yes. And you recently started a movement, right?

Tracye McQuirter:

Mm-hmm (Affirmative).

Rip Esselstyn:

Can you tell me what's the name of that movement? And then the timeliness of it could not have been better.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah. Well, I started a movement called 10,000 Black Vegan Women. I'm a word nerd, so forgive me for that plight thing.

Rip Esselstyn:

No, please. Help me.

Tracye McQuirter:

You help me too. Yeah. I started this program 10,000 Black Vegan Women Because this is the 10th anniversary of my first book *By Any Greens Necessary*, which was the first vegan diet book for black women. These last 10 years, I am actually very proud to say been one of the most influential vegan books and particularly when it comes to popularizing veganism among this generation of African Americans. It's helped thousands of folks go vegan, particularly black women, so for the anniversary, I wanted to do something even bigger and bolder to commemorate that memorable. I thought having 10,000 black women go vegan together in one year, in 2020.

Tracye McQuirter:

That's why I chose this year because it's the 10-year anniversary of that book. I soft launched the program in February, COVID-19 hits and I decided to move it back. It's going to be a free online program. That was great. It was already online but because we were in such an unknown state in terms of what we can eat, all of it at that time in February and early March, I decided to move it back to May. Then as we approached May and we're still in this precarious state, I decided to move it back to October. When people sign up for the program, they get now a free weekend vegan two-day jumpstart guide.

Tracye McQuirter:

They can download that, there's eight recipes and meal planning, grocery shopping list, meal prep tips, so they can go vegan right away from the weekend and they also get a weekly email from me with nutrition tips, inspiration. 6500.

Rip Esselstyn:

6500?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

We got to get 3500 more.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah. 3500 more, we're averaging about 50 women a day and women from around the world, actually, but we'll get there and people can still sign up after October.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yes. I want to get hit 10 before October for sure. That is ongoing as we lead up to the official launch in October and the reason as you say that it's timely and even more important than ever, is because we are seeing that the folks who are hardest hit by the pandemic, the folks who are getting sick and dying in the highest numbers are black folks. The root cause of that is systemic white supremacy and one of the symptoms of that is higher rates of chronic disease. Systemic white supremacy affects us in health, education, housing, economics. Every aspect of life. That's what it's structured to do.

Tracye McQuirter:

When it comes to health, it is no surprise that African Americans experience the highest rates of chronic diseases that are preventable and in particular, black women have the highest rates of heart disease, stroke, certain cancers and diabetes. We came into the pandemic with that, the pandemic has made that worse. If you are already coming in with these preexisting conditions, you are likely if you get the disease to get sicker and die in the highest numbers from it. What do we do about that? Well, there are lots of things that can be done about that. One of the things is to take back control of our health by changing the way we eat.

Tracye McQuirter:

There's resistance to systemic white supremacy, to police brutality and then all of this police brutality, this stark relief also, With Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many other people who were being killed in a three-week period by police. What I say about that, all of this is happening. We're dying in highest numbers from preexisting chronic disease and one of the best ways to remedy that and take back control of our health is to eat healthier plant based foods because those are the healthiest foods to eat so that if a pandemic occurs again, we are less likely to get it, to be sick and to die in these highest numbers.

Tracye McQuirter:

Also, with the police brutality happening on top of that, consistently, but it stark relief because of these videos and the particular lynching, this police officer lynching George Floyd and the worldwide outcry for me, I look at that and it's devastating, it's paralyzing, it's traumatic. When you look at the system as a

whole in terms of police brutality against black people and people of color, there are 1000 plus black folks, people of color who are killed by police every year, in these types of instances. Police brutality, killed by vigilantes like with Ahmaud Arbery and those three white men who killed him.

Tracye McQuirter:

Or and, not but, that's traumatic that is ongoing for a hundred years. We also know that 800 African Americans die every day from preventable diet related diseases. That's more than 300,000 people a year. You've got 1000 plus here, you've got 300,000 plus here, both traumatic, preventable issues. We have national and worldwide outcry about this 1000 plus but not about this 300,000 plus, and I'm always thinking about that. There are always people working on it. Black folks have been leaders, pioneers, trailblazers in the vegan movement. We were plant based, not plant exclusive in west and central Africa.

Tracye McQuirter:

We know we have a long tradition of this, but the knowledge and the outcry about it is just not there and it should be. You have people who are victims who are being killed and victimized and brutalized by police in this way and you have people protesting about it, resisting about it and it's been ongoing for generations. But you have many of these folks who then are eating food that is hastening their death, the standard American diet. That is yet another reason why this is so important because we're going to be resisting, we're going to be activists in these many ways, we must take care of ourselves.

Rip Esselstyn:

It doesn't matter if you're a lifelong athlete or a weekend warrior. When you eat clean fuel, you're able to perform at a higher level. The same is absolutely true for our pets. The better they eat, the more active and vibrant they are. In fact, when I'm riding my mountain bike, my dog Jade runs right along with me with the energy and vibrancy of a young pup, thanks to Wild Earth, dog food. I run on clean plant based protein and so does she. To learn more, visit the episode page at plantstrongpodcast.com to claim up to 50% off your order.

Tracye McQuirter:

We must be healthy. For me, this is a way that Dick Gregory talked about veganism in 1986. This is the way I have always thought about it. All of these things are interconnected, they're never separate. This whole period has just again, brought all of these things that are already connected to the fore in my mind and many others.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Well, to me it just-

Tracye McQuirter:

[inaudible 00:24:42] that long answer.

Rip Esselstyn:

No, that was a beautiful answer and to me, it shines such a wonderful light, the work that you're doing, and the advocacy and the passion that you have for getting this word out to black people specifically, it

seems like black women. If you can get the black women, you're probably going to get the black families, etc.

Tracye McQuirter:

Absolutely. That's absolutely right.

Rip Esselstyn:

Let me ask you this, and I want to go back just a little bit to the word veganism and I'm wondering if you feel like in your culture, the black culture, that word veganism carries some baggage with it and all the, "You know what, that's white food" and stuff like that or do you feel like that's not the case?

Tracye McQuirter:

I have never felt that was the case. Again, it's the... The way that I'll answer that is this. First, I learned about veganism from Dick Gregory and then when I took my junior year away that next year, I went to Nairobi, Kenya, the first year and I couldn't be vegetarian, although I wanted to be. But I had two experiences with animals on safari that made me know I didn't want to eat them again. I go back home, the next semester, I'm in DC, I'm going to Howard University and I'm walking back and forth to campus. I find out that there is a large black vegan and vegetarian community, right near Howard University that started the first 100% vegan restaurants, cafes, carry outs and healthy stores in the nation's capital.

Tracye McQuirter:

Starting in the 1970s, there were 14 of them. Again, this is 1987 before the internet. My mom and I immersed ourselves in this community. We learned how to cook. There were cooking demonstrations all the time. There were lectures, they were bringing people around the country. We went to these lectures, people just in the community were holding court, they were raw food vegans. They were people who were African, Hebrew, Israelites or people from the Nation of Islam. There was soul food, vegetarian restaurant, which until recently had the largest chain of vegan restaurants around the world, 14 in location. This is the community that I learned how to be vegan from.

Tracye McQuirter:

When we were protesting, I think at that time was the Iraq war, when we were having rallies and organizing and doing protests, there were always vegan food trucks. You didn't have to bring your food; you didn't have to worry about anything. There was always food there. This is a long answer to your question, because for me, veganism has always been black. It has always been a part of my culture. I still, 33 years later, know more black vegans than I know white vegans and you know I know most folks.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, it's-

Tracye McQuirter:

It's never been a white thing. The term itself, we started that with vegetarian as an umbrella term for vegan, vegetarian, raw foodist, breatharians. You know what I mean?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

The term changed but the idea that it's a white thing was never my experience. And honestly, I thought that this was the experience of most folks around the country that wherever there were large black communities and cities, there were black vegetarian societies, there were black outlets, black restaurants, cafes, the whole nine yards. I assumed that for years.

Rip Esselstyn:

The reason I asked this question is because I recently interviewed Dr. Jarik Conrad, who will be next week's guest on the podcast. He wrote a book called *The Fragile Mind* and in it, he tells the story about having his parents over for dinner and when they saw how he was eating, his mother asked him why he was eating white people food. I wanted to know if Tracye encountered this as well.

Tracye McQuirter:

I can't answer for what most people think, that's number one.

Rip Esselstyn:

I know you can't. You can't. Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

I can't and number two, you can answer what most white people think about veganism, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

They don't. Most white people, they're not vegan. They're not.

Tracye McQuirter:

But most black people aren't vegan either, but we are the fastest growing vegan and vegetarian demographic in the country, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

8% of black folks are vegan or vegetarian as compared to 3% of whites and then fewer Latinx communities, Asian American communities, native communities. There's that and it's always been like that, but the majority of us eat the standard American diet. So, yes. There is definitely that. If you're speaking about not just my personal experience with it, but the broader experience, absolutely. For a variety of reasons, folks haven't been introduced to the information and sometimes when they are introduced to the information, it depends on where it's coming from.

Tracye McQuirter:

They may think that it's a white thing, or it's a skinny white woman thing, but my experience teaching veganism 30 plus years is that once I connect the dots the way that Dick Gregory connected the dots the people instantly get it. It's not a topic that I address, it's a non-issue for me.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. One more comment and then I want to move on. Okay?

Tracye McQuirter:

Okay.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want you to know how much I loved this book. Can you see it?

Tracye McQuirter:

Aww. Thank you.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Look at all my notes and everything. It was spectacular and I recommend it to anybody that wants to delve into and start this lifestyle. It's fantastic. I love the way you wrote it, I love the way you brought different people into it, but your relation or I shouldn't say relationship but the way you were so motivated by Dick Gregory and one of the things that he said and maybe he said this during your talk at Amherst was, and this is regarding to soul food. He said, "The quickest way to wipe out a group of people is to put them on a soul food diet."

Rip Esselstyn:

Then I would imagine that if I love this kind of food and I didn't want it to be taken away from me, I would maybe turn to Bryant Terry and all the great stuff he's doing in creating soul food that's healthy, but I-

Tracye McQuirter:

They have soul vegetarian restaurants. As I mentioned, they have been around since at least the early '80s. Specifically doing vegan soul food. They started in Atlanta. They were the largest chain of vegan soul food restaurants. They have pioneered this movement in terms of vegan soul food in many cities around the country, including DC. Most black folks don't know that or know about it. That's the issue, and they have cookbooks they have... That's already a movement and a subject that they've pioneered from which Bryant Terry and me and other folks have benefited and blossomed from. Right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yes, it's definitely an issue with the cuisine when we... I'll give you an example. My family has been having Thanksgiving every year together, my extended family in DC hundreds of people, have a really large family from since before I was born for more than 60 years and when my mother and sister and I first became vegan, we would bring all of this vegan food and we'd be vegan evangelists. "Try this food. Have this." All of that. We were teased mercilessly. I don't recall people saying, "This food is white." I just recall my relatives saying, "What is this food?" You know what I mean? "Why are you eating this? Why aren't you eating the fried chicken and the mac and cheese?"

Tracye McQuirter:

My friends, I don't recall them saying that, but they were just like, "What is this food? Why are you eating this?" Again, I may just have really been privileged growing up in a majority black city all this time that I've been vegan, early on and being immersed in this. This notion that it's a white thing just was not my experience. Even when it was new to people and being introduced to it immediately we had this community and these resources to refer them to. We didn't have to refer to white things. You know what I mean?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

That's my honest answer. This has not been my experience and I assume that that was the case with most black folks too until I learned otherwise.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Thank you. I have a question for you.

Tracye McQuirter:

Okay.

Rip Esselstyn:

I have never heard a word that's on the front of this book before and I'd love for you to explain to me what it means.

Tracye McQuirter:

P-H-A-T?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yes, but let me. Your subtitle is, A revolutionary guide for black women who want to eat great, get healthy, lose weight and look phat. Spelled P-AH-A-T. What in the world does that mean?

Tracye McQuirter:

Rip, you didn't look it up? You had-

Rip Esselstyn:

I didn't because I wanted it to be authentic when you tell me what it means. I'm imagining it's got to be something that's positive.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, of course. It just means curvy, thick. That's all. Mm-hmm (Affirmative). P-H-A-T. It's an acronym for something that I don't recall at the moment that I would have to Google too, but that's all it means. It just means thick and curvy and that's what...

Rip Esselstyn:

That's probably something that's very well-

Tracye McQuirter:

Normally, we tend to be curvier, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

And a lot of women don't want to lose those curves. Basically, I was saying you can still be curvy, just like folks who are fitness experts and they have clients and their clients are afraid they're going to lose their curves. It's the same thing. You can still be phat.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I love it. I love it. That's really clever. That's very clever.

Tracye McQuirter:

Thank you.

Rip Esselstyn:

You've been at this 33 years, what would you say was the hardest thing for you, Tracye, to give up?

Tracye McQuirter:

Cheese, for sure. It was definitely cheese. I love cheese so much and I will also say that I never liked fish, I never liked seafood. I like crab and lobster and scallops, I think but just fish, never liked it, never liked eggs. Those were two things, bam, I didn't have to deal with. A lot of times fish can be the hardest thing for folks to let go of and they also have this notion that it's healthier, but it was cheese for me. Really, it took me about a year and a half to let go of cheese and the deal with that was that I knew that I might never come to dislike the smell of cheese, the look of cheese and the taste of cheese. I had come to dislike the look of meat in the grocery store.

Tracye McQuirter:

The notion of how it's produced, factory farming, the slaughterhouse. All of that, the smell of it, barbecues, it repulsed me, but cheese never did in that time and so I realized that that might never be the case. I had to make it mind over matter. The way that I did this was I had this goal, I am going to let

go of cheese. That's my goal, I'm going to reach it. I would read everything I could that was available at the time about how poorly it's produced, how unhealthy it is, it's one of the biggest sources of saturated fat in the American diet. It definitely was then and still one of the or if not be, there's so many other types of processed products now, and I watched videos.

Tracye McQuirter:

While I was eating cheese and taking one step forward and then two steps back, I was still reading and watching and having conversations with people. All of these things were still working together. What I tell people is, have this goal in mind to be vegan and if you slip up and you take two steps back start again the next day but don't stop talking to people who are already vegan or transitioning with you. Continue to watch videos, read the books, because that is still working on your mind. It's all still working, and it will eventually quit and that's what happened to me. The momentary pleasure of a piece of cheese in my mouth wasn't worth the health risk.

Tracye McQuirter:

Finally, it just quits and I haven't [inaudible 00:39:46] for it anymore.

Rip Esselstyn:

I like telling people, because you're right. That to me is probably the hardest thing for people to drop is the cheese and once you understand what's going on with cheese and the case of morphemes and the saturated fats.

Tracye McQuirter:

That's it. Exactly.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. That's why we affectionately call it dairy crack, right?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Because it is-

Tracye McQuirter:

I've ever heard that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I like to say if we want to get you off dairy crack and we want you to stop worshipping at the church of cheeses seven days a week, right?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yes. Amen to that.

Tracye McQuirter:

Amen to that. 30 plus years ago, the vegan cheese was awful to me. It did melt, it tasted like milk, so when you were letting go of cheese, you were letting it go. The vegan cheeses now, some of them are so much better but then, it was like you just cut it and it was gone.

Rip Esselstyn:

It was atrocious.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Can you remember back to when you started this? Because I know it's 33 years and people ask me this question. What differences did you notice as far as did you feel better? Did you look better? Were there any obvious differences when you let go of the dairy and the meat and the processed foods?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, definitely. That 25 pounds I had gained my first year that dropped.

Rip Esselstyn:

That dropped and you were looking phat after that.

Tracye McQuirter:

I was looking phat after that. Exactly. That's going to be your word now.

Rip Esselstyn:

I have to use it five more times during this interview.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah. I definitely dropped that way. I have naturally oily skin so I had acne and pimples and my skin cleared up and I noticed that it started to clear up but really when I went on my first cleanse after I went vegan, and I went raw for two weeks on this cleanse, it cleared up from the inside. My skin is much better. People were commenting that it glows. What else? My menses was lighter and I rarely got cramps throughout my whole... I'm vegan now my whole adult life, I rarely get cramps. I rarely got cramps, I'll be 54 so I'm on the other side of that. I'm getting on the other side.

Rip Esselstyn:

54, if I didn't know better, I'd just reverse those digits. I thought you're maybe 45 if that.

Tracye McQuirter:

Right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Hey, welcome. Welcome to the club.

Tracye McQuirter:

Exactly. Those were the main things, Rip and also because I was young. I was in my 20s, I could have had health issues at that age, but I didn't. Just being vegan my adult life, I've been able to maintain my health, but those were the major things. Losing that 25 pounds, clearing up my skin and my menses was much lighter.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want that to dovetail us right now into Ageless Vegan because you do look so absolutely remarkable for 54 and then of course your mother, Mary, who is 83 now, if I'm not mistaken.

Tracye McQuirter:

She'll be 84 this month.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. She epitomizes what an 84-year-old plant-strong vegan can look like. Right?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

And the fact that you guys have been on this journey together and you wrote Ageless Vegan with your mother.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

And it's a beautiful book, hundred killer recipes.

Tracye McQuirter:

Thank you.

Rip Esselstyn:

Do you aspire to be like your mother when you're 84?

Tracye McQuirter:

Absolutely, absolutely. The same with your family. You can see what you hope to be. How healthy you hope to still be, how you hope to maintain it. My mother went vegan with me when she was in her early 50s, and she, at almost 84 has the same health markers. Her doctor say she has the same health markers as she did when she was in her 50s. She has no chronic diseases. She has the same weight, same hourglass figure. She is one of 14-

Rip Esselstyn:
It's not hourglass.

Tracye McQuirter:
It's phat, right?

Rip Esselstyn:
Thank you. Yes.

Tracye McQuirter:
She's one of 14 siblings and of the ones who survived into their senior year, she's the only one who doesn't have a chronic disease. Both of her parents died of chronic diseases. I've never met my grandparents on her side. She has changed that paradigm and she also exercises six days a week, twice a day. Well, she was before the pandemic at a senior center, and I'm talking about weight training, yoga, Pilates, aerobics, and she walked everywhere. She really is a beast. I really look up to my mom and I hope that I'm able to be as healthy and just have the mindset of still wanting to be healthy for the rest of my life.

Tracye McQuirter:
It was really important for me to write this book with my mom because my sister Maria, who's also... We all three went vegan together and have the support system. We were working together early on since the late '80s. We started one of the earliest vegan websites ever, I think in 1996. There were I think maybe four vegan websites at the time that I recall. Ours may have been the fifth and it was the first buy in for black folks. The first vegan website, 1996 and '97. We have been working together for years. She's a historian. She is the reason I know so much of this history. But my mom, at our 30-year anniversary, which was in 2018, I wanted the world to know about my mom and I'm not...

Tracye McQuirter:
The world, I just wanted to write a book with my mom and have her story be out there and be inspirational because it's one thing to be vegan from 20 to 50, but to be vegan from 50 to 80 and see what that looks like and know that you can do it at any age is really powerful.

Rip Esselstyn:
Well, you said she's a vegan beast, I think that your mother and my mother need to get together for some weight exercises and also for some yoga sessions. They will hit it off. Then they follow that up by going to somebody's house and cooking some really good, healthy vegan food. That'd be good.

Tracye McQuirter:
Yes, absolutely. Of course, I've seen your mom's vegan food and I think that would be a fabulous idea if they got together and we could sit and eat what they make.

Rip Esselstyn:
Yeah. We'll make that happen.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Another thing in reading *Ageless Vegan* and I want you to know I don't have it in front of me because I got it on my Kindle.

Tracye McQuirter:

Okay.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. You give a nice nod to your mother and how much she taught you guys, I think you and your siblings in regards to volunteerism and helping out people. Is it fair to say that she's a large part of your activism today?

Tracye McQuirter:

She absolutely is, yeah. She's the reason. My mom was divorced by the time I was born or separated and then divorced. She became a divorced mom of three girls. We, not so but also we did not have a lot of money growing up, and yet, every Christmas we sponsored at least one family that had fewer resources than we did. That's something we did and we cooked food and brought gifts for them, and actually went and sat with them. We didn't just take it to a place. We took it to the family and sat with them, and ate with them and talked with them. This was public housing that we would go to and that was a new experience for us. That's what we did.

Tracye McQuirter:

My mother volunteered all the time for women who were domestically abused as she was for a period, for people who were formerly incarcerated, just a number of different types of organizations. I absolutely get that from my mother. She still does things. She gives money. My mom retired as a paralegal long ago. She's doing great, doing fine, and she still gives money and teaches quilting at her senior center. She still volunteers. Yes, this is something that is a lifestyle of hers, and she instilled that in us and it is important to volunteer, to give back and to be activist. It's just how we were raised.

Rip Esselstyn:

Do you talk to her every day.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, I'd say I probably talk to my mom almost every day.

Tracye McQuirter:

That's great.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, it's wonderful. Help me out with the title of your first book, By Any Greens Necessary. Is that a take on a quote or Malcolm X or what's the background there?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, that is a take on By Any Means Necessary, that was popularized by Malcolm X. He may have originated it, I just I'm not able to verify that, but it may well be true, but he absolutely popularized it and it's attributed to him. When I was writing the first book, I wanted to come up with a title that was clever, that was black, and that was memorable and I was struggling with it. I just decided I'm just going to look up some famous black quotes. As soon as I saw that one I was like, "That's it. " By Any Greens Necessary. It says everything right there in the title. I trademarked it. That's the name of my business. [inaudible 00:52:02] and other stuff should be coming at some point, I guess.

Rip Esselstyn:

Tell me this, I love the quote, but why is it By Any Greens Necessary instead of by any beans or buy any fruit? Why did you pick greens?

Tracye McQuirter:

Good question. Nobody has asked me why not buy any beans, that would have worked too.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay.

Tracye McQuirter:

Really, because then you don't do... Best protein question. Right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

It's a good question and I'm going to-

Rip Esselstyn:

I don't know, is it because of collard greens or just-

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, it could. I'm going to answer your question.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay.

Tracye McQuirter:

It's so good I have to use that too. Yeah, it's definitely because greens are the most nutrition packed food that we can eat. Dark leafy greens, the healthiest foods on the planet. Also, these greens are a part of soul food. Collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens. It was a cultural constant. Even as

omnivores, even as eating the standard American diet people may season their greens with meat, but greens were as a cultural marker. I said greens for those two reasons.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, one of my big things in my third book, *The Seven-Day Rescue* that I got from my father is three to six servings of green leafys a day because they are such a nutritional powerhouse. I want you to know that my father loves this. Greens more than anything. That's his thing. A greens man, you got to power him down.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, absolutely. I really appreciate that. Tell him I said thank you.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, you can tell him yourself at Plant-Stock this year.

Tracye McQuirter:

Okay, good. Awesome.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Let me ask you this. This is a personal question. You ready?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Good. Are you dating right now?

Tracye McQuirter:

No, I'm not. Okay. Go ahead, ask your part two.

Rip Esselstyn:

My question is-

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. No, I want to know when you are dating, does it have to be somebody that is a vegan or does it not matter? I just want to know your thoughts on that.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah. Originally no, it did not have to be, when I was younger. I have dated men who were not vegan, and that let me know that they had to be vegan forward.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

Because as I got older, I came to understand that my partner's health might decline, might decline, could likely decline and mine would hopefully maintain or even get better as we got older. That was number one. Number two, I realized over time, I didn't want to be intimate with somebody who ate animals and ate dairy products, because this is my lifestyle and also my profession. I know that I was very self-righteous in my younger years and I have really worked hard not to be that way. It may not seem because it's my profession, I'm always talking about it, But I also want to meet folks where they are and just want to share information and just let it go. We're all adults.

Tracye McQuirter:

I wanted anybody that I was with to be vegan because they wanted to be vegan. I may have been an inspiration, a catalyst, a spark, or whatever, like Dick Gregory was for me, but I didn't want them to do it just because they were with me because as soon as they got mad, they go eat a hamburger, and that happened. You know what I mean?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

And I just can't deal with that. Absolutely. I have dated some men who weren't vegan and wonderful people, but ultimately, that was one of the reasons that it didn't work out but I had a long term relationship with someone who was vegan, and it was wonderful. There were other reasons that we didn't end up being together but maintained a great friendship. So yes, they have to be vegan, and that's just again, my personal choice.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, I totally get it. Obviously, I married somebody who is, she wasn't when I met her, but within two months, she very quickly came over to the good side.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah. Exactly.

Rip Esselstyn:

Whatever side, but I want to say something about this because... I'm in my office right now and my neighbors, their refrigerator went out and their freezer, so they asked me if they could use my refrigerator and ice box here in my office. I said absolutely. Of course, they've got meat and they've got dairy and they've got all that stuff. Every time I would open up the refrigerator to get my food, I could not believe the odor that came out of the fridge and I was just appalled by it. Just for that reason alone, I could not live with somebody that doesn't eat the way I do because the smell is just intolerable.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah, that's the smell of it. Uncooked and then the awful smell of it cooked too. Yeah, you're right. That's a good point, too.

Rip Esselstyn:

Anyway, it's so deep. It's so deep.

Tracye McQuirter:

Well, let me tell you this into asking you that question. I am available and I am looking. I just want to put that out there because I'm in my 50s now and I'm being more bold about it. There you go.

Rip Esselstyn:

All right. Well, fantastic. We'll get the word out, Tracye. All right, good stuff. You've got your five fab core rules and you've also got your 14 steps to a healthier you. Can you talk to me about one of each? And if you want for me to make it easier, I can throw one out to you or you can just think of one of your fab five food rules that you want to share, then one of your 14 steps to a healthier you.

Tracye McQuirter:

Sure. One of the fab five food rules really quickly is by any greens necessary, eat your greens. Right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yes.

Tracye McQuirter:

Key, as your father says, definitely eat dark leafy greens at least three times a day, if you can. If you can eat them... I'm sorry, at least twice a day for your meals. If you can eat them three times a day, a smoothie for breakfast, a wrap, a salad, stir fry for lunch or dinner. Awesome. That's one of the fab five. Then for the 14, I think the first one, one of them is-

Rip Esselstyn:

Know your why. So important. It really is, isn't it? Yeah.

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah. So important to know your why. That's the foundation because we live in a meat and dairy centered society, you may or may not have support, so you have to be solid in why you're doing it and have this goal and work back from there and it's not a race, it's not competition, it's your journey. Know that you will get there, you can get there and go on the path.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. We're going to have to have a part two, we really will. Okay? Yeah. Well, you know what, Tracye, this has been a lot of fun for me, it really has. I love the way our conversation upped and flowed and what we talked about and I think that our listeners are going to get a lot of value on it. Thank you for this conversation, really.

Tracye McQuirter:

Thank you so much. It was a lot of fun for me too. I appreciate it. It's great to talk to a vegan OG.

Rip Esselstyn:

Ha ha ha. OG? What does that mean?

Tracye McQuirter:

Old gangster or older vegan.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's good. In signing off, I want to say this about you. It's so apparent to me how you're so absolutely 100% committed to a socially just world and you see food as being the cornerstone in helping to create that world. I want to commend you for that. I want to do everything I can to help you do that.

Tracye McQuirter:

Thank you.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want you to know that we will be communicating a lot more going forward.

Tracye McQuirter:

Thank you. I appreciate that. I really do. That makes my day. Thank you so much, [inaudible 01:02:22].

Rip Esselstyn:

Me too. Can we do the traditional Plant-Strong sign off, if you just repeat after me? Ready?

Tracye McQuirter:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Peace.

Tracye McQuirter:

Peace.

Rip Esselstyn:

Engine 2.

Tracye McQuirter:

Engine 2.

Rip Esselstyn:

Plant-Strong.

Tracye McQuirter:

Plant-Strong.

Rip Esselstyn:

Give me a little bump.

Tracye McQuirter:

Awesome.

Rip Esselstyn:

Tracye, thank you.

Tracye McQuirter:

Thank you, Rip. I appreciate it. Much love.

Rip Esselstyn:

byanygreensnecessary.com is where you can head to learn more about Tracye McQuirter, including the 10,000 Black Vegan Women Movement. Let's help her hit that mark before October and do our best to become passionate advocates for anyone looking to make long lasting lifestyle changes. Next week, we continue the conversation on activism and education with author and human resources expert Dr. Jarik Conrad. Don't forget to visit plantstrongpodcast.com for the episode links and all the details for Plant-Stock 2020. Peace, Engine 2, keep it Plant-Strong.

Rip Esselstyn:

We discovered a silver lining through COVID-19 by forcing us to change our ninth annual Plant-Stock event to an online format. This allowed us to reach many people plant curious people around the globe and right now, the need has never been greater for people to adopt a wholefood plant-strong lifestyle. This year's event will feature the brightest luminaries in the scientific research, including Doctors, Michael Klaper, [inaudible 01:04:04], Michael Greger, my father and a host of other rock stars. Join us for our upcoming online Plant-Stock weekend from August 14th to the 16th.

Rip Esselstyn:

We are packing this live event with science and practical application and offering you a chance for your whole household to learn and cook along with us. We'll give you a front row seat to the Esselstyn Family Farm. And if you can't catch it live, no sweat. Video access is included for a year with every ticket and partial proceeds will benefit the Esselstyn Family Foundation and find out assistance is available. Visit plantstock2020.com today and learn more. The Plant-Strong podcast team includes Laurie Kortowich, Ami Mackey, Patrick Gavin, Wade Clark and Carrie Barrett.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want to thank my parents Dr. Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr. and Ann Crile Esselstyn for creating a legacy that will be carried on for generations and being willing to go against the current and trudge upstream to the causation. We are all better for it.