

Exclusive Excerpt

Committed: A PETA Senior Vice President's Memoir

As PETA's senior vice president of campaigns, Dan Mathews works hard to capture public attention for animal rights. Sometimes this means recruiting celebrities; other times it means protesting in a strange costume. In his new book, *Committed: A Rabble-Rouser's Memoir*, which chronicles his 20 years at PETA, Dan reflects on dressing as a carrot to promote vegetarianism ... at "cattle country" elementary schools:

"All I could hear was the sound of my breath inside the towering orange outfit as I was led past a school bus encircled by armed cops, troubled teachers, and renegade students trying to give me a high five. A friend joked that my getup should've come with a bulletproof vest, but polyester was tough enough to deflect the bologna slices I was pelted with, courtesy of the Iowa Pork Producers.

"Welcome to the tumultuous tour of Chris P. Carrot, PETA's mascot whose simple mission was to give away buttons and leaflets outside Midwestern grade schools. The carrot's arrival prompted news crews to give their reports live from inside school cafeterias. 'Kids shouldn't talk to strangers,' declared one mom. 'Even if the stranger is a vegetable.' Through the carrot's eyehole, I saw myself in the bewildered children. I never imagined growing up to be a veggie vigilante. I was such a meat enthusiast that my father, who ran a diner, named the 'Danny Dog' on the kiddies' menu in my honor. My journey to becoming a costumed crusader began in the ninth grade, when I was attacked by bullies who somehow knew I was gay before I did. One day one of them hollered, 'Fag!' and punched me in the stomach, knocking me to the ground. Stunned, I looked up to see chuckling faces as I lay gasping for breath.

"Soon after, I was on a fishing trip with my dad. My rod bent over and I excitedly reeled in my catch, only to discover that it was a big, ugly flounder. 'You got a booby prize!' someone laughed as he stomped the flailing fish and tore out the hook, causing blood to pulsate from the panicked creature's mouth. I grew uneasy, considering what the scene looked like from the flounder's point of view. Stunned, he was looking up to see chuckling faces as he lay gasping for breath.

"I'd become one of the terrorizing bullies I dreaded so much in school. Most people are sensitized to the plight of animals by cuddly puppies—I sympathized with a rubbery bottom-feeder. I never ate fish again and soon stopped eating anything else with eyes (except for potatoes). I eagerly shared my newfound notion of what it meant to be 'civilized,' but most people reacted as if I were advocating rights for pet rocks. Undeterred, I formed an animal rights group at school and soon took a job with PETA. Now, I circle the globe doing whatever it takes to focus attention on animal issues—such as provoking debate dressed as a carrot. I guess you could say I've courted hostility for being both a fruit and a vegetable."

Dan Mathews' *Committed: A Rabble-Rouser's Memoir*, published by Atria/Simon & Schuster, can be preordered at PETAMall.com.