

REAGAN HENDERSON

Diary of a Homeschooled, 10-year-old Vegan

Dear Diary,

My cousin Shelby gave you to me today! She is really nice and I'm so glad she came to our Winter Solstice party. It was really funny because Aunt Vanessa and Uncle Rick brought cookies made with butter on accident which made my mom mad, cause I had already eaten like five before I found out they weren't vegan. They tasted sooo good, but I hope I don't get sick tonight. Shelby said I'll be fine, and she would know because she's a lot older than me.

Anyways, I've always wanted a diary and you are especially cool, because there are blue stars and hot pink sunrises on your cover. I already wrote my name and address and telephone number and birthday on the inside cover so that if I accidentally lose you (I promise I won't!), someone will return you to me. I'm so excited that I won't be able to sleep at all tonight! Mom said she has a present for me in the morning to celebrate Solstice, but I know it won't be nearly as cool as you are. Okay, I have to go now but don't worry. I'll put you in a secret hiding spot.

Dear Diary,

I only have a minute to write because Mom said I could take a recess from my Math lesson. She gave me a new drum that Aunt Vanessa decorated with beads and paint. I like it, but not as much as you. Mom also said she bought new incense at the Farmer's Market that we can share, but I don't really care because I hate incense. I think I'd rather sit next to grandpa while he smoked a cigarette than burn incense. I wish she'd just buy a giant candle that smells like cinnamon or something. Anyway, I'm really tired today because I stayed up so late writing and drawing and thinking about everything. Mom called me a slug and cut our early morning walk short because I was going too slow and couldn't keep up with her. She blamed my laziness on the cookies, but you and I know better. When she tried to explain what a lichen was, I pretended to fall asleep on a tree stump and started snoring really loud. I laughed so hard at myself that Mom gave up and took me home. But now we're working on Math (YUCK) so I sort of wish that I wouldn't have ruined my Science lesson. Oh well.

Dear Diary,

I got a C on my Science test and so my mom grounded me from dance class until I get better grades. I'm so mad because that's the only time I get to listen to the radio and now I can't go! And, Miss Rudy will probably make me do a hundred leg lifts next time, because I'm missing this week. I asked Mom why she's ruining my life and she just said, "Because I love you." I told her that it was too bad I hated her, then, and she made me go to my room. At least she gave me the afternoon off to study for my make-up test. I have to meet her at the kitchen table before dinner to take it. Yuck.

Dear Diary,

We're going to a drum circle this afternoon and I'm so excited because my cousin Shelby is coming. Yea! She is my favorite cousin, and I love talking to her even though my mom says she's too mainstream. That's because Shelby goes to public high school and dyes her hair blonde and isn't vegan and stuff. But I like her even if she is mainstream, because she treats me like a grown-up. She doesn't usually go to the drum circles, but today is Uncle Rick's birthday, so she's coming this time. Maybe Mom will let her drive me home! That would be the best. I wish Shelby could teach me my lessons, instead of Mom always doing it. Aunt Vanessa says Shelby speaks really good Spanish and I think I'd be a great Spanish speaker, too, if I had Shelby for a teacher. When I asked Mom if she'd let Shelby teach me, she just said, "I have more education than any other teacher around, and a load of debt to prove it." So I guess that means no. At least I don't have to go to real school. Mom says they make you sit at a desk ALL day and they only teach capitalism, which sounds really boring. Uh oh. . . Mom's calling me so I better grab my new drum. Maybe I'll get to start the rhythm tonight!

Dear Diary,

I thought tonight was going to be so great and then it turned out to be terrible. Shelby didn't come. I really thought she was coming, and instead stupid Byron came and he wouldn't stop pinching me and repeating everything I said. His mom said that I need to learn how to relate better to other children, but that's pretty hard to do when Byron's banging all over my drum and pinching my face. I wanted to push his face into the pizza and make him shut up, but I didn't. Drum Circle is usually my favorite day of the week because we drum and dance till our feet hurt. Some people sing out songs they just made up, and other people just sort of moan for what feels like forever. I always feel like I'm a zombie or something, but not tonight. Tonight, Byron

ruined it. I stole four Airheads and a handful of Fritos from the snack table when my mom wasn't looking to make me feel better. They're vegan anyway, and Shelby says a little sugar won't kill me. P.S. I passed my make-up test.

Dear Diary,

Last night I didn't sleep at all because my head itched so bad I thought I was going to die! I started crying, and I didn't think I was being loud, but my mom heard and came into my bedroom all worried and I told her my head itched so bad that I was going to have a heart attack if it didn't stop. She pulled my head in her lap like she used to do when I was really small and picked through my dreadlocks so carefully that I got impatient and started wishing she'd just pull them out to stop the itching. Then she kissed my forehead and said I hadn't been rinsing the soap out enough from my scalp, which caused dandruff and itching, and then she let me sleep in bed with her for the rest of the night. So, today we had to go to the store to buy this stuff called Tea Tree Oil and then rub it into my scalp and now I feel so much better. I thought my mom might give me a day off from school because my head still itched, but she still made me take a walk in the woods with her to identify mushrooms. At least it wasn't Math, though.

Dear Diary,

Yesterday in dance class the best thing ever happened. Miss Rudy said she'd help me make up my own dance routine, to whatever music I want! No ballet, no way. At first, I thought I'd use some of my mom's old tapes, 'cause she has tons from all over the world that she got when she used to travel, but now I've decided to dance to a song from the radio, except I don't have any of that kind of music so I had to call Shelby for help. She said she'd drop off some CDs, but I knew

Mom would get mad, so I just asked her to drop off the music at Miss Rudy's studio instead.

I've already started practicing some moves in my bedroom. There's this cool one I learned from watching MTV one time at Aunt Vanessa's house called "The Butterfly," but it's kind of hard, so Miss Rudy might have to help me. I can't wait!

Dear Diary,

Sorry it's been so long since I've written in you. My mom caught me listening to Snoop Dog and practicing The Butterfly and when I refused to tell her where I learned it, she grounded me from everything, but especially from writing in you, because she says I should be spending time studying my Math instead. Did I tell you I got a D on my last test? She even went to Miss Rudy's dance studio and yelled at her for letting me listen to the radio because "children don't need to hear media propaganda." I don't know what that means, but I think it's the same reason she doesn't trust anyone who's mainstream. I'm so embarrassed. Miss Rudy probably thinks I am a big weirdo, and Mom cancelled my whole dance class session because she says she can't trust Miss Rudy anymore. I wish I had a TV or something, because I am so bored that I will probably just fall over one day in the woods and no one will find me until I die. Mom tries to keep me busy by teaching me pottery and painting, but still, I pretty much only get to leave the house when we go to Drum Circle. I'm getting pretty good at drumming, I think, but I kind of wish I could play REAL drums, with drumsticks and cymbals and stuff. I bet Mom would sign me up for public school before buying me something like that.

Dear Diary,

Mom signed me up for a gymnastics class today! And guess what? It's not a private lesson! There's like eight other kids in the class and they all go to real school. Anyway, Shelby takes gymnastics at the same gym, so I'm sure it will be great. Maybe we'll even be in the same class someday! After I get really good at it, I mean. She's probably a lot better than me, but I can't ask her because I'm still grounded from talking to her since Mom found out she gave me the bad CDs. My first class is tomorrow, and Mom gave me her old leotard to wear. It's a little faded, but it fits perfectly. I could kiss her I'm so happy!

Dear Diary,

I saw Shelby at the gym today! She was eating a bagel with cream cheese and I almost asked her for a bite because I've always wondered what that tastes like, but I couldn't, because cream cheese has cheese in it. Shelby's class is right after mine and my mom picked me up late, so I got to watch Shelby's class for a while. They do back-handsprings and back-walkovers and are really good. It was so amazing. They get to listen to the radio the whole time, and I overheard them talking about playing soccer, and decorating lockers, and sneaking out on Friday night. I could have listened all day, but my stupid mom picked me up before I could hear anything else. Anyways, I really like my gymnastics class. I'm the only homeschooler, but I recognized some of the kids from the dance studio, and one girl named Maria had come to a drum circle before, so we're sort of friends. I think my favorite thing to do in gymnastics is bars. But I like beam, too, and of course, floor is really fun. I don't know! I can't make up my mind. P.S. I got an A+ on my English test so things are going GRRREAT!

Dear Diary,

I have been so busy with gymnastics and school and drum circles that I've barely had any time to write in you! I am so sorry, but not much has happened anyway. My gymnastics session ended today, so we had a big party and everyone brought food to share. Even though the teachers said to bring healthy snacks, most people brought unhealthy stuff. So, when I walked up to the huge buffet of food, I couldn't find anything that was vegan, except for the carrot sticks my mom sent with me, which no one wanted to eat, including me. I couldn't eat the cookies, or the Cheetos, or the homemade cupcakes, or even the celery with cream cheese on it. I ended up with a plate that had nothing on it but a honey-stick, and when I sat down, Maria told me that even honeysticks aren't vegan, and I had to put it back. Sometimes I hate being vegan. My mom used to study nutrition before she went to Berklee and says we eat vegan because it purifies our bodies and keeps the environment healthy, but still. Anyways, sorry for complaining. I actually had fun, and the new session starts in a week or so.

Dear Diary,

Today Maria gave me a ride home from gymnastics and asked me why I have dreadlocks. I didn't really care that she asked me, except that I don't exactly know why I have dreadlocks and didn't know what to say. She asked me how old I was when I got them, and I told her that I couldn't remember. I must've been a baby. She thought that was so weird and said, "So you've never had regular hair? The kind that you comb?" The truth was no, I have never had that kind of hair, but for some reason I didn't want to tell her that, so I just said, "Of course I've had regular hair!" Then Maria's mom said to leave me alone and she told a story about how she pierced the ears of Maria's sister Lupe when she was only a baby. "See, just because Lupe's

never had regular ears doesn't mean your ears are better than hers." She totally confused me, and I didn't see how having dreadlocks since I was born was anything like having pierced ears, but anyway, I don't think I'm going to hang out with Maria anymore. She can take her regular hair and comb it till her hair falls out, for all I care.

Dear Diary,

I'm pretty sure that today was the best day of my life, or at least, so far. I finally learned how to do a cartwheel ON THE BEAM!!! Did you know that a balance beam is only four inches wide? And now I can do a cartwheel on it and not fall off. Isn't that the greatest? To make my day even better, my mom let me watch Shelby's whole gymnastics class and then, Shelby drove me home. But she didn't take me right home. First, she pumped up the radio really loud, rolled the windows down, and drove through like five stop signs without even stopping! Shelby smoked a cigarette and made me promise not to tell, which of course I NEVER would, even though I think it's gross. Then, we went by her school to meet some friends named Ashley and Kate. They had just finished soccer practice and wore these long, striped socks up to their knees. They also had silky, brown ponytails that looked like they'd been brushed a thousand times. I never wanted regular hair so bad in my life, but they told me my dreadlocks were "rad," and even said they wished their moms were as cool as mine. "She's not exactly mainstream, if you know what I mean," Shelby said, and then I had the courage to ask why they wore their socks so high. Kate banged on her shin and said, "Shin-guards, because we have a habit of kicking each other in the shins," then we all laughed, but I wanted to know why they kicked each other in the shins. I figured it must be part of the game. "Maybe your mom will sign you up for soccer sometime,"

Shelby said. But I doubt it. I didn't see any girls with dreadlocks on their team. At least I can do a cartwheel on the beam! I'm so glad I'm not grounded from Shelby anymore.

Dear Diary,

This is Top Secret news. You can't tell anyone. It's so Top Secret that instead of doing my Math homework, I'm writing in you. Okay. Here's the news. Today my mom let Shelby give me a ride home from gymnastics again, but instead of taking me straight home, she took me to McDonald's!!!! I almost peed my pants because I was so scared my mom would find out, but Shelby reminded me that my mom would rather go to a Snoop Dog concert than go to a fast food place. Still, I kept looking at the door until Shelby got annoyed and said, "Do you want to be here, or not?" I did want to be there, because I'd never been there before, but I worried that they didn't have any food I could eat. "Duh," Shelby said, "Of course they don't have vegan food. This is McDonald's. If you're going to order anything, you gotta get a cheeseburger." At first, I didn't understand what she was saying. She couldn't mean that I should order something with meat in it, could she? Yep, she meant it. I shook my head "No" for about ten minutes before Shelby handed me a warm ball wrapped in yellow paper. "So it's a loaded gun, I guess," she said, smiling bigger than I've ever seen her smile before. "But it's your decision. You don't have to eat it," she said, taking a big bite off her own burger, "But you can if you want to. What do you think?" I knew what my mom thought, that the entire world would blow up and die if I ate meat, but I still didn't know what *I* thought. Why did Shelby bring me to McDonald's? What if I was allergic to meat and poisoned myself by trying it? And why wasn't my mom there to snatch it out of my hand and yell at me? With Shelby staring at me, I decided the only way I could figure out what I thought was if I tried a bite. So I did. I unwrapped that golden burger,

took the biggest bite of my life and closed my eyes till I finished swallowing. I ate meat. And oh, my gosh, it was good. My mom never told me meat tasted that good! Of course, after I remembered all the horrible stories my mom told me about animals being tortured by people, I ran to the bathroom and threw it all up. But still, it was great. Can you believe it? I felt kind of guilty when my mom tried to serve me roasted vegetables and rice for dinner, because she'd been cooking just for me. I kept the wrapper, though. It's in my pocket and it still smells like cheese.

Dear Diary,

My mom has been crying for two hours since Aunt Vanessa called and told her that I ate meat. I can't believe Shelby told her mom and now my mom knows and she won't even talk to me. "I'm not mad. I'm sad," she said to me, and then she started hiccupping so bad that she couldn't even finish her dinner. I think she's smoking in the bathroom now, and she thinks I don't know, because she opened the window, but my window is open, too, so I can smell it. I tried to tell her that it didn't matter, because I threw it up anyway, but she said if I think it doesn't matter, than I am not her daughter anymore. But I wonder how she can say that, when I have the same freckles as her, and the same reddish dreadlocks as her, and know all the same things as her, because she's my teacher, too. Of course I am her daughter. No one else matches her like I do. But she's still sad at me, and there is no one that can make her feel better, especially me, and all of it is my fault because I ate meat. I guess she thinks that now, I am mainstream, too.