

## Flamboyant Story: Matthew Buckley

*This is one of a series of stories that I have been writing about a nineteen-year-old woman named Sally, who is raising her seven-year-old brother Michael now that their mother is in gaol for armed robbery. Michael has autism, epilepsy, and obsessive compulsive disorder.*

I became a vegetarian at the age of seven, and a vegan at fifteen. When I became a vegan I consulted a dietitian in order to ensure that I got all the nutrients I require.

I was the only vegetarian in my family.

Now that I was raising my little brother, he was going to be vegan too. Well, at least for the most part. If he was to be looked after by someone else - say, for example, if he went to a sleepover party - he might be served animal products. But all the foods and beverages that I was going to give him would be vegan.

I had made an appointment to take him to a dietitian to make sure he would get all the nutrients he needs.

It was the day of the appointment.

I looked at my wristwatch. It was 8:32 am. The appointment was for 9:05 am.

I put my purse and keys in my handbag, put my handbag over my shoulder, and walked to the doorway of Michael's bedroom and looked in.

Michael was dressed in a Tyrannosaurus rex outfit that Mum had made him for a fancy dress party the previous year.

I looked at him incredulously.

"Is that what you're wearing?" I asked him.

"Yes," he replied, "I'm wearing it right now."

"I meant: is that what you're going to wear all day?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"You're not going to a fancy dress party," I said, "You'll look silly."

"Oh," Michael said. Then he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Oh well. I like it. I'm a dinosaur. Rowr!"

He put his hands in front of him like they were Tyrannosaurus rex claws.

I sighed. I admired his individuality and imagination. But I still would have felt silly with him in that costume.

"Take that costume off please, Michael," I said, "We need to get going."

Michael sighed. Then he said, "Fine."

He took the costume off, revealing himself to be dressed in the jeans, T-shirt, and socks that I had laid out for him earlier.

I had already told Michael where we were going and why.

On the way to the car he skipped while chanting, "I'm gonna be a vegan. I'm gonna be a vegan."

In the car on the way to the dietitian clinic Michael said to me, "So I have to tell everyone that I'm vegan now?"

"Only when it's necessary, I suppose."

"Why did the vegan cross the road?"

"Why?"

"To tell someone she's vegan," Michael said. Then he said, "Fred's dad told me that joke. I told him that I didn't get it. He told me that vegans like to tell everyone that they're vegans."

"Yeah that's a stereotype that a lot of people have about vegans," I said.

"It's a what?"

"A stereotype."

"What's that?"

"Um...", I said, "It's a common belief that a lot of people have about us vegans. We're said to love to tell people that we're vegans."

"Oh," Michael said. Then he said, "Do vegans like to tell people they're vegans?"

"I suppose it depends on the individual vegan," I said.

"Do you tell everyone that you're vegan?" Michael asked.

"I suppose I only tell people when I need to," I replied, "It's not a secret that I'm vegan. But I'm not flamboyant about it."

"Oh," Michael said.