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VN Publisher **Joseph Connelly** talks shop with today's must-know names.



10 Questions

LISA BLOOM

Legal eagle and author keeps readers' minds sharp with her new book *Think: Straight Talk for Women to Stay Smart in a Dumbed-Down World*.

LISA BLOOM GRADUATED FROM YALE LAW School with honors, spent eight years as host of truTV (formerly Court TV), has been a legal analyst for an alphabet soup of news stations, and is frequently a guest on morning news, TV magazines, and talk shows around the remote. Bloom, 49, a much sought-after speaker, currently runs a prominent Los Angeles law firm, and somehow also finds time to run marathons, qualifying for the prestigious Boston Marathon. After 30 years of vegetarianism, Bloom made the leap to vegan in 2009.

1 What inspired you to write *Think*?

I've been a TV legal analyst on all the major networks for more than a decade. But as the years have passed, my priorities have flipped. Now I am asked almost exclusively to talk about celebrity drunk driving, divorces, and love triangles. There is not a network today that would devote several hours to a war-crimes tribunal. I have tried, fruitlessly, to get worthy stories covered. Network execs tell me viewers only want

Paris and Lindsay and Charlie Sheen. Our tabloid and reality-show culture is dumbing us down, and I don't see anyone pushing back. The consequences are alarming—we are shamefully ignorant about environmental catastrophes, about genocides we could stop. Most bright young women I interview can correctly name more Kardashians than wars we're in now. I wondered why somebody didn't do something. Then I realized I am somebody. So I buckled down for a year, turned away clients and television appearances, researched, and wrote this book. It was important to unflinchingly write about the problem—the first half of the book—but also to offer solutions, the second half.

2 You begin *Think* by stating that, "25 percent of young American women would rather win *America's Next Top Model* than The Nobel Peace Prize." What is the root of this apathy?

This is the question that ate away at me. How can this be possible? At first I thought this 25 percent were just bimbos. But the more I

looked into it, the more I realized that they are rationally responding to a culture that often gives women bigger rewards for being hot than for being smart. The hot girl, according to all the research, not only finds love, she gets the job, the promotion, and a lifetime of everyone smiling at her and assuming she is credible, competent, and kind. This "beauty bias" is well documented in psychological literature. And women innately know this, which is why we spend our last dollar on lip plumpers and lash extenders, and submit our bodies to dangerous plastic surgeries. But we also know this is sick and wrong. Every woman I spoke to wanted to push back against this nonsense, and live a more meaningful life.

3 How is it possible to push back?

It is not only possible; it is exhilarating to push back, because we know that so many of the messages our "celebutainment" industry feeds us are garbage. And even if being hot gets us noticed, finds us love, even gets us the job—we still want to be smart, we want to contribute, we want more meaningful lives. No

matter how many magazines tell us we should be worrying about our eyebrows or nail beds, we want to be defined by our hearts and minds and contributions.

4 Surely there is a place for intelligent, educational content that is still fun and enjoyable to read. In *Think* you write about “reclaiming the brain God gave you.” Please explain.

Sleazy celebrity “news” magazines—and please, starlets’ DUIs are not news—probably have a hundred times more readers [than VegNews]. That’s why it’s up to all of us, as consumers, to reclaim our brains. Every dollar we spend, every online click, is a vote for or against smart, meaningful content, or idiotic, brain-rotting drivel. We have to make a decision to push back, starting right now. In my book, I outline the first step: How to create time to think. Because for most women, we are so exhausted from our daily lives that we’ve pushed thinking right off the agenda. Once we grab back some time for ourselves, and start reading the good stuff, we are on our way.

5 How would you respond to the hard-working, educated, intelligent women who protest and say, “But I need to watch *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* or *Real Housewives* to keep my sanity. It’s my way of winding down at the end of a long day.”

I get it. I am 100 percent in favor of hardworking women retaining sanity and relaxing. Just not with tabloid media, because it lowers our IQ, makes us think squabbles between rich, spoiled people cosmically matter, and lines the pockets of paparazzi who stalk celebs’ kids on the way to school. In the book, I outline healthier ways to relax: make cupcakes (vegan, of course), play Rock Band with your kids, write on your old boyfriend’s Facebook page, read real humor books and magazines, or have sex. Not necessarily in that order. Reality shows are staged and present the worst images of women—as shallow, materialistic, cat-fighting narcissists. Celeb sites are filled with lies. Why is that “relaxing”?

6 Excellent answer, as is the book. Now let’s turn to you. You were vegetarian for years, and recently went vegan. What was the final straw for you?

After being vegetarian for 31 years, I read,

in close proximity, *Skinny Bitch* and *Eating Animals*. I also saw the documentary *Earthlings*. Sickened by the cruelty of factory farming, I decided that I would no longer fund it. By going vegan, I boycott animal cruelty three times a day. Not only do my food dollars support local, organic farmers and vegan restaurants, I continue to be the healthiest and most energetic person I know. I almost never get sick, I run marathons, I have multiple projects—my law firm, television shows, books—going on all at the same time. People with colds wave me away saying, “Don’t shake my hand! I’m sick!” I smile and give them a big hug. “No problem!” I say, “I’m vegan!”

7 You are a very progressive woman and yet there are parts of you that are quite old-fashioned, such as your family values, the way you are raising your kids, or cooking for your fiancé. How do you make it all work?

I don’t cook because I am female. I just want plentiful, healthy vegan food around me all the time, and restaurants are too time consuming and expensive. If anyone, male or female, wants to come over and whip up a fresh, organic vegan meal for me, soup to nuts—they are welcome! I never thought about whether my child-rearing views are traditional or not. My core philosophy is to give them a lot of love and respect, and stay out of their way as they experiment and learn and grow. I was also never into martyrdom. I’d tell my kids to shush while I decompressed and read a book. They learned to grab their own book and join me on the sofa. Helicopter parenting is overrated. The moms are strung out and exhausted, and the kids are annoyed. So how did I make it all work? I didn’t insist on doing everything myself. I always retained time for myself to imagine, to dream, to think. And I encourage everyone to do the same.

8 Our readers will be curious to learn where these amazing skills stem from. You’ve had some strong female influence in your life. Let’s start with your grandmother.

I wrote a very personal story about my grandmother, nicknamed Fox, in the book. Fox scared bears out of her kitchen in Alaska, survived her husband’s suicide, cared for two severely mentally ill adult children into her 80s, started and ran a successful business, and

even handed out illegal birth control to coal miners’ wives in West Virginia as a young girl. Her life was one big “no-whining, I-can-do-this” zone. She is one of my role models. She thought her way through her problems, confident in her brain’s ability to work through whatever came her way. My goal is for girls and women to stand up straight and march confidently forward, just as Fox did, no matter what life throws at us.

9 And then there is your mother, Gloria Allred, who is arguably the most well-known female attorney of our day.

Of course my mother was a huge influence. I lead with her in the book because she was such an empowering mom. She couldn’t have been less interested in what I wore or how I fixed my hair. But she made sure I went on picket lines with her so I’d understand that working people have to fight for fair wages, and I rode in her VIP car in the gay pride parade year after year, simmering at the “God Hates Fags” counter-protesters. She got me out there to see the real world.

10 Speaking of your mother, one of her most famous cases was suing the all-male Friars Club for discrimination. You followed in her footsteps when you represented a girl who wanted to become a Boy Scout and sued the Scouts. What’s wrong with men having all-male clubs, and would you sue the Girl Scouts on behalf of a boy who wanted to sell Thin Mints?

The world is changing, for the better. Boys Clubs of America is now Boys and Girls Clubs of America, serving underprivileged kids of both genders. Camp Fire Girls of America is now Camp Fire USA. And around the world, there is simply Scouting, where boys and girls can learn camping and leadership skills together. Only in a very tiny number of countries, like the US and Yemen, is Scouting still sex-segregated. My 12-year-old client was right: She should not have been excluded from a kids’ activity because of her gender. For adults, what’s wrong with all-male clubs is that business is often conducted there, which is why the US Supreme Court has said that unless the group is truly private, they must integrate. I agree with that for all groups, male or female. **VN**

Joseph Connelly is publisher of *VegNews*.