



Cruella? Not Me!

For those of you who don't know me personally, I'll tell you my dirty secret. From the first frosts of autumn until the start of summer I wear fur. Old, jumble sale, ripped and raggy fur but fur nonetheless.

Every winter I drag my bag of dead beasts down from the attic and wonder if this will be the year that the anti-fur campaigners finally shower me with paint or if there will be a new mum at Joe's school who recoils in horror when she spots my winter garb.

I don't wear fur to look glamorous (as the rips, tears and glue patches will testify) and it's certainly not about showing off my wealth and status like the women who wear mink in sunny climates. It's about keeping warm and if you live here in the frozen North and become immobilised by cold every winter like I do then there is no better way to stop the shivering. Just ask a polar bear. Or the Inuit.

If you *are* going to wear fur or leather; sleep beneath a duvet filled with baby duck feathers or eat meat I think it's important to remember where the coat/ shoes/duvet/ burger started its life. Carnivores who wear rubber gloves to handle a raw chicken breast drive me mad. So do people who refuse to eat meat on the bone because it looks too much like a dead animal. It is a dead animal and if that animal died to feed or clothe you then the least you can do is show it some respect by acknowledging where it came from.

I like to think that if I had to kill an animal for food or to use its skin for clothing then I could, even a great big one like a cow or one that screams horrifically like a pig.

It's not that I relish the killing, that would be too weird, but I don't want to deny what has to happen to the animal for me to eat or keep warm. It can't do any harm to say a little prayer of thanks to the animal while you wield the knife too. Pierce Brosnan told me I would go to hell for killing his lobsters when he saw me sticking a knife into their brains but that was the quickest and kindest way to kill them. How else did he think they would make it onto his plate?

My kids no longer flinch when they see me pulling the insides out of a pheasant or



slicing down the warm belly of a freshly killed hare and I have wondered if their emotional detachment when seeing so much blood and gore could be a bad thing.

I want my children to understand where

"Once we realised what it was, they were happy to eat the hare in a stir fry"

their food comes from but I don't want to turn them into murderers. Hopefully, the fact that they love their cockatiel and gerbils and see a very clear line between animals for food and animals as pets is an indication that that their fellow human beings are safe.

And then there was the dog incident which left me convinced that they hadn't lost all their sensitivities. We came home one day to find what we thought was a dead dog hanging off the gates of our driveway. It turned out to be a hare, left by my local game man, but was so bloody big that it was convincingly canine. The kids were distraught but once we realised what it was, they were happy to eat the hare in a stir fry.

Something else which I think is important is that we should try to use as much of the animal as possible. Whenever my game man delivers pheasants I make a quick call to my vegan friend Nicola Hebson to tell her to expect a package in the next day's post. Nicola is a taxidermist and jewellery maker in Great Harwood who makes fabulous things from what's left of my pheasants after we have eaten the meat; and yes, I did say she was a vegan. The wings become fascinators; the heads are turned into brooches and the feet into pendants. Russell Brand owns one

of her feet.

When I first met Nicola she was none too happy to see me wearing fur. I do try to be considerate when wearing my fur coat and avoid doing so in front of people who would obviously find it offensive. I hadn't expected Nicola to be upset as she was a taxidermist.

Then last week I found myself in an awkward situation when I went to buy some furniture from a lady in Colne. As I sat on her sofa with my fur coat moulting all over her cushions, she mentioned that she used to work for the Anti Vivisection Society, was a vegetarian and refused to wear any kind of animal skin, including leather.

I considered telling her that I also disagree with unnecessary testing on animals but knew she may have trouble believing me. I decided instead to apologise for wearing fur in her home. "That's okay," she said "I sell vintage furs in my shop but send all the profits to the Anti-Vivisection Society."

Good grief, the fur debate is about as controversial and confusing as it gets. Vegan taxidermists? Anti-vivisection fur sellers? Then there's me; the lady who, in spite of the Cruella hair and the mangy fur coat, is very nice to gerbils. Promise. 🐹



Nicola's work

