



Queen of the Rashes

Farewell to summer; the agricultural shows, the carnivals, the funfairs - and strange summer rites such as Rushbearing. This year our daughter Zoe was honoured to take the crown as Queen of the Rashes in Newchurch, Pendle; one of only a few parishes still celebrating this ancient tradition. Although rushes are no longer gathered to carpet the church floor, the children still weave the grasses into head-dresses and crosses before processing through the village to crown the new queen.

A week before the ceremony Zoe asked, "What am I going to wear, mum? I'm supposed to have a white dress."

I nearly said, 'Doesn't your First Holy Communion dress still fit you?' but stopped myself because;

a) the Communion dress was a cast-off from a school friend and never really fit her in the first place.

b) Zoe never makes a fuss about clothes and is just as happy with a dress from a jumble sale as she is from a proper shop. For once in her life Zoe deserved something special.

At times like this, having a fashion designer for a friend comes in really handy. "Zoe, why don't we drop in on Carrie-Ann and see if she could run up a dress for you?"

Zoe was gobsmacked. "What, really? Thanks mum!"

When we arrived at Artisan Studios in Burnley, Carrie-Ann was revving away at her sewing machine hurrying to finish samples for her autumn/winter collection. She had three magazine shoots coming up in the next two days and Prince Charles was picking up a dress for Kate Middleton in the

morning. "So you need the dress by Friday, Zoe? No problem." Bless her, she doesn't like to disappoint.

It was after 10pm on Rushbearing Eve when we collected the dress. The minute we were home Zoe legged it upstairs to try it on. Twenty minutes later I found her sitting on my bed, heartbroken.

Zoe thought the dress looked too clingy and because it was backless, wearing a vest was out of the question. She had started to cry, forgetting that she'd put a bit of

mascara on and now had a white dress patterned with black streaks. "I've ruined it mum! I've ruined my dress!"

I was reminded of my wedding day when

I'd had similar trouble with the bridal gown borrowed from my mother-in-law. The dress was made from silk velvet smuggled into the country during wartime and embroidered with gold thread by the ladies who made the priests' vestments. It was beautiful but very tight and see-through. The only thing I could wear underneath it was a strange, strapless latex tube. All was well until Ged's best man ended his speech by asking our guests to raise their glasses to

*"I've ruined it mum!
I've ruined my dress!"*



made for running. The top half fell down and the bottom half rode up to form a ring around my middle. I looked pregnant. And half-naked again.

Zoe's Rushbearing dress was finally rescued by the good fairy of washing-up liquid and the addition of a sequinned scarf. All was calm on the day; the sun smiled and no-one would have guessed at the tears and traumas of the night before. And which passage was Zoe asked to read from the bible during the Rushbearing service?

Luke, Chapter 12.

Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you not to worry about the clothes you need for your body...

the body is much more important than clothes... Look how the wild flowers grow; they don't work or make clothes for themselves."

Yes well, I know there's a lesson to be learned from all this. But she did look lovely.



'Sue and Ged'. Yes, my name is Gill, Sue is Ged's ex-wife. I laughed because I knew it was a genuine, nervous mistake but my sister was furious. The best man ran from the restaurant in tears and I hitched up my dress to run after him.

But my latex tube underwear was not