

## **BIOPHILE – JULY 2007**

An invitation to send “letters with balls” closes each of these columns, as you may have noticed. So why am I surprised when our readers send them? Letters I mean – although I suspect it’s going to take a fine pair of cojones to answer this particular challenge. There I was, feeling as smug as the proverbial cat that got the cream when it was summarily wiped from my face – the cream, I mean.

The letter was from Van Zijl Loots, a Capetonian and a vegan. In it, he gently pointed out that as admirable as my conversion to vegetarianism may be, “... the dairy and egg industries are by far the cruelest to animals... and all those animals also end up in the same slaughter houses. At the end of the day, you can’t be against the abuse and exploitation of animals, and not be vegan.”

Punto, Mr Loots. Punto, indeed. While my conscience wrestled with his words, my mind started listing the harrowing self-denial that lay ahead. How *could* a girly-girl chat possibly take place over anything but a frothy cappuccino coffee? And now that I had forgone bacon as a failsafe hangover cure, was my liver to make do without the omelet too? I have also invented some pretty creative things to do with cream, I might tell you – and some of them have been enjoyed in sight of my duck down duvet. Now both were to be deleted from my repertoire and somehow I knew that Soya curd on an organic cotton sheet would hardly incite the same unbridled passion! Life, as I knew it, was about to end, and the path to the horizon was to be lined only with broccoli. Aargh!

I started doing some mental exercises, supplanting the humble bovine with some of my favourite ‘furries’. What if, I imagined, I had developed a liking for elephant milk? How could I enjoy it on my breakfast cereal, knowing that a wise old cow had had her floppy-trunked girl calf wrenched from her warm, crinkly side on an icy night and then had bellowed her angst over the fence as the little one was shoved into a small metal box on the other side, to wait out its lonely youth, far from her guidance and protection? Would yoghurt still taste as yummy, knowing that every potentially mighty bull elephant had had its life ended with a bullet at the dawn of its first day on

earth – or its tender white flesh ‘grown’ as ‘ellie veal’ for the soft teeth of effete diners in Johannesburg or Paris?

All so that the old girl’s milk could be mine.

In the logical and integrated philosophy to which I aspire, all life is precious, all life has equal value, all life must be honoured and cherished to the best of our ability. So why was I prepared to perpetrate against a cow what I was not prepared to do to an elephant? Because, once again, I had found myself to be a self-serving hypocrite, that’s why. And it must stop.

But the question of whether or not I should/would/can eat eggs is one I haven’t yet resolved – and no doubt Mr Loots will soon clarify my thinking on this matter too! Eggs harvested from battery chicken farms have long been forbidden in my house, and I think ‘free range’ is a label fraught with hidden abominations. But what about the eggs which my own, happy, busy little chickens have given me over the years? Can I not eat those?

And it does seem as if they were ‘given’ to me. Honey (rescued from Alexandra township in Johannesburg) liked to deposit her daily treasure in one of two places – my couch or my pillow. And even when I left the eggs there for several days to test her maternal tenderness towards them, she showed no inclination of nurturing another of her kind. Clearly a career girl was our Honey. Winnie (so named because she was an African chicken that never shut up, like our former first lady) showed similar disregard for her ova, tucking them behind any bush in the garden and leaving them to their destinies, despite being provided with a most luxurious chicken hatch. But then she had her sights set on high office, I guess, and kids might get in the way!

Perhaps Les Girls didn’t sit because they knew that the eggs were unfertilized and were therefore no-hopers from the start. And perhaps that was where my cruelty towards them lay – that I hadn’t provided any cocks on the property. Well, I’ve got news for them – regrettably, there seldom are around here, but it is my experience that, nonetheless, there is a fun life to be had while scattering unfertilized ova to the winds of life!

Comments (with balls please) to [patriciaglyn@wol.co.za](mailto:patriciaglyn@wol.co.za) – especially from you, Van Zijl Loots!