

# Tagging along

*Fur manufacturers may start labeling how the animals were killed*



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All right, fellow members of academia, it's time for a vacation. It's the middle of winter, we're just beginning to feel the semester's first wave of tests, and spring break is far, far away. So your buddy J.J. is about to magically whisk you away to an exotic location.

How does Beverly Hills sound to you? Sunny skies, expensive cars, plastic surgery-altered faces and Robin Leach's voice in the background wherever you go.

So we're rolling in our Benz down Rodeo Drive, passing by all the lavish retailers, and you notice a fine fur coat in the window. Now you know if you're in Beverly Hills, you've got to have a fur, so let's go inside.

You skip over the low-budget rabbit, the old-woman styles and the '70s pimp getups, then find the perfect mink. The feel is good and the fit is right, and since this is an imaginary trip, we actually have the funds to flash for the fur.

But before you hand over the skin to be sacked, you notice an extra tag hanging from the arm of the coat. You expect it to say "Made in Ghana" or "See Reverse Side For Care," but instead it says in huge bold lettering:

**CONSUMER NOTICE:** This product was made with fur from animals that may have been killed by electrocution, gassing, neck-breaking, poisoning, clubbing, stomping or drowning, and may have been trapped in a steel-jaw leghold trap.

And then we realize that the vacation is just a dream, because you'd never see something like this in real life. Right?

Back to reality, folks. Allow me

to introduce you to the proposal actually being presented by the Beverly Hills Consumers for Informed Choices, or IDIOTS for short. They want to place these tags on furs because the animals are treated unethically before they die, and people don't know about it.

Luke Montgomery, the group's spokesman, says, "It's not about animal rights, it's about giving customers the right to make up their own minds."

So I guess they have no real problem with how the animals are killed, they just want all the rich Californians to know what they're buying and how it arrived in their hands. The fur industry doesn't hide the way they kill the critters, but the retailers seem to fib a bit and say they are killed "humanely."

"We just don't want them to lie to people that are spending thousands of dollars on coats," Montgomery said.

Well, no matter what Montgomery and his ward of liberal hooligans preach, the problem in Beverly Hills won't be fixed with tags that scream scare-tactic propaganda. People will stop buying these furs after they understand that killing them is wrong.

Too bad there isn't anything wrong with killing them! The Bible tells us we have dominion over the animals of the Earth, but let's not argue the morality of animal killing — we should analyze the actual absurdity of the entire issue. Let's apply this "tell-me-how-it-got-here-on-a-tag" concept to the extreme. If a dead fox gets a tag for a fur, then a dead pig should get one for a pork chop. (We're definitely equal-opportunity.)

So I go to Super Saver before a barbecue to load up on some chops. I better see more on the plastic than just a "97% fat free" sticker. There better be a tag that tells me not only how it was killed, but every detail associated with the process. It should say the hog was raised in Atlantic, Iowa, by a man named Fritz, what kind of feed it ate, how many other pigs it was raised with and how big it got before it was sent to slaughter.

Then it better say which IBP it was shipped to, who stunned it to death, who skinned it and how it

was cut up.

To be completely thorough, I better know who the guy was that cleaned up the feces from the factory floor. It should conclude with a detailed description of how it got from IBP to my grocer's refrigerator. (Including a comprehensive guide to the deliverer's driving habits.)

Then we may finally be able to purchase quality consumer products with knowledge of the item's origin and death — and this would apply to furs, chops, clothes and KFC. That's what these Beverly Hills wackos want — for the consumers to know not only the facts, but the history of the product novel-style.

And it seems that the citizens of Beverly Hills are actually supporting this whole tag scheme. Seventeen percent of the population there signed a petition to get the initiative on the May 11 ballot. (That's more people than those who voted for the current mayor!)

But if you, citizens of civilized America, feel this proposal is as much of a farce as I do (and don't want to start tagging dead animals willy-nilly), then maybe we should take a permanent vacation to the Hills and slap some sense into these people.

Just be sure to get registered to vote by May 11.



# The name game

*Identifying people by group, not individuality, leads to bigotry and misperceptions*



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*Prejudice and bigotry of many sorts seem always to lurk just beneath the surface of our interactions with others.*

—from the introduction to "Bigotry, Prejudice and Hatred," Edited by Robert M. Baird.

This could hardly be truer. We can and should be happy that much of the hateful bigotry that was once the norm in our nation has been overcome. Not all of it, but a lot.

The next problem, as many people other than myself have said, is to combat the deeper prejudices that lurk where we often can't see them.

The common bigotry of current society can effectively be called by another name: "groupism." (It's not in the dictionary — let's just say I coined the term.) I feel safe saying every one of us has been guilty of it, in repeat numbers. And defeating it may make the fight against outright hatred seem easy. Let me explain.

I was recently annoyed by the loud talking of a white male, seemingly not too different from myself. I immediately thought, "Why does he have to be so loud?" Common response, right?

Another time, I was annoyed by the loud talking of someone who was obviously an international student. This time I said to myself, "Why do they have to be so loud?"

Catch the minuscule difference? Both perpetrators were talking to other people, yet I identified the white student as an individual, and the foreign student as merely one of a group. I did this immediately, and completely without malice.

But that "they" I used to name the international student has a wealth of implications, whether or not I ever directly visit those implications in my

mind.

It implies thinking of the person as a "foreigner" and "alien." It also just as easily encompasses lots of racial and ethnic slurs — even though I might never completely form those phrases myself.

I had taken the easy yet disrespectful way of dealing with another person in my mind. Even though categorizing him that way held no advantage for me; even though what groups he might be part of didn't apply in any way to this situation, I had grouped him.

This is actually a form of bigotry. It's the quiet beginning to attaching all sorts of qualities to those groups, and then easily pegging those qualities onto anyone whom I perceive to be in that group. That's not fair to anyone.

Nevertheless, it is incredibly practical.

You can think a person from L.A. is a gang member, and never have that assumption challenged. You can patently think of homosexuals as "sick" or "freaks."

It makes life easier. You might never be burdened with thinking about them as individual people.

If you told me to think of people I know who are minorities, I could form a picture of several people in my mind. But I guarantee you, there are others who would fit that description that I would never think of.

Those are people who are close friends or co-workers — people I've had to get to know. And I'm no longer capable of just shoving them into a group, because I know too much about them.

Once I'm aware of their personal hopes, their daily trials, it just doesn't make sense to try to label them anymore. That's why their parents gave them a name.

Now, consider the bothersome international student I mentioned above.

What if I had been forced somehow to think about what guts it took for him to study in a foreign nation? What if I had been forced to sit and watch his whole life up to this point on a movie reel? I'd know his family, his home, his private moments.

And it would be so damned much work to think about that calling him anything but his name would feel like cheating myself.

I'm sort of perplexed by the PC trend of renaming various minority groups. You can change the erstwhile term "Indian" to "Native American." You can go from "gays" to "homosexuals" (or various others). No matter what letters make up the name, it's just another handle for us to use to throw people into a faceless, inhuman pile.

I have an acquaintance whose family came from the nation of India. I was told she became upset because people tended not to recognize her as an Asian.

That's no surprise. It would be a novel idea for most of us to think of "Asian" as a purely geographic term rather than an ethnic one, and would be just as unusual for some people to realize that India is part of the continent of Asia (on your globe at least — not geologically speaking).

But I wish this woman would think about how thoughtlessly we can toss her into whatever group we choose, regardless of her preference. Maybe she'd decide not to fuel "groupism," the bigotry of convenience.

Maybe she'd really just like us to know her name.