

KELLY RUTHERFORD

From Glam to Green

Kelly Rutherford got her first taste of life at the red-hot center of the zeitgeist when she joined the cast of Melrose Place back in the '90s. These days, the actress finds herself in another must-watch show about glamorous people doing nasty things. As Lily van der Woodsen on Gossip Girl, Rutherford summons unexpected warmth and decorum in the role of a Park Avenue climber with a wild child past. Meeting Rutherford, you realize that the warmth and decorum is no act; even when she's toting around her newborn and cracking jokes, she exudes an uncommon poise. Here, she talks about conspicuous consumption, eco-style.

I noticed you walked in here with a FEED bag on your shoulder. (The FEED bag is a reusable tote sold to raise money for food for children in need.) Those bags are pretty trendy—I could sort of see Lily van der Woodsen running around the Upper East Side with a FEED bag on her shoulder.

Wouldn't that be great? We actually gave FEED bags as the gift to cast and crew last Christmas. I think something like 25,000 kids in Rwanda got meals because we gave out those bags.

I'm serious, though: *Gossip Girl* has so much influence over pop culture right now, it seems like something as simple as having Lily carry a FEED bag in one episode would have a gigantic impact.

Personally, I'd love to turn *Gossip Girl* into a total eco-machine. But I think it goes without saying that the show has to be true to itself, and the world it represents. I mean, we're talking about a character who lives on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. And speaking as someone who's constantly back and forth between the east and west coasts, it seems like the reusable tote bag thing, and eco-consciousness in general, hasn't penetrated New York the way it has in L.A. Not yet, anyway.

Now that I think about it, Lily van der Woodsen undoubtedly has her groceries delivered. But you could argue that New Yorkers are at an automatic advantage, sustainability-wise, because they mostly live in small apartments, and they walk.

That's true—not that anyone should be complacent. I mean, there are so many greener things we could all be doing, and if we all did them, it would make a huge difference. If you're going to get an iced tea, get it from the place with the biodegradable cups. Stay away from beauty products with parabens. Eat organic food. Wear organic clothes. And make sure that your household products are all non-toxic. Speaking as a mother, that one's really important: Why would you want all these chemicals around, for your kids to breathe in or get into? It's your home. I just feel safer using cleaning supplies from a brand like Seventh Generation. And I like knowing that when those products get washed down the drain, they're not toxifying the

water supply and feeding chemicals back into the environment. The added expense is minimal, and it's absolutely worth it.

Has becoming a mother changed your perspective on sustainability?

Well, motherhood changes your perspective on everything, really. It definitely made me want to set up a household that was clean and healthy. But more than that, I think it changed my whole mindset about consuming. I'm materialistic, I like things. I'd never say otherwise, but I started to feel this craving for a simpler life; I wanted to shed what was unnecessary and stop competing in that "look what I have" way. In L.A., you can get wrapped up in thinking what your car says about you—what it tells people about your status. Buying a hybrid was a way of sidestepping that. It's trendy now to drive one, but even so, if that's what you've got, you're not really playing that game.

It's interesting that you say that, because one argument that's come out of the green think-a-torium advocates making "eco" an aspirational thing.

Well, I know I aspire to be greener. I have those days where I don't get my iced tea from the place with the biodegradable cups and it sends me into a guilt spiral. I think it's important to focus less on that guilty feeling and more on what's positive. You want your kids to be healthy; you want your life to be simpler. And something like shopping for the cutest organic kids' clothes, that's fun. Let's focus on the fun part.

That sort of brings me back to *Gossip Girl*. There has to be a way to get some eco-aspirational storyline into that show.

What, like Chuck Bass bicycling around New York and becoming best friends with Ed Begley Jr.?

Next time, on *Gossip Girl*...

Maybe. I think maybe not, though.

