

Friday, January 25, 2008

Of Greenpeace, the hunted, and the hunters.

Â In 1999, a wonderful family living several miles from central Tokyo hosted me for a few days, which was a great alternative to being among tourists in a hotel and away from where regular Japanese folks live. One morning, the son took me to Tokyo's equivalent of New York's South Street Seaport, teeming with wall-to-wall freshly-caught fish. Already a strict vegetarian, I hesitated about even going in the first place, but if this is the fate of countless fish -- I ate my huge share of fish and meat before becoming vegetarian -- I decided to witness part of that fate. Â Not only were fish there. Several minutes into our tour of the huge building akin to an airplane hangar, I saw a multi-pound slab of whale corpse. My host confirmed it was what I thought it was, and I started feeling plenty more down than I already was around all the dead fish. Â Our host was at once concerned about my feelings and hoping to reassure me that all was okay, that this is a deep-rooted part of Japanese culture to eat slaughtered whales. Â As an aside, I would not be surprised if plenty of restaurants prepare whale meat in a very tasty fashion with some delicious side dishes -- Japan has plenty of excellent cuisine, including the vegetarian kind -- at least if the diner does not know that a whale is on the plate. Â Particularly as I watch the above Greenpeace video showing activists trying to prevent Japanese whalers from harming their prey, I wonder if the whale meat that I saw at the Tokyo fish market resulted from so-called "scientific" whale slaughters for which Japan rightfully receives so much international heat. Â Granted, I do not draw the line at being opposed to eating whales and humans, as I explain here. While I do not know enough about Greenpeace to know if I agree with everything they do, to date I am not aware of anything I oppose about Greenpeace except to the extent that any of their actions risk the lives and safety of the people they are trying to stop from harming animals and the rest of the environment. In Baltimore a few years ago at Fells Point, I happened upon one of Greenpeace's docked Rainbow Warrior boats -- this one not all that big -- to which visitors were invited. Greenpeace has been able to attract not only volunteers, but enough funding to pay specialists in their field to go on their missions, including the crew of this ship, some of whom were chopping, slicing and dicing vegetables for their dinner. Â The pure-seeming drive of Greenpeace inspires me in my law practice to keep on fighting, and to see victories around the corner even on days when clients suffer crushing defeats. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:00