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MICHELLE McDONALD

WILDLIFE PROTECTION DEPARTMENT

// BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON

LIFE LESSONS: Having once owned a rabbit fur poncho isn't something Michelle McDonald is proud of. But she's not reluctant to talk about it either. The poncho was her college graduation gift to herself.

McDonald had helped her parents care for a feral cat colony. She'd worked to save sea turtles near their Florida home. Yet, somehow, she'd missed the reality behind the fur garment. "I had no idea what happens to these animals."

Now with The HSUS, McDonald spent the past three years traveling to fashion design schools, teaching students and faculty about the cruelty of fur. Her presentations combined the hard-hitting stories that converted her—animals skinned alive, caught in cruel traps, and suffering on fur farms—with information about cruelty-free fabrics such as faux fur. Sharing her personal experiences was essential. "I don't expect everyone to know this stuff," she says. "I didn't know this, and I loved animals."

SHIFTING HER SIGHTS: In January, McDonald moved to a new role in The HSUS's wildlife protection department—the campaign against the use of lead ammunition for hunting in the United States. Already, she's drawing insights from her unusual road into animal protection.

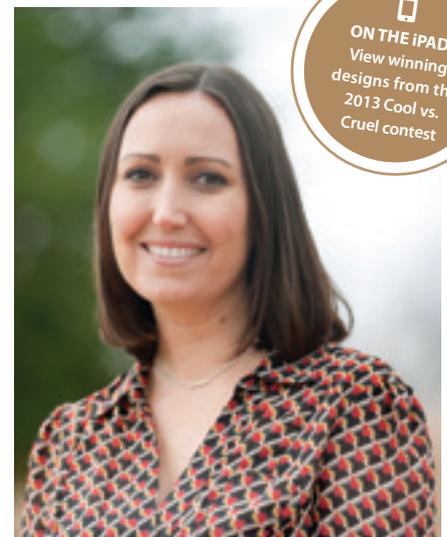
As a teenager, McDonald dreamed of doing hair, makeup, and costumes for Disney. But in college she pursued a degree in criminal justice. During an internship at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, she learned how to conduct a full criminal investigation, including extensive firearms training, even how to enter houses during a raid. She says that ammunition experience will be useful now, as she works

to address the millions of rounds of toxic lead ammo that are annually discharged into the environment.

More than 130 species of wild animals, in addition to humans, can suffer secondary poisoning from those lead pellets and bullet fragments. "I love the advocacy part, and I love trying to change people's minds," she says. "I'm excited to work on an issue that encompasses animal welfare, environmental concerns, and even health concerns."

CHANGING FUTURES: After her father was diagnosed with leukemia, McDonald opted for law school, taking night classes so she could help with his care. After his death in 2008, she poured her heart into an animal law group she'd organized at Florida A&M University. Those connections, and a summer HSUS internship, led her to the Fur-Free Campaign.

McDonald has since spoken to thousands of students, many of whom would email her afterward to say how shocked they were. After one presentation, a deaf student and her interpreter told McDonald she'd changed the student's mind about working with fur. It's these kinds of connections she now hopes to build when talking to state legislators and hunting groups about the dangers of lead ammunition. "I've learned," she says, "how to talk to a room full of people who don't really want to hear what I have to say."



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KATHY MILANI/THE HSUS