

No shopping for abstaining tourist

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WHEN Australian visitors Jill and Danny Chivers visited Gisborne last week their hosts showed them a good time.

They took them to an exhibition opening ("a hoot"). Organised a nice lunch ("lovely"). Took them out to dinner at a riverside restaurant ("wonderful"). Coerced them into hours of olive picking ("interesting").

What they did not do, however, was take them shopping.

Jill Chivers says she could have coped with a trip to town - but it would have been tough. She is half-way through a self-imposed clothes-buying ban and, for a woman who has shopped her way around the world, it's proving to be a challenge.

"My name is Jill and I'm a shopaholic," she says in the introduction to a blog she started in December when she decided to go a year without clothes shopping.

A couple of weeks ago - prompted by interest shown by New Zealand television programme Breakfast when she appeared — she upgraded the blog to a stand-alone website. There, fellow 'holics can get support by simply reading about Chiver's journey, or they can subscribe to regular motivational e-mails.

Jill Chivers says she is not the first person to do the non-shopping thing. Nor is she really "doing without" (her wardrobe at home in Queensland occupies an entire room).

What is unique is her you-support-me-I'll support-you approach.

"What I'm saying to people is that, if they decide to do something like this, they don't have to do it alone," she said.

"My only male follower says he doesn't have a problem with clothes shopping - he has a problem with food. But he's still getting a lot out of sharing someone else's journey."

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Chivers was never one of those women who sold their kids for the price of a new hat - her biggest purchases were made when she had a lot of disposable income and, even then, she made sensible choices that would see her through several seasons.

Even so, she admits to showing signs of a compulsive personality. Visiting The Gisborne Herald, for example, she comes clad in an animal print cardigan topped by animal print wrap.

She wears animal print every day. Her Queensland home is stuffed with so much animal print "it purrs", she says.

"So while my blog might seem a bit trivial to some, there is a deeper meaning to it than just not updating my wardrobe.

"There was always a darker meaning to my shopping, some void that had to be filled."

Chivers' decision to explore that darkness - and to take others with her on the ride — does seem to have been a long time coming.

Signs of a problem were already there a couple of decades ago when, as a 20-year-old working in Sydney, she had lay-bys all over the city.

In her professional life, she has spent a lot of time motivating others in the corporate world.

"I'm always telling other people they should listen to themselves, to their instincts. The time had come when I had to do that for myself," she said.

"When it comes to something like clothes shopping, the issue of how much is too much is a very personal one. It's different for everyone."

She has fallen off the wagon once. It was a pre-loved animal print Ashley Fogel skirt she just couldn't resist

But she does not believe she will go out binge shopping come December 16, when the 12 months of abstinence is officially up.

"If I do that, then I will have failed . . . I will not have addressed that emotional need," she said.

"My intention is to do that, to face up to what it is that motivates me to buy clothes and, if possible, help other people do the same in their own lives."