



Nancy Kourtjian

Changing the world through trash

The prospect was grim. Another three hours of slogging through wet, brown bags and boxes. Applesauce and baby food jars spilled onto the city hall parking lot.

I surveyed my bloody finger, rubbed my aching back and wondered why in Creation I was there at 9:00 on a Saturday morning.

Smashingly beautiful in a tattered black jacket and worn jeans, I clumped over to the police garage to drag out a ladder. The hole in my "monster" boots collected water, but I needed them. When crushing bottles with a tamper, astride a bin of jagged glass, heavy footwear is crucial.

My huge, clumsy work gloves completed the Frankenstein look. But never mind. My work was cut out. Two tons of glass, kindly donated by conscientious citizens, begged attention.

Then I discovered the prize of the day. A blue glass compote gleamed proudly in multi-colored glory. The somewhat vulgar piece, obviously pseudo "Depression glass," lay among assorted wine and whiskey bottles in the dented produce carton. I took it home.

Later, a shiny stainless steel knife appeared. Its former owner had dropped it, inadvertently, in a bag of bottles. Miraculously, it matched my silverware pattern. I "recycled" it.

Buried treasures are a fringe benefit — one of the many joys of recycling.

RECYCLE. Before Earth Day the word meant nothing. Then came temptation, knowledge — and guilt. I consumed the apple of environmental awareness and the sin of wastefulness would burn my soul forever. And it was not enough to ban bottles from my own trash — I had to change the world.

And so it began. My life would never be the same. Nor would that of my husband and children, much to their chagrin.

Countless hours of sifting through garbage to rescue non-biodegradable glass from the landfill. Meetings, phone calls day and night. "Where do I take my newspapers?" "Must I soak off the labels?"

President of a corporation (especially a non-profit one) isn't the job it's cracked up to be. "Earth Alive Inc." became an integral part of family activities. There were incredible impositions on our time and our bodies. But, somewhat grudgingly we all (or almost all) became a family committed to conservation.

Operating a recycling center is often uncomfortable. Obvious hazards are cuts, bruises, aches and constant noise. We stuff cotton for tissue in our ears to shut out the crash of bottles in boxes or against the side of the dumpster. (Throwing bottles is a great way to deal with frustration.)

And then there are the bees. These inevitable product of summer and the sweet sticky residue in beverage containers.

Neighborhood vandals wrought havoc until Monty, a helpful hardworking foreman with the city maintenance crew, conversed with them. Now the episodes of scattered glass are rare.

WHEN A VISITOR with a macabre sense of humor left a dead cat in the dumpster, I had second thoughts.

Why was I sticking it out? Others went on to bigger and better things. Carolyn Place gave her customers to the county and found a paying job. Helena Sexauer closed shop in Bloomfield and now battles lake pollution. Marietta Crabtree (originator of a large recycling operation in Macomb County) was running for some office, last I heard. Still, I recycle.

I pulled a TV dinner tray out of a bag. Memories of an unforgettable encounter were unleashed. Years before, our elementary schools served lunches on aluminum trays. Two well-meaning eco-freaks (my son and dearest friend) decried the waste. "Why don't you recycle them?" they said.

Thus began two years of frustration — all to teach children how to save a precious, non-renewable resource. First, I organized a committee of mothers and students to rinse and store the trays. Then, school trucks hauled them to a lumber yard.

Not satisfied, I convinced the manager of Stouffer's Northland to save the large aluminum

pens used to store their special entrees. These were transported to our storage area by a group of dedicated mothers.

It all fell apart in the second year. Rinsing crews disbanded and hundreds of dirty containers attracted rodents and raccoons. The patience of the lumber yard owner was exhausted.

ONE SNOWY afternoon near Christmas, I fished through mounds of sticky dinner trays, gooey pans and uneraten lunches. Blobs of Stouffer's "spinach souffle" and "shrimp au gratin" gave a gourmet touch to the mess.

With my sons' help I salvaged what was possible. The next phases involved a furniture company (they donated a truck), a compactor firm (they let us borrow a compactor and baler) and a scrap dealer. He gave us all of \$75 for the entire lot — but he did accept it.

I invested this small fortune in five small trees which were planted with all due ceremony at the schools that took part in the program. Ironically, three of the five succumbed to vandalism or neglect within a few weeks. I'm not sure whether the last two survived or not.

The recollections made me doubt my sanity. Why wasn't I smart like Betty Shaw, for instance? Visions of other former recyclers came to mind. Betty managed the Redford Township center, but now she has a best-seller on conservation and works with CONCERN Inc.

Barbara Hallman, once director of Royal Oak's center is a councilwoman.

Monica Goering, the vivacious redhead who started a large efficient recycling operation in Southfield let the city take over. Then she sold real estate for five years. Where is she now? Cultivating her organic garden. Where did I go wrong?

It was exciting to help Monica lobby for county help. The fight for the Bottle Bill was a challenge and testifying in Washington a nice change of pace. But still I recycle.

IT MUST BE the people. Faithful families. The



children — dainty little girls immaculately dressed, enroute to Grandma's or a party. Or rowdy ragamuffin boys, bottles in hand, begging to throw in "just one more."

That's what kept me going. These truck drivers, maintenance men, the company president, the wine-maker who worked to earn free bottles. The high school counselor who recycled cider jugs into terrariums. (She even paid us.) All gave smiles, encouragement and pitched in and helped.

Guess I had to prove a point. Finish a job. Besides, who else would do it? But no time to rest on laurels yet.

fitness

Barry Franklin



Knocking off a hubby, the easy way

While watching a murder movie the other day, a familiar plot began to unfold. A young woman, in her mid-twenties, had married a wealthy middle-aged man, knowing that his fortune would someday be hers.

The years slowly passed, and she found her marriage increasingly unbearable. As she began to explore several unorthodox ways to hasten her widowhood, it struck me that there are many socially approved methods to "naturally" accomplish this end. My suggestions to her would be as follows:

1. Fatten him up. Studies have shown that the life expectancy may be shorter for people who are markedly overweight. Obesity increases the death rate from heart and other circulatory diseases, diabetes, liver and kidney disease. High calorie foods with each meal and for between-meal snacks will accomplish this goal. (Alcohol is an excellent way to camouflage calories, since each drink contains 150-200 calories.)

2. Increase the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in his diet. Select meats (heavily marbled

with fat) and whole milk dairy products that are high in saturated fat. These foods increase the level of cholesterol in the blood and may increase the risk of coronary heart disease. Some specific suggestions include: Never bake or broil when you can fry foods; seldom serve fish or poultry since these foods contain less saturated fat than red meat; avoid cooking with vegetable oil and polysaturated shortenings; use butter or hydrogenated fats instead; finally, serve cholesterol-rich egg yolks as often as possible.

3. Get him accustomed to more and more salted food. Placing the salt shaker in front of him at every meal may allow him to do his own dirty work.

There is strong scientific evidence that excessive dietary salt may raise the blood pressure. Elevated blood pressure appears to increase the chances of a heart attack if it goes undetected and untreated. (To this end, discourage the importance of his regular medical checkup to detect and treat conditions that lead to heart attack.)

However, for those women who want their husband around for some time, take the opposite course of action to this advice. It may postpone his departure by many years, give you a virorous and grateful companion into the retirement years and provide your children's children with a grandfather they'll appreciate.

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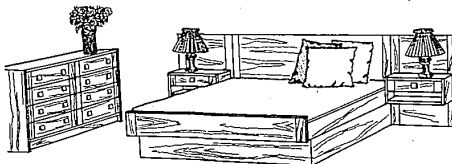
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