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A victory over limits



PROVIDED

Hikers at a vista, Sam's Point.

An Ellenville non-profit provides a joyful way of overcoming durance vile

by Susan DeMark

ANNIE ZANCHELLI BEAMS as she looks around the apple field at Angry Orchard Cider House in Walden. Her smile is bright as she takes in the moment. On her outing to the orchard this warm autumn day, she radiates the happiness of a woman able to experience something that has eluded her for far too long. Annie and her fellow visitors listen closely to the tour guides talking about the orchard's founding and extolling its incredible bounty of apples and cider products.

People with mobility impairments can now savor outdoor exercise, the wonders of nature, the joy of purposeless fun, and the heightened sense of community at harvest time through SOAR Experiences' adaptive programs.

Next to Annie is Joseph "Joe" Zanchelli, Annie's father, in a red veteran's t-shirt. Though the ground is uneven, with clumpy grass and patches of dirt among the fruit trees, Annie and Joe are able to negotiate the surface well in the Action Trackchairs in which they ride. These mechanized wheelchairs have wide, deep tractor-like treads over their wheels

which allow the Zanchellis and others to traverse terrain that presents formidable obstacles to standard wheelchairs.

Thanks to SOAR Experiences – the initials stand for Specialized Outdoor Adaptive Recreation -- the Zanchellis and others with mobility impairments can enjoy outdoor outings such as hikes, orchard gatherings, and off-road adventures in the Hudson Valley and nearby region. Soaring accurately describes the joy and newfound freedom the Ellenville-based non-profit makes available.

The endeavor grew out of the businesses in which Scott Trager and his



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family – his wife Susan and sons Alex and Sam – were involved: an off-road driver training school and an authorized Action Trackchair dealership. What began in 2019 with a request from two paraplegic guests to devise an adaptive outdoors off-road activity has evolved into a separate entity which sets up and promotes varied outdoor gatherings as well as related education and opportunities.

The events bring together people with mobility impairments, including veterans, people who have impaired mobility due to lifelong and in some instances rare diseases, and others who have suffered due to the onset of Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, or other illnesses. The events also have brought together caregivers, students in occupational therapy programs in the state, and volunteers from local and regional businesses. Each event becomes quite a community gathering.

Far greater need

As Trager knows, the organization is tapping into a far greater need. "The more we work with this demographic," he says, "the more we feel they are underserved. What SOAR Experiences seeks to offer, foremost, is a safe and rewarding, experience that connects people with opportunities in nature -- and with each other."

Judging from the responses of those attending two events this autumn and from reviews or Instagram comments others have written in the past few years, SOAR Experiences is answering a major need. Its programs include hiking, airgun marksmanship, off-road passenger ride-alongs, and hand-control off-roading. The public hikes in 2025 have ranged in destination from Sam's Point Preserve, Mohonk Preserve, and Green Lakes State Park to Rockefeller Preserve and Tarryville Park.

The sense of a newly accessible world was evident in the group at the Mohonk Preserve.

"We are just so lucky to have this for David to do," says Michelle Terwilliger-Hathaway, a caregiver of David Amther, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis four years ago. Next to Terwilliger-Hathaway, Amther is in one of the Trackchairs, answering a question about his collection of guitars. Such outdoor events permit different options instead of just going out to dinner or lunch, Terwilliger-Hathaway says.



SUSAN DEMARK

Father and daughter Joe and Annie Zanchelli at the SOAR Angry Orchard Cider House apple picking event.

The event exhibited the freedom of expanding the boundaries of limited mobility, as the visitors in Trackchairs explored the orchard, received a tour by guides, and gathered to taste Angry Orchard's ciders. The participants were joined by caregivers as well as 14 volunteers, including students in Iona University's occupational therapy program and employees of Walden Bank. Scott Trager welcomed everyone and provided directions and safety information. His son Alex helped ensure the equipment was functioning correctly and comfortable for the visitors.

"This is one of our favorite tours to do," says Willow Hegedus, one of two Angry Orchard Cider House employees giving a tour. As the group winds through the orchard toward the cider house, Hegedus tells of Angry Orchard's extensive history, apple growing, and its prominence in the country's cider production.

As she went through the orchard, Annie Zanchelli explained the event's meaning for her: "I'm trying out this [Trackchair], and seeing something like this makes me excited. I hadn't been able to do something like this before. It's making [the outdoors] accessible."

Annie and her father have Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, a group of inherited conditions that damages motor

and sensory peripheral nerves, causing muscle weakness and shrinking, a loss of dexterity, and other impacts.

Joe served in the Marines from 1981 to 1994, when pain forced him to give up military service, he explains. While he is in pain a lot, he says, "You can't let it stop you."

Trager expresses a zeal for the endeavor he and his family have established and for producing programs that will make the outdoors more accessible to people with mobility disabilities. The programs not only widen their horizons, but also deliver health benefits, research has found. As Trager tells the participants at a recent hike, access to natural settings improves the physical and mental health of people with mobility impairments.

Studies show reduced inflammation, improved circulation, and decreased risks of chronic disease such as diabetes. Additional social connections and a greater sense of well-being are also among the benefits.

An adaptive sampler

As one listens to Trager share at a SOAR event, it's evident that his love of the outdoors altered and enhanced his own life's pathway. For years, he had a high-intensity career in the financial sector

and was a team leader for market-moving information at

Bloomberg. As he relates, buying a Jeep and then going off-road driving with his family set his life path in a different di-

rection. Trager realized he did not want to work in the financial sector.

Trager's wife Susan found a 75-acre property in Ellenville, which they acquired in 2011. The Trager family cre-

ated a place there, Northeast Off Road Training Adventures (NORA) for people to enjoy the rugged outdoor setting and receive training for off-road driving. Seven years later, they expanded to serv-

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ing people of all abilities, and in 2020 became a factory-authorized Action Trackchair dealership, Starr Adventures. The company sells and services specialized wheelchairs to individuals, rehabilitation facilities, and veterans' hospitals.

A request from two paraplegic guests from the Helen Hayes Rehabilitation Hospital sparked what has become the adaptive recreation program and eventually the non-profit organization. The two guests brought temporary hand controls, which the company outfitted into one of its rental vehicles. As Trager recalls, they had a great time and urged the owners to put together an "adaptive sampler" outdoors recreation program.

Fifteen participants from the Helen Hayes facility took part in the sampler, which became formalized as SOAR. A video of the sampler program by Richard Corbett of Wheels2Walking which shows him going over rocky, stump-filled, and muddy terrain in an Action Trackchair has over 160,000 views. They trained to drive off-road in a Jeep at the driving school in Ellenville.

"This is getting bigger"

As time went on, the driving school provided experiences to guests from rehabilitation hospitals and veterans' organizations.

The adaptive program drew more participants and gained momentum. In late 2023, the SOAR organization became a registered state not-for-profit. The IRS has very recently approved it as a 501c3 organization, which will enhance its fundraising abilities and enable it to apply for government and private foundation grants.

"This is getting bigger," says Trager, "and we can't turn people away."

On a recent crisp, cool morning under a sparkling blue sky, a group of hikers on a SOAR Experiences event in Action Trackchairs, along with accompanying caregivers and volunteers, gathered to take part in one of the organization's six guided adaptive hikes at Mohonk Preserve. SOAR, Mohonk Preserve, and the Starr Adventures dealership partner for the hikes.

For Alan Blacher, it meant experiencing a beautiful morning at a place he has always loved. Blacher, who spent some four decades as a lighting designer for major television shows and received two Emmy Awards for his lighting direction, says he is now largely

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SUSAN DEMARK

The group of SOAR Experience's hikers give the V for victory sign at the Testimonial Gateway Tower in Mohonk Preserve.

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homebound after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He was at the event with his partner of 45 years, Peter Clem.

"It feels great," Blacher says. "We love Mohonk. We needed to get some fresh air It feels wonderful because I can't do what I used to do."

Kyle Mast, another participant, is very active in community-fostering organizations such as One Rare Experience. He found out about SOAR and thought it would be a great opportunity that he just doesn't get enough of, doing a hike at a nature preserve.

"I've always loved the outdoors," Mast says, looking out to the fields along the Pin Oak Allee. To be able to do the pathway independently on the Trackchair meant a great deal to him.

A mother who identified herself as Staci T on TripAdvisor wrote in her review of a SOAR hike this month about watching her son's ability to explore nature where he couldn't go before. It gave him, the means to hike beyond the pavement and into the forest.

"The adventure we were able to have yesterday warmed this Mama Bear's heart," she wrote. Seeing the smile on my son's face when he was able to be in an environment we've not really had a chance to take part in ..., My son and his friends had the time of their lives!"

"The more we do these events," Scott Trager told the group, "the more we realize we need these events."

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When words fail

“Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast”

by Karlie Flood

MORE THAN A billion people are living with mental-health disorders, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported this year.

“For every single therapist that we have in the United States, there are 350 people looking for that type of support,” said Trina Clayeux, founder of Stand Together, in a provocative article titled

“Performing music is a tender, intimate conversation I can have with many people at once.”

More Therapists Won't Fix The Mental-Health-Care Crisis. While professional one-on-one counseling is a solution, clinical care is not enough, she argues, even if a person sees a counselor regularly. It's critical to identify, learn, and utilize other ways to cope with, process, and release one's emotions.

Clayeux argues for community being an additional component to a mentally



BROOKLYN ZEH

Ginger Winn.

healthy life. Music is one of the main ways people are finding community in the Hudson Valley. Listening to and making music can be a lifeline.

Events combining mental wellness and music are increasing, starting with the first O+ Festival in an event centered

on the exchange of art and music for healthcare. BLOK Party is a gathering of BIPOC musicians, artists and makers from the region. Heart of Midtown is a free mental-health, art and music festival created to connect the community. Into the Well Dance Parties are a collaboration

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between DJ Dee Dee Dame, Ruben, and the Mental Health Association. Rewind Unplugged is presenting a new series of performances and conversations about coping, creativity, music, and mental health.

Music listening

David Cruz, known locally as DJ Jams Bond, is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, and artist who co-founded Kingston Techno, a community-driven electronic music and arts collective creating dance spaces that are safe and



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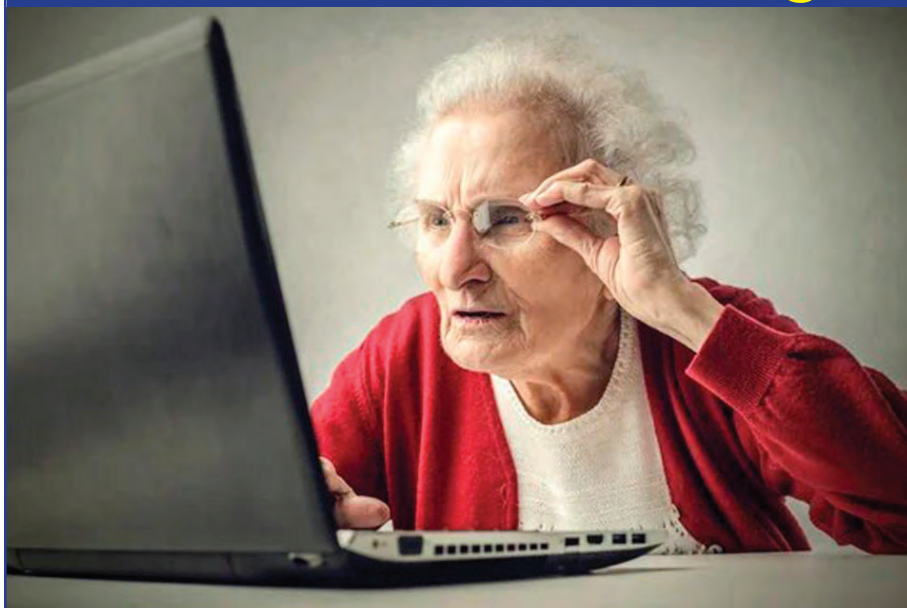
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inclusive to all. Cruz deejays a variety of events, including Skate Time in Accord, the Switch's Salsa Nights, and weddings and dance parties. He believes there are many different ways music can impact one's mental health, emotion being a major factor. "There's listening to music. There's experiencing music as if we are dancing or playing it," Cruz says. "Experiencing music as a listener, you are perceiving sound and that sound of those songs, that type of experience is more of a receiving aspect. And that could bring up a whole range of emotions. Music is one of the most human things that we have."

Music allows people to tap into something and be very present, Cruz explains.

Research that has shown exposure to diverse musical genres and artists can broaden perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and foster empathy.

"In terms of community, it's just about being able to relate to people. It's a connective tissue between a lot of us and the community. Music can help others feel more connected and less isolated if they are participating in the music, if they are dancing together or clapping together, or there's some activity in music creation. I think there's participation involved with that which is very present and can be done without our usual sense of language and interpretation.

"There's another way of connection that is still very human and still feels like a language even if it doesn't necessarily bear words," Cruz continues. "Everyone can be involved in music, and when people are present with it, it removes a lot of the feelings of disconnection that people may be prone to feeling. Experiencing music in a dance setting allows one to be present with themselves and their body, and then it allows them to be present with their surroundings and the people in their surroundings."

Cruz notes the shift in energy while he's playing music for a crowd. "What I notice is that people feel moved or changed after experiencing a dance event or a concert. People come into that space and leave slightly different. There's emotion that's tapped into."

Music helps unite people. It brings all generations and different cultural backgrounds together, especially music with which people are familiar. "Most of the time," Cruz sums up, "people are leaving with some level of positive outcome from the power of community bonding

over music.”

Scientifically, music can strengthen your brain, too. A heady 2023 medical tome, “Cognitive Crescendo: How Music Shapes the Brain’s Structure and Function,” concluded that “music listening improves cognitive functions such as memory, attention span, and behavioral augmentation. In rehabilitation, music-based therapies have a high rate of success for the treatment of depression and anxiety and even in neurological disorders.”

Music making

According to “Your Brain on Music: How Tunes Can Impact Your Mind,” researchers see music as a universal phenomenon that utilizes a myriad of brain resources. “Engaging with music is among the most cognitively demanding tasks a human can undergo, and it is identified across all cultures. Therefore, it underscores its fundamental human nature.”

Writer, artist and community organizer Callie Mackenzie sees music as an opportunity for her to process her feelings. “Sometimes it can be hard to talk about something, but singing about it is easier. So many times, people come up to me at a show and get very emotional and tell me how those lyrics sum up something they were feeling and couldn’t express it, or a message they needed to hear. Performing music is a tender, intimate conversation I can have with many people at once.”

Ginger Winn, a songwriter, a singer and producer living in the Hudson Valley, has been using music as a coping mechanism since she started playing guitar and songwriting as a twelve-year-old. After losing her dad, she turned to music instinctively, writing the song “To, Dad” the day her father passed this previous year.

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One way this is being done is through social prescribing. WHO defines social prescribing as "a means of connecting patients to a range of non-clinical services in the community to improve their health and well-being building on the evidence that addressing social determinants of health such as socioeconomic status, social inclusion, housing and education are key to improving health outcomes and can help to address the underlying causes of patients' health and well-being issues, as opposed to simply treating symptoms."

Here's a single social prescription for you:

Try a new hobby, or practice an old one. Look at your local calendars (we post weekly events in *Almanac*). See what is going on in your community. Pick something that interests you.

You could try a book club (many to choose from: the local libraries, Rough Draft in Kingston, or The Common Good in Ellenville). Try a new craft at Unwind, Rewind Kingston's new free craft cafe on Wednesdays from 3 to 6 p.m. Also, a community music and social wellness group meets every Friday from 1 to 3 p.m. at The Music Therapy Studio at 638 Broadway in Kingston (free).

"Writing helped me process grief that felt too big to face head-on," she says.



PROVIDED

Above, David Cruz (DJ Jams Bond); below, Callie Mackenzie.



DEVON WOOD

"Putting my thoughts on paper and shaping something beautiful from something painful was healing. Whenever I'm going through something difficult, I write a

song. It helps me release what I'm feeling and makes the moment feel less heavy, almost like it loses some of its power once it's written down."

Making music activates more parts of our brain neurologically than most other activities, says Cruz, because it taps into so many different parts of our body and our brain; the emotional level, the auditory level; and the participation of sounds and rhythms and timbres and harmonies. People can remember things immediately if they hear a song. "When people hear familiar music that they've heard, then there's some level of experience there with memory and emotion."

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The latest health theories



GENIA WICKWIRE

The more you nap, the longer you live.

by Sparrow

EVERY DAY OR TWO I hear a new health theory. Do you? Here are some recommendations I've lately encountered:

I teach a writing class every Thursday night on Zoom, and two weeks ago one of my students, Dr. Josie Oppenheim, said: "The more you nap, the longer you'll live. Studies have shown that even one nap a week can make a difference." Come to

think of it, my father lived to 104, and took a little snooze every day – more than once a day, as he aged.

How To Take A Nap

A nap is like a seduction – and the person you're seducing is you. You know that Woody Allen movie where he screws a red lightbulb into a lamp every time he romances someone? Woody has a point. There should be a ritual to seduction.

When I decide to nap, I close the curtains, lie down in my bed – the bed I sleep in at night – turn on the light, and open a book. The book must be carefully chosen. I don't want a mystery novel, or a magazine, or anything engrossing. I want a book that exhausts the mind.

In fact, I've found the perfect text, and I will lend it to you if I ever finish it (which is unlikely.) It's by the great Joseph Conrad, and no one's ever heard of it. The title: *The Mirror of the Sea*. It's a memoir of Conrad's life as a sailor. The book is exquisitely written, educative, but intensely soporific. (That means it puts you to sleep. Certain herbs are called "soporifics": hops, chamomile, passion-

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flower, St. John's wort, valerian root. Of course, if you want to cheat, you can take one of these herbs to facilitate your nap.)

After the nap, recline for a while and remember your dreams. Today, my nap-dream ended while a woman was singing a long folk song – something like “Barbara Allen” – but the tune was wrong, and the incongruousness of her melody awakened me.

For a while, I lay still, remembering the discordant entertainer.

You should never set an alarm for a nap; you should let it live out its natural lifespan, unless you have some high-pressure career like CEO or trash collector. Come to think of it, my first job after I flunked out of college was doing construction. One of my coworkers – let's call him Charlie – would eat lunch, then fall asleep, and always wake up exactly at the moment our lunch break was over. Charlie had a psychic gift on the level of teleportation.

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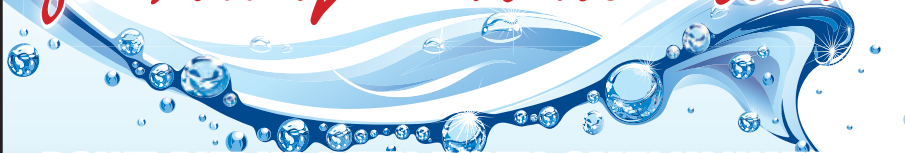
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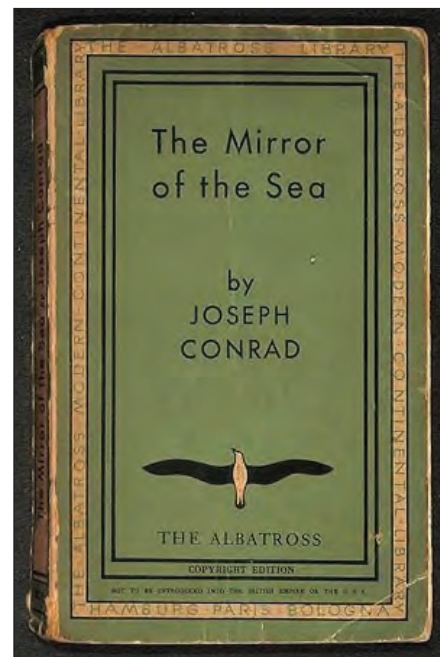
Remember my weekly Zoom writing class? One part of the class involves me asking a series of questions. This week one was:

Think of a funny place to put a Band-Aid.

Rhoney Stanley, who's a dentist with a MPH (Masters in Public Health) replied: "On your mouth." She explained that she encourages her patients to put a Band-Aid on their mouths, which forces them to breathe through their noses.

I've heard for years that nose-breathing is superior to mouth breathing. But why? I wrote to Rhoney, who replied:

Breathing through your mouth is deleterious to your health. If you seal your mouth, you are forced to breathe through your nose and that is the better way to



breathe as it calms down the vagus nerve and gives you Nitric Oxide (helps erections among other benefits)

Then in a second email, Rhoney continued:

I also have an appliance called myomunchee I got from Australia, which you sleep with or wear during the day and forces you to breathe through your nose because you have this bulky thing in your mouth and you can't stick your tongue out when you wear the myomunchee. (www.myomunchee.com)

I looked up "the superiority of nose-breathing" on Google and found that nose hairs filter out dust and toxins and send them down your throat instead of to your lungs. The nose humidifies oxygen. And breathing through the nose regulates

air temperature – your lungs don't like extremely hot or cold air. Your sense of smell alerts you to dangerous impurities around you. And it's harder to hyperventilate while breathing through the nose.

So Rhoney's right — put a Band-Aid on your mouth!

Two people told me, two days in a row, that I'd lost weight. I wasn't conscious of it, but my only theory is that I avoid, whenever possible, eating late at night. Instead, I'll have a glass of juice. My wife bought a case of Lakewood Pure Black Cherry juice from the food co-op (am I allowed to endorse a product in this essay?), so that's what I'm drinking. Supposedly cherry juice fights gout, as well, by lowering uric acid levels in the body. Black cherries contain anthocyanins, which are powerful antioxidants that help reduce inflammation.

In an ad that plays before a YouTube video, a woman in a polyester blouse said: "I cook a lot, so I've used a lot of cutting boards. But recently I learned that plastic cutting boards add microplastics to our food..." And an image filled the screen of evil shards of plastic, looking like multicolored geometric confetti. Once you've seen microplastics with your own eyes – even if they're only the unleashed whimsy of a graphic designer – you'll never use a polymer cutting surface again.

My friend Tom sent me an article from the Eco-Logic substack about the worldwide precipitous reduction in insect populations. One factor is the interaction of pesticides. A study in *Nature* (2021) showed that each of two individual pesticides had a 10% death rate for bees, but combining these two pesticides resulted in 90% bee fatalities.

At our house, we're aiding the insect world with our pollinator's garden, consisting of flowering milkweed, echinacea, bee balm, goldenrod, mint. (The garden is entirely the work of my wife, Violet

Snow, but I'm taking co-credit for it, just for the purpose of this essay.)

Remember, health is not just personal. All beings on earth together form one mega-being, and we must assist that

mega-being however we can. So improve the health of your spouse or a local dog, and your sciatica will disappear!

[Note: Some of the medical advice in this essay may be incorrect.]

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Microplastics: the new environmental puzzle

Yet another reason to switch from plastic to glass, metal, ceramic, wood

by Violet Snow

IT'S BAD ENOUGH to have square miles of plastic containers swirling around in the ocean and polluting our waterways. Now we have learned that synthetics, from plastic to polyester, are shedding microscopic bits of substance that we inhale and consume from plastic strewn into the environment.

These microplastics have now started to be linked to possible negative health consequences. Although research on this topic is just beginning, they appear to cause DNA changes and oxidative damage that are linked to increased risk of cancer and reproductive disorders. According to *Harvard Medicine*, the Harvard Medical School magazine, microplastics have been found in many parts of the human body, including blood, saliva, liver, kidneys, breast milk, and meconium, a baby's first stool.

Just thinking about microplastics in my bloodstream makes me want to accelerate the process I began years ago: conversion of my household goods away from plastic. A recent perusal of a factsheet on reducing microplastic exposure, supplied by <https://www.beyondplastics.org>, sent me to the hardware store to look for a set of glass food storage containers. I'm now air-drying any clothes made with Spandex, since the heat of a dryer causes plastics to break down and shed more easily into the air.

I already do approximately half of the recommendations on the list, just to reduce the plastic in my life. Like many people, I carry a stainless steel water bottle so I don't have to buy water bottled in plastic and can avoid using disposable cups at parties. (Even most paper cups

have plasticized linings.) At the supermarket, when possible, I opt for items (honey, peanut butter, applesauce, juice) in glass containers rather than in plastic, and I often reuse the jars for storage, which I'll be doing more often now. I carry clean food containers in my car and bring them into restaurants for my leftovers—a simple gesture that startles people. Some coffee drinkers carry around ceramic mugs for use in cafes.

In addition to avoiding the waste and pollution of single-use plastics, I find the concept of microplastics has added a whole new level of concern. For instance, I do my food shopping with reusable shopping bags, but they're made of recycled plastic. Isn't the recycling a plus? Maybe not enough of a plus, if my bags are shedding microplastics everywhere. It's not hard to switch to canvas or cotton.

Inside the shopping bag, I carry recycled storage bags so I don't have to take new plastic bags for my produce—but my recycled bags are all plastic, which will shed microplastics onto my food. I can wash the food off, sending the microplastics into the septic, to leach eventually into

groundwater and thence into the creek, which supplies my town with drinking water. The factsheet recommends cotton storage bags. I've tried them, and the vegetables wilted in my fridge. Do I go with silicone bags, which are waterproof?

When I looked up the environmental effects of silicone, I was not surprised to find the manufacture of silicone products contributes substantially to pollution. On the plus side, silicone is abundant, being derived from sand. While the reusability of silicone bags is positive and long-term, when they finally wear out and are discarded, they can persist in the environment for decades, says the British blog <https://www.greenmatch.co.uk/>. After weighing the pros and cons of silicone, the British website suggests alternatives like bioplastics, specifically polylactic acid, or PLA.

Also used for 3-D printing, PLA is derived from plant sources including corn starch, tapioca roots, and sugarcane. Second-generation PLA is even more environmentally friendly, since it's made from residue, waste, and by-products: stems, straw, husks, and leaves. PLA is

Google it

SEARCH ONLINE FOR "MICROPLASTICS," AND YOUR ALGORITHM WILL THROW UP ADS for plastic-less items like the following. I cannot vouch for their reliability — you will have to judge for yourself — but they do look promising.

- <https://scrubbelove.com> sells cleaning sponges made of coconut fiber and wood chips.
- <https://pelacase.com> offers cell phone cases that are compostable, composed of bioplastic elastomer (a starchy plant-based substance) and waste products from the harvest of flax.
- <https://www.bhueland.com> has an array of cleaning products, from detergent tablets for laundry and dishwasher to liquid hand soap in reusable glass pump bottles.
- <https://us.thehumble.co> sells dental care products, including toothpaste tablets, bamboo toothbrushes, and more.
- <https://theearthlingco.com> has developed herbal shampoo and conditioner bars.



PHOTOS BY VIOLET SNOW

Left, if you find glass too heavy, Woodstock Hardware has stainless steel food containers that are great for take-out; right, back to basics—wooden cutting boards, metal cookware, and cotton dusting cloths.

compostable, and its production is less energy-intensive than that of fossil-based plastics. On the other hand, its low melting point means it can't be recycled with other plastics, nor is it compatible with backyard composting because it breaks down too slowly, states <https://bioplasticsnews.com/>. (Biobag, a company that makes PLA-based bags in various sizes, claims its products can be sent to high-temperature industrial composters.) PLA is good for short-term food storage, but it's not sufficiently impermeable to moisture and oxygen for long-term storage, and the bags are not as tough as regular plastic bags. Obviously, there are tradeoffs to be weighed. Perhaps I will hedge my bets with a mix of silicone and PLA bags.

What else have I learned? Don't use plastic cutting boards, and don't microwave your food in plastic containers. Some of this stuff is easy—just use wooden cutting boards and microwave in ceramic bowls. I've never been a fan of non-stick cookware or of liquid soap in plastic dispensers, so I don't have to phase out those items.

I stopped buying shampoo and conditioner years ago, when I learned I could use baking soda (sold in cardboard boxes) to wash my hair and apple cider vinegar (sold in glass jars) as a rinse. These substances do not strip the natural oils from

hair, so I don't have to wash as often as I used to. There are also shampoos and conditioners manufactured as bars and packaged in paper, but I like the idea of avoiding the chemicals used in commercial hair care products, which are often tested on animals and require intensive energy for manufacture.

But back to plastics.

Dishwashers contain plastic parts that emit microplastics at the high water temperatures required for efficient washing. Tossing plastic items in the dishwasher adds to the effect. Looks like it's time to do a lot more hand-washing of dishes, or at the very least, leaving plastic out of the mechanical wash. I already buy dish detergent for hand-washing in bulk from Houst Hardware in Woodstock, so I expect to reuse my big plastic storage bottle and the smaller dispenser bottle into eternity. But it appears that microplastics from the bottles could be leaching into the dish detergent. Perhaps I'll play chemist and experiment with baking soda, cornstarch, and/or vinegar for hand-washing of dishes.

Last year, I switched from laundry detergent in plastic containers to those detergent sheets packaged in cardboard. The sheets contain a type of plastic called polyvinyl alcohol that is currently the subject of controversy over whether it

fully breaks down in wastewater, possibly depending on the presence of specific bacteria. Darn it. I suppose when mine are used up, I'll go to powdered detergent or tablets in cardboard boxes.

Studies done in Europe (see <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) show that when synthetic textiles (polyester, Spandex, etc.) are washed in domestic washing machines, the higher the temperature and the longer the washing cycle, the more microplastics are emitted into the wastewater. Higher-speed spinning in the washer also increases emissions.

Single-use dryer sheets often contain plastic, unlike wool dryer balls, which soften clothes. Microfiber cleaning cloths are also made with plastic, and it's easy to save worn-out cotton clothing to use for dusting and wiping.

Then there's the fact that some replacements for plastic are more expensive, especially when it comes to containers. I see the expenditure as an investment in our health and the well-being of the planet. Since the replacement containers can be used over and over, hopefully the expense for each item won't come up more than once—or at least not often.

Maybe we can't change every item on the list, but we can pick the ones that are easiest and try not to drive ourselves crazy.



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