

Making Ripples

Tossing the Trash

by Amanda Bancroft

It's time to toss out the trash for the last time. Yes, the last time! On December 31st, you walk to the curbside pickup bin carrying your last bag of garbage and a camera. Proudly, maybe with a few doubts in your mind, you have a family member snap a picture of you holding the garbage above the trash can, smiling at the thought that this could be your last bag, if you succeed. Your new year's resolution is to live completely trash-free! Or at least, if you're Rose Brown of Charlottesville, Virginia, this is your moment of triumph.

In 2008, she resolved not to produce any trash in 2009. By the end of 2009, she had produced just a half-pound of trash compared to the average 1,642 pounds most people produce in one year. She writes on her Tumblr blog, ZeroGarbageChallenge.info, "I wanted to challenge the assumption that it's okay and correct to package my waste in plastic bags and send it off to someone else's land to be buried - or to end up in a river or ocean." By transitioning to non-disposable products, recycling more, composting, being more attentive while shopping, and actively changing her habits, she succeeded.

And the best part? She's not alone. People who publicly go zero-waste tend to inspire others to take the challenge, too, and these people in turn inspire more people to stop producing trash. Béa Johnson and her whole family have successfully done this in California and documented it at ZeroWasteHome.com as well as in her book, "Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying your Life by Reducing your Waste." Author Amy Korst and her husband achieved it, too, and you can read all about it in Amy's book, "The Zero-Waste Lifestyle: Live Well by Throwing Away Less." Lauren Singer lives a zero-waste life in New York City and blogs about it at TrashisforTossers.com.

If this sounds daunting – and believe me, it's not easy and our household is still wrestling with plastic product elimination – don't worry! You're not alone. There are terrific online resources for the aspiring-to-be-trash-free family.

Check out NoTrashProject.com for a wealth of up-to-date, fresh ideas on a zero-waste lifestyle, including a post on homemade giftcards that give your family and friends beautiful art as well as great experiences, which studies repeatedly show have a greater impact on our happiness when compared to receiving physical objects.

And remember that making a difference is not a purity contest: if you could only save one person's life, and your neighbor saves twelve people, that doesn't mean you should save nobody's life! The same goes for environmental efforts: if you don't think you can go completely trash-free now, that doesn't mean you should stop trying to reduce the trash you produce. Similarly, if you do wonderful things to improve water quality, it doesn't mean that the trash you produce is rendered harmless in the landfill – doing something good shouldn't stop you from doing something else that's good. All ripples are important.

Ripples is an emerging online educational center inspired by a holistic approach to making a difference. Follow our journey to live sustainably and make ripples with our lifestyle at: www.RipplesBlog.org.