

THE FAITHFUL CONSUMER

By Sarah Streed

In this monthly column, I try to connect faith and the environment in a real, practical way. At the end, I'll offer a practical action that can have a significant environmental impact.

Like most mothers, I spend hours doing laundry. Cooped up in the laundry room, surrounded by piles of clothes assorted by color, my life seems to be measured—not in coffee spoons like that of J. Alfred Prufrock in the poem studied in College Lit.—but in units of laundry detergent.

However, doing laundry does have its interesting moments. One is seeing what I find when I go through the kids' pants pockets. I figure since I'm doing their laundry, I get to read anything I find. I get lots of insight into their lives from this practice. There's the occasional detention slip from one of my sons that I wasn't told about, or the note passed to one of my daughters, almost written in a foreign language from computer chat rooms: "plueez—hes hot 4 u / nicole says so 2"

I even have laundry epiphanies. (What better way for God to talk to me than through the laundry?) I remember when our eldest—now 17 and going off to college in the fall—was eight. I was going through the pockets of his khakis he had worn to church and pulled out a wad of little yellow cards. I knew instantly they were "St. Paul's Church Welcomes You" cards from the back of the pew.

One card had a strategic battle scene peopled with intricate stick figures under a Confederate flag. (His passion for several years at this point in his life was the Civil War.) Another had a Superhero engaged in some form of Superheroness. (Self-explanatory.) The third and last card was different. Instead of his usual detailed style, it was simple, poster-like. There was a tree like a preschooler would draw, bush, grass, two tiny clouds floating next to a shining sun. Underneath the picture was the caption: A Non-Polluted Earth: My Dream.

I literally stepped back as if struck. I put the card down on the counter; I couldn't even hold it. This wasn't a drawing from Earth Week at school, this wasn't a response to an environmental show on Wisconsin Public Television--this was simply what he had been thinking when his thoughts were roaming freely during the "boring" church service. In short, this was what was on his mind.

I wanted to give my son his dream. That was the moment when I "converted" to doing laundry the green way. For nine years now, I've used only laundry products that are environmentally friendly and phosphate free. For nine years, our family hasn't added phosphates or toxins to the wastewater that seeps down into the water table.

I've run the gamut, from throwing in little disks holding ceramic beads to buying very expensive environmentally friendly detergent at Whole Foods, but the product I like the best is H2Orange by Envirox. (You can also dilute this product and use it to clean floors, tile, ceramic and porcelain—basically everything. I use their Mineral Shock for all the toilets, and their Glass Cleaner and Carpet Cleaner as well.) Just a little bit cleans an entire load of laundry, whites included. The easiest way to get H2Orange is through Messner Inc. in Madison and you can now order through the website. For approximately a \$5 shipping charge, you can get H2Orange and other cleaning products shipped directly to your house. Go to www.messnerinc.com

One of my readers, Barbara Smith in the Wisconsin Division of Energy (DOA), alerted me to the fact that Wisconsin Focus on Energy, through its ENERGY STAR Products program, has launched its 2003 ENERGY STAR "Start the Savings Cycle". This is to encourage consumers to replace old, inefficient clothes washers with energy and water efficient ENERGY STAR machines. If you buy a new efficient washing machine by July 15, you'll receive a **\$100 Cash-Back Reward**. For more information on this, call 800-762-7077 or visit focusonenergy.com

Let's do what we can to give our children their dreams. Let's start by taking care of our world, the world they will inhabit when we are gone and they have their own children.

May's tip: Green is the best color for laundry.

Until next month, then, God bless dreams and washing machines.

Sarah Streed is the Executive Director of WICEC, a group of people of all faiths working toward a just and sustainable future. Go to www.wicec.org or email sarahstreed@wicec.org.

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