

Newspaper: Boone County Recorder
Column Title: Community Enviro-Line
Column Article Title: Gratitude from an Eco-Geek
By: Becky Haltermon, Boone County Solid Waste Education Coordinator
Date: December 2008

Pledging allegiance to environmentalism is a funny thing.

You're reading the beliefs of an eco-geek who can't sing a Christmas carol without thinking, "Five golden rings? Are you nuts? Don't you know that twenty tons of mine waste are generated for each simple gold band that gets manufactured?!"

I look at life through green-colored glasses and whatever meets my gaze is greeted with ecological evaluation. Unsurprisingly, when you ogle gloriously gift wrapped packages as just so much future garbage, you might come off as something of a Christmas spirit Scrooge. But this planetary perspective involves much more than criticism for the excesses of the holidays, it also offers a deep sense of understanding for the true meaning of the season.

So in the spirit of a cold month celebrating the best in humanity, I offer my list of Christmas greatest hits, all of the gifts that I am grateful for this year:

Kids - The most enjoyable activity you can get paid to perform is talking to little kids about the planet. I still can't believe that teachers allow me to approach children and ask them what they really think about this environment we inhabit. Little ones get wide eyes when I read them *The Lorax*, middle school students inform me they have plans to solve global warming, and teenagers delineate schemes to expand classroom recycling programs. If I find myself feeling blue because some unrepentant litterbug keeps dumping bags of dirty diapers on Boone Aire Road, all I need do is look to our youth for a true sense of hope and excitement about a future improved environment.

Community - I find that the more people I know, the fewer possessions I must own. I joined a bicycle co-op and now have access to tools and experts that are not only motivating me to get my Schwinn together but providing me with a social circle that encourages reuse and recycling. Similarly, my posse of exquisitely dressed lady friends participate in clothes swap parties where we trade our unwanted garments in for those of our buddies. We pass on castoffs, prevent the waste of wearables, and have a ridiculously awesome time. I feel so lucky to connect with these communities and glean insight, encouragement, advice, and even a free dress or two.

Family - Followers of this column may recall that my favorite ecological debater, my little sister, left our lovely County for grad school. I couldn't be more pleased that she is coming home for the holidays. As she and I dream up handmade crafts like origami ornaments made of sheets from recycled magazines (check 'em out in my blog), and belittle each other's ideas for parental presents, I realize that sometimes, what this eco-geek needs more than anything is dialogue and disagreement. "If Mom wants gold rings," my sister hisses, "then we are going to freaking get her gold rings." We agree to get them second-hand, satisfying this environmentalist.

I hope your holiday is full of good company, conscientious gifts, local food, and fewer wastes. But most of all, I hope it is bright and happy!

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Becky Haltermon is the Boone County Solid Waste Education and Litter Abatement Program Coordinator. Learn more at <http://kyecogeek.blogspot.com/> or contact at 859-334-3151 or [bhaltermon@boonecountyky.org](mailto:bhaltermon@boonecountyky.org).