

## It's Inconvenient Being Green

By LISA TAKEUCHI CULLEN

My condition began when I read of a couple in New York City who had vowed to live a whole year without toilet paper. They were conducting an experiment in environmentally low-impact living as research for a book, they said. For a year they would eschew transportation that emits carbon dioxide, shun foods wrapped in plastic packaging and, most dramatically, conduct the elimination of their waste without the aid of wasteful paper products. I mull the logistics of paperless hygiene as I load a family-size pack of Charmin Ultra Soft into my Subaru Forester. According to the plastic packaging, each roll contains 569 sq. ft. (or 52 square meters, which sounds a lot better) of murdered tree. Like the bear in the commercial, I squeeze it tight. I like my toilet paper. I like it a lot.



I am not particularly eco-conscious. But I am increasingly eco-anxious. Every day, it seems, I hear of some new way the world around me is going aggressively green. Workers in Portland, Ore., are cycling to the office. Ireland has slapped a tax on plastic bags. Incoming freshmen at California colleges are asked to keep their Red Bulls in thermoelectric fridges. David Duchovny says he recycles, has solar power and drives an electric car. Now every time I purchase a single-serving water bottle, I hear the opening theme from *The X-Files*.

So it was with some relief that I learned that eco-anxiety is a diagnosable condition. A so-called eco-therapist in Santa Fe, N.M., reportedly sees up to 80 patients a month who complain of panic attacks, loss of appetite, irritability and what she describes as some sort of a twitchy sensation in their cells. Eco-anxiety is not new--the etymology website WordSpy found it mentioned in a 1990 Washington Post article--but it's only now becoming widespread. Environmental consciousness is no longer just another lifestyle choice, like open marriages or joining the circus; it has been upgraded to a moral imperative. That forces Americans to add environmentalism to their already endless checklist of things to fret about. Did I remember to turn out the kitchen light? Couldn't I memorize the directions to my job interview instead of print them out? Why, for the love of Pete\*, did I use a napkin to wipe my mouth when I have here a perfectly good sleeve?

Recently I have spent considerable time considering my environmental failings, if not actually doing much about them. Like the average American household, we own two cars. Between my husband and me, we drive 13,000 miles (21,000 km) a year, making our country 520 gal. (2,000 L) of gas more dependent on foreign suppliers. The thermostat in our 2,200-sq.-ft. (200 sq m) house is set at 70°F (21°C). It takes 6,960 kW-h a year to

power our computers, halogen lights and plasma TV. My child went through an industry-calculated average of 4.4 diapers a day for 34 months, which amounts to 4,488 soiled Huggies in some landfill. So far this year, I have traveled 34,574 miles (or 55,636 km, which sounds a lot worse) by air. According to the calculator on ClimateCrisis.net my household produces 15 tons of carbon dioxide a year. The average is 7.5. Mine is the Sasquatch of carbon footprints.

Anxiously I ponder the ways I might reduce my shoe size. I have seriously considered banning Christmas gifts this year to avoid the senseless consumption of sheer stuff, but I don't want my kid to say she saw Mommy dissing\* Santa Claus. I could theoretically ride a bicycle to work, but I am concerned that some where along the eight miles of highway, I will have a seizure. I have looked into yurts, but they are not a popular housing alternative in New Jersey.

The reasons for not going green usually boil down to one, so elegantly put by a frog who had no choice in the matter: It's not easy being green. It's easier to toss the leftovers into the 13-gal. (50 L) Hefty bag then figure out how to use the compost bin that sits just outside. It's easier to drive to the grocery store than to plant my own vegetable garden. It's easier to keep my job writing for a magazine that prints 3.52 million copies a week than it is to start over in a new career designing suburban yurts.

Yes, the truth is inconvenient. But I'm trying. I am attempting to reverse my eco-unconsciousness, if only to assuage the twitchy sensation in my cells. I have installed the low-energy lights I bought at Home Depot, even though they make my living room look like a gas-station toilet. I look for products at the grocery store with the green recycling thingy on the package and then place my purchases in reusable burlaps bags. I potty-trained my kid. When I die, I plan to be placed au naturel in a shallow hole and become fertilizer for a dogwood tree. But there's one thing I won't give up. If he wants my toilet paper, Al Gore himself will have to pry it from my cold, biodegradable hands.

\***dis**: disrespect

\***for the love of Pete**: I am frustrated with this situation