

Guilty Greenie: Season 1, Episode 5

Bagby on Bags

Cait Bagby: Hello and welcome back to Guilty Greenie. We are live here on Fireside from the Climate Collab auditorium, and we are your imperfect hosts. I am Cait Bagby.

Sarah Ferris: And I'm Sarah Ferris and we are tired of perfectionism in trying to live more sustainably. Personally, I feel that if I'm not living in my mud brick, solar powered, home, eating huhu grubs and foraged mushrooms, then I'm pooping all over this glorious planet, no matter which way I turn. So let's get real for a minute and focus on what we can achieve because granted mud bricks and huhu grubs... they're sustainable and perhaps even a perfect pairing just not anywhere near me.

So join us as we bear all. We'll share our own guilt, share our own journeys and just add some levity in our attempts and fails to be more eco-friendly but in the real world. Right, Cait?

Cait Bagby: Yes. And I have so many questions right off the bat like, what are huhu grubs?

Sarah Ferris: Don't you know what a huhu grub is?

Cait Bagby: I don't. I have a feeling this show is going to be entertaining if for no one else than ourselves. We are going to share our own journeys: the good, the bad, and already the laughable. Today we are diving into the great bag, debate. Paper, plastic, cotton: what's the best choice? Let's find out.

Sarah Ferris: Yeah. I've actually got no idea what the right answer is here. I feel like any which way I turn, I'm probably doing it wrong so I'm looking forward to hearing what your going to tell me.

Cait Bagby: I don't either so that's it. Show over. No idea. That was our shortest show ever.

Sarah Ferris: Well, this week I'm talking about bags with Bagby. How good is that?

That was actually my nickname in high school.

Well, it's begging for it really? To be fair.

Cait Bagby: Today's topic came about because Janelle, who is in our audience, asked the question about, reusable bags.

Sarah Ferris: I love that. We've got a listener that has given us a topic. It's amazing. I want to start by asking you this, how many bag options are there?

Cait Bagby: How many fingers and toes do you have? Multiply that. Um, there's so many different configurations of bags. I think we should stick to the main three, which are paper, think of like a paper grocery bag. The standard brown ones. Plastic, and when we think of plastic bags, what we know is single use. And then the cotton reusable bag that has taken the world by storm in the last couple years.

Sarah Ferris: Everybody loves a tote.

Cait Bagby: Oh my God. And everyone's either giving them away or they're... well, I won't give away the ending yet. But, every brand is putting them out there as like, "here's the sustainable option." Out of those three, which one do you think is the more sustainable option?

Sarah Ferris: I used to think that it was the cotton reusable tote, but I have heard whispers on the wind that it's not the case. So I will say paper then. Recycled paper bag very specifically.

Cait Bagby: Okay. I'm going to tell you you're wrong.

Sarah Ferris: Well, I knew I was. I also have to tell you, I've never used a paper bag in my life.

Cait Bagby: Really? Wait, hold on. Our grocery stores, even growing up, you get two options, paper or plastic.. They literally ask you at the checkout, paper or plastic?

Sarah Ferris: Oh, ours were pretty much plastic or grab a box from the emptied, whatever.

Cait Bagby: I wanted to dig into that but that's a whole different conversation. Here at wholesale stores like Costco or BJ's you can go pick out a box, otherwise you don't get bags at all. So you can either carry it out, just put it in the shopping cart, wheel it out to your car and fill it up, or you can just pick a box. And I actually love that because you're reusing the packaging it came in.

Sarah Ferris: Of course. I'm wondering also, because the paper bag thing, it's not very big where I've grown up in New Zealand. I've got a lot mild flashbacks of maybe feeling that paper bag, but it wasn't like a common thing like you are saying, plastic or paper.

Cait Bagby: Super common here. And then as you brought up the size of the bag, because obviously the sizes will vary, but in the U S the standard paper bag will hold about 14 items while the standard plastic, and we're talking grocery store bags, will hold anywhere between five to 10 items. So there's a volume adjustment too.

Sarah Ferris: Ooh. We're doing maths. Welcome people.

Cait Bagby: I won't do it, Sarah. Paper bags are actually more, I'm going to say this and then I'm going to back up and explain it. How's that?

Sarah Ferris: Yeah. Go for it.

Cait Bagby: Paper bags are more environmentally stressing than plastic is. And out of plastic, paper, or cotton, plastic comes out as having the lowest cumulative environmental footprint.

Sarah Ferris: No, stop it. Are you joking? There's gotta be a massive but.

Cait Bagby: Massive, massive, BUT in there. This came out of several different studies. The one that's most cited and most popular was a 2018 life cycle assessment out of Denmark. It took into account manufacturing of the product. That takes into account water usage, chemicals, energy usage... I don't think it took into account the human impact. That's something that's missing from environmental studies and it drives me nuts.

It also took into account the number of times it was used. It took into account how it's disposed of when it is properly disposed: recycled or incinerated. But, it did not, and this is a major, major, but huge asterisk here... it did not take into account when things don't go according to plan. And as we know in the world of plastics, most of it ends up in our waterways and is not properly disposed of. So I think a really important thing to consider.

Sarah Ferris: Yeah, I agree. But also, can you actually recycle those plastic bags? Because over here, in the UK, you can't recycle a plastic bag, like a single use plastic bag. It doesn't go into our blue recycling bin. Right?

Cait Bagby: Yeah. No, you can't. When I say you can't recycle it, you can't throw it into your curbside recycling bin. That's a big no-no.

Sarah Ferris: . Right. So when you were saying that you're recycling that bag, are you just saying that you're reusing that sort of single use plastic bag over and over again until it breaks down?

Cait Bagby: No.

Sarah Ferris: Okay.

Cait Bagby: This study was based on when they were talking about single use and we'll dig into this in a second, but this was based on two usages for that bag one to carry home your groceries or whatever, you're carrying home and two using it as like a trash bin liner or something like that.

Sarah Ferris: Right?

Cait Bagby: So it was based on those two. When I say recycling, there are recycling facilities specifically for plastic bags. They have to be sorted from other plastics because it is a particular type of plastic. It needs to be broken down certain machinery. Different type of

recycling facility. Some stores when you walk in, do they have this in the UK where there's like a bottle deposit, you can drop off your plastic or glass bottles or aluminum?

Sarah Ferris: Yup. Yup. Yup.

Cait Bagby: Some stores will actually have that specifically for plastic bags. They will have a bin for you to put your plastic bags in and they go to a special recycling facility to be dealt with. However, however, however.

Sarah Ferris: There's always a however.

Cait Bagby: Right, a 2000 study found that only 1% of plastic bags are recycled. Not can be. Are recycled.

Most of them that find their way through the appropriate channels... don't end up as waste, don't end up in a landfill or waterway or so on and so forth. A lot of them actually are incinerated. And I'm not saying, burn your plastic bags at home. Please, please do not. Please don't do that.

Sarah Ferris: No, I'm not going to do that. I'm not gonna set a plastic bonfire. But is there not really bad like the chemicals and stuff in it, if you burn it?

Cait Bagby: Yeah.

Sarah Ferris: Right. It doesn't seem like plastic is such a great option then. I mean, the other two must be horrific if that's the best option.

Cait Bagby: Well, so that's the thing, if we're looking at the long-term impact that wasn't discussed. We know in, was it 2020, 2019, there was a whale that washed up on shore, and I believe it was France. It had 80 pounds of plastic in its stomach...

Sarah Ferris: oh God. I do remember that.,

Cait Bagby: including plastic bags. And so I think when we're talking about the fact that plastic is viewed as actually one of the more sustainable in terms of environmentally friendly options, we're talking about this from a creation standpoint, we're not talking about its entire life cycle because it hasn't been covered.

Also, what's not talked about is the health and welfare of animals, ocean pollution, microplastics, how that affects human health. How does it affect tourism? Right. If you roll up to a beach with a ton of plastic on the shore, chances are, you're not like pitching a chair and going, "Hmm, this is relaxing."

Sarah Ferris: Absolutely. So it's trying to strike that balance between a product that is actually sustainably made and then sustainably disposed of, and you're saying that the plastic

is the best option that we've got still out of these three options: paper, cotton, and plastic. Oh my God. That's depressing.

Cait Bagby: I'll give you at the very end, what I think the best option is. How is that?

Sarah Ferris: Yeah. Give us a little suspense.

Cait Bagby: Dun, dun, dun. All right so you know how we talked about a plastic bag based off of being used twice: once to carry things home, once as like a bin liner or just any other usage.

Sarah Ferris: Yeah.

Cait Bagby: For a paper bag, the equivalent, it would need to be used three to 43 times to offset the environmental cost of creation.

Sarah Ferris: Okay. And it's paper.

Cait Bagby: Who is using a paper bag 43 times?

Sarah Ferris: You stick your groceries in that and then you get, I mean like today, a leaking packet of beetroot, for example.

Cait Bagby: Or anything that's sweating. It's gonna tear right through the bag. I switched if I don't remember my reusable bags, I do ask for paper because I've just always assumed paper is the better option and I will reuse them for different things. If I'm cooking with grease in the kitchen, I'll use it to absorb grease off of food.

Sarah Ferris: Ooh. That's a good idea.

Cait Bagby: Well, that not for this episode, it gets tricky because then you can't recycle it because you can't have grease on paper.

Sarah Ferris: Oh my God, Cait!

Cait Bagby: I know there's so many little nuances,

Sarah Ferris: Oh, you can't win.

Cait Bagby: I will compost. I'll put them in my compost bin.

Sarah Ferris: Mmhmm that's good.

Cait Bagby: I've also made my nieces little elf costumes out of paper bags.

Sarah Ferris: That's impressive.

Cait Bagby: That's the only time I've been crafty in my adult life. I will end it there, at a high point.

Sarah Ferris: I must see these elf paper bag costumes. They sound impressive.

Cait Bagby: I'll send you a picture. But yeah, three to 43 times it has to be used. It is the, obviously the least durable option. The good news, slight good news, here is that 14 to 20%... two different studies, one out of 2018, one out of 2020, 14 to 20% are recycled.

Sarah Ferris: That's still not great though: 14 to 20%. Do you know what's happening to the rest of the 80%? They're just single use then?

Cait Bagby: They're ending up in landfills essentially and without the appropriate environment for them to break down, they take longer to break down. It's a bigger release of, in landfills methane. This is a huge issue. It's the same as sending food scraps to a landfill. They need the proper environment to break down and if not provided that I can actually have an adverse environmental impact.

Sarah Ferris: Right.

Cait Bagby: All good news here on the Guilty Greenie today. Tune in next week to be more depressed, but

Sarah Ferris: We're getting an extra side of guilt today.

Um, okay, so paper bags, I'm on the fence on that.

Cait Bagby: They're difficult to make too. They're pretty toxic to make like the chemicals needed, the dyes, water usage is really high, energy usage is really high. And paper bag consumption in the U.S. is estimated around 10 billion bags a year. Single use plastic sits around 14 billion. So it's slightly less than plastic bags, but still pretty high. That requires 14 million trees.

Sarah Ferris: Oh, hold on. Oh, I assumed these paper bags were made out of recycled paper or something.

Cait Bagby: Some are...

Sarah Ferris: but not all.

Cait Bagby: Nope, but not all. I am not a scientist. I am not an expert in the process whatsoever, but I've, you know, curious dug into it a little bit. And, what I came up with is these trees have to sit for three years before they can be used in the paper process. Then the bark is stripped off, it's dried, and then it's pressed down into a pulp and there's a whole

chemical process. And then to recycle them, you can put paper bags in your curbside recycling. The same process has to happen again essentially they need to be broken down, they need to be stripped, they need to be made into the sludge, which requires a lot of water, a lot of energy, a lot of chemicals. And every single time you do it much like plastic, the fiber gets a weaker and it gets shorter so it's lifespan in terms of how many times it can be recycled is not great.

Sarah Ferris: I'm having flashbacks to when I was in school and we had to make recycled paper and the process of that. It's not an easy process.

Cait Bagby: In school, did you have to cover your book?

Sarah Ferris: Yeah, they still do that here, but they make the kids do it with plastic. Honestly, the UK is so un-eco...

Cait Bagby: Wait what?

Sarah Ferris: Over here. You've got to have sticky back plastic. What we used to do was magazine covers, or recycled newspaper, or something to cover up, old wrapping paper. But no, over here, the things that they do, honestly, they're so backwards sometimes in the UK. Sticky back plastic and if you don't, you get a detention. Unbelievable.

Cait Bagby: No. Are you being serious?

Sarah Ferris: I'm being serious. If it's not covered in like clear sticky back cut plastic, they'll have a conniption.

Cait Bagby: So we always used paper bags. The grocery bags and then you could draw on them all semester. It was great.

Sarah Ferris: Of course. It makes good sense. I like it. All right. So the paper bag is again it's kind of one of those things, isn't it, it's too much upfront in the manufacturing side of things. And then actually the disposal side of things isn't great either because it's going back into that same cycle at very best and,

Cait Bagby: and the usage, right? So it has to be 43 times to equal the cumulative environmental footprint. Again, not taking into account. I'm just going to repeat this because I know someone's going to be listening and being like "no, plastics really bad." We know. Plastic is terrible. This study did not talk about what happens when it is not properly disposed of or recycled. So 43 times to equal the asterix quote, unquote environmental cumulative impact of a single use plastic bag.

Sarah Ferris: Which let's just back it up on that 43 times on a paper bag. It feels impossible.

Cait Bagby: Well, if you could wrap your textbooks. Yeah. How many days of class you got?

Okay. If you think paper has a high number of usage in order to even out, reusable cotton tote bags.... take a guess.

Sarah Ferris: So your question is how many uses do I think a cotton bag needs to break even?

Cait Bagby: Yeah, conventional, we'll start with conventional.

I broke cotton bags down into traditional cotton and organic cotton. When I say traditional, we're talking about like heavy pesticide use. What they call conventionally grown crops, although there's nothing conventional about dousing the land in chemicals.

Sarah Ferris: Um, I don't even know anything about the organic or whatever, so yeah, we can do a whole topic on that. I don't know. I'm going to pluck a number out of the air and so if paper bags are 43 ish, I'm going to say a hundred. I'm just pulling a number out. Close?

Cait Bagby: Conventional cotton, ready for this? No, one's ready for this 7,000 times.

Sarah Ferris: What's the actual... You're joking.

Cait Bagby: 7,000 times for conventional cotton bag.

Sarah Ferris: Wow.

Cait Bagby: You wanna know what organic cotton is?

Sarah Ferris: Yeah. Is it markedly different?

Cait Bagby: Oh yes. World's different.

Sarah Ferris: Okay. Fire Away.

Cait Bagby: Fifty-four years of daily use: 20,000 times,

Right.

Sarah Ferris: Okay. Hold on. Organic cotton is worse than the other cotton: cotton, cotton. Oh my gosh. That's unbelievable. I'm thinking about the cotton tote bags I've got. Would I get 7,000 uses out of them?

Cait Bagby: It's fifty-four years per bag, for organic cotton, 54 years. Every day.

Sarah Ferris: Good Lord.

Cait Bagby: I think the answer is no.

Sarah Ferris: You'd have to be like, "right, I'm taking my dog for a walk and my cotton tote bag for a walk just to get the wear out of it." Wouldn't you? Why is that?

Cait Bagby: Cotton is a very, very thirsty crop. And we'll lump these cotton bags into the fashion supply chain or the textile supply chain. That's a broader term. Most of the impact in the textile supply chains comes from upstream. And I believe it's around 70%. When I say upstream, we're talking about the farming of materials, down to everything right up until it's pretty much sold to the customer.

So we're talking about a water and energy usage for turning those fibers into a thread, turning that thread into a wearable item, using chemicals to dye them, uh, you know, anti-wrinkle or wrinkle-free chemicals, whatever it is. 70% of pollution within the fashion textile industry is upstream.

When it comes to cotton one, we know it's a very, very thirsty crop. It requires a ton of water. Organic cotton actually has a lower yield.

Sarah Ferris: Right. That makes sense.

Cait Bagby: So it not only has a lower yield, but then it requires actually more water and it's estimated around 30% more resources to produce the same amount as conventional cotton.

Sarah Ferris: My mind is just blown and I tell you what, I've been to a number of things over the last couple of weeks and the free goodie bag that they're giving out at Crime Con and then at the awards thing I went to, they were all filled with tote bags. All of them. Like I've collected six more tote bags that were just given to me. There's even a tote bag inside a tote bag. Now, I'm just adding up the years. I'm just praying they weren't organic, which is probably the worst thing I could say.

Cait Bagby: So that's the thing, you don't want to support the use of pesticides that are running into waterways specifically in the communities that contribute the least, but are hands down the most impacted in terms of health and... and actually we should talk about that. I'm going to touch on this really quick cause it's something that is very important to me. When we're looking at environmental impact studies or the long-term studies, one thing that is often missing, especially in the climate change space is the impact to human life.

A lot of times we'll talk about what happened to a whale. Okay. But why aren't we talking about what's happening to Indian farmers? Or why aren't we talking about forced child labor, or the fact that 20% of the world's cotton is produced in China and they've been accused of forced labor and imprisonment of the Uygher population.

It's to the point where a lot of brands have actually stopped getting their cotton from them, because these are massive human rights injustices. And then the use of pesticides leads to really harsh health complications. Long-term, financially they can sink entire communities. I just wanted to add that in there because when we are talking about materials, we do need to talk about the impact, not just on the wearer, but on the individuals who are actually growing and creating these products.

Sarah Ferris: Absolutely. It's something that I don't even think about when I'm carrying around my tote bag. Is there any place that I can get, like guilt-free cotton? Is there such a thing? Should I be looking for a little label?

Cait Bagby: GOTS is the biggest one.

Sarah Ferris: What is it?

Cait Bagby: G O T S

Sarah Ferris: okay. Like Game of Thrones. That's how I'm going to remember it

Cait Bagby: Yep. They are one of the leading textile standards for organic fibers. Fair trade is another one that I happen to like.

Sarah Ferris: MmHm. The GOTS one, how do you know if you're buying a product that's got, you know...

Cait Bagby: It'll have their stamp on it. It'll say GOTS certified.

Sarah Ferris: And are they out there a lot? Is this like something that's like a needle in the haystack to find, or, can you find these I just haven't been looking for them?

Cait Bagby: A lot of people don't pay attention to labels in general. They just look at a price tag or look at the size.

Sarah Ferris: You're just talking to me, so yeah.

Cait Bagby: GOTS is definitely out there. It's just a matter of retraining your eye as to where to look for these certifications and even Target carries certain brands that have gone through different labeling schemes to ensure that they are meeting the standards in terms of whether a fiber is organic, whether it's made with the community in mind with fair practices, labor practices...

We could do an entire, and maybe we should, do an entire show on certifications because different certifications mean different things.

Sarah Ferris: No, I think that's a good idea, but also I was just thinking what we could do is on our Guilty Greenie Instagram, we can put pictures or images of what these actual labels look like.

Cait Bagby: Yeah, no, we can do that. Yeah, let's do that.

Sarah Ferris: But at the end of the day, you'll still saying that the cotton is not what we should be doing in carrying our food.

Cait Bagby: I told you I'm going to say at the end what I think. I'll give you my honest opinion then. All right, very quickly. Let's finish up cotton because we should talk about end of life. We should talk about recycling because that's part of it as well. It's estimated 30, three zero, million tons of cotton are produced every year. Only 15% of that ends up at textile depositories. So again, we're talking about things that need to be properly recycled. You can't just throw a cotton tote bag into the trash or into your recycling bin. You can't do that.

Sarah Ferris: Right? So it's not just going to decompose when it goes into landfill.

Cait Bagby: Right. It will eventually, but it'll take a very long time. It needs to go to a textile depository. It's just like the plastic bags. They have to go to special recyclers. One of the problems that's been relayed about, even at these specialty recyclers, we know that textile recycling, it's not the it's not super scaled yet. It's difficult to recycle textiles, especially if there's more than one fiber in there because being able to separate those fibers is very tough.

The logos on the bags are actually what present a problem.

Sarah Ferris: When you say logos, do you mean what? Just printed logos, woven logos?

Cait Bagby: Both. Woven logos actually have to be taken off and there's not a machine that's going to fit every single logo so often that's done by hand, if it's done at all. And then the ink logos, depending on what the ink is, that could be a toxic ink, or that could be a clean ink, but they all have to be treated somewhat separately. Not as straight forward process.

Sarah Ferris: No. Nothing good is happening. Like I want a nice clear cut. "Sarah do this." This is confusing me so much more. I have to say, I want a clean answer.

Cait Bagby: When you find that host, let me know cause I will listen in.

Sarah Ferris: It's just such a complicated topic, isn't it? It really is. Nothing's ever straightforward and I think it's weighing up the best option, the lightest footprint we can put on the planet with it.

Cait Bagby: Exactly. This is a good time to go to your challenge from our last episode because as consumers, we know we can shift our behavior, but more importantly, we can tell brands, and governments, what we want, what we don't want. And your challenge last episode was to write to a company or government to ask them to change a certain behavior. And I asked you to ask your family to do it too. So hit me with it. What happened?

Sarah Ferris: Wow. You know how it's called the Guilty Greenie? I'm feeling very guilty about this one because it was such hard yards. But as usual, I've done it a little audio clip for you. I always record when I tell the family what the challenges and you can hear the reaction and see what I'm up against. So here we go.

" So this week's Guilty Greenie challenge is that each of us have to choose a company that has a redundant product. Can you think of any products off the top of your head?"

Sarah's Family: " Starbucks. They have plastic cups."

Sarah Ferris: " Well, there's your first letter? What are you thinking?"

Sarah's Family: "This, this is. This requires effort".

Sarah Ferris: "Yeah. So does saving the planet. So Josh, can you think of a product that you'd like to swap out?"

Sarah's Family: " Um, guns in America?"

Sarah Ferris: " Okay, well, that's a different podcast."

Sarah's Family: "You've got to have this one. I think you need to give us some more time to think about it."

Sarah Ferris: Right. So you see what I was up against, right?

Cait Bagby: Okay. Can I just say those responses were a range of emotions and I was here for every one of them. I just, we went from Starbucks, to guns, to more time and he's had three weeks. So if that's not enough time...

Sarah Ferris: I tell you what, it's not enough time. To be fair, Aviana kind of recognized straight away that Starbucks was a bad thing so she only went to Starbucks three times this week. 'Oh, well done.' I'm talking like epic fail in our household. The only person who actually managed to do anything was moi, myself - of course.

Cait Bagby: So who'd you write to?

Sarah Ferris: I was staying at a hotel in the middle of London and at the breakfast, all of the little pottles of food were in plastic containers with plastic lids on them, like I'm talking plastic on plastic, which is completely unnecessary. You've got a bowl, you've got a dishwasher, sort it out. That was mind blown. I was like, "that is ridiculous." So I wrote to them. I think I Twittered and I emailed on the response form when they said, have you got any feedback after the stay?

No response at all, but hopefully. I'm going there next year for a similar thing and I will be checking in to see if they've made a change. I couldn't understand for the life of me, but then I was thinking maybe because we've got staff, like hospitality shortages at the moment in the UK because of Brexit and God, I couldn't even tell you why...

Cait Bagby: You think if you get one person to put plastic lids on, you could get one person to put them in the dishwasher.

Sarah Ferris: Right!

Cait Bagby: Just thought.

Sarah Ferris: That's so true. You're so right. It was ridiculous. Anyway, that really annoyed me. The other thing is, my elder daughter insisted that I hadn't included her on the challenge. I had. She'd just walked out of the room and ignored me as usual.

She said, last night at dinner when I said, "okay, so how has everybody gone with their challenge? What have you come up with?" And she said, "well, I can think of one straightaway that needs to be gone." And she said, "blockbusters videos." And I went, "I think it's already done." But then she said "HMV" which is like a music store. She said, "there's no reason that anyone should be selling discs at the moment cause you can stream everything."

Cait Bagby: I have questions, not necessarily pertaining to the challenge itself, but if you don't mind me asking, how old is she?

Sarah Ferris: She's 18.

Cait Bagby: 18. And she thinks blockbuster is still around. I just, I have so many questions on that.

Sarah Ferris: I don't even know how she knew about blockbusters to be honest.

Cait Bagby: They made a documentary not too long ago about the last blockbuster. It does exist. There is one that still exists because now it's become this tourist trap where people want to go and visit and get nostalgic.

Sarah Ferris: It's like the pyramids.

Cait Bagby: Exactly like the pyramids, yup. In Bend, Oregon.

Sarah Ferris: Oh, okay. Well, I won't be putting that on my tour list. I can tell you that much.

Cait Bagby: I am pretty sure they give tote bags. Like you can buy a blockbuster tote bag.

Sarah Ferris: To add, to put your plastic VHS in there as well. Um, I was going to say the other thing that I noticed about this challenge was over the three week period that it was in the back of my mind thinking, "okay, what am I looking for?"

It was actually surprisingly hard to find a product because a lot of the places that I was going to had made those eco swaps that probably only maybe six months to a year ago, weren't in there. So there was no plastic forks. There was always sort of sustainable well, the choices that they'd made were on the right path.

I was pleased about that and it did make me conscious. The other thing that happened was my husband, I think his mindset has changed because of these challenges that we're putting out there, and he went to a cooking thing for work...

Cait Bagby: what kind of job does he have? That sounds like a great work outing.

Sarah Ferris: I know! It was one of those offsite kind of team building things, which is actually probably his nightmare, but he went to it and they did this cooking thing. And he said, "actually, I asked them how sustainable is this?"

And they said, " all of our products are locally sourced and blah, blah, blah." He'd asked the question. I mean, HE had asked the question, so that's progress.

Cait Bagby: That's awesome. This is more to the heart of how to live more sustainably is a) start asking those questions. Even if you don't get the answer you like, even if you don't know what to do with that information, the more you start to ask questions, the more you start to think about things, the more you start to see certain things and speak up. But if you don't know, you don't know. You only know what you don't know.

Sarah Ferris: It's so true.

Cait Bagby: Is that how that goes?

Sarah Ferris: I don't know. Don't ask me I'm terrible. I'll screw up any quote.

Cait Bagby: It also shows that as individuals, we're more willing to be like, "just tell me what type of bag to use," rather than I should send an email off or send a tweet out.

I find that really interesting and I think it comes down to wanting to feel like we are in control. Whereas if we send an email off, we don't know where that goes. We don't know what the outcome will be. We have no idea.

Sarah Ferris: No, I think you're right and it comes down to time. Doesn't it? Who has the time to chase that? We just want to know we're doing the right thing straight away.

Cait Bagby: Yeah. I think tweeting is better because then you can see it and other people can see it which gets other people excited. And there's that saying, again I'm going to butcher it, it's like what difference does one plastic straw make said, 1 billion people.

Sarah Ferris: I think you got that one, right?

Cait Bagby: If everyone's writing to that same hotel, let's say someone sees your tweet and then another person, next thing you know there's 200, 500 people writing into this hotel and being like, "Hey, why are you doing this?" That's powerful peer pressure.

Sarah Ferris: I like the idea of that.

Cait Bagby: So long as it's not mob mentality, don't do that.

Sarah Ferris: Oh God. Why is there always have to be as long as there's not, I might have..

Cait Bagby: We should have named it the Guilty Greenie as long as it's not. Or let me add an asterick.

Sarah Ferris: Here's a disclaimer. I like it.

I think we should start with our Guilty Greenie high points What have you got to tell me? Have you had some exciting high points?

Cait Bagby: No, I'm trying to think. All right. I do have a high point. You know me, I'm kind of a homebody. I don't shop a lot. I don't go out and do a lot of stuff plus COVID times and all that but I will say this so high point for me, it's fall here or autumn in New England.

And while the leaves are absolutely beautiful and changing colors, they are also falling faster than I can manage them. Love the fall. Don't like the clean-up. I've decided this year I'm not really doing a cleanup.

Sarah Ferris: I've been doing that for probably a few decades now Cait and it's worked very well for me.

Cait Bagby: Brownie points to you, Sarah.

Sarah Ferris: I like to let the planet do its own work on its leaves. If it feels the need to drop leaves all over my garden, then it can let them do whatever it needs to with them. Yeah.

Cait Bagby: Yeah. I read an article, this is a while ago, talking about how important leaves are to the ecosystem in creating habitats for different critters that help with soil health and essentially it creates this little shield. Helps trap in moisture, gets the soil, you know, in composting, nutrient dense. And so I've just decided this year I'm going to rake them to the areas they need to be in for the most part and shredding some of them to go in our compost pile, which we do every year.

But I don't know if it's just a lazy attitude or I'm embracing kind of more soil health this year.

Sarah Ferris: I don't think there's any shame in embracing either of those things, but mine's definitely a lazy attitude. But what I like in what you've just said is I've been winning the whole time. I've been creating probably the largest areas of soil health that I can possibly do in my backyard.

Cait Bagby: We should do an episode on how laziness is the best sustainability move you can make, I think... Okay Tell me your high point or points.

Sarah Ferris: Well, mine is related to one of our old challenges that we did, which was the laundry challenge and you know what, I'm really loving.

I went into my local refill ladder and I think I mentioned it on the last one we had done, but I hadn't by that stage used the laundry sheets. So they're little like strips of paper that are actually a whole laundry detergent in a little papery rectangle. It's wizardry, I don't know how it works, but you put it in and everything comes out smelling delicious and I feel so guilt-free and I love it.

Cait Bagby: After our episode on that too I switched over to the laundry sheets and I won't go back. I love them.

Sarah Ferris: Me too. And do you know my thing with the laundry sheets is I thought I do so much bloody laundry that I'm going to need reams of those sheets. But actually they seem to be lasting a really long time. I've only bought one packet and I think it had 40 in it and I'm nowhere near, I don't know if I'm just doing less laundry, who knows, but I'm liking them. That's my win.

Cait Bagby: Slowly rubbing off on you, Sarah, less laundry, laundry sheets... by the end of this year no one's going to recognize you. I have a feeling.

Sarah Ferris: I know. I know. And all those things, like my garden that are already sustainable, who knew! Just add that to the list.

Cait Bagby: Yeah. I second the laundry sheets. I won't go back. They're so convenient. They're eco-friendly and can I just say, as a bonus, they're less messy than using liquid detergent.

Sarah Ferris: Yes or powder. Absolutely.

Cait Bagby: Right, liquid detergent it runs down the side of the bottle. And then if it's colored, which we all know go back. If anybody doesn't know, go back and listen to that episode. Which one was it? Was it our first one? Was it laundry?

Sarah Ferris: Might've been like our first one, I think, yeah. We really started with the sexy stuff.

Cait Bagby: We're getting those engines going in the laundry room.

Sarah Ferris: Surprised we still have any listeners to be fair.

Cait Bagby: But, yeah, we talked all about different types of laundry, which ones were more environmentally friendly, plastic usage, all that kind of stuff. A lot of laundry detergent is that blue color. And that stuff stains, I know it's supposed to clean your clothes, but it will stain your countertop and stuff. It's gross.

Sarah Ferris: Oh, everywhere. And then, yeah it's so much more child safe, a child rather proof when they're doing the laundry as well. So they can't really screw up.

Cait Bagby: Okay.

We talked about the highs now that we've got everybody super excited about the possibilities of sustainability, let's bring it down a notch. Let's level it out and talk about low points and fails. So where are you at?

Sarah Ferris: Do you know what was really funny. It's I've just realized that my low point is also related to my laundry. And I think that is the saddest thing I've ever realized about myself that my highs and my lows this week are the laundry.

Cait Bagby: If your low point in life is laundry, I'd say you're doing just fine. You're good. You're succeeding at life.

Sarah Ferris: Shouldn't be my high point though, that's my point. Okay. So my low point is actually, I dunno if you've noticed this about me, but I'm kind of, the glass is always half full. So my low point came off the back of yet another one of my eco fails. Do you remember a couple of weeks ago I had to order some badges for a Crime Con that I was going to, and I decided to use eco badges.

Do you remember that?

Cait Bagby: Yeah, I do. Okay. So what was the outcome? Well, how's this tie into laundry?

Sarah Ferris: You wait. So, I had a lovely time at Crime Con and everywhere I went, I was like, "oh, these are my eco badges. Aren't I just wonderful." I'm saving the planet one badge at a time and people are like, "oh, they're really good."

And then I was thinking don't go outside in the rain. They will disintegrate. They're made of paper.

I get home and I'm just doing my laundry as I do. Then the following week, whatever, I pull out the dress that I'd worn and I just see just a pin. It's just a pin with around circle of white, stuck on my dress. It completely dissipated but the amazing thing about it is that it didn't go, paper everywhere.

So I thought that was a bit of a crap product to be fair. I mean, they weren't supposed to go through the wash, but that's anyway, that's my loss. My low point. Not that much of a low point, but um, you know, it made me laugh. What's yours?

Cait Bagby: Admittedly, when we talked about laundry, why is it always laundry?

Sarah Ferris: I don't know.

Cait Bagby: Thorn in our sides.

Sarah Ferris: We should play laundry bingo. For every, every time we do, we have to yell bingo or something.

Cait Bagby: Yeah. Every time we do an episode we'll do free printables. No, online. We can't have people printing. That's not, eco-friendly, we'll have an online bingo game for the Guilty Greenie and we'll put laundry terms on it. And what the prize is, I don't know. Just the sad understanding that Sarah and I can only seem to talk about laundry.

Sarah Ferris: That's it.

Cait Bagby: So my low is admittedly, I haven't done laundry in a while. Like I don't wash my clothes frequently, unless they're really bad and then I'll spot wash and stuff like that, but it actually got to the point where I was just like, okay, I've been hoarding piles of laundry in my closet.

So I did a massive wash this weekend. And I probably did between my husband, myself and dog blankets and bedding and stuff. I probably did close to eight or 10 loads of laundry. It was a lot.

Sarah Ferris: That's a week for me. Yeah,

Cait Bagby: For me, it's a lot.

Sarah Ferris: It's a lot.

Cait Bagby: Yeah. I have to say though, strips came in handy. Everything came out smelling fantastic.

Sarah Ferris: Exactly. I can't smell you from here like I could beforehand with your filthy lack of washing over there. Unbelievable.

Cait Bagby: Sorry. I got to take my quarterly shower.

Sarah Ferris: Yeah. Your quarterly shower and my once a year sheet washing because I live in the UK.

Cait Bagby: Oh,

Sarah Ferris: Well, that's not too bad. Right. Let's move on

Cait Bagby: all right. I have a challenge to give you for next week but before we talk about the next show's challenge, do you want my paper, plastic, cotton?

Sarah Ferris: Yes. Okay. Tell me, tell me the answer.

Cait Bagby: Use what you have. Seriously, use what you have first and foremost. And if you don't have a reusable bag or something like that just show up at Sarah's house. She will be handing them out for free.

Sarah Ferris: I've got six totes that are fresh as a daisy and they've got at least fifty- four years on each of them.

Cait Bagby: Um, you know, ask a neighbor, put it in your local post, "looking for reusable, cotton bags or whatever" someone has a stash of them. And so I would say use what's already out there, use what you have and the data does show us that it's not necessarily what you use it is what you put in that bag and how you get to and from.

Sarah Ferris: I like that. I'm just imagining Cait, that when I write my will, which I should really do, nobody kill me in the meantime, I'm going to actually leave tote bags to all of my children that have still got years left on them.

Cait Bagby: Oh my gosh. As long as you got to put a note in them though that says this one has 23 years left

Sarah Ferris: yeah.

Cait Bagby: I'm like that. So I think it's more important what you put in it, how you get to and from. Locally grown, seasonal, fruits and veggies. To me, I think more important when we're looking at carbon footprints and also how you're getting there. Are you a single user of a vehicle or are you taking public transportation or are you walking or biking? I think those are probably the more important questions along with using what you already have.

And secondly, I still will not choose plastic. I understand if we look at that study, it will tell us that plastic has the lowest cumulative environmental impact. But I also think that study is missing so, so much on the back end of it, that I can't in good faith, continue to support the petrochemical industry.

Sarah Ferris: Yeah, I can't do the plastic either. I'm not going to lie, but thankfully I've got plenty of totes. I'm winning. Right. So, I'm nervous challenge time.

Cait Bagby: I think the family is going to like this and now that I know your husband's on a cooking thing, I think this could be really fun.

Sarah Ferris: Oh, let me just redirect that Cait. Cooking thing, once he cooked, once he didn't even cook at home.

Cait Bagby: Now you got to ask them to practice the skills at home. All right. With food consumption comes food waste. I'm challenging you to cook a dinner for the entire family. It

can't just be for yourself and it doesn't have to be you, you can pawn this off on one of your children, if you want, or your husband.

Sarah Ferris: God, I'm so nervous now, Cait where is this going?

Cait Bagby: You have to do a zero food waste dinner.

Sarah Ferris: What does that even mean?

Cait Bagby: So no, no food scraps leftover. No like carrot tops or no vegetable peels, or you've got to figure out how to make a zero food waste dinner and leftovers are fine. As long as they're consumed, leftovers are fine.

Sarah Ferris: Right. Okay. Hold on.

At the eating end I'm not going to have a problem with that because 16 year old is inhaling anything he can get his hands on, but the other ends quite hard, isn't it? So I've got to think of a recipe that will feed everyone. It can't even come out of a tin?

Cait Bagby: I'm not going to say no packaging waste. I'm just going to say no food waste. We'll work our way up to no packaging waste.

Sarah Ferris: All right. Start me out with baby steps. Let's clarify. You're saying that if I'm using a vegetable, I have to use the whole vegetable. What does that look like? Oh my God,

Cait Bagby: That's up to you to decide.

Sarah Ferris: God, this is already stressing me out.

Cait Bagby: Let's say you're using cabbage or something, right. You're not going to use an entire cabbage, but if you're going to package up the other half of the cabbage and use it later, I don't consider that food waste. What I'm saying is if you go to cut the top off of a carrot, you have to figure out how to use the top of that carrot in that dish. No food in the trash.

Sarah Ferris: All right. I'm liking this challenge. It's getting my brain, like the juices are flowing. I'm already thinking about it. It's good. Okay. Challenge accepted. I shall see how I go. I might send you a little dish. Oh, sorry. It'll have carbon footprint. You can't, you just have to lick the photo I put on Instagram.

Cait Bagby: You should peel the carrot. And then for dessert, you can do candied carrot skins. Sorry. I'm like now planning your meal. Sorry.

Sarah Ferris: That's a tough sell. I think.

Cait Bagby: You do it with like maple syrup and you caramelize them. It's super yummy.

Sarah Ferris: Can I say how much you were wedded to the carrot in this dish?

Cait Bagby: I just find carrots really easy to like, not have food waste, but yet for some reason we like waste a ton of it. Like why do we cut the tops off and not eat them when it's perfectly edible? And why do we peel it when we will still we'll sit there and wash an apple and eat that? I don't understand why people have a thing against the outside of a carrot.

Sarah Ferris: I don't know. I don't know, but oh, that's another conversation we can have, because I know that there are like a certain, I think called the dirty dozen there's some things that you're not supposed to eat with skin, because of the pesticides on them.

Cait Bagby: I don't even get me started on that.

Sarah Ferris: I won't get you started on that. No, not today.

Cait Bagby: Well,

Sarah Ferris: Let's wind it up

Cait Bagby: Yeah, with that.

Join us next week to see if Sarah accomplished her challenge for more, the good, the bad, and the laughable.

As we tackle our own sustainability journeys, exclusively on Fireside in the Climate Collab Auditorium. Thank you for joining us on this week's episode of Guilty Greenie.

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Sarah Ferris: Bye-bye.