

# *Plastic-Free: How I Kicked the Plastic Habit and How You Can Too*

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## READERS GUIDE

Here are some questions to discuss with your friends or book group. Choose as few or as many as appropriate. Or come up with your own questions. I'd love to hear your feedback on any particularly challenging issues or questions that come up in your discussion. Feel free to email me at [beth@myplasticfreelife.com](mailto:beth@myplasticfreelife.com). Or leave your comments on the site. <http://myplasticfreelife.com>

### **Introduction: Waking Up to Plastic**

- 1) Why did you decide to read a book called "Plastic-Free"? Have you been concerned about the impacts of plastic on our planet and our lives? If so, what concerns you the most and what do you hope to gain from reading this book?
- 2) Beth Terry starts the introduction by describing herself as addicted to plastic and to the convenience-based lifestyle that plastic enables. Do you think that is a fair description of our society? Why or why not?
- 3) Beth awoke to her personal impact on the planet after seeing a photo of a dead albatross chick filled with plastic pieces that she used on a daily basis. Have you ever had that kind of "Aha!" moment? What happened? How was your life different afterwards?
- 4) Beth explains that for her, "plastic-free" does not mean never using plastic but trying to avoid acquiring any new plastic and feeling free from the mindless, automatic consumption of plastic. Do you think this is a good definition of "plastic-free"? What does "plastic-free" mean to you?

### **Chapter 1: Plastic Is Everywhere**

- 5) Beth takes a tour of her house and lists all the plastic items that she notices and uses on a regular basis. What would be on your list?
- 6) Beth decides to collect all her plastic waste to get an idea of her personal plastic footprint, and she invites readers to take her "Show Your Plastic Challenge" and collect their own waste for a week or more. Would you be willing to take the challenge and/or organize a group to do it together? Visit <http://myplasticfreelife.com/showyourplastic/> for details.
- 7) Of all the problems associated with plastic – waste, litter, toxicity, harm to wildlife, etc. – which one concerns you the most? Did any of the information surprise you?
- 8) Do you think our government is doing enough to protect us from toxic chemicals? What can we as citizens do to hold companies and our elected officials accountable?
- 9) What are some ways that plastic makes our lives easier? Are any of these benefits worth the environmental and health costs? Why or why not?
- 10) Before reading about the numbers in the "chasing arrows" symbol stamped on plastic products, what did you think those numbers meant? Has your understanding changed?

### **Chapter 2: Plastic Bags (Why Are There Melons in My Shirt?)**

- 11) Do you bring your own reusable bags shopping? What kinds of bags do you use? And what steps do you take to remember them?

- 12) Beth says she felt embarrassed the first time she brought her reusable bags with her to the store. Have you ever felt anxious or embarrassed about trying something new? What was it? And were you willing to give it a try anyway?
- 13) How do you feel about bans or fees on plastic bags? Which do you think works better? Why?
- 14) Has your community passed or considered plastic bag legislation? Would you be willing to start or get involved in a campaign?

### **Chapter 3: Plastic Beverage Bottles (Dealing with a Drinking Problem)**

- 15) After reading this chapter, are you convinced that bottled water is not healthier than tap water? Why or why not?
- 16) Were you surprised by any of the “Myths” about bottled water? Which ones?
- 17) Do you carry your own water bottle or other beverage container? If so, what kind do you use? And how do you remember to bring it with you?
- 18) What challenges do you experience to filling up your own bottle while away from home?
- 19) Several communities have considered bottled water bans. Do you think these measures are a good thing or should people be able to choose bottled water if they want it? Why or why not?

### **Chapter 4: Why Can't We Just Recycle It All?**

- 20) What were some of your assumptions about recycling before reading this chapter? Has your understanding changed? What surprised you?
- 21) Do you have a recycling system in place in your home? How is recycling handled in your community? Is it working?
- 22) Do you think companies should be responsible for the full life cycle of the products they manufacture or should communities deal with finding ways to recycle the waste?
- 23) Would you support bottle bills and/or other types of extended producer responsibility legislation?
- 24) After reading this chapter, do you think recycling is the best way to deal with disposable plastic?

### **Chapter 5: Take-Out Food & Packing Lunches (Keep Your Straw, I Have My Own!)**

- 25) Beth deals with take-out food and leftovers by bringing her own containers and utensils with her when she leaves the house. Have you tried bringing your own foodware with you to restaurants?
- 26) What are some challenges to avoiding restaurant food packaging and what would make it easier?
- 27) Would you feel comfortable asking party guests to bring their own beverage containers or skip the plastic at potlucks? What are some ideas for communicating with friends and family without creating resentment?
- 28) Has your school or community taken action against Styrofoam and other disposable foodware? Would you be willing to get involved in a campaign or start one yourself?
- 29) What were your assumptions about paper or bio-plastic packaging before reading this chapter? What have you learned?

### **Chapter 6: Grocery Shopping (Saving the Planet One Cheese Wrapper at a Time)**

- 30) What plastic-packaged foods do you purchase on a regular basis? After reading this chapter, which things might you consider changing?
- 31) Do you have access to stores with foods in bulk bins? Do you use them? Or if not, would you consider giving it a try? What concerns do you have about the safety of bulk bins?

- 32) Do you make any of your own condiments and other processed foods from scratch? What recipes can you share? And are there any recipes in the book you are inspired to try?
- 33) It's ironic that sometimes we have to choose between organic food in plastic packaging or conventional food without plastic. What would be your priority? And what can we do to have our food without either pesticides or plastic?
- 34) Would you consider asking a store manager to reduce plastic-packaged foods or to install bulk bins?

#### **Chapter 7: Personal Care & Household Cleaning (When Lazy = Green)**

- 35) What plastic-packaged personal care and household products do you purchase on a regular basis? After reading this chapter, which things might you consider changing?
- 36) Do you think liquid soap is more sanitary than bar soap? Why or why not?
- 37) Do you make any of your own personal care/cleaning products? What recipes can you share? And are you inspired to try any of the recipes from the book?
- 38) If you have children, what kinds of diapers do/did you use? What do you think of cloth diapers vs. disposables vs. elimination communication?
- 39) What are some ways to cut down on the use of plastic garbage bags – whether new bags or reused grocery bags?
- 40) Have you written to a company to ask it to change its packaging? What response did you get? Is there a company you feel inspired to write to now?

#### **Chapter 8: Feeling Overwhelmed (Help! I'm Drinking My Cleaning Fluid!)**

- 41) Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the environmental and social problems we face and feel like burying your head in the sand? What are some strategies you could use to cope?

#### **Chapter 9: Durable Goods (When Cheap = Green)**

- 42) What plastic items do you use in your kitchen? Are there any you want to replace with plastic-free alternatives? Answering the questions on page 267-268, what are your personal priorities for what to start with first?
- 43) What are some ways to save money while replacing toxic plastic?
- 44) After reading about silicone, do you think it is a safe alternative to plastic? In what circumstances?
- 45) Are there any durable plastic items you need to buy in the near future? Would you consider searching for them secondhand or borrowing/renting instead?
- 46) What are some of your favorite sources for natural, plastic-free products?
- 47) When ordering online, have you ever requested no plastic shipping materials? Would you be willing to do it in the future? And what do you think about sending back unwanted packaging to vendors? Is putting pressure on companies to change worth the impact of shipping packaging back to them? Why or why not?
- 48) Do you ever get overwhelmed by having too much stuff? What are some ways to simplify your life?

#### **Chapter 10: Nine Reasons Our Personal Changes Matter**

- 49) Do you believe that our personal actions can make a difference? In what ways? And in what ways are they not enough?
- 50) After reading all the inspiring stories from the "heroes" profiled in this book, are you motivated to go beyond personal action? If so, how?
- 51) What one thing are you willing to do today to be part of the plastic pollution solution?