DISCARD NATION
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*Un*fashionable Facts:
- An average US citizen throws away nearly 70 pounds of clothing and other textiles each year ([Council for Textile Recycling (weardonaterecycle.org)](weardonaterecycle.org).
- The amount of clothing thrown out in the US has doubled in the last 2 decades to over 14 million tons [[The Environmental Crisis Caused by Textile Waste (roadrunnerwm.com)](roadrunnerwm.com)].
- 84 percent of discarded clothing ends up in landfills or incinerators ([Fast Fashion Is Creating an Environmental Crisis (newsweek.com)](newsweek.com).
- Textiles can take 200+ years to decompose in landfills, twice as long as batteries and five times as long as leather shoes [The Environmental Crisis Caused by Textile Waste (roadrunnerwm.com)](roadrunnerwm.com)

Throughout our childhoods in the 70's and 80's, hand-me-downs were not only practical, they were coveted. So, at what point in time did it become culturally acceptable to throw clothing into the garbage?

It's no secret: fast fashion has accelerated both in terms of quantity and damage to our planet. Despite the pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and supply chain disruptions, the global fast fashion market increased 8.8 percent—from $91.23 billion in 2021 to $99.23 billion in 2022, according to the Business Research Company. An increased number of young people seeking affordable clothing is driving the market for fast fashion to new levels. The United Nations estimates the world's youth population will grow by 7.9 percent to 1.3 billion by 2030. Fast growing social media channels persuade people to dress like celebrities or music stars. Clothing manufacturers chasing the latest trends sell large quantities of apparel that are "in" for a short time at a low price. The production of low-priced garments typically involves terrible working conditions and very low pay, usually to women. Once the trend is over, the clothing is discarded, often ending up in landfills. According to Forbes Magazine's Gen Z report, 60 percent of fast fashion items are produced and thrown out in the same year.

What's worse is that it takes more than 200 years for these items to decompose. And, in addition to wasting resources, while decomposing, textiles generate the greenhouse gas methane, produce 7 percent of total global carbon emissions, and release toxic chemicals and dyes into ground water and soil. Only 15 percent of post-consumer textile waste is recycled each year, leaving 85 percent of discarded textiles in US landfills, according to the EPA.

Interestingly, both natural and synthetic fabrics pollute the environment. While some clothing may be made from natural plant fibers such as cotton or silk, the treatment and processing of these yarns and fabrics significantly slows degradation. Further, bleach, dyes, printing, chemical baths all render the material toxic. Burning these fabrics in an incinerator releases the harmful toxins into the air, water, and soil.

Clothes manufactured from synthetic fibers, including polyester and nylon, are either non-biodegradable or less biodegradable than natural fibers. They are also a noteworthy source of microplastic pollution from laundry (Microplastics present pollution puzzle | PNAS). In 2010 ecologist Mark Browne discovered large amounts of nylon and polyester fibers from clothing washing ashore in heavily populated areas. According to Belgian researchers Van Cauwenberghe and Janssen, seafood from European supermarkets contained approximately 90 microplastics particles and one order of oysters contained approximately 50 particles.

So what's the solution? Undoubtedly, cheap clothing and fast-changing fashion fuel buying additions. However, each of us has an opportunity to consider the impact of our purchases—and set new trends. How? First, we can think before *purchasing*:
- Reducing consumption—buying fewer, perhaps more special, items.
- Shopping secondhand shops to discover our style *and* help the environment.

And, we can think before *tossing*:
- Offering unwanted clothing to family, friends, neighbors. Using social media groups to offer items to neighbors for free.
- Donating to charities with resale operations (Goodwill, Salvation Army), helping people in need *and* avoiding landfills.
- Reselling pieces in good condition online (Poshmark or Threads) to give clothes a second life *and* make some extra money?
- Upcycling garments. Sewing a quilt or new clothes out of larger fabric items to repurpose garments.

By reducing the amount of clothing we purchase, and finding new homes or uses for items we no longer want, we can positively impact our planet. These simple acts will help reduce the resources needed to produce and ship garments, decrease the amount of textiles in landfills that generate toxic greenhouse gases, and lower the quantity of microplastics in our oceans,

sea-animals and seafood. Yes, one person *can* make a difference. Thank you for taking action today!