

Hello there, I'm June Simms and this is As It Is!

Recycling efforts are increasing around the world as people consider new ways to preserve the world's limited resources. These recycling efforts are no longer limited to paper, plastic and cans. Today we hear how fabric scraps and used clothing are also being given new life.

But first, we hear about a man who is in a race against time to record the sounds of nature.

Our world is a noisy place, filled with the sounds of traffic, airplanes, machines and people. But quiet places remain, if you know where to look. Eight years ago, audio engineer Gordon Hempton identified the quietest place in the continental United States. He calls the place "One Square Inch of Silence." He has used this symbolic spot in a northwestern rain forest to campaign against noise pollution. But the self-described "Sound Tracker" is now going deaf. Steve Ember reports.

For Gordon Hempton, it started with an experience known to many people. He had to repeatedly ask "What? What did you say?" Then his hearing got worse.

"I was laying in bed in the springtime about a year ago. The sun was shining. The birds could be singing. They should be singing. And I was hearing none."

Hempton leaned over to his partner at their home in a wooded, rural neighborhood on Washington's Puget Sound.

"And I said, 'Kate, do you hear birdsong?' And she said yes. I knew my life was going to be different."

Hempton's eyes get watery as he describes the cruel irony of his situation. More than twenty years ago he trademarked his nickname as "The Sound Tracker." Sharp hearing defined his career as an Emmy award winning sound recordist. It also led to his activism against noise pollution.

He has circled the globe three times in search of the perfect sounds of nature.

Those are howler monkeys in a tropical rain forest in Belize. Closer to home, coyotes howl in an eastern Washington canyon.

He also found places so quiet that he could hear the soft sound of a hummingbird's wings.

Hempton says his hearing loss is quickly getting worse; creating what he says is a "real urgency" to finish his project.

"I'm not totally deaf. But I have lost most of my hearing. So I am running a race to finish the Quiet Planet collection."

That's the title of a planned 19-volume set of nature recordings.

Volunteer assistants now help Hempton review and edit sound files and identify imperfections.

"I miss it. I feel so connected when I can listen to the place I am. And the difference between hearing where you are and not is like the difference between being awake and not."

The exact cause of his hearing loss is not clear. Doctors say it may be the result of an infection, or a tumor or a combination of things. More tests are needed.

Hempton is self-employed. He says his health care plan does not pay for hearing loss treatment. So, for now, he's directing his attention to completing his "greatest hits" album.

"After I get Quiet Planet finished, out there and I have an economic cash flow to get my hearing back, then we're going to do it. That's the first thing on my to-do list."

The Sound Tracker says he's hopeful his hearing loss can be reversed. I'm Steve Ember.

And I'm June Simms. You are listening to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

Giving New Life to Yesterday's Fashions

The clothes at most dress shops are ready to wear, but not at Ginger Root. Charlie Heck is a regular customer. The store's owners turn old dresses that she bought at a thrift store into stylish new outfits.

"The problem with clothing nowadays is that it seems to be standard sizing. And if you don't fit into that exact standard sizing that the clothing doesn't fit well. But then I can come in here and spend a little bit of money and get it to fit my body."

For her, recycling and repurposing is a way of life. She promotes it as the editor of the magazine Luri and Wilma.

"We profile eco-friendly designers."

These include designers like Kristen Swenson and Erin Derge. The two friends opened Ginger Root two years ago. The store specializes in turning yesterday's fashions into 21st century styles.

Ms. Swenson says there are many creative ways to turn an old piece of clothing into something new and exciting.

"Sometimes you can just get away with hemming something and that's all it needs. Otherwise, you can hem it, remove the sleeves, take in the waist and that's good. Or sometimes we'll take dresses and turn them into blouses."

Ms. Derge says redesigning old clothing is often interesting, sometimes challenging and always fun.

"It's kind of like sculpture. It sort of feels like that like, you're kind of chipping away at this fabric, cutting out the damaged parts. It's kind of fun. It feels kind of like archeology when you open up a jacket and see the way someone else worked on it. It teaches you more about your own craft."

Turning neckties into bow ties was Mariama Bramble's hobby. Now it's her business.

Ms. Bramble sells her bowties online under the brand name Brownbelle. She says the fact that they are recycled makes them more marketable.

“I definitely see that people are appreciating something that is a little bit more unique. It's not mass produced, so it's a little bit more special.”

Ginger Root's Erin Derge agrees. She says the demand for environmentally friendly fashion is increasing. So too is her feeling that she's making a difference in the industry.

“The fashion industry has so much waste associated with it. So much fabric is thrown out, so many dyes and things that can really affect the environment. And it feels really good to be able to be a part of the industry, but on our terms.”

For her and other eco-friendly designers, green fashion is more than a passing trend. It is a style for a lifetime.

That's As It Is for today. I'm June Simms. For questions or comments about our show, email us at learningenglish@voanews.com.

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