

A volunteer's experience of Creek Week:

Our creek is suffering. It needs TLC.

By Patrice Rhoades-Baum

“Hey, are you still working on that stuff?” Susanne hollers from a few feet upstream.

“Yeah – *ugh* – I almost – *ugh* – GOT IT!” I shout as I yank a tangle of rusty springs and bits of canvas from the muddy bank of Fountain Creek. Is it a remnant of an old baby crib? Nearby is a muddy cloth shower curtain with rusty metal rings, tied to an extension cord.



As first-time volunteers for Creek Week, it was satisfying work. *And eye-opening.* We were at Fountain Creek Nature Center, helping to clean litter on the trails and pick up trash along the creek.

Turns out, all kinds of stuff ends up in Fountain Creek. We found a shoe, ball cap, beer cans, tennis ball, cardboard yard sign, and the heavy rubber base of a traffic cone.

And we found LOTS of plastic. We filled several large garbage bags full of plastic water bottles, straws, grocery bags, milk jugs, Styrofoam cups, packing peanuts, and various plastic containers. It was astonishing and a bit depressing. I have a renewed commitment to reduce plastic waste in my household.



The father/son team just upstream dug a plastic-and-metal chair out of the muddy edge of the creek. Their oddball discoveries included a kid's shoe and a hiking boot. Worse, they found several jugs of windshield wiper fluid, leaking into the creek.

I've always been distantly aware of the fact that trash ends up in our waterways. However, my up-close-and-personal pick-up project made this realization more real, more visceral. We were picking up all kinds of trash **ALONG** the creek and **IN** the creek. We were continually dismayed by what we found.

This is our region's drinking water. Local farmers use this water to irrigate the crops we eat. All types of animals rely on Fountain Creek for habitat, and birds rely on the creek as a flyway.



Clean water is essential. But our creek is suffering, more than I ever knew. I was glad to give our creek a bit of TLC. I'll volunteer with Creek Week again – and help to give Fountain Creek the TLC it needs.