TRANSCRIPT: Leave No Stone

Note: Episodes of Outside/In are made as pieces of audio, and some context and nuance may be lost on the page. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors.

**Sam Evans-Brown: Just a heads up for people listening and don’t like curse words, there are a couple in this episode.**

**Taylor Quimby: So this story starts with a soft-spoken… should I say who I am? Geez.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Taylor Quimby.**

**Taylor Quimby. You’re Sam Evans-Brown.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Yes I am.**

**Taylor Quimby: And this story starts with a soft-spoken gentleman named David.**

*David Baril: Hi my name is David Baril.*

**Taylor Quimby: He’s just over 40. He’s got a bushy salt and pepper beard, very heavy on the salt. And he’s an avid hiker.**

*David Baril: Back in August 2018. I was with my son. We were working on his list of 4,000 footers.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: For listeners who aren’t from the Northeast, there are 67 mountains in New England that are higher than 4,000 feet, and trying to climb them all is a thing that a lot of people do. It’s like Colorado’s “14ers” except… 10,000 feet stumpier.**

**Taylor Quimby: I don’t know if everyone will like that characterization.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: It’s true!**

**Taylor Quimby: David Baril and his son were hiking on one of the most popular peaks in New Hampshire - Mount Lafayette.**

*David Baril: We had just gotten done eating lunch. We were getting ready to head back down. As was packing up, I happened to notice that there was a small stone. I looked at it and noticed there was a name inscribed on it.*

*Taylor Quimby: Huh. So it was face up, the inscription?*

*David Baril: Yes.*

*Taylor Quimby: How big was it?*

*David Baril: Roughly the size of a tennis-ball.*

**Taylor Quimby: And the inscription said...**

*David Baril: Dr. John B. Macdonald.*

*Patrice Barklund: Hi I’m Patrice Barklund.*

*Kelsey Barklund: And I’m Kelsey Barklund, I am the grandaughter of John B. MacDonald.*

**Taylor Quimby: Kelsey loves the outdoors - in fact she through-hiked the whole Appalachian Trail in 2015.**

*Taylor Quimby: What’s your trail name?*

*Kelsey Barklund: Poppins. Like Mary Poppins.*

**Taylor Quimby: It’s a love that was passed down in part from her grandfather, John.**

*Patrice: He would plan for the weekend what he would gonna do by Wednesday, and if you weren’t on board, you weren’t going…so*

*Kelsey: I live by that rule so,it’s a good rule.*

**Taylor Quimby: On April 1st, 2015, Kelsey had just started hiking the AT, when her grandfather passed away at age 92..**

*Kelsey: When we went up to New Hampshire, I decided that since Mt. Lafayette was one of his favorites and he loves the Whites, that I would do something in memory of him… and that’s where we got the idea to do the memorial rock.*

**Taylor Quimby: She actually made two memorial rocks. The first one was written in black nail polish.**

*Kelsey: So that was a really good day. And very windy. We have a photo of me holding the rock and my hair is just whipping in the wind.*

**Taylor Quimby: And the second one, she brought up a year later. This one was smooth, and engraved with John’s name, the dates, June 11th, 1922, and April 1, 2015. And three words, in quotations: “Rise Above It”.**

*Kelsey: I wouldn’t think anybody would find it, but I know it’s there and that’s all that matters.*

**Taylor Quimby: Now this is the rock that David found.**

*David Baril: There’s a lot of negativity in the world. There’s not enough positivity.So when I saw “rise above it”... it was definitely something to live by.*

**Taylor Quimby: Now I should say that avid hiker as he is, David is a member of a closed facebook group: The 4,000 footer club. Are you Sam?**

**Sam Evans-Brown: No.**

**Taylor Quimby: Well I am… it’s a big group: there are more than 17,000 members. And mostly people posting about trail conditions, sharing you know sunset pictures, that kind of stuff, but also I’ll admit that they argue. A lot.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: On Facebook?**

**Taylor Quimby: I know it’s shocking!**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Weird!**

**Taylor Quimby: And so David, for some reason, was curious - what would these folks think about the memorial stone that he found?**

*David Baril: So I snapped a picture, I posted on facebook, and it was definitely a range of opinions.*

**Taylor Quimby: I reached out to a lot of these folks, and you’ll hear them throughout this story.**

*Taylor Quimby: What’s your feeling about the memorial stones?*

*Sue Mills: I hate them.*

*David Baril: Some people suggested, well , take it.*

*Zachary Berger: I think I would. I think I’d remove it.*

*David Baril: It doesn’t belong up there, it’s trash.*

*Zachary Berger: It doesn’t belong out there.*

*David Baril: I’m going to go up there, the next time I’m up there -- which is very soon! -- and I’m going to take it and throw it away.*

*Greg Rehm: What happens if everyone puts one of those stones, or little sticks or little trinkets or something out there?*

*Jeff Marion: It’s a real quandary.*

*Mary Welch: Let it be.*

*Greg Rehm: To me it’s trash.*

*Patrice Barklund: It’s not like it’s trash or anything like that. It’s*

*a rock.*

*[cue theme]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: This is Outside/In, a show about the natural world and how we use it. I’m Sam Evans-Brown Evans-Brown. Today, we’re examining a set of educational principles created in the 80s and 90s called Leave No Trace. The idea that when you go camping or go for a hike -- the only thing you should EVER leave behind, are footprints. But in a world where our every step has some small impact, what does it mean to leave no trace? And just how far can you take this idea?**

[theme fade]

**Sam Evans-Brown and Taylor: [sigh] okay…**

**Taylor Quimby: So how should we…**

**Sam Evans-Brown: How should we get into this?**

**Taylor Quimby: Well you can tell part of this story since you were in the interview with Jeff Marion.**

*Jeff Marion: I was one of those outdoor nuts. I spent a lot of time climbing, backpacking, caving.*

**Taylor Quimby: So this is Jeff Marion Marion - he’s a scientist with the US Geological Survey, and one of let’s say many architects of Leave No Trace.**

*Jeff Marion: And I do research on visitor impacts to protected natural areas.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Now when Jeff was a kid in the 60s, people had very different ideas about how we should behave in the wilderness.**

*Jeff Marion: Tree damage in particular was much bigger back then.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: It was normal for campers to clear land, and cut down fresh firewood.**

**Taylor Quimby: Chop chop chop.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Boyscouts...**

*Jeff Marion: It was back in the era when ditching a tent was ok, and washing your dishes in the creek and in the spring was ok, complete with soap suds….*

*Sam Evans-Brown: Ditching a tent? What’s that?*

*Jeff Marion: Digging a small trench around the tent so when it rained and the water comes down the hill it doesn’t flow into and under your tent.*

*Taylor Quimby: That sounds nice.*

*Jeff Marion: [laughs] Yeah. But It falls into the well what if everyone did it category. Today It’s a scary thought*

**Sam Evans-Brown: The “what if everyone did it” question - you’re going to hear that a lot in this episode. And it was an especially pressing question back then, because in the 60s and 70s camping and hiking had suddenly become mainstream activities.**

**Taylor Quimby: In 1950, National Park Service areas saw 33 million visitors. In 1970, just twenty years later, that number had increased to 172 million.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: And those boy scout principles of, “bring the hatchet, ditch the tent” were taking a toll.**

*Jeff Marion: For example campsites starting proliferating everywhere, Shenandoah National Park for example they just started having 100s and 100s of new campsites being created by visitors all over the place, and in some cases right next to blue ribbon trout streams...*

**Sam Evans-Brown: And around the Sam Evans-Browne time, we were becoming more sensitive to just how fragile some of these ecosystems really were. Trout streams, alpine vegetation - places where it doesn’t take much to accidentally kill something.**

**Taylor Quimby: And so in the 1970s, federal agencies started to come up with a bunch of slogans to help steer all these new outdoor adventurers in a more sustainable direction.**

*Jeff Marion: You’ve probably heard some of these phrases, but it was minimum impact camping, or no trace camping, it was pack it in pack it out, some of those kinds of catch phrases, take only photos leave only footprints, there were a lot of those kinds of slogans.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: And in 1987, the three biggest stakeholders - The National Parks, THe forest service, and the bureau of land management - all came together and put out pamphlet called “Leave No Trace Land Ethics”.**

**Taylor Quimby; And included were a handful of basic principles for people spending time in natural landscapes: Number one. Be smart about preparation**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Know where you’re going, have the right gear, don’t bring unnecessary crap.**

**Taylor Quimby: Like a boombox? I shouldn’t bring a boombox?**

**Sam Evans-Brown: You can, just don’t leave it there.**

**Taylor Quimby: Number two: Concentrate Impacts in High Use Areas.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In popular areas stay on the trails, and camp in the campgrounds, whenever possible walk on rocks not plants**

**Taylor Quimby: Oh yeah.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Durable surfaces Taylor, It’s all about durable surfaces.**

**Taylor Quimby: Number three: Spread Use and Impact in Pristine Areas.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In the backcountry, where there aren’t any trails - Don’t make new ones. Spread out, don’t walk single-file**

**Taylor Quimby: Oh… side to side!**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Cause that makes trails.**

**Taylor Quimby: Yeah.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Yeah.**

**Taylor Quimby: Ok. Number four: Pack it in Pack it Out.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Take your shit home with you.**

**Taylor Quimby: Number Five: Properly Dispose of What You Cannot Pack Out.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Okay so I think one is literally referring to shit.**

**Taylor Quimby: [laughs] Bury that poo. Number six: Leave What you Find.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Take home your trash, but *don’t* take natural stuff with you - no rock collections, walking sticks, or squirrel pets.**

**Taylor Quimby: This is the saddest one from a childhood perspective.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Well certainly the rock collections, your boy is a rock collector.**

**Taylor Quimby: Well I buy all those from licensed areas, we don’t steal them.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Oh my god.**

**Taylor Quimby: And finally, number seven: campfire building**

**Sam Evans-Brown: If you must do it, keep it small and do it in a place where there’s already been one. And only little sticks from the ground, not cut from living trees, for firewood.**

**Taylor Quimby: The green stuff never burns well anyway.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Well sometimes campers like that, they call it a smudge, it keeps the mosquitoes away.**

**Taylor Quimby: Really? Those people are not following Leave No Trace.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Yeah you don’t hang out with them in the woods.**

**[music swell and fade]**

**Taylor Quimby: While the principles of leave no trace, or LNT, may sound pretty straightforward… for the advanced practitioner, it can be complicated.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: So whereas the hiker who is familiar with biodegradability might pack out their candy wrappers, but throw banana peels in the woods…**

**Taylor Quimby: You know - they’re thinking, “what’s the harm?” The LNT trained person will gently point out those banana peels actually take a surprisingly long time to decompose.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: And could attract animals that might start hanging around the trail, looking for scraps.**

**Taylor Quimby: I went for a hike the other day, and there were squirrels at the top and it actually tried to go into my bag and it climbed up my leg. Somebody been feeding that squirrel.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: That sounds like a fake story.**

**Taylor Quimby: It’s real. I have pictures! I have picture proof. Okay let’s take it to the next level.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: A beginner Leave No Trace advocate may know that - if you have to poop in the woods - you ought to be a certain distance from trails and water sources, and that you want to bury your poo in a cathole six to eight inches deep.**

**Taylor Quimby: But the diehard Leave No Tracer might go an extra step and say that you REALLY ought to put your used toilet paper in a plastic container, and pack it out with you.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Or actually pack out your poop too… that’s a thing.**

*Jeff Marion: I’ve looked at that from a scientist’s perspective and asked the question “how important is it that people carry out Toilet paper?” And my own determination has been… not very… and a lot of people in the Leave No Trace community will perk up their head’s at that and say, what? What did he say? In fact I’ve done some studies where we’ve buried toilet paper in the ground at six or so inches deep and we’ve dug it up a year later and it’s completely gone!*

*Jeff Marion: Now in western deserts… no not so much, you pretty much need to carry it out.*

**Taylor Quimby: So one way to understand this, is that Leave No Trace is primarily a set of ethical principles - rather than a specific set of rules..**

Jeff Marion: It’s not black and white. It’s not this is the only best practice and those other practices are awful, don’t do them. It’s always shades of gray.

**Taylor Quimby: But while ethics are more flexible than hard rules, they also - as you heard with the toilet paper example - leave room for well-intentioned people to disagree about what is and isn’t worth getting worked up over. For example, you might know that feeding wildlife is generally a bad idea and against LNT.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Don’t feed bears.**

**Taylor Quimby: Don’t feed the bears. ...but see little harm in feeding a bit of bread to a friendly opportunist like the mountain-top birds that are on a lot of the White Mountain peaks.**

*David Baril: My 13-year-old went hiking with me last winter, and the second he saw the grey jays he was like ‘wow’. That was crazy and when he found out he could feed them out of his hand. He was literally hooked.*

*Mary Welch: Don’t feed the jaybirds, it’s not in their nature to eat human food. Now you’re leaving a trace behind. You’re changing the environment.*

**Taylor Quimby: But while there are those who are debating the finer points of Leave No Trace, clearly, not every hiker has heard about these principals.**

*David Baril: Mount Lafayette had been subject to a fake skeleton earlier in the year.*

*Taylor Quimby: A what?*

*David Baril: A fake skeleton.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: I love how it’s “been subject to a fake skeleton” as if it had just dropped from the sky.**

**Taylor Quimby: Well, it’s true, nobody knows where the thing came from! The skeleton got a nickname, Bonesy…**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Of course…**

**Taylor Quimby: And whoever put it up there wedged it into a cairn near the summit during the warm months, but it stayed all winter long, it got totally frozen in ice. And you can see tons of pictures of Bonesy on this Facebook page, some people are making jokes, some people are posing with it, but let’s be honest - a lot of people are upset, because one person’s practical joke is really just another person’s garbage.**

**And with all these examples, I personally sometimes find myself sometmes wishing that there really was a singular authority we could look to, to say - yes, this is okay, or no, this is bad.**

**For the purposes of this story, Jeff Marion is the closest thing we’ve got.**

*Taylor Quimby: So I have gotten comfortable eating the entire apple core. But I still spit out the seeds.*

*Jeff Marion: Yup. So you’re you asking me if it’s okay to spit out the seeds?*

*Taylor Quimby: I’m just saying what do you think?*

*Jeff Marion: Well again it would depend. I rarely see apple or orange seeds… In fact I have never seen an apple tree or orange tree or something like that growing out in the side of the trail in a place where people eat lunch, and so I would say that is an inconsequential problem that I wouldn’t lose any sleep over.*

*[cue mux]*

*Taylor Quimby: Oh okay, alright, hat’s big! You just said a word that we haven’t heard: inconsequential. Which is, an impact that may violate Leave No Trace but is so small it’s hard to imagine that it matters.*

*JM: Yeah. Absolutely.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: So we asked Jeff Marion, *theoretically…* if someone were to leave an engraved stone on top of a mountain… where would that fall on the Leave No Trace spectrum?**

*Jeff Marion: I actually came with a little data here, and I’m going to read it right now because it’s appropriate. An estimated 146 million americans participated in estimated 10 point nine billion outdoor recreation activities in 2017. If one person leave one rock on top of one mountain, I would say it’s inconsequential. But you know 146 million people leaving those rocks? It isn’t inconsequential.*

*Zachary Berger: If enough people do it, and it doesn’t take a lot, it’s going to have a significant impact.*

*Jeff Marion: I hate to always resort to that, it’s kind of a cop out to say, well what if everyone did it.*

*Sue Mills: If every single person that came up there left something… what would it look like?*

*Jeff Marion: But you know that’s a pretty powerful issue with respect to Leave No Trace, is what if everyone did it?*

*Greg Rehm: What happens if everyone puts one of those stones, or little sticks or little trinkets.. Or something out there.*

**[mux fade]**

**Taylor Quimby: Now obviously there were a lot of people who thought the rocks are a problem waiting to happen - they are with Jeff Marion, you know, what if everyone does it? I want you to see if you can guess the three biggest opposing arguments.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: People who think the rocks are fine?**

**Taylor Quimby: Yeah, defenders of the memorial stone.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Okay, so…. First stab at it. You can’t go into the wilderness without leaving some sort of trace?**

**Taylor Quimby: Exactly. Exactly. I would say the number 1 rhetorical immediate pushback… listen folks, there’s no such thing as leave no trace.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Right. You’re all kidding yourselves… You’re leaving traces like crazy, so why draw the line here?**

**Taylor Quimby: Like a footprint is literally a trace. And enough footprints actually is what leave things like paths and erosion, and so:**

*Mary Welch: You know we can’t go to extremes with it. That’s not realistic or logical. So my opinion is that the stone was not really a big deal. In the grand scheme of things.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Okay, what was idea number 2…**

**Taylor Quimby: It’s another philosophical one.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Oh oh oh, is it that they’re okay with some types of impact but not okay with others? Like cairns and blazes and that kind of thing are okay, but like, oh memorial stones aren’t - what are you a memorial stone… [laughs] memorial stone bigot?**

**Taylor Quimby: Yeah okay, yes, it’s a consistency problem.**

*Mary Welch: If you’re going to be that deep into it and that technical about it, then you have to take down all of the signs that are up, you have to take down all of the markers, and everything that’s ever been man-made up on there.*

**Taylor Quimby: No cairns.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: No trails. Like...trails are ugly.**

**Taylor Quimby: No hiker huts, cabins on top of mountains type of thing.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Buildings, are we joking here?**

**Taylor Quimby: No observatories, no fire towers.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Third one?**

**Taylor Quimby: Now the third one is more specific to the memorial stone.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Is it that memorial stones are nice, and like leave them alone?**

**Taylor Quimby: No the third one I would say is the slippery slope, the whole what if everyone did it thing, it’s… a fallacy.**

*Mary: What if everyone brought an engraved rock up there, and I said but not everybody is.*

**Taylor Quimby: Just because there is one doesn’t mean there’s going to be 146 million.**

*Gregory Simon: Not everybody is going to do this. So I just don’t think it’s going to be a big deal, it’s a pretty rare thing.*

*Mark Courtenay: I’ve done all the 48, and I’ve done almost all of the Appalachian Trail in Maine.*

*Taylor Quimby: You’ve never seen a memorial stone or anything?*

*Mark Courtenay: I have not.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Right every hiker who goes into the wilderness would have to had a parent who had recently died and also really loved hiking and also wanted to go through this process of making a memorial stone and engraving it and bringing it up and leaving it there.**

**Taylor Quimby: Right, right, right.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: But what if everybody brought Bonesy to the top of a mountain.**

**Taylor Quimby: … What? Oh that’s the perfect example! What if everyone brought a skeleton to the top of Mount Lafayette.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: That would be awful!**

**Taylor Quimby: There would be thousands of skeletons!**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Have you considered that?**

**Taylor Quimby: Slippery slippery slope. [laughs]**

***[mux swell]***

**Taylor Quimby: Now Sam Evans-Brown.. Before we totally dismiss the slippery slippery slope… there is actually an example that might favor the slippery-slopers.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Oh!**

**Taylor Quimby: And we’ll hear about it… after a break.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Cool cool cool cool.**

*<<<<<<<<>>>>>>>*

BREAK BREAK BREAK BREAK

**Sam Evans-Brown: Welcome back to Outside/In. I’m Sam Evans-Brown Evans Brown.**

**Taylor: I’m Taylor. And Sam Evans-Brown, I’d like to introduce you to Megan.**

Megan Murphy: C’mere Luna. C’mere. You really don’t want to have a dog breathing next to me as I”m trying to do the interview...

**Taylor Quimby: Megan Murphy lives on Cape Cod and she is the founder of a very unusual grass-roots movement.**

Megan Murphy: It started about four years ago as a simple hobby.

**Taylor Quimby: Around 2014, Meegan was going through some big changes… she had just jettisoned a successful retail business, sold it off, it wasn’t making her happy.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Mid-life crisis?**

**Taylor Quimby: Uhh, like a semi mid life crisis. And so during this time, she was taking these long walks, as folks will do in a mid life crisis, along the beaches of Cape Cod. And everytime…**

*Megan Murphy: Something beautiful would wash ashore in front of me. Whether it be a piece of seaglass or a heart-shaped rock.*

**Taylor Quimby: And one day, Megan thinks - maybe I can share this experience with others by writing little messages on rocks and leaving them for other people to find. And so on her next walk, she brings a sharpie and jots down just a handful of inspirational thoughts on a few rocks she finds.**

*Megan Murphy: You’ve got this, or the answer lies within.*

**Taylor Quimby: The force is with you.**

*Megan Murphy: Blessings are on their way.*

**Taylor Quimby: That Sam Evans-Browne night a friend found one and texted her - she was like is this your handwriting? And Megan was like noooooo.**

*Megan Murphy: She said well if it was you, I just want to let you know that I found it and it made me feel better.*

**Taylor Quimby: It was all the validation she needed/ Megan Murphy started painting more rocks, leaving more rocks… And then…**

*Megan Murphy: I took a piece of driftwood and simply painted on the piece of driftwood saying “take one if you need one, add one to the pile”.*

*Taylor Quimby: Do you ever get inspirational writer’s block?*

*Megan Murphy: Absolutely! But thank goodness for the internet.*

**Taylor Quimby: Speaking of the internet, Megan’s daughter comes up with this idea - on the backs of the rocks, they should put a hashtag… hashtag Kindness rocks. So now, when people find and post the rocks - Megan Murphy can see all these folks who are posting her rocks!**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Why does everything have to become social media memes? Can’t you just find a nice rock?**

**Taylor Quimby: How are you gonna track those rocks without a hashtag man?**

*[clip montage]*

*Newscaster: Something as simple and little as a rock can have a big impact…*

*Girl: A painted rock!*

*Teenage boy: We are here working on the kindness rocks for our school.*

*Woman: Angels are with you, or you’re not alone, or have hope.*

*Woman 2: You’re special, keep going, you’ve got this…*

*Teenage girls:**Mine says smile. This one’s going to say be yourself.*

*Megan Murphy: Yeah, it’s well...I can only tell you the scale is huge. Everyday my pages on social media grow. I have over 100,000 followers.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: That’s a lot of rocks.**

**Taylor Quimby: That’s a genuine trend. And then, right after Thanksgiving this year, Megan Murphy kinda hit the big time… she went on on of the biggest morning programs on TV… The Today Show.**

*Karen: In my garage is where we do the spray painting.*

*TV reporter: The kindness rocks project gave Karen a sense of purpose. She she started her own chapter in Alyssa’s honor.*

*Karen: When I’m having bad days and I hear about the rocks helping other people have better days, they ultimately make me feel like I’m having a better day. Look at my rocks.*

*Megan Murphy: 28 - Obviously anytime you’re on national television. That brings a lot of attention. Both good and bad.*

[Mux and applause]

*TV Reporter: Megan and Karen thank you for sharing your story...*

**Taylor Quimby: One person’s movement is another person’s slippery slope argument. Unbeknownst to Megan Murphy, her legions of inspirational artists had been depositing kindness rocks not just on beaches, or in urban spaces… but also on trails, and in National Forests.**

*Greg Rehm: What I love about hiking in the mountains is.. It’s just nature.*

**This is Greg Rehm, avid hiker, and unabashed hater of kindness rocks.**

*Greg Rehm: One is literally sitting on my desk in front of me. It looks like a painted ladybug. Green and black with two googly eyes.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Oh. That’s just not tasteful.**

**Taylor Quimby: Not into it? And this is another rock-hater Sue Mills…**

*Sue Mills: friend of mine and I hiked Mt. Field and got to the top was a plastic rubber duck and a kindness rock. The first thing that I saw...and my blood just boiled. I was so annoyed.*

**Taylor Quimby: So Greg and Sue are just a couple of the many hikers from the 4,000 footer group who make a conscious effort to remove painted rocks from trails and mountain-tops, they’ll truck them back out.**

*Sue Mills: So I took both of them and stuck them in my backpack.*

**Taylor Quimby: A few posters have put up pictures where they have literal collections in their backyards… or on a porch where there’s 6,7,8 kindness stones sitting on their porch.**

*Taylor Quimby: What do you do when you find a painted rock, like what’s the process?*

*Greg Rehm: Pick it up, throw in my pack, pack it out, and throw it in the trash typically.*

*Taylor Quimby: You throw a rock in the trash?*

*Greg Rehm: To me it’s trash! Same thing I do with a wrapper.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: That’s part of...This is… uhhhh!!**

**Taylor Quimby: You don’t throw rocks in the trash Sam? You know when a rock breaks, I throw it in the trash. It’s broken!!**

**Sam Evans-Brown: This rock’s no good anymore, I… we’ll come back to this. We’ll come back to this.**

**Taylor Quimby: Everybody I spoke with for this story thought the kindness rocks were awful. Even David, who initially posted John B. MacDonald’s memorial stone.**

*David Baril: Painting rocks and then leaving them in random places… I mean… [sighs].*

*Taylor Quimby: Yeah.*

*David Baril: Sorry but that’s trash.*

**Taylor Quimby: And a lot of people pointed to this one specific example on the top of a mountain in New Hampshire that really drove them crazy.**

Doug: My name is Doug Brown.

**Taylor Quimby: Doug also an avid hiker, like 90% of the people in here, I used the word “avid” before every time I wrote hiker, I didn’t mean to do that.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: There are no hikers that are not avid.**

*Doug: A friend of mine was about to move out to a new job out west, and we wanted to catch one more hike before she left. Cardigan is an easy one to get out to for a sunrise hike in the summer, seemed right, so we went out there…*

**Taylor Quimby: But when they got there, Doug saw a kindness rock. And this one was like a very big kindness rock.**

*Doug: The rock was probably about 6 feet wide, and couple feet tall…* and it was spraypainted in spray paint or something pretty permanent *and t said “kind is cool” with mountains and a smiley face. I think.*

*Taylor Quimby: The style is like high school notebook doodle.*

*Doug: Yeah, that’s a fair way to call it.*

**Taylor Quimby: A few days later somebody tried to clean it up with a wire brush and some paint remover, which, I hear is arguably worse for the environment than the paint.**

**Sam Evans Brown: I would argue that.**

**Taylor Quimby: actually went up a few weeks ago and it’s still there.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: I saw your video. LIttle windy out there?**

**Taylor Quimby: Well, you know. It was january.**

*Taylor Quimby: I found the rock… it’s pretty faded now, but I don’t know how long it’s going to take for this to go away. Up on top on the actual tower… let’s not forget this a like thirty food man-made tower on the top of this mountain, the door says “shooby” in white spray paint. So this must be a place some people are coming to tag for some reason.*

**Taylor Quimby: So I think we can genuinely ask: does the kindness rocks trend have a real environmental impact?**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Well… an environmental impact though? Does nature care that there are kindness rocks at the tops of these mountains.**

**Taylor Quimby: Do the rocks as the trend is now, which is to say there are a few, here and there going up and down. Is that causing a real problem that we can say yeah, this is an issue.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Is it lead-based paint?**

**Taylor Quimby: Megan encourages everybody to use environmentally friendly paint, but a lot of people will talk about paint, yeah.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: So… you know. I’m not going to say that I’m a fan of the kindness rocks… but I’d say it’s pretty unlikely that they’re harming anything.**

**Taylor Quimby: So one of the arguments that Jeff Marion made, remember he’s our LNT expert for this episode, is what if everybody is picking these rocks up from rivers…**

*Jeff Marion: If there’s thousands of people taking them out of the creek, what about the invertebrates that live on those stones, the aquatic insects that live on those stones, what about the eggs of trout that get laid in between those stones.*

**Taylor Quimby: You know rocks are a big part of the ecosystem for small fish…**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Riverine ecosystems, yeah...But why would people wade into a freezing cold river to get one rock out of the bottom when they’re literally surrounded by rocks… when there are rocks all around them.**

**Taylor Quimby: Yeah.**

**It seems like maybe one or two people would grab a river rock but it seems like most people would grab one of the numerous other rocks.**

**Taylor Quimby: Arguably...where you have to go with this, is that people are really upset about is the other part of Leave No Trace that we haven’t really talked about yet. Because the Forest service and national parks - they aren’t *just* trying to conserve wildlife.**

*Jeff Marion: They have a dual mandate, and the other side of the mandate is to provide for appropriate types and amounts of legitimate or appropriate recreational activity.*

**Taylor Quimby: Jeff says, even back in the 70s this idea of how we share the wilderness was becoming a problem.**

*Jeff Marion: People trying to experience solitude in the outdoors were not finding it. So problems with crowding, conflicts between different types of users, like hikers versus horseback riders.*

**Taylor Quimby: And what’s ironic, is that the principle that protects our most popular areas of wilderness, this is rule # 2 - concentrate impacts in areas that get a lot of use… is the same principle that’s likely to cause conflict between hikers.**

*Jeff Marion: You really want to create one good sustainable trail and keep people on it to the extent that you can. Crowding is a big, big, deal. But that impact is contained to that one narrow trail.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: I have to say that this for me was one of the biggest revelations. Which is that when you hear people… because you hear people say this all the time, oh we’re loving our wilderness to death… When you say that, what you’re really saying is that there are a lot of people in one place which might actually be a sign of success in terms of Leave No Trace.**

**Taylor Quimby: Yeah. It’s counter-intuitive. But still, this aesthetic idea of enjoying a quiet solitary mountain-top or trail… It’s actually has made it’s way into the updated list of Leave No Trace Principles. It’s the new Rule Number Seven: Be considerate of other visitors.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Look after your pet. . Don’t shout and have loud conversations. Basically, don’t be obnoxious.**

**Taylor Quimby: Don’t be like me.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In toe-shoes with a boom-box.**

**Taylor Quimby: And from this standpoint, you don’t have to make the argument that something has real environmental impact - you just have to make the argument that it’s annoying to hikers.**

*Zachary Berger: These massive groups that go out now, fifteen to twenty people, these big squads of people that go out hiking…and so on. I mean, that’s a lot of impact. Think of all the noise of all the people yapping and talking. Just that, it takes away from that solitude that some of us really want to capture out there.*

**Taylor Quimby: So there are a couple of other interesting points I want to talk about: Point #1 is an academic criticism of Leave No Trace that’s been put out by a geographer named Gregory Simon - and that is basically that, the whole concept segregates areas of quote unquote pristine wilderness, from the rest of society… and sometimes that is at the expense of a broader environmental ethic that actually accomplishes something.**

*Gregory: Yeah the idea of the wilderness of this kind of island, you know? That somehow can be cordoned or roped off and separated from the rest of the world, and Leave No Trace kind of buys into that. And we kind of say that, you should be thinking about leave no trace from cash register to campsite… Or in another place we say leave no trace starts at home.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: This is what I was talking about with the guy who is taking rocks and throwing them in the trash. These landfills that are incredibly expensive to make, he’s filling them up with stones. And like, the idea that that’s a better environmental outcome than a painted rock being on top of a mountain somewhere. That’s crazy!**

**Taylor Quimby: Right. And Point number two is that Leave No Trace is an educational mission. The point is not to be right for the sake of being right, the point is a practical… you’re trying be a good environmental steward, but also you’re trying to teach other people to do the same, so you don’t want to just piss them off..**

*Jeff Marion: Inconsequential or not, well it’s a judgement call. Sometimes I bite my lip and shut up and I don’t be the LNT nazi, and other cases… I am that person. And I don’t apologize for it.*

**Taylor Quimby: And deciding when, and how to be that person, can be just as tricky as following Leave No Trace itself. Megan Murphy, the Kindness rocks lady, says she heard from some really thoughtful outdoors people after her Today show interview, you now they reached out, they said listen this is becoming a problem… and now she teaches her followers the principles of Leave No Trace. But she also received rocks with mean messages from angry hikers who would rather shame her than educate her.**

*Megan Murphy: That’s not a way to communicate, that’s not a way to get your point across. Bullying by way of hate rocks is not acceptable and... You know. It’s not okay.*

**Taylor Quimby: And so, I wind up back at this story about Kelsey Barklund and the memorial stone, and we ask ourselves: Is this the moment to be the LNT nazi, as Jeff Marion put it, or is it the time to let it go?**

**Sam Evans-Brown: I think it really tells you something that she herself is a leave no trace adherent.**

**Taylor Quimby: That’s right. The whole family is.**

*Kelsey Barklund: I’m kind of the person who give people the stink eye when they walk off trail and I’m also the one, when I pull over for someone when I’m going downhill and they’re going up, I say “uphill has the right of way” and I try to inform people of the rules of mountains. When I was doing it I was kind of like this is kind of against Leave No Trace… but it means a lot to me. So it’s interesting, because I had the whole devil and angel on my shoulder while doing it.*

*Patrice Barklund: And the other thing is that my Dad was an advocate for Leave No Trace, and for how many years, fifty sixty years, that he trained people to not leave stuff in the woods, and if he saw it he picked it up.*

**Taylor Quimby: You know, Sam… I think that most memorials that we think about are meant to be seen… you know, we put them out so people can read the memorial of a person. But what’s weird in this case, is that wasn’t really the idea. It was more like a symbolic gesture.**

*Kelsey Barklund: I went about 200 feet off trail and hid this rock in this area that I didn’t think anybody would find it… but I know it’s there and that’s all that matters.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Oh so that is interesting… somebody did find it, but imagine if no-one ever did. Would it still be a violation of Leave No Trace?**

**Taylor Quimby: It’s kind of like. It’s kind of like that saying ‘if a tree falls in the woods and nobody hears it… does it make a sound?’**

**[long pause]**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Yeah I mean... It’s just like that because the die-hard Leave No Tracers will say OF COURSE IT MAKES A SOUND YOU JUST CAN’T HEAR IT YOU IDIOTS!**

**Taylor Quimby: It’s physics!!**

**[cue theme music]**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Outside/In was produced this week by Taylor Quimby and me, Sam Evans-Brown Evans Brown, with help from Justine Paradis, Nick Capodice, and our Executive Producer, Erika Janik. Maureen McMurray is Director of the Kindness Smock Project.**

**Taylor Quimby: Special thanks to all of the members of the 4,000 footer group on Facebook, and especially those who were willing to talk for this episode: Doug Brown, Greg Rehm, Mark Courteney, Mary Welch, Sue Mills, and Zachary Berger. Honorary mention to George Philbrook, who scrubbed the giant kindness rock on Mt. Cardigan.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Check out Outsideinradio dot org, to see some pictures of the memorial stone in question, the Mt. Cardigan Kindness rock disaster, as well as some painted rocks that have been - ahem - unwilded from various trails and mountain peaks.**

**Taylor Quimby: Music from this episode came from Blue Dot Sessions and The Itchy Creeps.**

**Our theme is by Breakmaster Cylinder.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Outside/In is a production of New Hampshire Public Radio.**