



VOICES & VIEWS

DIY detergent creator Melissa Power wants everyone to have access to clean clothes

A Fresh Start

BY SARAH LISS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON GORDON

 AS A SINGLE PARENT raising a young boy in London, Ont., in the late 1990s, Melissa Power tried to ensure her son, Brett, never lacked for anything. Then in her early 20s, Power was fortunate enough to always have a job—at one point she managed a McDonald's franchise; at another she worked at a pharmacy. But even with a full-time salary, there often wasn't enough to cover food, rent and bills. Certain basics had to be put on hold to pay for other costs—one of Brett's soccer tournaments, for instance—and at times, clean

clothes were a “luxury” her family was forced to forgo.

“Laundry was something that shouldn't wait, but it did,” she says now. “I have never, ever forgotten that feeling of humility.”

More than a decade later, Power, 39, is happily married to Scott Boughner, a youth mentor. In addition to 19-year-old Brett, their brood includes six-year-old Charlotte and two-year-old Hunter. And although she's in a secure two-income household, Power says, “I still have the single-mom mindset: where can I cut costs?” ➡➡

Giving back is a family affair for Melissa Power, whose six-year-old helps grate soap for her DIY laundry suds.



That lingering frugality prompted Power to begin making all-natural laundry detergent (out of borax, washing soda, baking soda and grated soap), and reminders of her past inspired her to use the DIY product to help others. She started small: in the summer of 2014, she came up with the idea of holding a free event at a local laundromat, where people in the community could drop by and do a few loads using her homemade suds. After she posted the plan on Facebook, a friend connected her with Vince Clayton, the owner of PJ's in downtown London. He agreed to host the day—and waive his fee.

That August, Power launched the first For the Love of Laundry. "I had no idea what I was doing," she says. "I made up posters on my computer and handed them out to Children's Aid, Ontario Works, food banks, the Salvation Army and other social agencies." The simple strategy worked: on the day of the event, two hours before PJ's doors were set to open, there was a lineup down the street. Power kicked things off early, and the laundromat was packed for the next five hours.

Since then, For the Love of Laundry has become a monthly occurrence, taking place at various London-area laundromats. For many, the events—which attract an average of 50 people at a time—are

a vital resource. Rose,* a 60-something regular, has struggled with joblessness; she finds employers are often hesitant to hire older workers. Having access to proper laundry facilities, regardless of her economic circumstances, has been a boon—especially when she's job-hunting.

"It was quite humbling to attend my first laundry event," Rose says. Being unable to properly wash your clothes, she explains, can be mortifying. "I always feel ashamed and gross, and people look at me like I'm nothing. But when I get to do my laundry, I feel like a million dollars."

The events have been equally transformative for Power, who's parlayed her sideline into a full-scale social enterprise. In April, she left her job in a vet clinic to focus on running the business. She now sells For the Love of Laundry soap online, at farmers' markets and in a local boutique, using the proceeds to help offset her expenses. (While certain laundromats and sponsors help cover costs, Power frequently pays for the events out of pocket.)

She wants to move toward a coupon-based system in the future, which would allow users to wash and dry on their own schedules; ultimately, she'd like For the Love of Laundry to go national. For now, though, Power is happy to be helping her own community, one load at a time. **R**