

PROFILES



The Environmental Cost of Hair Ties

by Sheri Radford / Jul 13, 2022

Hair ties may be small, but they add up to a big problem, one that Kooshoo is tackling

Canadian couple Jesse Schiller and Rachel Evans (pictured below) were travelling in Borneo in 2009 when they met the owner of the first recycling plant in the area. “He took us under his wing and revealed to us an area of his home island destroyed by an industry that existed only to produce goods for Western consumption,” Schiller says. “We were in our mid-20s, invigorated by a desire to make a difference in the world.”



Schiller and Evans spent the next year year travelling around Asia on a shoestring budget, and the memory of their experience in Borneo haunted them. After returning to Canada, the pair decided to use Schiller’s international sales experience coupled with Evans’ communication design skills to found a company that could make a positive impact.

“To be very honest, the values of our business—uplifting both people and the planet by creating responsibly made products—preceded the product concepts themselves,” Schiller admits. “We unravelled several idea threads for products, including a year working to redesign slippers into a zero-waste format, but ultimately it was a simple yet deeply personal experience that led us to hair ties.”

He explains, “Rachel was doing a kundalini yoga training that encouraged wearing a head covering during her practice. That turned our attention to the global yoga wear industry where we saw purported wellness brands almost exclusively using petro-chemical-derived textiles in their products, a reality that was strikingly antithetical to what yoga stood for.”



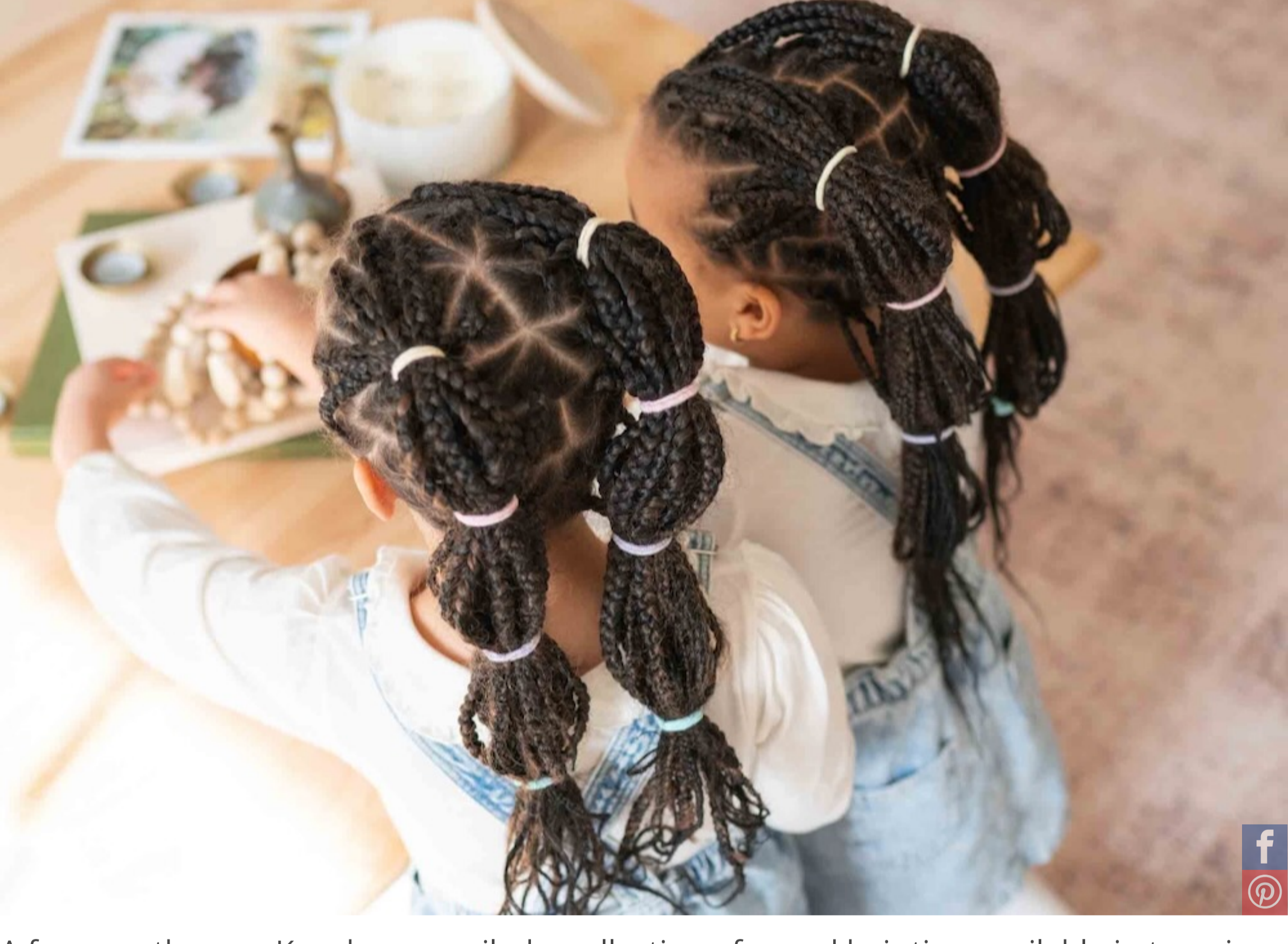
They decided to launch a business making plant-based head coverings, such as bandanas and headbands. While researching how to create these products, the couple learned a lot about hair accessories in general—and the ugly truth about hair ties just might make your hair stand on end.

Almost every hair tie ever manufactured has been made from plastic: polyester, nylon, spandex, synthetic rubber, etc. Making matters even worse, about 15 million hair ties get lost or thrown away every day in the United States alone. [Plastic garbage such as hair ties can harm wild animals](#), and [the vast majority of plastics are not biodegradable](#).

This hairy situation spurred Schiller and Evans into action. “We cold-called dozens of elastic manufacturers around the world, pitching them on our vision for an organic cotton, plant-based elastic,” Schiller says. “Eventually, we found a company in Rhode Island willing to take a risk on us, making for us a small run of elastic that we sewed into the world’s first commercially made hair ties made exclusively from plants.”

Those flat hair ties were the beginning of [Kooshoo](#). The name means “feeling good” in the language of Norfolk Island, where Evans’ family has lived for seven generations. Kooshoo launched in 2012.

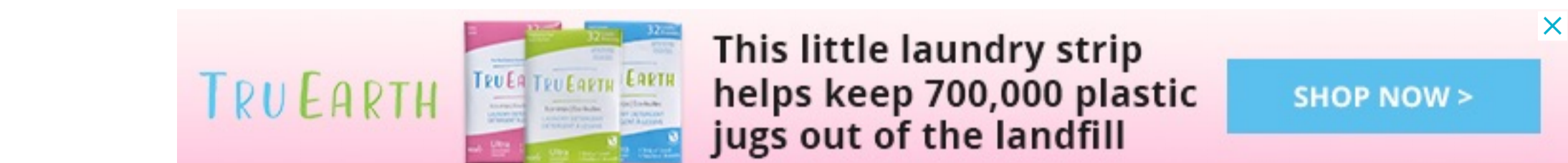
“That was a decade ago, and while our products have come a long way since, our ethos of uplifting every stakeholder involved—from farmers to textile workers to our customers—has never wavered,” Schiller says. “In a world awash with greenwashing and businesses cutting corners, we’re incredibly proud of having never wavered from our original vision.”



A few months ago, Kooshoo unveiled a collection of round hair ties, available in two sizes: Mondo, which are great for thick hair or big curls; and Mini, which work well on braids, thin hair or kids’ hair. Soft but strong, these plastic-free round hair ties are manufactured in Japan using certified organic cotton and certified fair trade natural rubber. They come in an array of colours ranging from pastels to neutrals to vibrant jewel tones.

“That moment in time with the recycling man in Borneo ended up changing the direction of our lives,” Schiller says. “In the years since, we’ve kept over 2 million plastic hair ties from our lands and waterways.”

It seems that this hair-raising story has a happy ending after all.



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