

Bit of an update

Hi all—I've both been busy at digitizing my cassette tapes that Dick didn't get to, and have been unable to get into this page to tell you about it, because of a technicality with the site. But here's a quickie-update.

First, Peter was here in October, and not only cleaned up (streamlined) a lot of the wiring of my computer/audio set-up, but selected for me a nifty little machine into which I can record my cassette tapes, leaving my computer free for me to do Other Things while digitizing progress is being made: a Tascam DR-40. This is pretty easy to use, AND did not break the bank (they cost about \$150). In addition, I now have a decent portable device on which I can make new recordings, besides digitizing the ones I have.

So I bombed through several trips' worth of tapes, and then...I tried to record one, and it sounded—not merely “bad”, but AWFUL! I could hardly hear anything, and the sound was wobbly. I cleaned the play head and pinch rollers, tried it in the other deck, in the other direction, but nothing helped. Yet evidence showed that I had once listened to this tape and taken careful notes on contents! Suddenly I remembered seeing Dick do something many years ago. Just as he had done, I whipped the tape out of the machine, turned it over to inspect the little felt pressure pad that keeps the tape snug against the record/playback head. I guess I can't show you exactly what I saw, because that piece of evidence is lost in the shuffle, but here is the difference between a Good pressure pad and a Bad one:



The pressure pad in the upper cassette is fine, but little is left of the pad in the lower one, thanks to M.O.T.H.S....

Sometimes they get eaten entirely away, which was the case in the poor cassette I had in hand!

So now what? Fortunately, having lived through this problem before, I knew what to do. I keep a bag of cassettes whose contents I don't care about, for exactly this purpose. You have to unscrew the 5 screws holding the cassette together, separate the two halves CAREFULLY, and remove a good pad (mounted on a narrow strip of springy metal) from an otherwise "dead" cassette. Having done that, you open your damaged cassette with even more care (the other one was just "practice" for this part). Most of all, you do not want to scatter the contents. You don't want the tape itself to unwind, or get out of its "track"; you don't want to lose the plastic sheets that encourage smooth tape travel; nor do you want to dislodge the little rollers with pins inside that can come out and get lost. Did all that work? GREAT, if so, you carefully (using tweezers) lift the bad pad out, throw it away or keep it in your Demo collection, and equally carefully plop the new pad assembly into its place. Once you're sure it's in correctly, reassemble the cassette (being sure the tape doesn't get pinched somewhere as you do so), put back the screws, and voilà! a cassette with a working pressure pad!

But then, having discovered this one VERY bad one, I examined all the other cassettes in my big box o' recorded tapes. I discovered some 30-35 that had pads in greater or lesser need of replacement! I've now spent several hours (is it more than 4? I didn't count) doing this, and as far as I know everything is back in working order. In the process I noted a few tapes I thought I should just re-digitize, because though their pads were not Awful, they were definitely not good. I got pretty good and even quick at doing this, and am thinking of making a video—if I succeed in that, I'll put a link here.

There's one more thing, though. Having replaced the damaged goods, how do I prevent it from happening all over again? You know what moths like to eat: WOOL (and some other things, including, as I've discovered, some things like polar fleece that I don't believe are edible!); these little all-important pads are made of felt, which is usually made of—WOOL. OK, this is a problem I've been dealing with for a number of years. I've now seriously reduced the number of moths in my house and stuff, but they do come back, either because you miss some eggs, or because new ones enter your house.

The solution is amazingly simple: you asphyxiate them with carbon dioxide!

(Don't believe what you grew up with hearing about moth balls—I've found a living larva in a garment that had been kept for about a month in a heavy plastic bag with mothballs! Even if mothballs get the living moths and larvae, they don't appear to get the eggs....) So your prep is pretty easy: you arm yourself with some heavy-duty "contractor" plastic bags (check them for leaks, though), or some bins—or even clean trash cans—with loose-fitting lids. You put your stuff in one of these things, in a place where you can leave it undisturbed for several days to a week. When you're all ready, you go to the nearest store where you can get DRY ICE (pellet form is most convenient, but you do what you gotta do). USE GLOVES so you are not handling it with your bare hands, because you'll get a nice "burn", the stuff is COLD. You rush home with this, because it sublimates pretty quickly. You put about 1/2 to 1 pound of dry ice into each bag/bin/barrel, and close the top LOOSELY. As the dry ice sublimates, it releases carbon dioxide, which is heavier than air, so it settles. You want it to drive out the air, and you don't want the bag to explode! Leave it undisturbed for a few days to a week, and you should be home free. [Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides](#) has a nice page on this.

And now, back to work....