

7.24.015: What's your Garbage?

A young, well-intentioned college student from Texas A&M, somehow embedded to the studies of environmental engineering with a bent for NGO work, stood breathless at the bar of the Bamboo Hotel. A hefty walk from the boat dock, she cut right to the point, not even asking the hotel manager how he was. The manager, and owner of the permaculture farm up the way, stood (barely) listening to the wonderfully delicious environment solutions being offered by this girl for trash abatement/water cleanliness for the village of Tzununa... She clearly wanted to save the world. Yet he tasked her.

"Why is it good to have garbage on the side of the road?" And there is a lot of garbage on the side of the road. Garbage rules the sidelines of Guatemala. She stuttered. Her twenty-two-year-old self was soon to be no match for Shad's Johns Hopkins BA '006. She wasn't crying, but you could hear her panic.

"Come on college student. Problem solver. Engineer. I'm a teacher. Questions are where answers come from. Why is garbage on the side of the road a good thing?"

"Umm... No one has to worry about it then." She replied

"That's actually the answer to the opposite question. And what if you clean it up, as you wish to do, and monetize it and use the money to fund your water project? Why is that bad?"

Awkwardness... her semester behind books no match to his year living and learning about Atitlan.

"As a child in New Jersey," he began, "every week we put our garbage on the curb, and every week we did it again. In that I learned, or so I thought, that the problem was solved. And so I never looked at it. I never saw the real problem."

In sweeping away the unsightliness, he continued (in my own words), we create ignorance. We hide our own light. We become our shadows. That Frito-Lay bag, that idea of Coca-Cola selling back our own water to us, supposedly purified: these ideas are realities. These create outcomes that leave children twenty pounds heavier than their parents. This garbage on the side of the road leaves light on the problem and eventually, hopefully, communities, villages, tribes, nations, will have no choice but to look at the clutter. It cannot be ignored. We cannot afford to live within the veil. The trash accumulates, but it also

stays near the source of the problem. It stays where the solution may be birthed. And the clichés begin to bubble: "out of sight, out of mind" is the winner... And so, as such, we've lost our minds. We've used them in such a way that the disagreeable is ultimately curtailed. And yet our choices to create and live within said-reality remain. And we are but a collection of choices. And our choices are the shadows, and they may do nothing but shed light away from ourselves. And darkness grows. There are many problems around us. Shed light on one today. Don't just put it in the proper receptacle and consider it done. The real problem in solving the problem is getting rid of it to begin with, clearing away space on which more light can fall, rather than simply kicking it to the curb.