

In an impoverished nation, absolutely nothing of value gets discarded until it is no longer useable. If they could go through an American landfill, they would be shocked at what we throw away.

Surviving hard times

By DENNIS EVERS
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"When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." —

Mark Twain

I owe my dad an apology and I wish he were still around to accept it. My father lived through the Depression, and in my younger years I used to chide him about his peculiar Depression-driven habits. One that really irked me was he had us kids pull the nails out of boards, save the lumber if possible and pound the nails straight for reuse. It wasn't that he couldn't afford to buy a truckload of lumber and nails; it was just the principle of not wanting to throw away something that was still perfectly functional, albeit slightly used.

I'd tell my dad that he was a visionary and a conservationist and I was ignorant not to see it. His generation had a totally different outlook on life. Things were simpler, most houses were simple little homes that served their purpose well, not the ego driven monstrosities of today. (A friend of ours looks after a 20,000 square foot mansion that the owner uses a couple of weeks a year.) His generation seemed happy with a simple home and a small garden to help put food on the table.

He told me that during the Depression, it wasn't about just your survival; it was about everybody trying to get through it together. If a stranger came to your door in need of food, they would simply water down

the soup to make it go farther. It was the right thing to do.

If he saw me buying a case of bottled water, he'd roll over in his grave. (Although in my defense I refill them numerous times, and make my kids do the same.) He'd ask me what's wrong with tap water, or water from the hose, or drinking fountain, and he would be right. More than 60 million plastic bottles end up in U.S. landfills every day—about 22 billion last year alone.

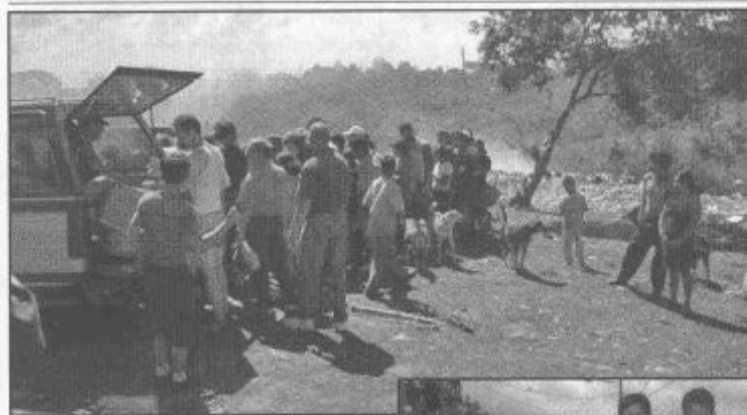
Disposable cameras, disposable cell phones, paper towels — at what point will we realize enough is enough?

My dad's generation used a single straight razor for decades until they invented the safety razor that used replaceable blades. Now we have throwaway razors with four blades

for a "closer" shave. Kids' shoes have LED's with batteries in them. The only thing my dad would ask is, why?

My dad's generation used cloth diapers. They were softer and better for you, and didn't end up tossed out the window like so many we see today littering the countryside. It is estimated that 27.4 billion disposable diapers are consumed in the U.S. every year. Over 50 pounds of petroleum products, 300 pounds of wood and 20 pounds of chlorine are needed to produce disposable diapers for one baby each year.

These aren't just huge numbers, these are staggering numbers. While many of the disposable products are touted as "convenient," my dad would ask the obvious "at what price"?



Above: Dozens of people who sift through rubbish at the dump in Central America line up for bags of rice and beans, some candy and toys. Right: It's all in what you have. To these boys, the balls were one of the best gifts they had ever received. Our idea of poverty and the harsh reality of genuine poverty are two different things.



Having traveled extensively in Mexico and Central America, I've seen hundreds of children and adults rummaging through a single dump to salvage plastic bags for seven cents a pound. (That's hundreds of bags.) I've seen three generations of one family, 16 in all, living in a black plastic and stick structure, with no running water, electricity and a dirt floor. And they were the norm.

We live in the most blessed yet conversely the most wasteful society in history, and we wonder why we are facing enormous problems. Unfortunately, decades of disposable and careless habits have caught



Dennis Evers and daughter Jenny give kids "high fives" while they wait all the way down the block for a Christmas bag.

up with us. Overflowing landfills and pollution are just a sampling of what's to come.

Take nothing for granted. Use everything as much as you can. Rethink essentials. Enjoy what you do have. Recycle everything possible including furniture and clothes. Use disposables longer than they're meant to be used, especially razors (but not diapers). Refill water bottles.

Challenge yourself to make more from less and new from old.

Life's little pleasures are the most affordable ones.

Perhaps the best thing we can do as a society is to look back at how our ancestors dealt with the Depression,



Waiting in line for some gifts and candy. We brought hundreds of toothbrushes and small tubes of toothpaste only to find the kids outside putting it on their finger and sucking it off. Live and learn.



Two small bags of food meant so much.





My daughter "Rick" hauls in 100 pound bag of rice for distribution at the Donna Holland Mission School.