

The Environment Needs More “Terrible 2-Year-Olds”

By Marinza Roosa

A lot of parents are familiar with the phrase “Terrible Twos,” but that phase would not end for me at 2 years old. I have always had a strong sense of curiosity. Before I could talk, I was crawling everywhere and touching everything that caught my attention. As soon as I learned coherent sentences and figured out how to be the center of attention, it was over for my mom and dad. When I learned the word, “Why?” at the ripe age of 8, they could see that my search for answers to my questions and my love of the sound of my own voice was not a good pairing. Lucky for them, I soon tired from that because “Why?” could only get you so far before your listeners become annoyed with you. So, I branched out. I started asking questions like,

“What’s your favorite color?”

“Where did this come from?”

“Where do you go every morning?”

And the question that would kick-start everything: “What’s your job, Dad?”

My dad is the administrator at our local landfill, and I would have never thought that being the daughter of the “Garbage Guy” would take me to where I am today: A teenager who cares deeply about the environment.

Although my dad’s job was not the most glamorous one out there, I was star-struck from the beginning. I remember what it was like to go into the recycling building for the first time. In my community, all of the recyclables are thrown into a semi parked in that recycling building and then hauled to a bigger city to be recycled. I remember dad letting me chuck glass bottles against the cement wall. Maybe it was then that I saw that recycling could be fun and in my small way, I was helping the environment.

Elsewhere at the landfill across the piles of trash, there is a massive building that houses equipment to smash the garbage into the ground. I was able to touch those massive machines. I

realized if they needed such big pieces of equipment, there was probably a lot of garbage that they needed to push into the earth.

I was even bestowed the honor of going inside the front office, where two fat cats named Lenny and Squiggy spent all of their days. Of course, as the child of the Big Boss, everyone was excited to see me, and I spent more minutes than necessary going over everyone's names to make sure that I had everything down pat. I learned that it takes a lot of people to deal with other people's garbage.

And I learned something else: The dark secrets behind the rolling hills.

Here's what my dad said: "Hey Marinza, look. You see those hills? Guess what is underneath them?"

I thought to myself, 'What a dumb question. Of course it's dirt. There is nothing but dirt beneath grass.'

"Dirt," I said.

Dad shocked me though.

"Nope. It's trash. Those hills look pretty realistic but underneath it's all trash that we have had to bury to try to make room in the landfill."

That sentence was when I knew that we needed to do things differently so that we would not run out of space in our landfills and hurt our wonderful Earth more than we already have.

While other kids were learning about their parents' occupations, I was learning about the "dump" - what goes in, why it goes in there, how horrible that is for the environment, what we are doing to help, and so on and so forth. The idea that if we do not act with urgency and care, our Earth can and will be gone sooner than we want was, surprisingly, not a hard concept for 8-year-old me to grasp. I could feel the urgency, and that was when a spark was ignited in me.

As the years went by, I was known for talking about everything environmental in my school. I promoted recycling, I educated those who probably did not want to be educated, I watched and learned what our school was doing, and I did my best to tell everyone who would listen all about my new-found knowledge. But just as I was about to go into high school, COVID hit. The impact that COVID had on the environment was astounding to me. Just in my small town, I could smell the fresher air due to less traffic on the road and see the roadsides were cleaner with less litter. Because of these lifestyle changes, we experienced more wildlife around our house, as, I'm guessing, animals felt it was safer and probably healthier to go get food. Once again, I could see just how badly we are hurting our environment, to the point that the Earth benefited greatly from just one year of reduced human contact.

However, something shifted.

I was noticing how much people were starting to take baby steps forward, even just recycling what they could and watching their garbage output - and I noticed no impact. On social media, I saw people going vegan, vegetarian, tracking their carbon footprint, composting - anything and everything, and yet there was no real change. Of course, it is silly to assume that just because a few people changed their habits, that the world would change. But I got to thinking, it seemed no matter what - how long I preached for, what individuals did differently, or what bins were used to separate trash from recycling - it made no difference at all to the rising greenhouse gas emissions.

The hardest thing to grasp is that while we as individuals need to keep trying, big corporations need to be held accountable the most. Big corporations are using up precious resources, wasting energy, and polluting our air. With the amount of corporations around the world, until we can get them to care, our planet will not be saveable.

A New York Times article states, “As the biggest companies strive to trumpet their environmental activism, the need to match words with deeds is becoming increasingly important.” The article goes on to explain that while some companies have announced goals, they fail to explain how they will reach them. For example, they are setting goals like cutting their carbon emissions in half by 2050 or putting out less greenhouse gasses. These are lofty goals that are often hard to obtain without a clear guide as to how they will reach them. Similarly, the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) put out that as of 2019, 100 energy companies were responsible for 71% of all industrial emissions since human-driven climate change was officially recognized. They also state, “Government and individual actions are vital to addressing climate change, but larger corporations, with their outsized influence and power in today’s world, have an even larger role to play.”

According to Earth.org, the number one most sustainable company in America is Clif Bar and Company. “Clif Bar and Company has a strong record of sustainability commitment and transparency. Their traceability program allows consumers to know where Clif Bar’s ingredients are coming from, and to see their progress on increasing organic and certified-sustainable purchases every year (currently 76% of all ingredients are organic or certified sustainable. The company also diverts 90% of its waste from landfills from its headquarters and bakeries, and is working towards powering its facility on 100% renewable energy. As it strives towards zero waste, Clif Bar is also reducing its carbon footprint via emission offset with a partnership with American Forests. To date, the company has planted 150,000 trees in areas damaged by wildfires and areas contributing to watershed restoration.”

Companies like Clif Bar and Company should be the standard for all big corporations. As Americans, it is our duty to know which companies to support or boycott. Those businesses that

are not actively working towards their goals or have not publicly released any goals need to be researched beforehand in an effort to find companies that line up best with our personal morals.

The companies that we support are a reflection of who we are and what we care about.

The evidence is clear. Although individual actions play a minor role in climate change, and we should continue to recycle, compost, and watch how much we are driving, those who we need to be pressuring to be better are the big companies who are hurting our homeland the most. With the freedom that comes with living in America, I encourage everyone to start asking questions. Be that terrible 2-year-old. Demand answers. Seek peace for our Earth that has sustained us for billions of years. Our planet is heating up every minute that we do not hold those big corporations accountable.

Sources

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