

Image: goodenergy.co.uk



Learning to confront the climate crisis

Confronting the climate crisis is a major leap for most people; they have more important things to think about ... like food on the table, electricity bills and school fees. I started to reflect on this when the passenger in my car went to throw an empty plastic bottle out the window, onto the grass verge....

“No, don’t do that,” I said. “Keep it on the floor. I can use it again at home.”

“OK, if that’s what you want,” came back the surprised and uncomprehending reply. (As if to say: ‘it’s your choice mate, but as far as I know it’s much simpler just to chuck it!’).

Of course, I was also no angel! If truth be known we were both adding to the climate problem: I was driving a petrol guzzling motor, which emitted noxious fumes, while she was adding her tiny bit to the man-made mountain of single-use plastics.

But focusing for a moment on pitching the plastic, it seemed obvious that the lady beside me had no idea she was doing any wrong. She would have jettisoned the used plastic container, whether she was motoring along by car, walking to the shop, or even riding a camel along the beach (which some people do, here on the coast of Kenya!). She had grown up in a faraway village, receiving a basic education before becoming a mother and

focusing on things to do with keeping her kids alive and healthy. To date, my thirty-something passenger had lived an 'off-the-grid' life when it came to contemplating such



This made me think back to my own experience in other countries, and yes, years ago there too was a tendency to throw bottles and cans out of the car window, without a care in the world. But nowadays, in those places, that propensity seems to have changed ... for the better. Now, those places sort their garbage at house level and have multi-coloured bins all over the place, gobbling up the multi-faceted rubbish which is generated every day of the year. But hey, let's not run before we can walk ... back to the bottle-out-the-window story.

Our actions are governed by our mindset, and our mindset develops as a result of the things we are taught from an early age, and whatever we hear and see and take part in, every day of our lives. Take for example just the other day; I happened to spend some time with a friend and our kids at a relatively new – and wonderfully alternative – restaurant in Nairobi, called *The Pallet*. For a start it's a bit of a learning curve for kids (and probably adults too!) that the staff can't hear or speak, but *hakuna matata*, you just point to the menu or write down your needs. Thumbs up for happy and contented!

Then, looking around the environment of the restaurant and its surrounds, you begin to notice that the seats and tables are fashioned out of old oil drums, or made from wood in the shape of a boat ... recycled goods which are not all uniformly honed, direct from the factory. The light shades are created from old glass bottles and there are plants all around this fantastic space, growing in re-used plastic bottles (Yes! we're back to the bottle-out-the-window story, once again). My three-year-old said to *flowers like that in plastic bottles at home, can't I?"*

Images: Duncan Gregory



And so, the learning begins ... and will continue ... through life.

To complete what I hope is an inspiring tale, it's interesting to note that my bottle-throwing passenger of yesteryear has become the bottle-recycling wonder of 2020. She has just started up a business, making and marketing juices. The lady buys mangoes and tamarind, avocados and oranges, at the local market, then spends long evening hours blending the fruits of the day into joyous juices, which when the next day dawns, tourists on the beach and workmen on a local building site will salivate to receive. In other words, they love these bottled juices... fresh from the tree and with no unsavoury additives!

Returning to our starting point, perhaps the most amazing part of the story is the used - and seemingly useless - plastic bottle. In an incredible turn-around my bottle-pitching passenger now spends an hour or two each day cleaning and sterilizing once-used 500ml

containers - collected each week from a local school - then fills them with blended juices to sell to her regular customers. She even implores those same customers to return their empty bottles for a third or fourth term of use ... in order to help fight the climate crisis.



Images: Duncan Gregory

It's remarkable at times, how our world can turn full circle!

.....