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A literal rags-to-riches story and hope for the environment

Sharon Abercrombie | Apr. 17, 2012 Eco Catholic

This is literally a rags-to-riches story -- a group of poor women living on the fringes of one of the largest dumpsites in the Philippines now support their families by weaving high-fashion purses, rugs and wine bottle holders from garment factory leftovers, organic materials and indigenous fabrics. Writer Simone Orendain provides details in an April 11 story appearing on the Catholic News Service website [1].

Orendain reports that five years ago, these women had been making floor mats made of old rags discarded in the dumpsite. Middlemen were buying the mats at 9 pesos and selling them to department stores for 35 pesos. The women were receiving 1 peso (about two cents) each for their efforts. Jesuit Fr. Xavier Alpasa, then a seminarian, changed all that. Alpasa, a former businessman, had been assigned to a parish near the Payatas dumpsite northeast of Manila.

When he discovered that the women were being exploited, he became their new middleman and coach.

Alpasa encouraged 22-year-old Reese Fernandez-Ruiz, a budding entrepreneur, to head up the collective's Rags 2 Riches, their newly formed company.

"It's been life-changing both for me and the artisans that we're supporting," Fernandez-Ruiz said. "It always validates the belief that there is hope in the world."

Forest Ethics, a San Francisco-based environmental group, can attest to that. The group's website announced [2] that 16 major companies and one U.S. city are trying to clean up their transportation footprints by reducing the environmental and social impacts coming from fossil-fueled transportation. Some of the companies, such as Walgreens, Chiquita, Seventh Generation, Whole Foods and Trader Joe's, have specifically committed to eliminating Canada's tar sands from its fuel supply chain.

The city of Bellingham, Wash., one of two U.S. gateway cities for the tar sands, is working on reducing its environmental and social impacts -- including carbon emissions -- and will adopt new guidelines that require minimizing its fuel purchasing from refiners taking feed stock from there.

If you are feeling grateful about these developments, you might want to go to Moving Art on YouTube [3] for even more reinforcement. A Berkeley friend recently emailed to say filmmaker Lewis Schwartzenberg's Oct. 14 video, titled "Gratitude," "is the best kind of morning prayer ... a really beautiful video with the words of Brother David Steindl-Rast and a wise little girl who speaks her truth. If we watched this every morning, how peaceful we would be."

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Links:
[1] http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1201470.htm

[2] http://forestethics.org/major-companies-act-to-clean-up-their-transportation-footprints
[3] http://www.youtube.com/user/LouieSchwartzberg