

It was likely right at seventy-five years ago this winter on a chilled rainy morning that I learned a deeply imprinted life lesson. Due to the rain and our fourteen blocks walk to school my dad came in his business car and picked up a group of us. Soon along the way a friend who had brought a biscuit took his late breakfast bites, crunched up the leavings with the wrapper, rolled down the window and tossed his trash. My Dad pulled over safely, parked the car and walked down to retrieve the trash. He returned it to my young friend and explained there was a receptacle at the school entrance for trash. As we arrived at school and were scurrying in my friend tossed his crunched trash appropriately. I noticed he looked back and my dad with his characteristic cheshire grin pulled away waving. Not another word was spoken but I have never forgotten the quiet message.

Lo, these many years later, my life is planted and pursued on a legacy ranch parcel where just at 4,000' of fence line serves as a boundary along a major state roadway. Boundary on the other end along a feeder connector for school, residential and business travel is just under 2,000' of fence line as well. For a full twenty years now, it's been my good fortune with the assist of family from time to time to try to manage roadside discards of every imaginable---and, some unimaginable---varieties. In a given week I could tell you what preferred beverages were being consumed and the most popular fast-food outlets. Among the more amazing have been cheap plastic jugs empty of their gin, vodka or tequila. Beer cans grew taller with more capacity over time. The more offensive and unpleasant items have included soiled baby diapers or garments. I had a late friend who in the first ten or twelve years collected aluminum. He helped finance support for a nonprofit with his collections. So, I would carry an aluminum trash bag and a "other" trash bag as well. As I rinsed with a hose the aluminum items, there'd be a disturbed scorpion, once a small snake but mostly just debris. He'd thank me for the crushed and rinsed aluminum when I added to his collections. Oh, yes, there were biodegradables that were left to follow their course. There's even a daily banana peel from someone's breakfast that persists to this day.

As I took my walk, I remembered Dad's quiet early message: "manage your own mess!" I've also had time to revisit my wonder of just how many tax dollars were spent with the roadside messaging "Don't Mess with Texas." I consider gratefully neighborhood groups, families, and businesses that take on sections of some of our roadways. Underlying the appreciation I feel, is a wonderment about how lessons for proper handling of one's own waste gets tossed off for others. It should be easy for us to model care and respect for another's property and public space.

Similarly, and with some horror I've participated in creek bed cleanups to remove incredible discards. What a waste.

All of this leads a concern for the well being of our open space lands and waters, our roadsides, through watersheds and wherever some due diligence could and should be important. When I recently mentioned this concern to a friend who lives out near the lake and another along the Comal, their extraordinary stories and descriptions abound.

Friends and neighbors, we can do better! Even a little bit of care can go a long way.