

Accidental Environmentalism

What's the connection between a throwaway paper cup, a Prius hybrid and a public aquarium?

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What's the connection between a throwaway paper cup, a Prius hybrid and a public aquarium? Well, I'm going to explain soon enough, but first let me welcome you to my new FishChannel blog: "Ebb and Flow." Why "Ebb and Flow"? Well, just like when the tide flows out and then washes back in, you never quite know what you're going to get with the tide (old tires, strange sea-dwelling creatures, the occasional government witness, etc.) or with a blog, my blog. However random it may appear at first blush, and random it will sometimes be (if reading aloud, use best Yoda voice), I will always tie in the fish-slash-aquarium thing.

So let's get back to my original question. The other day at the BowTie editorial offices, I was filling up with the gratis coffee in the gratis paper cups my company provides to its employees. Another editor was also getting a warm cup of something at the same time I chose to. I asked her why she didn't use the company-provided cups to which she replied, "Because I use this (she lifted up a maroon ceramic mug), which is better for the environment." (Insert bad pun here.) Now, I don't think she was being smug with her mug (I warned you), as she is a very nice person, a heck of an editor and not one to judge (well, perhaps a bit, but who doesn't). So as I am prone to do, I shot back in a half-joking tone, "Well, I drive a Prius."

And while using a washable coffee mug and driving a fuel-saving hybrid, nearly 100 miles to and from work every day, may be like comparing the environmental activism of Woody Harrelson pushing hemp smocks to John Muir saving Yosemite, my Prius driving is less noble than it sounds, and, yes, it is tangentially related to fish – I will close the loop in a bit.

As I explained to my coworker, I'm an accidental Prius driver. The whole hybrid thing comes down to timing with me. You see, I was taking my then 4-year-old daughter to the Aquarium of the Pacific, in Long Beach, California, a few years back, when I missed the turn to the aquarium off of Queens Way. I decided to just take the next right, but what I failed to realize was that the multi-lane, rather wide Queens Way, in the direction I was headed, is all one way. So channeling my best Jason Bourne (only at grandparent speed), and with my 4-year-old safely ensconced in her car seat, I whipped the steering wheel around, swung a broad, sweeping U-turn across a bazillion lanes and began heading down what I thought was an exit ramp.

Exit ramp my caudal peduncle, more like ENTRANCE RAMP, with a Long Beach city bus heading in my direction as verification. The bus slowed and I was able to slightly back up, but not before said bus took off my front bumper and tweaked the metal frame of my automobile. The cost to untweak the frame, replace the bumper, fix the front side panels, straighten the hood and fix part of the engine would have been more than \$10,000, and it being a \$16,000 new car, it was considered totaled. Suffice to say, that's one trip to the aquarium I'll never forget.

So yes, I do the responsible thing and drive a fuel-saving hybrid, but it might not ever happened had I not been on my way to treat my daughter to a day at the aquarium. I still use the paper cups, but I'm thinking about switching to my own mug. So that's my story of the paper cup, the hybrid and the aquarium.

Oh, before I sign off (if that's what bloggers do?), my company recently replaced Styrofoam cups with the current paper ones. If you like to make environmentally friendly choices, here's one: paper cups are better for the environment. A Styrofoam cup is made up of thousands of individual polystyrene (plastic) beads, and when a Styrofoam cup breaks down to the bead level, it has been documented that these plastic beads can and do end up in oceanic food chains and ultimately in the bodies of fishes, sea birds, sea mammals and us. So, if your employer uses Styrofoam, do like we did, ask them to switch to paper products. You also don't need the plastic lids or the sleeves either. If your morning cup of joe feels like it was used to cool a nuclear reactor, then perhaps you should consider using a pair of oven mitts when downing it.

So consider making the Styro-paper switch and look for future aquarium-related "Green Tips" in "Ebb and Flow" and in the pages of Freshwater And Marine Aquarium magazine. Talk to you later.

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