BE THE STICK, NOT THE PEBBLE

Holding space for others to take on greater meaning

Just out of college, my buddy Steve was heading to medical school and I convinced him that a trip to Mexico would be awesome. He was about to go nose-down into books for six years, so Mexico was an easy sell. “Maybe we’ll get to Puerto Escondido,” I told him. Sometime after that, I mentioned we’d be riding bikes, and later still, our route: Guadalajara to Mexico City, far from the surf.

We followed a rough map from the book Bicycling Mexico. People stared at us with a mixture of fear and wonder as we trundled through little villages. We fought off packs of wild dogs, stayed with a world-renowned artist, and I convinced Steve on as a key advisor. It was great to circle back on a crappy career and friendships to a rain stick, an instrument is cool. Bouncing down the dark route: Guadalajara to Mexico City, far from the surf.

We threw our bikes into some old boxes and flew to L.A. the next day.

Steve went to medical school, and I kept to more familiar places (without bike trips and foreign travel) as I moved around the following couple of years and kept that rain stick close. I came up with a mantra as kitschy as the souvenir itself: “Be the stick, not the pebble.” Bouncing down the dark inside of a hollow branch sucks, but adding volume to the sound of the instrument is cool.

Now, I’m not about to chalk up my career and friendships to a rain stick, but about the time Steve became an ER doctor, I was starting a nonprofit working in Mexico and Costa Rica and brought Steve on as a key advisor. It was great to circle back on a crappy experience and rebuild from the places we struggled. It was pretty obvious that we had both come around to

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