

## Need plastic bag? Pay!

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One thing I like very much here in South Africa is that every time you buy something in any store, big or small, the cashier would ask you, "Would you like a bag for that?" and adds, "That would be 20 cents, please."

So you don't see any plastic trash here. Also, people learn to bring their own bags when they shop or their handbag, hands and pockets will be full.

This is one laudable practice that we should adopt in the Philippines. In the wet market, they bag your purchases twice, with clear plastic, then a sando bag. In supermarkets, most foods are previously packaged in plastic or boxes and then still put in store plastic bags at the check-out counter. Anywhere else they so liberally give away plastic bags even when you do not ask. I had boxes and boxes of plastic bags at home, which I gave away recently. At any Mini Stop Mini-mart, they give you a big styrofoam box for every siomai and rice that you buy and two small plastic bags for sauces. Maybe, if they don't do that, they could lower the price.

Where do all these used plastic bags and Styrofoam boxes end up? I dread the next big rain and the floods that might ensue because our waterways are clogged with this debris. In our little community in Sta. Mesa, we don't need the rains, our streets are always soaked in water and I suspect this is caused by all those plastic bags and wrappers carelessly thrown away by vendors, neighbors and passersby.

I praise SM for their green bag campaign. They encourage you to use your own green bag every time you shop and give you extra points as incentives added to your SM Advantage Card. SM should compel stores in their malls to emulate their admirable example and may other stores follow suit.

One thing I miss, though, are our 24-hour convenience stores. There is none here and all stores open at 8 a.m. and close at 6 p.m., 7 p.m. tops. Offices are closed during lunch breaks. Cinemas and big eateries close at midnight. After six, there is nothing much to do but watch TV and sleep. People are deathly afraid to go out when darkness sets in due to rising crimes with the unchecked entry of illegal Africans from Namibia, Zimbabwe and other conflicted African nations. Houses of the rich are fortified with electric fences, other protective gadgets and paid security surveillance services. The poor use store-bought locks and bolts. I am in a protected compound, yet the house girls here tell me every night to bolt and lock every door and window.

Back in Manila, you could attend to your business affairs during the day then do shopping, go to the beauty parlor, dine, see a movie, go disco or ballroom dancing, even go to the wet market during the night. The little wet market (Talipapa) at V. Mapa Street is open until supply lasts.

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