

KELSEY TIMMERMAN TRANSCRIPT

Phil: The author of Where am I Wearing? Where am I eating? And you've got a new one, Kelsey.

Kelsey: Yeah, it's Where am I Giving?

Speaker 2: Tell us about Where Am I Giving? Let me guess. Is this when we give a donation of two dollars, where is that two bucks going?

Kelsey: Partly. So, I followed some common ways that we give. So for instance, I gave through Kiva and then followed it back to meet the people who were lent the money in Cambodia. I hung out with World Vision in Zambia. So that's definitely part of it, but the way the book came about was through my travels. You know, my first book, I looked into the garment industry, and I hung out with individuals who worked in garment factories or sweatshops. My second book, I went to Colombia to meet coffee farmers and met a slave in West Africa, and so you see this inequality and injustice that exists in the world, then how do you process this? What do you do? What do you do to make a difference? So I set off on this quest to answer "How can you be a good global and local citizen? Is there some type of equation that we can sort out?" So I went to the most generous country on the planet, which is Myanmar despite having ongoing ethnic cleansing and longest-running genocide. I went to Cambodia. I went to India where I met Gandhi's great-grandson and beyond.

Phil: Just back up there about Myanmar. Is that per head, how much money they give away as a government? Is that how you work that out?

Kelsey: So, there's something called the World Giving Index, and they measure three things. They measure have you given money over the last 30 days when they're doing the survey? Have you helped a stranger? And have you volunteered in the last 30 days? So when they factor all those things in, Myanmar has been at the top of the list, I think, for the last three to four years, and Theravada Buddhism has a practice of giving alms, so they give a lot of ... It's not so much the amount; when it comes to the actual amount that is given, the United States ends up giving the largest percentage. Americans give the largest percentage of their income, which is about two percent.

Speaker 2: I thought this was random news, and it relates to your book. Steven Seagal just a few weeks ago was appointed by Russia as a special envoy to the US. Do you remember that, Phil?

Phil: Yep.

Speaker 2: How did that have something to do with Where I'm Giving?

Kelsey: Oh, wow, so you've been on the blog recently. Yeah, we originally had Steven Seagal in the book just a little bit, because I met some monks in

Nepal This was my first big trip, actually. After I had been to Australia, I went to Thailand and Nepal. This was in 2001, and I hung out with some monks, and some of those monks actually knew Steven Seagal and claimed that he was some reincarnated version of some monk, so I had that in the book. I just went off. When you're writing, you go off on these weird tangents, and I had Steven Seagal in the book. It turns out Steven Seagal is not a great guy. He's friends with dictators. Vladimir Putin. He has a long history of sexual assaults, or at least accusations of sexual assaults, and, yeah, he's now Russia's envoy to the US. But, hey, we got Dennis Rodman, right?

Speaker 2: So, needless to say, when you were researching the book, you've cut him from the book and happily handed him to Russia, or Putin?

Kelsey: Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative). I'm sure I would really have made his career, just those two paragraphs I cut out.

Speaker 2: Yeah, he'd be devastated, Kelsey.

Kelsey: Yeah, I'm sure.

Speaker 2: Now, Phil's done a bit of research too. This is your latest book, *Where Am I Giving?* The one that you talk about the clothing industry, *Where Am I Wearing?* Phil will throw some stats at you in a minute, but one of the things that I was a bit confused about, are you telling us, because you've got an outfit, and you trace your T-shirt and your thongs and your shorts or whatever back to the country of origin, and you meet the people that make it, and you will tell us more about that? But are you saying to us that we shouldn't be buying clothes made in Bangladesh, or are you saying to us we should so we support that economy?

Kelsey: Yeah, so, I'll back up, and how it originally started was I love to travel. I love to go anywhere in the world and have adventures and meet people I find interesting, so in just this random act of travel, I decided to go wherever my T-shirt was made. It was made in Honduras, so I showed up there and had the adventures and just decided I should at least go to the factory, and there outside that factory I met a guy who was my same age. At that time, I was 25 years old. His name was Amilcar. Our lives were vastly different. The opportunities and privileges that had presented themselves to us were different, and I think it's the first time I started to examine the privileges and opportunities of my own life. And so what I set out to do after meeting him was just to tell the story that is truest, the lives of the workers.

Kelsey: And some of the workers, if you ask them, say, like in Cambodia, "Well, people in Australia and the United States think that we shouldn't buy the blue jeans that you make because you're not paid well enough, you're not treated right. And one of the young women was like, "Well, then I wouldn't have a job." Right? So that's partly right. When the global economic recession hit, millions of garment workers around the

world lost their jobs, so I'm not taking the stance one way or there other. I think it is much more complex than we're comfortable with it being, and I just try to tell the stories of the workers. One thing is for sure that we should think more about these people who we're connected with every single day and what their lives are like, and it's not this ladder out of poverty that some people present it as, and, for some, it's the best opportunity that they have, and those two things can be true at the same time, which is tough.

Speaker 2: So, you're basically putting a human face on globalization?

Kelsey: Exactly.

Phil: Okay. Well, one of those stats that I've picked up. Back in 1981 when Ronald Reagan was US President, something like 10% of the world lived in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty. Less than, you know, two bucks a day or something. That has now dropped to two percent, so, I mean, sometimes we look at globalization, and we think it might be a bad thing, but is there evidence that sometimes it works too and it's actually reduced poverty?

Kelsey: Oh, I think there's more economic opportunity, and I think when it comes to globalization, there is often the question of "Is is good," or "Is it bad," and, to me, that's a bad question. It depends on who you are and where you are to whether or not that's ... so yeah, people have jobs that weren't available before, but some of those jobs, if you are a Mexican corn farmer, and they opened up trade with the United States in terms of corn, and suddenly you can't compete with American farmers, and the price of corn drops, and you have to sell your farm. You have to move to the outskirts of a city and then get a job hopefully in a factory. You know, in that case, has your life gotten better? Right?

Phil: Yeah, yeah.

Kelsey: With the stat that you shared that the biggest amount that has been moved out of poverty, like China, have placed such a huge piece of that, and a lot of it has to do with their economy. People moving from inland out to the coast because they work in these factories, so you're right. There has been this mass exodus of people out of poverty, but, you know, some people have been left behind, and it's a complex question.

Phil: Yeah. Look, I want to talk to you about the places that you've been as well, but I just actually pulled up that fact that I found there, and I had the numbers really wrong. Let me just tell you what they-

Kelsey: Come on, Phil.

Phil: Nineteen ninety-one, it was 44% of the world lived in extreme poverty. That's less than a \$1.90 per person per day. And in 2005, it was down to 9.6 percent; that's a decline, they say, of 78%, so those numbers are even bigger than I-

Speaker 2: Yeah. So where were you Googling?

Phil: Yeah [crosstalk 00:09:46]

Kelsey: So, really half the world lives on less than \$2.50 per day, and that's already been adjusted. It not like as if you were trying to live in the United States on \$2.50. That's been adjusted already, and around 10%, that's the stats I have, live in extreme poverty, which is less than \$1.90 per day, so, yeah, great strides have been made through medicine and through aid. You know, 120 million people are alive today because of smallpox that has been pretty much eradicated, so there has been a lot of really positive things. It's easier to be a human, for the most part, in 2018 than it was in 1990.

Phil: I don't mean to belittle the work that you've done, because I really admire what you've done. It's fantastic, and I actually was thinking about whether I should bring this up whilst we were interviewing-

Speaker 2: Chuck it into the ring.

Phil: And I thought, you know ... Well, I mean, I can say I'm playing devil's advocate, but then I realize devil's advocate is actually a euphemism for being an asshole.

Kelsey: [inaudible 00:10:49].

Speaker 2: He can deal with it. What are you going to throw in?

Phil: But, listen, let's go back to the original. You still awake, Kelsey?

Kelsey: Yeah, I'm here.

Phil: Okay. Let's go back to the original. When you started following your clothing, where did you end up going, and tell us about what you found there. Tell us about your experience.

Kelsey: Yeah, so I started off I Honduras, and it was super awkward. All of a sudden, I was face to face with a guy in my shirt, and I had really no idea what to ask him, and it lasted 10 awkward minutes. You know, then about six years later, I went back to Honduras to find him, and he had looked at his life as a garment worker and said it wasn't enough and made the trek to the United States where he is today. We stayed in touch. Again, I went to the place where the T-shirts he ade were sold. I followed my Levi's blue jeans to Cambodia, and, you know, I've had a chance 10 years later to go back and meet Nari and Ai, young women who I met who had lived eight girls in a room about 10 foot by 12 foot in dimension, and there were two of them, and neither one of them were in the garment industry any more.

Kelsey: It turns out, pretty much by the age of 26, you're washed out in the garment industry, and they look at that period of their life fondly, where they were in the city, on their own, hanging out with friends, and now Nari's back in the village, and Ai is working in a hotel. Right? So they look back on that time of their life fondly. [Duwan 00:12:28] and [Zechun 00:12:28] in China, they were working about a hundred hours per week.

They had moved away from their son to pursue this opportunity on the coast. [crosstalk 00:12:36]

Phil: Can I just hold you up. Kelsey? When you say they'd moved away from their son, you're underselling it there as well. How long had they been away from their son?

Kelsey: So, when I met them, they hadn't seen their son in three years, so the son was being raised by Duwan's father, which is to uncommon in China whatsoever, but they hadn't seen him in about three years, because the opportunities were not like inland China. They were on the coast. But, in Bangladesh, I met a woman who earned \$24 per month, and to feed a family of four rice cost \$15 per month. And many of the people that I've stayed in touch with are no longer working in the garment industry, and it's not like their lives had drastically improved.

Speaker 2: Isn't there a such thing, though, as ethical trade where you should be paying a minimum amount of money, you know, not two bucks or the equivalent of?

Kelsey: Yeah. I mean, and there's been a lot of improvements too. You know, one of the worst disasters in history in the garment industry and in the industry period was the factory collapsed in Bangladesh in 2013, I believe, killing more than 1100 people, and since then, I think that was a real slap in the face of the industry, and definitely in Bangladesh, the building codes have been worked on, and factories have been inspected, and that has been improved. Also, there is a whole movement of fair trade clothing that didn't exist just six, seven years ago, so, yeah, there is ... You know, what I always like to say, though, is we're not just going to shop our way to a better world. That seems like such a Western way to try to treat any problem, is to just consume our way to a better world.

Speaker 2: Yeah, and you want to make sure the working conditions are safe there [crosstalk 00:14:26]

Phil: Sorry about that.

Speaker 2: That's all right. Working conditions are safe, that there's no child labor, discrimination, regular employment is provided. But even though there are a lot of companies that are ticking those boxes, it's still [inaudible 00:14:40] that they can pay somebody \$10 to make a T-shirt but sell it for 120. That's a huge profit margin for that company, isn't it?

Kelsey: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, it's like that in foods too. Right? When it comes to what a banana farmer in Costa Rica gets for lugging that banana on his back to the processing station, he gets something like one percent of the price of that banana. So, yeah, I mean, there is a lot of inequality and injustice in our world, and I think that we all need to be aware of that inequality and injustice, and I think that we can see that we're connected with these individuals around the world, and I think we

should accept some responsibility that we can make an impact. Actually, the next question is how are we going to act?

Phil: Yeah, exactly. Well, what do we do?

Kelsey: Yeah, so I think, you know, part of our job is being a responsible consumer, but, like I said, we're not going to shop our way to a better world, so I think we have to look at our lives as global and local citizens and look at that balance, and that's the whole point of Where Am I Giving, to try to figure this out. You know, one way is as donors, and I've seen the footprint that you all have made in empowering travelers to give to the destinations that they have been to and in line with the sustainable development goals by the UN. I think that's fantastic. You know, I think travel is a great way to become aware, and even our travel dollars themselves, as we are traveling, can be spent with local groups and local businesses, and I think that can make a real difference.

Speaker 2: Can I see a fourth book coming along here? Where Am I Traveling?

Kelsey: Yeah. Where Am I giving? That plays a big part. I've traveled around the world to meet amazing givers, and so many of their stories, whether it was ex-Hollywood producer, Scott Neeson who's originally from Australia who moved to Cambodia and is now this dump that I visited in 2007, which was the most hopeless place I'd ever been. Then, thanks to Scott and thanks to the locals who've worked with Scott, now kids are going to grad school that worked in this dump getting 25 cents per day collecting recyclables, but he traveled, right, that led to that, and it's the same for Ashok who runs an organization in the slum of Mumbai called the OSCAR Foundation where he coaches kids in soccer and football, I guess, and only if they stay in school, he'll coach them. And now 3000 kids are in school, and Prince William has come to visit him, and he's just really making an impact.

Kelsey: So, it's so neat to see how much that travel has played a part in people's seeing in a different way. In Myanmar, I met a guy named Tim Aye-Hardy who was involved in the uprising in 1988 and ended up on a whim just someone from the US Embassy asked him if he wanted to leave, and his life was in jeopardy, and he ended up on a plane with no money, just wearing his longie and ended up in LA. Fifteen or 20 years later, he went back to Myanmar, and he saw all these kids working on the streets in tea shops, and now he's started a program to educate them, where all the other locals in Myanmar were like, "We never even saw this as an issue before," but he saw with new eyes. So, this idea of traveling, see different, whether it's Ashok who left his community, never even left Mumbai but just went outside his community to see that there were different ways of doing things, so I find supporting individuals like that is a great way to make a difference.

Phil: Kind of relies on your being a good football coach. I've coached my son's [inaudible 00:18:55] football team. I don't think I'd end up with 3000 kids. You gotta have some skills, right?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Kelsey: Well, you know, Ashok showed up to his first practice, and he didn't think anyone was gonna come, and he wasn't going to go through the expense of spending \$6.00 on a football, so he showed up, and there was 18 kids there, and he didn't have a football. He was like, "Oh, I didn't think you guys were gonna show up," and the next practice he spent a quarter of his monthly salary to buy a football and started coaching them, so that's where Ashok started from, but he started local with people he knew, and it really grew from there.

Speaker 2: I'm really keen to read your books after chatting okay you. I want to know as a journalist you set out to research these. That was the premise. Has it changed your life?

Kelsey: Oh, for sure. Yeah. I mean, it's changed, not just the way that we shop but what I do with my time. You know, I'm actually not home right now. I'm in Des Moines, Iowa, which is an eight-hour drive from my home in Muncie, Indiana, because I'm visiting a Facing Project launch, so I co-founded a nonprofit called the Facing Project, a community [inaudible 00:20:05] project that focuses on social justice issues in communities where people share their stories, and their stories are lifted up, and that would not have happened if not for traveling, if not for this work, sitting and listening to people from all walks of life, people who the global economy looks at that deems not worth a lot but have amazing stories and personalities to share. That's all been influenced by this work.

Phil: Have you had a look at volunteer travel, like voluntourism and the impact that that has, and do you have an opinion on that?

Kelsey: Yeah, I think there's good ways, and there's bad ways, right, that it can be done? I think that there's a concept of fair trade learning. Right? At least the people who are being helped should gain as much from this experience as the volunteers themselves, and sometimes that's not always the case, so I think if you're evaluating to go and volunteer, make sure you're plugging in with an organization that always exists there on the ground, that it's run by locals, that they're measuring their impact. It's not just showing up to paint a school that was painted last month by another group of volunteers.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Or the same group of 15-year-olds going and singing A-B-C-D-E-F-G, which is what happens, and they take these kids off to Thailand to so-called teach children English, and it's just a different lot of faces doing the same thing.

Kelsey: Yeah, I mean, if you can apply a special skill, so I travel with Safari Doctors in Kenya, and they go out to these remote regions along the Swahili Coast, and they have doctors and dentists and eye doctors that travel out to these villages and provide services to thousands of people who would not have access to it otherwise. So, to me, if you're a doctor volunteering a month of your time, like that, is a very special thing that you are doing. So, if you can use the skill that the world values you most at already and put that to use somewhere else, like the special skill, I think that can make a bigger impact, but I think because we are traveling around and we're volunteering, we need to go in with the expectation that we're going to be influenced and we're going to be impacted, but we need to have realistic expectations about the actual benefit that the actual community that we're in will actually have from our presence there.

Phil: I'm gonna let a little secret out of the bag here. World Nomads. We had this kind of experience about five years ago where we were participating in a voluntourism project, and as you say, you know, painting a schoolhouse or something, and some of the people from World Nomads who were part of the group, we took some other people with us as well, were approached by one of the local tradesman. He said, "If you guys weren't doing this, I would have had that job." So that. Yeah. So that about five years ago really changed our perspective in about how we managed those community projects that we do through the Footprints network that you so kindly mentioned there. So we have been well aware of that for a while, and we are very careful to only associate with NGOs and other organizations who can do that, who can bring skills to a new place. I mean, you know, teach them how to fish.

Kelsey: Yeah, doing good isn't always an easy business.

Phil: No.

Kelsey: The Millennium Development goals were established around the year 2000 to eliminate poverty and measured eight things, and they selected a couple of villages that you named Millennium Development Villages. I went to one of them in Kenya, Sauri, Kenya, that was supposed to be the little village that would change the world, that they would eliminate poverty in this village, so Millennium left in 2015, so I showed up there in 2017, and I talked to one of the former mayors who was a mayor during this period of time when Millennium was there, and I asked him, "So, is life better?" And he's like, "Somewhat." But here you had people, experts in the aid industry, an economist with nearly unlimited resources trying to eliminate poverty in one village, and the life is just [minutely 00:27:59] improved, and it's not easy, too, right? But that doesn't mean we shouldn't have tried, because we have made drastic changes in people's lives, and people have made changes in their own

lives, I should say, but it's just not the easiest of work. Even people who are experts in it can struggle.

Speaker 2: One thing Phil wanted to ask you too. I don't mean to throw you into the deep end with your facts that you have to correct. Souvenirs.

Phil: Ah, yes. There's your next book. I've given it to you, mate. Souvenirs. The whole souvenir trade. I mean, because tourism has grown exponentially in the last 10 years, and, of course, everybody wants to take home, you know, a little remembrance of where they've been. So much so that, for example, Morocco became famous for its silverware, and people would go there and buy silver. They have to import silver from, I think it's Korea or somewhere, because there isn't enough of it in the country to keep making all the trinkets that tourists come and buy.

Speaker 2: So, is it supply and demand? I would think, yeah.

Phil: Yeah, just the demand for those things far outstrips their ability to produce locally and supply locally. So, you end up with this ridiculous situation where a place like Morocco is importing silver.

Speaker 2: Well, even in Australia, you can buy a souvenir boomerang that's made in China. I'm pretty sure some of our indigenous communities wouldn't mind, you know, supplying some if the money's poured back into their community.

Kelsey: Yeah, and I think those are really great questions to ask ourselves, like, "Where was this souvenir made? Who was it made by? How's it impacting their lives?" And we all know that there are products that you can buy from artisans in a country that is actually helping support them and their families.

Speaker 2: All right. If it's not an idea for your book, we should do it as a podcast.

Phil: Yeah, we will. No, no, no, no. We've actually got an article on the website about ethical shopping and about how that goes into what you should think about when you're choosing souvenirs.

Kelsey: Yeah, okay.

Phil: We'll bring that one up, and we'll have a good chat about that one [crosstalk 00:26:57]

Kelsey: You know, I think that is important in a way that we can positively impact the places that we go, but your point is a good one, that we can also make a negative impact as well. My friend, Rolf Potts, has a great book out, a new book out, that's called Souvenir. It's about the history of souvenirs that you all might be interested when you get ready for that podcast.

Speaker 2: Yeah, absolutely. That sounds great.

Phil: I'll email you afterwards. If you can introduce us, that'd be great. We'll see if we can get him on the show.

Kelsey: Yeah, for sure.

Speaker 2: Would you? That'd be fabulous. And I'm quite serious. I really look forward to reading your books. It's been fascinating talking to you and a lot to think about there as world citizens. Phil?

Phil: Yep. That's the point of this. Absolutely. Kelsey, thanks so much for taking time out. I know it's getting into the evening. You're giving up your free time there to talk to us, and we appreciate it.

Kelsey: Yeah. I enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

Speaker 2: I'm pretty sure I heard you swallowing a glass of wine.

Kelsey: Yeah, that was water. I think I'm about to have a beer now.

Phil: Yeah. Good man.

Speaker 2: [inaudible 00:27:53] Nice to chat with you.