

HOW TO READ ATENAS TODAY

Many of the pages in Atenas Today are in two column format, and the default “view” in the *Adobe Reader* will present these pages in a large size that requires you to scroll up and down to read the whole page.

By changing the “view” to “**Full Screen**” you can fit the page to your screen and avoid the scrolling.

When in “Full Screen” view, left click to advance to the next page, or right click to go back a page.

If the text is too small for your taste, push the “escape” key to exit the “Full Screen” mode, and change the “zoom” level to get the size you want.

THE NEW YELLOW PAGES

Don't forget to download and save the latest version of the Yellow Pages. Many new businesses have been listed. This section will help you find the goods and services you need.

ATENAS TODAY



Issue No. 72

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ATENAS TODAY is a free English language newsletter for the residents and potential residents of Atenas, Costa Rica. It contains informative articles and creative compositions submitted by our readers, and is distributed via email approximately once a month to over 400 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at fredmac222@yahoo.com.

Compositions from back issues are archived on the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce website, www.atenascatuca.com. Click on the English version and then Atenas Today on the business page.



DIRECTORY OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE IN THE ATENAS AREA

New names and numbers have been added to the directory. With each issue Atenas Today subscribers will receive an updated file containing the names and contact information of people who have chosen to be listed. Simply download the PDF file attached to this Atenas Today email and print it or save it on your computer.

If your name is on the list without contact information, it is because you are a subscriber to the newsletter, but have **not authorized the publication of your email address or other information**. To add or correct data please send an email to fredmac222@yahoo.com.

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Atenas Today Interviews
Lumberto Martinez

English-speaking contractor in Atenas



AT: I understand that you have been supervising the crew that has built 4 houses for English-speaking people in Atenas. How did you learn enough English to be able to communicate with your clients?

Lumberto: When I came to Costa Rica from Nicaragua at age sixteen I moved in with my uncle, who was the caretaker on the property of a couple from North America. These people helped me learn English by giving me workbooks and conducting English lessons on Sunday mornings for a group of young people.

AT: How long did it take?

Lumberto: After about three years I was able to converse pretty well. I like studying language.

AT: Tell me about your early life in Nicaragua.

Lumberto: I was born in 1984 in a small town called Cinco Pinos (Five Pines), in the north near the Honduran border. My mother had seven children, two boys, and five girls. I was number three.

AT: What did your father do?

Lumberto: Not much. He left when I was four years old. Later my mother remarried, but I was essentially raised by my mother and grandmother.

AT: Did you go to school?

Lumberto: Yes, for seven years. But then we moved to a farm owned by my grandmother, and I was the only male in the family who was available to live and work there.

AT: How old were you at that point?

Lumberto: Thirteen.

AT: Did you play sports? Have friends?

Lumberto: I played a little baseball, but my mother and grandmother kept me close to home. My grandmother lost three of her four sons during the war.

AT: So you worked on the farm from age 13 to 16, and then came to Costa Rica?

Lumberto: Yes. By that time my grandfather had moved to the farm, and there were other men, so I was not needed as much. We did not have money for me to go back to school, and I told my mother that I had to leave so I could make money to help support the family, especially my sisters.

AT: Did she agree?

Lumberto: Only after I threatened to go to Salvador, which was easy, but dangerous. Then she said I should go to Costa Rica, where my uncle was living, and where one of my sisters and her husband were going.

AT: Tell me about your trip to Costa Rica.

Lumberto: I was too young to get a passport, so my brother-in-law had to pay a man (called a coyote) to smuggle me across the border. It wasn't difficult; we just walked along the border a kilometer from the official crossing and got in a special taxi.

AT: Where did you go in Costa Rica?

Lumberto: The easiest job to get was cutting sugar cane. It's very hard work, the pay is low, and the contractors make you buy your own food and tools. They give you a concrete floor to sleep on, with no mattress. I worked for a while in Cana, which is very hot, and then near Turrialba, which is high in the mountains and very cold. Finally my brother-in-law got fed up and took me with him on a bus to San Jose. Eventually we ended up moving in with my uncle, who was working in construction in Atenas.

AT: Were you able to find work in Atenas?

Lumberto: Yes. I picked mangos for one of the contractors who go around buying fruit from landowners and then selling it in the market. I was determined to be the best mango picker he ever saw, and he rewarded me by taking me to other towns to pick fruit for him. The money was enough for me to live on, but not enough to be able to send any home.

AT: How did you get into construction?

Lumberto: It was difficult because I was so young. Finally I got a job as a helper for a contractor who was doing remodeling work in Ciudad Colon, and I worked hard to impress him. I was assigned to be the helper of a skilled worker (an operario) who was laying block. I made sure he had all the tools and materials he needed, and then did extra work by laying block myself. On one project an engineer came to check every day, and the spacing between the blocks had to be exact. If it was not, the engineer painted a red "X" on the wall, and it had to be taken down and done again. I was so conscientious about my work that the other employees kidded me about being "the eye of contractor".

AT: How long did you work for this contractor?

Lumberto: About one and a half years. A friendly operario taught me the tricks of the trade. By the end I was doing all kinds of skilled work: laying blocks, plumbing, welding, painting, etc.

AT: What happened next?

Lumberto: I saved my money and returned to Nicaragua. For three months I stayed at the farm and went to school. But I saw they didn't need me there, and I knew I could make money in Costa Rica. I was now seventeen and could get a passport. In 2002 I returned to my uncle's house in Atenas.

AT: At that time, 2002, construction activity was picking up in Atenas. With your skills it must have been easy to get work.

Lumberto: Unfortunately no. I was still young and no one knew what I could do. I had to start all over again digging trenches. But a local contractor did hire both me and my uncle to work on a big project near where we were living. He had known my uncle because my uncle had manually dug a 10 meter deep well for him..

AT: What was the project?

Lumberto: This contractor was building a house for the North Americans that eventually taught me English. In the beginning I dug trenches and helped the operarios lay block. Then, like the previous job, I started doing extra work laying block, and pretty soon I was promoted to being an operario and the contractor gave me a helper.

AT: How did you progress from being an operario to being a contractor?

Lumberto: The engineer on this job was a German who recognized my ability and motivation and taught me how to do all the other things required in building a house—roof structure, electrical systems, column and wall sizing, etc. At the same time my uncle became the caretaker for the North Americans, and they built him a cottage on the property. I lived there with him and began my English lessons.

AT: So the North Americans took a special interest in you?

Lumberto: Yes. They got involved in designing and managing building projects for other

people, and they asked me to be their construction foreman. Over the past four or five years we have built four houses, two of which are large, expensive complexes in the Pica Flora development in Atenas.

AT: What is your current situation?

Lumberto: I am now ready to go on my own as a contractor. Through my work in Atenas I have good relations with many subcontractors and suppliers, and I have been taught how to manage the finances of a building project. I am looking for opportunities to show my work, give references, and quote on jobs.

AT: Can you handle big jobs?

Lumberto: I am just finishing a two year project that involved a 500 square meter, two story house with a large swimming pool. In order to complete it on schedule I had eighteen of my own workers, plus another ten or so subcontractors working six days a week. Most of the workers have now gone back to Nicaragua, but are ready to be called back when I need them.

AT: What about the technical difficulties of building houses on the sides of mountains?

Lumberto: People who know Pica Flora will know that to build there means building on the side of a mountain. I work closely with a structural engineer and go overboard in making strong foundations. If a potential client has a mountain side lot, I would like the opportunity to show him what I did in Pica Flora and discuss the options.

AT: Do you plan to quote fixed price jobs?

Lumberto: My intention is to quote the labor fixed price, and the materials at actual cost. Material prices fluctuate too much for me to quote them ahead of time without building in a big safety factor. Also, this leaves the client free to pick what he wants for tiles, lights, appliances, etc. as we go along.

AT: You say you will quote the labor fixed price. What happens if you can't finish the job for the price you've quoted? Do you have the financial resources to make good on your quote?

Lumberto: I understand that the customer must be assured that his job will be finished, and that the contractor will not cut corners to try to live within his quote. I do not have the financial resources to cover over runs out of my own pocket.

So what I propose to do is show the client my detailed estimates of the labor hours and dollars required, as well as the hourly salary I will pay myself, and my projected final profit on the job. As the work proceeds I will report on the actual expenditures. If the work is not finished I will pay the workers out of my projected profit. If the work is still not finished after my profit is used up, the client will have the option of terminating my contract, or of continuing to pay my hourly rates until the job is done.

AT: That sounds fair. If you make a mistake and underestimate the job, you give up your profit, but the customer can still get the job completed.

Lumberto: And of course if I can do the job more efficiently than I projected, I get more profit.

AT: The incentives seem appropriate. How should people contact you?

Lumberto: They can call my cell phone at 8843-3849, or email me at: beto2122@yahoo.com

AT: Best of luck



Calling all Chili Cooks

**Start planning now to enter the 4th Annual Atenas Chili Cookoff
founded and sponsored by Kay's Gringo Postres**

When: Sunday, Feb. 13th, 2011 (the Sunday after Super Bowl)

Where: Quinta Romavista, Barrio Mercedes, Atenas - one km. off the Monte de Aguacate (old Alajuela to Orotina highway)

What time: 11:00AM to 4:00PM public - chili cooks set up at 10:00AM
This year chili will be cooked off-site and brought to the competition

In addition to some great-tasting chili, there will be:

- Live music, including country & western
- All day raffle with great prizes
- Contests and games
- Beer and wine garden
- Hot dogs, hamburgers, pies and cakes, and other goodies

All proceeds raised go to support the *Hogar de Vida*
home for abandoned, abused and orphaned children in Atenas

Entry fee only 3,000 colones. See website: www.kayschilicookoff.com for details

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact persons: Camille Naylor: 8377-3358; cami@qatro.com; Kay Costello: 2446-0664;
Carolina47@hotmail.com

Kay's Gringo Postres announces the 4th Annual Atenas Chili Cook off, to be held Feb. 13, 2011 (the Sunday after Superbowl) on the grounds of the beautiful Quinta Roma Vista. Twenty to twenty-five of Costa Rica's best chili cooks are expected to compete for trophies to be awarded the best chilis as determined by an expert panel of judges, as well as the ever-popular "Peoples' Choice" award.

The event will feature a beer garden, food service, live music, contests and games, as well as an auction and all-day raffle for great prizes, not to mention the best chili this side of Texas.

Entrance fee is 1,500 colones per person, which includes three sample cups for tasting different chilis. Additional sample cups may be purchased for a nominal fee.

It is expected that this chili competition will be the biggest event of its kind this year in Costa Rica. As many as 500 visitors are expected to attend.

All proceeds raised will benefit the *Hogar de Vida* in Atenas, a home for abandoned, abused and orphaned children.

For more information including pictures of Quinta Roma Vista and a map of how to get there, please go to: www.kayschilicookoff.com.

The Origins of Chili

There are almost as many claims "we made chili first" as there are chili recipes. The citizens of Mexico argue that their ancestors invented the dish (naturally!) and point out that the chilipequin pepper was widely cultivated by the ancient Aztecs and Mayans. Chili is the Aztec word for the chile plant. American Indians, on the other hand, vigorously assert "Our fathers harvested wild chile peppers before the Mayans ever thought about it".

Texans, however, belittle both theories, insisting that chili was invented by Texas trail cooks, to serve to cowboys who were "winning the West". Needing hot, fill-up-the-stomach grub to serve to hard-working ranch hands, the cooks combined widely available beef with the chile peppers which grew wild, creating a sort of stew they called "chile con carne," later shortened to just "chili".

Another theory has it that the first chili was served to the inmates in the jails of San Antonio, Texas, in the early 19th century. Supposedly it was made from the cheapest cuts of meat and combined with enough chili peppers to kill any bad taste. Even so, Jailhouse or "Chain Gang Chili" was reported to be so good that ex-cons who couldn't get a good bowl on the outside, broke parole to be recommitted – homesick for good chili!

What is known for sure is that by 1835, when the republic of Texas was mobilizing a military force in San Antonio, the officers employed Mexican lavanderas (washerwomen) to cook for their new army. These women, soon to be known as San Antonio's "chili queens," used their huge washtubs to stew up vast quantities of beef and dry chili peppers for the military, and later the general public.

The San Antonio chili queens continued to serve up their now famous chili until 1946, when War rationing and health inspectors forced their closure for sanitary reasons. By this time, of course, chili had already taken hold across Texas and the rest of the U.S., and was well on its way to becoming one of the country's best-loved dishes.

Chili Cook offs

The first chili cook off on record took place in 1967, prompted by New York-based writer and humorist H. Allen Smith's brazen declaration: "Nobody knows more about chili than I do. No living man can put together a pot of chili as ambrosial, delicately, zestfully flavored as the chili I make!". This statement so infuriated Texans, including Frank X. Tolbert, a Dallas newspaperman, that he immediately arranged a cook off between Smith and Wick Fowler, another newspaperman whose favorite hobby was cooking chili and who was considered Texas' "leading authority" on the subject.

The contest was held in Terlingua, Texas, a dusty ghost town along the Texas-Mexico border. The showdown ended in a tie, even though promoter Tolbert was heard to mutter that non-Texan Smith's chili was a "chili-flavored, low torque, beef and vegetable soup!" and that he had "the blasphemous gall to add canned pinto beans!" (Texans do not put beans in their chili).

Sparked by this event, the Chili Appreciation Society International and rival organizations were formed, to continue the sponsorship of chili cook offs around the country, with the regional winners competing for championship honors each year in Terlingua. The purpose of these competitions is threefold: (1) to whip up the best bowl of chili ever made: (2) to have as much fun as humans are allowed to have doing it: and (3) to raise money for worthwhile charities. Last year more than 2,000 chili cook offs were held, raising close to \$2 million dollars for charity.

(SIDEBAR):

Basic, no-nonsense recipe for Texas Chili:

3 to 4 pounds rough-ground chili meat	1 tablespoon ground cumin
6 ounces chili powder	6 ounce can tomato paste
1 tablespoon salt	2 tablespoons flour
½ teaspoon black pepper	water as needed
2 medium garlic cloves, chopped	

Pour in just enough water to cover the bottom of a large chili pot. Turn the heat on high; when water steams, add the meat and stir fry until lightly browned. Then mix together all the dry ingredients and add to the browned meat. Add tomato paste and water as needed to thicken as desired. Season to taste and simmer 45 minutes, or longer. Of course, you can start throwing in chopped onions, various hot peppers, coriander, oregano and a whole bunch of other stuff, but just the basic recipe will make some fine (if not prize-winning) chili!

The Atenas Today Art Gallery

The Art Gallery is a regular feature of Atenas Today. Local artists are encouraged to submit photographs of their works to be included in the gallery, and to send a new picture each month. The artists may be contacted via the email addresses shown.



"Saltamonte"

Evelyn Levtchenko
levtchenko.art@gmx.eu



"Passing Storm"

Al Alexander
jeanandal@gmail.com



Graphite -- GreenPeace Ships
by Steve Wiens

A note from Steve:

I am planning on giving drawing lessons in Atenas 9am - 12pm, but need to hold it at one of the students' houses. This will not conflict with the Monday painting class that Mary holds at Kay's. The fee will be 3000 colones each to cover my gas (I live in Esparza).

Please repond if you are interested and if you would be willing to open your home to a few mornings lessons. Contact: sjwiens@gmail.com

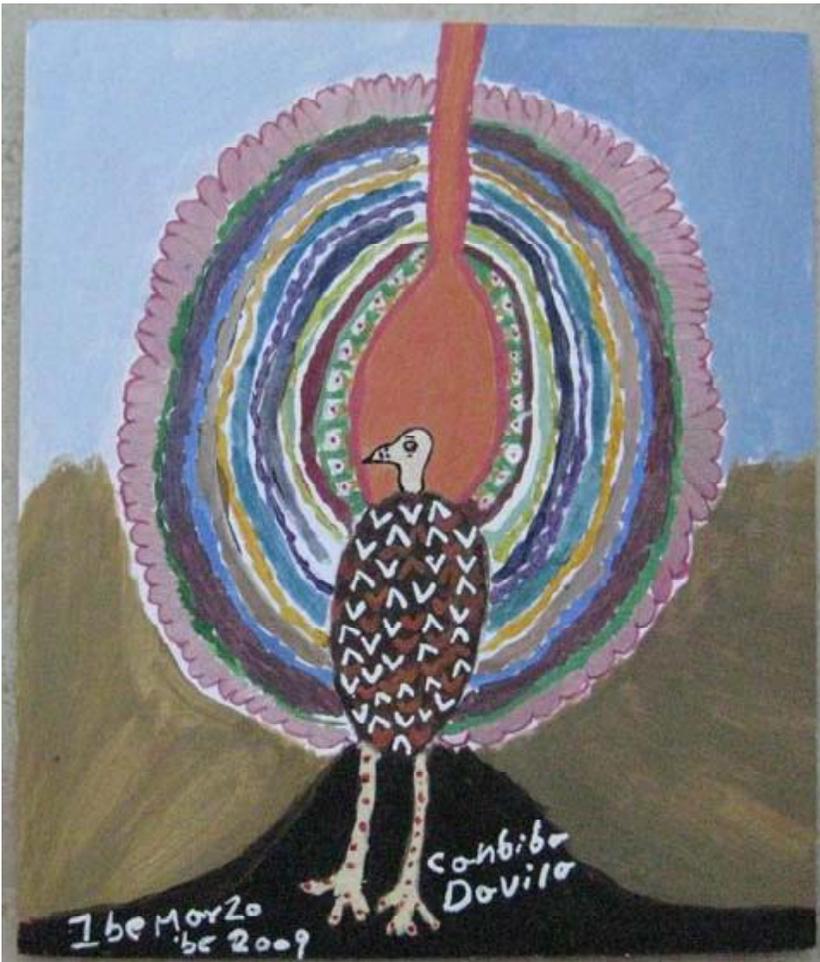


"Roses at the Inn, Morocco"

Alice Constantine
www.aliceartworks.com



Mary Park
mandgpark@shaw.ca



Candida Roso Davila
CandyDavila29@yahoo.com



Bismarck Ubeda Granados
Bismark72345@yahoo.com

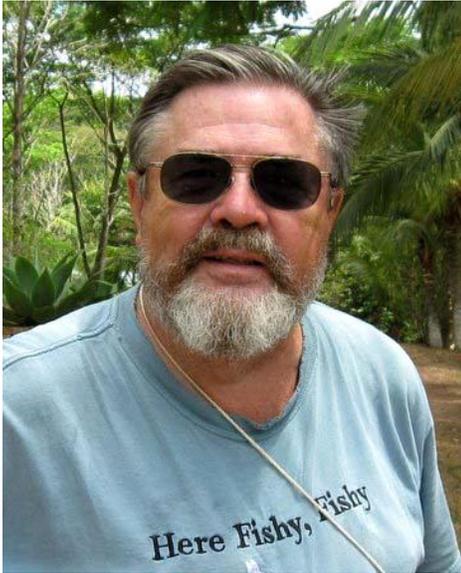


"Collage"

Harriet Sheppard

hweyman@hotmail.com

Photo Exhibition



by Martin Lively

My photos have graced the “pages” of [Atenas Today](#) for some time and I share them via the Internet on <http://picasaweb.google.com/gmlively>,

But like a printed book, a printed photo, especially a larger size print, somehow makes a bigger statement. For this reason I have arranged to display a collection of my photographs at the ReMax office in Atenas between January 14 and January 28.

The impetus for this show is my recent concentration on [High Dynamic Range photography](#), HDR for short. Combining several exposures and computer post processing allows one to combine a fuller range of clarity within the light spots and the dark spots of most photos.



Our eyes are constantly adjusting within an image in view, but the camera takes one slice of time. The fullness of exposed details depends on the camera’s settings ,and even the best averaging systems show whited out and blacked out areas in most photographs.

HDR uses [multiple exposures](#) near in time but different in exposure to get closer to what we see. Three to five exposures are bracketed around the camera’s best advice settings and intentionally over and under expose from there. PhotoMatix, and other software (I use Photomatix), then combine the multiple images allowing a wider range of settings to contribute to the final image.

From there one can tone map the image adjusting for brightness and intensity of color and enhancing or submerging details. This works on a single exposure too, especially with [high resolution GIF](#) or RAW files.

Please come by the ReMax Best Climate office across from the Coope gas station anytime between the 14th and 28th to see my photos and a few gyotaku (fish rubbings).

Go Bananas!



by Theresa Fulton

Bananas are everywhere here in Costa Rica, so you have probably seen many different types: big, small, yellow, red, seedless and packed full of seeds. Ever wonder – if there are no seeds, how are the bananas reproducing?

Bananas are interesting in many ways. Like most biological organisms, including humans, bananas in nature are usually diploid (di = two, ploid = chromosome set) – they have two sets of chromosomes, one from mom and one from dad. However, the most common banana that we eat, the soft, sweet seedless type is a triploid. This is a genetic anomaly that has 3 sets of chromosomes, one from one parent and two from the other. The resulting progeny (children) are parthenocarpic - the fruit develops without being fertilized - and thus seedless. Most of these are actually hybrids between 2 different wild species of the genus *Musa*. It is thought that a rare triploidy event (a mutation) occurred years ago, possibly as many as 7,000 years ago. People liked the fruit with no seeds, and so kept cultivating it.

Triploidy can be very advantageous. The plants tend to be bigger and more vigorous than their diploid counterparts, as well as not having seeds (this is also used in breeding seedless watermelons). They can be propagated (multiplied) by rooting suckers or corms (the underground root part) without having to produce seed. However, when plants are multiplied by cuttings they are all genetically identical clones. (Among its other benefits, sexual reproduction mixes up genes and creates variety!) This lack of genetic variation can be disastrous. If one plant is susceptible to a particular disease, then they all are. The Southern corn leaf blight epidemic of the 1970s and the Irish potato famine of the 1840s were caused by this lack of diversity, and at this moment Black Sigatoka leaf spot disease, a fungus, is wiping out banana populations all over the world. Plant scientists are hard at work developing new banana lines that are resistant to this fungus and more diverse. However, this is not easy due to the sterility and the complex genetic nature of bananas.

Although bananas seem so at home here in Costa Rica, they are originally native to southeast Asia. Now they are an important staple food in developing countries, particularly in some of the poorest countries in Africa, with consumption being up to 400 kg (882 lbs.) per year. Worldwide, Costa Rica is the 7th producer of bananas -- producing over 2,000,000 metric ton a year.

Banana production surpassed coffee as the main agricultural product in 1992 and is now the #1 agriculture export for Costa Rica.

The banana is the largest herbaceous flowering plant (no, it is not a tree). Unless they are picked fresh, like here in Costa Rica, bananas are difficult to ship ripe as they are so easy to crush and they ripen quickly. (Hence Bill Gates' quote "Intellectual property has the shelf life of a banana"). Therefore they are more frequently picked and shipped green, and then gassed with ethylene to initiate the ripening process later. This sounds bad! But fruits naturally produce ethylene during their ripening process, so this is a widely used method of extending the shelf life of fruit, including apples and tomatoes.

Even though they are such an important food world-wide, interestingly enough bananas are a source of mystery even to scientists. The genetic cause of the mutation causing the parthenocarpy is unknown, and little is known about the genes or chromosomes of bananas. Indeed, the taxonomy of the whole genus *Musa* is still controversial because there are so many natural hybrids in the wild as well as vegetatively propagated varieties, so they are difficult to classify. Plantains are also in the genus *Musa*, yet there is no official botanical distinction between the two. So soft sweet types are called bananas (sometimes dessert bananas), and firmer starchy types are called plantains (or banana plantains), but there is no formal difference. The lack of scientific knowledge about bananas is being addressed now by scientists in the Global Musa Genomic Consortium and at the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, in Nigeria.

And that is good news – because what else could we wrap our tamales in?

Bizarre fact: Many foods are naturally slightly radioactive, and bananas are more so than most other fruits, because of their high potassium content, and the small

amounts of the isotope potassium-40 found in naturally occurring potassium. Proponents of nuclear power sometimes refer to the banana equivalent dose of radiation to support their arguments. The good news is that your body doesn't accumulate P-40, it just gets rid of it. So eat on!

For more reading, see Heslop-Harrison JS and Schwarzacher T (2007) Domestication, genomics and the future for banana. *Annals of Botany* 100: 1073–1084, 2007

Available online at

<http://aob.oxfordjournals.org/content/100/5/1073.full>

Questions, comments or suggestions for future articles: tf12@cornell.edu



Black sigatoka infection in a managed banana plantation in Costa Rica (Photo by Juliane Henderson). Yield losses can be as high as 50%. From the Pests and Diseases Image Library

<http://www.padil.gov.au/pbt/index.php?q=node/13&pbtID=166>

A Fairytale, Costa Rican Style



by Sally Timm

Since arriving in Costa Rica, I have often thought of the tale of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” specifically the likelihood that if that story had been written to describe the process of settling here, the story’s protagonist might have described her experiences along the lines of, “This place is too wet/cold/cloudy. This place is too dry/hot/windy. This place is *just* right!”

When hubby Leonard and I began our great adventure – a move from the suburbs of Chicago to Costa Rica – we did what many of the people we have spoken with since did. We settled in at the first spot we saw based on only a superficial understanding of whether it met our needs. As the initial mental fog that came with our relocation began to lift, we realized that what we needed (or wanted) turned out to be quite different from what we had found.

Our first stop was a quaint little cluster of rental cabanas perched on the side of a hill a few kilometers outside of San Ramon, Alajuela. The spot features a national rain forest which served as our front yard. (Sort of like living in the garden section of a Home Depot, only better.) We had been introduced to this housing option by a gringo couple who

befriended us during due diligence trips we made prior to resettlement. On the second of two such journeys, they invited us to join them for dinner at their cabana where we saw the tremendous natural beauty of the rain forest and the splendor of the Central Valley at night (as viewed from a Costa Rican hillside). That was at the end of March 2010. It was the dry season.

We arrived in country three months later and headed straight for Santiago where, by this time in the midst of one of the wettest rainy seasons in Costa Rican memory, it rained. And it rained. Then, it rained some more. When it wasn’t raining, it was foggy, a condition we soon discovered to be common at our 3900-foot elevation. These were important revelations for us. There were others.

We decided we really didn’t want to live in a climate where a sweater was an essential wardrobe piece. After all, wasn’t that one of the reasons we were leaving northern Illinois? Daytime temps at our little cabana were fine – for us, most of the time - but nighttime was

another matter. (I spent the first six weeks of our stay fantasizing about the day when our shipment of possessions would arrive from the states so I could grab the down comforter we had tossed in at the last minute "just in case.")



We also experienced traffic gridlock San Ramon style. More people means more cars but not necessarily more functioning traffic lights or passable roads. I had spent hours (literally) thinking about how much easier life would be once I left my daily commute on Chicago's roads behind. Alas, getting to-and-from San Ramon wasn't the relaxing experience that either of us had envisioned.



So it was that after two months Leonard and I recognized that we had plopped into the first bed of our Goldilocks story. The Santiago-San Ramon area was too cool, wet, cloudy, and populated to suit us.

About this time, one of our cabana neighbors suggested a trek to Atenas and Kay's Gringo Postres. We liked what we saw and began thinking that the town might serve as the setting for the proverbial second bed for us to try. On October 1, we moved into a rental apartment in the hills of the Angeles area.

Before I continue, I should mention that in undertaking our due diligence, the network of ex-pats with whom we connected drummed into me and Leonard the best guidance I think we could have received when it comes to moving to Costa Rica: *Rent first!* This advice came both from people who had followed it and from people who had not (and wished they had). Had we not heeded their admonition, we could have found ourselves trapped, an unacceptable situation given the variety of choices that Costa Rica has to offer transplants with all our varied preferences.

Our life here is good. There's less traffic and less crime, both benefits that generally accompany small-town living. The people, especially our fellow ex-pat adventurers, are great. And the climate? Well, even if *National Geographic* never really published a claim about this being the best climate in the world, they might want to consider doing so.

For me and Leonard, the world remains open. What a freeing thought, truly *pura vida!* For now, at least, things in the tale of our move to Costa Rica feel "just right."

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The Importance of Having a Good Contractor



by Fred Macdonald

We surmised the problem was caused by one of the many small earthquakes that we experience in Atenas. The ground shifts and anything in the ground shifts with it. Imagine the forces on a right angle pipe joint encased in concrete when one pipe moves differently than the other one.



In my case the cracked elbow joint was in the concrete floor of a bathroom, under the built-in vanity. There was no evidence of a water leak in the bathroom, and we would never have known about the problem if our gardener had not noticed wetness in the ground on the outside of the house.

The water was leaking down through the concrete to the dirt underneath, and from there out through the foundation wall of the house. Eventually the cutting effect of the flowing water would have undermined the foundation.

Our house was completed some three years ago. Fortunately for us we had a contractor in Bernhard Hertkorn who will do everything in his power to help you deal with house problems, even when they are not his fault.

Bernhard knew exactly where the pipes were in the floor, and he knew that the most likely location for a break was at the elbow. He brought his small jack hammer and cut a ten inch diameter hole in the foundation wall. The cracked elbow joint was right there.

An hour later the elbow was replaced and the hole patched. The cost to me--zero.

Would your contractor have responded this way?

Pura Vida: The Pause that Refreshes

By Bettie Nebergall



Many years ago I experienced firsthand the power of pause - the secret value contained in hesitation. It occurred during a really rousing Ragtime performance at a Scott Joplin festival. The audience was tiring as it was near the end of that evening's presentations, and we'd heard a whole lot of tinkling piano since early afternoon. The last player was a big guy with a happy smile who bounced across the stage, sat down and began a rollicking tune, playing loudly enough to drown out the shuffles and coughs of the increasingly restless audience.

Wisely, he waited until the melody had repeated for the third time before he tricked us all. It was a simple stunt. He played three of the four combinations and paused, hands frozen in the air above the keys. After a second, some of the more attentive listeners noticed, after two seconds he had the majority, and after three there wasn't a sound in the hall. Individually, we had all moved through the same phases: first we felt the prickly realization that something wasn't right, next came the sensation, the actual weight of his silence, and finally our wandering attention became completely focused on him. At just that exact moment, he turned his face toward us and slowly smiled. He had us; we knew it, and we knew he knew it. His hands were still poised over the silent keys, and we were holding our collective breath. He gave us a big wink, lowered his hands to the keys but still didn't touch them. After one last stagey look out across all our upturned faces, he sighed dramatically and played the rest of the phrase. The tension released with an audible gasp and the entire audience rose in a deafening ovation, clapping and laughing as he finished the final chorus.

Who would dream that so much could be contained in a pause? For most of us, life is about the notes, not the silence between them, yet there is so much power in the spaces, the silent parts of our lives. In a recent blog post titled "Life's Missing White Space," Leo Babauta, author of "The Zen Habits Handbook for Life" discusses the value of that part of a design which isn't filled with things. White space in magazines, websites and ads imparts four important elements: clarity, emphasis, luxury and balance. By using white space in the design of our lives, we

Babauta advocates removing non-essential items from our lives: our daily routines, our surroundings and possessions, thus leaving only the essential items. As I read his suggestions, I realized that he's actually describing our typical Costa Rica lifestyle. Here are his techniques:

BREATHE. Simply take a couple of minutes between tasks, meetings, anything that you do, to breathe. In CR, this primarily occurs while driving. Strong, deep inhales are necessary for cursing.



SCHEDULE. Don't overschedule.

In CR, remember that mañana doesn't mean tomorrow, it means Not Today.



PROJECTS. Do fewer projects at a time.

In CR, even if you wake up in the morning with nothing to do, you'll stay busy all day and you still won't be done by bedtime.





SIT. Start your day with white space - just sit still for 10 minutes enjoying a coffee or tea.

This is perfect for CR. It can take that long to fill the coffee sock.

REMOVE CLUTTER. Pick out a few important things and remove the rest.

This one's easy - we did it before moving here.



SAVOR. Slow down and enjoy everything you see and do, just everything!

PURAVI DA, BABY!

The Ham I Am!



by *Marietta Arce*

I am the second child in a family of four children. As a consequence of birth order and natural temperament, I learned to navigate the family dynamics early in my life. I realized at a very young age what it would take for me to comply with the unwritten rules of the household yet still fulfill some of my own ambitions, which were often at odds with the rules.

My older sister was the guinea pig for my parents who were in their early 20's when she was born. This is not an unusual trend for most couples when they have their first child and are eager to establish their place as members of adult society. My sister became the academic model that the rest of us siblings were expected to follow. She was (and is) extremely bright and surpassed all of the scholarly trials that came her way.

When we arrived in New York in 1963 (speaking nothing but Spanish), bilingual education to help one *adapt* to the new country was unheard of. We began school almost immediately and the following year, my sister received a plaque which recognized her high

academic achievement; tangible proof that success was possible. I found the plaque, forgotten and dusty, in my parents' home in New York a few months ago. It made me recall an important turning point in my childhood.

Academic excellence was not only expected and required in my family when I was growing up, it was not excessively praised. Our parents believed that since we offspring were organically healthy, it automatically guaranteed that we would infer their expectation that we would excel in school. I don't remember where that plaque was displayed; in fact, I cannot assert that it ever was. In contrast to my sister's self-imposed devotion to academics, I was an indifferent student whose goal did not include getting plaques to hang or keep in drawers.

My sister was a serious student and person while I spent a great deal of my time making my classmates laugh and getting into mischief, especially after my parents transferred us to the Catholic school in our parish! I was often excused from the classroom for a few minutes, until the 'punishment' had sunk

in and I was deemed ready to rejoin the class. I was repeatedly compared to my older sister; the nuns always seemed surprised that two such different people could come from the same family. I always felt sorry for my sister; she wasn't having any fun.

I credit birth order with turning me into an acute observer of human nature as a child. I excelled in *reading* the adults around me, especially my mother whose attention I desperately sought and whose deprived childhood had limited her sense of humor. One of my passions became (and still is) making her laugh because her peals of laughter came from a place deep within her and were not easily provoked. I can say without any hesitation that laughter is serious business and I began my journey as a little girl trying all sorts of antics if they would get me *her* coveted attention, laughter and applause. A ham, I am.

Despite my indifference to grades, I did very well in school (and later in college) receiving letters of commendation and honors which I carelessly stuffed into books and promptly forgot. I was completely unaffected by these prizes because I didn't actively pursue them or value them the way I should have.

Every so often, I feel remorse that I didn't embrace academia the way my parents urged. The remorse doesn't last long for me, however. Despite her illness (Alzheimer's), her bedridden state, and her total non-recall of who I am to her, my mother smiles at me and actually laughs at some of the nonsense I try on her each week when I visit. Making *her* laugh is still the accolade and recognition that I consider one of my most important accomplishments. In that moment of her laughter, I feel we are connected on some level and that she does know me by the ham I am!



Revised Car Insurance Table

In the November issue of Atenas Today we published an article about car insurance in Costa Rica. The article included a table showing various options, coverages, and costs. Unfortunately one of the cost numbers was in error. The amount given for "Comprehensive Insurance" was only half of what it actually costs (my insurance agent had quoted me the cost for six months, not a whole year).

Show below is the corrected table.

Insurance	Your fault accident			Not your fault accident			Theft	Approx. Cost (\$25K car)
	injury	other car	your car	injury	other car	your car		
Marchamo (obligatory)	\$11K /person note 1	0	0	\$11K /person note 1	0	0	0	\$625
Basic INS (optional)	after \$11K/person other car passengers up to \$76K/person note 1	80% up to \$60K note 2	0	\$11K /person note 1	0	0	0	\$155 + marchamo
Comprehensiv INS (optional)	after \$11K/person other car passengers up to \$76K/person note 1	100% if cost >\$200	100% if cost >\$200	\$11K /person note 1	100% if cost >\$200	100% if cost >\$200	car value	\$2,200 + marchamo
Comprehensiv INS with family protection (optional)	after \$11K/person 100% for members of your family up to \$40K note 3	100% if cost >\$200	100% if cost >\$200	after \$11K/person 100% for members of your family up to \$40K note 3	100% if cost >\$200	100% if cost >\$200	car value	\$2,200 + \$65 + marchamo
note 1	Treatment must be at a government hospital. Injured parties can go to court for more.							
note 2	You may be taken to court to pay the other 20%.							
note 3	Family members up to 3rd cousins are covered. You are not covered. Treatment may be at any hospital.							



ANNOUNCEMENTS

From Atenas Cultura

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On February 20 we are having Art in the Park with art activities for children. We want to have several stations of different styles of art--jewelry, music, painting, origami, etc and we need your help to man the stations. If you have arts and crafts abilities or would just like to assist the person in charge, please let us know. It's going to be lots of fun and we need lots of help to make it happen. Please let us know if you would be willing to help out.

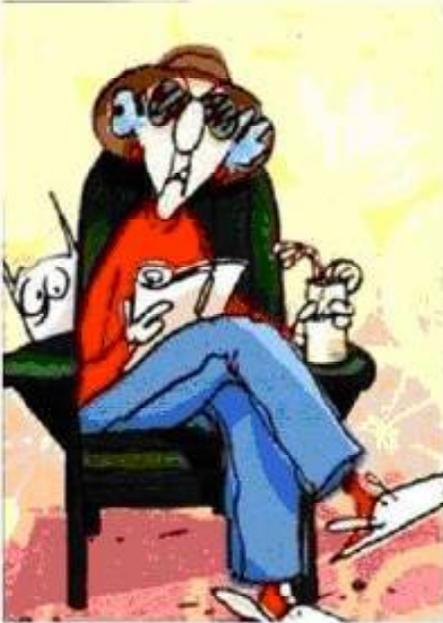


New classes have also been opened up this year in Su Espacio as well. Latin dance classes will now be offered with Carlos on Monday and Tuesday night at 7:00 p.m. and Fabio on Wednesday night at 7:00 p.m. Guitar lessons will begin next week on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. The other options are always available: Zumba, Pilates, Aerobics, Taebo, Yoga, Gymnastics, Karate, Ballet, Dance, English, and Spanish classes.



HUMOR PAGE

Senior health care solution - according to Maxine



So you're a sick senior citizen and the government says there is no nursing home available for you - what do you do?

Our plan gives anyone 65 years or older a gun and 4 bullets. You are allowed to shoot 4 politicians - not necessarily dead!

Of course, this means you will be sent to prison where you will get 3 meals a day, a roof over your head, central heating, and all the health care you need! New teeth - no problem. Need glasses, great. New hip, knees, kidney, lungs, heart? All covered. (And your kids can come and visit you as often as they do now).

And who will be paying for all of this? The same government that just told you that they cannot afford for you to go into a home.

Plus, because you are a prisoner, you don't have to pay any income taxes anymore.

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