

ATENAS TODAY



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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 350 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 by category 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.

Atenas Today Interviews Dr. Larry Ruhf

Provider of Psychological Counseling Service in Atenas

AT: You are a relative new comer to Atenas. When did you arrive?

Larry: I moved here last summer with my wife, Kris, and thirteen year old daughter, Dani. I just bought some land and plan to build a house.

AT: Where were you living before?

Larry: I was born and grew up in Allentown, PA, but spent my adult life in Western Massachusetts, where I worked as a psychological therapist

AT: Did you come here to retire?

Larry: No, I'm only sixty years old and am still enthusiastic about my work. I just needed a change, and my family was up for the adventure.

AT: Why Costa Rica?

Larry: You mean aside from the natural beauty, the wonderful people, the perfect weather, the low cost of living, and multitude of interesting things to do?

AT: Yea, those things are a given.

Larry: Well, we felt that living here would be a big change, but not so big that we couldn't continue our work. In my case I wanted to continue counseling, and there are many North Americans here who undoubtedly have problems similar to the ones I have been helping people with for over 35 years. My wife is a professional massage therapist, and she also plans to pursue her work here.

AT: Tell me about your background in psychological counseling. How did you get into this field?

Larry: My first exposure to mental health issues was "up close and personal." When I was 16 my older brother became a paranoid schizophrenic. My parents had a very hard time coping and leaned on me. I often visited him in the hospital and tried to help. It became a life-long interest.

AT: Where did you get your training?

Larry: I majored in psychology at the University of Michigan, and got my doctorate in psychological counseling from the University of Massachusetts.

AT: Where did you work?

Larry: My first job was as the director of psychological services for two counties in western Massachusetts. I saw every kind of mental illness, and my early idealism was quickly tempered by good dose of reality. At the same time I began teaching part time at Antioch University, and I continued teaching there until just last year.

AT: You must really like to teach.

Larry: I loved it. My approach was very "hands on", as opposed to lecturing, and I got lots of positive feedback from the students.

AT: What happened next?

Larry: My next job was at the Mount Tom Institute in Holyoke, Massachusetts. While I was there I developed an innovative program called "network therapy". This was a program to deal with the most difficult cases of mental illness. At that time the state government was trying to get mental patients out of the hospitals and into the community. The burden was being shifted back onto the families, and the families did not know how to cope.

AT: What did you do?

Larry: A big problem for the families was their embarrassment and reluctance to ask their friends for help. In many cases there were people who wanted to help but didn't know how. I would convene a big meeting of everyone involved in a particular situation—the patient, family, friends, doctors, social workers, church

members, sometimes even the police. There could be 30 or 40 people. Over a three hour period we would develop a plan. The emphasis was on community action to cope with the situation, not on curing the patient.

AT: Didn't this require a lot of follow up?

Larry: That was not part of the program. The idea was to help the community get started and let them carry on.

AT: Did it work?

Larry: It was hugely successful. I was asked to train people in Canada and Europe on the technique. Of course it didn't make the problem of mental illness go away, but it greatly alleviated the family's feelings of helplessness.

AT: Is it still going on?

Larry: Unfortunately no. At least in the United States. With advent of so-called managed health care in the 1990's, there was no money for programs like these. The insurance companies claimed there were no tangible benefits and refused to pay. Now there is very little organized community support for the mentally ill, and many end up in homeless shelters.

AT: What happened to your work?

Larry: By 1995 there was no money to continue "network therapy", but I built on my experiences in family counseling working through the pediatric center at Holyoke Hospital. I specialized in the holistic treatment of troubled adolescents. This lasted until a drastic budget cut at the hospital killed the program. Mental health always seems to be the lowest priority.

AT: What kind of counseling do you want to do in Atenas?

Larry: With my breadth of experience I think I can help people with whatever is bothering them. People living here tend to be isolated from their families back home, and that can be a source of anxiety. Some people may be out of relationship with one of their children, or have children with special needs. Then there are marital issues; most of us could use a tune up once in awhile. In fact, it is a truism in my profession that there are at least seven issues in every marriage that never get completely resolved.

AT: What about people who need medication?

Larry: Although I am not a psychiatrist and therefore cannot prescribe drugs, I am very familiar with psychiatric medications and can provide counseling. I intend to partner with a licensed psychiatrist when necessary.

AT: What do you think will be different about counseling people here in Atenas?

Larry: Well, obviously the average American here is older and has experienced a major life transition in moving to a foreign country. I expect I will helping people deal with stress related to things like retirement, aging, loneliness, living in a different culture, etc.

AT: What about the fact that you will be working in a small community and your clients will be coming from your own social group?

Larry: This can be both an asset and a liability. By knowing the people better I should be able to help them more. On the other hand, I will have to earn their trust that I will maintain their confidentiality.

AT: Where will you meet people for counseling?

Larry: In my office upstairs from Su Espacio on the main road across from the gas station. There is room there for small group workshops, as well as individual counseling.

AT: What do you charge?

Larry: My standard fee is 20,000 colones for a one hour session, but I am flexible.

AT: How should people contact you?

Larry: They can call me at 2446-xxx, or email me at: larryruh8@gmail.com.

The Spark

by anonymous

Five good friends were having one of their regular dinners together. One of them had just read a magazine article about young women being too picky about choosing a husband.

Ms. Realistic: When you are twenty three you think there is someone better just around the corner, and you think you are too young to get married anyway. Then suddenly you're thirty. There are many fewer eligible men around the corner, and you know that you are not as physically attractive as you were a few years ago. This article makes the case for settling for someone who is less than your ideal.

Ms. Experienced: Yea, and when you are thirty you realize that the glamour boy that was your ideal when you were twenty three is not what you want now. It can turn out that in the long run you really weren't really settling at all.

Mr. Married-three-times: It's all luck, anyway. Half of all first marriages end in divorce, no matter whether they thought they were settling or not.

Ms. Romantic: But you can't settle if the "spark" is not there. What's the point of being married if the other person doesn't make your heart beat faster, at least some of the time?

Ms. Realistic: Come on. How long does that spark stay hot anyway? Six months? A year?

Mr. Smitten: Sometimes that spark can be really hot.

Ms. Experienced: Yes, but it's not unique to one person. I've felt it many times with many different men, but it doesn't last, and you can't base a successful marriage on it.

Mr. Smitten: I agree that you can't base a marriage on it, but I disagree that it is a common occurrence?

Ms. Realistic: Let's explore this. How many times would you say you felt that spark?

Mr. Smitten: I can think of about four times in 50 years.

Mr. Married-three-times: Wow. That's hot. Did you have a relationship with all of them?

Mr. Smitten: Oh no, one of them was a check out girl in a store that I saw only once.

Mr. Married-three-times: Bummer.

Ms. Romantic: I think it's great. I too believe in love at first sight, even if nothing happens.

Ms. Realistic: How do you know? What kind of love is that?

Ms. Romantic: It's magic. I know within seconds of meeting a man whether the spark is there or not. He doesn't even have to open his mouth. Of course he has to be intelligent, and not be a Republican.

Ms. Realistic: If he doesn't speak, how do you know these things. How is this spark communicated?

Ms. Romantic: Like I say, it's magic. I can't explain it, but it's irresistible.

Mr. Smitten: I think it's communicated in the eyes. The times I felt it was with women who were attractive, but not raving beauties. There was something in the way they looked at me that made me fall instantly in love with them.

Ms. Experienced: Oh boy. All those gorgeous eyes out there.

Mr. Married-three-times: Eyes, bodies, hair, lips, skin – it all goes together to drive you crazy. But my contention is that men like women who like them. Most men have very fragile egos when it comes to rejection by women, and they are attracted to a woman who gives them signals that she is interested.

Ms. Romantic: That idea discounts the power of the spark. You're saying that men just want a high change of scoring, no matter who the woman is.

Ms. Realistic: Well, the theory of evolution would back that up. The male drive is to make as many babies as possible, spark or no spark.

Ms. Romantic: And the same theory would say that the female drive is to make your babies with the right man, so that they will thrive. Hence, the need for the female to have the intuitive feel for the spark.

Mr. Smitten: So my sparky feelings don't matter.

Ms. Experienced: On the contrary; it's part of the same dynamic. The woman feels that you would be a good father for her children, and that feeling is communicated to you through her eyes, thereby igniting your spark so that you will oblige her. Nature has done its job.

Mr. Married-three-times: I always knew the women were in charge.

Ms. Realistic: What has all this got to do with young women being too picky?

Ms. Experienced: I think the magazine article is right. Young women tend to over-think the situation, and fight mother nature instead of going with the flow. You have to take some chances and be willing to adapt to what life deals you.

Mr. Married-three-times: Amen.

Ms. Romantic: Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, old time it is a flying.

Ms. Realistic: Making a wrong choice is very hard on the children.

Ms. Experienced: So is making no choice, or having children too late in life. It seems to me that even with all the divorces most children are still doing OK. The fact that there are so many of them to share the experience makes it easier.

Mr. Smitten: That spark sure was a good feeling. I'd like to have it again.

Ms. Romantic: Look into my eyes.