

# ATENAS TODAY



Issue No. 62  
*February 21, 2010*

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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 250 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at [fredmac222@yahoo.com](mailto:fredmac222@yahoo.com).*

*Compositions from back issues are archived by category on the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce website, [www.atenascatuca.com](http://www.atenascatuca.com). Click on the English version and then Atenas Today on the business page.*

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## DIRECTORY OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE IN THE ATENAS AREA

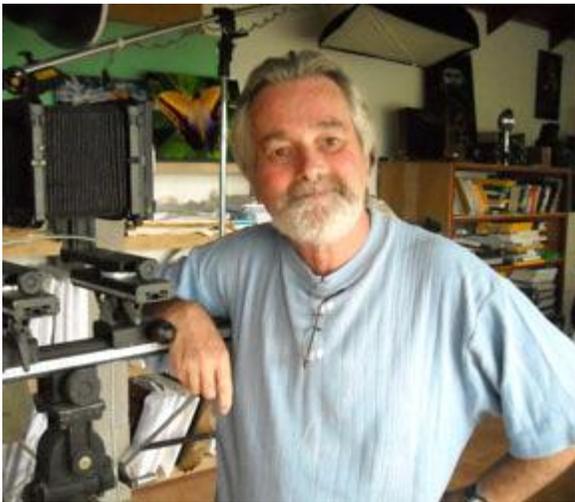


New names and numbers have been added to the directory. With each issue Atenas Today subscribers will receive an updated file containing the names and contact information of people who have chosen to be listed. Simply download the PDF file attached to this Atenas Today email and print it or save it on 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](mailto:fredmac222@yahoo.com).

## Atenas Today Interviews John Dessarzin

Professional photographer



- AT: I understand you have some new ideas about selling your photography services. What is your plan?
- John: As far as I know, there is no one doing aerial photography of homes in Costa Rica. There are many spectacular homes built on mountains where the best view of them is from the air.
- AT: Isn't that going to be very expensive?
- John: Not really. I can fly over an area in a small helicopter and take pictures of many houses on one trip. For \$200 a homeowner would get 3 high quality pictures, both as 8.5 by 11 prints and in digital form on a CD. Larger prints at high resolution up to 16 by 20 would also be available.
- AT: That would certainly be worth it if you were going to advertise your house for sale.
- John: Or even to frame and hang on their wall.
- AT: When do you plan to start?
- John: I want to wait for the rains so that the plants and foliage look good. Then I have to fly when the light is right and the wind is calm. It will be a few months.
- AT: What other type of photography services are you offering?
- John: All types of architectural pictures, exterior and interiors. Also, social events like weddings and parties. In fact I have

the experience and equipment to photograph anything people want.

- AT: Where and when did you learn to be a photographer?
- John: I graduated from a four year school of photography called the Ecole de Photographie de Vevey near my hometown of Lausanne, Switzerland. It was like a graduate program after college. This was in about 1967. I was twenty years old.
- AT: Did you always know you wanted to be a photographer?
- John: Yes, from the time I was ten or twelve years old. Originally I was excited by the idea of making films, but later I found that I liked working on my own, rather than in the big group that is needed for films.
- AT: When did you leave Switzerland?
- John: Shortly after I finished school I moved to New York. I had been there a few years before to visit the World's Fair, and knew that was where I wanted to live. I was excited to leave the small town where we lived in the French part of Switzerland, and go to America.
- AT: How did it work out?
- John: New York was great, but it was the height of the Vietnam War, and the American government wanted to draft me, even though at that time I barely spoke English. So I left and went to live in Paris instead.
- AT: Good idea. What did you do there?
- John: I worked for an agency doing photography for an international magazine and taking pictures of celebrities. Then after a couple of years I moved back to New York as the liaison photographer for a French company. I also got involved in advertising and fashion photography for the big department stores in New York.
- AT: You were living in Manhattan?
- John: Always. It was an exciting time in my life. New York is the Mecca of photography and publishing. There was plenty of free lance work. But after a while I wanted to leave and see the rest of the world.
- AT: Where did you go?

John. I began a long journey to the West. The first stop was Boulder, Colorado, where I worked for a couple of years for a company that did special effects and slide shows. One of our jobs was to create a multi media slide show for the lobby of a bank. It used 148 slide projectors, synchronized to show the four seasons in Colorado, accompanied by music--quite a challenge in those pre-computer days.

AT: And then?

John: From there I went as a free lance photographer and film maker to Los Angeles, Hawaii, Hong Kong, Manila, Bangkok, India, Russia, and Africa. In the early 1980's I moved back to Paris for a time, and went on assignments in the Caribbean and South America. My work was featured in shows in New York, Hong Kong, and Paris.

AT: You didn't get tired of all that moving around?

John: Finally I did, and in 1983 I moved back to New York and set up my own studio. I did portraits, weddings, fashion, magazines, and all the photography for seven coffee table books. My big break came when I began to do architectural photography for Sotheby's International Realty. The fact that I was working for them put me in great demand for similar work.

AT: And then you met Dorothy.

John: Yes, I was photographing a wedding of a friend of hers. It was the proverbial "love at first sight."

AT: And the timing was right. You had gotten all that traveling and wild living out of your system.

John: I suppose.

AT: Our readers will remember the story of how Dorothy got MS and you took care of her, eventually giving up your career in New York to bring her to Costa Rica.

John: It was the right thing to do, and I don't have any regrets. However now I do want to try to re-start my photography business here. I have had two shows of my work at the National Gallery: "Fauna Rica" and "Cuba". But it is not easy to sell photography in Costa Rica.

AT: Hopefully your experience with architectural photography will pay off here. How can people see some of your work?

John: My web site, [www.dessarzinphotography.com](http://www.dessarzinphotography.com), outlines my experience and shows many examples of what I have done.

Also I have a studio in my home in Vista Atenas, with the very latest in equipment, and portfolios of my work, which I would be happy to share.

People can contact me at 2446-9045, or by email at [johndessarzin@ice.co.cr](mailto:johndessarzin@ice.co.cr).



*John's collection of old cameras*

Hello

Join us for some great conversation with local (visitors welcome)  
women  
in our community!

Wednesday, February 17, 2010 More fun.

&

Our First Speakers Series is

Wednesday, February 24, 2010 Special Monthly Guest Speaker

*Julie Wagner will talk about Tortugas and the Turtle Refuge Site.*

Please put both of these dates on your calendar. Don't miss Julie.

It is a fascinating topic where we can make a difference.

Looking forward to seeing you soon.

Have an outstanding day!!!

## Su Espacio Hosts Yoga Classes

EVERY TUESDAY AND THURSDAY AT 9:00 AM LEAH MACLAUGHLAN CONDUCTS YOGA CLASSES AT THE STUDIO AT SU ESPACIO. THE COST IS 2500 COLONES PER PERSON PER CLASS. SU ESPACIO IS LOCATED NEXT TO PANDA, ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE GAS STATION.

## Canadian Club of Costa Rica Seeks New Members

The Canadian Club of Costa Rica, with a current membership of 200 full-time or seasonal residents of CR, is welcoming new member applications. Cost for Canadians is only \$12.00 per person a year (\$24.00 per family).

The Club encourages networking and engages in charitable work through an active Outreach program. A monthly luncheon brings members together in a variety of restaurant locations for socializing and to hear a speaker. Three major activities take place during the year: a Red & White Canada Day Picnic, a festive Thanksgiving Dinner and a gala Christmas Party.

Check out the website at [www.canadianclubcr.com](http://www.canadianclubcr.com) for more information. If you would like to become a member, contact Ron & Jo-Anne Findlay at [www.fincafive@gmail.com](mailto:www.fincafive@gmail.com) or by phone at 2446-0936.

The next monthly meeting is being held at Kianti's Restaurant in Belen on February 17 at 11:00am and luncheon follows at 12:00 noon. Kianti's is located between La Ribera Mall and the Marriott hotel, on a side street 25 meters east and 100 meters north of the Mormon Temple (large white and gold building). Guest speaker is Geoffrey West, a global citizen who aspires to help humanity save itself from its present self-destructing path and author of "A Greenprint for LIFE." Interested? Contact Ron & Jo-Anne Findlay by email or phone.

## Atenas *Clima y Cultura* Sponsors First Event of 2010

This Sunday, February 21st at 7 p.m. is the first "Sunday in the Park" of 2010. There will be a band, the Rodriguez twins on guitar, and Luis Sandoval.

Many more cultural events are planned for the coming year.

*Tina Newton*  
*Atenas Clima y Cultura*  
*cultura.atenas@gmail.com*  
*2446-7735*

# The Pros and Cons of the New Highway

*We are all delighted with the opening of the new highway that allows us to get to San Jose or to the beach in half the time. It will inevitably result in big changes for Atenas, some positive, some negative. Printed below is a letter from **Douglas Espinosa**, a Tico native, about his concern.*

I was born in Atenas and still live here. My sons go to school here, and we are 100% Atenienses.

Today I just want to make a comment about a topic that has been tumbling around in my head.

In the past few years I have seen how families from San Jose and its suburbs have moved to Atenas so that their children can grow up in a secure and drug free area. However many of those kids have already been contaminated with the San Jose life style. I saw one of them painting graffiti on a bus that was going to San Jose. Neither us locals or the foreign ex-pats (Americans, Canadians, Europeans) who live in Atenas want those kind of people coming here.

There is an article in today's news paper announcing that a factory is moving here from San Jose, and the company will use the new highway to bus 120 workers to Atenas everyday. Who knows if these people would decide to move permanently to Atenas and what kind of people they are. I know everybody has to work and raise a family but the kind of people you and I want to have as neighbors are those from other nice cities like Grecia, Palmares and Orotina, not people already contaminated from San Jose that are part of the Ultra (Saprisa soccer team fans), or gangs like the "pandillas" from La Carpio, Leon XIII, or Barrio Cuba.

The article mentions how our local government, the "Municipalidad" is working to attract more business, but I hope they will control the situation so that we Atenienses can maintain our quality of life.

## Su Espacio Classes

Karate classes will begin in Su Espacio starting February 6th. They are for adults and children. Henry currently has them set for 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays, but if you want classes and that timeframe doesn't work, let us know and we'll see if can do another time/day.

Latin dance classes are still being given on Tuesday and Thursday nights at 7:00 p.m. Come and learn all of the latin dance moves.

Exercise classes are at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Whether you enjoy relaxing and stretching or full-out sweating, the classes are available for you.

*info@suespacio.org*  
8330-5613

## Microscope Donated to School



Fred Macdonald presents a professional quality microscope to teachers at the Atenas High School. The microscope was donated by Robert Wideman, a U.S. resident who is building his retirement home in Atenas.

The high school welcomes donations of equipment and tools. They are also seeking musical instruments for a newly formed band.

# Our Columnists

## A Book



*by Diane Holman*

The first time I sat down to read Push, I could only read 31 pages. It was so strong. The second time I went back to it, I couldn't stop reading. I think it was because Precious *connected* with another human being who saw her as a whole and separate person. Today, the third day, I finished the book, crying and cheering inside the indomitable pursuit of the possible in an impossible situation.

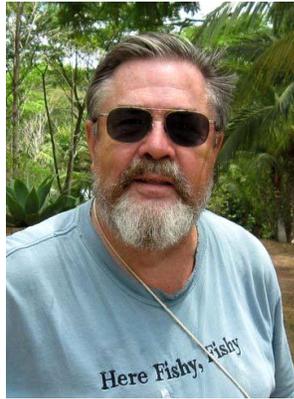
On page 131, Precious writes in her journal:

“I'm alive inside. A bird is my heart. Mama and Daddy is not win. I'm winning. I'm drinking hot chocolate in the Village wif girls—all kind who love me. How that is so I don't know. How Mama and Daddy know me sixteen years and hate me, how a stranger meet me and love me. Must be what they already had in they pocket.”

My son Joe teaches special education at an inner-city high school in Washington, D.C. He discovered Push by Sapphire last year and wanted to introduce it to his class. Letters had to be sent to parents, warning them of the strong language and heart-rending circumstances in the book. Then Joe copied the book on the school Xerox and handed it out to his students. For over a week the red-covered paperback was everywhere: in classrooms, in the cafeteria, in the library. The kids devoured it; they “could not stop reading”, as Joe puts it. Many students told him it was the first book they had read.

“Precious” is now a movie, winner of the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival. It is nominated for an Academy Award in several categories, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress. Push is an amazing testament to life.

# Volcan, Panama



*by Martin Lively*

A cool, close three days out for visa renewal.

All the guide books say that there are trout in the Rio Chiriqui Grande near Volcan, Panama at 1,870 meters elevation in the Cordillera Central just south of the Costa Rican border.

The river sure looks fishy.

You can leave anytime you permission from Costa Rica to usual if your S.A. owns the car from your lawyer and your Registro in Alajuela (a block for the corporation, or just yourname. You also need to from the timbre seller across year it was 500!!! Inside the the first screener, a young lady your license number on her and traffic tickets and then directs you to window 5 where your very formal, fancy Permiso de Salida is issued. Now the drive can start.



So, let's take a little drive.

want, but your car must obtain be taken out of the country. Per you need a Personaria Juridica cedula or passport so that the South of Llobet) knows you can act your personal ID if the car is in purchase 5,000 colones of stamps the street from the Registro; last Registro you will be directed to who checks your paperwork, runs computer to see if it is free of liens make out a simple form and

If it's a weekday leave very early or very late to avoid San Jose rush hour since you need to get through or around the City to Cartago and Route 1 towards Panama. On second thought since you know the first part of the trip and do not know the final, the Panamanian part, you better leave here in the dark rather than be driving unknown and poorly signposted roads in Panama in the dark. Yes, it does take

that long, it is about 300 miles most of it on two lane roads jam packed with trucks. Beautiful mountain views through the Talamanca Mountains over the Cerro del Muerte. At km marker 89 there is a small soda at the intersection of the steep unpaved road down to the Rio Savegre where there are Costa Rican trout, it's a good place for a pit stop and a cup of coffee or hot chocolate.

When you drop down from the Mountains to lower elevation near Perez Zeledron aka San Isidro de General you have a choice to continue on the Inter-American Highway and skirt the big central valley sort of following the river to the sea or making a hard right at Perez and dropping down to Domenical and the gorgeous coast road to Palmar Norte. We took the valley route going down and the ocean route returning. Both took about the same amount of time.

At the border you will need to clear Costa Rican Immigration, then Costa Rican Customs, then Panamanian Immigration and Panamanian Customs. The offices are not that easy to locate and there is a side trip to buy a one month Panamanian auto insurance policy and to get any photocopies of the auto and personal documents so the easy way is to hire one of the young "helpers" who will guide you through the bureaucratic maze on each side of the border for \$5 US. Be prepared also to pay a small bribe, \$2 will do, to the Panamanian customs official who takes you into his small office and tells you that the inspection of your car and contents might take a long time, but if he could look forward to a nice coffee and pastry soon that he could hurry through the process. So help him with his coffee money or take your chances on a methodical plodding through every bag and every nook and cranny of your car.

Look for the little town of Conception about a half hour from the border, there you turn left and start up the volcanic slopes. In less than an hour you are in Volcan, and 15 minutes more brings you to Cerro



Punto and the Bambito Hotel. Here for a little over a hundred dollars per person per day you can enjoy first class accommodations and three meals. For a lot less there are some smaller hotels in Volcan where we had an adequate room for three for \$60. No meals, but Daly's Restaurant, the Kay's Gringo Postres of Volcan, has great breakfasts and lots of ex-Pats and an Irish/Mexican lunch special of an enchilada served on a bed of mashed potatoes. Our hotel arranged for a guide to show me the local fishing holes and he and I tried about six spots along the Chiriqui Grande. I fished shallow, middle, and deep running lures and then last bait in each place. Not one strike! Not one follow! Nada. If there ever were fish there, they were caught out long ago. There are also two small lakes not far out of town in a public preserve and they have been planted with largemouth bass. Cool high lakes are not conducive to big bass and the little one who decided to inhale Roberto's bronze super

duper looked a lot more mature than the ten inchers I have caught in Florida and Virginia. He went back to await your visit.



Cerro Punto is the fruit and vegetable provider for a lot of Panama, and the hectares and hectares of carrots, onions, celery, strawberries, potatoes and every other standard veggie are beautifully laid out on hillsides in quilt like patterns. Dahlias grow into and through the streamside shrubs reaching ten and 15 feet into the air with their violet blooms. The clouds both shade and water everything and the rich black volcanic soil provides footing and nutrients for the abundant crops.

The area is quite cool, bring a sweater. There are only a few other than tipica restaurants, one Colombian and one Italian. It seems that Chinese and Palestinian immigrants run most of the tiendas and Estadounidenses run the bed and breakfasts. <M><

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## Hole Number 3 at Finca Huetares new Miniature Golf Course



Finca Huetares  
Barrio Los Angeles, Atenas  
2446-4147



## FEBRUARY COLUMN for Atenas Today

Around the world, various approaches are adopted in relation to stray animals. Some examples:

- Due to a WSPA study in Costa Rica roundabout 1 million (!) abandoned dogs are living / suffering in the streets. Many of them are sick and starving. There are no public shelters, and even this country has an animal welfare law it seems there is no huge interest of Government and Municipalities to improve the situation. Of course, there is lack of money, but also punishment of animal abuse and abandonment is not really forced.

- Until today, in Miami, USA around 20,000 dogs and cats are killed every year in shelters! Most of these unlucky creatures have been dumped by their owners. Many of them are healthy and young and a large number are pedigree. You rarely see a stray dog or a stray cat in this area. The catchers are doing "marvellous" work. Unfortunately the number of animals "treated" that way is never decreasing, although a lot of money must be spend for catching and euthanizing. I personally cannot understand why this senseless killing is going on and on.

- In Germany euthanizing healthy and non aggressive animals is prohibited by law. Dogs must be registered, owners have to pay taxes for them. Animal welfare organisations manage to re-home nearly all of the unwanted animals taken into their shelters, even if they are old and/or handicapped. Some of these organisations even help others, particularly in the Mediterranean and the Middle-East, by taking dogs and cats from there to re-home with families. There are no dogs on the streets.

So, what is the difference in handling the stray problem? The various responses to an excessive population of strays in an area can be categorised as follows:

- a. ignoring the problem
- b. killing the excess animals
- c. influencing the "holding capacity"
- d. registration and identification
- e. spaying and neutering programs
- f. educational programs

In my opinion, the only way to solve a stray problem successfully *long term* is to keep on with massive spay/neuter clinics AND educating the population, especially children, about animal welfare. THEN there is a good chance that - first - dogs and cats cannot reproduce uncontrolled and - second - next generations understand the advantages and will interact in a more ethical way with them.

We of the Atenas Foundation for Helping Abandoned Animals are working hard to give our share for an improvement of animal lives in our area. Comparing with other areas in Costa Rica, Atenas could already experience a significant improvement in the streets – we have a lot less strays in better shape now. In 2009 we were able to fix 423 dogs and cats, we found new homes for hundreds of abandoned animals and we started our education program in schools. Allow me to bore you with more detailed informations in one of the next AT issues. ;-)

For today I want to thank all the people that made our success possible. With donating money and beautiful things for sale, with donating their time while volunteering, with offering temporary homes for dogs and cats. And – last but not least - also with providing mental support (believe me, sometimes its hard to see and handle the still neverending emergency cases and having somebody who recognizes your work is essential for continueing!)!!! Thank you, thank you, thank you! And keep on in 2010...!!!!

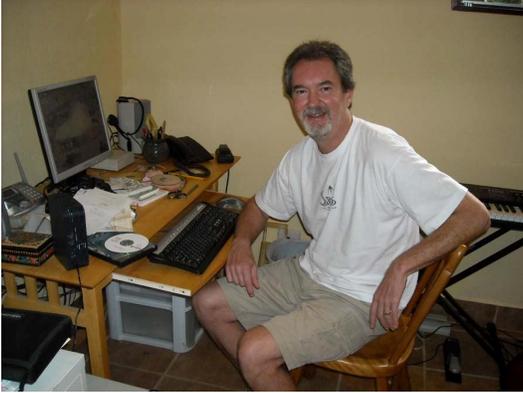
A special thank goes to our Atenas Today columnist and huge foundation supporter Lori Moberg Berry who is leaving Atenas. We will miss you terribly!

Sylvia Spix  
in the name of



Fundación Ateniense de Ayuda a Animales Abandonados  
Atenas Foundation for Helping Abandoned Animals  
Tierschutzverein Hilfe für herrenlose Tiere Atenas

## TECH TALK



by Gordon Klatt

### Windows 7

I've been using Windows 7 for a couple of months, and I have to say that Microsoft finally got it right this time. It's the best Windows yet.

IF you're in the market for a new PC you can still find them with Windows XP and Vista. I would avoid Vista. After all, 7 was introduced to fix the problems with Vista. And unless you have a specific reason to want XP, Windows 7 is your best choice. If you have an older XP computer and want to upgrade to Windows 7, as I did, there could be some compatibility issues. Microsoft has a small program you can download that will analyze your computer and report if it's capable of running Windows 7. Here's where you can get it:  
<http://www.microsoft.com/Windows/windows-7/get/upgrade-advisor.aspx>

And even though you're upgrading from XP to 7, wiping your old XP installation is necessary before installing 7, so you'll have to backup your data before install and then reinstall your application programs.

If you're upgrading from Vista, 7 installs right over it, with no loss of programs or data.

If you're considering getting a Mac, you might want to check out Windows 7 first. With much improved graphics it seems this version of Windows didn't fall far from the Apple tree.

If you have questions about Windows 7, please send them to my email address found at the end of this article.

### COMPUTER SECURITY

Computer security has become a huge issue, and security software has become a huge industry. Here's what you need.

#### Anti-Virus Software

Most new PC's include some version of anti-virus software which you can evaluate for 60 days before they stop working and you have to pay for them. Symantec and McAfee are two of the most popular. The problem I have with them is they do a lot more than watch out for viruses, they also include firewalls and other unnecessary features, and you have to pay for them. I want anti-virus software to do just that, watch out for viruses. Since XP, Windows has included a firewall, so you don't need another. And there are several free anti-virus programs you can download from the internet. Here are two:

<http://free.avg.com/ww-en/homepage>  
<http://www.avast.com/>

I've used Avast for over two years and I find it works very well. And again, it's free.

## **Anti-Spyware**

In addition to viruses messing up your computer, there are other potential threats: spyware, trojan horses, malware, etc. Another free program I use in addition to Avast Anti-Virus is SUPERAntispyware. Learn more about it and download it here:

<http://www.superantispyware.com/>

Other free anti-spyware programs can be found and downloaded here:

<http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/spywareblaster.html>

[http://www.lavasoft.com/products/ad\\_aware\\_free.php](http://www.lavasoft.com/products/ad_aware_free.php)

## **UPS (Uninterruptible power supply)**

Laptop owners don't need to worry about it, but if you own a desktop computer a battery backup, or UPS, is essential. Power outages and spikes can seriously damage a computer, so it's a real problem here in Costa Rica. If your computer is running and the power goes out, a UPS gives you enough time to properly turn it off. It could also protect your computer from a lightning strike. If your phone line is connected to your computer, be sure to connect it through the UPS. It's also a good idea to get a UPS for your flat screen TV. The batteries in a UPS will last from 3-4 years, so as it gets older, be sure to test it to make sure it's still working.

## **Date Backup**

We store a lot of valuable data on our computers, photos, emails, and other documents, but we don't often give much thought to what might happen if our computer fails, or is stolen. External hard drives have become very popular, and inexpensive. Once a month I backup my critical data to an external drive, and I then store the drive in a safe place.

If something were to happen to my computer I can easily recreate it on a new one.

I worked in the PC industry in the US for 18 years, and am now providing computer support in the Atenas area. If you need help solving a computer problem you can email me at [gklatt@live.com](mailto:gklatt@live.com), or call 2446-9079. If I can walk you through a problem repair over the phone, there's no charge. If on-site service is required, my rates are very reasonable.

If there's a question or topic for a future issue you think might be of interest to others, you can send it to me at [gklatt@live.com](mailto:gklatt@live.com).

Next month's topic: Email Etiquette

## Why Are We So Fat?



by Fred Macdonald

The information in this column comes from a 2009 article in the New Yorker Magazine by Elizabeth Kolbert. I found it fascinating, and in light of Michele Obama's new initiative to help parents deal with overweight children, I thought I would summarize it for our readers.

First, a few facts about Americans' weight:

If you are an adult woman five feet tall and weigh over 140 pounds, you are considered "overweight". Likewise, if you are an adult man six feet tall and weigh over 204 pounds, you are considered overweight. Using these benchmarks you can determine roughly where you fit (pun intended)

In the early 1960's some 24% of Americans were overweight. In the early 1970's this number had increased slightly, to 25%. But in the 1980's it began to escalate rapidly, reaching 33% in the last survey. At the same time the percentage of people extremely overweight (obese) has doubled.

Men on the average are 17 pounds heavier than they were in the 1970's, and women 19 pounds. The proportion of overweight children, ages six to eleven, has doubled; and for adolescents, ages twelve to nineteen, it has tripled.

If becoming overweight were a disease, it would be classified as an epidemic. What has caused such a change in such a short period of time?

Several hypotheses have been advanced. The first place we usually look to explain human behavior is Darwinian evolution. Is there a "survival of the fittest" argument that leads to weight gain? It turns out there is. The secret to human dominance as a species is the human brain, which consumes vast amounts of energy. Studies show that as humans' brains got bigger, enabling them to hunt successfully, their digestive tracks shrank. This condition created a desire for foods that were high in calories and easy to digest

At the same time it was to humans' advantage to stockpile food in body fat between hunts, or later between harvests. But the Darwinian explanation fails to explain why after millions of years of hominid evolution we should have such a large increase in calorie consumption in a couple of decades.

Another theory relies on the power of economic incentive. American culture steers people to always do what is best for their pocketbooks. Food is cheap, and high calorie foods are the cheapest. In the past twenty years the real cost of fats and oils has decreased by sixteen percent, and the real cost of soft drinks by twenty percent.

In fact sweetened drinks are a major culprit. They account for 7% of all the calories ingested in the United States. If you drank only water, you would weigh 15 pounds less.

It seems logical that people with limited financial resources will tend to buy their calories as cheaply as possible, thus eating the things that put on weight. But again, why the big jump in the past twenty years? The percentage of poor Americans has not tracked the percentage of fat Americans.

However, there is another factor at work that is amplifying the fat producing food choices of Americans—the high fat food itself is being made deliberately addictive so we will want to eat more. The snack industry uses combinations of fat, sugar, and salt to strive for what they call “eatertainment”. Product developers talk about creating “a lot of fun in your mouth,” and “unlocking the code of craveability.” And of course they want to make these products easily available in vending machines.

Then in the early 1960’s a theater owner discovered how super-sizing could increase profits. When he sold popcorn in only one size box, customers rarely bought more than one box, no matter how he priced the second box. But when he offered a bigger box, they were happy to pay more for it, and they ate it all. And that made them thirsty, so they bought the extra large soft drink to go with it.

McDonald’s soon followed, getting more of the customers’ money by selling jumbo sizes. Not only that, they increased the calorie count in the regular sizes. A small bag of fry’s went from 200 calories to 230 calories, and the large fry’s bag provided 500 calories. The calories in a “small” soda increased even more, from 75 to 150 calories. (Generally an adult needs to stay under about 2,000 calories a day to maintain a low weight).

This trend toward bigger portions illustrates what researchers call the “elasticity of the human appetite.” We will generally eat what is put in front of us, without regard to how many calories we are consuming.

A famous experiment demonstrated this tendency in a dramatic way. A group of people were served bowls of soup. Some of the bowls had hidden tubes under the table that kept slowly refilling them. The people eating from the trick bowls ended up consuming 73 percent more soup than the others, and they didn’t even know it.

My personal experience confirms that “portion control” and “availability” are the best ways to limit my weight. I have a friend who automatically sets aside half of what is put on her plate in restaurants, and she is slim, slim, slim. Doing that is beyond my will power, but I do cut down on caloric input by not having snack foods in the house. If they are not there, I can’t eat them.

Exercise, of course, is a major factor in a determining what you weigh, and a number of trends in America have been in the direction of less exercise. In the case of children the attraction of TV, computers, and video games has kept them sitting on their butts more.

Another factor has been the decline in informal sports activity. When I was a boy we played pick up ball games constantly. Now there are leagues, coaches, and pressures that make you want to drop out if you are not “good at it”.

So there are lots of reasons and no magic bullet. As a society, should we care? There are those who argue that we should let fat people alone and not stigmatize them and make them unhappy. Michele Obama is being careful not to use the term “obese” in her campaign about children’s weight. But in the end it is about health, and there is no question that grossly overweight people are less healthy, and that costs us all. In this sense it is like smoking—we let people do it if they want, but we discourage it through information campaigns, taxes, availability, etc. I applaud Michele Obama’s initiative.

Buen Provecho

## How Do You Define Success?



*by Marietta Arce*

We began to plan our family's move to Costa Rica over eleven years ago. Living in Costa Rica had been my fondest wish for longer than I could remember. It was a decision that we did not make lightly because there were many others who would be affected by our move, but we felt the time was right and we forged ahead.

A few months before we moved, I told a friend in New York that I was thinking of placing a small advertisement in a newspaper directed at my classmates from the Escuela República del Perú in San José. I had attended this institution until second grade but had never kept in touch with any of my classmates, something I always regretted. My idea was to connect with some of them and try to rekindle the relationships. My friend was not impressed with this idea and I soon convinced myself she was right and forgot all about it.

When the social media (Twitter, Hi5, Facebook) hit the mainstream, I was reminded of Ralph Waldo Emerson's conviction that we must trust and listen to our own ideas or risk seeing them brought to fruition by someone else! Those products began with an idea (not unlike my own) that someone was confident they possessed the

talents and resources to make a reality. In my opinion, the financial success of these ventures pales when measured against the deep satisfaction that is felt when you create something unique, something you believed you could do even if no one else was on your side.

When I first arrived in Costa Rica a decade ago, I became aware that my extended family was scattered and unconnected; that many members did not know each other. Our family had grown apart and no one was making any attempts to unite it. I made myself a promise to do what I could to encourage friendship among the members. I pursued this goal with optimism and conviction and will always be grateful to my husband and children for their support in this area. Yesterday, I was a guest at a birthday party which brought together many of the relatives who had been estranged or had been strangers just ten years ago. As I looked around me, I felt grateful that I listened to the inner voice that prompted my involvement. Being an active part of a family is one way I define success. How do you?

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