

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.

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The Reluctant Resident

By Richard Sheppard

This Costa Rican life is truly paradise. El Mejor Clima del Mundo is even better than advertised. Weather is never a worry. We are surrounded with sweeping views. The Ticos are genuinely good-hearted people. Being retired and not having to work, ices the cake.

It didn't come easily. My life in Atlanta was comfortable. I had a lovely house and garden and my children and grand children lived nearby. I took pleasure in my work, as I had become my own boss. It was rewarding because for all the problems that continually resurfaced, I had a simple set of solutions. I took pride in no longer having to slay new dragons. The trick was in avoiding them in the first place.

At home there was a place for everything and everything was in its place. There was a predictable reliability to the course of the day. I had a tasty dinner at a consistent time. Weekends took care of themselves. Our friends, of many years, were there. I was content.

Over the last 15 years my wife and I vacationed several times in Costa Rica. She loved it. I was impressed, but mildly. After her friend moved to Atenas, there was a lot of discussion about moving to Costa Rica. On and on it went, until one day the bombshell hit. "We're selling everything and moving to Costa Rica. I'm going. You can stay here if you like." My reaction was: "Oh great, so now we go off to Costa Rica to die?" Why on earth would I leave this lovely life that has taken so long to build? Why move to a third world country where I don't even know the language? How do I communicate? What about tropical diseases! What would I do all day?

After a few days I realized that I could easily squelch this crazy idea. I would take a look at the numbers! The numbers would dismiss this foolish dream and shift the focus back to earth. So I set up a spreadsheet and ran it. The resulting numbers were too good. Obviously I had made an error. I reran the spreadsheet. No, it was true. The numbers were that good. The numbers were convincing. I was caught in my own trap.

So here we are. It is early morning. I sit here on my veranda in my Sarchi Rocker and look out across the valley. The clouds are fluffy and white. The sky is blue. A gentle breeze is blowing. The mountains cast shadows in Monet grays and encircle our views in deep blues and greens. The cows graze on the green hillsides like clumps of Velcro. Fears have become joys. Everything is strange and new. Every action is an adventure. Learning a new language is fun. The things I called fears are now the joys of my life. My reluctance to move here seemed to make sense at the time. Now, I can't quite remember why I was so adamant about not wanting to retire. It's a true change of mind. Wake up and smell the bromeliads!

We live in a house that we could not have afforded in the States. Our garden is lush. Our social life is enhanced by people who have also been drawn to a different way of life, who appreciate a cow holding up traffic or a horse parked in front of a bank. The cost of living is a small fraction of what it was and life is so much richer. And as for not having anything to do, I've got too much to do! I have to budget my time. And if I don't get it done, well, that's OK too. Pura Vida!

“Mature” Parenting Insights

by Marietta Arce Valverde

I became a mother for the first time at the ripe old age of 36. My second child was born a month before I turned 40! That’s not so unusual in the U.S. anymore but for Costa Rica, it was certainly not the norm 15 years ago.

I had wonderful pregnancies and deliveries and only worried when the genetic counselors informed us of all the things that could go wrong just because of my age. Well, it was their job and fortunately everything turned out splendidly.

As an older mother, I feel I have more patience than I would have had if I had been in my 20’s. I was fortunate enough to have had a ‘career’ so I knew what that was all about. My husband’s generosity, income and open-mindedness allowed him to accept my decision to stay home and raise our children.

We moved to Costa Rica when the children were 7 and 3. I was always amazed by the age of the mothers I interacted with, they could have been my children! I never made an issue or a secret of my age but it seemed to matter to others. They would remark that I had a lot of energy ‘for your age’, or that I looked very young ‘for your age’. I began to think more deeply about this; to quiz my children, subtly, about how they felt about my age. They shrugged off the question and assured me that it didn’t make any difference to them.

I’ll never forget one evening when I took them to eat at Tony Roma’s and the waiter asked me if I was out for an evening with my grandkids. Too shocked to think, I just answered “No, these are my children.” He removed himself quickly. I was puzzled as to why he would ask that. In a youth-loving culture, surely his purpose was not to make me feel old? As a service-oriented employee, surely he wasn’t trying to make me feel bad? I began to think of all the things I could have said, like “Why, is there a special price if they are?” or “Didn’t the boss teach you anything about tact?.” But in fact, I said and did nothing.

This kind of situation comes up every once in a while and I usually just smile at my kids and we accept that it is going to happen time and time again. I have assured them that if it doesn’t bother them, then it doesn’t bother me. They say that people are not mean, just unaware of the effect their words might have on others. I am grateful my children are so mature for I confess I am not always.

Some months ago, my daughter and I were shopping for shoes for her. The salesclerk took her away and I heard them talking over certain styles. My daughter made her decision and the salesclerk suggested she go see what her ‘grandmother’s’ opinion was. I cringed when I heard this, feeling anxious for my child. A few moments later, I heard my daughter’s voice, firm and proud, ask: “**Mom**, what do you think of this pair?” If she is smart, the salesclerk will have learned a valuable lesson; if not, I certainly did – I don’t need to worry about my kid or my age!