

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.

Ricardo Cortez Castro

by Jan Yatsko

Every Friday morning in the town of Atenas (where Tom and I live) there is an outdoor farmer's market lined up under the shade of 16 huge fig trees. People come to sell vegetables, fruit, cheese, meat, tamales, baked items, clothing, flowers and craft items. Without fail, Ricardo Cortez Castro is there at the same corner, crouched next to a stand that sells colorful tropical flowers. Ricardo walks a half a mile to market transporting his products in a wheelbarrow. Ricardo creates replicas of the traditional wooden carts pulled by two oxen and sells these carts at the farmer's market. He also sells fresh beans and hollowed out gourds from his garden and snake fat (Ricardo says it's good for asthma).

Ricardo has always led a simple life. One afternoon a couple of weeks ago, we sat at the location where he was born 79 years ago and he told me a little bit about his life in Atenas. Four of his 16 grandchildren sat with us. Ricardo was 8 years old when his father made a wooden cart with two oxen and gave it to him. As a poor boy with many siblings, this gift made a lasting impression on him. By the time Ricardo reached 4th grade he had to quit school to work as a laborer on a farm that raised rice, beans, coffee and corn. He was one of 11 children and everyone had to contribute to sustain the family.

I asked Ricardo why he creates ox carts. He said he never forgot the ox cart that his father made for him. With 34 years of carpentry experience behind him, Ricardo recycles found materials to create his wooden ox carts. It is not sophisticated work, but it carries the spirit of creation and the honesty of work and tradition. Some would classify his work as outsider art. Tom and I have a collection of seven of his carts.

Ricardo now lives with one of his seven children. As is the custom of many Costa Rican parents, he has divided up his land and has given it to his children. He owns very little and is a very content person. His bedroom consists of a simple bed surrounded by his ox carts and gourds. He still maintains the simple life of a campesino (country worker). At 5 AM he is cultivating his garden of corn and beans. He has lunch at noon, takes a siesta and creates his carts in the afternoon. As he did as a child, Ricardo contributes what he earns at the farmer's market to help sustain the family.

A week later, I stopped to say hello to Ricardo who had brought more ox carts to sell at the market. Ricardo told me that his youngest grandson, Fernando, asked him why he doesn't tell him stories like he told the macha. His grandson was referring to me as it is a term sometimes given to blue-eyed, blonde or light skinned people. Ricardo told me that his grandson made him realize that he needs to tell his stories before they are lost forever. Do you know of someone who might have some wonderful life stories waiting to be told? Ask them before it's too late.

Read other articles and see artworks by Jan Yatsko on her website, www.janyatsko.com.

Atenas Residents Lose Money in Bank Scams

An Atenas Today reader has reported the disappearance of a sizable amount of money from an account in an Atenas bank. Apparently at least six other people have had similar recent experiences. Unlike an earlier report in Atenas Today of money lost due to “phishing” (emails that lead you to a fake bank website where you put in your account number and password), these losses were due to someone gaining access to the account numbers and passwords, and then transferring money into multiple other accounts.

How does someone get your account number and password? There are multiple ways. Visiting a website or opening an email could infect your computer with a program that records your entries and reports them back to the thief. Or using a computer for financial transactions in an internet café could result in the capture of your account number and password. Or of course there could be a dishonest person at the bank.

The Costa Rican police are investigating the situation in Atenas. They advise doing all your on line financial transactions only on the computer at the bank. Another precaution is to set a low limit on the amount of withdrawals permitted each day on your account, and then monitor your account balance frequently. Be aware, however, that at some banks you must come in person to the bank to put a hold on your account. If you are frequently out of the country it is a good idea to give limited power of attorney to someone who can act quickly on your behalf if necessary.