

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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Animate Being

by Diane Holman

I have been told by a sorcerer, and so live in accordance with his words.

He has told me as openness to life, so I frequently find myself dancing.

He has told me as trust in others, so I often embrace.

He has told me as surrender to the clemency of nature,

so I draw nourishment from sun and wind and rain.

I am a creature of speech, sustained by the telling.

My Favorite Relationship

by Diane Holman

My favorite relationship is intimacy and so I am moved to inquire into the conditions under which and within which intimacy tends to develop.

I begin by noting that we love what we value, and we value what we know. So the inquiry starts with knowing. How does one come to know the other?

First, there must *be* an other. In the first stage of a relationship meant to deepen, the other is to some extent constituted by one's own projections and wishes and dreams. It takes time, often a good deal of time, for each to winnow out from what one "knows" about the other, projections one is putting on the other. (And this is probably never done completely or perfectly.)

If after this initial stage, each continues to attract the other and the relationship continues, the responses of the other to life, to occurrence and change and sadness and joy—and the responses of the other to oneself—are duly noted, taken in, evaluated. I am not talking about an intellectual appraisal. I am talking about a total being evaluation, which can perhaps best be likened to the attunement of musicians to each other and to the music that occurs in jazz improvisations.

Trust in the process of attunement is strengthened by the practice of intimacy, the practice of speaking as truly as one can of one's thoughts and feelings, of allowing candor to the other and to oneself. In this manner each comes to value the other.

And we love what we value.

This love has no end—not in the sense that it never ends, but in the sense that it is not going anywhere. There is no goal this love strives to reach. Intimacy is being well with each other in the company of each other. To say it as simply and accurately as possible: intimacy is its own reward.

Observing Animal Behavior

by Diane Holman

This morning when I opened my eyes I saw three birds in the banana plant, two yellow and one bright orange, and a squirrel, rusty brown, eating at a bunch of unripe bananas. The canaries noisily nattered with each other.

Later, when I had arisen and tied my robe around my waist, the chickens from across the road came over to peck at the *mani* on the hill, under the supervision of the rooster who, unnecessarily it seemed to me, sounded his *cacareo* over and over again.

There are those in every species who prefer the sound of their own voices over eating. I confess I am one of them. I love conversation. I love the aptness of words to convey inner thoughts and feelings. I love the onomatopoeic and the alliterative, the click of consonants and the roll of vowels. I love the breathy pauses while one searches for the perfect word, and I sink in the lushness of a phrase that carries home to me the meaning of the other.

It is not that the canaries and the rooster and I do not eat. Of course we do. But our greatest delight is in making noise.

Living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in Costa Rica

by Martin Lively, February 14, 2009

Who is that pretty and always smiling lady seen using her red, three wheeled walker all over Atenas Central and at almost every Gringo party? She is Jean Ivins Lively, my wife of forty five years. (Happy Valentine's Day, love)



Jean and I met in 1960 when she was a freshman and I was a junior in college. Four years later when she graduated we married.

Six months after that, at age 22 while working as a sales clerk during the Christmas season at Macy's Department Store in San Francisco, California, Jean realized that she could not make change for a sale without looking at the coins. She had lost the ability to feel the difference between coins of different sizes. It is called the 'glove effect' since what one feels is as if they were wearing gloves. Her general tactile loss was attributed to a pinched nerve and treated by physical therapy.

Between 1964 and 1971 we had four children and if Jean had any MS symptoms they were masked by the stress and strain of having and caring for a raft of kids.

The first really troublesome symptom began in 1978 after we had moved to Virginia. Jean's right leg developed controls of its own; sometimes when she told it "go", it wouldn't, and then at other times her leg just flexed on its own. This came and went and came again, and after a brain tumor was ruled out, our family doctor sent Jean to a neurologist and via a spinal tap he strongly suspected and began to talk about MS as a probable cause.

Still, Jean's MS was not diagnosed until many years later. In the early days the doctors talked about "a pinched nerve," hypoglycemia, and viral infections. From time to time additional symptoms like slurred speech and blurred vision appeared, got worse, and then went away. Some like leg muscle spasticity, incontinence, and the far more serious inability to void, came and stayed. Fatigue was, and is constant.

With the availability of Magnetic Resonance Imaging, MRI, the growing suspicion of MS became an announced diagnosis in 1978. We were very frightened by the fact of what one only hears about as a terribly debilitating and sometimes life threatening disease. Jean volunteered with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society's National Office in Washington, DC, and we both read a lot and attended workshops and seminars to learn to

understand the disease rather than fear it, and then to learn to live with it.

Over the years with the assistance of medication, therapy and mobility aids we have managed to live what most would describe as a pretty normal life. Decreased strength, mobility limitations, and an active day of half the time of most people, calls for some additional planning, but has not kept us from doing what we want, including moving to and building a retirement home here in Atenas, Costa Rica, and even doing some serious sport fishing and in other ways exploring the beauty of our other country.

We first came to Costa Rica in 1989 for a two week language and cultural homestay program offered by ILISA in San Pedro. Jean walked unaided at this time and we enjoyed the trails of Guayabo, Monteverde and Jardin Lankaster. As she moved to first a cane and then a walker we relied more on cars and boats to get to interesting sites and pursued a variety of gamefish both in Costa Rica and elsewhere. (She has caught bragging size dorado, yellowfin tuna, king and silver salmon, and small mouth bass.)

Two years ago Jean's MS changed from the exacerbating and remitting variety to secondary progressive. So now instead of new symptoms appearing, growing in their effects and then regressing to a state just a little worse than before, we are on a slow but constant diminution of mobility and strength. So while we can do it, we do it! Recently that has included inshore trolling out of Puntarenas on the Aquaholic, and kayaking the mangrove estuary with Jowen and Stefanie Sapiano.

After that first trip to Costa Rica in 1989 we vacationed almost every year here staying in various small hotels and bed and breakfasts throughout the country. About six years ago we "discovered" Atenas and have been coming here since then. Finally, a few years ago we bought a piece of a former coffee finca in San Isidro de Atenas, and in 2006 built a home. When we finally get all the papers together we will apply for Pensionado Resident status and will spend all but two months per year here. In Costa Rica we can afford home visits by physical therapists, and enjoy the assistance of a gardener/handyman and a full time housekeeper/cook/personal assistant to Jean and Terry, my sister who is also disabled and lives with us. In the North these necessities for us, are luxuries out of reach. In the future if Jean or Terry requires full time assistance we can hire a maid to assist Mariluz, our housekeeper. We prefer that plan over the specter of an assisted living or skilled care facility.

A national expert on MS, Dr. Dennis Chinchilla Weinstock cared for Jean during a serious exacerbation in 1998 and we visit him from time to time at his offices in Alajuela or at Hospital CIMA. He and his father, also a neurologist, ran the Interferon/Betaferon trials in Costa Rica that were conducted by a team at Georgetown University in the US.

Cognitive issues are part of MS, and today Jean found herself suddenly without two needed medicines. My car was in the shop. What to do? Only in Atenas can one call Dra. Candy of Linea Vital who will telephone a prescription to Farmacia Central where Roxana will put the medications in a taxi and send them to our home. Less than an hour from discovered need to meds in hand. Pura Vida is not just a slogan on a t-shirt!

Knowledge and Assimilation

by Marietta Arce

I recently learned that a couple with whom I had a growing acquaintance left our town suddenly, without leaving a forwarding address. Most people accepted the news and moved on, but I had a gnawing sensation that would not let me rest until I had found out more. I don't believe that people are disposable, every relationship is important to me.

I had their email address but I was hesitant to make the first move. If they wanted me to know that they were moving, wouldn't they have told me? As you might guess, I am extremely people-oriented. It should come as no surprise that I talked myself into emailing them and simply asking what happened. I reasoned that they could ignore the message or write me back. Happily, I did receive a lengthy reply which explained in detail the reasons for their move. I believe that they made the right choice; Atenas is not for them and their young children at this point in their lives.

Whenever I come into town, I am aware of the changing nature of our residents. It seems that each Friday brings a new group of expats to the farmers' market; people who are either vacationing or permanently residing here. I usually ask what it is that brings people to Costa Rica to live. They often look puzzled and point to the fact that I also chose to come back to Costa Rica to live. Ah, yes I say, but I have 'valid' reasons: I was born here; I have lots of family here; I speak the language; I know what to expect!

Knowing what to expect is crucial and not knowing often results in misery for all involved. I can almost always guess which new expat is going to make it in Atenas and which is going to head for Escazú or 'back home'! I always feel bad when it doesn't work out because most of those people come with hopeful hearts and leave embittered, feeling duped and resentful, as if someone held out on them.

My family moved to New York in 1963. I was a child. I did not know what to expect. One day I was visiting my grandmother in San José and the next day I was experiencing the cold and snow of a New York winter. Although our move had been planned for six months, I don't remember anyone sitting and discussing this monumental event and the effect it would have on our family. My parents had nothing but the very best intentions when they decided on this move, but that did not lessen the impact the drastic change had on me.

My mother was a social worker, a miracle worker of sorts. As soon as she had learned enough English, she began to work in New York. She was constantly reminded that people in "America" who did not assimilate were the ones who did not succeed intellectually or financially. She forced us to forget all about our 'roots' and become part of the culture around us. No Spanish was ever spoken in our home after the first few months. I believe she was right: learning the language of your new chosen home is the very first thing an expat must do in order to thrive.

It is true that most Costa Ricans will help you out when they see you struggling, but contrary to what many guide books say most Costa Ricans do not speak English! I was happy to read about the first group of volunteers (from the U.S.) who have generously committed six months to a year of their lives (in exchange for room and board) to work in rural areas of Costa Rica helping teachers teach English to their students

Many of the teachers need help too! These rural areas are potential tourist attractions as well and our government is betting on the success of the program to improve the standard of living of the communities. It is a good start.

Where is the Money Coming From?

by Fred Macdonald

The news these days is full of complicated stories about the collapse of the world's financial system. The issues are so complex that even some of the heads of our financial institutions admit they do not understand them. The public is told we have to rely on well-intentioned experts to do what is necessary to pull us out of this dive. So far the solutions talked about all involve unprecedented spending by the government of money it does not now have. Some 700 billion dollars has already been authorized, and Obama is now asking for 800 billion more.

One fairly simple question has bothered me. I have been told that the government gets its money to finance deficit spending by selling Treasury Bonds. I know from personal experience that right now the interest being paid on new Treasury Bonds is almost zero, presumably because our government is holding down interest rates to try to stimulate the economy.

My question is: who is going to buy all these bonds at no interest to provide almost two trillion dollars?

A friend recently loaned me a book published in 1994 called "The Creature from Jekyll Island." This book describes a meeting that was held on Jekyll Island, Georgia, in 1910, where a group of bankers created the Federal Reserve System. The author considers the Federal Reserve System to be a cartel created by big banks to maximize their profits at the expense of the public, and in 500 pages he makes a good case. In the process he supplied the answer to my question.

Most of the two trillion dollars is going to be created out of nothing by the Federal Reserve "loaning" money to the banking industry so they can "buy" the bonds. Here is how it works:

1. The Treasury Department offers a bond for sale at a certain price (which determines the interest rate).
2. The public, including many foreign governments, buys some of these bonds.
3. The bonds not bought by the public are offered to the Federal Reserve.
4. The Federal Reserve accepts the bonds and pays for them with "Federal Reserve Notes", which are created by an accounting entry. The Federal Reserve has a new asset (the bond), and a new liability (the Federal Reserve Note).
5. The Treasury Department takes this newly created money and deposits it in government spending accounts in various banks.

To the extent that the Fed "buys" the bonds and not the public, new money has been created. Since there has been no corresponding increase in the goods and services available, this action is clearly inflationary. But it doesn't end there.

The Fed can pump more new money into the system by lowering the reserve requirement for banks. Right now commercial banks are required to keep a reserve equal to about 10 percent of their deposits. The other 90 percent can be lent out. So when the Treasury deposits \$1000 from the bond sale into a government bank account, the bank can immediately loan \$900 of that amount to an individual or business. That individual or business then deposits its \$900 into another bank account, and that bank can lend \$810 to someone else.

This cycle repeats about 28 times with the effect that the original \$1,000 turns into \$10,000 worth of money in various checking accounts.

Think about it. If the Treasury has to rely on “sales” to the Fed to get its 2 trillion in bond money, the total amount of money that could be pumped into the system is 20 trillion dollars. The entire GDP of the US economy is only about 15 trillion dollars. Talk about potential for inflation!

The author makes the case that the Federal Reserve System has been printing money and causing inflation like this since its inception. Governments like this system because it gives them money to spend without raising taxes, but in reality the inflation is a tax, and a very regressive one that hits people who cannot afford investments whose values will rise along with prices.

But in our current situation where the public is not spending is it inflationary for the government to be pumping money into the system? In the short term, probably not. But when the public starts spending again and competing with all those government trillions for goods and services, what then?

Throughout modern history many governments and economies have failed because they tried to create something out of nothing by printing money. Us retired people living on relatively fixed incomes in U.S. dollars could be in for a rough time.

Happy New Year