

Costa Rica's Tentacles *by Elizabeth Gonzalez*

It has been my experience that something happens to ex-patriots when they have resided in Costa Rica for a certain amount of time. The days turn to months and months into years and one day, people find that while they once thought they would never adjust to life in CR, their hearts are now completely wrapped in this tiny nation's tender tentacles.

When does that moment come and how aware is the victim? Perhaps it is the day he finds himself no longer impatient when he arrives at the bank and sees the long line. Instead, he sits in the chair and moves up and up until his turn comes and he and the teller exchange a moment's pleasantries before conducting his transaction. Or maybe she suddenly realizes that she is no longer aware of the rooster's crow at odd hours but can distinguish the hummingbird's wings or the cricket's sounds announcing the time and she takes a moment to listen.

Costa Rica has been blessed with peace for many decades. Our not having an army has made it imperative that we use other means of settling our differences with our neighbors, be they next door or thousands of miles away. It seems that the whole world is in turmoil. Wars of one kind or another are taking place and destroying any hope of long-term world peace. And yet, here we are, most of us quietly going about our lives with little thought of the horrors being committed elsewhere.

It is true that the anonymity of a large city can be liberating, especially when one is young. However, the feelings of isolation that often accompany that freedom are detrimental to mental health, as evidenced by an increase in affective disorders in many industrialized countries. Here in Costa Rica, old-fashioned values remain the norm, despite the influx of new technologies and their sometimes de-humanizing effects.

We are in the midst of a crucial period in our existence: whether or not to approve CAFTA. It remains to be seen which way the popular vote will go, but one thing is for certain, it will be done peacefully and it will probably take longer to come to referendum than was first mentioned; that seems to be another Costa Rican tradition we are loathe to extinguish!.

I ran into an ex-patriot friend the other day. He used to complain about everything in Costa Rica, in loud tones and with negative expressions. When I asked how he was doing, he sheepishly confessed he was thinking of relocating another relative here.....I guess those tentacles got him! What about you?