

# 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](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.*

# Immersion Travel – Bringing Home More Than a T-Shirt

*by Alison Tinsley*

If you just want a rest, a totally serene vacation, why not go to a resort and let them take care of you. Sometimes we all need this type of relaxing trip where everything is *easy*. But other times, we want the new experiences, new sensations and new challenges that travel in a foreign land can bring. This is when what I call “immersion travel” fits the bill.

My husband, Chris, and I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel extensively in the last several years. We’ve written a guidebook about Costa Rican lodgings (more about this later) and we’ve traveled around Europe, Mexico and Central America a lot. Here are two scenarios we’ve witnessed.

## Scenario I – The Resort

Bob and Gloria and their eight year old twin sons are staying at an all-inclusive resort on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. They get up in the morning and go to the breakfast buffet where they have a choice of all the breakfast items they would eat back home. Then they climb on a tour bus with 30 other Americans and drive to a “jungle park”. There they hike down a trail where the monkeys are so tame they beg for food. Afterwards, the whole family does a zip-line tour along the treetops that truly gets the old adrenaline rushing. They eat the lunch packed by the hotel as they relax on the beach and watch the kids wade along the shore and build sand-castles. Later, back at the hotel, they swim in the pool while the kids play on the water slide with other American children their age. After dinner the hotel offers a movie. Later, when the kids have gone to bed, Bob and Gloria relax in the jetted fiberglass hot-tub with a glass of wine. At the end of their week’s vacation they take home photographs, a great tan and lots of souvenir Costa Rica t-shirts to give their friends and relatives.

## Scenario II - The Immersion Trip

Bob and Gloria and the kids have decided to really *explore* Costa Rica. The first place they stay is a small ranch on the slope of a volcano near one of Costa Rica’s least-visited national parks. Their cabin is down by the river and as soon as they get there the kids put on their swim suits and swim in and out of the waterfall and the natural pool beneath it. Bob and Gloria, in the meantime, relax in a hot-tub formed from river stones and heated with wood. That afternoon, they all go for a horseback ride on jungle trails where they are the only tourists around. They spot monkeys swinging through the trees and, with their binoculars and a bird book, identify many different kinds of birds. When they return that afternoon, the twins run off to observe cheese-making (most of the food served at the B&B comes from the ranch and garden) with the son and daughter of one of the ranch hands while Bob and Gloria enjoy a siesta. After dinner that evening, which is a hearty meal of *tipico* Costa Rican food cooked over a wood fire (the hotel does not have electricity), the twins improvise games with the three children of a French couple who are

also staying at the hotel. At the end of their week's vacation they take home a smattering of Spanish and French, a new appreciation for electricity, knowledge of rustic cheese-making, a bird-list that includes 63 birds spotted, email addresses for new friends in Costa Rica, France and Holland and, of course, t-shirts for the friends and relatives.

Many people – be they young singles, couples on their honeymoon, retired folks, or families with kids – are choosing immersion travel over package tours or resorts when they travel abroad. They're making this choice for several reasons. Some people want to taste and smell the *real* flavors of a country, not just to have an American experience on foreign soil; others want to actually get to know the people in foreign lands. For me, immersion travel is all about imagining I'm someone else. Not only am I experiencing different aspects of the world – I'm also experiencing different aspects of me.

When I'm in Costa Rica, I'm nature woman. I don't wear make-up, I don't worry about my clothes (other than, as always in a foreign country, I dress modestly so that I don't offend), and I don't care what my hair looks like (at least I try not to) or that I'm ten pounds overweight. I get up early and hike in the jungle or down dirt roads where I stop and chat with passersby (Costa Ricans are extremely friendly and interested in talking to foreigners). I do yoga on wooden decks overlooking the ocean or rushing streams. I eat fresh fish and rice and beans and drink fruit smoothies and beer with ice in it at small roadside stands where no one speaks a word of English so I *have* to practice my awkward Spanish. I go to off-the-beaten path destinations and do things (like walking around with binoculars and a bird book) that I would never dream of doing back home. I shop in pungent markets and eat fruits and vegetables I've never even seen before. I rarely go shopping (other than for food) or watch TV or go to the movies. I don't even read the newspaper. I slow down when I'm in Costa Rica – and I like that different pace.

In France, on the other hand, I put on lipstick every morning. I dress in chic black and I accessorize. I have my hair cut in Paris and I hate the fact that I'm ten pounds overweight, but I can't resist the cheese and bread and chocolate mousse so I figure I'll just diet when I get home. I go to museums, window-shop everywhere (the French just have so damn much style), pop into small cafés for an aperitif (or *apero* as the French say) and drop into bed dead tired every night. In France I am sophisticated (or at least as sophisticated as I'm ever likely to get). I discuss politics in execrable French, know all the latest movies and the current restaurants and boutiques. In short, I assume my French persona. And I'm charmed by feeling just *so* French!

Immersion travel does take more effort than just going to a travel agent and telling them to take care of everything. It takes some thinking on your part. You don't necessarily need to plan ahead if it's not a major tourist season where you're going, but you do need to make your own decisions every day and to inform yourself of what's available before you go. If you think this is what you want for your next journey, here are some ideas to help you make your trip more authentic.

1. Avoid chain hotels. There are plenty of books available these days that describe charming small hotels for every budget. To name just a few, Karen Brown does a great

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experiences with home exchanges. We've traded for a beach house on an island off the coast of Honduras, an apartment in a seaside village in southwest France, an apartment in Paris, an old stone farmhouse in Gascony, a village house in Umbria, Italy and a house in San Luis Obispo, California. One friend who lives in a perfectly ordinary two-bedroom house outside of Santa Fe traded for a castle in England. Both parties thought they got the best end of the deal!

Some people do volunteer work on their vacation. They build houses, dig wells, work in orphanages, volunteer for archeological digs or trail maintenance in parks. Now that's immersion. Other people take language classes in Antigua, Guatemala or San Miguel de Allende, Mexico or anywhere else around the globe. They live with local families and learn the language pretty darn quick.

Call me idealistic, but I think immersion travel is a way to peace on earth. It's a whole lot harder to hate people when you know them as individuals. When you've laughed with someone, watched a sunset with them, when you know they're working three jobs so their kids can get an education and they love baseball and rock-and-roll, too, it's not so easy to demonize or de-personalize them. When you come back home, rather than just being a souvenir those t-shirts remind you that you are *part* of the global community. It's like the t-shirt commemorating the 10-k race. It means so much more if you didn't just watch the race, you actually ran it.

# Tourist Visa Renewal on San Andres Island

*by Martin Lively*

3 days out for Visa Renewal.....San Andres – Yes.....Decameron – No

A pinched nerve in my shoulder made the thought of ten hours driving to and from either border unbearable, but it was time to get out of Dodge for three days. What to do? How about that all-included tropical island deal at the travel agency?



In less than an hour on March 5, 2009 in a fine TACA jet we were in Colombia, albeit much closer to Nicaragua, 140 miles, than the mother country much, much further to the south. Decameron greeters paid special attention to my ladies in wheelchairs and we were whisked thru immigration and customs to a waiting taxi, prepaid, of course.

Javier, our driver, loved his little island and decried the day the *narco-traficantes* arrived from mainland Colombia about twenty years ago and started building and buying; buying everything, including the police I suspect since the moorings for the long, thin, over motored speed boats were right across the street and strand from Police Headquarters. Why pay guards when you are already paying the guards?

The 15 minute drive from airport to Hotel San Luis along the beach road was a view of wonder and shame. In single frame one can see the slick, high rise condos at the point, the blinding white sand, guano clear water growing seven shades of blue as it goes out to the reef, and falling down shacks with chickens, pigs and tattered dress girls barefoot in the muck.

Denzel Washington gorgeous Eddie pulled open the taxi door and greeted us. He and two other uniformed porters took me to registration and Jean and Terry to the snack bar to wait for our room to be

ready. A hamburger and two beers later we were in our room. Small, plain, but adequate and clean the only downside to the room was that the a/c wall unit had to run continuously to fight the indoor heat and the damn thing smelled of every cigarette that had ever been smoked in that room. Now I smoke now and then, but I don't sleep in ashtrays. The hotel has gone non-smoking in rooms and restaurants, but the lingering scent of years before was a constant irritant.

Eddie, however was a constant joy. He asked me at poolside where we wanted to dine that evening. One can choose dinner at any of the specialty restaurants of the six Decameron hotels on the island, but you must reserve early the day before. (Unless Eddie is doing it for you ;-). The San Luis in addition to the big buffet, a no reservation dinner, has a Japanese restaurant and the sort-of- Continental Pastafary, which from the name I thought was a spaghetti place – but it wasn't. Anyway, I choose Japanese and slipped Eddie a nice tip. Later than afternoon we were people watching near one of the four pools and outdoor bars when our dinner reservation arrived. The Pastafary; the Japanese place was not open that night.

While the ladies napped I walked the 50 feet from our little porch and across the open air lobby to the street and the beach on the other side. It was the most beautiful beach scene of my life; just staring at it made the trip worthwhile. Windblown palms framed a vista of stripes of white going clear going aqua then pale and deep blue changing with the bottom and the clouds until the sea was a patchwork quilt of bluegreens ending in a solid sky blue with fluffy white clouds. The travel poster picture that one dreams of was right there in my face and I just sat in the sand and tried to take it in. “Hey Mon, need'n anythin?” brought me from my near meditation. Auschwitz thin with big hair stuffed in a black, yellow, red and green crochet cap the Rasta guy did not need to list his wares, I had seen him and a Canadian tourist at the snack bar make the telltale hand to hand double pass while we waited for our room.

Dinner was fine at the Pastafary; an extensive salad bar, nice fresh made rolls, mostly seafood main dishes with chicken, beef and pasta also available. Dishes were made to order, artfully arranged and not overcooked – bland, but OK; sort of Red Lobster quality overall. Breakfasts and lunches at the International buffet were always enjoyable, the waitresses very attentive and always ready with more coffee or whatever beverage you had chosen. All the usual breakfast fare was available in both bain marie and griddle cooked to order styles. Every tropical fruit you have ever seen was nicely displayed at both meals. Fried fish, pork stew, roast beef, pollo a la brasa, Cuban subs, a pasta bar, on and on went the choices. With three meals and the snack bar one could eat from seven in the morning until ten in the evening and then keep drinking free beer and rum drinks until seven the next morning. Yes, one of the many bars is open every hour around the clock!

Eddie got us reservations for the Japanese place for our second dinner . FORGETTABOUTIT! Somebody was at Benihana's once but failed to understand that you can clang the spatulas all you want, but without prime ingredients and seasonings the result is just *arroz con todos sin sabor*. And that was made worse by an inferior soy sauce, the kind that in grammar school we called bug juice. Restaurante Bruja at the Aquarium Hotel was the prettiest and the best seafood of the trip. The Aquarium consists of round, three story, 12 unit buildings set on piers above the water of San Andes Bay.

The Bruja is at the end of a pier jutting out a little further into the water and the walk out is spectacular at sunset, you can look down and see tropical fish ten feet below you and out to the red, gold, and pink clouds fading into grey as the sky darkens.

Transportation between hotels is no longer part of the package, so we called Javier and asked him to drive to the Aquarium but to take an extra half hour getting there and show us some of the sights. His mini tour included the various churches, including the 1844 Baptist Church which is original and which contains a lot of history of the island, the hill area where most of the working people live, the big fresh water lake on the other side of where we were staying, Rocky Cay (pronounced RowKeyKey) a beach and snack bar only facility of Decameron, the Marazul Hotel – probably the nicest of the bunch, and the downtown with tons of typical tourist shops as well as the high rise condos overlooking huge yachts from around the world.

A storm from the North kept us, and most others, off the beach, but the pools were refreshing and the breezes kept the heat bearable. Snorkel and scuba trips, horseback riding, island tours, boat trips to outlying cays for the day, local lobster restaurants; there is a lot to do. When it is less windy the hotel provides kayaks and small sail boats and snorkeling equipment for use right out front. All in all the trip was an easy three days out, but I would love to find a way to get to San Andres, or even better to the sister island of Providencia which all say is the most unspoiled little island in the Caribbean. A small hotel or B & B with THAT beach right out front is somewhere in our future.

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## Atenas Today Interviews Sara Basloe

*Distributor for [www.sendoutcards.com/sara](http://www.sendoutcards.com/sara)*

- AT:** I heard from a friend who had met you at Kay's Gringo Postres that you have recently moved to Atenas and are running an internet business from here.
- Sara: That's right. My husband and I were running an on line greeting card business from our home in Colorado, and we decided to move here and work in a warm place.
- AT:** I want to find out about your business, but first tell me a little about your background.
- Sara: Okay. I was born in 1951 in Herkimer, a small town in upstate New York. I went to school there through high school, and then attended Syracuse University.
- AT:** Go Orangemen !
- Sara: Yea !
- AT:** What did you do after college?
- Sara: I majored in retail marketing and got a job with Macy's in New York City, where I became the manager of the cosmetics department of the store in Herald Square.
- AT:** You mean you supervised all those beautiful women who spray stuff on you as you walk through the store?
- Sara: Right. There were some 200 women and men in that department. But after two years they transferred me to a Macy's in San Francisco. I must have been doing something right, because in San Francisco I was made a Group Sales Manager of 13 departments.
- AT:** And you are only two years out of college?
- Sara: Yes, but I knew I needed more business training, so I went back to Syracuse and got an MBA.
- AT:** So at that point you had a great combination of experience and education. Where did you go next?
- Sara: I went back to San Francisco and worked for Levi Strauss as the product manager for what are euphemistically called "comfortable fit men's jeans".
- AT:** You mean jeans for old guys who want to look cool but not hurt.
- Sara: Right. It was a major market segment.
- AT:** Then what? It must have been about time to get married.
- Sara: Not yet. I was having fun but not finding Mr. Right.
- AT:** What was your next job?
- Sara: I was recruited by Sherwin Williams to be the District Manager for their 21 stores in Arizona and New Mexico. Then after 8 months they transferred me to Atlanta to be the Regional Director of Retail Sales for the Southeast , which had 455 stores.
- AT:** Wow. No time to look for Mr. Right at that point.
- Sara: It was a demanding but fun job. Sherwin Williams was very successful with their specialty stores. But then in about 1982 a new senior vice president came in who wanted to shake things up. He issued a decree that every senior manager who had never served as a Sherwin Williams store manager had to give up their position and move to a new location to manage a store.
- AT:** And take a salary cut?

Sara: No. You kept your salary, but you had to relocate and do a job that was several levels below what you were doing. This vice president subscribed to some kind of new theory of “chaos management”. With so much experience I decided to forgo the opportunity to be a store manager, again, and was excited about the next adventure on my career journey.

**AT: Where did you go?**

Sara: I then partnered with my brother, who had a successful advertising agency in New York City. For the next 15 years I created and sold advertising and marketing programs to Fortune 100 companies.

After that I decided to move to Colorado and go back to school. I became a Certified Life and Business Coach. My business was focused on helping individuals develop strategies to improve their lives, their careers, and their companies.

Then finally, at age 48, I met Mr. Right. He was living in a home he had built for himself in the mountains outside of Boulder, Colorado. I was able to do my coaching work from anywhere, and I moved to the mountains. We were married in 2000.

**AT: How did you get into the greeting card business?**

Sara: I had a friend who was using a new internet service called SendOutCards. It was unique in that you could select or design your own cards on line, and then they would be printed and sent via the post office to the recipient. With 11 nieces and nephews and hundreds of business contacts, I was always mailing cards to people. I thought this service was fantastic. My husband agreed, and we became independent distributors for the company.

**AT: How does it work?**

Sara: You go to the website and log in. They have great, user-friendly software to help you design cards and maintain a list of people and events you want to remember with a card. You can upload personal pictures to incorporate into the card designs. The company puts on a stamp and mails your card for you.

**AT: What does it cost?**

Sara: The cost is about \$1 plus a stamp. In general the cards cost less than half what you would pay in a store.

**AT: Is it intended for businesses or individuals?**

Sara: Both. For businesses it is a great way to remember your customers so that they don't forget you. For individuals, it is a very personal way to stay in touch and show people that you cared enough to send them a printed card. And you can add a gift also.

It also is a business opportunity for anyone looking extra income here in Costa Rica.

**AT: Is there a way people can try it out for free?**

Sara: Yes. I have a special name and password they can use to send out a couple of cards. Simply login as “calypso”, with password “calypso”. It is easiest if people just give me a call so I can show them how to send their first card. Also, I like to work with people to help them get started and I urge people to call me at 8301-6372, or email me at sara@sbsoc.com.

**AT: Sounds like a great business to run from Costa Rica. How did you end up here?**

Sara: Like most of the ex-pats here, my husband and I were looking for a warmer place to live. Florida did not appeal. A friend told us that Frontier airlines had a direct flight from Denver to Costa Rica, and we decided to try it.

**AT: Where did you go first?**

Sara: Being mountain people we went to Arenal. It was beautiful. One day we were in a bakery there and surprised to find that the owner was a man from the same area where we lived in Colorado. When we mentioned that we might want to rent a place in Costa Rica to try it out he said he had a house available right then. We took it and lived in Arenal for three months. It was great, but the internet service was terrible, and we knew we could not run our business from there.

**AT: How did you end up in Atenas?**

Sara: I had a friend in Colorado who I thought had told me that her mother was living in Atenas. So on our next trip, we stopped in Atenas and stayed at Anna's Place. A notice on the wall at Kay's led us to the house we are now renting.

**AT: Is your friend's mother still here?**

Sara: That is the weirdest thing. I called my friend and told her we were in Atenas. Asked her where her mother's house was. She said her mother never lived in Atenas, but was in Puriscal. She knew nothing about Atenas. It must have been destiny leading us here.

**AT: Obviously it was meant to be.**

Sara: Yes. I love it here. I have made a number of friends through the informal ex-pat woman's group that meets every Wednesday at 1:30pm at Kay's Gringo Postres. I hope more women will join us. It is an open invitation.

**AT: Our community is certainly growing. Welcome and good luck with your business.**

# Cultural Pluralism

*by Marietta Arce*

In the last decade of living in Costa Rica, I have become aware of an increase in the 'cultural pluralism' that is a prevalent and an identifying characteristic of the United States. I am very excited by this evolution because I believe that every culture has something to teach to and something to learn from another.

I am always eager to meet people who have decided to uproot themselves and permanently move here. Their stories fascinate and entertain me. I can spend many hours comparing notes and sharing anecdotes. The stories that I especially enjoy, however, are the ones of families who move here and successfully transition their children into our growing 'melting pot'. Unfortunately, I do not hear these stories very often, at least not here in Atenas. It seems that families come and quickly move away, not finding the schools, the activities or the friends they would have liked for themselves or their children.

When I was a child and my parents decided we would be moving to New York, I don't remember exactly what my thoughts were. Although I was excited about going on an airplane, I remember feeling sad about leaving my family and home. It was not part of our 'family culture' to question any decisions made by our parents and we, the children, just accepted the choice made for us. Luckily, we moved to a country that offered more of everything than we had ever known. We were successful in our adventure. I am the only one of my siblings who chose to return to a place that was always my home in my heart; this does not minimize the passion that I also feel for the U.S. and all it offers.

I believe that many people come to Costa Rica running away from something; running to something, or because they have an idea that this is a paradise where nothing can go wrong. I have recently been hearing "The Costa Rica Song" by Jacob Dylan (Bob Dylan's son) and it does give the impression that life here is better somehow, just because. Most of us who live here are reminded on a daily basis that nothing is perfect and, depending on our perspective and fortitude, we make the best of it or try to change things.

It is my experience that people who make it to five years in Costa Rica often remain for good or go away and return once again with renewed energy. I have just said farewell to a friend who is returning to Uruguay. I have a feeling that she will be back. Although she had things happen to her which she confessed "could only happen in Costa Rica", she remembers her time here as mostly positive and she is grateful to have made many good friends on whose support she could always count.

We have shared many important moments and I know that even if she does not come back to live here, she will visit often. Yesterday, I was amused by her comment that in all her years living here, she had not been able to arrive late for any appointment with a Costa Rican because no matter how late she was running, the Tico/Tica was always running even later! Punctuality is something we should learn from other cultures; it would be a good thing and it doesn't mean we would be giving anything up.

# Living With Nature in and around Atenas

*by Lorna Smith*

Afternoon clouds are starting to gather. It is that time of year again when the end of verano, or “Costa Rican summer”, is drawing to a close. In another month or so, the afternoon rains will mark the gradual end to the dry season. The end of the dry season also marks the beginning of the nesting season for the Yigüirro, or Clay-colored Robin, Costa Rica’s national bird. Beginning in March, you will hear his cheerful, melodious song throughout Atenas and the Central Highlands. See if you can spot him, (it is the male that sings, of course, to attract a mate and announce himself to any competition in the vicinity.) He often sings in plain view, his modest and inconspicuous brown plumage cloaking a truly amazing voice. It is this beautiful song, so reminiscent of the American Robin, that earned the Yigüirro his enviable title. With over 850 species of birds found in Costa Rica, competition for the title of National Bird is pretty tough. Consider that the Scarlet Macaw, Keel-billed Toucan and Roseate Spoonbills are just a few of the flashy, flamboyant and impressive birds that might have been selected.

However, the country of Costa Rica got its start as an agricultural and farming nation and it is still very important today. Farmers of all kinds the world over are ruled by the vagrancies of weather. So any bird believed to have the ability to sing and bring in the rain, literally reigns supreme. Every year, as the clouds begin to gather, the Yigüirros burst into full-throated song. And every year the rains follow soon after. Early Ticos made the logical connection between the Yigüirro’s magical song and the advent of the seasonal rains. Who can say that the Universe does not work that way? Certainly not me!

Once the male Yigüirro successfully chooses his mate, nest building begins in earnest. Last season, our resident pair of Yigüirros made no fewer than six trial nests before finally settling on the perfect home. In the end, it’s the female of the pair who makes that determination. Were the trial nests intended to fool any would-be predators looking for newly-laid eggs or hatchlings? I have found no reference to this behavior in the scientific literature. Perhaps there is a future study for me here?

The nest of the Yigüirro is not remarkable. In fact it very much resembles the nests of the American Robin—dried-mud and grass formed into a cup and lined with a few feathers. Our own pair of birds proved to be remarkably canny when it came to selecting a site for nest construction. For two years in a row, they have chosen to construct their multiple nests on the concrete beam between the posts on our covered veranda; a nice wide platform covered and protected from rain and predators by the ample roof overhang. The final and successful nest they constructed was right outside our office window, providing me with a ring side seat to the arrival of the new family. Four eggs successfully hatched. I am not sure exactly how many were laid. I did note when I peaked into the nest that the light blue color of the eggs is very like the sky-blue eggs of

the American Robin. None of these similarities are so unusual when you consider that both birds are members of the same genus, *Turdus*.

According to the authors of *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*, two or three eggs per clutch is most common. Yet all four of our resident nestlings survived to fledge and fly away. I like to imagine that I played a small, but humble role in their successful upbringing. While lying in bed in the morning, or working at the computer I kept my eyes and ears tuned for signs of a mother robin "distress call". I would respond by running outside to discourage any intruders such as Grackles or Brown Jays intent on locating the nest. Perhaps as a biologist I should know better than to interfere with the course of nature, but then what IS nature? The yard-as-habitat is not, the bird feeders I maintain are not, perhaps the spread of Great-tailed Grackles is not, as they have taken advantage of the habitat niches provide by the advancement of agricultural fields and disturbed areas through out the Central Highlands. So yes, I helped Mother Robin keep her chicks safe and sound. So there will be future generations of Yigüirros spreading their cheer and calling in the rain throughout Atenas for many, many years to come.

Lorna Smith and her husband Darrell are both biologists, formerly from Washington State. They are both avid birders and wildlife observers, and serve as occasional guides to the many friends and family members who come to visit them in Atenas.

# Retirement

*by Diane Holman*

Retirement hands you time on a silver platter, and there are few things more valuable. Time, like silence, contains riches that can never be fully mined. Allowed to flow and unfold, without let or hindrance, it fully reciprocates our desires.

It is time that is surrendered to the demands of work. It is time that is traded for money. I found satisfaction in my work as a lawyer, but I also found stress, and not only the stress inherent in the job but also the stress of knowing how many, including myself, depended on the money. And there was always a craving to reappropriate myself, to collect my thoughts and nourish my soul in the flow of unimpeded time and the ambiance of silence.

What we gain through work is undeniable: pride in a job well done, money for food, clothing, shelter, television sets and computers. But what is ceded is great and calls for reclamation. Retirement is a basic need.

At this time the U.S. economy is in dire straits. There was much discussion about the economy on the Dr. Phil show a few weeks ago. One interview Dr. Phil did was with a teenager, a girl who was worried that her mother might never be able to retire. After some conversation back and forth, Dr. Phil concluded: "Well, it is possible that your mother will not be able to retire". One of the "experts" on the show agreed and added: "I think retirement is a concept of Western civilization that will soon be discarded". And another "expert" threw in: "For sure, don't count on Social Security for retirement".

Wait a minute! I always thought retirement was one of the hallmarks of a civilized society. I loved working and growing older with the awareness of the safety net of Social Security in the back of my mind. If the average working person in the U.S. is being asked to give up retirement, the country is poorer in every respect than the country I left. And if the average working person doesn't reply with a resounding NO to this request ("I have been working all my life and I have every right to depend on Social Security"), then the promise the country was founded on—that each person has a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—will, in my opinion, be significantly compromised.