

*A look at life in the jungle of Costa Rica*

## *The BriBri and the Bridge*



*By Nanci Stevens & with Barry Stevens-  
Co-founders of El Puente-The Bridge*

## Table of Contents

<i>Dedication</i> .....	5
<i>The BriBri and The Bridge</i> .....	6
<i>Pedro</i> .....	10
<i>Alejandro</i> .....	10
<i>Faustina's Story</i> .....	12
<i>Constantino</i> .....	18
<i>Verbs!</i> .....	22
<i>Toyota</i> .....	24
<i>McNugget</i> .....	28
<i>There Are Pollywogs in My Drinking Water!</i> .....	32
<i>Ronualdo and the Medicine Men</i> .....	36
<i>Just a Thought</i> .....	42
<i>Jackie and Joseph</i> .....	44
<i>I Call Him 'The Funky Chicken'</i> .....	50
<i>We have a howler monkey in the trees overhead!</i>	56
<i>Katie and the Piglet</i> .....	60

<i>Marvin is Learning to Smile</i> .....	62
<i>Maria</i> .....	64
<i>I call it the Everything Bug</i> .....	69
<i>The Cock on the Block</i> .....	72
<i>Two Thumbs up for Corky</i> .....	74
<i>After The Trees Fell</i> .....	78
<i>Jack</i> .....	82
<i>Albertina</i> .....	86
<i>An Easter Miracle</i> .....	88
<i>Angels With Their Skins On</i> .....	92
<i>Agua Sapo</i> .....	96
<i>Marguerita</i> .....	100

# *Forward*

The Bridge is a faith based non-profit organization devoted to serving the less than fortunate indigenous people of Costa Rica; originally the BriBri and then being joined by the Cabecar) and of Panama (the Nobe Bugle and the Guami).

We do not believe it is fair practice to preach to hungry people, but live our lives 'out loud' and up front and speak to the people from what we do, not what we say.

Our personal beliefs come from an amalgamation of brilliant minds, both ancient and new and the altars of our home show that we are open to wisdom of the 'Gods' from everywhere.

Our credo is to love everybody to the best of our ability and "what you think about, you bring about," simply that and nothing more. Leaving text books and expensive courses aside, we speak to the people through the every day parables of our own mistakes and successes.

We all have the same hopes and dreams  
We all laugh over the same funny things  
And no matter what language we speak,  
We all suffer the same pain  
Our lives are no different than theirs

Our Faith "It will be done unto you as you believe." - Jesus

## Dedication

Barry and I dedicate this book and our program to all the girls and boys, and men and women who daily make this happen. You come from every place on the globe, and radiating out from here, your continual givingness makes the whole world a better place. You arrive on a shoestring with a smelly pack on your back, and the giving you give is with your heart and with your hands. Your love is palpable. People walk onto the premises and gasp. "My God it's peaceful here!" You continue to help make that happen. Through your diverse eyes, we have a holistic understanding of the world outside of this tiny spot we inhabit. You bring us hope for this precious earth.

We dedicate this book to the men and women again from all around the globe who participate by sending us prayers and funding. Whether singularly or through large foundations, from the office or from the comforts of your own home, each of you is an integral piece that makes this happen. You may not be into smelly back packs, but you can give just the same. Not everybody chooses to travel.

We dedicate this book and our lives to the practice of living in this moment of Now, receiving continual inner guidance and being available if possible to the next person who walks up to the door.

*Our Mantra- How much better can it get?*

## The BriBri and The Bridge

My Dad started writing his memoirs the day before he was hit by a truck. I often felt he figured if he had enough time to sit down and write about it, he was done living it. When he did write, it was mystical and worth waiting for. I don't know if *my* stuff is worth waiting for, but that's just the way it is.

Every so often I lift my myopic eyes above the all consuming adventure we've carved out for ourselves here and remember there's a whole world out there beyond my horizon. I also realize that if it weren't for the players at the other ends of the world with their prayers, their talents, and their extras, we could not continue to do what we do; the most meaningful and satisfying work we've ever done. "I have sent you nothing but angels."

From the moment, many years ago, that I felt compelled to make Costa Rica's Caribbean my permanent home, the mechanisms that created a seven year stall became more grist for the mill; polishing and honing vital skills for the work of which we were yet completely unaware.

We vaguely knew that the Caribbean sported an indigenous population, but I'd also been peripherally aware of our own native people and their plight. Nothing had compelled me in that direction. For me, well, I just saw myself ensconced in a little straw hut making a living selling painted coconuts on the beach; peddling my famous salsa and helping middle aged ladies with their spiritual crises.

People are blown away by the "amazing" thing we did, actually "pitching" everything and following a dream. I've heard it said, 'If you're not standing on the edge, you're taking up too much room'. The real hero is the man who followed me down here trusting that my dream would be big enough for him too; "Whither thou goest, I shall go".

Bear and I nested in quite nicely after about a month of honeymooning, circling the country and then fixing up a cute little Tico rental that could have fit inside our bedroom back in San Diego. We quickly slapped up window screens before the mosquitoes got really bad and plugged up the biggest holes against the smallest of the snakes and the largest of the spiders. With the help of our guy Friday, Daniel, who we sort of inherited with the property, we pushed out the front porch, installed decorative bars on the windows, put our pretties up and then entered into a short lived period of, "well, now what do we do?" Spiritually 'aware' people *should* be in the know about asking leading questions. And so it is.

From the moment we arrived, I knew we had entered paradise. I had never seen so much beauty in all my life. I also knew that by our very being here, we would be helping to trash it. We would be using her vital resources and contributing to her waste and pollution problems, I felt we had to give as much as we got.

The main road out front of our house cuts through the rain forest all the way to the border of Panama about an hours' drive away. Behind us, the jungle stretches dark and lush and somewhat impenetrable for miles; Indigenous country; the reserve; vast yet depleted, its people spiritually defeated, on the brink of extinction as tides of human locusts and global warming swarm and swallow. Long and difficult foot trails twist around ancient trees with exotic names like sangrillo, kacha, almendra, nispero; glacial hosts to a pharmacopoeia of plants to cure every disease known to man, and then some. Pink flowering Bromeliads, the size of couches drip vejuco vines Tarzan like to the rich wet earth below, home to vipers and poison arrow frogs. But the jungle no longer sustains human life. The paths lead out as well as in. The people are looking for help. The paths lead to our front porch.

All sorrow is due to the fact that many are seen  
where there is only the One.

Ānandamayī Mā

## Pedro



One rainy afternoon while I was preparing soup in our tiny kitchen, Daniel brought us an old Indian named Pedro. Toothless and emaciated, he'd been shopping with two of his grand kids in the trashcans of Puerto. I have a talent for expanding a meal. After treating his ulcerated and bleeding feet and filling up his belly with homemade veggie soup, we sent Pedro on his way feebly supported by an old broken broomstick I suspect he found in a trash can dig one day. And so began our soup kitchen.

## Alejandro

Within days Daniel also introduced us to Maria and Abilio, a young BriBri couple with five children freshly removed from the interior over a week's walk away. They shyly approached, looking for help in enrolling their oldest son, 7-year-old Alejandro, in school. With the cost of uniforms, backpacks, shoes and school supplies, about \$75, the possibility of school was a distant



dream away. That they spoke little Spanish and the schools did not speak BriBri did not shake their resolve to get him an education. Bear and I had spent that much money and more on a nice meal out often enough so we 'foot the bill' and got him suited up. The brave little brave and his sister Carmelita became the first in their family to ever attend school. And so began our school program.

One by one and little by little extended family members overcame their shyness and a natural tendency towards distrust. Before long our tiny soup kitchen was serving over a hundred bowls of soup a week to people making the trek from up to four hours away. From many different directions and many different tribes, community began to form. And added to that, a volunteer program that brings young and old people from all over the world to bask in the refreshing changes they see all around them and most importantly within themselves. We call ourselves "The Bridge".



## **Faustina's Story**

“Just how old are you, anyway?” I asked loudly. Communication was already difficult. Her first language, BriBri, was unlike anything I had ever heard and we were both getting by on Spanish. On top of that she had already said she was hard of hearing. “Somewhere close to a hundred,” she answered in a tiny voice squeaky and unused.

Earlier that morning, I had found myself pacing the house with too much energy to settle in any one place. I don't usually hike alone in the jungle but I knew a couple of well used trails, and although I'd never been there before I thought I knew which path branched off to the old lady's house. The trail begins up from the main road and goes up and up and up.... And up. If it hadn't been for the captivating beauty, the rocky muddy path would have been grueling. As I walked, I thought of this quasi centenarian trudging, grocery laden, pouring rain, trees overly burdened with 100 pound soggy bromeliads, dropping their gigantic branches onto the paths below. How tough these people must be! The trees finally thinned and I came out into a clearing, an overlook with the stunning backdrop of the Caribbean Sea.

Four skinny dogs heralded my arrival into their territory. After loudly examining me, they must have determined that I wasn't foe. Two simple wooden shacks came into view and I watched as Faustina disappeared into the one on the right, the tinier of the two with smoke dancing out from an open window in the front.

It took this beautiful old Indigenous woman a while to recognize me. Her eyes were sharp, but I was out of place. She'd only seen my on my own turf. With recognition came genuine delight that I would pay her a visit. She beckoned me to sit in an old string chair by the door while she settled back in a nearby threadbare hammock.



As we talked pleasantries, I took in the simplicity of this humble cooking shack; bare walls, bare floor and raised hearth of building blocks on which a large pot of pejibaye boiled. She must have just stoked it for it went happily unattended for the hour or more I spent with her. Through the open doorway I could see dogs, chickens and pigs doing what dogs, chickens

and pigs do everywhere. Sunlight slinked in across the floor as if being pulled by tiny invisible snails.

“I think the sun moves”, she finally said, jerking me out of my reverie. “What?” I asked, sitting up straighter. “Well,” she answered, “you’ve been sitting there for about an hour and I’ve noticed the light coming in the doorway has moved. I think the sun must move.” When I realized she was serious I gently told her, “No, the earth rotates. When you go to bed at night, lovely old ladies like you on the other side of the world are just getting up to feed their own chickens, pigs and dogs the same as you. Their skin may be darker or lighter but they have the same needs you have, the same likes and dislikes, sorrows and joys. You have sisters all over the world.” I could see she had become incredulous so I cast about the smoke filled kitchen for help. An orange and an apple I found nestled near some hanging pots would do. While she was still shaking her head in wonderment, I showed her how the earth made its twenty-four hour turn. “You are here”, I



said pointing to a spot on the orange. “As the earth rotates, people all over the world prepare to start the day. Some speak French, Italian, Chinese,

German....” As I spoke it occurred to me that secluded as she was, I was seeing what the world had been for Faustina. Except for a few forays out, she’d lived her whole life in the jungle.

“What about other animals? Do they have rivers? Houses?” I described an elephant and a giraffe. With each new answer came more bewilderment and wonder. “Oh!” she said, “this makes my head tired. I’ve lived all these years and never knew any of these things.”

As I watched her slip deeper into the hammock, I asked her if I could come again. I’d bring a globe and some animal pictures. As I walked back down the path away from her place, I marveled how she’d even been unaware that the earth was round. I was looking forward to returning with the globe. How fun it would be to teach her about the world.

Then a new thought hit me. She’s lived in the rain forest for nearly a hundred years. The earth will always be round, but as the old Indians die off so will what they know. I’ll be the one asking the questions next time.

Weeks later, Faustina’s daughter Esmerelda dropped by. I had already gone back to take her the globe and pictures of animals of the

world, “Mother”, Esmeralda said, “was still shaking her head over the enormity of it all”. She said that her mother had become bored with life and no longer interested in anything. “She’s a whole new woman now”, she said happily. “She’s out gardening, and is all excited about life.” She pesters her daughter constantly for more information about the world. “Why?” she wanted to know of her daughter, “if you knew about all these things, why didn’t you tell me?” Esmerelda’s answer, “You are the mother. I thought *you* were here to teach *me*.” “Then”, she answered, “Then Nanci is my mother, she teaches me things.” May I ever be worthy of the honor.

Recently I had the opportunity of taking Faustina to the clinic for her hearing. She had a ton of wax in her ears and a nest of ants. She claims she hears a lot better now. We’re always happy to oblige.

If you but looked at your soul, the all  
perfect reflection of God within you, you  
would find all your desires satisfied!

Paramahansa Yogananda

## Constantino

Occasionally Bear and I are asked if we consider “The Bridge” a ministry. “Not really”, we reply, “although we are the only Science of the Mind presence in the country. We consider it bad form to preach to a captive audience of starving people with “come to Jesus” messages; or, for that matter, any other. We don’t preach. We just practice. In many cases we are surprised by the close personal relationship these people have with their creator. They call Him Sibö.

Constantino lives in a broken down shack about a half hour away in the jungle behind us. Dirty and unkempt, he spends his day hauling bunches of bananas and yucca, breadfruit, and mandarin oranges, jungle plants or whatever happens to be in season to sell along his rout to town. No one really thinks he gets his produce legitimately. We may not share the same definition of ‘your property’ or ‘my property’. As a kid I remember picking people’s flowers and offering them for sale door to door. I never thought anything of it. Maybe that’s what makes me so tolerant. Most people steer away from this savage looking man.

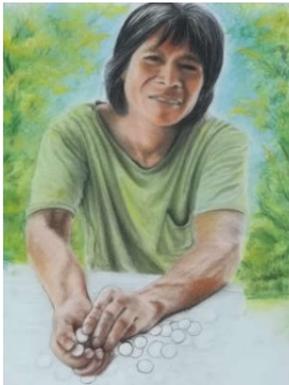
Constantino squatted down beside me in the dirt. He was shirtless and he held his old torn black pants together with a liana vine he’d

pulled down from a sangria tree. The zipper in his grubby jeans, rusty and broken, hadn't been able to close in a long time. Looking up at me from the new baby plant he'd just introduced into the soil, he asked, "Nanci, do you think that Jesus was a man or a myth." His face held the deep conviction of one well acquainted with the Divine. His teeth were broken and yellow and around his matted thick black hair he wore another liana vine; this one twisted into a crown. He had never spoken this way to me before. We don't preach.

"Well", I answered, "I believe Jesus was both man and God. I believe he taught us that we are all brothers. Jesus said it in so many ways. After performing his miracles he taught the people, 'All this and more shall you do.' Jesus was born knowing who he was. The Buddha found out in his later years. Many people are awakening to this truth now."

"So", he answered, "the only thing that keeps us from believing we can be like Jesus is our mind telling us so." "Exactly", I said. "Wow", he continued, "I am 30 years old. It's late for me to start." "I waited until I was fifty," I answered. "We are all connected; the earth, the plants, animals, the sky, everything. It's never too late to believe in who you are".

As he was getting ready to leave, I could feel he wanted to say more, so I asked him if he knew how to read, a fair question due to the small percentage of indigenous who are literate. When he answered yes, I asked if he would like to borrow a book. "Sure, he said and he walked away with my Spanish version of 'The Four Agreements'. Two days later, flying high, he was back for more. Within the month he had gone through everything I had in Spanish; all three volumes of 'Conversations with God', 'The Power of Now', 'The Sermon on the Mount', and 'The Prophet'. It was only after he had reread everything twice or more that I thought he might be ready for the only thing I had that was left, Ernest Holmes' text, 'The Science of Mind'.



A few years later, Constantino corralled me at the end of a soup kitchen day. "I've finally come to realize," he said to me, "that most people are unconscious. That they go through life not having any idea that their thoughts create their own realities, and that *we ourselves* are the reasons that our lives are the way they are." He paused deep in thought, and I nodded at him to continue. "But what I don't understand is what the future holds for me."

"If you can't see the future as yet for yourself", I said to him, "Let's look at where you've been and ask yourself the same question. A few years ago you were hooked on crack and begging at my door. You were always out of work and forever having to borrow money to get to the clinic because you were sick all the time. Now I see you, strong,

healthy and sober with more work than you can handle. Now, today is the future of that sorry and unhappy man that you were then. Keep doing what you've been doing. You're on the right track. There are no limitations to what you can be, do, or have."

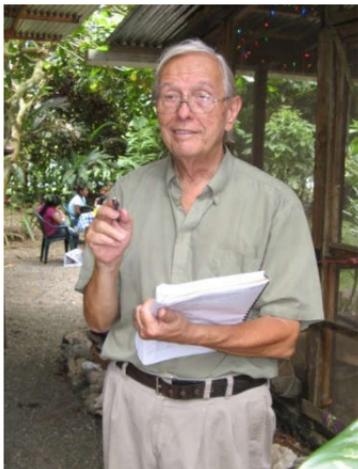
I left him with that thought and a wondrous bemused smile on his face that grew and grew and seemed to make him chuckle from deep within as he began to realize such a simple and unmistakable truth.

## Verbs!

“You’ve got two years to study Spanish.” I had informed Bear when he first realized we were moving to Costa Rica. Five years later he finally picked up the dictionary during our ten hours in the air on the American Airlines flight down here. I however was much better prepared. I had started taking Spanish at thirteen and had never quit. For reasons I had never understood, I felt compelled to be fluent. So other than a few colloquialisms and a few surprises, I got along well enough right off the bat.

Bear on the other hand was a trip. He’d get really nervous when I’d go into town. “What will I do if someone comes around while you’re gone and wants to talk to me?”, he would fret. Usually proficiently eloquent if not verbose, Barry’s being tongue-tied was a novelty. But he’s gutsy and, sink or swim, he’s up to the challenge. His French, on the other hand while not helping one little bit started to improve a lot. With his *voulez-vous* and chopping off the last three letters of every new word he learned, he kept everybody in stitches. One morning for breakfast he ordered what he thought was a cheese omelet with no bacon. What he got was a platter of four pieces of cheese encircling a large mound of the rejected pig. The staff must have thought his order was a bit odd too, for they all had their heads poking out the kitchen

window to catch his reaction. “Mi Espanol es en mal estado”, he readily admits. He’s right, his Spanish does suck.



Bear is a sight to see at the hardware store. With a flourish he will whip out a detailed schematics worked out on the computer. First there’s a drawing of the item, a cross *section*, an indication of its use, its surrounding components. Inches become centimeters, pounds into kilos and nails have become clavos. He makes great friends and is loved by everyone for his willingness to learn. What’s his New Year’s resolution? “I promise to use verbs this year.” What’s next year’s?” “I promise to use them correctly.” That might be a good idea.

One evening I eavesdropped on him talking to an inebriated Abel. When he finally made it back to bed, Bear asked me how well he’d done. “Well,” says I, “Other than inviting yourself to go home to bed with him tonight I gotta admit you did pretty good.” Poco a poco. Indeed, little by little.

## Toyota

“I think he’s dying, Nanci” I heard Maria yell from the backyard. Maria was working the soup kitchen and I’d sent her out to see what the chickens were making such a fuss over. “You think who’s dying?” I asked as I joined her along the perimeter of our lot. She pointed into the bushes. “Him, I think he’s dying.” At the base of a guarumo tree I could see movement deep down in the thick bush. A three-toed sloth had fallen out of the tall tree and his heavy ‘ka-thunk’ had startled the chickens in the yard.



Although sloths have been known to fall out of tall trees and survive, they don’t make a practice of it so I spread the bushes to get a better look. At the same time the smell hit me. I understood why Maria had made such a dire prediction. His left arm was only bone to his wrist with only a thin strip of hardened leather flesh covering his elbow. His hand hung loose, barely attached to the arm. There were burns on all of his feet. High tension lines, bane to wildlife. The pain he was in must have been incredible. I hollered at someone to bring me a box and a towel,

tucked him into the passenger seat of our ancient Hyundai and sped off to Avarios Sloth Sanctuary twenty miles away.

Judy and Luis Arroyo, owners of the sanctuary had run a bed and breakfast until the tremendous earthquake of 1991 hit and changed so many people's lives. As they were rebuilding, two young girls brought them a baby sloth. There was no one to ask how to care for it and the Arroyos became the resident experts. If anyone was going to save this little guy, it would be by Judy.

I could keep the smell away some by opening all the windows and driving as fast as the torturous unimproved roads would allow. At the police checkpoint we were obliged to wait in the hot sun for the bored and lethargic officer to saunter out from under the shade. As he was about to give me the requisite grilling about my paperwork and my destination, he stuck his head inside the passenger window. Both the fierce aroma and my reply must have been of one accord, and I gained my release in record time. He wasn't the least motivated to search the car.

Barry had phoned ahead and the staff of Avarios was ready for us. I was flattered when Judy asked me if I wanted to 'scrub up'. As soon as the anesthesia took, we were finally able to take a real good look. He had probably been living in this awful condition for over two weeks.

We would not be able to save his mangled limb. The gardener was sent for, a saw was found and we amputated the poor sloth's arm up almost to the shoulder.

Being an old rehabber from way back, I was used to working with wild animals. I've cared for raccoons and opossums, barn owls and bobcats. This was a first time, however that I'd been this close to a sloth. Aviarios was being overrun with baby sloths that had simply fallen off their mothers; a fall fifty feet to the forest floor; not reunite-able with their mothers. Their weakened condition is thought to be caused by poisons, air dropped for the banana plantations making the baby's lose their wills to survive. Power lines are the other major cause of casualties. Just recently a huge Tamandua anteater fell to his death from high wires a few meters down the road from here.

Our own unfortunate sloth, who turned out to be a male three-toed Bradypus earned the name Toyota for his endurance. Within minutes of coming to, he was eating as if he hadn't a care in the world. He now graces the convention hall at Aviarios as a living reminder of human 'advancement' and the tenacity of nature.

Be whatever you want to be. Happy. Sad.  
Weak. Strong. Joyful. Vengeful.  
Insightful. Blind. Good. Bad. Male.  
Female. You name it. I mean that literally.  
You name it.

**Neil Donald Walsh CWG 1**

## McNugget

“Well at least he’s got the brains God gave a chicken”

The chicken came into our lives one day as I was buying cat food at the vets in the little mountain town of BriBri. Two square cages out front were filled with the tiny yellow chicks. Once chick had a leg stretched out really weird and didn’t seem to be able to walk well, so I separated him out from the others and took him back inside the good doctor’s office.

“What’s wrong with him?” I asked, plunking the little guy down on the counter. “Deformed.” Came his short and somewhat obvious answer. “What are you going to do with it?” I asked. “Sacrificarlo,” came his answer. Kill it. “Démelo?” I asked, and when he nodded, I walked away from the vet’s office with the lucky little baby chicken.

Not knowing where else to stash it, I shoved the chick into the pocket of my shorts and continued on with my chores. Fridays were my big shopping days with thirty bags of groceries to pick up for “The Bridge” and a long list of ‘to dos’ ahead of me. The shrill peeping from

out of my pocket got me some really weird looks and I found that if I kept my hand pressed against my side, the little yellow fluff quieted right down. Then I'd just sort of look like I was nursing a sore hip.

I'd never had a chicken before and had no idea what I was going to do with this one. I figured it would probably bond quickly and we would get both the benefits and the disadvantages. I wondered what Bear would say. I was clueless yet somewhat reassured that the chicken was meant to become a part of our family. To help ease the transition, I suggested that Bear have the privilege of naming it and he and 'Chicken McNugget' began to develop a genuine rapport.

For about six weeks the chicken lived in my pocket. I spun around the house cooking, cleaning, doing yoga postures, running off to the store; the myriad of errands that make up "The Bridge". During soup days he would peak his beak out to get strokes from the indigenous people who'd shake their heads at the bizarre way they'd see us treat what they could only have considered food. Buena comida. Free-range chickens live around where we live. We encourage them to come around because they thrive on tarantulas, scorpions and baby snakes. So what's a little chicken poop? During the night the distant cocks would crow sounding rather homey being several lots away. However, Bear and I vowed we'd have to find a home for Mc Nugget if it turned out to be a 'he'. "When he crows, he goes." Was our agreed upon motto. With the chicken coop only ten feet from our bedroom window, we weren't looking forward to lusty lungs at two in the

morning. Tico roosters do not feel the necessity to wait until just before dawn to raise the neighborhood, if not the dead. I entertained the fantasy that since it was being raised by humans, the chicken might not learn to crow. To cinch it, I would hold the little thing and softly “coo coo ru coo coo”, dove-like in its ear. We hoped for a miracle.

In the mornings early after our readings, our prayers and my first cup of coffee, Bear and I would bring McNugget out from under the heated covers to give it flying lessons. Using a blanket, we'd trampoline the chick in the air like a high flying acrobat helping bring strength to both its wings and its crooked leg. Within days its deformity was gone.

McNugget loved Bridge days. Sad little children holding the little chick would find much to smile about. The bird's very delicate nature gentled the hardest of hearts. By the time we had to conclude that this chicken was a male, we could no longer bear the thought of giving him up, so each time he'd clear his throat, I'd softly repeat, “coo coo, coo, coo.”

McNugget soon began to sprout beautiful white plumes and a large scarlet comb. He liked to be held and petted and would stretch his head way out to get his neck stroked. Mayra and the kids named him

“Sududula”, which simply means ‘white’ in BriBri. They suggested only half in jest that we add him to the vegetable soup. ‘Sududula sopa’ they would call out and we’d all get a laugh. Chicken hung around sharing soup and cuddles with everyone who came to The Bridge becoming himself a bridge uniting the two cultures in laughter.

Mc Nugget grew and grew and grew, being fed on veggie soup, corn, tarantulas and love. He attracted the attention of two neighborhood chicks and soon he was a family of seven. Was it time to put on an addition to his coop? Then the inevitable day came when he stretched his head high and in a lusty voice yelled, “Cock a Doodle Doo!” Oh dear.

Having a rooster in heat is both laughable and disturbing. “Just what is he doing with my sandals?” “Why is he chasing the yoga instructor down the street?” At the time we had about decided we were gong to have to find a more suitable home for him and his amorous advances, Chicken McNugget solved the problem himself by falling over dead of a heart attack one night in his cage. He had had a short but glorious life and we will miss him dearly.

Common sense ruled over sentimentality. Bear and I sent his precious portly remains home with Mayra and her seven kids for their long awaited Sududula Soup.

## **There Are Pollywogs in My Drinking Water!**

Seasons in Costa Rica are unpredictable. I never know what to tell people when they ask me, “What month is the best to visit?” Since I happen to love the rainy season most I usually answer, “come down anytime, it’s always beautiful.’ I believe, however that spring sprang sprightlier with the rains this year, which may have caused our amazing amphibian infiltration.

What I particularly love about the rainy season is that it brings with it a plethora of wildly noisy night creatures. One in particular, I believe is labeled Drab Smilisca. This unfortunately named frog although only 6.5 centimeters in length, more than makes up in power and presence what it lacks in physical charm.

The dry season in the south east corner of the country kept us hauling water much of the time. Only in the wee hours of the night could we get enough pressure in the hoses to fill the half dozen plastic barrels that we try to keep full to run the soup kitchen.

I have always been fond of wildlife and completely willing to share my resources with them. We'd had so little rain for such a long time, however, that there were no longer any puddles to paddle and splash in, no places to plant their progeny. So after a long night of very loud fun, frolic and fornication, these webbed wonders wandered off into the wilderness leaving us in charge of their offspring. 5000 polliwogs evenly distributed among all six barrels of our precious drinking water.

During dry season, dumping the water out is unthinkable so I knew we had to use it. Equally unthinkable was to aid to their declining population by flushing the baby frogs down the toilet. It seemed I had no other choice but to supply them with their own container and care for the babies until the skies could at last present them with their own precious puddle.

What do baby polliwogs eat, anyway? Want to see a feeding frenzy? Drop a piece of hamburger into the water. Sort of like tiny piranhas. Scary! I thought I over did it the other day. Put too much food in the bowl and figured I'd have to dump the water out and give them fresh. The next day however, the water was crystal clear and fresh smelling. They even eat their own poop! Wish my kids had been so easy. Whoa, come to think of it they did eat their own poop. I guess I don't remember it being so charming then. Well, anyway....

So now that the rainy season has finally arrived, we're cultivating some really nice puddles. Barry and I are scouting the neighborhood for good homes for our babies. Not too near; the croaking from even one is enough to keep us awake at night. It's dizzying to imagine the voices from 5000.

Our gardener, Abilio, the faithful BriBri man watched quietly as I siphoned off the mosquito infested water, saving the newest batch of froglings for a pond or a puddle. "Nanci", he finally broke the silence, "We indigenous people kill everything. We cut the trees, we kill all the bugs; we pollute the rivers and hunt all the animals. When we see a snake we cut its head off."

"That's true," I replied. "If people want to see wildlife; monkeys, sloths, toucans and iguanas, I tell them to not bother going into the reserve, but to take the main road to Manzanillo. That paved highway is protected and the only place around here to see wildlife."

"But you, you even save the pollywogs." He uttered incredulously, "You even doctor your own chickens. Now my daughter Katie wants me to start saving pollywogs too."

"For me," I answered, everything is God. It has to be. How could I not love all things? I feel a kinship with everything natural. That silly

chicken is like a sister to me. I really care about her and all the animals and plants, and your Katie. You probably don't have a chance with her passion. She's a natural born rehabber who loves all of nature too. And you and your people at one time *all* used to feel that way too." I could see he was thinking that one over. After a while he looked over to me and answered sadly, "Yes, you're right about that."

Every morning, first thing, I check on our babies to make sure of one thing; that they have not sprouted tiny feet and escaped throughout the house. Long before that, we will have relocated them and the new batch that just came in this morning after another sleepless fun filled night, again covering the tops of all six water barrels. There will be no shortage of the Drab Smilisca frogs this year. Long live the species.

## **Ronualdo and the Medicine Men**

It was about as the year was coming to a close when the Solano Vargas family moved into the area. Fresh out of the interior, they weren't yet familiar with the Spanish language and as such unable to communicate. The four boys, Danny, 14, Erick, 12, Erasmo, 10, and Ronualdo, 9 years old began to make up their own language. At first I thought they were trying to mimic English, it sounded so close, but then I realized that their gibberish was a great and successful attempt to level the playing field. So Barry and I gibbered back in kind, earning us instant acceptance into their new and totally foreign world. "Ba stabba da o mono oi sabanna." one of them would say to me and I'd offer back, "weea ho ho caba daya!" And off we'd go learning more about each other than if one of us had had a superior grasp of the language. Now that they speak Spanish, I kind of miss the early, easy, silly days.

The boys are relatives to the Vargas Vargas family, their mother is sister to Abel, Mayra's troubled husband. I was relieved to note that this group seemed to be caring and functional if not educated. Nobody in the family had ever had any formal schooling, so I began my campaign to get all the little Indigenous boys enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> grade when school began again in February.

Kids all over the world have different advantages and disadvantages. My granddaughter in Tennessee has been playing computer games since she was two. Like most American kids, she's had coloring books, paints, story books and all sorts of learning tools preparing her wonderfully for a grand entrance when she'd start her formal education at five. These boys, however, had never even heard the Spanish language, had never used a phone, ridden in a car, sat on a toilet seat, seen themselves in a mirror, held a pencil or a crayon; had never even seen a book or any written language. They were going to start in school in just three months to study totally foreign topics in a language they that were just now having to use. The sun goes down here at five thirty year around. They would be doing their homework



by candle light. We ask a lot from these children.

The public school in Puerto Viejo is purported to be *the* worst in Costa Rica, but I have hopes that with at least a couple of years under their belts and maybe some tutoring at The Bridge, our kids can learn enough reading and math skills to keep them from being too badly taken advantage of.

The day I introduced Elda to Don Candido, our BriBri medicine man, she had brought Ronualdo down from the mountains to find help for a chest cold he had developed. Of the two of them, the great healer himself seemed to be in the greater crisis. He was clearly distraught. Apparently, the farm land where he has been growing his miracle pharmacopoeia of plants belongs to a neighbor Tica woman. She'd just put the property up for sale and was stubbornly refusing him access to it unless he could cough up her \$48,000 asking price. Sick with grief, he told us he was no longer able to take anymore patients because the land was off limits to him. Pulling from his available stores, he brewed Ronualdo up a tea, and teary with disbelief we went on our way.

A few days later, Elda brought her sick child back to me. Even with Candido's tea, Ronualdo hadn't been able to shake the cold. With no other option open to her, Elda had to learn the ways of the clinic. I took her for her first run through, early that morning around seven. Then, after seeing her through the registration process, I left, leaving her instructions on how and where to use the bus back home. Apparently they had waited in that cold and scary facility until nearly closing time, and then Ronualdo got a quick checking over and was sent away untreated.

Ronualdo was now in worse shape than ever. He was even having trouble breathing. This time, too, he was joined with his three older brothers and their father, all suffering from one stage or another of chest cold. The clinic put the sad little kid on oxygen for several hours

until nearly morning and then transferred him and his mom to the hospital in Limon an hour and a half away. Pneumonia. 'Now', I thought, 'At last he's in good hands.' Armed with new hope and a plethora of pharmaceuticals for the rest of the family, we headed back home.

I hadn't expected to hear back from Ronualdo and his mom for a few days, so I was surprised that in after just two, they returned to The Bridge. The sick little boy hadn't even been treated at the hospital. At first chance, they had put him back into another ambulance and had sent him back home. So, let's try it again. This time the doctor on call at the clinic was Doctor Brown, a very capable and delightful man with a smile and bedside manners I've never seen elsewhere. After some shouting and very un-Brown-like language to someone on the phone, Dr. Brown admitted that the staff at the hospital, some who didn't like indigenous people, had sent him away, once again, untreated. One more time, as we watched the ambulance drive off, I sincerely hoped that our seriously sick little boy would finally this time get the treatment he so well deserved.

I made the hour and a half trip to Limon once during the ten days or so that Ronualdo was being kept. Elda had had no money or clean clothes for days. There is no food available for relatives, and the mother sleeps in a chair beside her child's bed. After several days, I suspected she might appreciate a change of under things. I had also picked out a couple of coloring books and a stuffed teddy bear to take

to our sick little kid. It made my heart break to see him hooked up to a drip line of chemicals foreign to his system, and to see too the look of disbelief he gave me when he realized I was going back home without him.

I could hear him crying from a very long ways off a week or so later when his mom brought him yet again to me. The funny little imp I once knew was gone. In his place this child's face held the look of great fatigue and pain after the long and arduous battle that he seemed to be losing. His body was now stiff as rigor mortis, swollen in places twice its normal size, with a case of hives surrounding his traumatized body: terrible reactions to a foreign and poisonous medicine. I'd never seen a child so sad. It was time to try Candido again.



It took a month after Don Candido snuck back onto the old lady's farm for Ronualdo to become his old self again. The good doctor had gathered wonderful teas and body washes, and slowly the swelling began to taper off until finally rupturing from a quarter sized hole on his left thigh, spewed the foul poisons and antibiotics of western medicine. Then Ronualdo's

father also hired a one-eyed BriBri shaman to lift the family hex he believes has made them all sick. It seems that some of the Vargas Vargas are feuding with the Solano Vargas for I don't know what and hexes aren't that uncommon down here. It's all part of living in the jungle.

And so, what happened to Don Candido's stingy old neighbor lady? Well, during her own land investigation, it was discovered in a great karmic stroke, that what she *thought* was *her* land also happened to be indigenous property and since she herself hadn't a drop of indigenous blood, she was to be paid \$7000 by the government and told she had to move out. Candido is once again back in business.

## Just a Thought

I was standing at the dining room table concocting about four gallons of fresh fruit juice, when Carmelita came to me with one of our new donated coloring books. The words (1) red, (2) blue, (3) yellow, et cetera, were written as suggestions to be colored on the page.

As one of the first in our school program, and at that time in her fourth year, I knew that Carmelita had started studying English. So, standing side by side, practically touching, I began to teach her the colors.



“(#1) red, means rojo. (#2) blue, means azul. (#3)...” “Not these”, she impatiently interrupted, and pointing to the last color in the row, she asked, “What is this color, (#5)?” “Flesh.” I answered, “Flesh is the color of skin. The word also means skin; ‘piel’ in Spanish.” Looking down at our touching arms; mine, the color of freckled wheat, hers being the color of milk chocolate, she asked, “Whose skin is the color of flesh, yours or mine?” “I don’t know,” I admitted, “you tell me.” “Mine,” she returned with a smile. “And so it is!” said I, as she happily bounced off to play. Ya gotta love it.

The Blind cannot lead the blind. There must be a seeing eye. Develop this inward vision. Understand who and what you are and why you cannot help being happy, and you will bring joy to everyone whom you contact.

Earnest Holmes

## Jackie and Joseph

Down “Crack Alley” in one of the seediest parts of Puerto Viejo, Jacqueline’s mother, user and maker of crack, carries out her ruined existence. The broken down shack is strangely quiet during the daytime, now. All of the minor children had been taken by child welfare and had been placed in foster care facilities and orphanages. Jackie was no longer a minor. When she wasn’t at home, she was living under a plastic bag on the beach with Joseph.

In the earlier years of Puerto Viejo, the tiny town used to be called Old Harbor. There was prosperity and hope among the black immigrants who settled all along the Caribbean shores. Jackie’s family made a name for themselves with a prosperous coconut business.

As drugs were introduced into the area, Jackie’s family succumbed to the lure of its deadly attractions and the coconut business was exchanged for quick cash, a quick fix and the turn of a quick trick.

When we first met Jackie, she was thirty-three and starving. By the time she was only twelve, she had already had a child with a runaway

boyfriend, and then had had another two or three more by her stepfather a couple of which were living at the make shift orphanage in town with the rest of the minor children in her family. Her stepfather had finally been corralled, and was serving 43 years hard time. Jackie had been kicked out of the house for having 'finked on daddy'.

From out of the foulest of swamps come the most beautiful of lilies. Inside this wrecked and wracked body of abuse and disregard are still seeds of the God child she's meant to be. God reached in his hand and deposited into her life a man named Joseph; gentle, tall, skinny, religious, complicated and also hooked on crack, the dread-locked 'Lancelot' showed up just in time to prod the police from their lethargy and get Jackie's step-father thrown in jail.

As we know, the blind do not well lead the blind. Our knight in shining armor, having his own set of dramas, barely kept his own head above water.

The couple first came to us filthy, broken, dangerously starved and terribly hooked. "The Bridge" soup kitchen became the place they could come and experience acceptance. In town they were just two more of the lost ones; two more to avoid; two more to label 'unclean'. As yoyo's do and addicts, they'd go from strong and hopeful to broken and damned and back again and again and again.

And he asked of Jesus. "Master, how often must I forgive this man, seven times?" And the master replied, "No, seventy times seven." We saw only the purity beneath the tortured face of these young people. "Jackie," I would tell her, "I only see God when I see you. There is a place in you that has never been violated or abused. In my eyes you are whole, perfect and complete." They would both gobble up books from the Spiritual section of our library, and bed down at night in the tall grasses with their own true favorites. There's always hope.

"How can you keep letting them in after you do so much and still they slip again, you're enabling them," doom-sayers would volunteer. But I have been asked to 'feed the poor, love my brother, and turn the other cheek.' Never did I hear, 'Except in cases of...'. Whether you're down and out or hopeful and strong, wealthy or indigent, The Bridge attempts to serve hugs and unconditional acceptance along with soup.

After a particularly bad backslide, Jackie's body began to give up and for the second time in a year, she needed six pints of blood to keep her alive. It was a few weeks before they showed their faces at The Bridge. They silently entered and quietly sat down out of sight at a table behind the trees. They were stone cold sober and terribly sad. She had just lost Josephs baby, her only one created from love. It appeared they had finally discovered bottom.

Silently I slipped in behind her and wrapped my arms around her. “Jackie,” I said again, “There is a place in you that has never been touched, has never been hurt, and is pure as the day God gave you life. You are the daughter of God, beloved and loved. I see only the Christ in you. Let yourself find that place.”

The Bridge is gifted with wonderful things from all over the world. Just that morning we had received a nice donation of crayons and coloring books. Barry had announced that he wanted to ‘talk to those two’, so I asked the two of them to come in and I sat three of the new books and a box of crayons down in front of her thinking she might be more comfortable if she had something to do with her hands. After rejecting two of the coloring books, she leafed through the third and settled on a puzzle that matched letters to numbers to create a phrase. Bear sat down with the troubled pair and lovingly began his fatherly, ‘you just gotta get off drugs’ talk. Not much time went by when Jackie’s eyes got wide, and with a loud squeak of surprise, lifted up the page she’d been working on. The half finished puzzle she had chosen read “SAY NO TO DRUGS”. Barry got quietly up and said, “Jackie, you’ve just heard the voice of God. I can’t add a thing to that.” And with that, he went back into the house. And what was written on the second half of the puzzle? “MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE.”

Our lives at The Bridge are very often magical and wonderful. But when it hit me what the Universe had to have gone through in order for this phenomenon to occur on our front porch at this exact time, I

began to wonder at the magnitude of the hidden support system that is ever ready to come to our assistance. God had indeed parted the Red Sea again.

Within two weeks, our now even more determined young couple *had* made the right choice with the prodding of the head hooker in town who (it is reported), burned down their makeshift shack. Early one morning we hugged them good-bye, and off they went to start thirteen months of voluntary separation and lock-up. As the bus pulled away, we were filled with tears, prayers and hope that this time spent away would be everything that they would need.

When you came into this world, you cried and everyone else smiled. You should so live your life that when you leave, everyone else will cry, but you will be smiling

Paramahansa Yogananda

## I Call Him 'The Funky Chicken'

It was on a sunny Monday afternoon, as Constantino and I worked around the house to pretty it up for Christmas, when a pigeon flew against the side of the startled man's head. Maybe the pigeon (he or she, I don't know,) was trying to land, but instead slid clumsily down Constantino's sweaty shoulders like a slip-and-slide in an amusement park and then plopped unceremoniously to the dirt at his feet. The bird shook his tiny head, took in his surroundings, nodded his approval, made some delightful little cooing sounds, and moved in for the next two days.



I guess we'll call him 'Funky Chicken'

The pigeon appeared tame; didn't startle to the noisy activities going all around us as we worked in and out of the house. He just seemed worn out but contented to be in our happy atmosphere. I checked the whereabouts

of our two fat and lazy but capable cats, Tica and Bitts, saw that they were indeed couch potatoes for the day and then I let him make himself at home. He liked the rice I'd made the crew for lunch. I made sure he had water and other things I thought pigeons would like to eat and kept half an eye on the cats aware of a very slim chance they might be enticed away from their Rip Van Winkle slumbers before

supper time. I made a few phone calls hoping to locate someone who knew someone in the neighborhood who knew about pigeons. Pigeons mate for life. I thought he must have a family somewhere who'd be missing him right about now.

While we continued our day with tree trimming and raking, the pigeon flew around the house occasionally, exploring, but never getting higher than the tops of the chicken coops, unacceptable in the land of cats and coatis, raccoons, wildcats and possums. Without lift, he had no defense against anything, so as evening came on, I realized he was still in no condition to take off for home and we were going to have to board Funky Chicken for the night.

The pigeon had become easy to catch toward dark even by me, he'd become tired from the work out and excitement of the day. So I snatched him up and bedded him down in our ancient cat carrier that Bear had dug out from its dusty hiding place. The broken down carrier had seen a lot of use. It has carried baby pigs, cats, hawks, parrots, possums, and toucans, to mention a few. Even with the cage washed, I imagined the unfamiliar smells and environment must have been frightening to him and he cooed and pleaded mournfully, maybe finally fully realizing he was indeed spending the night away from his familiar surroundings. I wadded up a sock about his size for company and brought him close to our window so he could hear our voices and wouldn't feel so lonely, and he fussed for about an hour like any displaced soul might, then he gave it up to sleep and was quiet the long night through.

Next morning our new roommate rewarded us with a sweet good morning medley, seemingly none the worse for ware because of his tiny prison stay. I concocted something yummy for his tummy and shooed his little birdie butt outside hoping he'd gained enough strength during the night to take off for home; although we had

already developed an attachment to the energy of his presence and would be sorry to see him go. The pigeon appeared to be in no hurry though, but again hung out all day, working his wings and the crowds; a real people pleaser. I had checked the cats again. First thing in the morning they had shown a glimmer of interest in the bird. Then, once fed, they discovered the couch and we were home free again, I hoped, till suppertime.



The Pigeon made himself the talk of the community during soup kitchen that day as he visited with the folks filling their bellies, coloring in books and working in the yard. He responded to Bear and I when we cooed to him as he

strengthened his wings in the safe environment of The Bridge. Still the cats slept on, never even noticing the audacious aviarian interloper attracting all the attention from the crowd.

As the pigeon got braver that day, he began following me onto the front porch, in and out as I poured coffee and served soup. I'd hold the door open and in he'd come, eventually joining me in the kitchen at the sink, now flying through the house just inches above the heads of the still unaware slovenly slumbering cats.

Evening moved us all indoors at about the same time the cats discovered their empty stomachs. I wondered at the wisdom of having

them all get acquainted. Then as Tica stretched fully awake, the suicidal bird flew directly over her head. The “NO!” from both of us stopped her in her mid flight strike, and the old cat instantly settled into a bored expression, began a bath and never gave the pigeon another glance. Bitts appeared to lose interest too, but we felt that this cat might bear watching for a little while longer.

Meanwhile our newest houseguest made himself at home, responding to our silly cooing by flying from my shoulder to Bear’s, gaining altitude, soaring up through the rafters. We both felt it expedient to shut off the overhead fan, not *even* wanting to face what could happen if the bird flew into it, this bird to which we had already become so attached.

Most evenings, for the first couple hours, I do my thing and Bear does his; his back to me, working at the computer; my back to him, working at the sink. Sometimes the evenings seem long. But that Tuesday night with the pigeon in the house, we got the show of a lifetime.

On a large wooden end table alongside the couch rests our tiny boom box. The music we had chosen to listen to that evening was a CD called “Prayer”; beautiful prayers from all around the world in a dozen of the world’s religions. Much to our surprise, he began to tap dance on the six inch round slippery surface, frustrating himself when he’d slide off, but



hopping back on determined to entertain us with his amazing love for music (or life). It looked like he was dancing the ‘funky chicken’.

I had to drape a washrag over the silver box to give him better footing and protect the thing from any well-aimed accidents.

And around and around he danced, spinning in a circle, his head going in every direction, taking breaks only when the music got too slow for his liking by swooping through the house, thrilled with the strength he was gaining in his wings. Being witness to such joy in this precious bird, we wondered what we had done to deserve such a treat. We sort of wished he would make his home with us. We sort of knew he probably had a home of his own.

It was with great reluctance that we bedded him down at last for the night. He had been a shot in the arm for us; a reminder to lighten up. This time he made very little fuss as I arranged the bedding for him in the old cat carrier, and he cooed contentedly for long after we switched off the light. It had been a great day topped off by a great party supplied by a silly pigeon.

Wednesday morning, as the sun came up, we shoed him out of doors again and watched as the bird raced around the house gaining even more strength and altitude. Then after one last check-in at us through the window, he took off like a shot, leaving silence and a void we hadn't known existed until then.

It's been a while, now. I keep hoping he'll come back, bringing his wife and family to visit. Every once in a while I hear cooing way off in the distance, mournful, soft, and wonder if it's him, and I am glad we were given the opportunity to once again serve in such a delightful manner and in such an unusual way.

Beauty never withheld itself from him. It has not delivered itself from others. There is no such thing as a special dispensation of Beauty to any one individual or to any group, no matter what their belief may have been.

**Holmes Ernest**

## **We have a howler monkey in the trees overhead!**

“It sounds like a sick dog.” Barry was looking out over the lake at a tree in the distance. The eerie glow of the amazing sunrise illuminated a gentle spume off Mount Arenal giving the impression of lazy cotton candy draped sleepily over one side of this most energetic and picture perfect volcano.

“What sounds like a sick dog?”

“I dunno,” he answered, sliding up closer to the shiny wooden railing over looking the valley to Lake Arenal, now boasting metallic pink from the glare of the mighty sky.

“It’s a howler monkey,” I said, yawning, as I joined him on the porch.

“No, there’s a dog out there, sounds like he’s got a cold.”

“It’s a howler monkey,” I repeated. “Look up in that tree over there.” I pointed out. “It looks like a black ball against the bright sky. No distinct features from this distance.”

He was howling to greet the morning. Welcome to Mono Congo; the amazing howler monkey, Mono Congo. I’m still enchanted by them even after all these many years. We look for them everywhere we go; on a bus to Limon, on a zip line strung through the trees, a stroll to

Manzanillo, or the sandy forests all along the beach. I can imitate them pretty well but it's hard on the voice. And I have to be careful; I had one follow me home one time, and I have *no* idea what I'd do with him.

We live under the dense canopy of the Talamanca foothills. We hear hearing them at about four in the morning way off in the distance wailing their plaintive cry. Once Bear and I had even become temporary parents to a little one whose mommy had probably been eaten. I've rehabbed lots of different types of animals. This one was sure different. The doctoring book says you're supposed to rub their food in their own feces for some reason or other that I never did figure out. He solved the problem for me. He never pooped one time the week I had him. Everyone who came to visit the little guy wanted to feed him a banana. He got so constipated that even after three suppositories, spoons of cod liver oil and I forget what else, he was still stopped up by the time we got someone in the know to take him off our hands. I've got to hand it to the guy at the other end of the line when our little fella finally did let go. I'll bet there was plenty to rub his food in then.

About a month ago, an ousted adult howler monkey moved into our immediate neighborhood. According to those who study them, adult males don't co-exist well in the wild, so the unfortunate weaker members, and the old males are kicked out to start a new life on their own. In their new territory, the young ones loudly announce their

attentions for a new bride while the elders loudly proclaim the injustice of being ousted and replaced by younger competition.

It's been written that the second noisiest animal on the planet is the howler monkey, seconded only by the trumpeting of an elephant. And this one's only about the size of a large house cat. It's impressive being jerked awake at four in the morning by a howler monkey sounding his clarion call in announcement of the morning light. I half expected to see something the size of a gorilla, swinging through the trees overhead.

Finally after about a month of making the saddest sounding calls, this lonely monkey was successfully joined by another. The two became one, and they have moved off in the distance where we still hear them, but faintly; the wooooooooooooo, sounding something like the mournful wailing of a displaced ghost. Even with my well-mastered monkey call, I know I can never replace the joy of a real union. Ah, well, such is life. We'll miss them of course. May they live long and happy lives.

When we come to know our inner God,  
which is our true Self, we will know that  
the divine is in everybody.

**Howard Murphet**

## Katie and the Piglet

“Mommy, I want you to buy me a bicycle,” pronounced the precocious five year old with the assurity of a kid twice her age. “I start school next year and I don’t want to walk that far.” Katie, last in line, but certainly not least already had her mind set forward towards kindergarten although school for her was still a good eight months



away. But after having studied her four older brothers and sisters, all now in fifth grade, trudge the hour-long trek through jungle and dusty road, she’d had plenty of time to conclude that *that* much walking was not in the cards for *this* child. Dutifully her mother Maria went off to price the child’s wishes and returned with the sad news that *never* would she ever be able afford such a ‘luxury’ for her little Indigenous child. The eighty-dollar price tag was way out of the poor woman’s reach. Only slightly discouraged, Katie went off to play at her Aunt Juanita’s house,

hugging her new little puppy against her warm body.

Aunt Juanita was an enterprising and conscientious old BriBri woman. She raised pigs to sell for tamales and iguanas to repopulate the jungle. Although she was forbidden to practice her skills because she was a woman, she came from a long line of curranderos, and was respected for what she knew of medicinal plants.

As the two of them played with the new puppy, you could see that Juanita would really like to have a little puppy 'just like this one'. It was then that Katie spied a tiny black piglet rooting around under one of Juanita's iguana cages. "Oooo, what a cute little piggy!" Katie exclaimed, ditching the puppy. "I would like to have him for my own," she added as she scooted down beside the little animal, and he squealed as she squeezed him to her chest. "I can't give him to you," Juanita explained. "Several months from now, when he's big and fat someone will pay me a hundred dollars for him. As it is, I had to pay eighteen dollars for this little one."

"I will trade you my puppy for this pig," declared little Katie, "and when he's big, I will sell him and then I will have the money to buy a bicycle on which to ride to school."

And so our mini mogul traded leash for rope, puppy for piglet, planted a kiss on the old woman's wrinkled and sun worn cheek, and cheerfully led the little animal towards home. I suspect we haven't heard the last from our youngest entrepreneur. I don't envy her teachers when school starts for her next year.

## Marvin is Learning to Smile

Recently seventeen year old Marvin was flipping through recent photographs of himself and others here at The Bridge. “Nanci,” he said to me, “In all my pictures I’m frowning. The others have smiles on their faces, but me, I’m always frowning. I guess if I had something to smile about, I would smile more.”



“Look at your older photos.” I answered, “In them you have a really nice smile. It hasn’t been gone long. If you think about it, you have a lot to smile about. You live in the most beautiful country in the world with a clean ocean you can swim in every day and a climate that never gets cold. You have your health, family and friends. You even eat every day. I know that your life has been hard, and *that* is also the case with everyone else here too. As unfair as it might seem, the universe works like this. If you want good in your life, you must look forward to it’s coming to you. Those who use bidi bidi (poor me) phrases live bidi bidi lives. You must smile in anticipation of good in order to signal to the universe that you are ready to receive ‘good’ and you will be rewarded for your efforts; ‘Fake it till you make it’.”

A few days later I was bent over a massive bowl of fruit when he bumped my arm for attention. I was slow to respond and bent on finishing my project, so he bumped me again. I looked up into Marvin's face that held a sh-eating grin. When I asked him, "What's up?" He replied, "Just practicing." How sweet it is.

*Give and it will be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give unto your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

**Jesus**

## Maria



Maria became my main house gal practically as soon as we moved to Costa Rica. At 4'ft10", this tiny, young, BriBri woman was shy, reserved unable to speak much Spanish with a baby on one hip and a stair-step up of four other young children; the oldest being eight. She had come from a turbulent and abusive family and, hidden from the truant officers and child protective services when they came to call. Way inside the interior of the reserve, children had to be bussed and boarded far away and were only allowed to come home on weekends. Maria's mother reasoned not necessarily accurately that Maria would be in even more danger at school. So instead of dealing with at all, she arranged an early marriage to get the 'troublesome child' out of the house, and the truant officers and child protective service off her back.

Even at 13, Maria knew what she didn't want. With cigarette burns tattooing her own back from her own drunken father's 'foreplay', she vowed not to accept a pre- arranged marriage to a drinking man, and so her intended, Abilio, became permanently sober, took his role as

man of the house seriously, and began a family with this ignorant but very wise young woman-child.

Every house Maria has ever lived in has had a dirt floor, so I knew that I couldn't expect her idea of clean to be that of my own. Through the years she has learned much and has taught me much.

Maria celebrated her 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday this year. She told me that Katie, now nine, was recently playing with her seven year old friend Ivonne in a cute little playhouse that Abilio had built for his daughter to keep her toys and herself out of the rain. The girlfriend was marveling at how many toys Katie had accumulated.



“How do you do it?” She asked of Katie. “I give stuff away.” Katie answered decisively. “What do you mean?” enquired the puzzled child. “The more you give, the more you receive.” The wise little child began. “Just the other week I had a visit from a very poor cousin from Amoubri, many days walk away. She doesn't have anything! I had two baby dolls and although it hurt me to give it up, I let her take home the smaller of the two. Within a week, a friend of my moms, who has a

daughter a year older than I am, brought me this one.” And she proudly held up a lovely knew little baby doll ½ again the size of the one she had so generously given away.

Maria had been teaching her children to trust and know that they will not be left wanting. She also mentioned that on that same occasion, her middle daughter Maria Shirley was asked to give up some of her clothes to help this poor most desperate girl. It was tempting for Maria Shirley to feel petulant for having to share from her own meager wardrobe, but then she remembered her mother’s words, ‘the more you give, the more you receive’, and with raised spirits began to appreciate her own largess by comparison to that of her cousin, becoming more generous as she went. Her mother said the child from the interior went home with a garden sized bag of really nice things. Within three days, a large donation of new and used clothing, Maria Shirley’s size came through here at The Bridge more than ever making up for the sacrifice she had chosen to make. I wondered why she had been so reverent and quiet that day while sorting through these fine items that I had set aside for her.

But that’s not all, as they say. Maria told me a story of the day she and Abilio were determined to find the eggs that she knew were being laid by her five hens. The farm is large and rustic with many places for the hens to deposit their daily offerings. They dug in the undergrowth of the surrounding jungle, looked under the houses and shacks and

behind everything they could think of, only giving up after a protracted but fruitless search.

The next day dawned along with the arrival of a distant acquaintance hurting from financial woes and hunger, who hoped to take away with him something to fill up his empty belly. Maria also being pocket poor and with little food in her own cupboards, despaired of being able to help the unfortunate man. Then as she 'stilled' her mind she 'saw' the clutch of eggs in the field in the next property over from hers. Hidden beneath a pile of old tin roofing, all five hens had been laying their eggs; about forty in total. After a lunch of omelets and coffee, Maria was able to send the happy man away with a pouch filled with fresh chicken eggs.

And then again at about that time, Maria had enquired of the universe how she was to come up with the cash to pay the electric bill. She stood quietly 'listening' and was 'told' to open up a package of incense I had given her as a gift quite a while before. Inside, wrapped around the incense sticks that she could have found much earlier was a ten thousand colon bill; considerably more than what she owed for the electricity.

When you live in the now, you don't  
stiffen for the punch

Nanci Wright

## **I call it the Everything Bug**

“Falderee, Falderah, falderah, falderah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.” I always think of that old traveling song when I’m about to embark on a road trip. “My back pack on my back!” Depending on the type of transportation we use, obviously determines the size back pack. Our luggage must be very light this time because we will be on our own two feet thumbin’ rides. Maybe we’ll take a bus or two if they happen to be going where we want to go.

What’s this got to do with the Everything Bug? This little fellow is about the size of a gnat and is one of my greatest teachers regarding what not to Pack. I’ve never met a naked Everything Bug. By the time I notice the tiny insect, he has already begun to collect his baggage. Now I can’t say how this little guy happens to come by his grizzly cargo, maybe the spoils of war and feasting or just the detritus he’s found along the way. At any rate, this curious insect glues upon its body the empty remains of other tiny bugs, ants, gnats, flees, spiders; mostly too tiny to be recognized, until what once was a creature the size of a pin head, has now become the size of a pea.

I’ve often wondered what the purpose for this startling oddity is. Why would he take on such an unnecessary burden, making himself so

terribly clumsy? He can no longer walk a straight line or climb. Sure it makes him look bigger, but to what expense. Then again, maybe when everything in our world is so much bigger, somehow we have to puff ourselves up to be noticed.

I've got to laugh at Barry. We live in a tourist town, so when he sees a back packer with a HUGE pack, he inevitably asks, "Who's carrying the refrigerator?" A traveler I just happened to be on the bus with one day was traveling with a cello case. Nothing else. I assumed there was a cello in it, and that he had to have all his clothing tucked tightly all around the huge instrument, sort of like the Everything Bug. He gave me a dirty look when I just had to ask the inevitable, "Have you ever wished you had taken up the flute?"

Could it be that the Everything Bug slaps his conquests all over his body to advertise his prowess, somewhat like shrunken heads hung like macabre beads encircling the naked body of primitive man.

I suppose I am more civilized than that; no doubt I use more socially acceptable methods to seek for attention. Then again, it depends on where I am. But whether we are a peacock or a panther, a criminal or a clown, we all have our ways of getting noticed. When I'm around a group of new people, the poor folks have to suffer from my own brand of show and tell.

I used to travel with a whole lot of dead baggage just like the Everything Bug. I would pack fear of finances. Stuck. I would pack fear of failure. Stuck. I would pack fear of success. Stuck. I would pack fear of the past. Stuck; and on and on and on.

On the eve of our departure, I am especially aware of the Everything Bug. The past several days have been about preparation; shopping, cleaning, arranging; getting all our ducks in a row so we can fully leave the household running in our absence. But my own personal baggage will be light; a pair of flip flops, a bathing suit, a couple of shirts, pants, my jammies, my stuffed bunny, and a good book; and, oh, yeah, my own brand of show and tell to show and sell along the way. No dead weight to bind the past or the future to my bag. We'll carry no dead ancestors, current adversaries or future woes. We'll put our thumbs out and our hands in the hands of trust, and walk wholeheartedly into this moment of now. "Falderee, Faldera, Faldera, my knapsack on my back.

## **The Cock on the Block**

Here at The Bridge, we have a motto- “When he crows, he goes.” There doesn’t seem to be a law in this country for a rooster to wait until sunup before he throatily welcomes the morning. So one hears “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” all throughout the night. Since our chicken coops are a mere ten feet away from our bedroom window, ‘when he crows, he goes’. When our hens are in the mood to hatch baby chicks, we buy fertile eggs somewhere else.

Without a rooster on premises, the girls have had to fill the bill- or the beak, so to speak, of both genders. Two of our hens have each sprouted a long rooster feather, and now once in a while, we hear “urr ur ur urrrrrrrrrrrhhhhh!” as the ladies substitute for the ‘cock on the block’, locally known as ‘el gallo mas gallo’. So far we’ve been fortunate; the girls have been kind enough to wait until daylight.

One time, Mrs. Grey, a perfectly normal mamma chicken, was running with her babies across the yard to escape the clutches of a gavalan. The large hawk had been circling the skies overhead all day keeping the usually happy brood on edge and fearful.

As we watched, she stopped in her tracks. She turned around, leaned forward, and started to run- straight to the hawk, while letting out her chickenrooster yell at the top of her voice. As she approached the hawk, he turned and looked at her with a look I can only interpret as surprise. She did not slow down. She slammed right into that mighty hawk, knocking him off his claws and sending him beak over feet into the nearby hedge. He struggled to his feet, scrambled into the open, and got the hell outta there.

Mrs. Grey then turned and waddled back toward the other chickens huddled frozen together, who were looking at her with a look I can only interpret as respect. Strange things here.

And then came Corky.

## Two Thumbs up for Corky

One rainy day in December, Corky pecked his way into the world with a strong will and determination to beat the odds and survive. His head was somewhat on sideways and the amazing eleven tiny toes that he was 'given', sprouted in every direction and were clenched tightly into two little fists. As Corky ran, he would give the impression



of a fuzzy ping-pong ball crazily careening across its course. I figured with a little effort (ie. special food, special handling, 24 hour mommy-ing and lots of love), we could eventually include him with the rest of our unusual pet family. And then, if we found out that he was a he, he

might not be able to crow. You know; his head being on sideways and all might curtail any nocturnal emissions – vocally, of course.

His mother hen and brother chicks abused him, knowing with the brains that God gave a chicken; that severely disfigured members of the chicken family probably ought to be culled from the ranks. But I, being the long time rehabber that I am, do not have the brains that

God gave a chicken, so I culled him from the ranks and decided to try my hand at giving the enthusiastic little ping-pong ball a chance at life. So, Corky, short for corkscrew of course, hung out in my pocket for the first several weeks of his young life as I went about my chores around the house. Corky was contented to lie snugly against my hip as I worked one-handed on dishes or dusting while kneading his tiny tree-branch toes to encourage their development or giving him deep tissue massages on his neck and shoulders to encourage better alignment. In the mornings, Bear and I might bring Corky in to the house to give him flying lessons to strengthen his wings. Heck no we didn't know what we were doing, but we also knew that every day beyond his very first day on this planet was a bonus, so what could it hurt? Eventually his toes (all but one of them) opened up and spread enabling him to have enthusiastic, if not coordinated forward motion. He sort of ran sideways like a crab and bumped into things. Eventually, he had to move out of my pocket. It was getting pretty cramped down there.

Corky bonded to both Bear and I and followed us around the house until finally he had to be evicted, (I've never been able to potty train a chicken) meanwhile even then he always stayed within earshot. If we'd clear our throats, he'd cough too, and before long we may have a great "conversation" going. Anyway, he was happy. He'd held two wives and although his aim was poor, the hens thought he was wonderful, having themselves never seen the neighborhood competition who lived with his own brood down the road a bit.

Corky made a great teaching example. We had bought him along with a baker's dozen of fertile eggs from a neighboring farm to be hatched by one of our own hens. These neighbors had been spraying pesticides along the edges of the road. When someone in our community would ask us how Corky came to be this way, we would then have the opportunity to teach about poisons and the environment.

Corky was a great motivator. During community kitchen one sunny afternoon, I happened to be serving soup to a little boy named Jefferson. This little Indigenous kid had been showing up here with his family for a while. But this day I noticed something peculiar about one of his hands. As I approached closer to look, he quickly hid it under the table. His Grandma spoke quietly as she explained that he was born with two thumbs on his left hand, which his parents had chosen not to have surgically removed when he was a baby. The kids picked on him at school so he was a bit sensitive about it.



Before I could think of what I was doing, I had grabbed the child up, had given him a big hug and hauled him across the yard to where Corky was scratching for bugs in the dirt. "Look", I said, "I have a chicken with eleven toes and he's my favorite chicken in the whole wide world. Now you're my favorite little boy in the whole wide

world." Jefferson squatted down to check out the incredibly lucky chicken with the amazing toes and then looked up at me with a marvelous grin. I could see a new look in his eyes.

Weeks later, Jefferson reported to me that one of the kids at his school had been picking on him again. This time he got right in the kids face and announced, "So what, I have a friend who has a chicken with eleven toes!" "Oh, no you don't." The bully challenged. "Oh yes I do and I can prove it to you!" That seemed to silence the lad.

But not so Corky. True to his nature and with a few modifications, I might add, Corky, just like his brothers in the 'hood', split the long night silence with lustily lilting chords of cacophonous canción. What ever happened to our "If it crows, it goes" motto?

Corky wasn't with us for long, anyway; there seemed to be more wrong with him than meets the eye. Long enough time though for him to create a really happy family of a beautiful red hen and seven little chicks who stayed with him till the end, each chick perfectly endowed with the requisite eight toes, no more.

So Corky, "two thumbs up!" Or a whole lot more. If you never did another thing in your precious bumbling little life, you definitely earned your wings.

## **After The Trees Fell**

For a long time after the trees fell I wished my own world could have somehow come to an end too. I no longer wanted to live in a world where so many cared so little about the future of this precious planet. I cried, “God forgive us for we know not what we do!” Beam me up Scottie. Take me away from these blind stupid fools.” My tears never stopped for the months that the tree slaughter went on. Every time a tree went down, it was like I was experiencing my own mother’s death all over again. The ripping of the blades through the ancient monsters was only slightly less awful than the pause before the terrible crash, bringing yet another of her beautiful life giving trees to the forest floors, depriving monkeys, sloths, toucan’s iguana’s, and so many more of the animals who live within them, too numerous to mention, of their natural homes and corridors for moving throughout the jungle.

In San Diego, when I moved into the house I ended up living in for the next 38 years, it was surrounded by trees and wild animals; raccoons, skunks, lizards, snakes, birds, squirrels, opossums, foxes, rabbits, owls, and bugs. The new human neighbors didn’t much like the bugs. So between the dogs and the DDT, our neighborhood was successful in eradicating not only all the bugs, but also all the wild animals too. Towards the end of those thirty eight years, I watched as almost all the ‘bothersome’ trees were leveled and the rare animals

that we did come across were now becoming crippled and diseased and trying unsuccessfully to survive within their own poisoned environment.

Now I was watching it happen all over again. The once dense forest behind our house was becoming a slaughterhouse of decaying trees, now corpses, lying across one another like pick-up-sticks from hell, devoid of life and no longer life giving. And then slowly, unendingly being torn apart literally limb by limb to be made into lumber, the incessant whine of the killing machines sending rivulets of fear throughout all the remaining forest, and stoking the terrible grief in my own ripped open heart.

The morning was slightly overcast and still when the tree butchers returned to the lot behind our house. Soup kitchen was underway with six tables on the platform and two tables inside occupied by our local indigenous neighbors. Usually, even though we live right on the highway, our home is a haven, a lush, relatively quiet and safe place for the less than privileged people of this area to come share a healthy meal and a friendly community. The butchers had been gone for several days and I'd had my hopes that they had done all the damage that they were planning on doing. With sinking heart, I checked the clock to see if I could bug out of work before the cutting got started, only to see that the traitorous time piece was stuck on 'way too early'.

With one ear on the platform and the needs of the people, and the other glued to the goings on behind the house, I was yanked out back by the sound of a hard tap, tapping. Two of the workers were hanging

out beneath one of the few trees left untouched nearby. One had a machete and was whacking at the biggest one closest to me, kind of like a kid pulling the legs off bugs. By the time I reached the fence, I had left common sense and neighborly decency behind. I couldn't bear to see yet another tree go down. I couldn't stand to feel the tearing in my guts again and like a wild woman unwisely accused the unenlightened man of trying to single handedly destroy the rainforest. As just as neighborly, he countered by promising to do just that right in front of my very eyes if I didn't 'get the hell out of there and mind my own damn business'.

Fury, fear and despair shook me to the core of my being as he went back to hacking at that beloved tree again. I stood stock still in the center of the yard frozen with dread. An anger unearthed from the underworld threatened to slay me with its intensity and I saw thru a red cloud. Knowing somehow that I had to save that tree, and having no idea what I was doing, I called on all the forces who might be listening, to keep these men from hurting this tree, "God, whatever it takes, don't allow this to happen, make them stop this, make them stop this now!" In less than a minute the sky turned black, the huge rain cloud being pushed by a horrendous wind that began to tear through the trees; leaves and small branches being blown in every direction. The workers, no longer having much shelter of their own, had the audacity to find a safe place underneath one of our own huge trees until I routed them out with a well aimed umbrella, and a curse that I hoped a tree branch might fall on their heads.

The wind and rain blew intensely; wild and crazy, for about a half an hour then the sky returned once again to the same slightly overcast way it had been before. On the platform, the people were abuzz with the wonder of the freak storm they had all just been witness to.

But it wasn't long before I heard the workers back in the same place, and the tack, tack of the machete telling me that the tree I had tried to save was again in peril. So I repeated what I had done before, ignorantly but desperately calling on any 'body' out there that might help keep this tree from being in danger. Again, just like before, the sky darkened immediately and with it came an enormous wind that blew outrageously, this time finally convincing the two men, at least for now, to leave their work alone and call it quits for the day.

In the movie *The Secret*, the scientists talk about us having enough energy in our own bodies to light up New York City. I don't know what that means. However, I went for a walk in the forest alongside of the beach the next day, where the coral reefs meet the almendra trees. The walk is one of our favorites with plenty of tide pools to play in and trees to keep out the sun. On this day however, because of the storm from the day before, dozens of our favorite trees had been ripped up by their roots and hurled over, leaving the area there just as devastated as the lot behind our own back yard. And enormous trees had gone down all over the area. One neighbor lost her storage shed that day when a tree went down in her back yard, narrowly missing her gardener. I tried not to imagine all the stories that didn't come my way, but I have to believe that in my unrestrained rage I was somehow responsible for those freak storms. Anger is a luxury in which I try to no longer indulge in. One day at a time.

## Jack

If I were ever to apply the word curmudgeon to anybody, it would have to have been to Jack. From the very beginning of our life in Cost Rica, this old x-pat from the U.S. had a case of the hates for us. He appeared to be the only stick in the ointment of this beautiful balmy place. Shorn of most of his fingers through God knows what dire happenstances, this scraggly unkempt unpleasant old man spent most of his time sitting on the steps of Jeffry's grocery store with a bottle of beer clutched in one mutilated hand and a nasty thing to snarl through broken teeth at almost everybody. Barry and I especially appeared to be the subject and the recipient of his venom, as we'd happen to meet him daily on the road, on bikes or simply just trying to shop at the tiny local establishment where gargoyle like Jack would crouch awaiting the next innocent victim of his vitriolic utterances.

Through the years, Barry and I began to learn the source of his unhappiness towards us. It seems Jack had always had his heart set on owning the house we were living in. He felt he had been cheated out of having it for himself. The neighbors who know him all say that he would never have been able to come up with the cost anyway, but whether fantasy or reality, it still stuck in his craw, and embittered him more every time he saw us.

One evening, Barry braved the gauntlet of the old curmudgeon, and instead of bicycling the extra mile into town to do the grocery shopping to avoid him, decided to shop at Jeffrey's.

It wasn't long before I got a call from Barry's cel phone, "Call the police" he said, "Jack has got me stuck in Jeffrey's and is threatening to not let me out." I think my answer was, "Oh for God's sake." as I hung up the phone. "This has got to end." Stupid old drunks don't intimidate me. Usually they're too clumsy to move fast enough to out maneuver me. Anyway, back in the sanity of our pleasant little home, I began to remember, passages from the Masters of the Far East Teachings when it was told that one was to concentrate love towards ones enemy's and they would either have to change, or I guess self destruct. Jesus held out his hands towards the marauding bandits that were sure to destroy the temples with rays of such continuous love until they no longer knew who to fight squabbling among themselves like mad dogs, many of their own number were killed before they ran off in terror, never to molest the village again. Not one hand had been raised from the village people.

With that lofty precedence in mind and the teachings of 'The Secret', I began an experiment with Jack. Each day I chose to envision a golden halo above the head of this most unpleasant of men. I didn't have to look at his scowl; it was the halo I was seeing. Mother Theresa was asked how she did what she did. Day after day she tended to the most undesirable of people. For years she knelt before them tending, lovingly. Her answer was that she saw Jesus in every face she cared

for, in all “His distressing disguises.” If she could do that for the multitude, surely I could at least do it for one.

At first the experiment felt ridiculous, and then I remembered that way back in the past in San Diego I had placed a ring of roses around a photo of Sadaam Hussein and sent him love at the peril of my reputation. So I had already done the ridiculous. ‘Stupid’ came to mind next until I reasoned that nobody would ever have to know about it anyway. When curiosity entered, I felt I’d made a turnaround and began having fun with the experiment, eventually actually beginning to see the Christ through his crusty dusty exterior.

The sky had just turned dark several months into this, when Mr. Wright, the manager of a bicycle shop in town pulled into the yard on his motorcycle. He had found a wallet in the road in our neighborhood and didn’t recognize the man in the passport. It appeared the wallet still contained credit cards and important papers, more important down here than money. The front page of the passport showed a picture of none other than Jack. The manager asked if Barry knew the man in the photo and if he would see to it that these important documents be returned to him. After Mr. Wright motored away, the moment had come. Earlier this evening Barry had bicycled by Jeffrey’s store and sort of knew where he could find the odious man, so with haste but not without reluctance, Barry cycled back to the spot where he had last seen his nemesis.

True to form, Jack began a surly attack before he began to understand what it was that Barry was trying to offer him. At that moment he became a new man. He jumped up from his perch, threw his arms around Barry thanking him profusely for saving him so much time, effort and money by returning his papers.

It's been five years. Jack is always pleasant to us now. He came by to apologize one day for being such a Jerk and explained what had been eating him all these years. The man says hello every time we cross each other's path, he supplies us with the star fruit for our fruit juice from his enormous tree. I no longer see him out front of Jeffrey's; he says he's stopped drinking. Magic.

## **Albertina**

The only thing that was not tiny about this very shy little sixteen year old BriBri girl was the swelling underneath her plain cotton dress. At first nobody knew where she had come from, but it was obvious that she was well along in her pregnancy and was never accompanied by anyone. Albertina's most outstanding feature was a smile that lit up the world. It became apparent that she didn't speak any Spanish and her response to everything was just to smile. It turned out that she had fled from an abusive family deep in the interior, and hoped to find the woman who had been good to her when she was very young. Maria had helped her then, maybe she could help her now.

Albertina became a regular at the soup kitchen; for months always friendly, never trying to communicate; getting alarmingly more rotund each day. She fielded any questions about the father of the baby, refusing to name him regardless of how refusing might hurt her chances for financial support.

One afternoon, I was clearing off the dishes during soup kitchen, when I noticed that Albertina wasn't at the table anymore. Usually she would loiter an hour or so for the community atmosphere. Her bowl of soup had gone untouched along with a still hot cup of coffee, and she

was nowhere to be found. Apparently her contractions had started, so she had picked up her stuff and headed for the buss to the clinic to give birth to her baby on her own, again completely unaccompanied.



I got to remembering my own experiences with giving birth. If I'd had to do it alone, I would have shouted from the rafters, "I want my mommy! Where's my husband?", maybe in that order. But to have no qualms about giving birth alone and without a whimper, these people are truly strong.

Albertina emerged from her three day confinement with a healthy large boy child, back at soup kitchen as if nothing had happened. Fat and bald, we call him the Baby Buddha. She showed off the child that she named Gael with that same wonderful smile as if giving birth was the most natural thing in the world; which I guess it certainly is.

## **An Easter Miracle**

This story starts a few years back when we had the opportunity to replace the 17x24 ft. tarp that offered to keep the folks eating soup here dry. I was always kind of grumpy about the fact that before we had put up that huge tarp, we had light coming into the windows of our house. The tarp dimmed the light so noticeably that I found it hard to do any artwork inside. So like a winey princess, I insisted unwisely that the new roof be made with transparent sheeting instead of the stronger aluminum. I could have remembered the story of the three little pigs, but that never crossed my mind, and it wasn't long before I realized that my way had been a big mistake. Our monster rainforest trees drop branches when they are done with them, and the howler monkeys also help to keep the dry branches from littering up the sky by dropping them down from overhead. So as only a few years went by, the brittle plastic rebelled but gave in under the constant drilling from the forces from above.

Close to the end of the calendar year, The Bridge population starts to pick up with school out, Christmas coming and the inclement weather bringing in more of the working men from the fields. I was starting to wonder if I was going to have enough floor space to keep the people dry under this now very leaky roof. I'd begun serving umbrellas with our soup. Although we couldn't afford to replace the

roof, Barry decided it was time to get an estimate as to what it might cost to if we were to.

One Afternoon, three days later, a family of six visited The Bridge. The couple was from Utah and was choosing to spend a couple of years touring the world with the kids doing good as they went. Barry and the gentleman from Utah were getting to know each other on the porch to determine how he and his family could be of service, while his girls were out at a table on the platform with coloring books and pencils. One of the Howler monkeys in the tree overhead broke off a branch and hurled it down onto the already abused roof, breaking yet another hole through the plastic and almost hitting one of the little girls. The answer to the father's inquiry was obvious; He instantly knew that he was here to ensure that we had a new more structurally sound roof over the eating area. Within three days he had accomplished just that by paying for the new materials and he and his whole family, helped to build the new roof. I've never seen kids so game. Even the littlest one got in the act, retrieving rusty screws as they were dropped from above. The eight year old got the crappy job of scraping up the monkey poop.

Just in time too. The weather became wetter as the season progressed, dumping tons of water down on us but leaving the people dry underneath the shiny new aluminum roof. Our Annual Christmas

Party that year entertained over a hundred people with good food, water balloons and friendships. With school out, the numbers swelled

as they have a tendency to do this time of year. We finished off the rainy season, and at the same time, the busy season, with an Easter party at the end of March that entertained over 120 people. I was happy that the new roof had kept people dry during such a wet time, but I really missed the light that we had had when the roof had been plastic, although I finally had had one plastic panel installed in the middle of the patio roof where few tree branches could fall, so I was somewhat mollified for now.

The day after the big party was Easter Sunday. Our plans for the day were to find a secluded beach, (not an easy assignment for a Samana Santa) and enjoy each other's company. Usually Bear is up at four in the mornings working on some creation or another, but this morning, at five, we were all snug in bed with the kitties still untroubled by growling tummies. The chicken's noisy reveille hadn't yet pierced our slumber when the tree branch landed on our house. This branch was about three feet in diameter and the impact on the new metal roof sounded like the end of the world. If we had still been using the plastic roofing, the wooden support beams would have splintered forcing the weight of the monster branch to land on the main house, but the new now crumpled platform roof had taken every bit of the weight so that seventy feet of tree just lay like cotton batting over the entire width of the house, just barely touching the chicken coops at the other end of the yard, without causing any damage at all. Even the clear panel of plastic that I'd had installed in the patio roof was left miraculously undamaged. The tree had been taken down by a mata palo, a monster strangle fig vine sometimes eight inches in diameter that sucks the life

out of its host tree. With nothing to support itself, the tree eventually has to fall. It chose to fall at exactly the perfect moment when nobody was at hand and high season was declared officially over.

An epilogue: Barry and I carried out our plans to spend Easter Sunday together at some quiet beach. We knew we couldn't do anything about the tree anyway until the next day. Upon returning to the house later in the afternoon, however, we learned that one of our generous donors had been by, had taken pictures of the demolished roof and was well on his way towards having the money to replace it already. Within a week, we had yet again a brand new aluminum roof, this time with strategically placed plastic panels that give us a whole lot of light where there was no longer a branch overhead. How much better can it get?

## **Angels With Their Skins On**

As the old John Denver song goes, “Some days are diamonds, some days are stones.” I remember that this particular morning, quite a few years ago, didn’t start out looking like the stone would turn into a diamond. Our wallets showed that we were down to our last \$10, which in itself wasn’t unusual, but Friday was the day one of us would normally bike in to town to buy the groceries for the donation bags we give away on Saturdays. We’d already used up all the credit the store owners had generously allotted us, the eagle had not shat for a while and Pay Pal was not expected to miraculously deposit money we didn’t know about any time soon. Bear had already checked the on line bank account to determine that, yes, the bottom line there too was in danger of turning from black to red. We had no idea how we were going to meet tomorrow’s ‘pay role’.

To add insult to injury, our telephones had been out of service all morning; no dial tone at all, not an unusual occurrence while living in the jungle back then, but enough to make us feel a bit cut off from the rest of the world and our moods just a little bit gloomy.

The day was too wet to spend any time out of doors, so I chose a chore I had never done before, refinishing our bedroom's hardwood floor. "Okay God", I muttered, "If you want us to keep doing this thing, You're going to have to damn well pay for it Yourself. I'll do my job, You do yours." I had to laugh at myself later when it occurred to me that this probably wasn't the best way to talk to God, and I had never been one to get down on my knees to pray either, but there I was, definitely on my knees; paintbrush in hand; praying.

It's not unusual for funds to just walk in the door when we are most in need of them, but I must admit, I was more skeptical about instant manifestation back in the olden days. Now that I am less so, instant manifestation usually happens, well, instantly.

Around ten or so, the telephone rang. Not thinking about it, I automatically went to answer it. It was a call from an American couple we had never met, shopping at Price Smart in San Jose. They had recently moved here from Texas and had heard about 'The Bridge' and wanted to know if they could do any shopping for us while they were there to bring down to us later on in the day; balls, dolls, medicines, food. I told them about the bags of groceries that we usually give away

on Saturdays. The miracle couple assured us that we had nothing to worry about and that they would take care of everything.

As I hung up the phone, I noticed that Barry was looking at me funny. "I thought the phones weren't working," he said as he went to check for himself. No dial tone. Indeed, they still weren't.

Stefan and Danna, our expat angels on the ground arrived at our house in Puerto about sundown that day with twice as much as I had requested and a whole lot more besides, creating a lasting friendship that just keeps on giving.

Several years later, Danna flew back to Texas to share in the chore of helping the family out with her elderly and ailing father leaving Stefan to take care of things in Puerto. After she was there for a while, she decided she didn't want to return to Costa Rica, so Stefan put the house here up for sale and began the arduous and interminable wait for someone to come in and buy the house so he could finally join his wife back 'home'.

Real estate wasn't moving very quickly and it seemed to be going nowhere for him for the longest time when in despair one day Stefan finally got down on his knees. Over and over he prayed, "God, please

send me a blessing; I need a miracle. Please send me a blessing; I need a miracle.”

The next morning, the call came through. A couple from the States was looking to buy in Puerto Viejo and was ready to move into their house right away. Stefan had gotten two for the price of one. Since then, Bruce and Linda Blessing have become good friends, community leaders, and warm and wonderful neighbors, and their own giving natures send ripples of blessings out to all who are graced with knowing them.

Meanwhile, Stefan and Danna are realizing their own dream. They are ‘seeing’ the States. Now no longer saddled with an ailing father, may he rest in peace, or the upkeep of a house in Costa Rica, they are making love and life in a Winnebago built for two.

## Agua Sapo

There aren't many places down here that make agua sapo. I don't know why it's called 'frog water', but it's one of my favorite refreshments. The bars may have a concoction made with the same ingredients: ginger, lemon and brown sugar, but they still assure me that agua sapo is different. I think I get that the whole or maybe a part of the recipe has to be cooked. I don't know. It does taste different, and I wish more of the local watering holes would offer agua sapo.

Be that as it may, I had dedicated much of this day to making a whole lot of juice for the Easter Party. I hoped to put up at least 40 concentrated quarts of star fruit, passion fruit, banana and pineapple juice in baggies to fill up the freezer. It always feels like there's money in the bank when the refrigerators are full.

Although Costa Rica is noted for its safe drinking water, Bear and I have always filtered every drop we drink and every drop we serve to the people. I think living in the Orient as a kid convinced me not to trust the water (I still don't buy from the street venders). We brought with us when we emigrated down here, a couple of Britta Filter pitchers and a whole lot of filters that have been replaced over the years by friendly mules who volunteer to bring them all the way down

to Puerto. I also keep a sizeable smoky quartz crystal in the bottom of our big lime green, to insure even more the quality of the water we serve to our guests.

It took probably four hours to make 40 quarts of juice that day. I know I worked both pitchers like they had never been worked before, until finally exhausting both fruit and our refrigerator put the project to rest, the mess, and filled up the pitchers one more time, the finishing touches on the was returning the large pitcher to its accustomed noticed something move it.



the fresh space, I cleaned up water putting job. As I green spot, I inside of

Snuggled tight inside the pitcher, against the filter, probably numbed if not dumbed by the constant and relentless chaos, of the last four hour filtering process, the filling and emptying of the water, the murderous quartz crystal rolling everywhere; there squeezed a tiny frog, lime green and very, very still. That is until I tried to extricate him and discovered that he was still very much alive and not interested in moving on. It took me quite a while to gather up the tiny stowaway and deposit him outside in a puddle that had to be a welcome relief from his stay in the house of horrors.

Later on, after I'd had a chance to think about it, and had decided that that particular breed of frog was not harmful enough for me to sacrifice the 40 quarts of juice I had worked so hard to make, I got to laughing. I decided I would keep it to myself at the Easter Party that they really were drinking my own authentic version of agua sapo.

In my best, most active moments- in my mystical moments- I have a profound sense of belonging.

**Brother David Steindl-Rast**

## Marguerita

It was one of those days when one didn't know whether or not to wear a bathing suit under one's rain coat. The day seemed as though it could go either way. Both puffy black clouds and a piercing sun at the same time gave the day an other-worldly sense that anything could happen.

Barry was doing some shopping at the corner grocery store right across from the scummy river that separates the village of Puerto Viejo from Playa Negra. The corner is famous for its most infamous; the crack heads, drunks and prostitutes. We don't usually shop here; not because of the gathering of these folks, but because the personalities of this particular store's staff are usually somewhat hard to be around too. However it does stock such staples that the other contenders don't, like chicken feed and rolling papers.

The chickens that day would go on strike if he didn't come 'home with the bacon', so to speak. Although unlike expensive pork, chicken feed on the other hand, cost, well, chicken feed. As Barry was rounding the corner of the building after his shopping trip, a terrible racket drew his attention to what looked for all the world to see, in

broad daylight; a mob scene. Right in front of him, not twenty yards away, twelve angry men had one terrified

Man in their grip and as one entity, were forcing the unfortunate guy across the cement bridge that spans the murky water using a machete as their guiding light, nudging him across with a little flat sided coercion.

“What is going on?” Barry asked no one in particular. It wasn’t until she answered him, did Barry realize that Marguerite was standing right by his side.

A long way’s from her prime, and beauty a distant memory, Marguerita, is the town’s oldest ladies of the night. Mostly irascible, temperamental and aggressive, this nice lady usually greeted Nanci with, “Don’t talk to me!” Until, that is, Nanci handed her a red plush velvet stuffed doggy for Christmas a year ago, and now Marguerita’s having a little more trouble being snotty to her.

“Well,” she began, in answer to his question. “The guy that’s being whacked by the machete made the unwise decision to steal a bike from a man right down the street in front of too many witnesses who are trying now to convince him never to do it again.”

“Oh”, was all Barry got out before a police car came screaming around the corner and parked not four feet from where they were standing. With a great wrenching movement the would-be thief tore himself loose from the angry mob and with a huge “Save Me!” lunged himself toward where the two of them were standing, tore open the door of the police car and shut himself in. As if following in the wake of this surprising new development, the enraged leader still unfinished with his business with the perp, and still brandishing the machete, attempted to chase the terrified fellow into the squad car. The officer simply put out his hand in a stop gesture, and the moment was past. The police car went one way, and the mob went another and in a few minutes the street was quiet again. The tide had gone out.

As the two of them contemplated what had just taken place, the old tired prostitute put her head on Barry’s shoulder and said, apropos of nothing, “Barry, I’m too old for this line of business anymore, what do you suggest I do?” “Sell real estate, Marguerite,” he answered her, “sell real state.”

What is a voice

if it does not

raise against injustice?

What is a voice

if it does not

sing for change?

What is a voice

if it does not speak

for those who cannot?

What is a voice

if it refrains from

forming the hearts vision?

What is a voice

if it merely

mimics the machinations of culture?

A stilled voice is

a dried reed,

lost toy,

torn page...

a broken feather

floating down an

emptied canyon.

What is a voice

if it remains silent

against leagues of tyranny?

Maryanne Radmacher





Nanci Wright was born in San Diego California in 1946 as Nancy Lynn Robinson and raised throughout the world with her parents and brother and sister while her father worked in the State department for the U.S. embassy. She is known for her fine portraits and her paintings of wildlife.

The BriBri and The Bridge is a compilation of short stories that Nanci has gathered throughout the years about the people, animals and situations that the couple have found themselves in since moving to the Caribbean Coast of Costa Rica in 2004

In Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, Barry and Nanci run a non-profit foundation called El Puente-The Bridge that serves the underprivileged indigenous people of the Talamanca Mountains.

**All profits for the sale of this book will go to the BriBri and the Bridge. Cover Photo by Mazie Crow Portraits and art by Nanci**