

Rain and Reductor!
Reflections from Costa Rica

November 2022

Judith Blanchard

This month's reflection is part of a diary I kept during four weeks studying Spanish and volunteering at an eco-agricultural project in Costa Rica in September of 2022. I called it: "The conversion of a privileged Norte-americana."

It took Covid, a poem by Langston Hughes, and 12 days, but I think I am beginning to experience a conversion. I am not a newbie to culture shock, and I wouldn't say my experience here in Costa Rica has been that exactly. But I was not immune to the many judgments that come with visiting a developing country like this.

I am struck by the steel bars topped with barbed wire on every home; the long (45 minutes-plus) waits for a bus ride of fewer than 2 miles; the lack of electric vehicles in a country touted for its green energy; and, especially, the adjustment to the climate. Of course, I could have been more informed about what it means to come to a tropical country in the rainy season! The irony is that Costa Rica not only has a dry season and a rainy season, but the rainy season provides the experience of *both* every single day.

What is that experience? I wake up to gorgeous blue skies with fluffy white clouds, and temperatures in the 70s, but by noon there comes a downpour, with continuous rain for the next 5 to 8 hours. The temperature drops only 5 to 10°, but it makes it most difficult to plan, especially to walk anywhere in the afternoon. Gratitude begins to kick in: for an umbrella and for local drivers who give me a ride.

The sentiments expressed by poet Langston Hughes come to mind, in words that proclaim "I love the rain."

*Let the rain kiss you.
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.
Let the rain sing you a lullaby.*

*The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.
The rain makes running pools in the gutter.
The rain plays a little sleep-song on our roof at night—*

And I love the rain.

— Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

I'm not quite there with Mr. Hughes – yet – but I do love the sound of the rain on the metal roof and in the trees when I am safe at home in my little room with my host family, as rivers, swelling with rain and more rain, turn brown and surge nearby, on nearly every afternoon.

This morning I wake to look out at the edge of the jungle right by my window and spotted butterflies (*mariposas*) chasing one another through the trees. I discover two bushes in bloom that I had not noticed before; perched on a branch between them, a lovely gray bird, which I think is a dove. The rain does indeed sing, as do the birds every morning, and the sun does come up again!

As on other journeys, I have been writing Haiku poems, and this one is inspired by those two butterflies.

*They chase each other
Beautiful mariposas
Catching means birthing*

Walking to school (*Maximo Nivel*) on Thursday, I spot a grandfather holding the hand of his festively dressed little granddaughter on their way to a *Dia de Independencia* (September 15) event. My route to school has become quite familiar, and a pleasant walk, albeit over city streets and mostly uphill.

So many things I admire about these loving, patient, open-hearted people. Costa Rica abandoned its army 100 years ago, and put all of that money into education and healthcare. It definitely shows! I asked one of my teachers whether that means there is no homelessness in Costa Rica. His response was that it is generally true, except where drugs and alcohol are involved. One of the places I walk by every morning is a treatment center for those addicted to alcohol and drugs. They are probably the only 100% green energy country in the world! This is mostly from hydroelectric power, so they bless the rain! They have wind power as well.

Sadly, Ticos are still heavily dependent upon fossil fuels for their vehicles, and their use of plastic is not unlike ours. So many Spanish words make me smile: like “REDUCTOR” for speed bump! *Reductor* - a great word for our eco-conscious commitment to **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**.

I pray for our brothers and sisters in Florida recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Ian, while we enjoy Los Colores, the glorious palette of God’s creation here in Maine in the fall – and recent days of, yes, much-needed rain.

Blessings, Judith

The Rev. Dr. Judith Blanchard has retired as Chaplain Clinical Leader at Maine Medical Center after 20+ years of service. She lives in South Freeport and is looking for ways to mitigate climate change. Judith invites you to check out Third Act Maine:

<https://thirdactmaine.substack.com/p/introducing-you-to-third-act-maine>.

Note to Readers: Have you an earth care experience to share from a cultural setting outside of Maine? We welcome you to share it in this monthly Earth Care and Spirituality reflection series. Send your reflection, in prose or poem form, to stephenh11656@gmail.com.