

Incidentally Iris



by
Iris Ruth Pastor

The first firm memory I have of Mark Silverstein was slow dancing with him at age 13 at a Bar Mitzvah party. I was uncomfortable for two reasons: he was holding me way too tightly for my dad's idea of propriety and my yellow brocade party dress was flattening my burgeoning breasts into very unflattering pancakes.

When the dance was over, Mark very suavely (if any 13 year-old can be described as suave) released me from his arms and shot me an intensely dreamy look before departing back to his buddies.

My next recollection of Mark Silverstein was centered around the barrage of buzz he created by traveling 250 miles to attend our 45th high school reunion via his brand new 2010 Triumph Bonneville motorcycle.

A recent Facebook post updated me on Mark's newest adventure: selling almost everything he owns and moving to Costa Rica. Intrigued, I immediately tracked him down and begged for some time to chat about his change-of-

Selling it all and trying something new

life direction.

Mark tells me he is taking two suitcases and his "Do Cool Sh*t" t shirt.

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Mark Silverstein and his daughter Taaron on the trail to Angel's Landing in Utah

In the picture, Mark and his daughter Taaron are on the trail to Angel's Landing in Utah – one of the most dangerous hiking trails in the country. His in-your-face motto emblazoned on his t-shirt falls seamlessly in line with his philosophy on life:

Die with memories, not dreams.

Totally intrigued with what he is doing, I ask him, "Why?"

"I did a year's worth of re-

search and went down and visited three times – totaling about 30 days. The country has about 5 million people, is the size of West Virginia and has an excellent program for pensioners, without giving up American citizenship. It also has a good public health care system called Kaja that you qualify for if you are a permanent resident.

"It's a beautiful country," Mark continues, "with warm and welcoming people. Costa Ricans actually wave and say hello instead of 'What are you looking at?'"

"And I wanted one last adven-

ture where I could explore nature, do yoga, and learn to surf."

"Costa Rica is the land of 'pura vida,'" Mark concludes. "Pura vida means cool or no worries – it's also used as a greeting both when saying hello and goodbye."

Costa Ricans say "pura vida" – it is everything that makes their Central American paradise so alluring. Pura vida is the Costa Rican version of the laid-back philosophy of "Hakuna Matata" from The Lion King. It's how they look at the world.

Curious about the Jewish population in Costa Rica, I did some research. According to the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, the Jewish community in Costa Rica is a "peaceful community in a peaceful land."

According to Daniel J. Elazar, founder of the Center, Costa Rica is unwavering in its friendship with Israel since 1948 and the only state to maintain its embassy in Jerusalem.

Elazar notes that although officially a Catholic country, several thousand Jews, from the same two villages in Poland, have found a home in Costa Rica – building a prosperous and closely-knit Jewish community.

The estimates the size of the Jewish community to be about 2,000, but notes that many suggest there are another 1,000 "hidden" Jews, including American retirees who have settled there. And like much of the Diaspora, the community is nominally Orthodox by choice.

Mark departed Cleveland on Tuesday, August 31. He plans to arrive in Costa Rica today. He's going to buy a dirt bike and then a 4 x4. Though he intends to build a house, for now he has rented a 2-bedroom home with a pool, 2 kilometers from the Pacific Ocean. Mark plans to start a non-profit to help indigenous tribes like the Boruca sell their art and craftwork. The photo shows a hand-painted balsa wood mask typically sold to tourists.



And he is also planning for lots of company from the States. I'm betting he'll get it. As Mark says: "Surfs up and jungle trekking is waiting."

Keep Preserving Your Bloom,

Iris Ruth Pastor