

Vallarta: My Healing Place

BY WANDA ST. HILAIRE

(Part 2 of 2)

My sister and her boys came to celebrate my 50th birthday exactly as I had envisioned: with friends and family on the Bay of Banderas. We chartered a boat with Mike's and had a marvelous day, complete with dolphins playing, whales breaching, huge manta rays gracefully floating past, and one lazy turtle who popped out to nod an *hola*. The boat was impeccable and Miguel's crew was delightful. For a grand ending, we ventured out to Bucerías for dinner at Sandrina's with Latcho and Andrea to entertain us. I'd had a successful Cuban-style book launch at Sandrina's last Christmas and hit it off immediately with the vivacious owner. She surprised me with a big gourmet chocolate birthday cake buried in fresh fruit and too many candles. It was a milestone rung in with the pleasure of life at its finest.

Then came New Year's Day and I moved into my house, a place my sister had convinced me to rent in spite of financial scurvy. I don't think I really believed I would ever step into my dreams; I thought I'd only be plotting them out in my journal for an eternity. But I have. I am living in a little *casita* of my dreams with windows everywhere and a view of the entire bay and the city. It has a huge patio with a hammock and came with binoculars so powerful that I can see the craters on the moon. I have to walk up a steep, steep hill but I should have buns of steel by the time I go home for summer.

So many small pleasures are now in my reality that my heart feels flutter-bugged; things that may mean nothing to anyone else, but are just what the doctor ordered.

Who would think that food could make one so happy? The *mercado* in my neighborhood is filled with stalls of every kind of freshly picked fruit, vegetables and herbs and makes me



smile each time I visit. An old couple sells only chicken and brings in their free-range stock daily. I can order a steak *molida* (ground) from the local butchers and with it, I've made the best Bolognese sauce ever. If I'm early enough, I pick up a little bag of farm fresh eggs that taste like little globes of heaven. There is a big, savory breakfast at the *loncheria* with thick tortillas, a selection of homemade salsas, and rice and beans, all for under \$3.00.

I bought a large basil plant, rosemary, and an *hierbabuena*, that sit on my open windowsill to toss into my meals. I have a "real" kitchen, something I've not had for many years and I've made two men groan with pleasure in it - but only over food!

An afternoon at the Spanish Experience Center for my first cooking class was not only fun but also *delicioso* with Azteca tortilla soup on the menu. Learning something new to add to my repertoire is exhilarating for a foodie.

I am having the time of my life selling books at the farmers' market in La Cruz de Huanacaxtle on Sundays and at the Old Town Farmers' Market on Saturdays. I love the interaction with my readers and interested people; Vallarta is a community that honors and supports creativity and the arts.

I eat my profits with the selection of delectable treats at both farmers' markets: chocolate tamales, Thai food,

savory crêpes, home-baked bread of all types, croissants, pies, quiches, freshly ground coconut, salsas, handmade chocolates, dressings, tasty organic produce, fresh cheese, flax tostadas - all types of tasty treasures.

I adore Mexican food, so eat it frequently, but also enjoy the international flavor of Vallarta with its many ethnic restaurants. I am eating better and healthier than I ever have in my life and am blissed out about it.

Tres Hermanos - three brothers, German, Alberto, and Santiago, introduced me to the joy of a beach foot massage. As an incentive for a prolific week of writing, a reward of a seaside massage is good for both body and soul.

There is an herbal store near Ley where I pop in to get bizarre blends of teas for any ailment or health boost. I've even made my own luxurious lavender sea salt scrub.

I wanted to find a gentle holistic healer to help deal with the after effects and I did, quite by serendipity. She is a calm, nurturing woman who does acupuncture and dispenses other healing remedies and treatments. I am working with a cheery strength trainer twice weekly and go to an energizing zumba class at Shanti Studio to replace my salsa aerobics back home. I am glad to be getting fit after last year's unwanted reprieve.

To improve my Spanish, *poco a poco*, I take a weekly private class with Cecilia Paredes. We translate and laugh and conjugate verbs at Roberto's - no stuffy classroom - only ocean breezes and frothy cappuccinos.

I walk everywhere and pass the ocean daily or sit for a sunset before going home. People smile and wave and stop to chat. Men compliment. I thank God every day for no snow. No snow, no snow, no snow!

The warm and wonderful women who own the coffee/book shops have been accommodating and encouraging by carrying my books and El Sofa hosted a full house reading where I met Amaranta's loyal and enthusiastic clientele for a rewarding Friday night.

Nature awes here and I had an amazing whale experience on a morning out with Carlos at Eco Explorer. Aside of the many magnificent whales we

watched, at one point while we sat quietly, we had an astounding moment where we heard the unforgettable song of the whales through the hull of the boat, a cure for whatever ails one, in and of itself.

My creativity and inspiration have kicked into high gear. I'm endlessly entertained and never bored. I have trouble making myself go to bed and I wake early with one new idea or another. I feel like my heart is finally opening and filling and I have the miraculous healing zone of Vallarta to thank for it.

Muchisima gracias, Puerto Vallarta. This is my ode to you.

Wanda St.Hilaire is the author of The Cuban Chronicles, the Circle of Life series, and a poetry/journal written in PV called Of Love, Life and Journeys. She is currently writing her next travel memoir about the "French Fiasco" as mentioned above. You can visit her site at www.wandasthilaire.com and find The Cuban Chronicles at El Sofa, Casa del Libro, Las Mujeres de Villa and Gringo Books (Bucerías), or visit the author at the weekend farmers' markets.


12 Steps Meetings

329 Basilio Badillo (unless otherwise indicated) - South Side.
The current schedule is posted on the door.
Or call 222-3906, 222-2521, 209-0746, 209-0746 evenings.

Hotel Zone: 1712 Francisco Medina Ascencio Blvd., (2nd floor), across the street from Mega Commercial and the Sheraton Hotel, next to (south of) the main TelCel customer service office.
Tels: 322 136-2538 and 322 209-0746. Mon.-Fri. at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

- ⊕ **AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) Open Meetings:**
Daily 9 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.
Men's Stag Meetings: Sunday 11 a.m.
- ⊕ **Open GLBT Meetings:** Wednesday 11 a.m.,
427 Constitution corner of Manuel M. Dieguez.
Ed: 224-1974. www.setac.com.mx
- ⊕ **AA Men Closed,** 8 p.m. Thursday
- ⊕ **AA Women:** Thursday 10:30 a.m.
- ⊕ **AI-ANON:** Mon. & Fri. 6:30 p.m. (Fri. only May-Nov)
- ⊕ **NA / Narcotics Anonymous:** Daily 5 p.m.
- ⊕ **Nic. Anonymous:** Monday 9:00 a.m.
- ⊕ **CODA Step Sisters:** Tuesday 6:30 p.m.
- ⊕ **ARTS (a 12 step program for creative people):**
Tues. 8 p.m. (Sasha 222-8336 or Angela 222-3906)
- ⊕ **CODA (Co-Dependents - mixed):** Wed. & Fri. 10:30 a.m.
- ⊕ **OA / Over Eaters Anonymous:** Only Tuesday 5 p.m.
- ⊕ **Friends of Bill Win Paradise - Open Meetings**
(in English) Mo., Wed. & Fri. at 6 p.m. Jalisco time at Paradise Plaza, Rm L-15, 2nd Floor by U.S Consulate Office.
- ⊕ **YELAPA:** Generic 12-Step Meeting's
on Sun. at 4 p.m. at Hotel Lagunitas.
- ⊕ **SAYULITA:** AA meetings (in English) - 6:30 p.m.
on Tues. & Sat. AI-Anon: Wed. 5 p.m. at 11
Calle Primavera. Times are Nayarit zone.
Tels: 322-141-5994 or 329-291-3133.