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July 16-31, 2021 E-mail: bajatimes@yahoo.com WWW.BAJATIMES.COM

LOCAL & WORLD NEWS

Never Forget The Lesson Included

Written By Robert Nauck, Jr.

"I arrived at the address and honked the horn. After waiting a few minutes I honked again. Since this was going to be my last ride of my shift I thought about just driving away, but instead I put the car in park and walked up to the door and knocked.. 'Just a minute', answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.

After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 90's stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie.

By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets.There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

'Would you carry my bag out to the car?' she said. I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman.She took my arm and we walked slowly toward the curb.

She kept thanking me for my kindness. 'It's nothing', I told her.. 'I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother to be treated."Oh, you're such a good boy, she said. When we got in the cab, she gave me an address and then asked, 'Could you drive through downtown?'

'It's not the shortest way,' I answered quickly..

'Oh, I don't mind,' she said. 'I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice.

I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. 'I don't have any family left,' she continued in a soft voice..'The doctor says I don't have very long.' I quietly reached over and shut off the meter.

'What route would you like me to take?' I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator.

See Next Page...

Woman Reunited With Two Fishermen Who Saved Her Life 35 years Ago

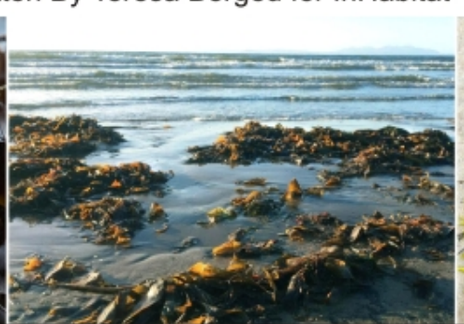
Written By Steve Hartman for CBS Evening News

9 year old Desiree Rodriguez was saved from drowning 35 years ago by Captains Mark Pisano and Paul Strasser (L). Her family's bodies were never recovered. She recently celebrated those she lost while celebrating the guardian angels she gained (R) .

See page 02

Surprising Ways Seaweed Benefits The Environment

Written By Teresa Bergeu for InHabitat

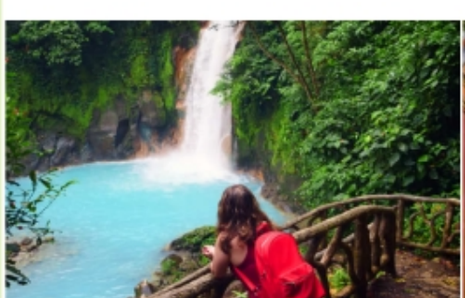


Seaweed farming started in Japan in the 1600's (L). Today seaweed is formed into a chemical fertilizer (C) Rensselear Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y. is even exploring a seaweed extract to treat COVID-19 (R) .

See page 04

Top 10 Countries With Happiest Ex-Pats: We're #2!!!

Written By Jennifer Liu



This layout says it all!!! In Mexico 72% of the population is happy with their work-life balance (L), 79% are happy with the cost of living (C) and 89% are happy with life in general (R).

See page 05

From Front Page...

LOCAL & WORLD NEWS

We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl.

Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, 'I'm tired.Let's go now'.

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico.

Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her.

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

'How much do I owe you?' She asked, reaching into her purse.

'Nothing,' I said

'You have to make a living,' she answered.

'There are other passengers,' I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly.

'You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,' she said. 'Thank you.'

I squeezed her hand, and then walked into the dim morning light.. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life..

I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away?

On a quick review, I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life.

We're conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments.

But great moments often catch us unaware-beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one.

PEOPLE MAY NOT REMEMBER EXACTLY WHAT YOU DID, OR WHAT YOU SAID ~BUT~THEY WILLALWAYS REMEMBER HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL.

At the bottom of this great story was a request to forward this - I deleted that request because if you have read to this point, you won't have to be asked to pass it along you just will...

Thank you, my friend...

Life may not be the party we hoped for, but while we are here we might as well dance."

From Front Page...

Woman reunited with two fishermen 35 years after they rescued her from the water

Fishermen are known for their fish stories. But the story charter boat captains Mark Pisano and Paul Strasser tell is all too real.

Thirty-five years ago, Pisano and Strasser were piloting a charter back from Catalina Island off the California coast, when they came across a capsized boat and an orange life vest bobbing in the waves. Pisano jumped in and pulled out 9-year-old Desiree Rodriguez — the only survivor.

"That story, it really throws a loop at me," Strasser said.

"It was catastrophic. Imagining what she went through that day is unspeakable, really," Pisano added.

Her mother, father, sister, aunt, and uncle all perished in the incident. Rodriguez had been in the water for 20 hours when Pisano and Strasser found her.

"It was against all odds that she was still coherent and alive," Pisano said.

This was the last time Pisano and Strasser ever saw Rodriguez, but they always wondered about her.

That's until a podcaster named Phil Friedman invited both men on his show, along with a surprise guest.

On Friedman's show, Strasser and Pisano were reintroduced to Rodriguez. The brims of their ballcaps weren't nearly wide enough to hide the joy. Thirty-five years was not nearly long enough to erase their bond.

"When I connected with them, they brought a lot of closure," Rodriguez said.

Since then they have stayed in touch, and this week Strasser and Pisano invited Rodriguez, the aunt who raised her, and the rest of her family to take a little journey. It was Rodriguez' first time back on the ocean, and it was a journey that would bring her full circle right back to where she was found.

"I'm glad we could come together today and kinda heal," Rodriguez said on the trip. The bodies of her father, sister and uncle were never recovered. The journey was their first memorial — a commemoration of the family she lost — but also a celebration of guardian angels she gained.

"I hope to know you guys forever," Rodriguez said to the two men who found her.

"You know everyone says God works in mysterious ways," Pisano said.

Fishermen usually tell stories about the one that got away — but Strasser and Pisano will always cherish the one who got to stay.

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She Fell Nearly 2 Miles, and Walked Away *Part 2*

Written By Franz Lidz For The N.Y. Times

Dr. Diller laid low until 1998, when she was approached by the movie director Werner Herzog, who hoped to turn her survivor's story into a documentary for German TV. He had narrowly missed taking the same Christmas Eve flight while scouting locations for his historical drama "Aguirre, the Wrath of God." He told her, "For all I know, we may have bumped elbows in the airport."

Intrigued, Dr. Diller traveled to Peru and was flown by helicopter to the crash site, where she recounted the harrowing details to Mr. Herzog amid the plane's still scattered remains. The most gruesome moment in the film was her recollection of the fourth day in the jungle, when she came upon a row of seats. Still strapped in were a woman and two men who had landed headfirst, with such force that they were buried three feet into the ground, legs jutting grotesquely upward.

"It was horrifying," she told me. "I didn't want to touch them, but I wanted to make sure that the woman wasn't my mother. I grabbed a stick and turned one of her feet carefully so I could see the toenails. They were polished, and I took a deep breath. My mother never used polish on her nails."

The result of Dr. Diller's collaboration with Mr. Herzog was "Wings of Hope," an unsettling film that, filtered through Mr. Herzog's gruff humanism, demonstrated the strange and terrible beauty of nature. "Making the documentary was therapeutic," Dr. Diller said. "At the time of the crash, no one offered me any formal counseling or psychological help. I had no idea that it was possible to even get help."

Lima or bust

Dr. Diller attributes her tenacity to her father, Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke, a single-minded ecologist. He met his wife, Maria von Mikulicz-Radecki, in 1947 at the University of Kiel, where both were biology students. (Her Ph.D thesis dealt with the coloration of wild and domestic doves; his, woodlice). Late in 1948, Koepcke was offered a job at the natural history museum in Lima.

Getting there was not easy. Postwar travel in Europe was difficult enough, but particularly problematic for Germans. There were no passports, and visas were hard to come by.

To reach Peru, Dr. Koepcke had to first get to a port and inveigle his way onto a trans-Atlantic freighter. Setting off on foot, he trekked over several mountain ranges, was arrested and served time in an Italian prison camp, and finally stowed away in the hold of a cargo ship bound for Uruguay by burrowing into a pile of rock salt. When he showed up at the office of the museum director, two years after accepting the job offer, he was told the position had already been filled.

He persevered, and wound up managing the museum's ichthyology collection. His fiancée followed him in a South Pacific steamer in 1950 and was hired at the museum, too, eventually running the ornithology department. An expert on Neotropical birds, she has since been memorialized in the scientific names of four Peruvian species.

He is remembered for a 1,684-page, two-volume opus, "Life Forms: The basis for a universally valid biological theory." In 1956, a species of lava lizard endemic to Peru, Microlophus koepckeorum, was named in honor of the couple.

In 1968, the Koepckes moved from Lima to an abandoned patch of primary forest in the middle of the jungle. Their plan was to conduct field studies on its plants and animals for five years, exploring the rainforest without exploiting it. "I wasn't exactly thrilled by the prospect of being there," Dr. Diller said. "I was 14, and I didn't want to leave my schoolmates to sit in what I imagined would be the gloom under tall trees, whose canopy of leaves didn't permit even a glimmer of sunlight."

To Juliane's surprise, her new home wasn't dreary at all. "It was gorgeous, an idyll on the river with trees that bloomed blazing red," she recalled in her memoir. "There were mango, guava and citrus fruits, and over everything a glorious 150-foot-tall lupuna tree, also known as a kapok."

The family lived in Panguana full-time with a German shepherd, Lobo, and a parakeet, Florian, in a wooden hut propped on stilts, with a roof of palm thatch. Juliane was home-schooled for two years, receiving her textbooks and homework by mail, until the educational authorities demanded that she return to Lima to finish high school.

'A place of peace and harmony'

Dr. Diller's parents instilled in their only child not only a love of the Amazon wilderness, but the knowledge of the inner workings of its volatile ecosystem. If you ever get lost in the rainforest, they counseled, find moving water and follow its course to a river, where human settlements are likely to be.

Their advice proved prescient. In 1971 Juliane, hiking away from the crash site, came upon a creek, which became a stream, which eventually became a river. On Day 11 of her ordeal she stumbled into the camp of a group of forest workers. They fed her cassava and poured gasoline into her open wounds to flush out the maggots that protruded "like asparagus tips," she said. The next morning the workers took her to a village, from which she was flown to safety.

"For my parents, the rainforest station was a sanctuary, a place of peace and harmony, isolated and sublimely beautiful," Dr. Diller said. "I feel the same way. The jungle was my real teacher. I learned to use old Indian trails as shortcuts and lay out a system of paths with a compass and folding ruler to orient myself in the thick bush. The jungle is as much a part of me as my love for my husband, the music of the people who live along the Amazon and its tributaries, and the scars that remain from the plane crash."

Before 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic restricted international air travel, Dr. Diller made a point of visiting the nature preserve twice a year on monthlong expeditions. Much of her administrative work involves keeping industrial and agricultural development at bay. She estimates that as much as 17 percent of Amazonia has been deforested, and laments that vanishing ice, fluctuating rain patterns and global warming — the average temperature at Panguana has risen by 4 degrees Celsius in the past 30 years — are causing its wetlands to shrink. A recent study published in the journal Science Advances warned that the rainforest may be nearing a dangerous tipping point.

"After 20 percent, there is no possibility of recovery," Dr. Diller said, grimly. "You could expect a major forest dieback and a rather sudden evolution to something else, probably a degraded savanna. That would lead to a dramatic increase in greenhouse gas emissions, which is why the preservation of the Peruvian rainforest is so urgent and necessary."

Under Dr. Diller's stewardship, Panguana has increased its outreach to neighboring Indigenous communities by providing jobs, bankrolling a new schoolhouse and raising awareness about the short- and long-term effects of human activity on the rainforest's biodiversity and climate change.

"The key is getting the surrounding population to commit to preserving and protecting its environment," she said. "Species and climate protection will only work if the locals are integrated into the projects, have a benefit for their already modest living conditions and the cooperation is transparent." And so she plans to go back, and continue returning, once air travel allows.

Fifty years after Dr. Diller's traumatic journey through the jungle, she is pleased to look back on her life and know that it has achieved purpose and meaning. "Just to have helped people and to have done something for nature means it was good that I was allowed to survive," she said with a flicker of a smile. "And for that I am so grateful."

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From Front Page...

Surprising ways seaweed benefits the environment

While the news often mentions the terrible things in the sea, such as gyres of plastic and other trash, the oceans also hold an extremely valuable resource: seaweed. This renewable and easily harvestable organism is used for everything from food to spa treatments to a possible COVID-19 medicine. This eco-friendly ingredient also features in many common products, including paint, toothpaste, ice cream and beer.

Farming seaweed

People collect seaweed both wild and cultivated from seaweed farms. Wild picking involves either wading into the seawater to gather the slippery crop or picking it up off the shoreline. Especially abundant harvests usually come post-storm when seaweed washes onshore. For centuries, people gathered seaweed using this traditional method.

Nowadays, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, 96% of global seaweed production comes from farms instead of wild gathering. Depending on the type of seaweed grown, farming may involve attaching the seaweed to rope lines suspended in the sea just off the coast, or growing the seaweed in nets. Seaweed farming in Japan started in the 1600s, and the practice may date back to the 15th century in Korea. Other parts of Asia, including China, Indonesia and the Philippines, also produce seaweed for food and other products. In the Philippines alone, about 40,000 people made their living from seaweed production in the late 90s.

When it's time to harvest seaweed, people in most seaweed-growing countries use boats and machinery like rakes or trawlers. While easier than hand collection, harvesting with these tools can adversely affect habitats and wreck sea animals' homes. To combat this, farmers in Norway devised a rake method that only removes the floating top canopy of seaweed, this avoiding seabed disruption.

Seaweed helping the environment

Farming seaweed might even improve the sea's health, according to findings from Chinese researchers in a 2019 issue of Stochastic Environmental Research and Risk Assessment. Research found that seaweed aquaculture can help combat eutrophication, the process whereby water becomes so overly enriched with nutrients that it causes excessive algae growth and oxygen depletion. The study discovered that seaweed aquaculture removed more than 75,000 metric tons of nitrogen and more than 9,500 metric tons of phosphate from coastal waters. Seaweed aquaculture also sequestered and absorbed a large amount of CO2 and released more than a million metric tons of oxygen. As a natural filter, seaweed helps remove pollutants from the environment; this does mean people should eat seaweed in moderation, though, as it can contain high levels of metals and iodine.

In addition to keeping oceans healthy, seaweed also helps terrestrial farmers. When used as fertilizer, seaweed helps farmers avoid using nearly 30,000 tons of chemical fertilizers. Summarizing these benefits, the seaweed study's authors wrote, “These results demonstrate that Chinese seaweed aquaculture has turned the pollutants that cause eutrophication into nutrients, which generates considerable environmental benefits as well as socio-economic values.”

Seaweed in cosmetics and medicine

Diverse parts of the world use seaweed in cosmetics, too. Many Tanzanian women farm seaweed for export to China, Korea, Vietnam and other countries that use it as an ingredient in cosmetics and skincare products.

Even Ireland has harvested seaweed for hundreds of years. A 12th-century poem recounts how monks distributed edible seaweed to hungry poor people. In the early 20th century, the Irish coast housed nearly 300 seaweed bathhouses. You can still find some places in County Sligo to take a traditional seaweed bath. “This is our traditional spa treatment,” said Neil Walton, owner of Voya Seaweed Baths in the town of Strandhill.

Scientists continue searching for more health benefits from seaweed. The Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York has even explored using seaweed extract to treat COVID-19. This extract contains variations of heparin, a common anticoagulant. Though heparin usually comes from animal tissue, this seaweed alternative may become popular. If so, this could lower costs for seaweed as a biofuel resource.

Seaweed as biofuel

Seaweed aquaculture may also increase the use of biomass as renewable energy. In 2015, biomass-derived energy accounted for about 5% of U.S. energy use. Biomass energy encompasses plant and animal-derived energy, such as food crop waste, animal farming, human sewage, wood or forest residue and horticultural byproducts. So far, seaweed as biofuel has garnered little commercial interest, and the market remains mostly unexplored. But the industry holds great potential. According to Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy, a United States government agency that funds and promotes research and development of energy technologies, U.S. seaweed cultivation could reach 500 million tons and provide more energy than 23 billion gallons of gasoline.

Seaweed farming paired with other industries

Seaweed farming can also work with other industries, such as fish farming. Some environmental experts worry that open-sea fisheries negatively impact ecosystems due to the excess fish feed and fish feces floating in the water. Integrating seaweed production into fish farms could help reduce nitrogen emissions and break down other pollutants.

A seaweed farm could also pair well with an offshore wind farm. The first such operation is being built by Belgian-Dutch consortium Wier & Wind this year. The company plans to grow patches of seaweed for biofuel between large turbines 23 km off Zeebrugge in Belgium. This combination may lead to a genius symbiotic relationship. Seaweed production would make use of large open spaces between turbines, and the turbines would prevent ships from running over floating seaweed.

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Sebastian Junger on the defense of freedom, in the land of the free

Years ago, some buddies and I walked up the East Coast along the railroad lines, sleeping under bridges, drinking out of creeks, and cooking over campfires. It was a kind of high-speed vagrancy that saw us pass through everything – farms, ghettos, suburbs, wildlands – that make up this great country.

Once we walked through Chester, Pennsylvania, a small but dangerous town that has recently tripled the murder rate in nearby Philadelphia. It was a warm fall day, and I saw a man drinking on his front porch. He raised his beer as we passed by, and I stopped to ask him what he loved most about America.

"Freedom!" he said without hesitation. "It's a free country!"

The man was African American, and lived in an exceedingly poor, broken community. It seemed like a kind of moral victory that he would remain focused on freedom despite the injustice of his circumstances.

My father grew up in Europe and fled fascism in Spain and then in France, and he told me that he came to America because he knew that freedom and democracy would never fail here. He always made sure to tell me that many thousands of Americans were buried in his home country of France, where they had died fighting for the most basic freedom there is: that no one, no matter how powerful, can wield cruel and arbitrary authority over anyone else.

The same can be said about American revolutionaries who overthrew English rule, and Union forces that defeated slaveholding Confederate states during the Civil War.

I believe that my father – a theoretical physicist who spoke with an accent – and the man on his front porch in Chester would have had a huge amount to talk about.

American democracy has survived every single attack upon it, including al Qaeda's fourth airplane, which was headed for the U.S. Capitol building on 9/11 until passengers forced it down into a field in Pennsylvania. Twenty years later, thousands of MAGA supporters attacked the same building for the same reason: it's the heart of our democracy, and they wanted to intimidate and control us.

We may know the greatness of our country, it seems, by the cruelty of our foes.

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From Front Page...

The top 10 countries where expats are happiest with work, life and cost of living

The coronavirus pandemic impacted lives around the world, but depending on where you reside and the local response to prevention efforts, your experience may have varied greatly.

Those experiences are among the data collected by Internations, a global expat community, for its latest Expat Insider survey of more than 12,000 people to capture how happy they've been living and working abroad in the last year.

At No. 1, expats living in Taiwan reported being the happiest across a broad range of factors including quality of life, career prospects, ease of settling in and satisfaction with life abroad in general. With a population of about 23 million, Taiwan to date has reported 1,682 cases and 12 deaths from the coronavirus, according to data from Johns Hopkins, and largely stopped local transmission by the summer of 2020. However, a recent spike in cases led officials in the country's capital to raise the city's coronavirus alert level in the last week.

Taiwan's capital of Taipei has been recognized for several years as the top city for expats to live in, with especially high marks for efficient local transportation, available and affordable health care, and friendly residents who expats say help them feel more settled in their new life abroad.

Other countries that made headlines early in the pandemic for their bold leadership to contain the coronavirus, including New Zealand, Australia and Vietnam, also make the top 10. In addition to those in Taiwan and New Zealand, expats in Qatar reported being most satisfied with the official communication they received from leaders and health authorities about Covid-19 as the pandemic evolved over the last year.

Overall, 45% of survey respondents say that Covid-19 had an impact on their current stay abroad or their relocation plans. About 1 in 3 people said the pandemic delayed their plans to move abroad, and roughly 1 in 5 expats already living abroad said the health outbreak kept them from returning home in the last year.

The survey, conducted in January 2021, asked expats to rate their satisfaction across four main categories, including quality of life (like a healthy environment and robust WiFi infrastructure), ease of settling in (such as language barriers and friendliness of local residents), personal finance (such as access to affordable health care) and working abroad (such as job security and a stable local economy). Locations with affordable costs of living, larger investments in social safety nets and with access to plenty of outdoor and leisure activities to balance work and life also top the list.

Here are the top 10 countries where expats are happiest with their work and personal lives in 2021.

1. Taiwan

·75% are happy with their job
·74% are happy with their work-life balance
·78% are happy with the cost of living
·96% are happy with the quality of medical care
·62% say making new friends is easy
·80% are happy with life in general

·2. Mexico

·80% are happy with their job
·72% are happy with their work-life balance
·79% are happy with the cost of living
·68% are happy with the quality of medical care
·77% say making new friends is easy
·89% are happy with life in general

·3. Costa Rica

·70% are happy with their job
·69% are happy with their work-life balance
·55% are happy with the cost of living
·83% are happy with the quality of medical care
·65% say making new friends is easy
·88% are happy with life in general

·4. Malaysia

·69% are happy with their job
·72% are happy with their work-life balance
·82% are happy with the cost of living
·82% are happy with the quality of medical care
·66% say making new friends is easy
·85% are happy with life in general

·5. Portugal

·62% are happy with their job
·70% are happy with their work-life balance
·75% are happy with the cost of living
·78% are happy with the quality of medical care
·59% say making new friends is easy
·84% are happy with life in general

·6. New Zealand

·78% are happy with their job
·83% are happy with their work-life balance
·29% are happy with the cost of living
·78% are happy with the quality of medical care
·54% say making new friends is easy
·77% are happy with life in general\

·7. Australia

·73% are happy with their job
·76% are happy with their work-life balance
·42% are happy with the cost of living
·88% are happy with the quality of medical care
·54% say making new friends is easy
·80% are happy with life in general

·8. Ecuador

·72% are happy with their job
·79% are happy with their work-life balance
·78% are happy with the cost of living
·73% are happy with the quality of medical care
·68% say making new friends is easy
·88% are happy with life in general

·9. Canada

·69% are happy with their job
·72% are happy with their work-life balance
·42% are happy with the cost of living
·78% are happy with the quality of medical care
·52% say making new friends is easy
·76% are happy with life in general

·10. Vietnam

·86% are happy with their job
·78% are happy with their work-life balance
·85% are happy with the cost of living
·57% are happy with the quality of medical care
·67% say making new friends is easy
·85% are happy with life in general

··Global expats on average

·68% are happy with their job
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Meet the man who needed less than three months to run across the United States

Wriiten By Andy Deossa

Do you want to fall off a cliff, or get hit by a car?

If that's a real question you've ever asked yourself, chances are you're doing something pretty wild. So much so that the closest people around you probably tried to persuade you against it, but you didn't listen.

This was indeed an actual question Hellah Sidibe faced while maneuvering up mountains in Arizona. And what's wilder? Those miles were just a fragment of his cross-country trek on foot.

3,061 miles, 14 states, California to New York.

The idea stems back to May 15, 2017, where Sidibe challenged himself to run every single day. His streak transformed into a year, then two, then three. Somewhere in between, he decided to take on a transcontinental journey that's long even if you're traveling by airplane.

"I knew I had the ability to do it in 100 days or less … that's what I told my sponsors," Sidibe told Yahoo Sports. "But in the back of my mind I had my personal goal to do it in 85 days."

He did it in 84.

The journey begins

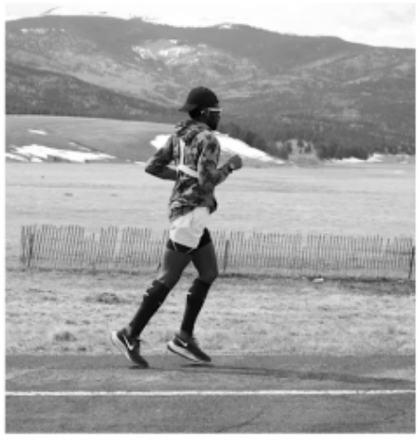
Sidibe's expedition was originally delayed by the pandemic, but on March 1, his feet kicked through the sand on Huntington Beach to officially mark the start. Best friend Garrett Jones drove an RV equipped with everything he needed and went ahead every five miles for potential rest stops. Alexa Torres, Sidibe's then-girlfriend and now fiancée, followed alongside in a support vehicle to map out every twist and turn of the route.

"I wanted to do something that was a little more challenging, and for something bigger than myself," Sidibe said. "I didn't think anyone had done it."

What he quickly found out is that there were about 300 documented runners that have completed the cross-country feat on feet. So the research began and he reached out to Robbie Balenger, who was about to finish his transcontinental, eventually running the final 17 miles with him in May of 2019.

Fast-forward almost two years later, and Balenger is driving eight hours from Colorado to New Mexico to meet Sidibe and return the favor. They later reconvened in Oklahoma and also at the finish line. But before the joyful reunion, Sidibe had to get through California and Arizona, what he calls the toughest part of the whole process.

Sidibe, a New Jersey resident, is accustomed to doing most of his runs on flatter surfaces, so the rapid rise in elevation was a shock to his body and



quickly unspooled into all types of leg pains. The swelling got so bad for him at one point that he went from his original size 10 shoes to an 11.5.

It was a rough start, being "humbled by the mountains," and he only logged 876 miles in that opening month. Once he found that stride and his body began to adapt, Sidibe turned it back up and was able to hit 1,225 miles in April.

"Ten-to-14 hours a day for a majority of the time," Sidibe said. "The lowest we got was eight hours, but the thing is you eventually have to make it up at some point, so I had to keep pushing myself."

There wasn't much downtime. It was run, sleep, wake up, repeat. As Sidibe's motto on the side of the RV stated, "no matter the circumstances."

'Who gets excited over new shoes?'

Born and raised in Mali, Africa, Sidibe grew up loving futbol. It wasn't the running part of the game he loved though; in fact he hated it. But coming to the U.S. as a freshman in high school allowed him to pursue that coveted dream of being a soccer player. After graduating from DeKalb High School in Illinois in 2008 as an all-conference player, he landed at the University of Massachusetts, a Division I program, where he played from 2010-2013.

After college, he played for Kitsap Pumas, a fourth-tier Seattle Sounders affiliate, in hopes of getting his shot at Major League Soccer. A year later, MLS Cup champion Sporting Kansas City was looking at him in the supplemental draft, but visa issues and other obstacles blocked his path as he wasn't yet a U.S. citizen at the time.

"I did my best to play at that level but there were certain adversities I had no control over," Sidibe said. "But you're chasing stuff sometimes in life not realizing that it's setting you up for something else."

The something else ended up being running.

"I used to make fun of the UMass track runners in the athletic building," Sidibe told Yahoo Sports. "They used to be so excited to get new spikes and shoes and I was like, 'Who gets excited over new shoes just to run?' Now I understand."

A simple pair of shoes ended up being the larger purpose behind Sidibe's transcontinental. He linked up with a non-profit organization called Soles4Souls to raise money for their mission of providing shoes to those in need while also trying to help cut down poverty. Sidibe knows firsthand the rough conditions he experienced back home, where kids are running barefoot on dirt and stepping on metal scraps.

To Sidibe, shoes are both a luxury and all you really need to become a runner.

Through his 84 days, he helped raise around $20,000 for Soles4Souls and collect shoes from all over the place. Company CEO Buddy Teaster, who is an ultrarunner, joined Sidibe four times during his adventure.

"Not only are we capable of doing amazing things, but we gotta do it for greater purposes," Sidibe said. "It's not just about me, me, me. If we can find a way to help something or somebody, I think we're going to go a long way."

You can't outrun systemic racism

A lot of people joined Sidibe throughout the transcontinental. Some were complete strangers intrigued at what this man with trekking poles was doing running in the middle of nowhere. Others were fans, following the journey on his social platforms. However it happened, meeting people was one of Sidibe's favorite parts of the journey.

One particular incident, however, stood out for an ugly reason. While Sidibe says many police officers were supportive of his endeavor, one in Oklahoma approached him in an interrogative manner while reaching for his gun. In that instance, Sidibe says, he stayed as calm as possible, not wanting to frantically wave over his support car. Luckily, two couples who were waiting not far ahead to meet Sidibe intervened to help diffuse the situation.

"The police started buying the story then. He wasn't buying it just with me," Sidibe told Yahoo Sports. "Those were two white couples. I think that had to do with it.

"You start questioning a lot of things," he added. "You don't want to make it racial, but that's all you can think of at that point."

In Missouri, Sidibe said he ran past a high school and someone in a truck stuck their head out the window and yelled the N-word at him. There was no hesitation in that targeted attack, nor was there when Sidibe took to his Instagram to speak on it. The principal of the school reached out to support Sidibe, along with police and town locals. As the apologies flowed in, so did donations to Soles4Souls.

"You realize there's more good people than bad ones," Sidibe said. "I didn't care for them to get in trouble, just to see what they did was wrong. And for what?"

The end and the beginning

Despite all he had to endure, both physically and emotionally, Sidibe said his homecoming in the New York City area was nothing short of amazing.

On his last night, he did stop home in Rochelle Park, New Jersey, showering and eating inside the house. But when it was time to sleep it was back to the RV. He wasn't about to throw 83 days of a routine away just because he was home. That wasn't the final destination.

So he woke up on May 23 to a massive group including a mayor, firefighters and more, sending him on his way toward New York.

In the city, the mob and anticipation grew and hundreds of people waited for him at the finish line as a NYPD motorcade guided him. Once he took that final left turn and saw the journey's end, Sidibe said, it was as if the agony of the 84 days had been just a dream.

Somehow, he found the fortitude to make the day even more memorable by dropping to a knee in front of the crowd and proposing to Torres, the one who was by his side the whole way, driving slowly with the hazard lights on from California to New York.

When he first brought up the idea of running across the country, she said "oh no."

Thankfully after he did it, she said yes.

"If she wasn't there, I don't think I would've survived. She knows me better than anybody," Sidibe said. "I thought her job was harder than mine. She had so much on her plate. My energy was just focused on running, hers was everything collectively."

The three-person transcontinental crew beat his original goal by a day. Sidibe attributes that in large part to the "Lex method," a term for Torres finding the easiest and most efficient ways to do it.

Then again, nothing about running over 3,000 miles in 84 days is easy.

"I'm even stronger than I thought I was," Sidibe said. "And it's not just about me — everyone is much stronger than they think they are. You won't know that until you put yourself to the test. You just have to find your limit and break it. I found my limit within this and I broke through it. Now I have to find the next one. I don't know how I'm going to make that happen, but I will find the next one."

He paused, and flashed a big smile.

"I will."

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California and Mexico sign agreement to open new border crossing by late 2024

Written By Alexandra Mendoza

The governments of California and Mexico signed an agreement Monday stating their commitment to work together to open new border crossing at Otay Mesa by late 2024.

With the new gate, the third in the San Diego region, officials aim to reduce long port-of-entry wait times. The goal with the added crossing is a wait time of no more than 20 minutes.

Currently, passenger vehicles and commercial trucks crossing the border between Tijuana and San Diego may endure tedious waits — harming business, as well as air quality as they idle in line — officials said.

"This new port of entry will not only spur economic activity, but it will also improve the quality of life for the millions of Californians and Mexicans who frequently cross one of the busiest borders in the world," said California Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis.

She called the agreement "a great example of California's leadership in combating climate change. The project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve mobility in the region."

Otay Mesa East, also known as the Otay II project, is expected to provide an economic boost of $1.8 billion annually, officials said.

With the signing of the memorandum of understanding, California and Mexico have agreed to adhere to construction timelines, to quickly resolve any policy issues, and to establish a framework to share toll revenues for project funding.

"We know what it takes to get it done. We have certain milestones to meet, and now we have this document that memorializes our commitment to the project," said California Secretary of Transportation David S. Kim after the signing ceremony Monday at the construction site in Otay Mesa.

On the California side, the $1-billion project has already secured $565 million in local, state and federal funding. The remainder is expected to be financed mostly through toll revenue.

On Mexico's side, a first-phase investment of more than $186 million is under consideration to cover construction work and access roads, according to Roberto Velasco, director of North America with the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Last year, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador included the Otay II project within an infrastructure plan aiming to reactivate the economy.

Velasco emphasized that this project was a symbol of a strong binational relationship. "We believe in building bridges, not in building walls, and this is important for us in that sense," he said.

"This is the future of the U.S.-Mexico relationship that we want — a future where we are more connected, and we allow for the many different possibilities that life in the border offers to both of our countries."

Officials from Mexico and California, including San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria, far left, attend the signing ceremony Monday in San Diego's Otay Mesa community.

Initially, Otay Mesa East will have five lanes for vehicles and five more for commercial trucks, with the option for these to be interchangeable depending on the time and demand, explained María Rodríguez-Molina, project manager with the San Diego Assn. of Governments.

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