May 22, 2026

Dear Family, Friends, and Colleagues,

Our lives were profoundly changed by our recent journey to Costa Rica. What began as a trip to explore sustainability and environmental stewardship became something far more personal: a powerful reminder that another way of living is possible — healthier, kinder, greener, safer, and more joyful.

Carla and I warmly invite you to download and explore our PDF collection, an affordable and meaningful way to experience this journey from your own home. Inside, you will find Carla's beautiful poetry inspired by Costa Rica, photographs taken by us and fellow travelers, reflections on sustainability and public health, and a draft essay currently being prepared for publication in a magazine or journal.

Together, these pieces tell the story of a country that demonstrates how protecting nature can lead to longer, healthier, and more prosperous lives. At the same time, they confront a painful reality: powerful interests too often attempt to silence science, discourage inconvenient truths, and intimidate those who speak out for environmental justice. Yet we believe hope is stronger than fear — and that data, compassion, photography, storytelling, science, and human courage can overcome even the darkest forces.

In April 2026, we traveled to Costa Rica with Intrepid, an environmental education tour company known for affordability, safety, and exceptional local guides. As I moved through rainforests, villages, coastlines, schools, and protected ecosystems, I could not help comparing what I witnessed with my 37 years of research and public service in West Louisville — a predominantly Black and low-income community of 60,000 residents where prosperity, health, and life expectancy have too often declined under the burden of industrial pollution and environmental neglect.

We wholeheartedly encourage you to place Costa Rica on your bucket list. Our extraordinary native guide, Jordan, and the remarkable team at Intrepid Travel helped create one of the most meaningful educational and personal experiences of our lives.

An old Chinese proverb says, "Hearing something a hundred times is never as good as seeing it once." Walk the streets of San José, then walk parts of West Louisville, and the contrast becomes impossible to ignore. In Costa Rica, nature is treated as sacred and essential to human survival. In too many American communities — especially poor communities — environmental destruction has become normalized.

Over the course of my career, I have traveled widely and studied both flourishing and struggling cities across the world. I have tried to understand not only why communities fail, but also how they can succeed and thrive. What moved us so deeply about Costa Rica was not simply its breathtaking beauty, but its values. It remains one of the world's safest and most environmentally conscious democracies — a nation that prioritizes clean air, clean water, biodiversity, education, health, and human well-being.

Costa Rica continues to accomplish something many American cities increasingly struggle to achieve: it protects life while teaching people how to live well.

This journey strengthened our determination to help build a better world for our children and grandchildren who will inherit this wounded Earth long after we are gone. We believe countries like Costa Rica offer a hopeful model for how humanity can confront climate change, restore ecosystems, and create healthier and more livable communities for future generations.

When we returned home, we were thrilled to learn that our film, *Climate of Hope*, is now being finalized under the direction of three-time Emmy Award winner Chris Nolan.

Climate of Hope Film:
https://www.climateofhopefilm.org/

We would be deeply honored if you would consider helping us complete this project through a nonprofit tax-deductible donation. Contributors may receive screen credit, invitations to our red-carpet premiere, and — most importantly — the knowledge that they helped bring a message of hope, truth, and environmental justice to the world.

What began as a somewhat boring PBS-style documentary has evolved into a gripping and emotionally powerful story about students, scientists, and communities confronting intimidation and political pressure while fighting to protect public health and the planet.

For the past two years, many people involved in the film have worked countless hours for little or no compensation because they believe this message matters. Carla and I have provided financial contributions to help amplify this work, including promoting my latest book, *Climate Chaos: Killing People, Places, and the Planet.*

Additional information can be found at:
https://www.sunlouisville.org/

In a world too often filled with fear, division, pollution, and despair, we still believe kindness, truth, science, beauty, and hope can prevail. We will not be intimidated by slander, threats, or violence directed toward community activists, climate scientists, public servants, or those courageous enough to defend the Earth and future generations.

With love, gratitude, hope, and enduring determination,

John and Carla

Forces of nature in extraordinary splendor
Tiger paws, poor man's umbrella allow me to sit under
Multitudes of birds sporting rainbows of feathers
Shrill sounds creating a cacophony for our pleasures

From treetop to treetop host monkeys to swing
Perched on a branch, magistic Tucan now sings
Black hawks in charge to keep out disease
White hurons dip in water, grabbing fish with ease

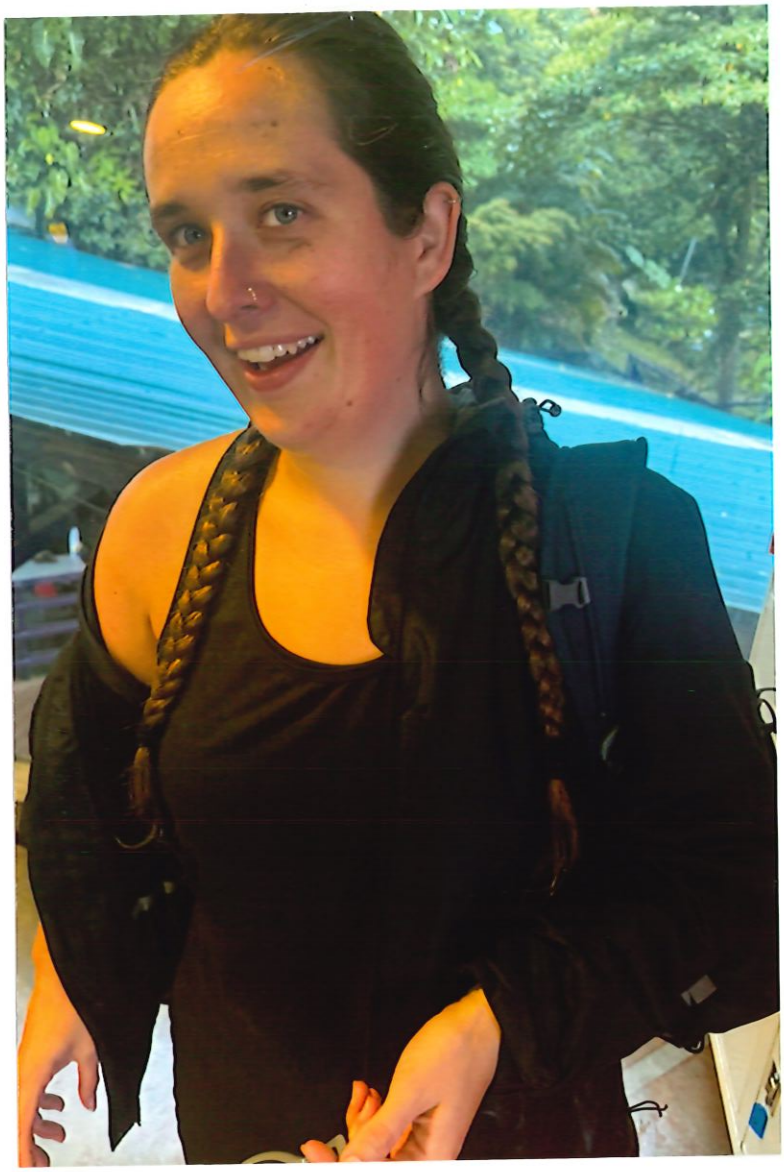
Sprinkles to pounding downpours, rain graces the ground
Leaving droplets on petals, beaks, leaves all around
Activities abound with the allure of nature
Ziplines, hanging bridges, hikes our earth provides nurture

The adventures are endless, future memories untold
Experience in the Rainforce, be brave and always Bold!

Written with joy by Carlita J. Snyder
April 25, 2026

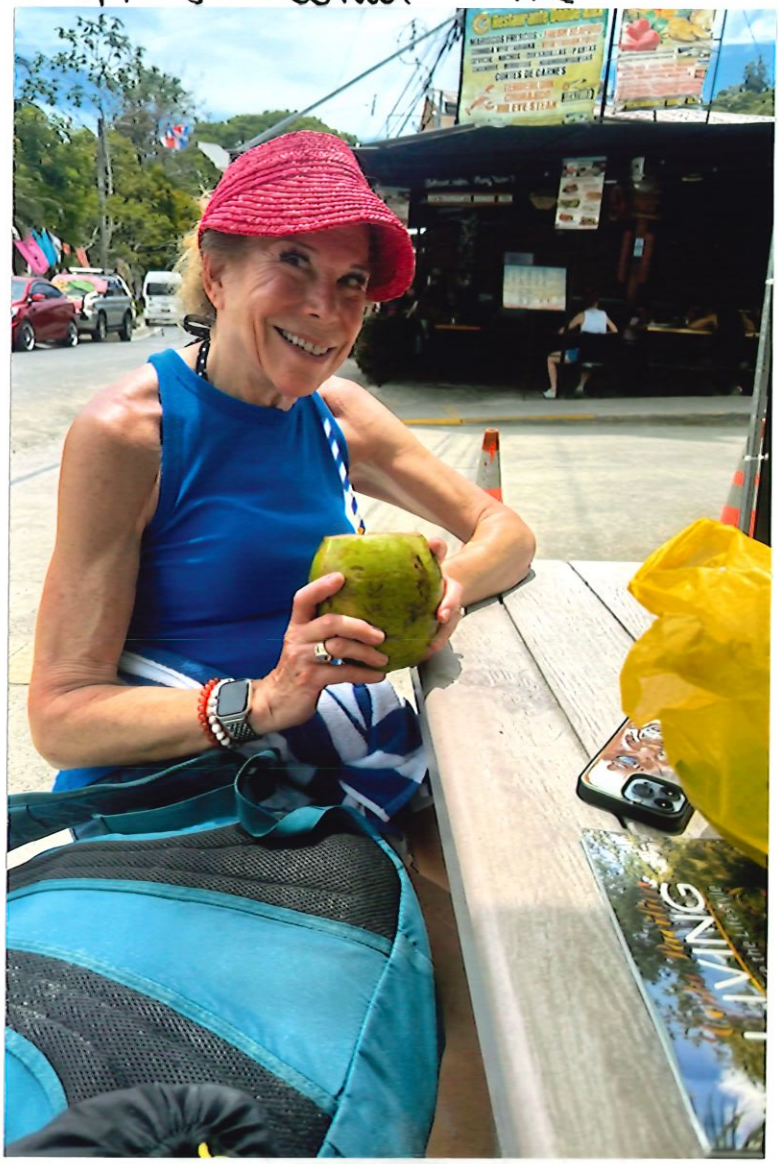
Pura Vida

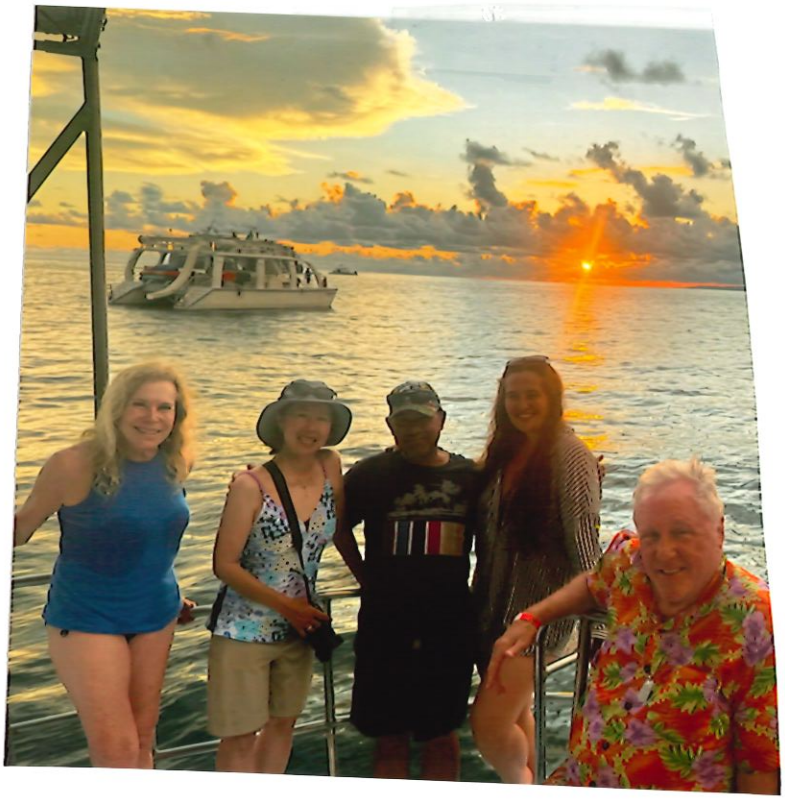
Our New Friends

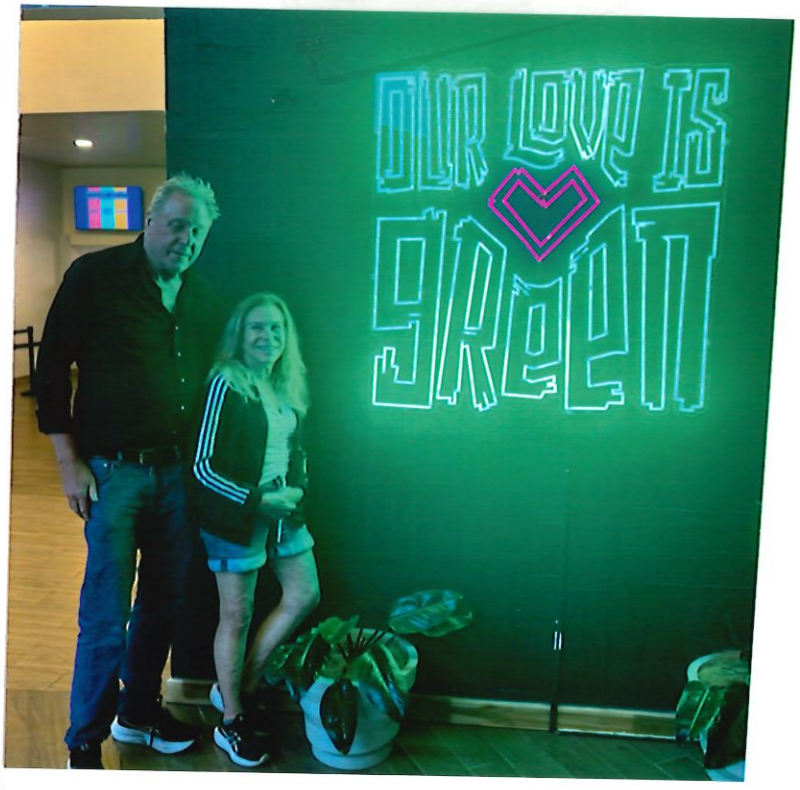


Plentiful Wildlife

Sipping Coconut Milk

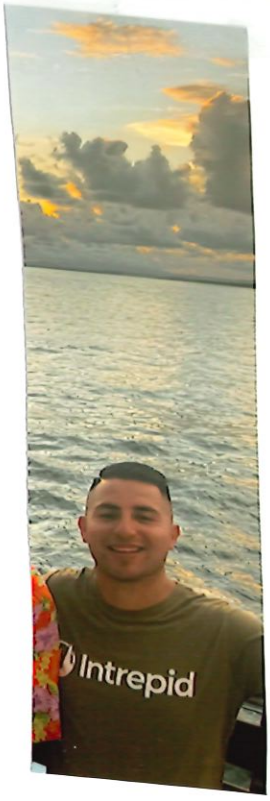


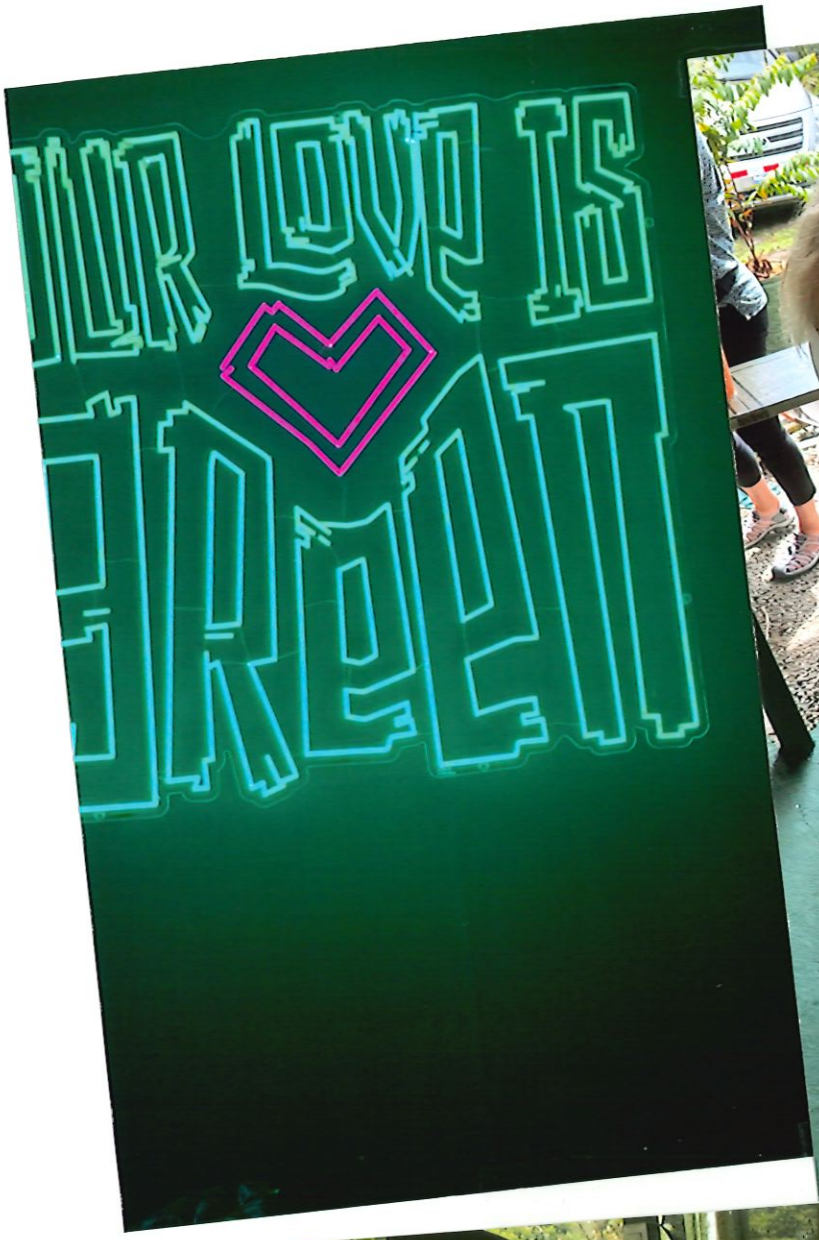





OMEGA

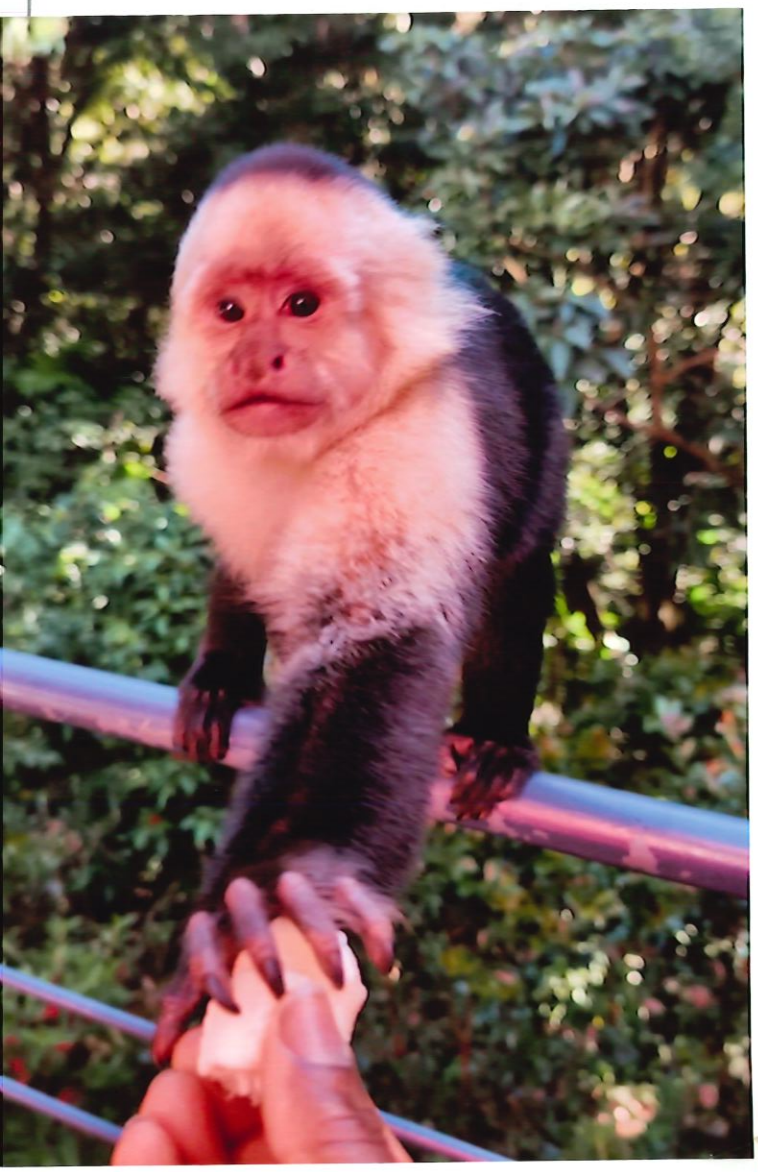

urn on


Intrepid



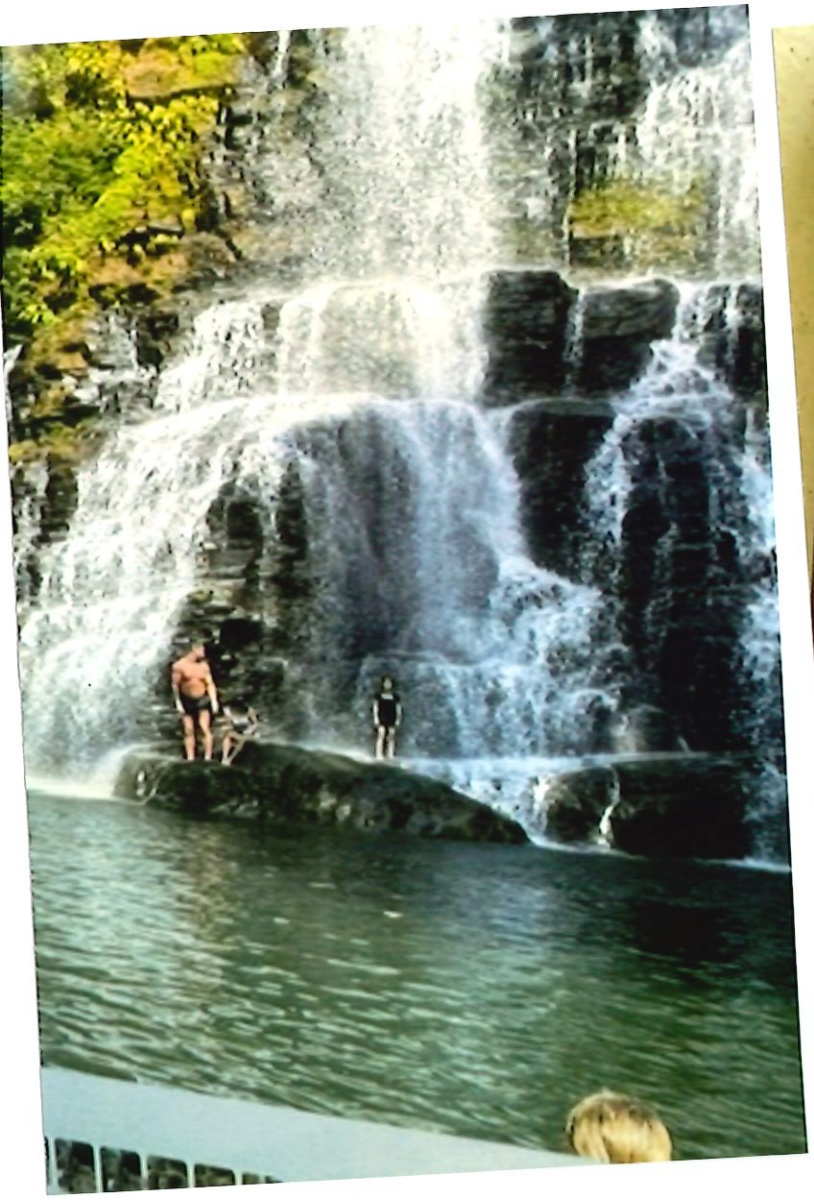
Cooking lesson with Chef Willian

Monkees Everywhere



Danger on the Bridge


EPIC
EPIC

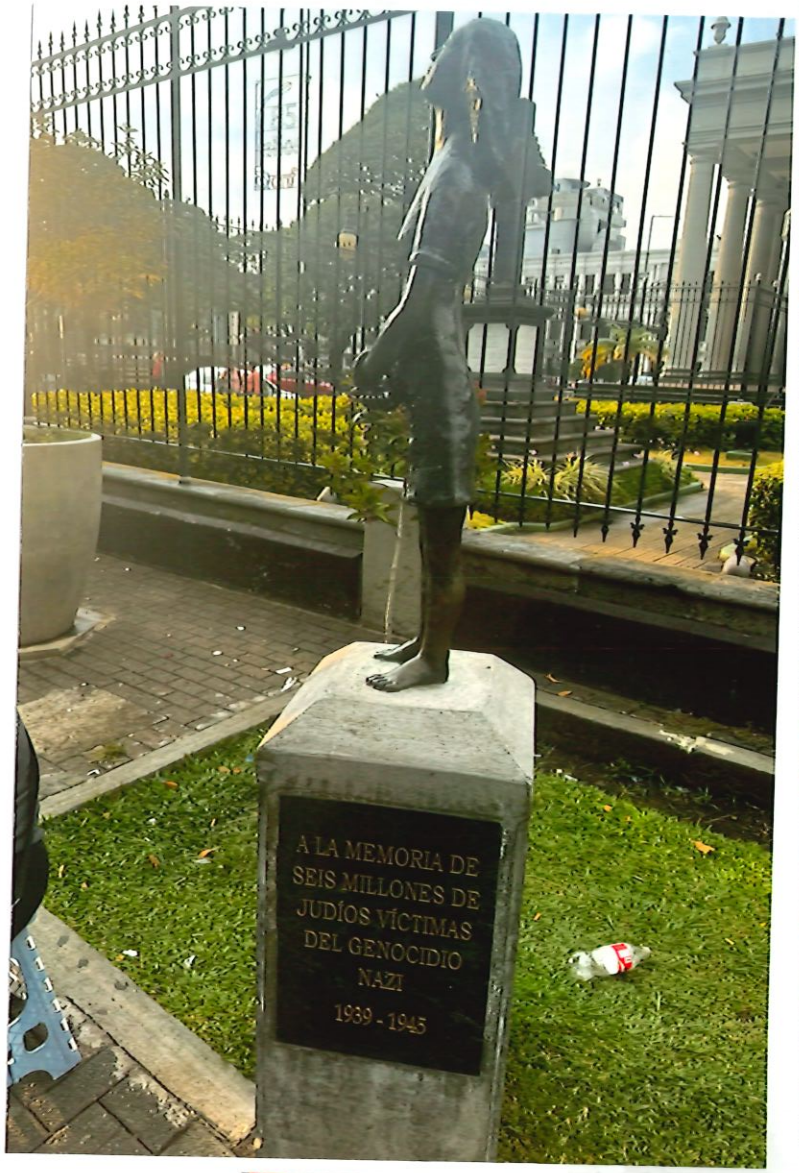


Magnificent Waterfalls!

Dareedevil Dr. G – Ziplining in Costa Rica

Lost in the Clouds !

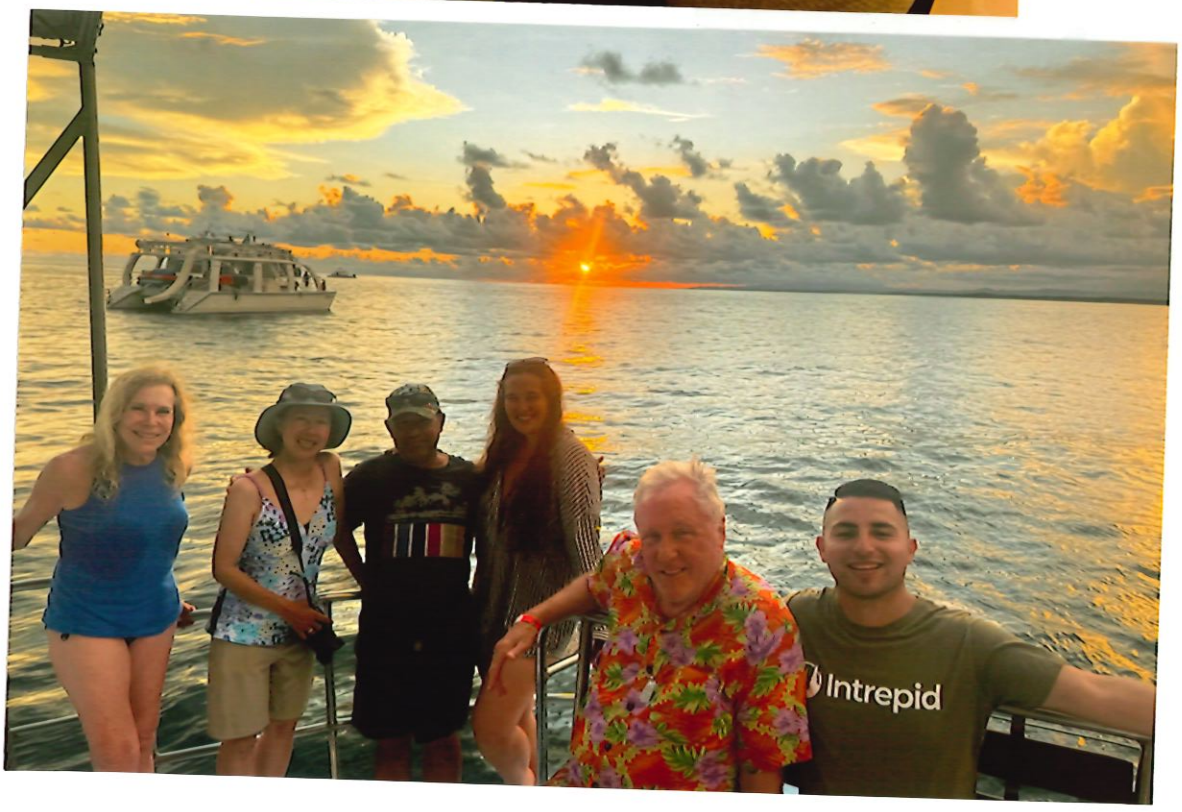
Downtown Costa Rica - Honoring John Lennon / Holocaust Survivors

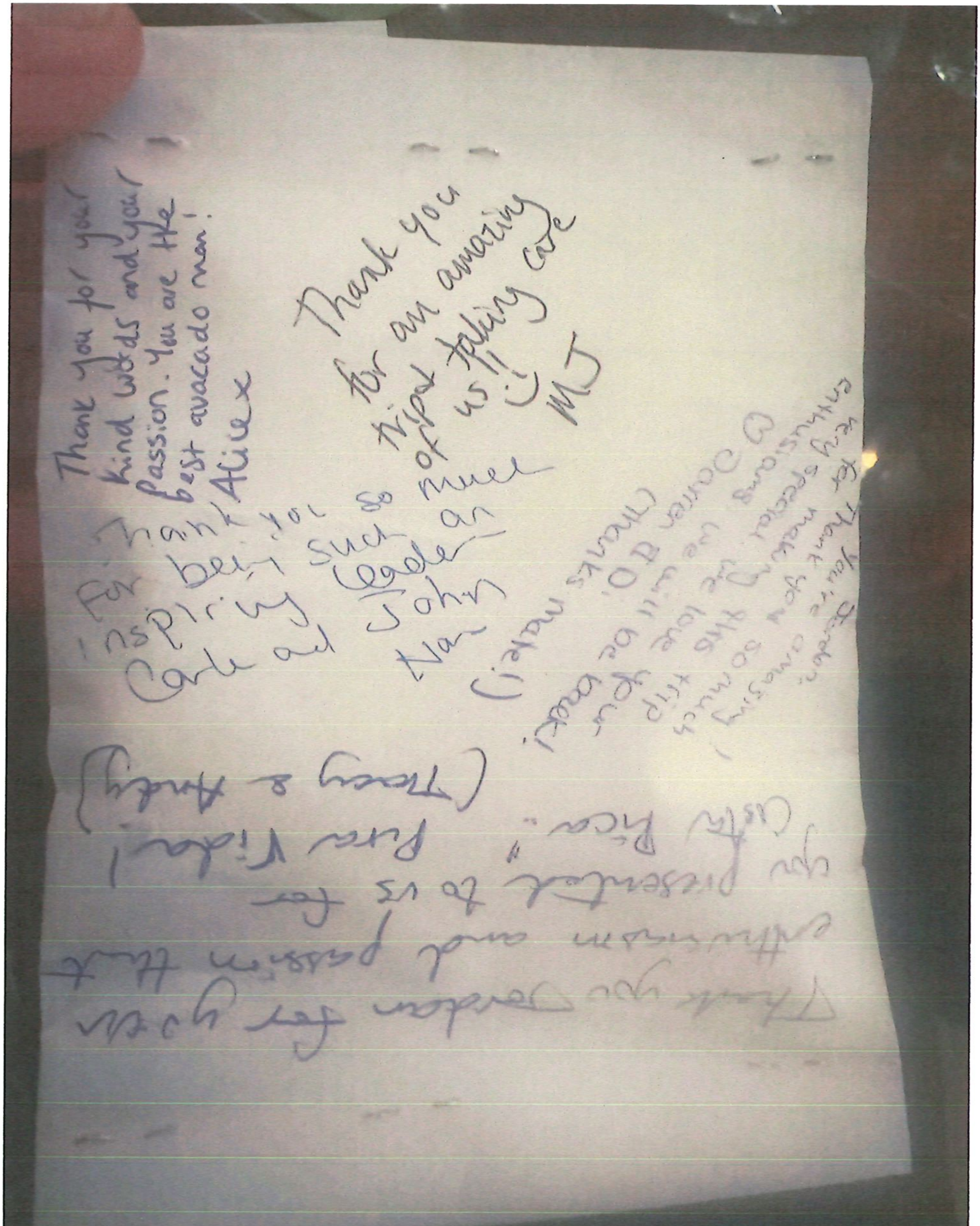


Views From Costa Rica

To the Beach!

Thankful for Jordan - Our great leader from Intrepid ♡





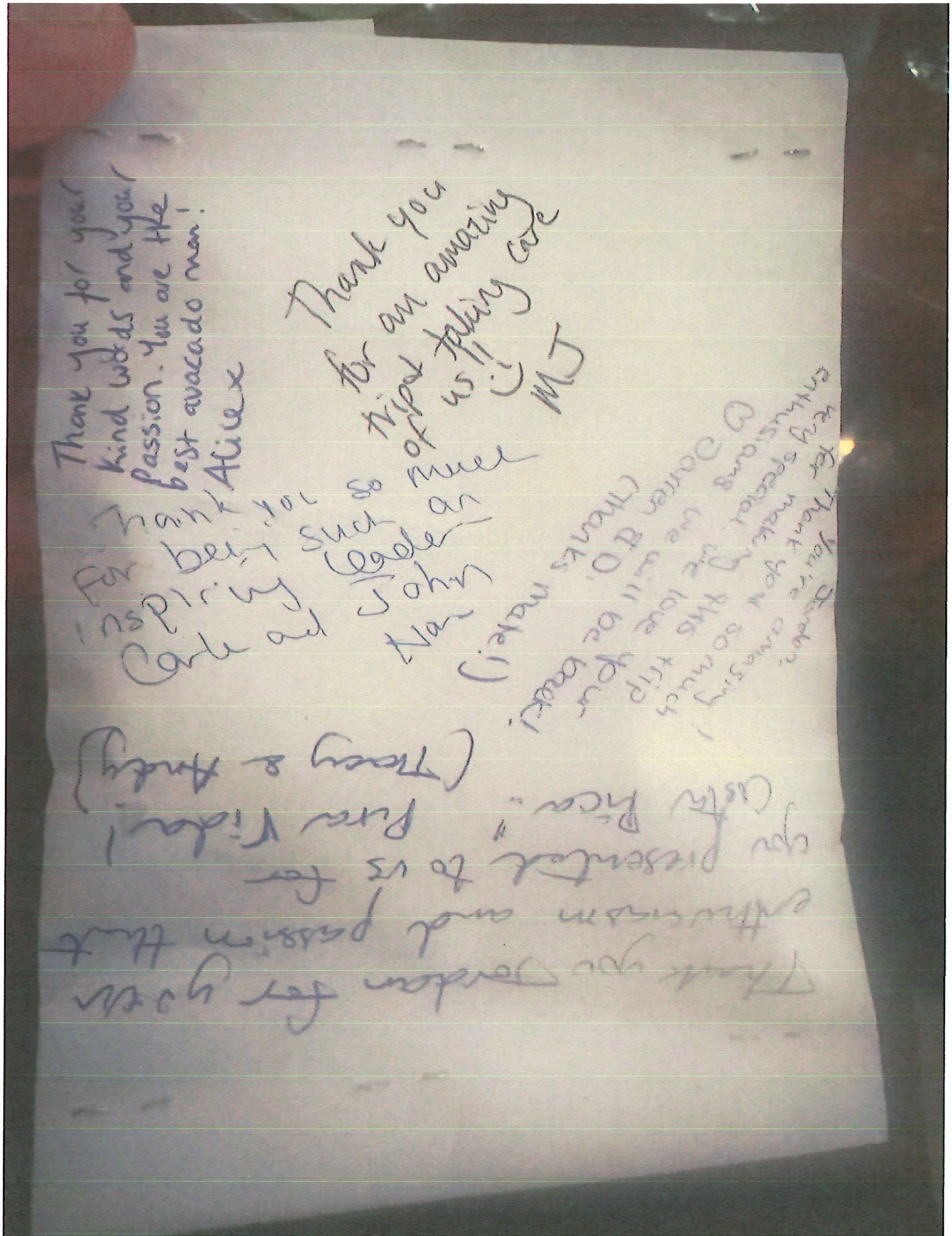
Thank you for your kind words and your passion. You are the best avocado man! Alice x

Thank you for an amazing trip of us!! & taking care :) MJ

Thank you for being such inspiring leader Carla and John Nan

Jordan: You're amazing! Thank you so much for making this trip very special. We love your enthusiasm. We will be back! ♡ Darren & O. (Thanks mate!)

Thank you Jordan for your enthusiasm and passion that you presented to us for Costa Rica." Pura Vida! (Tracy & Andy)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Jordan, You're amazing, Thank you so much for making this trip very special. We love your enthusiasms. We will be back! ♡ Darren & D. (Thanks mate!)
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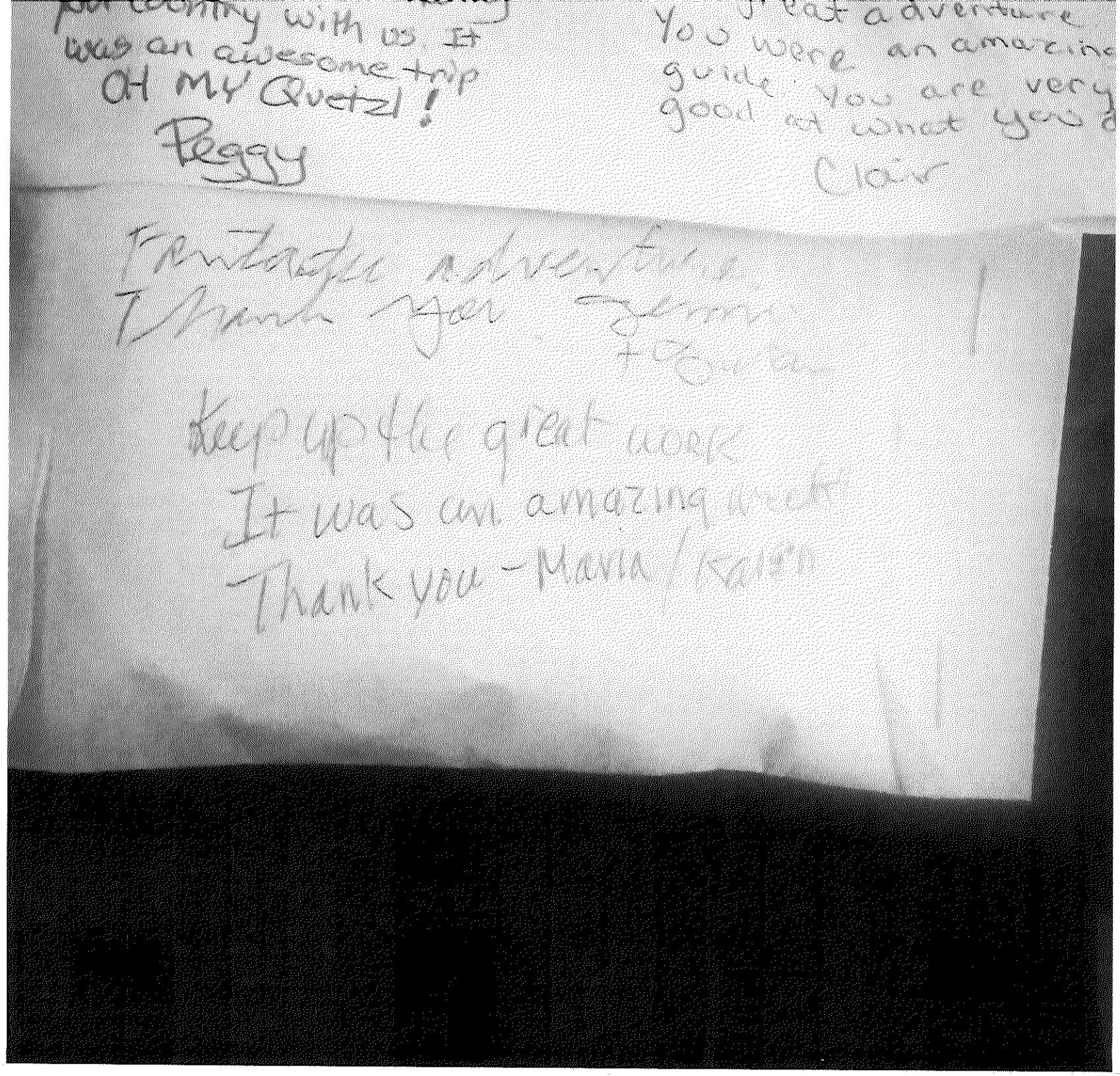

Essential Trip Information

Costa Rica Experience

★★★★★ 4.9 . 335 reviews

Overview and Itinerary-Pictures
April 20-28, 2026
John Hans Gilderbloom-Carlita J. Snyder

http://www.intrepidtravel.com 800-970-7299

Start	San Jose, Costa Rica	**Style**	Original
Finish	San Jose, Costa Rica	**Ages**	Min 15
Theme	Explorer, Wildlife	**Group size**	Min 1 - Max 14
Destinations	Costa Rica	**Validity**	01 Mar 2026 - 31 Dec 2026
Physical rating	■■□□□ ⓘ	**Trip code**	QVSS

Is this trip right for you?

- While this trip doesn't require a high level of fitness, it's essential to be at least moderately fit if you want to partake in all activities.
- Many of the activities on this trip (both included and optional) take place in the great outdoors. This means you'll need to be prepared to deal with insects and occasionally rustic conditions. It's all part of immersing yourself in this natural paradise.
- Costa Rica is generally hot and humid year-round, and from May to October it can be wet too. At night and in locations at higher elevations it can get chilly. Protect yourself from the sun, bring a waterproof jacket and light clothing you can layer, and stay hydrated. Please carefully consider which time of the year you'll feel most comfortable travelling.
- Costa Rica is a popular place and can sometimes be expensive. Expect to pay more than you would in other Central American countries for many things.

Physical rating

■■□□□

None of the activities featured in this trip require special training or skills, just a reasonable level of fitness and a willingness to participate. Cobblestones and uneven roads are common and you may be required to walk in hot and humid conditions. If you are in any doubt, please share these concerns or issues with your sales consultant so that your leader is aware prior and can pre-empt your needs.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader or local representative may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction - if this is the case, please ask the group leader or local representative to speak to their direct manager.

You may also choose to provide details in your online feedback, which we ask you to complete within 30 days of the end of your trip. Please do be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is completed, so informing us while still travelling will give us the opportunity to resolve the issue in real-time.

For general contact details please use the following page:
https://www.intrepidtravel.com/contact-us

In case of a genuine crisis or emergency, you can reach our local office on the numbers below:

In the case of a genuine crisis or emergency, please contact our local office:

Intrepid local operator: Available for phone call on +506 4600 6000

Itinerary

Hide all

Day 1 · **San Jose**

Hola! Welcome to Costa Rica. Your adventure begins with a welcome meeting at 6 pm in San Jose. With over half the country's population living within its parameters, San Jose has a dynamic atmosphere. If you arrive early, why not wander around at your own pace – a good place to start is the main plaza, perfect for some people watching. Tonight, maybe head out to get to know your group with an optional welcome dinner.

Accommodation

- Hotel (1 night)

Meals

There are no meals included on this day.

+ Optional activities

- San Jose - Pre-Colombian Gold Museum (Entrance fee) - USD17
- San Jose - National Museum (entrance fee) (Closed Sunday & Monday) - USD11

Special information

It's very important that you attend the welcome meeting as we'll be collecting insurance details and next of kin information at this time. If you are going to be late, please let your travel agent or hotel reception know. Ask reception or look for a note in the lobby for more information on where the meeting will take place.

Day 2 · **La Fortuna**

Head to Tesoro Escondido Waterfall this morning. Meaning 'hidden treasure', this 46-m-high waterfall plunges into turquoise pools and is the perfect place for a dip. The trail to get there involves hiking through the forest, over a hanging bridge and across a rock-strewn river. Don't worry if you work up a sweat, as you'll cool right down when you jump in! Have lunch at a nearby restaurant, then continue to La Fortuna – a small town just a few minutes from the famous Arenal Volcano. Spend the rest of the day as you please. Maybe make another splash at the 70-m-high La Fortuna waterfall, hike the lava field of the 1968 Arenal Volcano eruption or test your balance on a stand-up paddle board on the volcano's namesake lake. There are also several geothermal hot springs in the area, so why not relax your muscles with a soothing soak?

Accommodation

- Hotel (1 night)

Meals

- Breakfast
- Lunch

Included activities

- Alajuela - Tesoro Escondido Waterfall

Optional activities

- La Fortuna - Paradise Hot Springs (entrance fee) - USD47

Special information

The roads in this mountainous region are steep and curvy. If you're prone to motion sickness, you may want to come prepared with appropriate medicine or remedies to help you stay comfortable during the drive. Visiting the waterfall involves a short hike that takes approximately 30-45 minutes each way. The hike is relatively easy but does involve some elevation. Total distance is approximately 4 km round-trip. You should wear sturdy shows and bring water. The waterfall occasionally closes during periods of active volcanic activity at the nearby Poas Volcano. In this case we will visit Rio Cuarto Lagoon instead.

Your travel time today will be approximately 4 hours.

Some of the above optional activity prices include an entrance fee only. Transportation will need to be paid in addition to the entrance fee and is subject to change depending on the number of participants.

Day 3 · **Monteverde**

You have a free morning in La Fortuna. In the afternoon, take a minibus to Lake Arenal where you'll hop on a scenic boat ride across the water. Another minibus will be waiting to take you to Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve. Monteverde was founded as an agricultural community in 1951 by a group of North American Quakers who cleared virgin forests to create pastures for dairy farming. These environmentally aware settlers were conscious of the dangers of unrestricted farming, so they established a small, privately owned wildlife sanctuary, which has grown to become an internationally renowned reserve with over 2000 species of plants, 320 bird species and 100 different types of mammals. Check into your hotel, then maybe do a night walk to spot some of the area's nocturnal critters.

Accommodation

- Hotel (1 night)

Meals

- Breakfast

+ Optional activities

- La Fortuna - La Fortuna Waterfall (Entrance only) - USD25
- La Fortuna - Arenal 1968 Volcano View and Lava Trails (Entrance fee) - USD25
- Monteverde - Children's Eternal Rain Forest (The Intrepid Foundation Partner) Night wildlife walk - USD43

Special information

Your travel time today will be approximately 4 hours.

Some of the above optional activity prices include an entrance fee only. Transportation will need to be paid in addition to the entrance fee and is subject to change depending on the number of participants.

Day 4 · **Monteverde**

Join your leader for a guided walk in the Monteverde Cloud Forest this morning. Keep your eyes peeled (and your camera handy) for monkeys, toucans, sloths and coatis. You're free to explore for the rest of the afternoon. Maybe get closer to the creatures who dwell in the trees on a suspension bridge tour – or if you're feeling extra adventurous, zip line through the canopies! You could also head to the Serpentarium to check out some crawly critters, see up to 30 species of butterfly in specially created gardens or get your caffeine fix on a coffee and cacao farm tour. Whatever you do, be sure to watch out for the resplendent quetzal – one of the most elusive birds in the world.

Accommodation

- Hotel (1 night)

Meals

There are no meals included on this day.

Included activities

- Monteverde - Monteverde Cloud Forest - Visit

+ Optional activities

- Monteverde - Butterfly Garden and Insects Farm (entrance fee) - USD22
- Monteverde - Coffee & Chocolate tour - USD47
- Monteverde - Canopy Zip Lining (Entrance, Equipment & Transport) - USD101
- Monteverde - Suspension bridges tour - USD55

Day 5 · **Manuel Antonio**

Travel through the mountains by private minibus to the surf town of Manuel Antonio, stopping along the way to join a local family in their home to prepare a traditional lunch and sip on local Costa Rican coffee. You'll have the chance to jump in and help, learning traditional techniques as the meal comes together! After lunch arrive at your accommodation and enjoy some downtime. Tonight, you could watch the sun set over the Pacific and then grab a spot at a waterfront restaurant.

Accommodation

Meals

- Hotel (1 night)
- Lunch

Included activities

- Manuel Antonio - Homecooked lunch

Special information

Your travel time today will be approximately 5 hours.

Day 6 · **Manuel Antonio National Park**

Spend your morning exploring Manuel Antonio National Park with a naturalist to understand its incredible ecosystems. Monkeys, armadillos, sloths and hundreds of species of birds are among the wildlife you can spot here. The park also has turquoise seas and white-sand beaches – perfect for swimming and kayaking. It would be easy to spend your whole time here in or by the water – and with a free afternoon, you can do just that! If you're feeling active, you could continue exploring the park's trails.

Accommodation

- Hotel (1 night)

Meals

- Breakfast

Included activities

- Manuel Antonio National Park - (Entrance fee)
- Manuel Antonio National Park - Tour with a Naturalist Guide

Optional activities

- Manuel Antonio – Cruise (Inc transport, guide, lunch and drinks onboard) - USD95

Day 7 · **San Jose**

This morning, head to a mangrove forest on Damas Island for a kayaking adventure. This activity is run by a naturalist near their home along the canals, so you'll be exploring with someone who really knows the twists and turns of these protected

tropical wetlands. If you're lucky, you might spot a troop of curious white-faced capuchins in the trees above. Take a public bus back to San Jose, then head out for an optional farewell dinner and maybe raise a glass to a great trip.

Accommodation

- Hotel (1 night)

Meals

- Breakfast

Included activities

- Quepos - Mangrove kayaking with local guide

+ Optional activities

- San Jose - The Art of Craft Beer in San Jose - Urban Adventures - USD69
- San Jose - San Jose By Night: Food and Culture - Urban Adventures - USD74

Special information

Your travel time today will be approximately 4 hours.

On occasion, when the tide is too low to kayak in the morning, we'll swap the Manuel Antonio National Park and kayaking activity. The kayaking trip is beginner-friendly and conducted in either double or single kayaks in calm mangrove canals. You should wear light, comfortable clothing, sandals that may get wet, and sun protection.

Day 8 · **San Jose**

With no further activities planned, your trip comes to an end after breakfast. If you'd like to extend your stay in Costa Rica, just speak to your booking agent ahead of time.

Meals

There are no meals included on this day.

+ Optional activities

- San Jose - San Jose By Night: Food and Culture - Urban Adventures - USD74
- San Jose - The Art of Craft Beer in San Jose - Urban Adventures - USD69

Climate Truth Cannot be Silenced: The Triumph of Costa Rica and the Tragedy of West Louisville

by

John Hans Gilderbloom Ph.D.

Part I. Costa Rica is a Living Classroom: A Model of Good Stewardship

Costa Rica is close to an ideal place in terms of quality of life, sustainability, air, water and soil quality, and the safest democracies in the world. Costa Rica still manages to do something American cities increasingly struggle to accomplish: it protects life and teaches us how to survive and thrive. In April 2026, I traveled to Costa Rica with Intrepid, an environmental education tour company recognized for being affordable, safe, and staffed by exceptionally knowledgeable Costa Rican guides. As I moved through the country's ecosystems and communities, I found myself continually comparing what I saw to my 37 years of research, teaching, and service in West Louisville—a community of 60,000 predominantly Black and low-income residents where prosperity, health, and overall well-being have steadily declined.

Hearing something a hundred times is never as good as seeing it once, says the old Chinese proverb. Walk the streets of San José, then walk the blocks of West Louisville, and the contrast becomes impossible to ignore. I felt more at home in Costa Rica, with its vast nature preserves and commitment to environmental stewardship, than in parts of West Louisville shaped for decades by the destructive practices of chemical industries.

Richard Louv later argued in his influential book *Last Child in the Woods* that modern children have become increasingly estranged from the natural world, trapped indoors by screens and electronic entertainment. My generation grew up hearing mothers call from the porch, "Go outside and play," and in hindsight, they may have understood more about child development than many contemporary experts. Costa Rica understands this instinctively. West Louisville too often does not.

I was fortunate to grow up twelve miles south of the San Francisco city limits and only a short drive from the cafés, bookstores, jazz clubs, and waterfront streets of North Beach, Chinatown, Little Italy, and Fisherman's Wharf. My home sat beside the Crystal Springs watershed, a vast preserve of lakes, forests, creeks, caves, springs, and mystery. Unlike many American cities where drinking water flows through rivers contaminated by sewage, industrial runoff, and agricultural chemicals, our water came clean and cold from the Sierra Nevada. You do not fully appreciate something as simple as pure water until you have lived where it is absent, as I later experienced in Louisville.

Behind our home—built by my grandfather to celebrate my birth—stretched a natural paradise of Bay, Pine, Redwood, and Eucalyptus trees. Deer trails wound through thick brush along the Crystal Springs Reservoir. There were hidden caves, giant boulders, creeks alive with frogs and salamanders, and endless opportunities for discovery. As a child, I spent some of my happiest days wandering there with my childhood friend, author Bill Bacon—tracking deer, searching for

Native American artifacts, collecting rocks, snakes, banana slugs, rabbits, and lizards, or wondering how an abandoned 1934 sedan ended up buried deep in a creek bed.

There was danger too: swarming bees, spider bites, steep ravines, and the unpredictability of wilderness. But that landscape taught me curiosity, resilience, independence, and awe. It was the finest classroom a child could have—one that nurtured exploration, imagination, and a lifelong passion for research.

Just two miles away sat the Burlingame train station, where my grandfather Lauder helped build an early transit-oriented community of elegant apartments for working people. Long before planners coined phrases like "new urbanism" or "smart growth," Burlingame demonstrated that density, beauty, walkability, and public transit could coexist harmoniously.

San Francisco itself became another classroom. It remains one of America's most walkable and European-like cities—a place where preservation, architecture, transit, mixed-use neighborhoods, and vibrant street life made urban living attractive rather than oppressive. Cable cars, commuter trains, subways, and compact neighborhoods offered an alternative to the endless sprawl consuming much of postwar America.

I have since traveled widely and studied both flourishing and failing cities across the world. As a professor in California, Wisconsin, Texas, Illinois, and Kentucky, I led perhaps more than a thousand students on experiential learning journeys through the Netherlands, Spain, Cuba, Costa Rica, Italy, France, and across American cities as varied as Portland, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, New Orleans, Austin, Houston, Miami, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, New York, Carmel, San Antonio, and West Louisville. Over decades of teaching urban studies, economics, sociology, public administration, public health, planning, and climate science, I examined not only urban dysfunction but also the policies and practices that help cities thrive. I have written eight books, 67 scholarly articles, and numerous essays and op-eds appearing in publications ranging from local newspapers to *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

I write as a scientist rather than as a partisan, a position that has earned me criticism—and support—from both the political left and right. My work relies heavily on large-scale data analysis, allowing evidence rather than ideology to guide conclusions about housing, transportation, health, politics, and urban planning. The joy of the scientific method lies not simply in confirming what we think we know, but in discovering, often to our surprise, how frequently conventional wisdom collapses under rigorous scrutiny. I take pride in the body of research I've built—work that has deepened understanding of housing, homelessness, the Americans with Disabilities Act, COVID-19, foreclosure, rent control, renters' rights, health, and climate change. At times, my findings have drawn sharp resistance from interests invested in inequality, pollution, and civic dysfunction. Yet that resistance has never deterred me. If anything, it has strengthened my determination to pursue solutions to the accelerating crisis of climate chaos.

Costa Rica abolished its military in 1948. Imagine that. No tanks rolling through neighborhoods. No endless worship of weaponry. Instead, Costa Rica invested in schools, healthcare, parks,

transit, and environmental stewardship. The nation now enjoys one of the highest life expectancies in the Americas—over 81 years. In several predominantly low-income, majority-Black neighborhoods of West Louisville—home to roughly 60,000 residents—life expectancy falls into the low 60s. According to the Louisville Department of Health, countries such as Iraq and Jamaica report longer average lifespans than those experienced by many West Louisville residents. That is not merely inequality. That is a moral catastrophe.

The differences are visible immediately to anyone willing to leave the electronic cocoon and experience the world firsthand. Costa Rica smells of rainforests, volcanic soil, coffee, and ocean air. West Louisville too often smells of diesel exhaust, chemical plants, asphalt, and neglect. One nation built a reputation around biodiversity and ecological preservation; one American neighborhood became a sacrifice zone.

What makes the comparison so unsettling is that residents of West Louisville often earn significantly more than many families in Costa Rica. Costa Rica's median household income is estimated at roughly $13,000 to $15,000 annually, while many neighborhoods in West Louisville range between roughly $20,000 and $30,000—still well below the U.S. national median, but often nearly double Costa Rican incomes. Yet the deeper question remains: who is truly better off?

In Costa Rica, despite lower incomes many residents still breathe cleaner air, live longer lives, and face fewer daily exposures to industrial toxins than families living beside chemical corridors in West Louisville. Wealth alone means little if children grow up surrounded by carcinogens, asthma-inducing pollution, contaminated soil, and shortened life expectancy.

West Louisville's air, water, and soil are toxic and rank among the worst in American cities. In the words of Robert Bullard, the father of environmental justice movement:

"The communities where police are shooting Blacks are the same communities with high asthma rates, greater incidents of diabetes and strokes, more poverty, and more death from COVID-19. Forty years ago, people were saying 'we can't breathe, we are choking, you are killing us.' We are seeing across the board people are talking about dismantling this violent system of racism not just when a police officer kneels and chokes a person to death. It's violence when you have all this pollution pumped into a neighborhood and people are choking." (Bruggers, 2020)

The comparison exposes a profound contradiction at the center of modern America. A society can generate enormous wealth while still failing to protect basic public health. In purely economic terms, West Louisville may appear richer on paper. But if people are dying younger, suffering higher rates of cancer and heart disease, and living under constant environmental stress, then the meaning of prosperity itself comes into question.

A country does not become successful merely because incomes rise. Success is measured by whether people can live healthy, safe, dignified lives. By that standard, parts of industrial Louisville resemble an environmental sacrifice zone inside the wealthiest nation on Earth.

This is not accidental. West Louisville bears the scars of redlining, segregation, urban renewal, industrial pollution, freeway construction, and decades of political abandonment. Interstate highways slice through neighborhoods like concrete rivers of pollution. Chemical facilities situated near homes and schools release an estimated 75,000 pounds of hazardous toxins each year, according to federally mandated toxic-release disclosures. The trend is worsening, and the health consequences track closely behind: asthma, cardiovascular disease, and environmental-stress–related illnesses occur at double, triple, even quadruple the rates seen elsewhere. Children bear the heaviest burden. In some neighborhoods, half of all third-graders fail to meet government proficiency standards in reading and math.

Costa Rica offers a stark contrast. The country maintains a 97% literacy rate, and 84% of young adults ages 18 to 24 complete high school, reflecting long-term national investment in education and public health.

In West Louisville, residents rely on the Ohio River—one of the most polluted rivers in the United States—for their drinking water supply, a factor that contributes to Kentucky's reduced life expectancy. In Costa Rica, by comparison, tap water is widely regarded as cleaner and safer than what many communities along the Ohio River receive.

Ironically, many of Louisville's chemical plants are not owned by local or even American companies, but by large international corporations based in Europe—countries where producing these same toxic chemicals is heavily restricted or outright prohibited. These firms operate in Louisville precisely because U.S. regulations allow practices their home nations would never permit, exporting the risks to communities here while keeping the profits abroad. Job losses have also happened with the once crowded parking lots largely empty because of automation and not needing to reduce air toxins.

Costa Rica chose a fundamentally different vision of what a modern society should prioritize. Nearly all of its electricity comes from renewable sources, the result of decades of deliberate national policy. The country embraced a principle that many American policymakers still resist: environmental policy is health policy. West Louisville, by contrast, relies heavily on coal-generated power—a fuel that is not only dirty and harmful to breathe but also one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, the primary driver of global heating that is making more places difficult or impossible to live in.

And then there is the issue Americans rarely wish to confront honestly—guns. In Costa Rica, gun ownership is tightly regulated and relatively uncommon in most households. The country has no standing army and far fewer firearms in civilian hands. Costa Rica has only a small amount of gun violence among neighbors. Drug cartels and trafficking routes have pushed homicide rates upward in recent years. But the violence there still feels structurally different. Much of it is connected to transnational organized crime rather than the daily normalized civilian gun saturation that defines so many American cities.

West Louisville, by contrast, exists within one of the most heavily armed societies in human history, and Kentucky's gun laws are among the loosest in the nation. It is not unusual for individuals to possess dozens of firearms—sometimes collections of 50 or even 100 weapons.

Louisville officials report that nearly half of the city's shootings occur in West End neighborhoods like Russell, Shawnee, Portland, and Park Hill. Young Black men bear the overwhelming burden of this violence. Entire blocks live under the psychological architecture of fear: gunshots at night, memorial candles on corners, mothers praying children survive the walk home.

In such an environment, guns saturate conflict, despair, impulsive anger, and everyday disputes, transforming ordinary human friction into funerals. Costa Rica has only a small amount of gun violence among neighbors. Drug cartels and trafficking routes have pushed homicide rates upward in recent years. But the violence there still feels structurally different. Much of it is connected to transnational organized crime rather than the daily normalized civilian gun saturation that defines so many American cities.

Based on reported homicide rates, residents of West Louisville are roughly 13 times more likely to be killed than residents of Costa Rica overall. Even when comparing West Louisville to San José, the gap remains striking: residents are still approximately 3.5 times more likely to be murdered in West Louisville. The pattern is difficult to ignore—fewer guns, fewer deaths.

The deeper issue is not culture. Americans too often hide behind that word because it avoids accountability. The issue is public investment and political choice. Costa Rica chose healthcare over militarization. Parks over prisons. Education over abandonment. Public space over endless asphalt. Human development over corporate extraction. West Louisville received the opposite formula.

Traveling through Costa Rica this past April, I saw people outdoors constantly—walking, talking, gathering, living. Public life exists. Community exists. In too much of urban America, public life has collapsed into isolation, addiction, fear, and privatized survival. The opioid epidemic, homelessness, untreated trauma, and environmental degradation overlap geographically because they are symptoms of the same civic failure.

Frank Gehry once recalled how a Harvard professor transformed his understanding of cities not through lectures, but through walking tours of places around Boston and other cities. Cities must be experienced physically to be understood. If American planners, politicians, and developers spent one week studying Costa Rica and one week walking West Louisville, they might finally understand that urban decline is not inevitable. It is designed.

West Louisville is filled with remarkable people, churches, historic architecture, community pride, and resilience. But resilience should never become an excuse for tolerating injustice. Human beings are not supposed to survive toxic air, gunfire, addiction, disinvestment, and shortened lifespans simply because policymakers lack imagination or courage. To lead is to stand firm in the face of fear — to endure attacks on your character and even threats of physical violence for speaking the truth. At the University of Louisville, the President assigned armed police to protect professors like me after we received violent threats from those who wanted to intimidate us into silence.

Travel broadens your horizons and your visualization of what is possible. Sometimes the greatest lesson is not what another country has achieved, but what your own society has chosen to accept. "To travel is to live," wrote Hans Christian Andersen. He was right. You can read reports, stare at spreadsheets, and scroll endlessly through glowing screens, but nothing compares to seeing a place with your own eyes

Costa Rica is not utopia, but it is as close to it as a modern nation can get. It demonstrates an alternative vision of society—one where public health, environmental stewardship, and social investment still matter. Their largest industry is green tourism, thriving entirely without the presence of heavy, polluting industrial conglomerates. Granted, our global economy still requires some of the essential plastic products manufactured in Louisville; we simply demand that corporations act responsibly and put an end to deadly, toxic pollution.

Part II: The Blueprint for Urban Survival: Why Advanced Western Economies Must Go Green

The stark contrasts and localized triumphs in places like Costa Rica and West Louisville inevitably broaden our perspective. This leads me to ponder another urgent question: Is there any hope for advanced economies here in the United States and Europe?
The answer is yes. In my latest book, *Climate Chaos: Killing People, Places, and the Planet,* I elevate two key regions—Portland, Oregon, and the Netherlands—as premier global models for environmental stewardship and urban livability. These advanced economies demonstrate that aggressive, systemic policy shifts can successfully decouple modern prosperity from ecological destruction.

1. Net-Zero Architecture and Historic Preservation
Progress begins by legally transforming our built environment. Both Portland and the Netherlands enforce strict regulatory frameworks aimed at achieving net-zero energy buildings, engineering structures to produce as much localized energy as they consume.
Furthermore, these regions aggressively prioritize "urban recycling" and the adaptive reuse of existing structures over demolition. Preserving historic buildings delivers two critical benefits:

- **Embedded Energy Savings:** Rather than flattening a neighborhood, adaptive reuse locks in the "embodied carbon" already spent to create older buildings. Globally, a circular construction economy is estimated to reduce CO_2 emissions from heavy building materials by up to 38%. The Netherlands has codified this, aiming for a 50% reduction in primary raw material use by 2030 and a completely circular built environment by 2050.
- **Affordable Housing:** By eliminating the steep corporate premiums of new demolition and construction, cities keep development costs low. This economic cushion allows municipalities to mandate integrated, multifamily housing across all income groups while heavily discouraging the carbon-heavy, class-segregated sprawl of new single-family developments.

Housing and Preservation in Amsterdam. The best green house is an old house. The average rent share is 24%, much lower than the rent to America's working class. Seventy-five percent of the housing is rent controlled. Amsterdam residents consume one half of the housing that Americans use. The Dutch are creative in producing housing utilizing attics, basements, silos, old cruise

ships for student housing, old warehouses, silos, house boats, and even shipping containers. Housing policies are sound, with strong historic preservation practices that prevent demolition and are repurposed. It is not uncommon to walk through Amsterdam to see sturdy stone and brick buildings 100, 200, 300, and even 400 years old which is also a big magnet for tourists. If any buildings are torn down because of fire, flooding, or failure to upkeep, 90% of the materials, including glass, wood, brick, plumbing and electrical systems, are recycled and used again (Gilderbloom, 2025). Squatting laws also encourage landlords to fix up their units or risk losing the housing to a squatter. Thus, abandonment and demolition of thousands of historic houses that you see in West Louisville never is an issue in Amsterdam. In my many trips with students and to visit family, you simply don't see homeless people sleeping on sidewalks, benches, and lawns as you would see in your typical U.S. city. Dutch sociologist Leon Deben believes that homelessness in Holland is only a fraction of that in U.S. cities. (Gilderbloom, 2025)

2. Revolutionizing Urban Mobility

To combat the climate crisis, advanced economies must systematically break their structural dependence on the automobile. The Netherlands and Portland have completely redesigned their infrastructure to prioritize human-centric transit over car dominance. By investing heavily in protected biking networks, efficient trains, subways, light rails, and pedestrian-only greenways, they have successfully shifted millions of daily commuters away from personal cars. Not only does biking ensure a healthier population but it also reduces carbon emissions and pollution significantly.

This infrastructure overhaul yields profound societal dividends:

- **Public Health:** Regular biking and walking drastically lower rates of chronic cardiovascular disease and increase life expectancy. In fact, peer-reviewed data shows that the high rates of cycling in the Netherlands prevent roughly 11,000 deaths per year and save the economy billions in healthcare costs, translating to a massive 3% boost to the Dutch Gross Domestic Product.
- **Social Cohesion:** Decreasing car isolation fosters a vibrant sense of community—a shared "weeness" and civic connection. In the Netherlands, citizens cover more than one-quarter (50 to 60%) of all daily journeys by bicycle. Even in the automobile-dominated United States, Portland's long-term investments have allowed it to maintain the highest share of bicycle commuters of any major U.S. city. Small business also grows as people stop on their bikes for refreshments.
- **Accessible Innovation:** For remaining transit needs, the widespread adoption of residential solar panels and electric vehicles (EVs) significantly lowers the daily cost of living while slashing greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Cultivating Sustainable Economies

Finally, much like Costa Rica's pioneering eco-tourism model, these advanced regions have turned sustainability into a highly profitable economic engine. Green tourism has become a primary industry and a major destination draw for both Portland and the Netherlands. They prove that ecological preservation does not require economic stagnation; instead, it attracts global travelers who value conservation, low-impact hospitality, and thriving natural landscapes.

Ultimately, the lesson is clear: environmental degradation is not an unavoidable byproduct of a modern economy—it is a policy choice.

Part III. Becoming an Environmentalist is about Loving the Earth

During high school, I attended lectures by famed environmentalist Paul R. Ehrlich at nearby Stanford University and participated in the first Earth Day celebration at my high school in 1970—an event that awakened an entire generation to the environmental crisis unfolding around us.

Around the same time, famed journalist and environmental writer Mark Dowie became a frequent Sunday dinner guest in our home. Dowie later founded *Mother Jones*—where I would eventually serve as a fellow—and went on to write influential environmental books while teaching at MIT and consulting for 60 Minutes. Other regular visitors included author R. G. Larsen and playwright and *San Francisco Chronicle* journalist James Ross. Those conversations left a lasting impression on me and helped shape my lifelong commitment to environmental justice and public truth-telling.

I later attended the University of California, Santa Barbara—a campus reshaped by environmental activism in the wake of the catastrophic 1969 oil spill. As a graduate student, I worked as a research assistant for the brilliant Harvey Molotch, a founder of environmental sociology and urban growth-machine theory, whose analysis of the Santa Barbara disaster profoundly influenced my intellectual trajectory. I also had the privilege of working closely with the amazing Richard Appelbaum, studying the social consequences of growth, housing, and development.

During those years, I became something of a statistics rat, studying with some of the best quantitative minds I encountered: Roger Friedland, Bill Bielby, Robert Smith, Dick Burk, Richard Appelbaum, and Michael Tietz at University of California, Berkeley, and later working closely with my colleague Jon Lorence. That training in statistics and large-scale data analysis proved invaluable. (My advice to graduate students is simple: take advanced statistics and methods courses. They will put you far ahead of the pack and make you dramatically more competitive for well-paid positions. I pulled out $3.5 million dollars in local, state and federal grants.) It opened doors to major consulting projects and policy research for California Governor Jerry Brown, Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, Vice President Al Gore, and HUD Secretaries Henry Cisneros and Andrew Cuomo.

Ironically, even as Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear cast himself as a Democrat capable of winning in red states, I was left asking what that victory was supposed to mean for communities already bearing the brunt of environmental harm. From my vantage point, his administration showed no meaningful engagement with climate scientists producing rigorous, community-focused research—research that could have driven real environmental and public-health reforms in neighborhoods long denied prosperity. During his two terms, he remained silent as the University of Louisville's respected environmental centers—key advocates for a healthier, more livable Kentucky—were dismantled and replaced with an industry-funded center whose public messaging avoided confronting pollution altogether.

Instead, its spokespersons redirected attention toward tree canopy and discriminatory banking and development practices, sidestepping the deeper structural and environmental forces harming West Louisville.

My work with Richard Appelbaum eventually grew into my dissertation, and later we coauthored a widely praised book, *Rethinking Rental Housing*. Even before that, I had published my first book, *Rent Control: A Source Book*, which the *Orange County Register*—with characteristic sarcasm—dubbed "the Bible of the renters' rights movement." They weren't wrong. Nearly half a century later, rent-control laws have been adopted in **hundreds of cities and states**, especially across the West Coast. My research angered the major real-estate corporations, largely because they could never produce data showing I was wrong.

During the Clinton administration, I received federal grants to help revitalize abandoned neighborhoods in West Louisville, Covington, and Newport Kentucky. Those experiences reinforced my conviction that environmentalism cannot be separated from housing, transportation, race, public health, or economic justice.

Since 1990, I directed the Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods at the University of Louisville as part of the Kentucky Institute for the Environment and Sustainable Development. My work in West Louisville reshaped my intellectual trajectory—from a narrow focus on housing policy toward a broader vision of green urbanism and environmental justice. I later received honors from both Republican and Democratic leaders, including a Congressional Gold Medal from Vice President Cheney and the highest research award from the University of Louisville, the Presidential Medal for Research.

But over time, my understanding of environmentalism changed. I never viewed environmentalism as ideological theater, nor did I mistake symbolic gestures for meaningful reform. An Inconvenient Truth and the accompanying book by Al Gore performed an extraordinary public service by sounding the alarm about climate change and helping awaken global consciousness. The work deserved its acclaim, including Gore's Nobel Peace Prize. Yet I remember leaving the film troubled by its closing message urging Americans simply to "plant a tree." I understood the sentiment, but my research had begun revealing a far darker truth: thousands of West Louisville residents were dying prematurely from industrial pollution, even though their neighborhoods had abundant tree cover—Louisville ranks in the top 25% for urban tree canopy among 145 U.S. cities. While national leaders focused heavily on cleaner automobile emissions, the toxic burden of industrial pollution in poor and minority neighborhoods remained largely ignored.

Part IV: Speaking Out About Louisville's Environmental Cover-Up Comes at a Cost

To advocate for the models seen in Portland or the Netherlands is to demand a structural revolution—and in a city tethered to industrial profits, demanding change makes you a target. The lethal status quo of West Louisville remains entrenched not by accident, but because a powerful infrastructure of corporate interests and political compliance actively works to silence dissent. Speaking the truth about Rubbertown's toxic burden carries a steep personal and professional price.

For decades, community organizers, independent scientists, and courageous residents have faced intense pushback for pointing out the undeniable correlation between industrial zoning and shortened lifespans. When you publicly connect the dots between corporate emissions and the disproportionate rates of cancer and respiratory illness in Black, lower-income neighborhoods, you are not met with civic debate; you are met with aggressive intimidation. [1, 2]

To lead is to stand firm in the face of fear—to endure attacks on your character and even threats of physical violence for speaking the truth. At the University of Louisville, President James Ramsey assigned armed police to protect professors like me after we received violent threats from those who desperately wanted to intimidate us into silence. The threats were not effective; they made us more determined to document and speak out. I now live in an undisclosed location outside of Kentucky.

This is the hidden cost of environmental justice work in America. The cover-up relies on a culture of engineered silence—where whistleblowers are blacklisted, researchers are threatened, and community leaders are exhausted into submission. Yet this institutional fear only proves the volatility of the truth. The desperate rush to suppress environmental data reveals that the entities profiting from West Louisville's pollution know their model is morally indefensible. The armed guards outside our classrooms were a chilling reminder that, in the fight for climate reality, truth itself becomes a threat to power—and speaking it becomes an act of survival. But the fear inflicted upon me is insignificant compared with the suffering endured by the poor and innocent—from children to grandmothers—forced to live amid poisoned air, water, and soil.

My experience at the University of Louisville revealed, with unmistakable clarity, the extent to which institutions will act to preserve the financial status quo. When academic inquiry moves beyond abstract theory and produces actionable climate research capable of challenging the interests that shape and fund city infrastructure, it becomes a direct threat to entrenched power. The response to our findings was swift and openly hostile. The threats of physical violence directed at silencing our work were sufficiently credible that the university president authorized armed police escorts simply to ensure we could cross campus and fulfill our teaching responsibilities. This episode underscored not only the volatility surrounding climate research but also the profound institutional reluctance to confront the economic forces driving environmental harm.

I traced much of the damage to more than forty industrial facilities concentrated in West Louisville and came to a painful conclusion: tree planting, however sincere, was no match for the daily assault of toxic emissions pouring into the air. Our studies showed that residents living near major industrial sites were dying, on average, fifteen years earlier than residents in clean air neighborhoods in East Louisville.

As those findings gained public attention, the backlash intensified. Polluters marched into the office of President James Ramsey demanding that I be investigated—and fired—for alleged scientific misconduct. The university responded by convening a review involving prominent economists and scholars from the Universities of Chicago, Harvard, and North Carolina. Their conclusion was unequivocal: the peer-reviewed research was rigorous, credible, and first-rate.

The hostility did not end there. In 2011, the Louisville Metro Police Department warned university officials about an assassination threat involving a man reportedly waiting outside my home with a semiautomatic weapon. Armed campus police were stationed outside my classroom, and patrol cars frequently sat outside my house at night. In 2023, another man was arrested after threatening on social media to "beat me to an unrecognizable pulp" while claiming to be an international assassin. In today's academic world, telling uncomfortable truths increasingly requires fearlessness.

What disturbed me most, however, was not merely the hostility from polluters, but the growing unwillingness of the university itself to confront inconvenient truths. Ironically, while the University of Louisville once celebrated the national rise of its Urban and Public Affairs program—ranked among the top programs in the country alongside institutions such as Harvard, Berkeley, and Princeton—many of the scholars responsible for building that reputation, including Scott Cummings, Bert Useem, Hank Savitch, and Peter Meyer, were eventually marginalized, pushed into retirement, or forced out altogether. Today the once great highly respected program is near the bottom in recent rankings.

The Kentucky Institute for the Environment and Sustainable Development was shut down in 2018, and its website quietly disappeared. The award-winning Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods suffered the same fate. Professors studying pollution were excluded from the university's corporate-funded Center for Healthy Air, Water and Soil, while research documenting the harm caused by chemical, coal, liquor, and tobacco industries was marginalized or suppressed. Public relations campaigns increasingly promoted tree planting as the primary response to Louisville's environmental crisis. Imagine a physician telling patients that preventing cancer is as simple as planting a few trees, all while ignoring the toxic emissions pouring out of the chemical plant down the street. That is the level of denial we were up against.

The same troubling pattern emerged in vaping research conducted by a dentist and financed by tobacco-aligned interests, where industry-backed conclusions consistently downplayed health risks despite repeated warnings from organizations such as the American Heart Association and the American Lung Association about the serious cardiovascular and respiratory dangers associated with e-cigarettes. Yet the University of Louisville Center for Healthy Air, Water, and Soil publicly endorsed the study and circulated claims—on its website and official letterhead—suggesting vaping was "mostly safe" for two-thirds of users. For an industry facing mounting criticism, the ability to cite university-backed research became a powerful public-relations weapon. More troubling still, government agencies later increased research funding to the medical school, reinforcing a culture in which financial incentives too often overshadow scientific rigor. When universities become overly dependent on corporate funding, the danger extends far beyond biased findings; it threatens the gradual erosion of scientific integrity itself.

The same institutional reluctance to confront powerful industries can be seen in the spread of *Baudoinia compniacensis*—commonly known as whiskey fungus or black mold—which thrives wherever airborne alcohol vapors are present. The fungus has spread across homes, trees, fences, cars, and commercial buildings near distilleries, aging warehouses, and even bakeries. In Indiana, health officials advise residents cleaning the fungus to wear N95 masks, goggles, and

gloves because it binds aggressively to surfaces and is difficult to remove. Power washing a single residence with fungicide can cost as much as $1,000, yet the fungus often quickly returns.

Despite its growing presence, there are still no peer-reviewed studies examining the long-term health impacts of *Baudoinia compniacensis*. A 2012 class-action lawsuit filed by Kentucky homeowners was ultimately dismissed. Distillers have argued that reducing ethanol emissions would be prohibitively expensive and might even alter bourbon's flavor. Yet California has already demonstrated that such arguments are overstated. State regulations require wineries and liquor producers to install emissions-control systems that dramatically reduce airborne alcohol vapors and the spread of black mold. The policy has worked for years—and California wines remain among the finest in the world. In Louisville, whiskey fungus has stained buildings, damaged neighborhoods, depressed property values, and contributed to abandonment. According to estimates in Gilderbloom (2025), roughly 5,000 housing units have been lost because of the combined effects of black mold, industrial pollution, and environmental neglect.

For these reasons, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's designation recognizing the University of Louisville as a top research university risks becoming little more than a hollow credential unless academic freedom, scientific independence, and rigorous public-interest scholarship are protected rather than undermined. Despite its research designation, *U.S. News & World Report* ranks the university only 155th nationally, while its once highly regarded Urban and Public Affairs program—which at one point ranked 16th in the nation—has fallen near the bottom.

The consequences extend beyond academic reputation. When Amazon searched for a site for its proposed second headquarters—one of the largest economic-development projects in modern American history—Louisville failed even to make the company's top 25 finalist cities. Amazon projected that HQ2 would generate approximately $5 billion in direct investment and create more than 50,000 high-paying jobs, with thousands more indirect jobs expected in housing, construction, transportation, restaurants, and technology sectors. The company later selected Nashville for a major operations center expected to bring an additional 5,000 jobs. Company officials repeatedly emphasized the importance of quality of life, environmental conditions, public transit, higher education, and the ability to attract middle-class professionals and creative talent. Louisville, by contrast, was increasingly viewed as falling short in providing the kind of healthy, livable urban environment demanded by major employers and their workforce.

Meanwhile, broader concerns about academic freedom spread across campus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our research examining 145 counties found that communities with higher levels of pollution also experienced significantly higher death rates from the virus. We urged Governor Andy Beshear to impose stronger pollution controls that our studies suggested could reduce certain toxic emissions by as much as 90 percent and potentially save thousands of lives. Those recommendations were largely ignored.

More than a century ago, Louisville-born educator Abraham Flexner argued that universities and medical schools must uphold rigorous scientific standards and report inconvenient truths honestly. Similarly, another Louisvillian hero the first Jewish, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, famously observed that "sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants." Universities

cannot fulfill their mission when scientific inquiry is constrained by political pressure, donor influence, or industrial intimidation.

At the heart of science lies replication, skepticism, transparency, and open debate—not institutional silence. Our latest book on Louisville's environmental crisis includes contributions from Al Gore and writings from the late Pope Francis, both of whom sought to bridge science, ethics, and environmental responsibility. Inspired in part by that research, three-time Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Chris Nolan produced the world's first feature-length AI-hybrid thriller, *Climate of Hope*. Critics connected to polluting industries have already attacked the project for including my work and the stories of intimidation surrounding it.

Perhaps public officials such as Governor Andy Beshear will eventually confront the environmental injustices facing West Louisville and reconsider the political influence of industries resistant to meaningful regulation. Yet symbolic gestures such as spending 67 million dollars on tree-planting campaigns continue to receive far more attention than policies capable of substantially reducing toxic emissions.

Maybe I was foolish to speak out so openly, but I could not turn my back on the innocent children harmed by poisoned air, water, and soil. My late wife, Patty Gilderbloom, who taught in Louisville's industrial sacrifice zones, was stunned by how much sicker students and teachers were compared with those at the private Quaker school where she had previously taught in East Louisville.

The reality was uncomplicated: our research produced methods that cut certain toxic emissions by up to 90 percent. The EPA—under both Democratic and Republican leadership—chose not to enforce the regulations that would have required these proven solutions. During the industry's campaign to remove me, Senator Gerald Neal later informed me that lobbyists had described me as "dangerous," "crazy," "a communist," "too powerful," and a "genius." Not one of these claims had evidence behind it. My only mention of Marxism was to criticize it. I'm no genius. I simply apply the scientific method, and no one could refute my results. We learned the basics in fourth grade: use control and test groups, follow the data, and accept the conclusions—even when they threaten powerful interests.

My faith sustained me through much of this struggle. I was raised to believe that truth-telling is a moral obligation and that publicly funded universities owe honesty to the citizens who support them. In 1979, after reading a leaked letter from real estate lobbyist wanting me removed from my graduate program, or "neutralized," I seriously considered abandoning graduate school. I called my father, Murray Gilderbloom, a World War II veteran, convinced that pursuing the truth was no longer losing my life was not worth it.

He gave me an answer that shocked me. "This is a test of character," he told me. "Do you have a spine, or are you a jellyfish? You were raised to have a spine" He urged me to continue. He, too, had endured frightening late-night phone calls warning that he might lose his son if I did not back down. "I left your mother and your older sister and volunteered to be on the ground to fight in World War II against the slaughter of our Dutch relatives and perhaps lose my life because it was the right thing to do. I expect you to do the same. I weep at night thinking I might lose you,

but I expect you to not back down." Later, he gave me $10,000 to continue my research and publish my book. It was a big middle finger to the powerful real estate lobby. Looking back, he raised me to be a fight back against bullies.

A few months later, a man showed up at my door, enraged by "all the things" he believed I had been saying publicly. He forced me to my knees and pressed a gun to my ear before pulling the trigger. The round was blank, but the blast left me with permanent hearing and vision damage, along with lifelong post-traumatic stress. I collapsed and pretended to be dead as he ran out stealing nothing.. Even that didn't drive me away from my work. When Stella Capek and I were writing our overlooked book *Community Versus Commodity: Tenants and the American City*, Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down" became our unofficial anthem.

High levels of industrial pollution help explain why Kentucky continues to suffer disproportionate rates of disease and premature death. Our research found that poor residents of Louisville live, on average, five years fewer than residents of West Coast cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles. Environmental journalist James Bruggers reported that a single Louisville chemical plant emitted greenhouse gases equivalent to 600,000 automobiles circling the city. Imagine the cumulative impact of all 40 major chemical facilities operating in the region. According to the local Air Pollution Control District, Louisville releases more greenhouse gases per capita than any other American city. The irony is difficult to ignore: the city is governed largely by Democrats, along with Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, yet industrial pollution rarely seems to command sustained political attention.

When I retired from the University of Louisville in February 2025, two armed police officers stood outside the classroom where I delivered my final lecture to ensure no one entered intending harm. The event was filmed by Kentucky activist Julie Tackett—often described as Kentucky's own Erin Brockovich—for a provocative YouTube program produced with Chris Nolan. That image says more about the condition of modern universities—and the cost of speaking openly about pollution and political power—than any glossy mission statement ever could.

Part V: The Architecture of Forgetting: When Institutions Expel the Truth

The University of Louisville should stand as a beacon of truth, not as an instrument of silence, intimidation, or institutional forgetting. Today, much of our independent research archive survives only because it was rescued by the Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods at SUN Louisville. We continue to preserve decades of publicly funded scholarship that was systematically removed from university websites, scrubbed from library shelves, and erased from official memory.

Despite the censorship, the canceled classes, the threats of termination, the political pressure, and the literal destruction of research materials, I refused to back down. I was raised by a World War II veteran to believe that a life without courage is no life at all. Truth means absolutely nothing unless we are fiercely willing to defend it when it becomes inconvenient to the powerful. Too many innocent people are dying unnecessarily from industrial pollution and preventable disease while the very institutions entrusted with public welfare choose to remain silent. We desperately

need leaders who are willing to confront industries tied to coal, tobacco, chemicals, and liquor, rather than shielding them from public scrutiny.

The structural obligation of a scholar is not obedience. It is inquiry, rigorous evidence, transparent debate, and unwavering moral courage. I do not intend to quit—and I hope readers will refuse to surrender, too. Read the research, challenge the status quo, watch *Climate of Hope*, engage with empirical evidence, and demand institutions that are actually worthy of the public trust.

In a strange, unexpected way, I am almost grateful for the relentless efforts to silence me—but the physical attacks were a bit much. Ever since that terrifying night in 1979 when a gun was fired at my ear, I have lived with the persistent feeling that I might only have another day or two left on this earth. That awareness did not make me a jellyfish; it sharpened my thinking, strengthened my resolve, and reminded me daily that truth matters most when powerful special interests want it buried. Attempts at suppression almost always trigger the opposite effect: they inevitably draw greater, blinding light to the exact realities those in power hoped the public would never see.

Science should never be subordinate to donor pressure, political calculation, or industry intimidation. When Harvard President, Derek Bok, served on my advisory board for the Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods, he warned me that university presidents must constantly guard against donors seeking predetermined research outcomes. Universities exist to protect rigorous, independent inquiry—not to accommodate organized campaigns designed to silence inconvenient findings. Public officials, journalists, and academic leaders have a moral obligation to confront uncomfortable evidence honestly, especially when human lives are at stake.

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Data Sources and Editorial Reference
All data points cited across this series are compiled from publicly available online reports, federal databases, and rescued archives, specifically:

- The City of Louisville Health Department annual health equity reports.
- The Congressional Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) Study.
- The Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods (SUN Louisville).
- The University of Louisville Christina Lee Brown Envirome Institute.
- The University of Louisville Center for Healthy Air, Water, and Soil.
- The U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey.
- *Climate Chaos: Killing People, Places, and the Planet* (John Hans Gilderbloom, 2024), which preserves the 20 chapters and 29-author collaborative datasets originally published by—and subsequently purged from—the websites of the Kentucky Institute for the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Center for Sustainable Urban Development.

Section 1: Global Case Studies (Portland & The Netherlands)

- **Claim: Circular economy practices reduce heavy material carbon emissions by up to 38 percent.**
    - **Source:** International Resource Panel (IRP) / United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) global efficiency reports; corroborated by the *Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) Circular Building Sector Guide.*
- **Claim: The Dutch government mandates a 50 percent raw material reduction by 2030 and a 100 percent circular built economy by 2050.**
    - **Source:** Government of the Netherlands, National Circular Economy Programme (NCW) structural policy directives.
- **Claim: High rates of Dutch cycling prevent roughly 11,000 deaths annually, saving the economy billions (approx. 3% of Dutch GDP).**
    - **Source:** Fishman, E., Schepers, P., & Kamphuis, C. B. (2015). "Dutch Cycling: Quantifying the Health and Economic Benefits." *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 123(11).
- **Claim: Dutch citizens complete 28 percent of all daily trips via bicycle.**
    - **Source:** Netherlands Institute for Transport Policy Analysis (KiM), *Cycling Facts* annual baseline monitoring data.
- **Claim: Portland maintains the highest bicycle commuting modal share among major U.S. cities.**
- **Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) annual travel-to-work metrics.

  Claim: Professor Robert Bullard Texas Southern University on Environmental racism
    - **Source:** James Bruggers,(2020) Louisville's Black Lives Matter protests echo a long quest for environmental justice" Courier Journal June 24, 2020 reported in Gilderbloom, John Hans 2025, Climate Chaos: Killing People, Places and the Planet. London: Bloomsbury pages 171-172

Section 2: West Louisville & Rubbertown Environmental Data

- **Claim: West Louisville residents living closest to industrial zoning face up to a 15-year life expectancy gap compared to healthier neighborhoods.**
    - **Source:** Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness, *Health Equity Report* series.
- **Claim: Louisville releases more greenhouse gases per capita than any other comparable major American city.**
    - **Source:** Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District (APCD) greenhouse gas inventory reports.
- **Claim: A single Louisville chemical facility emitted greenhouse gases equivalent to 600,000 automobiles circling the city.**

- **Source:** Investigative environmental reporting by James Bruggers (*The Courier-Journal / Inside Climate News*), tracking EPA Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program data.

- **Claim: Poor residents of Louisville live, on average, five fewer years than residents of West Coast cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles.**
  - **Source:** Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods (SUN Louisville) comparative spatial health data analysis. John Hans Gilderbloom, Climate Chaos: Killing People, Places, and the Planet: London: Bloomsbury
- **Claim: A 145-county study linking higher baseline industrial pollution with accelerated COVID-19 mortality rates.**
  - **Source:** Independent epidemiological research data archive preserved by SUN Louisville.

Section 3: Academic Works & Literature Cited

- **Gilderbloom, J. H.** (2025). *Climate Chaos: Killing People, Places, and the Planet.* Rowman & Littlefield. *(Note for Fact-Checkers: This volume contains the 20 chapters and 29 cross-disciplinary co-authors whose baseline environmental public health metrics were removed from the Kentucky Institute for the Environment and Sustainable Development servers following its 2018 dissolution).*
- **Capek, S. M., & Gilderbloom, J. H.** (1992). *Community Versus Commodity: Tenants and the American City.* State University of New York Press.
- **Gilderbloom, J. H.** (1981). *Rent Control: A Source Book.* Distributed via Foundation for National Progress / *Mother Jones.*
- **The Flexner Report Reference:** Flexner, A. (1910). *Medical Education in the United States and Canada.* Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. *(Cited for the foundational imperative of scientific transparency and reporting inconvenient truths).*

Section 4: External Media & Project Verification

- **Film Project:** *Climate of Hope* (Forthcoming). Directed by Chris Sean Nolan (Three-time Emmy Award winner). Production data and project overviews can be verified through the official film tracking registry (climateofhopefilm.org).

- **Archival Repository:** Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods (SUN Louisville). All uncorrupted, raw data sets, mapping files, and policy papers regarding Rubbertown emissions controls are permanently hosted independently at https://sunlouisville.org