

West Palm cabdriver gets tired of Florida, starts new life in Philippines

Written by Administrator



Neil Hoag's wife Marge and their kids Kyle, 5, and Kenny, 2.

There's a familiar personal narrative around these parts: Somebody got tired of the daily grind and cold weather in his or her old life, packed up and moved down to South Florida to start anew.

Ask that person what happened next and they'll sigh: It's not all paradise. People are rude. Lawyers. Traffic. Greed.

Neil Hoag moved down from Michigan when he was a teenager and has been driving cabs and limos in West Palm Beach for the past 26 years.

He's met all kinds of interesting people — the guy who tried to strangle him from the back seat, for example.

But then he got fed up with American life, flew 10,000 miles to the Philippines, got married, had some kids, and became a coconut farmer.

Hoag is back in the States for another six weeks to promote his new self-published book, called "My Home in the Jungle."

"My Western life has been nothing but heartaches," says Hoag, recalling a failed marriage and a number of cabdriver friends who have died.

He's hoping the book will generate some extra money for his modest life in the Philippines — he spends about \$3,000 a year to support a family — and serve as a "will and testament" to explain his decision to his kids.

Hoag speaks proudly of the two mountain peaks he purchased, Pancil and Sangahon, in Southern Leyte province. He plants and harvests red mahogany trees.

He commissioned a local carpenter to build furniture that he designed, and got the whole village to help build a hilltop house. He's taught his kids how to kill and skin chickens for dinner.

"We're making the best life we can out of the land we own," he says.

Sending a kid to college costs a few hundred bucks a year.

Hoag met his Filipino wife Marge through the mail as a penpal: She was a friend of the wife of

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Hoag's great-uncle Larry, another expatriate in the family who also lives in Southern Leyte. No white male expatriate in Southeast Asia will ever escape the seedier speculations about why he's there, and Hoag doesn't shy away from it: "When I first arrived, there was an ocean of beautiful girls following me. Here, people don't pay attention to an average white guy like me. It's nice to feel attractive."

He speaks adoringly of Marge.

Not everybody will agree with the idea of paradise that he lays out in his book: man as provider and overseer, relaxing "with a rum and Coke in his hands."

He writes in his book: "She cares for our children's direction of their development and their day-to-day needs; I'm the provider of money and food."

His kids in the Philippines will need to travel hours to use the internet, and they won't know the comforts of American living.

But Hoag feels that's a worthwhile sacrifice.

Now, he rides around with his wife and kids perched atop a 150cc motorcycle, waving to the poor villagers who happily say "Hey Joe" to the strange white foreigner.

You could call it running away ("There are some things in life I can't fix," he says) or discovering what really matters.

Hoag's longtime cabdriving partner and former boss Matty "Mo" Lynch was surprised when he heard about Hoag's relocation.

But hey, Mo likes to say, "as long as you're happy."