

THE BLUE ZONES: LESSONS FOR LIVING LONGER FROM THE PEOPLE WHO'VE LIVED THE LONGEST

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Preface

1. According to Dan Buettner, "Scientific studies suggest that only about 25 percent of how long we live is dictated by genes... The other 75 percent is determined by our lifestyles and the everyday choices we make. It follows that if we optimize our lifestyles, we can maximize our life expectancies within our biological limits" (xxii).

In effect, maximizing our life expectancies is the goal of "Blue Zones," and, since you're reading this guide, it's one of your goals as well. So, before we begin on this journey together, let's first take some time to look through where you stand here at the outset.

Start a Health Journal, and take some notes on your current lifestyle:

- How much do you sleep? Do you ever need to take medications to help you sleep?
 - What are your eating habits? Traditionally, what do you consume for breakfast, lunch, dinner? Do you eat three meals a day, four? When are your biggest meals? What do you eat for snacks? How often do you snack?
 - What are your drinking habits? How much alcohol do you consume a day, a week? How much red wine, beer, mixed drinks? How much water per day? How much coffee, tea?
 - In how many days of the past twenty have you experienced anxiety? What are the current stressors in your life? How much time do you spend per day concerned about these, concerned about the past, the future?
 - How do you spend your social time? Read, watch television, go to the gym? How often during a usual week do engage in group social activities?
 - How much do you exercise? What kind of exercises do you get involved in?
2. According to Robert Kane, the director of the Center on Aging at the University of Minnesota people need to do something with their lives that "they feel is either interesting or worthwhile" (19).

What do you do in your own life that you find interesting and worthwhile? Is this connected to your business? Your social life? Your family? Your leisure activities?

3. Ushi Okushima, a 104 year old woman from Ogimi, a tiny fishing village outside Okinawa, possesses an energy unlike any other. So says Sayoko Ogata, who worked beside Dan, Ushi is a person who is “not worried about getting something in the future or sad that she had missed something in the past” (xviii).

How much time do you spend dwelling on problems of the past, or worrying about endeavors you need to accomplish in the future? How often can you live in the moment?

4. Sayoko now tries to be like Ushi: “I’ve learned to make my own meals for the family. I put love into my food. I care for my husband and my children, the husband comes home, and I have a good family. Also, I try to mentally check to make sure that I haven’t hurt anyone, that the people around me are okay. I take time each night to think about the people around me, and think about what I eat, and what is important to me. I also do this during dinner. I take time to reflect. I’m not chasing the carrot any more” (xviii).

What is the carrot you are chasing in your life? How important is family? How much time do you get to spend with them as opposed to work, your carrot?

5. Ushi claims that her secret is to “work hard, drink mugwort sake before bed, and get a good night’s sleep” (xx).

Do you get a good night’s sleep each night? Do you work hard? And what about that glass or two of red wine?

Chapter One: The Truth About Living Longer

1. “When Ponce de Leon landed on the northeast coast of Florida on April 2, 1513, he was searching, it’s been said, for a Fountain of Youth” (3).

Everyone wants to remain young. What do you do to try to remain so?

2. Thomas Perls, the director of the New England Centenarian Study at Boston University School of Medicine, says that one of the first things people must do is to get rid of all the “anti-aging quackery” (20). He says that wrong headed people offer an “ugly view of old people that’s completely false in order to get you worried about getting older” (20).

What is your impression of aging and getting older? How concerned are you about the aging process? What do you fear of the future?

3. According to Robert Kane, the director of the Center on Aging at the University of Minnesota, “If somebody could do a minimum of 30 minutes—maybe we could raise it to 60—of exercise at least five times a week that would help” (18).

How much exercise do you get each week? What kind of exercises do you do? For the next twenty days, keep an exercise log in your Health Journal. Try to increase your output by one day (30 minutes of exercising) a week each successive week. By the end of the 20th day, you will be exercising at a fine clip.

4. One of the things that Robert Kane would suggest for people to age successfully is to “have a sense of social connectedness” (19).

How socially connected are you to the world around you? What do you do for your social interaction? Can you think of ways that you can improve or enhance your social interaction? Try to join of group of people with like-minded hobbies or reading interests.

5. According to Robert Kane, people need to do something with their lives that “they feel is either interesting or worthwhile” (19).

What do you do in your own life that you find interesting and worthwhile? Is this connected to your business? Your social life? Your family? Your leisure activities?

6. Kane says that we must seek out a life that gives “you a sense of fulfillment, a good life, the sense of being valued, the sense of being cared for, and the sense that you are liked” (20).

How do you match up with these parameters?

Chapter Two: The Sardinian Blue Zone

1. When Dan asks 75 year old shepherd Tonino Tola if he ever gets bored, Tola says, "I've loved living here every day of my life. I love my animals and taking care of them. We don't really need the cow that I butchered today. Half of the meat will go to my son and most of the other half we'll share with the neighbors. But without the animals and the work it takes to raise them, I would be sitting in my house doing nothing; I would have little purpose in life" (51).

Do you love the place where you currently reside? Do you have a dream place where you would like to live someday? What would it take to get you to move to such a place? In your Health Journal, make a list of the necessities that you would need to attain this goal; then begin with the simplest item on the list. Start the journey toward this dream.

What is your purpose in life? Do you consider this purpose worthy of your time? What purpose(s) would be worthier of your time? List them in your Health Journal. Again, what would it take to get you to devote your full time to accomplishing such a goal? Make a list of what you would need to get you there; then begin with the simplest item on the list and let the journey begin.

2. As Dan relates, "In America, seniors tend to live apart from their children and grandchildren, often sent off to retirement homes when they become unable to care for themselves. But that rarely happened here. A combination of family duty, community pressure, and genuine affection for elders kept centenarians with their families until death. This gave people over 80 a huge advantage: They received immediate care when injured or ill, and perhaps most significantly, felt loved and a sense of belonging. A happy by-product was that grandparents stayed involved in children's lives" (52).

Where do the elderly live in regards to your family? Do they continue to share family responsibilities and goals? If not, set aside a time each week where the interaction can become stronger, more involved, and sustainable. Try to increase this involvement as the weeks go on. Write about this involvement in your Health Journal. Note the difference that it makes with the grandparents and grandchildren alike.

3. "Sardinian men seem to possess a temperament that enables them to shed stress. They are at once grumpy and likable, and often joke at the expense of one another. (It's probably no coincidence that the word sardonic has its roots on this island.)" (53).

Dan reveals that “studies have found that a belly laugh a day may keep the doctor away. In 2005, researchers at the University of Maryland showed that laughter helped relax blood vessels, linking it to healthier function and a possible decreased risk of heart attack. Others have found that laughter may lower blood pressure and increase the amount of disease-fighting cells found in the body” (162).

We all have stress. Make a note in your Health Journal over the next twenty days as to exactly when you have stress and what you do to deal with it? Do you drink? Act out on the stressor? Try to fix the problem?

Now try to practice laughter in the face of the stressor. Make fun of the problem.

Joke with others who are in on the same problem as you. Make note of this in your Health Journal, and watch as you condition your mind to laugh at your problems. At the same time, you’ll see that your stress is alleviating.

4. Dan comments, “Sardinians today have already taken on many of the trappings of modern life. Mechanization and technology have replaced long hours and hard work; cars and trucks have eliminated much of the need to walk long distances; a culture disseminated by television is replacing the one that put the emphasis on family and community; and junk foods are replacing whole-grain breads and fresh vegetables traditionally consumed here. Young people are fatter, less inclined to follow tradition, and more outwardly focused” (58).

Which do you resemble more? The lifestyle of the new culture or the past? Make note of this in your Health Journal. If you are dissatisfied with your response, reflect on what part of your daily philosophy will have to change in order for you to alter your lifestyle.

5. “Sardinian male centenarians seemed to avoid bone loss and fractures. One Italian study has shown that Sardinian centenarians reported less than half as many fractures as the average Italian centenarian” (60). Dan believes this may be because of their jobs as shepherds: “Their work was neither stressful nor strenuous, but it did require miles and miles of walking a day” (60).

How much walking do you do a day? Make a note of this in your Health Journal. Over the next twenty days, try to increase your daily walking exercise by increments until you can devote a steady 30 to 60 minute exercise each day.

6. Dan notes Tonino’s “capacity to take a few moments each day to admire the view of the island from his pastureland perch—though he’s seen this same vista nearly every day for almost 80 years” (61). He wonders, “How often do our hard-pressed lives allow us to take the time to appreciate the subtle beauty around us? Sardinians have the presence of mind to savor what they have—and perhaps are calmed by this” (61).

Take the time today to gather yourself and look out on the surroundings in your home, in your area, in your life. Write briefly of the beauty you see in your Health Journal. Take a few moments daily to appraise a similar place and time. Use your Health Journal to help you to reflect on its beauty. With this conditioning, soon enough you will begin to see the beauty all around you.

7. Dan notes that three centenarians he spoke with “Tonino, Sebastiano, and Giovanni all drank wine moderately. Cannonau wine has two to three times the level of artery-scrubbing flavonoids as other wines. Moderate wine consumption may help explain the lower levels of stress among men” (63).

How much red wine do you drink?

Chapter Three: The Blue Zone in Okinawa

1. Dr. Greg Plotnikoff, who holds degrees in both internal medicine and pediatrics from the University of Michigan, claims that “in America we focus on battling diseases once they occur. However, in traditional Asian thought, the highest, most honored form of medicine was prevention, and the lowest was treatment. Today in Japan, the focus is on avoiding disease in the first place. There are massive national and local efforts underway to prevent diabetes and heart disease. Japan’s priorities represent a profoundly different way of understanding medicine” (69).

How much time do you put into prevention? How much do you take care of yourself daily, looking into your own health and well being? Have you looked up your family’s medical history and adjusted your lifestyle to reflect preventative measures?

2. Dr. Craig Wilcox, a world renowned gerontologist, claims that “the Okinawan culture of longevity was beginning to disappear with the encroaching American food culture. Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald’s were the last calamity to befall Okinawa; the fast-food invasion has threatened many of the positive behaviors that led to Okinawan longevity” (74).

How often do you eat out during the week? How often do you eat out at fast food restaurants? How often do you prepare home cooked meals? How often are those home cooked meals healthy?

3. Kamada Nakazato, a 102-year-old woman living on the Motobu Peninsula in Okinawa serves as the “village noro, a priestess who communes with the gods and ancestors and serves as spiritual adviser to the townspeople” (79). This gives her life a sense of purpose, the spirit of ikigai. Dr. Makoto Suzuki, a Japanese medical doctor who discovered this Okinawan Blue Zone, says that ikigai is “the reason for waking up in the morning. A sudden loss of a person’s traditional role can have a measurable effect on mortality” (87).

What is your spirit of ikigai? What gives you reason to get up in the morning? What is your responsibility to the community? How are you needed? Likewise, can you find ways to assist your community in such a way as to make yourself more necessary?

4. Many Americans work toward retirement; however, if their sense of purpose, their ikigai, was the very job they are retiring from, this can cause great problems. Dr. Makoto Suzuki says that people with very clear senses of purpose and relatively high status, such as teachers, police officers and doctors, tend to “die very soon after they quit working” (87). As Dan notes, “the idea of retirement never occurred to the Okinawan peasant. To this day there’s not a word for it in their language” (81).

What are your thoughts regarding retirement? Consider how you can continue to imbue your retired life with a sense of purpose, with a continuing spirit of ikigai. Preparing for retirement isn't just setting aside the proper funds.

5. Hara hachi bu is a Confucian-inspired adage. Explains Dr. Craig Wilcox, "All of the old folks say it before they eat. It means 'Eat until you are 80 percent full.... That's because it takes about 20 minutes for the stomach to tell the brain it is full. Undereating, as the theory goes, slows down the body's metabolism in a way such that it produces less damaging oxidants—agents that rust the body from within" (83).

For the next week, try this during your three daily meals. Write about the experience in your Health Journal. Note how much food you consume, how full you feel after twenty minutes, and how your body feels as the days progress.

6. Kamada Nakazato says that one of the keys to her long life "comes from not worrying so much about your own problems. Sometimes you can best take care of yourself by taking care of others" (85).

How much time do you spend worrying about yourself? How much time do you spend taking care of others? Make a list of your current concerns in your Health Journal. How many of these are about yourself only? If the list is shaded to yourself, make an effort to alter the focus of your concerns.

Make an extended list of the concerns of your friends and family, then note down what you can do to help alleviate these issues. Take the simplest one and set out to complete this goal. Write about your reaction to this in your Health Journal. Try to accomplish yet another one of these goals at least once a week.

7. Kamada's keys to life are to "eat your vegetables, have a positive attitude, be kind to people, and smile" (85). As Dan says, "older Okinawans have eaten a plant-based diet most of their lives. Their meals of stir-fried vegetables, sweet potatoes, and tofu are high in nutrients and low in calories. Goya, with its antioxidants and compounds that lower blood sugar, is of particular interest. While centenarian Okinawans do eat some pork, it is traditionally reserved only for infrequent ceremonial occasions and taken only in small amounts" (118).

How much meat do you eat a week? How many vegetables do you eat per evening? Fruits? Over the next twenty days, focus on reducing the amount of meats and sugars you consume during the average day. Take detailed notes of this in your Health Journal. Write about how you feel after the process is complete, and compare it to your commentary as to when you began.

8. When 14 year-old Kurara was asked what most impressed her about her grandmother Kamada, she said clearly, "Grandma doesn't keep stress. Sometimes she is so straightforward it could sound harsh" (88).

Are you straightforward? Or do you store problems away, hoping they'll simply vanish? Try speaking your mind over the next week. It might sound difficult, but you'll soon find it remarkably cleansing, and will remove stress both from yourself and the relationships you've been withholding your honesty from.

9. The notion of moai in Okinawa stands for "a social support network, a ritualized vehicle for companionship" (90). As Dan explains, "The Okinawan tradition of forming a moai provides secure social networks. These safety nets lend financial and emotional support in times of need and give all of their members the stress-shedding security of knowing that there is always someone there for them" (119).

Says Klazuko Manna, aged 77 and the youngest person in her moai, "Each member knows that her friends count on her as much as she counts on her friends... It's much easier going through life knowing there is a safety net" (91).

Do you have a moai? Are there pockets of like-minded people, such as yourself, somewhere in your community that you could endeavor to join? If you are unfamiliar with such, try to seek out groups or joint ventures of people with similar passions online.

10. As Dan says, "books like *Bowling Alone* chronicle how people in the United States are increasingly alienated from their neighbors. On average, an American has only two close friends he or she can count on, recently down from three, which may contribute to an increasing sense of stress" (91).

How many friends do you have that you can count on? Over the next twenty days, try to increase your social network. Take a friend to Happy Hour. Set aside work for the weekend and join some friends for lunch. Buy the drinks. Pour the red wine. Tell a joke. Laugh. Loudly.

Join a club of people with like interests. You could find local branches of people who read the same kind of literature, enjoy the same sport, or even sample the same kinds of wines.

11. What most impressed the team of researchers about Kamada Nakazato was her gardening. As Dan explains, "Almost all Okinawan centenarians grow or once grew a garden. It's a source of daily physical activity that exercises the body with a wide range of motion and helps reduce stress. It's also a near-constant source of fresh vegetables" (119).

Where do you find your daily physical activity? Do you walk? Jog? Run? Have you considered a garden? If you don't have a small yard at your living space, there are always community gardens you could join. Take a look online. You

could increase both your health and social interaction, while you take steps toward eating right.

12. Centenarian Gozei Shinzato makes daily offerings to her ancestors. According to Dr. Craig Wilcox, a world renowned gerontologist, such actions may account for the longevity of life in this part of the world: “This is what we call ancestor veneration. Older Okinawan women have great respect for their deceased ancestors. They believe that if they make the proper offerings in the morning, the ancestors will watch over them for the rest of the day. It’s like if something bad happens, it was meant to happen; if something good happens, it’s because the ancestors were looking out for them. It’s a great stress reducer for these people. They relinquish worries to a higher power” (102).

Do you have a faith, either in God, gods, or ancestors that you can depend on to look over you? You might want to try to attend a religious service in your community. It’s good for fostering social interaction and for helping to relieve stress.

13. Looking at Gozei, Dan says that “it occurred to me that I was witnessing the happy limits of the human machine. I sensed neither the frailty nor the wistfulness of impending death but rather serenity—a certain satisfaction with life now free of the ambition and commitments that dog younger years—a life achieved” (103).

We can relax in our achievements at any time. Take a step back and consider the wealth of what you have achieved. Sit down and note these in your Health Journal. Share this with your friends. Raise a glass and celebrate in the accomplishment. Encourage others around you to share their successes as well.

14. Kamata Arashinto is a centenarian who sheds her concerns of the past by simply refusing to dwell on them: “I’m tired of the past. I don’t want to talk about it. I’m happy now. I have enough to eat. I’m surrounded by my friends. Why relive misery when better times have arrived? I’ve lived those hardships, and now they serve me well because they allow me to enjoy today” (110).

How much time do you spend dwelling on the past, rather than celebrating the present? Try to train your mind to refuse to consider the past for long. Each time you catch yourself dwelling on a past injury or unfortunate circumstance, take out your Health Journal and note how that experience has helped you to enjoy this very day that you’re experiencing at the moment.

Chapter Four: An American Blue Zone

1. The people of Loma Linda, California, consisting of some 9,000 Seventh Day Adventists, “lead the nation in the longest life expectancy” (124). Dr. Gary Fraser, who conducted the Adventist Health Study [AHS] said he “learned that nonvegetarian Adventists had about twice the risk of heart disease as vegetarian Adventists” (129).

As Dan relates, “Many Adventists follow a vegetarian diet. The AHS shows that consuming fruits and vegetables and whole grains seems to be protective against a wide variety of cancers. For those who prefer to eat some meat, Adventists recommend small portions served as a side dish rather than as the main meal” (165).

How much meat do you eat per week? Log your meat consumption in your Health Journal so that you can keep accurate track over the next twenty days. Then try to reduce your meat helpings to twice weekly. Increase your consumption of fruit, vegetables and nuts. Keep a weekly journal regarding how you feel in terms of your energy levels and overall health. After the twenty day period, look back on how you may have changed.

2. Dr. Fraser claims that “it is very clear that men who drank five or six glasses of water a day had a substantial reduction in the risk of fatal heart attack—60, 70 percent less—compared to those who drank considerably less water” (132).

For the next week, keep strict track of the beverages you consume, together with the quantity. Chart your consumption of water and try to increase this to five to six glasses per day. For the next twenty days, record an entry in your Health Journal regarding your energy levels and overall health. After you complete this effort, look over your notes. Do you see any correlation between water consumption, mood and health?

3. Dr. Fraser says that his studies “found that nut eaters also had a two-year advantage,” in terms of extra years added to their lives, “which seemed to relate largely to heart disease” (133). Says Dan, “Adventists who consume nuts at least five times a week have about half the risk of heart disease and live about two years longer than those who don’t” (165).

How often do you consume nuts? Over the next twenty days, try to increase your consumption to at least five snack portions per week.

4. Marge Jetton, a lively centenarian whom Dan met up with at her apartment, offered some insightful guidance about diet: “There isn’t anything you can eat that can’t be made out of something healthy. My daughter just sent me some waffles

made out of soy and garbanzo beans. Mostly I just eat the oatmeal in the morning, and then make up a nice raw fruit and vegetable salad for later in the day” (142).

What does your usual diet consist of? What are your favorite foods? What about your favorite guilty pleasures? It’s surprising how many of your “guilty pleasures” can be made healthier for you. Take a look in your health food store for alternatives? Look online for substitutes. Then start the process of working with these alternatives rather than the usual Snickers bar or double mocha cappuccino latte.

5. Marge is an extremely active woman who, among her many exercises, works out on her bike: “I set the timer for 15 minutes and try and keep the speed between 25 and 30 miles per hour” (143).

Biking is an extremely fine exercise tool for the human body. How much do you bike per week? Try to increase your biking activities. When you have to travel short distances, take the bike instead of the car. Take your bike to work. Keep the SUV in the garage and bike with the kids to the soccer field. You’ll find that within weeks, you’ll feel stronger, healthier and happier.

6. Randy Roberts, the pastor of Loma Linda University Church, speaks of the importance of the Sabbath: “It is meant to be a sanctuary in time for rest and rejuvenation, and I think it accomplishes that on a number of levels... It is healthy as a pure stress reliever that allows some peace to occur” (149).

As Dan notes, “A weekly break from the rigors of daily life, the 24-hour Sabbath provides a time to focus on family, God, camaraderie, and nature. Adventists claim this relieves their stress, strengthens social networks, and provides consistent exercise” (164).

Do you set time aside each week to relax and rejuvenate? Turn off the cell phones and TVs. Gather the family. Cook a meal. Play a parlor game. Start your own tradition. You might only be able to do this for a few hours per week as you begin, but try to increase this to a full day within the next two months. Note how much more productive you actually can become during the week.

7. The Mock family in Yucaipa enjoys a pleasant weekly Sabbath made up of friends, food and relaxation. Dan notes that “Adventists tend to spend lots of time with other Adventists. They find well-being by sharing values and supporting each other’s habits” (164).

Start a tradition with friends and family that encourages everyone to get together: share experiences, some food, a glass of red wine. Sit back and relax, laugh with each other, and put your work aside.

8. American nutritionist Adelle Davis is attributed with saying, "Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dinner like a pauper" (165). Dan notes that this attitude is "reflected in Adventist practices. A light dinner early in the evening avoids flooding the body with calories during the inactive parts of the day" (165).

What are your own eating habits? Track these over the next twenty days in your Health Journal. Try to increase your food consumption in the morning while decreasing them in the evening when the body has less opportunity to burn off fats.

9. Says Dan, "Adventists with healthy Body Mass Indexes (meaning they have an appropriate weight for their heights) who keep active and eat meat sparingly, if at all, have lower blood pressure, lower blood cholesterol, and less cardiovascular disease than heavier Americans with higher BMIs" (164).

Take some time to check on your own BMI online. Put this down in your Health Journal and, if you need to lose weight, don't go on a crash diet. Instead, buy a scale. Weigh yourself daily. Go on a nice easy process where you can simply eat healthier and exercise regularly. Record your weight weekly. After six months, check on that BMI again. You'll be happy with the results.

Chapter Five: Discovering Costa Rica's Blue Zone

1. Dr. Xinia Fernandez, a nutritionist who studied Nicoya, said of her studies, "We notice that the most highly functioning people over 90 in Nicoya have a few common traits. One of them is that they feel a strong sense of service to others or care for their family. We see that as soon as they lose this, the switch goes off. They die very quickly if they don't feel needed" (190). Costa Ricans call this devotion plan de vida.

What is your own plan de vida? What is the plan de vida of the elderly in your family? If they don't have a clear one, help them find reason within your own family.

2. Ninety-one year old Aurelano Rosales, from the village of Santa Ana, keeps a garden rich in foods that might help provide the magic of his longevity. "There was the maranon, a red-orange fruit five times richer in vitamin C than oranges; anona, which looks like a misshapen, thick-skinned pear known to have selective toxicity against various types of cancer cells; and wild ginger, a great source of vitamin B6, magnesium and manganese. Eliza Thomas, a California-based researcher and health writer, claims that "all of these are antioxidant powerhouses associated with disease prevention and longer life" (194).

Professor Leonardo Mata, who has been studying diets in Guatemala, believes that the most essential part of Rosales's diet is maize: "Here, the fact that they use lime—which is calcium hydroxide—to cook the kernels makes all the difference. It infuses the grain with a high concentration of calcium greater than in untreated maize and most other foods, and unlocks certain amino acids for the body to absorb" (195)

Look over your common food consumption notes that you have listed down in your Health Journal. Are you getting enough Vitamin C, B6, magnesium, and calcium? If not, start substituting some foods that hold the vitamins you might be lacking in. Within twenty days you'll notice a large difference in your life.

3. Gianluca Coilla, who headed one of the Costa Rican research teams, believes that an essential attribute to this Blue Zone's longevity lies in its drinking water. "What the atlas showed, specifically, was the mineral content of the water. It revealed that the water hardness, the calcium and magnesium content, was higher in Nicoya than anywhere else in Costa Rica" (201).

Dan says that this perhaps explains "the lower rates of heart disease, as well as stronger bones and fewer hip fractures" (223). Gianni explains that "the heart is a muscle, and all muscle contractions depend on calcium... Also, calcium is important for the bones... After we are about 40...we lose bone faster than we build it. Calcium may help slow that loss" (202).

For the next twenty days, plot your calcium intake in your Health Journal. By the end of this journey, you should be taking in calcium daily. You can find calcium in dairy products such as yogurt, milk & cheese; as well as in non-dairy products, such as salmon & tofu.

4. Dr. Elizabeth Lopez thinks that a great deal of Costa Rican longevity stems from the fact that “they are so positive and so devoted to their families. All but one of the 33 Nicoyans we have met live with their family. They have a wonderful support network. They also tend to have a large number of visitors that they receive almost every afternoon, which is both a physical and psychological safety net” (205).

Are you a vital part of your neighborhood? Do you visit or get frequent visitors? If you are dissatisfied with your involvement, start to make a change. Throw a dinner. Invite the neighbors over. Encourage them to bring a dish. Then start to make this a weekly habit. Make it an open-door policy once a week, then watch the neighborhood grow closer, your social unit grow greater, and your life become more worthy of being lived.

5. Dr. Elizabeth Lopez believes that one of the major aspects that generate such longevity in Costa Rica is the fact that the people have such great faith: “They tend to relinquish control of their lives to God. The fact that God is in control of their lives relieves any economic, spiritual, or well-being anxiety they might otherwise have. They go through life with the peaceful certitude that someone is looking out for them” (210).

Dan comments on the fact that he “heard of a study that echoed their findings: In this study participants who attended religious services about once a month or more had up to a 35 percent reduced risk of death for the next 7 years” (210).

What are your beliefs, spiritual, religious or otherwise? Do you have faith in these beliefs, in your future? Are you secure that you are taken care of and that you will be taken care of in the days to come?

6. Aida Baltoano, who lived a traditional farming life in Juan Diaz, located in the hills above the city of Nicoya, attributes her health to the fact that she keeps busy. “We don’t need much. We’re satisfied. You have to keep busy. When people have too much time they get involved with vices. Here we have enough to do. We stay busy enough to keep the Devil away, but not so much that we get stressed. It’s a clean, pure life” (220).

Dan concurs: “Centenarians seem to have enjoyed physical work all of their lives. They find joy in everyday physical chores” (223).

What physical chores do you take part in daily? Can you think of additional physical chores to get involved in? Try to increase the amount of physical activity you involve yourself in over the next twenty days and make note of these in your Health Journal.

Chapter Six: Your Personal Blue Zone

Now that you've worked through all of the above activities, it's time to look once again at the lifestyle you're leading. Look over the responses you offered to the questions set forth in the Preface of this Guide. Now, respond to the same questions with goals for a lifestyle you would like to lead.