



**THE WILDE
DEB**
JEN MILLER

Olympic Volleyball blowout

Once every four years, I'm in the mood to watch a little drama, a little jinxing, some long jumps, some pole vault, and some hammer throw and shot put. There are not even you see every day, and don't really want to. Every three years would be too much; every five years, too little. Four years seems just about the right interval at which to spend an afternoon watching a bunch of shot putters do their thing and wondering where they get the motivation to spend so much time practicing.

It's not as if these athletes can turn pro, even if they win the gold medal. The kids on 'Jersey Shore' will make more money in a week by being spotted than the most Olympic champions will make in a lifetime. A 'real' housewife makes more getting her nails done.

Spoiler alert: I don't know who actually won the gold medal in any of the above-mentioned sports, because if they were on TV, I missed them. Every single time I turned on NBC, the network was showing women's beach volleyball. Endless hours of it. Nine gamelike hours of it. I have never viewed chess on TV with NBC, so if suddenly beach volleyball was the only sport that remained. There was never any drama, jinxing or pole vault when I tuned in.

So instead of the long jump and hammer throw and other field events, I watched hours of women's beach volleyball and men's synchronized swimming, hours of fishing and hours of Michael Phelps. If anyone should get a gold medal for synchronized swimming, it is whoever designed the swimmer's nostrils.

It wasn't the fastest, the highest or the strongest who got the most airtime, but those who wore the skinniest outfits. The more covered the athletes were, the less coverage they got.

Historians tell us that in the ancient Greek Olympics (back before the euro), the athletes did their thing naked — maybe because that is the only thing that could have made Greco-Roman wrestling remotely interesting, and even then, not interesting enough. NBC is, no doubt, angling to bring back the all-Olympic, but barring that, it has beach volleyball. Besides, if the athletes were naked and barefoot, their world Nike makes any



Vincent Hato shows Maria, Claudia, a fire he started using a bird-dill technique and old birds into a cedar bundle. The Pintos are the owners of Ravens-Way Wild Journeys.

Owners of Ravens-Way find their calling among nature

BY JEN MILLER

PATAGONIA — Understanding the message that people are integrally connected with all other forms of life on this Earth is the key message offered by Ravens-Way Wild Journeys, a company based near Patagonia Lake that offers nature programs and wilderness adventures.

But despite providing a form of income to Vincent and Claudia Pinto, the couple who own the two outdoor preserves where Ravens-Way operates, it is the concept of spreading their love for nature and an understanding of the human connection to all that call this place home that truly keep the couple going.

With plans in the works to expand their ability to spread a knowledge of nature, which covers everything from wilderness survival skills to a detailed understanding of nearly every plant, bird, bug, beastie and creepy crawl that calls Southern Arizona home, the couple will undoubtedly be teaching others about their love of nature long into the future.

Enjoying the blaze

Having spent so much time with Vincent throughout the week, I had a really unique opportunity in that I was not



Vincent Hato checks out an avid fire carver for a group of wildlifers in the Science and Nature Discovery Center at Raven's Nest.

only able to participate in many of the courses offered by Ravens-Way, but I also had the chance to meet and interact with two of the most people I have ever met.

But as much as I was interested in learning about what plants I could eat, how to start a fire with sticks, or how to communicate with the trees, I was beginning to wonder the story behind how my two guides had come to be together, and how they had maintained such a long-term apprecia-

tion for nature. Growing up in Philadelphia, Vincent fell in love with nature as a boy while living along the edge of the Pennsylvania Woods, which haunts the city.

"That was my stomping ground. We had deer in our backyard, pheasant, quail, all sorts of wonderful things," he said.

Taking his cue from the likes of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir,

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEN MILLER

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Vincent and Claudia Pinto recently invited HeraldExaminer reporter Jacob Peterson to spend five days and four nights at Raven's Nest, a 40-acre preserve near Patagonia Lake. This story is the third publication in a three-part, first-person series. To read the first two installments in the series, visit <http://bit.ly/9W5t4C> and <http://bit.ly/9W5t4C>, respectively.

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Vincent got a degree in wild life biology and later in environmental studies. As an adult, he worked for various nature and environmental organizations, acquiring Raven's Mountain, a 50-acre preserve in the Chiricahua Mountains, in 1999, and Raven's Nest, the Patagonia-area preserve, in 2000.

"This is his life. To educate himself about every creature in this environment so he can pass that knowledge to us. To do, with every gesture, something for the protection and preservation of this habitat and the environment," Claudia said of her husband.

Claudia had talked to me numerous times about how passionate Vincent was about his desire to teach others about nature, and I believed her. But it wasn't until I found out how she and Vincent met that I really understood what it means to practice what you preach.

Born in Colombia to a wealthy family, Claudia was privileged to travel around the world, learn many languages, and attend the Wharton School of Finance and, later, Harvard. Becoming a big player in the world of international finance, Claudia worked in Europe, the U.S., Asia, and Canada, excelling in her career but yearning for the opportunity to pursue an Earth Stewardship role.

"I was dismayed to be working in China during a period of amazing economic growth that unfortunately happened at the expense of the environment, and not be able to do anything to protect it," she said.

Success, however, came at a price, and in October of 2006 when Claudia was able to take her first vacation in eight years, she travelled from Shanghai, China, to Tucson and fell in love with the Catalina Mountains — the blue skies, fresh air, and many nearby wilderness areas.

Claudia decided to take a sabbatical to explore the magnificent wilderness in Arizona and, attending a nature conference in November, met Vincent and was immediately inspired by his enthusiasm for the natural world.

LEARN MORE

To get more information about Ravens-Way Wild Journeys, or to learn more about Vincent and Claudia Fries, visit www.ravenswaywild.com. Those interested in taking classes offered by Ravens-Way should first visit the website and then email nature-journeys@tobmail.com. You can also contact Vincent and Claudia at (520) 421-4425 or (520) 424-4944.

"I was just amazed to see his passion and love for protecting the biodiversity of this region. I never felt before that I had found anybody that was really authentic about life's purpose. And such a handsome, witty, full of life ... he still seems larger than life. At that point, I knew why I was meant to stay here," she said.

And without looking back, Claudia and Vincent have built a life together, a life that is centered around the preservation and protection of nature, the environment, and all the creatures that inhabit this world.

After five days and four nights at Raven's Nest, my time with Vincent and Claudia was coming to an end when it dawned on me that the job, doing everything possible to protect the environment and telling others to do the same, would never end.

The buck had been passed to me, so to say, in that it was now my turn to go out and tell others about the informative lessons, deep insights, and all-around fun times I had a chance to experience during my wild journey.

In the end, Ravens-Way Wild Journeys not only provided me with an opportunity to learn about nature and how to survive in the wilderness in an Earth-friendly manner, but also with a compelling reason why I should care about doing either.

For me, Ravens-Way Wild Journeys, Vincent and Claudia Fries, provided that spark I needed to grow a love for nature that few ever achieve, but most wish they had — a love for nature I plan to savor, and enjoy long into the future.