

Changing marital dynamics

THE RELUCTANT IMMIGRANTS



MINOTTE RODRIGO CUENCA

huge house in the suburbs, a dog, his-and-hers Mercedes Benzes, stable jobs, and a gas station business they acquired. Though there was no time to stray, there was hardly any time for each other, either.

There were cracks in their marriage that could not withstand the migration back to Manila.

According to many people, moving or migrating is the number one most stressful thing in life, more stressful than divorce or personal illness.

So, if you have problems in your marriage, fix them first before you migrate.

Sometimes, though, you will not know that you have problems—until you migrate.

There is the story of Mitch (not his real name), who came to the

US for a better life for his wife and future children. After four years here, they divorced bitterly. There were issues of control and finances. Mitch lost his wife and was childless, jobless and homeless. His wife had been the breadwinner since they got here. Power has shifted and all their dynamics were changed.

There is also the story of Edric (also not his real name), whose family is prominent and wealthy in Manila. They owned a chain of hospitals and vacation houses by the beach. And so when Edric and his family migrated to the US, he was lost—not willing to start from scratch when he had all the luxury and support from his parents in Manila.

“Bakit ako maghihirap dito?” Edric wailed, not understanding

that he had to go to work daily, respect his boss, and account for his hours, measured by a bundy-clock (He had never seen one before!).

“But what if I’m finished by 3, why do I have to stay until 5?” Edric lamented. Used to being the boss and not the employee, he felt like he was wasting his time in an office owned by someone else.

Meanwhile, his wife bags a job to provide more for her kids. Mothers do what they have to do, even if it means starting from scratch. Nothing is beneath them. They will scrub toilets and bathe senior citizens if they have to. Mothers are always talented multi-taskers so it is easy for an employer to appreciate her—and promote her—in no time.

Edric is still lost and he and his wife are at a precarious marital

crossroad. He insists on starting a business here but has no connections or funds. His wife moves on ahead. He is sometimes jealous that she has been promoted. She loses her respect for him slowly when he is napping while she works and runs the house and tutors the kids with homework.

“Daddy yells,” said their kids and prefers to do homework with their mom. Rich boy-dad has a short temper.

She sees now how different they are. She hardly noticed in Manila, distracted by many activities, helpers, outings with friends at their vacation homes near the beach.

And though they have been married for almost 20 years, migrating to the States will continue to put a heavier strain on these is-

sues. The issue may be monetary from the outset, but ultimately, it is about respect.

Maybe they will endure, or maybe they will crack under the pressure of adjusting to a new life here.

There are, of course, many marriages that thrive in spite of migration, here or there and anywhere.

Is your marriage suffering in the States, or has it been made stronger?

Minotte Rodrigo Cuenca migrated to the US with her family only three years ago. She is a freelance writer in the Bay Area and founder of Candlelight Books (<http://candlelightbooks.blogspot.com>), sending used storybooks to remote provinces and schools in the Philippines. E-mail her at mrucuenca@yahoo.com

AZUCENA-VALENCIA LAW CORPORATION'S MISSION:

Highly skilled representation with a personal approach

THE founder of Azucena-Valencia Law Corporation, Atty. Myra Valencia Azucena, migrated from the Philippines to the US at age of five. Determined to succeed in the field of immigration law, Atty. Azucena became a diligent student and was admitted to practice law at the age of 25. Hard work and the desire for families to be reunited in the US are foremost in her mind. She takes her own personal experiences to heart and incorporates them in her practice.

She has been practicing exclusively in immigration law for over three years. At the age of 28, she became a partner at a large firm and left this year to begin her own practice. She is a member of the Filipino American Bar Association, the Los Angeles County Bar Association, and the State Bar of California. She is admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of California and the United States District Court for the Central District of California.

Atty. Myra Valencia Azucena has successfully litigated hundreds of cases before the Executive Office of Immigration Review, Immigration Court and the United States Citizenship Service. She has experience in asylum, criminal waivers and fraud waivers, adjustment of status, residency under the Child Status Protection Act, naturalization, as well as applications for immigrant and non-immigrant visas.

She is also an active member in the Filipino

community. She became a scholarship recipient of the Filipino American Bar Association of San Diego while pursuing her education in law, to sit for the California State Bar Exam. She is committed to public interest work and has received numerous awards for her dedication.

Myra Valencia Azucena has a true passion for other cultures. She travels frequently to gain a deeper understanding of the world and brings these experiences home with her. As an immigration attorney, Mrs. Azucena takes pride in the success of her clients. She loves making a difference in the lives of others.

Located at the heart of the financial district in Pasadena, the Azucena-Valencia Law Corporation formally opened its doors on Sept. 1, 2008. Atty. Azucena and her highly-competent staff work closely with their clients—people who want to live and work in the US—to ensure that all their needs are provided. They go out of their way to build personal and lasting relationships with their clients. Atty. Azucena and her team are passionate about uniting families.

The law firm is dedicated to the practice of immigration law and offers competent legal services in all areas of immigration law. They offer an hour of free consultation. For more information about their services, please call (626) 240-4654. Visit www.azvalaw.com or their office at 1055 E. Colorado Blvd., Suite 500 Pasadena, CA 91106.

(Advertising Supplement)

BANKRUPTCY-GETTING OUT OF DEBT



BEN DUPRE

WITH each passing day, large numbers of people living in the United States are struggling to pay for life's necessities because they are overwhelmed with consumer debt. The current mortgage meltdown has only exacerbated the problem as these same folks are slipping deeper into debt and are often even losing their homes through foreclosure.

With their backs pressed against the wall, many of these hardworking folks take extreme measures to pay their bills, exhausting their retirement accounts such as 401k, IRA's and the like. This article explores this phenomena and the relationship between filing bankruptcy and protecting one's retirement accounts.

Average household savings rates are negative in the United States

Instead of following the timeless advice of saving a percentage of one's earnings towards emergency and the inevitable retirement, more and more people are doing the complete opposite. According to Economic and Social Data Rankings (<http://dataranking.com/table.cgi?LG=e&TP=ne08-2&RG=1>), as of 2005, the United States average household savings rate is a negative 0.3%. In this current economic cycle, it is not uncommon to observe someone overwhelmed with consumer debt and withdrawing their retirement funds from their 401k's, IRA's and other retirement accounts to simply pay their bills. All of the long and hard years it took to save those funds, which were intended to be used for retirement, are increasingly being spent on insurmountable credit card debts with excessive interest rates.

Protecting one's retirement accounts for that day of retirement

For those deep into a debt ridden financial situation where retirement funds are still available, perhaps one should consider alternative approaches that provides protections to these funds. One of those alternative approaches is bankruptcy. Generally, retirement accounts that are ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974) qualified aren't considered property of the bankruptcy estate and therefore cannot be taken to pay off creditors. And, even if they were considered property of the estate, there are exemptions that may still protect these funds. Common retirement accounts that may be protected include various 401k plans, profit-sharing plans, IRA's, and stock bonus plans.

The shortfall in this system appears not in the extent of protections, but rather in transmitting the information to those that need it the most.

But while protecting one's retirement funds and dealing with overwhelming consumer debt are issues to consider, they, by far, are not the only ones. Each person's financial situation should be carefully considered as one seemingly insignificant fact could easily make a significant difference in outcome. If you are struggling to make ends meet and do not see an end in sight, you should consider evaluating all of your options, including bankruptcy.

Atty. Ben E. Dupre is a licensed attorney in California solely focusing on Bankruptcy and Debtor's Rights. Mr. Dupre can be reached at (408) 874-5300 or www.duprelaw.com.

This article was created for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice regarding your case. Pursuant to the 2005 Bankruptcy Act, we are a debt relief agency assisting individuals with filing bankruptcy.

(Advertising Supplement)

Renters have much to gain by pursuing home ownership

DAILY CITY, CA—Buying a home vs. renting is a big decision that takes careful consideration, as most mortgage consultants will agree. But the rewards of home ownership are great. For many years, purchasing real estate has been considered an extremely profitable investment. It is an achievement that offers a sense of pride, financial stability and potential tax advantages.

Yes, there are certain responsibilities associated with owning a home. Landlords will often argue the benefits of renting, and for obvious reason. If you are renting, you're helping them make their mortgage payment.

The numbers are staggering if you look at it this way. If you are paying \$1,000 per month for an apartment, and you know your rent will increase 5% every year, then over the next five years, you will pay your landlord \$66,309. If you are currently renting a house, you may be paying much more than that each month. Either way, you gain no equity by shelling out this monthly housing expense and you certainly won't benefit when the property value goes up!

However, if you were to purchase your own home or condominium, you would be well on your way toward building equity within that same five-year period. By choosing a fixed-rate loan program, you can have the comfort of knowing that your monthly mortgage payment will never go up. In fact, you would have the op-

tion of refinancing to a lower interest rate at some point in the future should interest rates drop, and this would cause your monthly mortgage commitment to go down.

In addition to building equity, there are tax advantages that come into play with home ownership. Depending on your tax bracket, owning a home is often less expensive than renting after taxes. Interest payments on a mortgage below \$1 million are tax-deductible, and your mortgage consultant should help you evaluate the tax advantages of various loan scenarios, and share this information with your tax consultant to glean feedback on your behalf.

To find the loan program that is right for you, your mortgage consultant will need to evaluate your monthly household income, current assets and savings, as well as any monthly obligations you may have for credit card payments, car payments, child support, etc. These prequalification factors, along with the report of your credit score, will determine how much house you can afford and what interest rate you will pay for financing. It is also important to let your mortgage consultant know what your future goals are, because this will help narrow down which loan option is the best fit for your long-term needs.

There are many different types of loan programs available, including “low” and “no” downpayment mortgage programs. These types of programs require the borrower to

provide less than 3 percent of the loan amount as down payment. FHA lenders rule that the mortgage payment, including principal, interest, taxes and insurance (PITI) should not exceed 31 percent of your gross income, and the PITI plus other long-term debt (car payments, etc.) should not exceed 43 percent of your gross income.

Housing is an expense that takes a big bite out of the monthly budget. If you are a renter and feel that “home” is more than just someplace to hang your hat, think about the advantages of purchasing real estate. It may be time to take the step into building your personal net worth as a homeowner.

Homes And Beyond is hosting a First-Time Homebuyer Seminar FREE to the public on September 30, 2008 from 7 pm to 8 pm at the Serramonte Library (40 Wembley Drive, Daly City, CA 94015). Seating is limited; call (650)991-0118 to reserve your seat.

Here's what you'll learn in this free seminar:

- Can I qualify for a home mortgage loan?
- What does my credit report say, and how will a mortgage banker look at it?
- How much home can I afford to buy?
- How should I go about finding the right home?
- How can I buy bank-owned/foreclosed homes at deep discounts?
- What are the available tax credits and special government loan programs for First-Time Homebuyers? ■

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