

THE DREAM SCENE



Newsletter

Issue no. 35 1st of January 2010



Bienvenido and Welcome to you all!

I am sure that most of you are glad to see the back of 2009. Lets hope that 2010 is a better year for us all. Wishing you all a happy and prosperous New Year from Mick, Tid, Angela and all our advertisers.



This photo was taken at the Book-Swap Christmas Get-Together on the 17th of December. Chris & Pam, who run the book-swap, are the two ladies in front wearing dark tops and pretending to be sober!
(Apologies for poor photo quality)

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Angela's Cartoon



He's mixed up the wife & girlfriend's presents!!

WHAT'S UP?

OK! If you want to miss the really bad and depressing news then skip the next five paragraphs.

Despite attempts to talk-up the situation by various parties, house sales in Spain continue to collapse. Figures released for October show that house sales were down 12.1% over September and down 21% over October 08. Neither the property fairs nor special offers by the banks on re-possessed houses have stimulated demand. A study by the BBVA bank has forecast that house prices will fall a further 8% in 2010. The number of home loans granted in October fell for the 28th month in a row with the total capital lent for home purchases dropping by an annual 31%.

The remainder of the Spanish economy is looking equally grim for 2010. Unemployment is expected to rise from its current level of 18% to around 20% in 2010. The long term prospects for the labour market remain bleak amid doubts about Spain's ability to grow enough to create jobs without radical changes to the economy and labour reform. The government appear to have neither the ability nor the will to do either.

The price of land in Spain has fallen by 7.5% in the third quarter of the year compared to a year ago, and is now back at the level it was five years ago. The average price of a square metre of land in the cities is now 599 € 100 € less than two years ago, despite the fact that the amount of land for sale is half what it was then.

Polaris World, who own six residential complexes in the Murcia region, has asked for a three-month period of grace while it attempts to negotiate a deal with its creditors. If it fails to reach an amicable settlement it will have to go into receivership. The debt, according to some sources, could be as high as 900 million €. The main creditors are Bancaja, CAM, Banco Popular, Banco de Valencia and Cajamurcia which would indicate that the true total of bad debt figures for Spanish banks is still not determined.

Nearly half of Spaniards are suffering from insomnia because of the economic recession. Experts say that fear of losing your job or difficulties in reaching the end of the month are keeping people awake at night, and that more women than men are affected. Between 16% and 21% of Spaniards say they have problems sleeping three or more nights a week and 48% say they suffer some form of insomnia. Of course all those barking dogs don't help either!

Despite all this bad news, the first national survey on sexual health conducted by the Ministry of Health has revealed that eight out of ten Spaniards say they are satisfied with their sex life. 88% of men and 84% of women say they are very or quite satisfied although the men admitted that they would like to have sex more often.

The government has announced that it will introduce a new law in 2010 to tighten-up the smoking ban to include all closed public spaces. The Spanish Hospitality Federation complains that premises spent a great deal of money just three years ago to create separate zones for smokers to comply with the legislation then. They now state that the proposed total ban will be disastrous for their business and will reduce their turnover by at least 10%. The (socialist) government of Andalucía has now asked for premises who have had modifications for smoking introduced to be exempt from the new act for a few years. The revised draft will be discussed by Congress in February and is likely to come into effect in June. Cigarettes are meanwhile back on sale at newsagents across the country under new legislation known as the 'Omnibus Law' which came into effect on the 28th December 09.

A 28-year-old Russian male has been arrested in connection with an attempted robbery in Torrevieja in late October. During the robbery a notary was shot dead. Police are still looking for a second male accomplice.

Completion of the construction work on the new high speed AVE rail link between Murcia and Orihuela is likely to be delayed until 2013. Serious problems have emerged concerning the geology in the Orihuela area whereby sections of the track may have to be anchored 20 metres beneath the surface.

The Valencia region has rejected central government's plan to give every child in the 5th level of primary school education a free lap top computer. The Regional Councillor for Education in the Valencia region, Alejandro Font de Mora, has rejected the plan to co-finance 50,000 lap-tops claiming that the use of the Toshiba NB200 computers with a 10" screen could produce myopia!! This rejection is based on a local ophthalmologist's report which also says too long in front of the screen could lead to relationship problems between the children. This is sheer lunacy when you consider that children have happily been using small screen Nintendo DS, mobile phones and similar small screen technologies for years. This is obviously a political decision taken by the P.P. ruling Valencia without regard to the obvious benefits for the children. Madrid and Murcia, also two P.P. controlled areas, have yet to take part in the scheme.

Municipal staff in the Costa Blanca town of Alcoy have held a three day sit-in in the town hall to protest the sacking of nine workers. The 300 staff also plan to return their Christmas cards to the mayor. Gosh! He must be gutted!

Real Madrid has launched a range of lingerie and underwear with the Real Madrid shield printed on the garments. Can't wait to see Ronaldo in a 'teddy'. It would no doubt cause some 'heavy breathing' among Man U supporters!

The Governor of the European Central Bank, Jean Claude Trichet, has said that Spain needs a greater flexibility in wages in the future. He said that temporary workers were feeling the brunt of the recession in the country, and declared that structural reforms 'cannot be avoided or postponed'. He wants to see wages linked to productivity and not the inflation index, and more investment in Education and work training.

The average retirement pension in Spain is now 860 € a month according to the Ministry for Employment and Immigration. The government have brought forward the retirement age for the disabled in Spain. Those with a 45% disability or more will now be able to retire at 58.

Telefonica have extended their rebate scheme for the unemployed into 2010. The scheme offers a 50% reduction in fixed line and mobile phone bills up to a monthly maximum of 20 euro. At present there are 115,000 individuals availing of the scheme. Telefonica want to raise this figure to 500,000.

Over the past year 75,000 vehicles have been left by their owners at the local *taller* (workshop). It comes as their average resale price is about 1,000 € while the outstanding repair bill is closer to 1,200 €

Both France and Spain have reacted angrily to the proposed ratification by the EU of a deal which will allow Moroccan fruit and veg to be imported into Europe with little or no duty. The agricultural lobby believe that Moroccan imports have already led to a reduction in prices claiming it is ruining French and Spanish farmers.

Nine Muslim men were arrested in Tarragona for kidnapping and plotting to kill a woman, who an Islamic Sharia court formed by them, had found guilty of adultery. The suspects were arrested after a lengthy investigation, and seven were remanded in custody, charged with kidnapping, attempted murder and illicit association. The woman in question was kidnapped by a gang of around 20 in March and held in a house to the west of Barcelona, from which she managed to escape. The woman was accused of adultery by her husband's family after she was seen in the company of another man.

In what can only be described as a crass and perverse action, the Canarian government have decided to remove or reclassify 50% of its protected species list. 226 species are to be deleted from the list altogether with an additional 131 species reclassified, 94 of them without protection. One species of extremely rare grasshopper was removed from the list so that a golf course could be built in its habitat in Las Palmas. This week the Spanish Supreme Court stated that real estate development in Spain has become a disaster and that lack of action and discipline from the administrations is destroying Spain. The action by the Canarians only highlights the general absence of regard for the environment.

The French hypermarket chain, Carrefour, have launched a new brand - Carrefour descento - which is designed to fight-off the challenge from the cheaper stores of Lidl, Aldi and D  a. Although the brand has already been launched in France it will not reach Spain for some months.

A German company called 'Fun Factory' is suing a Barcelona firm for distributing dildos from China which they believe resemble in colour, shape and pattern the ones manufactured by the German firm. The head of the Barcelona firm, who is one of the main distributors of sex toys in Europe, said that in 35 years in the business, he never met anyone who patented a dildo!

Mid-month a 100-kilo lioness escaped onto the Sevilla-Granada motorway while being transported. The motorway was blocked and the animal was eventually subdued with a tranquilliser dart. One week previously a hippo escaped from a travelling circus and was found grazing quite happily on the grass at a roundabout in Northern Spain.

Spanish social security is giving monetary prizes/bonuses to doctors who take off less time in sick leave. GPs here are paid around a third to a half of what their colleagues in the UK are paid. Life expectancy in Spain has now increased slightly with men living on average to 77 and women to 84.

The Spanish film industry is indulging in some collective hand-wringing at the moment. In November, Brussels blocked Spanish subsidies for 2010 filming projects while it investigates charges that the grants will favour big-budget productions over smaller ones. Since 1999 public and private Spanish television networks have been forced to contribute 5% of their revenues to the Spanish film industry. The Audiovisual Law also forces telecom's firms that offer broadcast services to contribute 5% of their revenues to the film industry as well. Following a long offensive by the TV stations, the Supreme Court has now ruled that this forced contribution may be unconstitutional and have referred the matter to the Constitutional Court.

The 8,639 prisoners currently being held in Spain for domestic violence attacks are enough to fill six jails.

271 people have died from 'swine-flu' in Spain this year, 15 of them last week.

The Murcia judge who was suspended by the Murcia High Court for maliciously delaying the adoption by a lesbian woman of her partner's child has had his appeal against the court's turned down by Spain's highest court has also had his suspension as a judge increased from the magistrate's original suspension of two years, three months to ten years. He was also ordered to pay a fine of 720    and 6,000    in compensation to the woman who had applied to adopt the child.

Every 28th December in the Costa Blanca town of Ibi, on the *D  a de Los Inocentes*, Spain's equivalent of April Fool's Day, a 'rebel' army known as '*Els enfarinats*' take over the town bombarding with flour and eggs any of the locals who refused to pay the taxes imposed by the fictitious army. The tradition goes back more than 200 years with the money raised by the 'taxes' paid by those who want to avoid a battering going every year to charity.

At the Gates

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates. 'In honor of this holy season' Saint Peter said, 'You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven.'

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. 'It represents a candle', he said.

'You may pass through the pearly gates' Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, 'They're bells.'

Saint Peter said 'You may pass through the pearly gates'.

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's knickers.

St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, 'And just what do those symbolize?'

The man replied, 'These are Carols.'

Redneck Wedding

One beautiful afternoon, a young redneck boy runs into his house and yells "Paw, I found her! I found the girl I'm gonna marry, and she's a virgin!"

Now while this might impress some families, it irritated and upset this father. Pounding his fist on the table, he yells back "There's no way you'll marry that girl! If she ain't good enough for her own family, she ain't good enough for ours!"

Spanish Vignettes: 'La Tomatina' by Jules

(Buñol is a small town about 25 miles west of Valencia. Every year on the last Wednesday of August, the town hosts the largest food-fight in the world, when tons of tomatoes are used as ammunition. The tomatoes come from Extremadura where they are less expensive and do not make good eating. Although the town has only a population of around 9,000, this swells to around 60,000 during the festival. The night before the food-fight, the town holds a paella-cooking competition. Many thanks to Jules for her first-hand account of the fun and mayhem at the festival.)

After a four hour drive to Buñol in Valencia, we parked-up on a make-shift car park to pitch our tent. This was not in our original plan but all the other campsites were full. We hadn't been asleep for long when we were awoken by music playing full blast on the car park. This was just the beginning of the days events and it was just six in the morning! By 7 am we packed away our tent and the four of us began to walk the streets and head towards the main part of the town where the tomato fight - *La Tomatina* - was being held. The streets were lined with hundreds of people of many different nationalities, all in wonderful humour and looking forward to taking part in the fight.

As we reached the top of the main street there were lots of stalls selling goggles, t-shirts etc. Everybody was dancing to the loud music, the atmosphere was amazing. Some people were still sleeping in their cars, some on car roofs, others on building roofs and even some in the streets! Coaches were now pulling up every second, adding more people to an already packed town. It was now 9:30 am, just 90 minutes before the cannon was due to go off to herald the start of the fight.

We followed the crowds further along the street making our way to the main town square. There were stalls after stalls along the way selling *bocadillos* and beer with lots of barbecues selling hot food as well. There seemed to be a food & drink stall outside every house and in the adjoining side streets.

On reaching the town square it was CHAOS! The square was heaving with people with some dancing in cages. People were holding hose pipes from the apartment windows above spraying water down to try to keep everyone cool, it was around 40°! The streets were very narrow and we were squeezing through the crowds. By now the noise was deafening and the atmosphere was electric.

A huge greased pole was placed in the middle of the square with a very large piece of ham at the top. People were trying to climb to the top of this pole and get the ham - almost impossible - but everyone was having a go, boys, men, ladies, all climbing over each others shoulders in desperation, the crowd cheering encouragement. Ten minutes to go before the first truck with the tomatoes arrives, people are wearing swimming caps, goggles and trainers. We made the mistake of wearing flip-flops which were definitely not up to the job.

The first truck, with 40,000 tomatoes, is driving slowly towards us and everyone is screaming and shouting. The cannon goes off and OH MY GOD! Thousands of tomatoes are being thrown - people are supposed to squash them before throwing but few do - tossing them whole - everyone's gone crazy! The second truck arrives with more tomatoes, then a third and it goes on and on and on. My arms are now aching and my goggles have been knocked sideways and upwards. The smell of the tomatoes is beginning to make me sick. Eventually the last couple of trucks arrive. By now I can only see red - red streets, red walls and red bodies - everyone is ankle deep in tomatoes. One truck stops within touching distance of us and just tips its load of tomatoes at our feet! People are now swimming in the tom's as the last truck arrives to dump its load. By now I'm physically sick with the smell of tomatoes and I need to get out. The four of us hold onto one another desperately trying to find a way out. People must have noticed the four of us trying to get away so they now deliberately target more tomatoes at us. Heads down, gripping each other, with our feet sliding on the sloppy streets in our useless flip-flops, with our mouths closed we struggle on - I've eaten enough of them!

Eventually I can breath. Not one of us has a white piece of flesh left! My hair is just one matt of squelchy tomatoes. Even more people lined the streets to watch everyone making their way to the firing line. There were newspaper reporters and TV cameras, all who seemed shocked at the sight of us. Out of the many thousands that were there, we four must have looked the worst! We were stopped every second to pose for photos; many people were laughing while others were horrified. The younger ones were rubbing themselves against us to cover themselves in tomatoes. We were desperate to get washed down at this stage, standing under any hosepipe from people's windows.

Making our way back through the streets everyone was still jeering and cheering, barbecues burning full force and buckets of ice with beers. Through all this a bride in a white wedding dress and trail walks through the crowds, bridesmaids in tow! Is she mad?

After posing for more photos we head back to the makeshift car park. We were told that they had communal showers, only to find they meant men holding hosepipes! Luckily, I was wearing a swimsuit under the clothes I was about to throw away. In between my swimsuit and flesh I was wearing a layer of sloppy squashed tomatoes. My hair smelt rotten and was stuck to my scalp. My son's friend had his goggles knocked-off and sported a nice little shiner. Kev's cheeks were swollen from repeated hits and I was still retching from the smell of tomatoes.

Next year I think that I will just be a spectator but the other three can't wait to do it all over again.

Definitely the experience of a lifetime!

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Jules will be going mobile from Tuesday 12th January 2010.

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Dedication

A female Sky News journalist heard about a very old Jewish man who had been going to the Western Wall to pray, twice a day, every day, for a long, long time.

So she went to check it out. She went to the Western Wall and there he was, walking slowly up to the holy site.

She watched him pray and after about 45 minutes, when he turned to leave, she approached him for an interview.

'Pardon me, sir, I'm Rebecca Smith from Sky News. What's your name?'

'Manny Fishbien,' he replied.

'Sir, how long have you been coming to the Western Wall and praying?'

'For about 60 years.'

'60 years! That's amazing! What do you pray for?'

'I pray for peace between the Christians, Jews and the Muslims.'

'I pray for all the wars and all the hatred to stop. I pray for all our children to grow up safely as responsible adults, and to love their fellow man.'

'How do you feel after doing this for 60 years?'

'Like I'm talking to a fuckin' wall.'

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Advice from the Don

An old Italian Mafia Don is dying and he calls his grandson to his bed.

"You lissin-a me. I wanna for you to taka my chrome plated 38 revolver so you will always remember me."

"But grandpa, I no'a like guns. Howzabout you leava me your Rolex watch instead."

"Shuddup an lissin. Somma day you gonna runna da business, you gonna have a beautifula wife, lotsa money, a biga home and maybe a couple a bambinos.

Somma day you gonna coma home and maybe find you wife inna bed with another man.

Whadda you gonna do then.....pointa to you watch and a say, 'Times Up?'"

1492* was a momentous year for the Spanish. First the capture of Granada from the Moors, which was quickly followed by the expulsion of all unconverted Jews. However it was the entry of a dogged Italian mariner and adventurer, Christoforo de Colombo (Cristobal Colón in Spanish), that would eventually change the world.

Information on the early years of Christopher Columbus is very sketchy. The information that he, his brother and his son have provided us has often been embellished or inflated and although often vain it does not detract from his achievements or greatness. It is generally believed that he was born in Genoa, Italy c. 1451. His family may have been Mallorcan Christianised Jews who migrated to Italy and changed their name to Colombo. Although his father was a weaver, Columbus did not wish to follow the trade and, as in Genoa all roads led to the sea, this blue-eyed red-headed boy became a sailor at the age of 14.

In 1476 a ship on which he was heading for Lisbon was attacked by pirates and sunk. With the support of some wreckage, Columbus swam several miles to shore and remained in Portugal for some years working as a sailor and map salesman. One of his many trips took him first to Bristol, then on to Galway and from there to Iceland. In the latter he would have heard about the proud traditions of Leif Ericsson's voyage to 'Vinland' (North America) and probably stories of the Scandinavians who had reached Labrador in 986 and 1000.

Between 1482 and 1485 Columbus sailed with Portuguese ships along the Guinea and Gold coasts of tropical West Africa gaining considerable knowledge of the Atlantic wind systems and Portuguese navigation skills. He was now convinced that India and China could be reached by travelling west across the Atlantic and that if he were to pioneer this route it would bring him massive wealth and fame. The idea that the world was flat was a view held then only by the ignorant. After the ancient Greeks it was generally accepted that the world was round and even there were some reasonably accurate calculations as to the circumference of the Earth even though no one had travelled it.

It could be said that it was the failure of the Crusades which stimulated the discovery of America; the eastern Mediterranean was now dominated by a hostile and strong Muslim presence. This made the old avenues of East-West trade to India and beyond for spices, silks and gold very costly due to extortionate middlemen, and dangerous due to the belligerent Turks and Ottomans and the anti-Christian dynasties in Persia and Turkestan.

In 1484 Columbus proposed to John II of Portugal that the king equip three vessels for a year of exploration across the Atlantic and back; and that Columbus be appointed 'Great Admiral of the Ocean', perpetual governor of whatever lands he might discover and that he should receive a tenth of all revenues and precious metals thereafter derived from these lands by Portugal. Ignoring for the moment his outlandish demands, the king submitted Columbus's proposal to a learned committee for analysis. The committee rejected the proposal saying that Columbus's estimate of the distance across the Atlantic to India as 2,400 miles was far too small. (Ironically this was the correct distance from the Canary Islands to the West Indies.)

Columbus then tried to get the Italians in Genoa and Venice interested in the project but was rejected. He then sent his brother Bartholomew to England to try and get Henry VII interested in the project. In May 1486 he petitioned Queen Isabella of Castile for assistance. She referred his plan to a group of advisors who, after a long delay, rejected it arguing that Asia was much further west than Columbus proposed. Once again his calculations let him down.

Columbus renewed his appeal again to the Portuguese king in 1488 and although the king invited him to an audience, it coincided with the arrival of the historic news that the Portuguese sailor, Barolomeu Dias, had rounded the southern coast of Africa but had to return to Portugal on the crews insistence, before travelling up the east coast of the continent. Now absorbed by the prospect of an African route to India, the Portuguese lost interest in an Atlantic route.

The indomitable Italian once again returned to Spain. Queen Isabella sent him some money to facilitate his journey to join her at the siege of Granada. Although she listened to his proposal, once again her advisers rejected his proposal together with the same extravagant demands he put before the Portuguese court. Columbus waited until the siege had ended, often helping with the fighting and once again presented his petition which was now rejected by King Ferdinand.

At this stage Columbus had an invitation to the court in England and an encouraging letter from the king of France so he decided to pursue these avenues following this long and exasperating series of rejections. As he was about to travel on, Friar Juan Perez, the queen's former confessor, got him to delay his departure while he hopped on a donkey and travelled to Granada to plead the Italian's case at the Spanish court. He sought the help of a mutual friend at court, Luis de Santangel, and together they managed to get royal approval for the project, the king signing the requisite papers on April 17, 1492. It is thought that the Catholic Kings accepted his outlandish conditions, identical to those put before the Portuguese king, as they never expected him to return.

The pious Queen Isabella was also motivated by the chance to gain souls as well as gold. By sailing west to the Orient, she thought that the Christians could attack Islam from the rear and hopefully regain the Holy Land. For her the Reconquest would continue until the last infidel perished. Economics also played its part. In an age well before refrigeration, eastern spices were in great demand for preserving and flavouring food, particularly meat. Pepper fetched 40 times its original cost and a pound of cloves was worth two cows.

On August 3 1492, the *Santa María*, the *Pinta* and the *Niña* sailed from Palos. The *Santa María* was the flagship and largest of the vessels but was only 70 feet long with a single deck which carried 40 men. The other two ships were much smaller and held 48 men between them. Provisions for a year were also taken. Most of the men were experienced sailors although some of the crew were criminals who were offered a royal amnesty for taking part in the voyage. Columbus carried with him a letter from King Ferdinand to the Khan of Cathay (China), not India, which Columbus hoped to reach. Next month - Columbus, the Voyages.

(*This year also saw the completion of the first study on Castilian grammar.)

Out & About

The month of December began with warm and balmy weather but it quickly turned into bitter cold with strong winds, dashing any hopes the brave had of a Christmas swim. With temperatures dropping as low as 2° in the night, heaters have been selling like 'hot-cakes' in the big stores. Then today, Wednesday the 30th, it reached 25° in the shade!

Both Dream Hills urbs appear to be incredibly quiet at the moment, many of the Brits having returned to the UK for Christmas. Sadly the economic situation has again taken its toll in Via Park 5. Browns the hairdressers are now closed although Jules will be offering a mobile service from mid-January, see Page 5. The R Bar has also closed with Kevin moving downstairs to run 'All Bar Sue.' On the lower ground floor, the Raheny Bar closed its doors in early December, only to be followed by the closure of Stallions Restaurant later in the month. Karen and Mark had fitted out a beautiful restaurant in Stallions together with some exquisite tile work and it is tragic to see it closed down now. Karen and Mark, who live in Dream Hills have been excellent hosts and I am sure you will join me in thanking them for their hospitality in the past and wishing them all the best for the future.

A joint carol service was held by Galadriel's and The Phoenix on Christmas Eve with mulled wine, music, barbecue etc. It was well attended and greatly enjoyed by all.

The town hall have been particularly busy in our area with the bridge linking Entre Golf and Dream Hills 2 now being officially opened. True to her word, the mayoress, Mónica Lorente, has now removed the illegal dumping area from near Entre Golf and has also planted 300 new trees in the vacated space. (Shame they didn't plant some in Dream Hills as promised..)

In early December, I attended a presentation of the proposed new security and emergency centre which will be located in La Zenia. These new facilities, which are due to be completed in 2011, will house facilities for the local police, a Guardia Civil office, the National Police office for foreigners, offices for the Bomberos, the Red Cross, Civil Protection, life-guards offices and the SAMU ambulances. Chris Poole, the head of Neighbourhood Watch in the O.C., has been campaigning for this since he addressed the Valencian Parliament three years ago. Miss Lorente announced that there would be 60 local police officers patrolling Orihuela Costa by 2011. In 2007 there were only eight officers in our area which has now been increased to 34. The mayoress also stated that the beach lifeguard service would be extended next year. She also announced that the new sports complex near Playa Flamenca will be completed well ahead of schedule next year, probably in April or May.

Locally it is tragic to see that much of the hard work of Terry, John and David to plant new shrubs and plants around the lower pool has been destroyed by a number of young boys who live in Dream Hills and who have stamped-on or uprooted many of the plants. These kids are around Via park V in the evenings so do please keep an eye on yours and what they are doing. It could all end in tears.

If you have any good quality spare plants or trees you no longer require, do please inform Terry at 503 or George & David in the 600s who are doing sterling work in replanting barren areas. More on this in another issue.

Please do not place your household rubbish in the small bins by La Casita and the playground. These are meant for small items such as wrappers and dog-poo. Enjoy a bit of exercise and walk to the main bins!

If you have any unused medicines, please take them back to the *farmacias*. They will ensure that appropriate medicines will be re-directed to Third World countries.

No good deed goes unpunished!

There was a man who worked for the Post Office whose job was to process all the mail that had illegible addresses. One day, a letter came addressed in a shaky handwriting to God with no actual address. He thought he should open it to see what it was about. The letter read:

Dear God,

I am an 83 year old widow, living on a very small pension.

Yesterday someone stole my purse. It had £100 in it, which was all the money I had until my next pension payment.

Next Sunday is Christmas, and I had invited two of my friends over for dinner. Without that money, I have nothing to buy food with, have no family to turn to, and you are my only hope. Can you please help me?

Sincerely, Edna

The postal worker was touched. He showed the letter to all the other workers. Each one dug into his or her wallet and came up with a few quid. By the time he made the rounds, he had collected £96, which they put into an envelope and sent to the woman.. The rest of the day, all the workers felt a warm glow thinking of Edna and the dinner she would be able to share with her friends.

Christmas came and went.

A few days later, another letter came from the same old lady to God. All the workers gathered around while the letter was opened. It read:

Dear God,

How can I ever thank you enough for what you did for me? Because of your gift of love, I was able to fix a glorious dinner for my friends. We had a very nice day and I told my friends of your wonderful gift.

By the way, there was £4 missing. I think it might have been those bastards at the post office.

Sincerely, Edna

(Pat Chambers)

Spain tightens healthcare belt.

The Health Minister, Trinidad Jiménez, has announced that at a meeting of European health ministers, Spain managed to gain the support of another six European countries to block agreement on a European directive on cross-border health care. El País reports that the directive proposed that patients would be able to receive health care in another EU member state, without prior authorisation from their country of residence, and would then be able to claim back the cost of the treatment upon their return. Spain was supported by Portugal, Greece, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Lithuania in blocking the proposal.

Jiménez explained that Spain's opposition came over concerns that such a directive would not guarantee quality health care to patients and would mean an additional cost to the public health system of around 2 billion € every year.

The problem for Spain, El País notes, would have been if expatriates resident in this country decided to undergo surgery at a private hospital in another EU state, and Spain would then have to reimburse the patient with an amount higher than the cost of such a procedure at a public hospital in Spain.

The Minister was also concerned that the measure would only, in effect, apply to those with a higher income who are able to meet the cost of surgery out of their own pockets ahead of reimbursement. The question of cross-border patient mobility will now be one of the tasks Spain must face when she takes over the rotating EU Presidency today.

UK European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

This year the UK will be responsible for issuing the EHIC to British pensioners resident in other EU countries. The UK is finalising its processes for the implementation of the new regulations i.e. They have not got their act together yet!

The planned date for the new regulations to take effect is 1st May 2010. However the EHIC cards issued by the Spanish Social Security Authorities (INSS) to British expat's are due to expire on 28th February 2010, based on a previous planned date for the new reg's to come into force.

If you plan to travel before the new reg's come into place, the DWP advises you to apply to the INSS for an extension to your existing EHIC. (More on this when the DWP announces it.)

Close Encounter of the Political Kind

A UK patrol was marching in the North of Helmand Province when they came upon an insurgent, badly injured and unconscious. On the opposite side of the road was a British soldier injured but in a less serious state.

The soldier was conscious and alert and as first aid was given to both men, the patrol commander asked the injured soldier what had happened.

The soldier reported, "I was moving north along the highway here, and coming south was a heavily armed insurgent. We saw each other and we both took cover in the ditches along the road.

I yelled to him that Saddam Hussein was a miserable, lowlife scum bag who got what he deserved and he yelled back that Gordon Brown is a fat, good-for-nothing, left wing half-blind Jock, and Lord Mandelson is a cross-dressing idiot. So I shouted that Osama Bin Laden was a tosser who dresses and acts like a frigid, mean-spirited lesbian.

He retaliated by yelling, "Oh yeah? Well, so does Harriet Harman!"

"And, there we were, in the middle of the road, shaking hands, when a bus hit us."

More confusion about electricity.

Some weeks ago the Costa Blanca News carried an interesting article in relation to discounted electricity bills.

A British lady telephoned *Ibedrola* and spoke to an English speaking operator who checked that as the lady was a resident, living here permanently and a pensioner then she was entitled to a discount, but would have to apply at the social security office.

The lady then travelled to the social security office in Alicante, where after waiting for an hour, was told that as she did not receive a Spanish pension she was not entitled to a discount. Another British couple were also turned away from the social security office on the same day.

The '*Bono Social*' was introduced last year by the Ministry of Industry to assist those who use less than three kilowatts of electricity, and are pensioners, have large families or are unemployed. Applicants must also receive a non-contributory pension of less than 540€ a month to qualify. They then have to obtain a '*certificado del bono social*' from their local security office. The scheme gives exemption from the standing charges on the bill, which are very small, but not for the amount of electricity used.

The CBN reporter contacted the national security hotline where it was confirmed that it had to be a Spanish pension to qualify for the scheme. The reporter has now asked the DWP rep at the British consulate in Alicante to clarify the position who will check it out and report back.

Electricity prices are due to go up by 2.6% on January 1 for most of us. It will be interesting to see if those who signed-up in Pilar will escape the new increase. More next month.

Reunion

My wife and I were sitting at a table at my school reunion, and I kept staring at a drunken lady swigging her drink as she sat alone at a nearby table.

My wife asked, 'Do you know her?'

'Yes,' I sighed, 'She's my old girlfriend.'

I understand she took to drinking right after we split up those many years ago, and I hear she hasn't been sober since.'

'My God!' says my wife, 'who would think a person could go on celebrating that long?'

And that's when the fight started...

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A man and a woman were having dinner in a fine restaurant.

Their waitress, taking another order at a table a few paces away noticed that the man was slowly sliding down his chair and under the table, with the woman acting unconcerned.

The waitress watched as the man slid all the way down his chair and out of sight under the table.

Still, the woman dining across from him appeared calm and unruffled, apparently unaware that her dining companion had disappeared.

After the waitress finished taking the order, she came over to the table and said to the woman, 'Pardon me, ma'am, but I think your husband just slid under the table.'

The woman calmly looked up at her and replied firmly, 'No he didn't. He just walked in the door.'

**BE AWARE!
SUPPORT YOUR
SECURITY GUARDS &
NEIGHBOURHOOD
WATCH**

It's not just you!

Sometimes the delays and bureaucracy here in Spain can 'grind you down'. But take heart, it's not just you, the Spanish are also in the same predicament. I reprint below two translated letters from the Spanish newspaper *El País* which indicate that we all suffer similar problems.

We all know how difficult it is to get rid of your telephone company, but I am going to tell you something that goes far beyond any Hollywood script.

The last letter I received from Telefónica told me that I have made that infamous Banco de España list of deadbeats. (Possibly a debtors list, Mick)

What have I done to deserve this?

I tried to have the telephone service of my dear mother, who died on February 2, cut off. My four

siblings and I have tried unsuccessfully to do this over the past nine

months. We tried everything:

sending faxes with death certificates, registered letters, etc.

I would like to know if there is some caring person

out there who can get us out of this damned mess. We are a family in mourning and hurt by the operators who don't know a thing and, above all, the directors and presidents who get huge salaries —

Inmaculada García Mazarío.
Madrid.

A few months ago, I saw a news report about a hospital in Zimbabwe, where patients were attended to in rooms with plastic walls and on beds made of cane. "How lucky I am to have been born here," I thought. Two days ago, I headed to a Madrid hospital with my father, who was suffering from a burst blood vessel in his eye. We got there at 4pm, and after three hours waiting, were sent to the neurologist.

We were told to wait once more, and spent six long hours there, as my father's condition got progressively worse. During that time we saw plenty: a senile woman who took off her wet clothes and hung them out to dry on the chairs, an older woman crying out for someone to help her husband, and so on. At 1am, my father began to cry, and I asked for a voluntary discharge so I could take him home. The difference between a hospital in Harare and one in Madrid seems nothing more than the building materials used.—

María Veral. Madrid.



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