

THE DREAM SCENE

Newsletter

Issue no. 36 1st of February 2010

Bienvenido and Welcome to the 36th issue of the Dream Scene.

January started off by being wickedly cold here. One evening it got as low as 2 degrees and snow was common to much of northern and central Spain. Locally, San Miguel de Salinas has a brief snow flurry. Gale force winds and heavy rain has also caused some damage locally, the winds in some places reaching 90km an hour. Tuesday, February 23 was a particularly stormy day with the N332 being closed for around an hour at La Zenia due to a fallen pylon. The whole fishing fleet in Alicante - some 250 vessels - were confined to port on the same day due to high winds and heavy seas.

This weekend however it has been warm with blue skies and it has been enjoyable travelling through the colourful orange and lemon groves on the road to Los Montesinos in the sunshine. Roll on Spring!

Well, believe it or not, we have now completed three years of the Dream Scene - 36 issues. It has come a long way since the original four paged effort. When I started the newsletter I bought a Brother laser printer to cope with the volumes. It has a cumulative page counter and today it tells me that since March 2007 we have printed 86,694 A4 sheets of paper (and had 383 paper jams!). However, even these volume printers have a limited life. I am now about to start on my third drum and this type of Brother drum retails at around 200 euro each. The original printer only cost around 280 euro! Fortunately Cartridge World in Torrevieja can now supply me with generic toner and drums. However to conserve toner and costs I have to print the newsletter at 300 dots per inch which can effect the quality of print and photos. But eventually the printer will give up the ghost!

As is expected during the recession we have lost a number of advertisers, the newsletter's main source of funding. This is unlikely to improve much as 2010 is expected to be another difficult economic year in Spain. Tid and I will undertake to continue with the Dream Scene for a further 12 months. If you enjoy the Dream Scene and would like to see it continue, why not help by subscribing to a year's issues. 12 monthly issues costs just 5 euro locally and you can guarantee a copy by having it delivered straight to your door or placed in your mail box on the first of every month. Or, if you prefer, you can have it sent to you by email; this costs just 5 euro if you live in Spain or £5 if you live in the UK. At best the Dream Scene just about covers its material costs, often not.

Every month between 250 and 300 hard copies of the Dream Scene are printed and distributed. Around 60 copies are sent out by email. Hard copies are often passed between neighbours. I estimate that between both Dream Hills urbanisations, some readers in Los Altos, the Lago Jardins and Los Balcones, and together with email copies, more than 800 people now read the Dream Scene every month.

If you would like to continue your subscription or start a new one then please contact me at mick.dreamscene@gmail.com or at house number 586 in Dream Hills (please respect siesta hours!).

At your peril, don't forget St. Valentines day on February 14!

Mick, Editor.

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Angela's Cartoon



WHAT'S UP?

For most of the month, the Spanish press headlined the unusually cold weather throughout the country. The high winds battering Spain on the Jan 14th resulted in a new record for the amount of power generated by wind farms across the country. At 1.33am in the morning it reached 11,693 MW, the equivalent output of 11 nuclear power stations, according to the REE Spanish Electricity Network.

The web-site of the EU announcing the Spanish six-month EU Presidency was taken over by hackers early in January. They substituted a photo of Mr Bean in place of PM Zapatero, welcoming people to the site. Zappy got off to a bad start this year for recommending that sanctions should be placed on any EU countries who do not meet their obligations. Coming from the Spanish this was a bit 'rich' attracting much scorn from fellow members particularly from Germany and the UK who reminded Zapatero of the many real estate abuses in Spain.

One in four international visitors to Spain last year was British, 13.3 million visited in the 12 months, but that is 15.5% down on 2008. In second place were 8.9 million Germans, down 11.3%, and then the French at 7.9 million, down 2.9%. Over the year Cataluña was the most popular region with 12.7 million tourists despite seeing a 11% reduction, followed by the 9 million on the Balearics (-9.8%), 8.2 million on the Canaries(-12.3%), and 7.3 million in Andalucía (-7.8%). The whole of the Valencia region welcomed 5.1 million tourists, down 10.6% on 2008.

One minister in the Spanish government has admitted that he thinks that 'submerged activities' (i.e. the black economy) represents some 20% of the country's GDP. Both the IMF and the OECD believe that Spain will remain in recession until 2011.

Under new legislation the Spanish banks will have to inform the Spanish tax authorities of any movements of cash or credit card payments for more than 3,000 €. Notaries will also be obliged to note the payment method used in the purchase of property. The new legislation is designed 'increase the efficiency in the fight against fiscal fraud'. However, I understand that the bank reporting is to take the form of an annual report, so I doubt its effectiveness.

The President of the regional Valencia government, La Generalitat, Francisco Camps, has signed a deal with Microsoft for a new Health Innovation Centre to be built in the Valencia region. It will be the first such centre in the world. Speculation is that the centre will be in Alicante, as Microsoft has already expressed a preference for the city, thanks to its good air communications, the already existent specialist health services in the area, and also because of the high number of retired residents living locally. However the regional government is thought to prefer Valencia or Castellón for the new centre.

The Supreme Court and the National Court in Spain have ruled that the three petrol companies, Repsol, Cepsa and B.P. blocked free competition in the market place by fixing the prices charged by them to independent petrol stations. The three companies have 30 days to pay a combined fine of 7.9 million €. Not a massive fine for the oil companies, is it? Just a slap on the wrist really.

Residents of a block of flats in the popular nightclub area of Torre del Mar, El Copo in Costa del Sol, are to receive almost 3 million € from their local Town Hall as compensation for the years of noise they suffered from the nearby night clubs between 1990 and 2003. It comes from a ruling by the Supreme Court, and means that each of the 18 residents will receive 156,000 €. Noise levels as high as 120 decibels were measured in their homes whereas the maximum permitted level is just 30. Those of you with similar grievances reading this should bear in mind how long it took the case to get to the Supreme Court.

Following complaints by neighbours, a woman in Málaga has been fined 3,756 € for feeding pigeons who were destroying the facade of a building with bird droppings. The Málaga Ayuntamiento has also declared war on irresponsible pet owners. 16 residents there have also been fined between 75 and 500 € for not picking up their dogs' crap. And, something which we all agree can be a curse in Spain if not addressed, four dog-owners were fined between 500 and 1,250 € following complaints by their neighbours about barking dogs! The full article is here - www.malagahoy.es/article/malaga/598318/multan/una/mujer/con/casi/euros/por/dar/comer/las/palomas.html

Anybody caught having sex in a car in the city of Valencia can now be fined up to €3,000, which should dampen all but the strongest ardour. If you must, take your passion to the countryside instead where the most you will have to put-up with will probably be some curious goats!

Staying with the Costa del Sol, constructors and promoters in the region are lamenting the fact that last year only 100 new properties were sold. This is 95% down on figures from 2005. As one pundit sarcastically yet accurately put it, 'I'm sure years of well-publicized corruption, and mistreatment of foreigners, had nothing to do with it. It's all just monetary, right? It couldn't possibly be because of the absolutely fictitious prices affixed to new construction, or the multitude of fees, taxes, commissions, and payoffs?'

It has emerged that the Basque terrorist organisation, ETA, tried on three occasions to kill Spain's former Partido Popular Prime Minister, José María Aznar. The attempts were made in the Basque Country during the election campaign in 2001. The terrorists tried to attack the president's plane with missiles which were bought from IRA members based in Germany, previously purchased from Libya. While in Spain, the missile launchers were stored in the Basque town hall of Lizartza! They were later recovered from an ETA weapons cache unearthed in France in 2004 together with a letter to the IRA complaining about the defective weapons.

{A tramp came up to me the other day and asked for €3 for a cup of coffee.

'€3!' I said, 'You don't need €3 to buy a cup of coffee.'

The tramp replied, 'I'm a big tipper.'

Six people, three Columbians and three Spanish have been arrested in Valencia for kidnapping a businessman who was held captive in a countryside cabin in Chiva for six days before he managed to escape. The kidnappers, who beat-up their captive several times, had demanded 300,000 euro as a ransom. One of the alleged kidnappers was an employee in the businessman's construction firm.

Car sales in Spain fell by 18% over 2009, taking the number, 952,772, down to levels last seen in 1995. The number comes despite the fact that 260,000 drivers took advantage of the Government car scrappage scheme, Plan 2000 E.

Two Ryanair planes collided on the ground in Girona Airport on the 13th of Jan. There were no injuries or serious damage, except maybe to the pilots reputations!

The P&O ferry which has linked Bilbao in Spain with Portsmouth in England for the past 17 years is to close on September 27 this year. The company stated that the route was making 'unsustainable losses'.

Cigarette manufacturers have increased the price of a pack of ciggies by around 15 cents. The government now plans to place explicit images of diseased organs caused by smoking on the cigarette packs in future to try and deter smokers. Consideration should be given to including photos of Posh Becks or Jordan which would be equally effective.

The Real Madrid football club are trying to buy a 17-year-old mid-fielder, Sergio Canales, from Racing Santander. A figure of around five million euro has been mentioned and Real hope to have the player by July 1st this year.

A dramatic report from INE, the Spanish National Statistics Institute, has revealed that in 40 years time only 10% of the Spanish population will be of working age. The INE predicts that in 2049, 60.6% of the population will be 65 or over, and that 29.07% will be aged under 16.

A woman in Cartagena district has been arrested by the Guardia Civil for advertising an offer of free sex on the Internet, but giving the telephone number and full address of a rival. The offended party has had to move home due to an avalanche of enquiries.

A Nigerian couple were sentenced to 12 years in prison by a Barcelona court for forcing young African women into prostitution. The young girls were made to partake in voodoo ceremonies and told that if they did not comply a curse would be placed on them. One Nigerian, who was promised work as a secretary, escaped from a brothel in 2008 and informed the authorities.

A local policeman in the town of Monachil in Granada has denounced his own Town Hall because of the poor condition of the police patrol cars. His placed his complaint after two policemen found their car had no brakes and ran into another vehicle. (Bet you they still charged the owner of the vehicle for using his mobile while driving!)

Puigcerda, a small town in Spain's northeastern region, will distribute funds collected from bad drivers to individuals who incurred no penalties. The mayor of the town announced the pioneering move to challenge the general view that speeding and parking fines exist to boost council coffers. Payout is likely to be small at around 10 to 15 euro per driver, but what a wonderful gesture.

There are a couple of items which are smouldering in the inside pages of the Spanish press at present. One concerns allegations that someone senior in the police force tipped-off ETA, the Basque terrorist organisation, about a crucial raid, which gave them plenty of time to escape. Another concerns allegations that an unnamed Spanish bank may have written-off more than 300 million euro in loans to the ruling PSOE party. It appears that the political party only paid back around €700,000.

Banesto bank has launched a savings product linked to the performance of Spain's football team in the World Cup. The bank is one of the team's official sponsors and says that if the side wins the cup they will pay out 4%. If they don't, then 3% will be the yield.

Spain's Central Bank, the Bank of Spain, has called for the ex President of CCM Bank, the Caja Castilla-La Mancha, Juan Pedro Hernández Moltó, to be banned from holding such a post for five years and that all the board members of the bank be fined between 5,000 and 155,000 € following what is considered their poor management of the bankrupt savings bank. Remember the heads of Spanish savings banks are invariably political appointees.

The government now plans to introduce draconian measures to the generous Spanish pension system. Based on current projections the system will be bankrupt by 2022 unless changes are introduced. If approved by parliament, the retirement age in Spain will move from 65 to 67. The increase in retirement age will be gradual, increasing by two months every year from 2013 to 2035. It is also proposed to move the early retirement age limit to 58 and widows' pensions are likely to come in for a hammering. The current 15 year period needed to have worked for a full pension is also to be lengthened but there will be more protection for housewives who have not paid into the system. As one would expect, the union are furious but the cut-backs have yet to be approved by parliament.

One in eleven palm trees in Orihuela has now been infected by the red palm weevil, Orihuela Costa being the worst affected. Once infected, the trees have to be cut down and the town hall contacted regarding disposal.

Nip & Tuck

Duncan's wife Morag had a big win on the lottery, so she decided to have a 'nip & tuck' to her unmentionables. When she woke up after the operation, she asked the nurse why there were three vases each with a red rose by her bed. 'Well,' said the nurse, 'the first one is from the surgeon who said that the operation was a complete success.' 'The second,' she continued, 'is from your husband who can't wait to get you home.' Morag laughed and asked, 'And the third one?' 'Oh,' replied the nurse, 'that's from Rab in the burn's unit and he says "Thanks for the ears."'

Taking a Christmas Break

Christmastime in Orihuela Costa can be very, very quiet. Many residents return to their native country to spend Christmas with family or relatives. (It reminds me of the saying, 'Relatives are people who come to visit you on their holidays when the weather is too uncomfortable to stay at home and do their own cooking.')

Others use it as an opportunity for a mini-break in Spain or abroad.

Some years ago, after booking through a travel agent, we spent Christmas at the Hotel Marina Mar, a four star in Mojacar; this modern hotel had excellent food and provided a good base for travelling around the area to Almeria etc. However the location was very quiet in the evenings; Mojacar seemed to have gone into hibernation. Except for some basic evening entertainment in the hotel, the nights were incredibly dull.

This Christmas, as 'She, who must be obeyed' was not very mobile, we decided to book five nights in Benidorm. Ok, some people turn their nose up at it but at this time of year it has more life than that in the combined Costas! Rather than book through an agent we decided that we would get better value and more information by searching and booking through the internet. After a trawl, www.travelrepublic.co.uk and www.booking.com seemed to have the best sites with good prices and plenty of customer reviews.

Eventually we choose Best Western Victoria, a four star hotel which was situated in the old part of the town and within easy walking of bars, restaurants etc. The one-way systems took a bit of getting used to but once mastered it was easy. Benidorm, as you are probably aware, is jam packed with hotels. There is metered parking in the streets but we choose to park in the hotel underground car park which cost €10 per day. The Victoria is a tall narrow hotel with good views of the area and a little patch of the Med which is only a five to ten minute walk away. Our room was a good size, clean and the bathroom was large with two washbasins. Heating and cooling could be controlled from within the room. The room had a mini-bar with fridge and our requests for extra pillows and tea/coffee making facilities were met within ten minutes. The TV had channels in English, German and Spanish. The English channels included Sky News and a couple of film channels.

We had booked full-board in the hotel. Although breakfast was average the other two daily meals were excellent, the food being provided by buffet service. There was usually three types of meat and fish together with the usual buffet fare. You were not stuck with a particular table or eating time; you dined when and where you felt like it within certain time periods. The chefs also stepped up a gear on Christmas Eve and Boxing Day with whole salmon, turkey and small steaks.

Before Christmas Day lunch there was a Cava reception after which we all sat at large tables which held about 14. This encouraged people to mingle and chat with others making the meal fun and sociable. The English speakers were separated from the Spaniards. Christmas lunch was the only meal which was waiter-served and it was truly excellent. This was a Spanish Christmas lunch so no turkey or plum-pud, yet the chefs excelled themselves. The lunch, which was six courses started with a selection of dates wrapped in bacon, Serrano ham, large prawns, Manchego cheese and a small glass of cold orange soup. This was followed by a hot pumpkin cream soup which was sprinkled with crispy Serrano ham. Then there was a generous portion of poached salmon with a white basil sauce with vanilla. Next there was a mandarin sorbet to refresh the palate which was followed by a good-sized gratinated rack of lamb with what the Spanish refer to as 'vegetables.' Dessert was a delicious fruit terrine together with a selection of Spanish Christmas candies followed by a glass of cava. Good quality wines, Ribera del Duero, were included with the meal and the waiting-staff kept bringing bottle after bottle. If you wished you could choose beer, soft drinks and water as well. All in all, it was a truly enjoyable and memorable meal.

After the meal the chefs made an appearance and accepted some well deserved applause. A waiter and waitress then went around the *anglosajon* tables with a tip-jar. One whole table of 'tight-arsed' individuals 'legged-it' before the tip-jar got to their table! Interestingly, the tip-jar was never offered to the Spanish who were probably equally anally challenged.

Musical entertainment was provided every night by the hotel. It was very good quality and particularly suited those who like to 'trip the light fantastic' or practise their *salsa*. One of the advantages about staying in Benidorm is that if you are not happy with the entertainment in your hotel, just pop across the road to one of the other hotels and check-out the entertainment there. There is always plenty of choice and you never have to walk more than a hundred metres or so. There is always entertainment available in Benidorm and of course the show at the Palace is well worth a visit.

Drinks in the hotel were remarkably reasonable with a bottle of house wine at around €7 and a pint of lager €2.80. Spirit prices were much the same as in the Via Parks. The hotel has a bar which was open all day, smoking allowed. In the evenings the bar had a 'happy-hour' between 8 and 9 PM where you could have two drinks - anything - for the price of one.

Total cost of the hotel (not including car parking) including full board for both of us for five nights was €475 and that included the Christmas Day lunch with accompanying drinks. Excellent value we thought and we would certainly do it again.

A hotel mini-bar allows you to see into the future
and what a can of Pepsi will cost in 2020.

- Rich Hall

It's been 18 years since the Chernobyl disaster.
Is it just me who's surprised - no super heroes?

- Jimmy Carr

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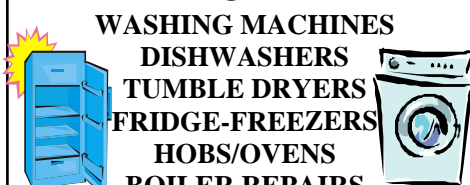
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Toilet Humour?

The other day I needed to pay a visit to the public toilet, so I found a toilet. It had two cubicles, one of the doors was locked so I went into the other one, closed the door and got on with the business.

A voice came from the cubicle next to me: 'Hello mate, how are you doing?'

Although I thought that it was a bit strange and he didn't sound like George Michael, I didn't want to be rude, so I replied 'Not too bad thanks.'

After a short pause, I heard the voice again saying 'So, what are you up to?'

Again I answered, somewhat reluctantly, 'Just having a quick dump... How about yourself?'

The next thing I heard him say was 'Sorry mate, I'll have to call you back. I've got some prat in the cubicle next to me answering everything I say.'

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Poor

I came from a very poor family; up
until the age of fifteen I thought
knives and forks were jewellery. I
can't forget the poverty-stricken days
of my youth. I never had any shoes;
my father used to black my feet and
lace my toes up. - Les Dawson

We were so poor, my daddy un-
plugged the clocks when we went to
bed. - Chris Rock

Names

A Navajo Indian boy goes to his father one day with a puzzled look on his
face. "Say Dad, why is my bigger brother named Mighty Storm?"

"Because he was conceived during a mighty storm", he said.

Then he asked "Why is my sister named Cornflower?"

"Well your mother and I were in a cornfield when we made her", he
replied.

He then asked "And why is my other sister called Moonchild?"

"We were watching the moon-landing when she was conceived", his father
replies.

The father paused and said to his son ... "Tell me, Torn Rubber, why are
you so curious"

The Vatican is to start printing a
Catholic edition of *Playboy*.

It still has a centrefold but you
have to pull it out just at the right
moment.

Spanish Property - Repossessions and Absurd Government Statistics

I make no apologies for reproducing part of Mark Stucklin's Monthly Spanish Property Bulletin. He is a switched-on guy who writes for the Sunday Times and has his finger, mostly, on the pulse of the Spanish property Market. You can get his regular free monthly bulletin by signing on at www.spanishpropertyinsight.com/

'Spanish banks and cajas (savings banks) may have to deal with a tidal wave of repossessions this year, with big implications for the property market, according to a recent article in the Spanish daily *Publico*. To make matters worse, the auctions banks normally use to dispose of repossessions are struggling to attract buyers, as the credit crunch has hit even the opportunists who traditionally bought at auction.

Banks will have to cope with between 100,000 and 150,000 repossession coming to a head in 2010, claims the article. Many of these foreclosures started as far back as 2008, but have been delayed by overloaded courts unable to process the avalanche of repossession demands. From now on these foreclosures will be the "biggest problem of the banks" claims one real estate professional quoted in the article.

Spain's General Judicial Council forecasts 180,000 foreclosures this year, up from 114,958 last year. The problem is that the people who normally buy at auction, known locally as *subasteros*, have disappeared from the market. "The companies that used to come to auctions have stopped doing so due to a lack of credit," a source at the courts in Madrid told the press, where foreclosures rose 300% in 2009. With few buyers at auction, banks will have to take back the properties onto their books at the 'write-off price' of 50% of valuation, which implies recognising a loss. That could have big implications for the banks and the property sector in general. "No financial institution is ready for this new stock of property, neither in terms of provisions, nor in terms of management capacity," one professional is quoted as saying.

The big question is what impact this new batch of repossession – the equivalent of 15% to 20% of the current inventory of property for sale – will have on the market. Unable to sell at auction, the banks might end up offering them for sale at their write-off values. The danger is that an avalanche of these properties dumped on the market at write off values will send the market into a spin, with prices falling another 20% to 30%. The danger, or perhaps the opportunity, depending on how you look at it.'

{Most of the Spanish banks are clearly not geared-up to handle the amount of property they now have on their books. However as inefficient as they may be, let me dispel a couple of myths. 'Handing the keys back' to the bank does not mean the cancellation of your liability. Banks will not accept the keys until, at the very least, all mortgage payments are up to date. If not, the debt will be significantly increased by penalty payments and the banks will, when they get their act together, pursue you. The more astute Spanish banks have already appointed solicitors in the UK for this task and have no problems in locating 'the disappeared.' (Some equally astute urbanisations are now hiring solicitors in the UK to recoup unpaid urbanisation fees. This is done through the County Court system on a No Win - No Fee basis, with the defaulter paying the solicitors fees as part of the debt. Why do we not do this in Dream Hills?) Secondly, if your debt to the bank is small and you fall into difficulties with payments, don't think that the banks will pursue the larger debtors first. No chance! If your debt/loan is small, this means you have positive equity in the property making it more profitable for the bank to foreclose a.s.a.p. And they will! If the debt on the property is large enough to create negative equity the banks may not want to unload the property just yet. I have heard of cases in Dream Hills where the defaulters has moved back into the properties and still remain there today, with the banks oblivious to their presence. Mick, Editor}

Mark Stucklin continues to berate the accuracy of the government statistics - 'Spanish property prices fell just 6.3% in 2009, the year of Spain's monumental property crash, according to the latest figures from the Ministry of Housing. Of course everyone knows these figures are **baloney**, that in reality prices are down much further than this, but nobody really knows by how much. Assume between 10% and 20% and you probably won't be far off (it depends upon what and where). To emphasise just how absurd the Government's figures really are, let's look at the peak to trough fall. According to this measure, Spanish property prices have fallen just 9.95% since their peak in Q1 2008. So they would have us believe that, in the worst housing market crisis in Spanish history, prices haven't even fallen in double digits. That compares to a fall of more than 30% in the US where you could argue the bust wasn't half as bad. The figures are so farfetched, there's really not much point wasting time on them. The Ministry of Housing bases its figures on valuations carried out by official appraisal companies. I don't imagine the Government doctors the figures, but it does tell you all you need to know about the accuracy of valuations in Spain. Let's hope the Ministry of Housing doesn't use these figures to formulate policy (what policy, other than knocking down the legally built homes of British pensioners?).'

Oy Vey!

Two Jewish men got to a Chinese restaurant. While they're talking, one of them wonders how many Jewish people there are in China. They both agree there must be some, but neither is sure how many.

When the waiter comes over, they ask him if there are any Chinese Jews.

'I don't know,' replies the waiter. 'I ask in kitchen. They will know.'

So the waiter goes to the kitchen, then comes back. 'Sorry. No Chinese Jews,' he says.

'What?' says one of the men. 'No Chinese Jews at all?'

'Sorry,' repeats the waiter. 'We got orange jews, apple jews and grape jews, but no Chinese Jews.'

(Jewish telegram: 'Start worrying. Details to follow.')

Forthcoming Events

Miguel Hernandez Centenary

Clocking-in

Tom was in his early 50's, retired and started a second career.

However, he just couldn't seem to get to work on time. Every day, 5, 10, 15 minutes late.

But he was a good worker, real sharp, so the boss was in a quandary about how to deal with it.

Finally, one day he called him into the office for a talk.

"Tom, I have to tell you, I like your work ethic, you do a top notch job, but you're being late so often is quite annoying."

"Yes, I know Boss, and I am working on it."

"Well good, you are a team player. That's what I like to hear. It's odd though, you're coming in late. I know you're retired from the Army. What did they say if you came in late there?"

"They said, 'Good morning, General'."

This year Orihuela Town Hall are pulling out all the plugs to celebrate the centenary of its famed poet Miguel Hernandez. More than 500 separate events have been organised throughout the year in his honour. If you would like a copy of these - all 46 pages of them - do let me know and I will email them to you.

Torre Vieja Carnival 2010

Torre Vieja Carnival runs from the 23 January until February 14.

A full list of events can be had from the Torry Tourist Office. The main parades are as follows:

On Sunday February 7 at 15.30, the principal carnival parade passes through the streets of C/ Patricio Perez, Ramon Gallud and Plaza Maria Asuncion. There will be lots of spectacle, music and colourful costumes, plenty of humour and salsa dancing.

Saturday February 12 at 21.00 sees the start of the Annual Night Carnival Parade taking the same route as above. Although this is a much shorter parade than that of the 7th with fewer children, the dance groups get to really perform on this parade and it is very impressive. Just the tonic to lift your spirits!

Orihuela Medieval Market

Orihuela's annual Medieval Market will this year run from February 5 to the 7th. This medieval market is the largest in Spain, drawing 200,000 visitors last year. This year they are pulling out all the stops and there will be 350 stalls, 100 more than last year. The whole market will be spread over a four kilometre stretch with workshops, children's activities, street acts with many new features and shows. This year there will be an Arabian flavour to the market, but there will also be knights, wizards, goblins together with horses, elephants and much, much more. This will be a major event and if you would like to see something uniquely Spanish, this is it.

The town hall has kindly laid on a complimentary bus service to and from Orihuela on the 5th and 6th. Buses will depart from the roundabout just behind the Ayuntamiento, Playa Flamenca on those dates only at 9.00, 10.30, 12.00 and 13.30. The return trips from the Comercial Centre Ociopia in Orihuela will be at 15.00, 17.00, 19.00 and 21.00.

John's Parrot

A young man named John received a parrot as a gift. The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary.

Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and laced with profanity. John tried and tried to change the bird's attitude by consistently saying only polite words and anything else he could think of to 'clean up' the bird's vocabulary.

Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot. The parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even more rude.

John, in desperation, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer.

For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then suddenly there was total quiet. Not a peep was heard for over a minute.

Fearing that he'd hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer. The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arm and said "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behaviour."

John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude.

As he was about to ask the parrot what had made such a dramatic change in his behaviour, the bird asked, very softly, "By the way, may I ask what the turkey did?"

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The History of Spain, Part 12 - The Discovery of the New World.

After departing from Spain on August 3 1492, Columbus, together with his three small ships - the *Santa María*, the *Pinta* and the *Niña* - sailed south for the Canaries where they remained for about a month. Their long delay here has never been explained satisfactorily. However, the Canarian women at the time were renowned for their incredible beauty and this may have contributed to the sailors' leaden feet or sails! (In case you want to check them out for yourselves chaps - don't bother - those genes have now been well diluted by the centuries.) Eventually, the explorers left the Canary Islands on September 6 along the twenty-eighth parallel - not quite far enough south to take full advantage of the trade winds but nevertheless beneficial enough. (In 1485 two Portuguese sailors tried to navigate the ocean by taking a northerly route. They encountered strong westerly winds and had to turn back in despair.)

After 33 days at sea, the various crews grew anxious. On October 9 the captains of the *Pinta* and the *Niña* boarded the flagship, the *Santa María*, and begged for an immediate return to Spain. Columbus promised that unless land were sighted in three days, he would do as they wished. On October 11 they picked up a green branch bearing flowers from the ocean and at two o'clock the next morning, under an almost full moon, the lookout on the *Niña*, Rodrigo de Triana, shouted '*Tierra! Tierra!*'

The next morning, October 12 1492, an exploratory group landed on a small island which Columbus named San Salvador - Holy Saviour - claiming it in the name of Ferdinand, Isabella and Christ. This date is celebrated every year throughout the Hispanic community worldwide as *El Dia de la Hispanidad*. There were many naked natives about who were very friendly and they traded parrots, cotton threads and fruit for glass beads from their future enslavers. Columbus quickly ascertained that there was no gold in San Salvador and the small fleet set off again seeking Cipango - Japan - and gold. On October 28 they landed on Cuba and Columbus showed the natives some gold. They indicated towards the interior which they called Cubanacam - mid-Cuba. Mistaking this for El Gran Cam - the Great Khan of China - he sent two of the crew to try and locate the Khan. They returned empty handed but reported that the natives in the interior, male and female, smoked a leaf which they rolled into a cigar and inserted in their nose! Disappointed, Columbus left Cuba but forcibly took with them, five native youths to act as interpreters, and seven women to comfort them. (They all died later en route to Spain.)

At this stage the captain of the *Pinta* - Pinzón - deserted with his ship to hunt for gold on his own. Columbus then reached Haiti where he found some gold but his flagship was dashed to pieces on a reef. Fortunately the *Niña* was nearby and rescued Columbus and the crew while some friendly natives salvaged most of the cargo. The friendly chieftain assured Columbus that there was plenty of gold in Haiti. This and the friendliness and kindness of the natives impressed him so much that he left part of his crew to explore and settle the island while he returned to Spain to report his discoveries. A fortress was constructed from the timbers of the wrecked *Santa María*. In early January 1493, Pinzón returned empty handed with the *Pinta* and was sufficiently contrite for Columbus to accept his apologies. He did not want to sail back to Spain with just one ship and on January 16 both vessels began their journey home.

The voyage back was long and miserable and they encountered many storms. When they reached the Azores, Pinzón once again deserted with his ship hoping to be the first to reach Spain with the news that Asia had been found. Columbus reached Portugal in early March and had the *Niña* repaired before setting off again reaching Palos in Spain on March 15. Pinzón had landed on northwestern Spain several days before, but Ferdinand and Isabella refused to meet him or his messenger. He fled in fear and disgrace to his home, took to his bed and died. Columbus was welcomed by the King and Queen at Barcelona where he was given the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea - *Almirante del Mar Oceano*. He remained at the court for six months.

Hearing that the Portuguese were now about to launch an expedition to the New World, King Ferdinand appealed to the Spanish Pope, Alexander VI (a Borgia and the most corrupt pontiff in history), to define the rights of Spain in the 'Ocean Sea.' A series of Papal Bulls finally led to the Treaty Of Tordesillas (June 7, 1494). It was agreed that a dividing line should run along a meridian of longitude 250 leagues (1 league = 3 miles) west of the Cape Verde Islands for discoveries before that date, but 370 leagues west for later discoveries. Spain (Castile and Aragon) would be allotted all the lands to the west of the line and Portugal to the east. And that, if you are still awake, is why they speak Portuguese in Brazil to this day, whereas the remainder of South America speak Spanish.

Hungry for gold, the Catholic Kings now provided Columbus with a new fleet of 17 vessels, crewed with 1,200 seamen together with sufficient animals to start herds and flocks in the 'Indies.' Columbus made four trips to the Indies in all. Unfortunately there is insufficient space in a single page to report on these event filled voyages in detail. Suffice it to say that generally they were a disaster. Hardly a man remained alive in the original fortress in Haiti. The Spaniards who were left on the island only ten months previously had roamed the island robbing the natives of gold and women. Each Spaniard had at least five 'wives.' The Spaniards had quarrelled and murdered one another, and nearly all those remaining were killed by the outraged natives. The same fate would strike a second settlement he would later found in Haiti.

The gold only trickled rather than the expected and promised torrents. Columbus resorted to slavery, capturing natives and giving 400 to the settlers and shipping 500 back to Spain. 200 of these died on the voyage, the remainder within a couple of years. During the third trip, Columbus and his brothers were arrested and brought back to Spain in chains, accused of negligence. On his fourth and final voyage Columbus was shipwrecked for more than 15 months on Jamaica!

Until the day he died, May 20 1506, Columbus passionately believed that he had reached Asia. In fact it was not until the Portuguese crew of Ferdinand Magellan returned from the first circumnavigation of the globe in 1522 that his assumptions were finally shown to be false.

Out & About

Development of the new sport's complex near Playa Flamenca is, if you pardon the pun, racing ahead. The flood-lit football pitch is almost completed and work has already started on the indoor swimming pool. The other new sport's complex in Torrevieja, or sport's city as it is called, is a massive affair and work here also seems to be progressing rapidly. It is located close to the existing indoor swimming pool and well worth a look.

Work has also started on the groundworks for the massive new retail development in the Los Dolses area close to the motorway toll together with the upgrading of the adjoining road to a dual carriage with an extra roundabout. This land, which was purchased by Alcampo, will be home to one of their new hypermarkets. Whereas the new hypermarket will be the prime asset on the site, there is also talk of a new retail park with multi-cinema and ten-pin bowling alley. The latter two may just be marketing hype as I feel that there may not be the permanent population locally to make such ventures profitable. Still, one never knows! As I understand it the whole complex would be similar to the *Dos Mares* complex near San Javier, except that the hypermarket will possibly be larger than the Carrefour in Torry. Gossip about Marks & Sparks and other UK big names are coming there are without foundation at this early stage. Similarly, the gossip that the developers want to take over Via Park I for extra space (and relocate those dispossessed to Via Park V) is nonsense.

The builders have also started on the groundworks for the new Mercadona in Los Balcones and work on the new commercial area between Entre Golf and Dream Hills 2 is also progressing. One of the Orihuela councillors told me that Aldi and Vidal were taking the space there. Seems odd that two supermarkets would set-up right next to each other, but time will tell.

Despite all this building activity, the recession continues to bite locally and shows little sign of improving during 2010. During a recent trip to the Playa Flamenca Commercial Centre, I noticed that several businesses have closed down. The original Asturias restaurant at Calle Mosca has now closed down. The Chinese restaurant next to Goya in *Los Balcones* has also closed down and it is now a Chinese *todo* (bricabrac). The Consum supermarket next to the Wok Gran Mundo in Torre de Horadada (the best wok on the Costa!) has closed down and it now also a Chinese *todo*.

Closer to home, Scampi's Fish and Chip Restaurant in Via Park V has closed down. I am very sorry to see Steve and Kay go. I have had some wonderful food from their establishment including some enormous and delicious cod. They are an exceptionally nice family and they will be missed.

I have now just heard that The Phoenix will also be closing in the spring. This is dreadful news. For several years both Neil and Donna have provided a welcome hub for various activities and celebrations around Dream Hills and have contributed greatly to the community. The DS wishes Neil, Donna and their son James all the best for the future.

Spanish kids are now reported to have broken all the emergency lighting in the stairs at Via Park V and as the top floor is now totally unoccupied they will run riot. Many of the large glass globes to the main lights on that floor have also been broken and the lift now seems to be permanently out-of-order. Also during the last week old cooking oil was emptied twice from the top floor into the rainwater drainage system. Unfortunately, this drainage system does not lead to underground pipes but pours directly onto the street next to Via Park V. The oil then remains on the street and pools in front of the bottom swimming pool! This has happened twice during the past week and once before following a hog-roast at The Raheny and there is no excuse for it. Dave the handyman now has to try and shovel-up the pooled oil. The council has been informed and hopefully they can do something about cleaning the mess on the street which is not a private road.

One of the committee members in Dream Hills tells me that both pools are in the process of being emptied and within the next few weeks repairs will be made and the pools refilled with fresh water. A new pool maintenance company will also start work and an additional pump will be installed in the lower pool.

Committee member Terry Dunn of No. 503 and John Kerr tell me that they are looking for some volunteers to help create a small football kick-about area for young children between the pools. This will involve mainly raking the ground of stones. If you and your kids would like to help with this do let Terry or John know or alternately leave your name and contact details behind the bar at All Bar Sue's.

The large silver aluminium bins are for garden rubbish only - NOT household rubbish.

Postman Pat Retires

It was Postman Pat's last day on the job after 35 years of carrying the mail through all kinds of weather to the same villages and towns. When he arrived at the first house on his route, he was greeted by the whole family there, who all hugged and congratulated him and sent him on his way with a cheque for £50. At the second house they presented him an 18-carat gold watch. The folks at the third house handed him a bottle of 15-year old Scotch whisky.

At the fourth house he was met at the door by a dumb blonde in her lingerie. She took him by the arm and led him up the stairs to the bedroom where she blew his mind with the most passionate love he had ever experienced. When they went downstairs, the blonde fixed him a full English breakfast: bacon, eggs, sausage & tomato with freshly squeezed orange juice. As she was pouring him a cup of steaming coffee, he noticed a £5 note sticking out from under the cup. 'All this was just too wonderful for words,' he said, 'but what's the five quid for?'

'Well,' said the blonde, 'Last night, I told my husband that today would be your last day and that we should do something special for you'. 'I asked him what I should give you'.

He said, 'F**k him! Give him a fiver!'

She smiled shyly and said, 'The breakfast was my idea.'

(Penny Halton)

Come Fly With Me?

Only nine airports in Spain were profitable in 2009. These were Alicante, Bilbao, Girona, Ibiza, Gran Canaria, Málaga, Palma, Murcia and Tenerife Sur. Barajas Airport in Madrid lost 311 million € last year and El Prat Airport in Barcelona lost 145 million. Alicante's El Altet is the most profitable airport in Spain, ending 2009 with operating profits of 43.5 million €. Capacity at El Altet will almost double when work on building the new terminal is completed, increasing annual capacity from 12.2 to 20 million users. The new terminal is expected to open at the end of next year. Only nine of Spain's 48 airports run by AENA, the Spanish airport authority, made a profit last year. One route, Barcelona-Madrid, has lost two million travellers due to the new AVE high speed train service.

The Spanish Development Minister, José Blanco, has blamed the large airport losses on Spain's 2,300 air traffic controllers. Three of them earn more than 900,000 € a year and another 163 collect more than 600,000 €. The average wage paid to an air traffic controller in Spain is now 334,000 €. One Spanish newspaper quotes Blanco as saying 'I've taken the decision to take the bull by the horns and do away with the privileges of the controllers'. The controllers have responded with unofficial strike action, mainly work to rules and mass absenteeism.

The Minister's plans to remove controllers entirely from 12 of the country's smaller airports to be replaced by automatic systems at the quieter airports. (Automated systems and Spanish efficiency - what could possibly go wrong?) El Mundo reported that controllers have said that criticism of their wages makes them lose concentration. Part of the problem for the employers is the limit of 1,200 annual hours of service, resulting in many of the workers covering some 400 hours of overtime each year.

The Minister for Development, José Blanco, has proposed reducing the wages of air traffic controllers in Spain to 200,000 € a year and has given them a month to lower the wages. It would mean an average 40% cut in take home pay. He said that the target was to reduce navigation costs by 15% and noted that the controllers earned two and half times more than he himself did as a minister and twice that of the French controllers. He said that cutting wages was the only way to reduce the AENA (Spanish Airports Authority) deficit. The controllers now say that there will be problems this Easter and that the coming months are going to be 'complicated.' Expect more airport misery.

The newspaper, El País, reports that the AENA will keep control of all Spanish airports and that the regions will only have a say in some matters, such as commercial strategies.)

In an unexpected move in early January, AENA, surprised the 16,000 drivers who work at Barajas Airport in Madrid with breathalyser and speed limit tests. Around 700 drivers were breathalysed at 27 different points in the airport. Just over 1% of the drivers tested positive for alcohol. 16,000 drivers does seem a lot but the airport has 4,500 vehicles in continuous operation around the clock.

More Union Trouble

The unions and SEAT have agreed on the re-admission of 300 sacked workers described by the company as being 'unproductive'. The can return in 2011 or accept redundancy pay of 60 days for each year worked. A 24 hour strike has been cancelled as a consequence of the deal.

Meanwhile a strike by workers paralysed the Nissan plant in Barcelona on Saturday January 23. They were protesting that sacked workers have not been taken back on despite an increase in work, and say they will hold similar stoppages on forthcoming Saturdays. The company says that the increase in demand is only temporary and they have ruled out taking back staff.

A Helping Hand

A farmer stopped by the local garage to have his truck fixed. They couldn't do it while he waited, so he said he didn't live far and would just walk home. On the way home he stopped at the hardware store and bought a bucket and a gallon of paint. He then stopped by the feed store and picked up a couple of chickens and a goose. However, struggling outside the store he now had a problem - how to carry his entire purchases home.

While he was scratching his head he was approached by a little old lady who told him she was lost.

She asked, "Can you tell me how to get to 160 Mockingbird Lane?"

The farmer said, "Well, as a matter of fact, my farm is very close to that house. I would walk you there but I can't carry this lot."

The old lady suggested, "Why don't you put the can of paint in the bucket. Carry the bucket in one hand; put a chicken under each arm and carry the goose in your other hand?"

"Why thank you very much," he said and proceeded to walk the old girl home. On the way he says "Let's take my short cut and go down this alley. We'll be there in no time."

The little old lady looked him over cautiously then said, "I am a lonely widow without a husband to defend me. How do I know that when we get in the alley you won't hold me up against the wall, pull up my skirt, and have your way with me?"

The farmer said, "Holy smokes lady! I'm carrying a bucket, a gallon of paint, two chickens, and a goose. How in the world could I possibly hold you up against the wall and do that?"

The old lady replied, "Set the goose down, cover him with the bucket, put the paint on top of the bucket, and I'll hold the chickens."

Performance Rating

Father O'Flanagan dies due to old age. Upon entering St. Peter's gate, there is another man in front, waiting to go into heaven. St. Peter asks the man, "What is your name what did you accomplish during your life?". The man responds "My name is Manny Cohen, and I was a New York City Taxi driver for 14 years" "Very well," says St. Peter, "Here is your silk robe and golden sceptre, now you may walk in the streets of our Lord."

St. Peter looks at the priest and asks "What is your name and what did you accomplish?" He responds, "I'm Father O'Flanagan, and have devoted the last 62 years to the Lord".

"Very well," says St. Peter, "Here is your cotton robe and wooden staff, you may enter."

"Wait a minute," says O'Flanagan, "You gave the taxi driver a silk robe and golden scepter, why did I only get a cotton robe and wooden staff?".

"Well," St. Peter replied, "We work on a performance scale, you see while you preached - everyone slept, when he drove taxis - everyone prayed!"

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Liverpool FC

Players from Liverpool FC visited Alder Hay Children's Hospital over the Christmas period,

"It's very rewarding to put a smile back on the faces of those suffering adversity and an uphill struggle," said Danny Brown aged 6.

Walking into the bar, Mike said to Charlie the bartender, 'Pour me a stiff one - just had another fight with the little woman.'

'Oh yeah?' said Charlie, 'And how did this one end?'

'When it was over,' Mike replied, 'She came to me on her hands and knees.'

'Really,' said Charles, 'Now that's a switch! What did she say?'

She said, 'Come out from under the bed, you little chicken.'(Pete Dudman)

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Changes to Driving Law.

It is now no longer necessary to carry a spare set of bulbs in your car. Just over a year ago the DGT (Trafico) announced that the Trafico Guardia would no longer impose fines for not carrying the bulbs, even though it remained as a serious infraction in the legislation! This did not stop 13,000 drivers being fined a total of two million euro during the past 12 months. The DGT director has apologised to drivers and stated that the law, which dated from 1998, will be removed immediately.

Mars Bar

The only way to pull off a Sunday afternoon 'quickie' with their 8-year old son in the apartment was to send him out on the balcony with a Mars Bar and tell him to report on all the street activities.

He began his commentary as his parents put their plan into operation:

'There's a car being towed from the parking lot,' he shouted.

'An ambulance just drove by!'

'Looks like the Anderson's have company,' he called out.

'Matt's riding a new bike!'

'Looks like the Sanders are moving!'

'Jason is on his skate board!'

After a few moments he announced, 'The Coopers are shagging!!'

Startled, his mother and dad shot up in bed! Dad cautiously called out, 'How do you know they're shagging?'

'Jimmy Cooper is standing on his balcony with a Mars Bar.'

(Ann Wightman)

Grandma

Harry is visiting his grandma.

She takes the opportunity to complain about the cost of living.

'When I was a girl I could go out with a shilling and come home with a dozen eggs, two pints of milk, a pound of bacon, half a pound of tea and a chicken.'

'Yes,' says Harry. 'That's inflation for you.'

'It's nothing to do with inflation,' says grandma. 'It's all them bloody security cameras they have nowadays.'

You do not really understand something unless you can explain it to your grandmother.

- Albert Einstein

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