

THE DREAM SCENE

Newsletter

Issue no. 41 1st of July 2010

Bienvenido a todos and to *Søren*, one of our readers in Denmark, en varm velkomst.

Well here we are again, July - sun, sea and mosquitos! (See page 12) It's 30° in the shade at 18.30, beautiful! There are some holiday makers around, the Spanish being in the majority, with the *anglosajons* still very thin on the ground. The pools look so inviting at the moment.

While speaking to Julian of First Choice this week, he told me that it is likely he will be closing the minimarket in the near future. There is not sufficient demand to keep the shop open. When you remember what this little shop has to offer - open every day with fresh bread and other staples, newspapers, postcards, stamps, a post box and much, much more - it will be a shame to lose it. It has been an asset to the community but as the old adage goes, 'Use 'em or lose 'em!'

Ann and Phil Ball are holding a charity bash at No. 246 in Dream Hills 2 on Thursday July 22nd between 3pm 'till 6pm. There will be lots of cakes, scones, cream etc with tea, coffee or soft drinks. The cost is just €2.50 per person plus €1 for the raffle. All proceeds and donations will go to the AECC Contra Cancer. We are certainly looking forward to it and hope that you can make it too. Put it in your diary!

There is plenty happening in July here. The San Javier Jazz Festival kicks-off on Friday July 2 with Chris Issak. The festival which runs for the whole month features many class artists including George Benson and two of my favourites, Dr. John and Canned Heat. See www.jazzsanjavier.com for more details.

The annual Habeneros & Polifonia Festival takes place in Torrevieja at the Eras de la Sol theatre from July 23rd to 30th. The festival (or competition) will feature 28 choirs from 16 different countries.

But if you really want to see something you will never forget then you must see this year's Moors and Christians pageant in Orihuela. This spectacular festival runs from the 16th to the 24th of July in Orihuela and a visit is a 'must see'. The town hall generally provides free transportation for a couple of days, to and from the festival from the Playa Flamenca area. You can get more information by calling Stefan at the town hall on 966 760 000.

Thank you to Alan & Pat for the joke books and to Denis & Beryl for their subscription and generous donation. Hope many of you readers overseas manage to join us over here this summer.

Mick, Editor.

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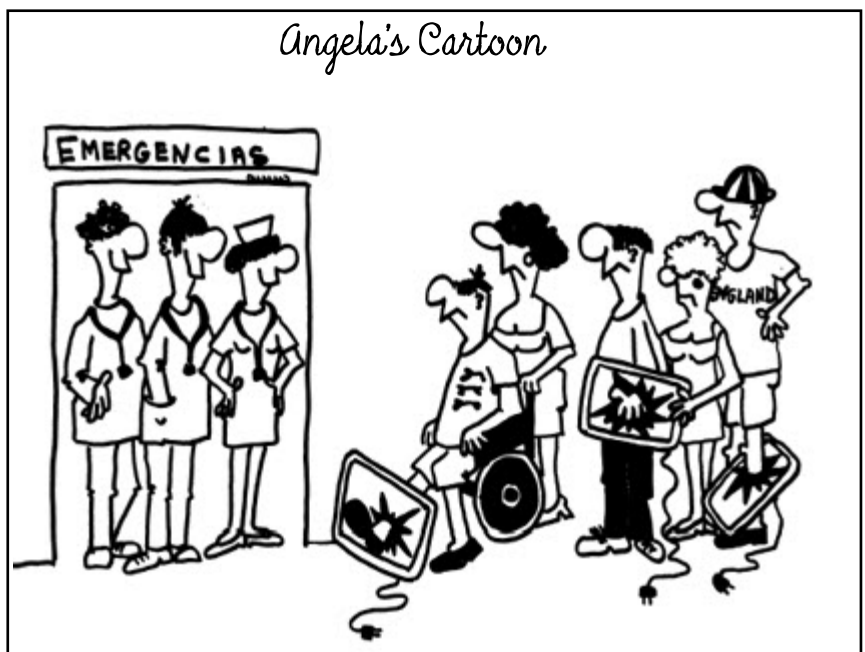
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Angela's Cartoon



What's Up?

The lead items during the month in the Spanish press have been the World Cup and the latest labour reform measures. After two years of failed negotiations between the employers' federation and the unions, the government have imposed some 'wishy washy' changes which nobody appears happy with. In Congress, there were more abstention votes than votes in favour of the new legislation. The issue of collective bargaining was not addressed and the contract system was further complicated. I cannot say how the measures taken will stimulate the economy, particularly when coupled with the VAT/IVA increases this month. (See new tax rates in Dream Scene, page 9 issue no. 32, October 2009.)

A General Strike called by the Spanish Unions has been set for September 29, no doubt to avoid the August holidays! The strike has been called in protest at some of the austerity measures, particularly in relation to pension reform. A strike called by the civil servant/government workers union in early June had little impact. There was also a 24-hour train strike on June 25 with around 43,000 passengers affected and a strike by the Madrid Metro this week has brought the city to a standstill. I would not be surprised if the air-traffic controllers 'play-up' this summer seeing that they have had their salaries reduced by around 40% and their daily shifts dangerously extended in some areas, particularly in southern Spain. You can expect plenty of strikes this year in Spain.

House sales in Spain recovered in April by 16.7% compared to the same time last year, with the resale property market particularly buoyant, up 26.6%, while new property sales were 10% higher. It was the 4th consecutive monthly rise in house sales in Spain, according to the National Statistics Institute. It had been thought that there was a rush to buy property ahead of the IVA/VAT increases in July, but in fact resale property is not affected by the new tax increase.

Some welcome news was that Torrevieja and Orihuela topped the national sales charts for the last 12 months of municipalities which are not provincial capitals. Both areas sold a total of 6,733 homes. In the provincial capitals 7,875 were sold in Valencia, 4,782 in Murcia, 14,187 in Barcelona and 31,325 in Madrid. For the 12-month period re-sales increased by 31.3% (Source Costa News). However there is still plenty of 'doom and gloom.' The Fitch rating's agency has estimated that house prices in Spain should fall by a further 30% between now and 2012. It's part of a warning for the real estate sector, with Fitch considering that the official housing statistics do not 'reflect the real situation of the market'. (Government statistics in Spain should have the preamble - 'Once upon a time.....') In an online interview, the Spanish ex Minister for Housing, María Antonia Trujillo, stated that she has been looking for a property for three years and would not buy a property in Spain right now as she had expected house prices to fall a further 30-50%. Probably an irresponsible statement given the fragility of what remaining confidence there is on the Spanish economy.

The new smoking legislation, which is expected to be introduced on January 1, 2011, will prohibit smoking in all bars, restaurants and leisure facilities, but will allow smoking in stadiums, bullrings and on terraces. Excluded from the legislation are some hotel rooms, smokers clubs and spaces where people are held against their will, such as jails and psychiatric institutions. Because of long delays, perhaps they should include airport terminals in this category!

The birth rate in Spain fell in 2009, the first time in 10 years after years of constant growth. The 2009 figure of 10.73 newborns per 1,000 residents indicated a drop of 5% on the previous year. Despite the recession, the statistics were met with some surprise as births among immigrants usually boosted the figures. This would indicate that the Socialist government's 2007 measure of giving a 2,500€ bonus to families with newborns failed to have an effect. The 'baby bonus' was withdrawn recently as part of the austerity measures.

Car dealerships across Spain are reported to be considering claiming back from purchasers 6.5 million € in discounts that they gave as part of the Government's 2000€ scrappage scheme, because when they later came to claim the money from the Government, the system collapsed. It's reported that 13,000 sales are in dispute. The car dealers have warned purchasers too that their income tax returns may not be accurate in these cases, saying they should be considered as a discount from the seller, and not as a grant but the *Hacienda* may take a different view of this!

The airport at Ciudad Real, the first private airport in the country, has applied for bankruptcy protection after being unable to meet a 290 million € debt. It comes after just two years of operation and a week after the regional government denied a 140 million guarantee. Most of the debt is held by Spanish savings banks, with CCM, Cajasol and Cajasur having 200 million between them. Work on the delayed new airport at Corvera in Murcia is to resume now that an additional line of 200 million euro has been approved. The airport is scheduled to open in 2012.

The Chairman of Iberia Airlines has stated that he is confident that the merger with British Airways will be completed in November this year.

Caja Madrid and Bancaja have agreed to form the largest savings bank in Spain. The two are currently the second and third largest in Spain. Some of the smaller savings banks are also expected to join them. European banks, mainly German and French, have 602 billion € invested in Spain through loans to banks and companies here. Today, July 1, Spanish banking institutions have to repay more than 442 billion euro to the European Central Bank.

Reported plans by the government to increase electricity prices for domestic users and small businesses by 4% in July have just been cancelled. Electricity bills in Spain have already increased by 26% in price over the past 30 months, and consumer and opposition groups have criticised the rise, especially as it was planned at the same time IVA/VAT is set to increase this month.

After receiving cross-party agreement, the Spanish government have introduced a new compensation scheme for victims of terrorism. A death will result in the compensation payment of 250,000€ 500,000€ for a serious disability and for permanent incapacity an initial award of 180,000€ is made which is then supplemented to take account of personal and family circumstances. All payments are tax free and backdated to January 1960. More Spanish people have been injured by ETA terrorists than any other terrorist faction.

(I'm in the doghouse again!! I swapped our double bed for a trampoline, the missus hit the roof!!!)

The *Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios* talked to 10,000 travellers in 150 airports and discovered that specially protected suitcases (i.e. with plastic or cling-film wrapped around them) saw robbery or loss on 3.4% of occasions while on normal baggage it was only 0.9%. Robberies were most frequent in the airports of Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Almería, Lanzarote and Menorca. The least robberies were at Valladolid and Zaragoza, followed by Tokyo and Munich.

An attempt by Spain to ensure that all battered women in Europe received the same level of protection, particularly if they move from one country to another, has been delayed by the UK, who have requested more time stating that the wording of the proposal is inadequate. In 2008, 8,000 Romanians and 2,000 Germans victims in Spain benefited from protection orders.

A British couple received a 17-year plus sentence for the murder of their two month old baby in Torre Vieja. Initially the couple were not arrested as there appeared to be nothing amiss until the autopsy revealed that the child had been beaten prior to its death. The couple were later arrested by the National Police after they tried to cross the frontier into Gibraltar, and have been held in prison on remand since April 1, 2008.

A British man has been arrested for stabbing a fellow Brit in a bar in nearby Urbanisation Ciudad Quesada at 11 am on June 10. The alleged assailant first fired a shotgun into the ground in the bar which, like the playing of the British National Anthem in a theatre, had the effect of virtually clearing the bar in a split second, people diving everywhere for cover. The chap with the shotgun then stabbed the victim in the chest. And you thought that Playa Flamenca Commercial (Dodge City!) was a bit lively!

A 61-year-old German woman who operated a bar in the Pinar de Campoverde urbanisation in nearby Pilar de la Horadada, was murdered in her bar during the torrential rains on the evening of June 15. Her German 60-year-old business partner and ex-lover has been charged with the murder.

The Spanish Tax Authority has warned of a massive 'phishing' campaign on the internet linked to this year's tax returns. The fraudsters try to trick victims into completing a questionnaire online, which looks as if it comes from the Hacienda and which asks for confidential information so that the income tax rebate can be paid. Hacienda has said that it never asks for account numbers over the internet.

A massive international operation has nabbed 178 people, 76 of them in Spain for credit-card cloning in 14 countries. The other arrests were carried out in Romania (16), France (30), Italy (7), Germany (16), Ireland (12), United States (8), Australia (2), Sweden (2), Greece (2), Finland (3), and Hungary (4).

A 52 year old has been arrested in Tarragona and charged with stealing 7.5 miles of copper wire, valued in excess of three million euro, taken during over 100 raids to the port. The wire was destined for nearby wind farms.

The prosecutor has called for a 24 year prison sentence, a 36 year ban from public office, and an 810 million € fine for Juan Antonio Roca, the ex Municipal Real Estate Assessor in Marbella Town Hall, for his alleged role at the centre of the Malaya corruption case. He faces charges of fraud, money laundering, bribery and misuse of public funds. The Malaya case broke back on March 29 2006, when some 20 people were arrested in the first stage, including Roca and the then Mayor of Marbella, Marisol Yagüe. It's become the largest ever corruption case based in a Town Hall in Spain. 95 people face charges in the case which is due to commence in late September.

The Spanish traffic authority, the DGT, will now ban all types of radar speed-trap detectors in cars. To date it has only been the radar inhibitors which have been banned.

Each of Spain's 23 players in the World Cup have been promised a bonus of 600,000€ if they win the trophy.

Free Wi-Fi locations and improved TDT signals are promised for the Orihuela Costa in the near future.

Latest: Have just heard that the ex-PP mayor of nearby San Javier, José Hernández, and three others were arrested this Tuesday, June 29, for bribery, corruption, misuse of public funds etc.

Easy, William.

A woman in a supermarket is following a grandfather and his badly behaved three-year-old grandson. It's obvious that he has his hands full, what with the child screaming at the top of his lungs for sweets in the sweet aisle, biscuits in the biscuit aisle, and for fruit, cereal and pop in the other aisles.

Meanwhile, Gramps is working his way around, saying in a calm, controlled voice: "Easy, William, we won't be much longer ... easy, boy."

Another outburst and she hears the grandpa calmly say, "It's okay, William, just a couple more minutes and we'll be out of here. Hang in there, boy."

At the checkout, the little terror is throwing items out of the cart, and Gramps says again in a controlled voice, "William, William, relax buddy, don't get upset. We'll be home in five minutes; stay cool, William."

Very impressed, the woman goes outside where the grandfather is loading his groceries and the boy into the car. She says to the gentleman, "It's none of my business, but you were amazing in there. I don't know how you did it. That whole time, you kept your composure, and no matter how loud and disruptive he got, you just calmly kept saying things would be okay. William is very lucky to have you as his grandpa."

"Thanks, lady," said the grandfather, "but I'm William ... the little bastard's name is Charlie."

Geordies

General Custer is standing on a hill overlooking the Little Big Horn. In the distance he can hear Sitting Bull's braves pounding on their drums.

He turns to a little Geordie soldier in his ranks, 'Listen,' he says, 'They have war drums.'

The Geordie replies, 'Why, man! The thievin' bastards!'

'The other night I ate at a real nice family restaurant. Every table had an argument going.'

George Carlin

'I've got Gordon Ramsay's new book, it's called "Take Two Eggs and F*** off".'

Jack Dee

Places To Eat, by Jules

Highly recommended is 'Mulberry's' in Quesada. (Telephone 966 719 819) Just drive through the arches and park close by. Mulberry's is situated to the left, just behind the petrol station. This is a fairly small but very popular restaurant with only space for three of four tables inside but plenty outside on the terrace with a good view of the local 'rustic' car wash! The restaurant and its owners, Chander Mehan - front of house, and James Honess - chef, featured in one of the episodes of BBC1's 'Living in the Sun' in March 2008.

The menu at Mulberry's offers plenty of choice with English, Thai, Indian and Italian dishes available. They also have a special menu priced at 12.75€ but as this menu may not always be on display you may have to ask for it. They also do superb sandwiches in a hot Ciabata style bread (they bake their own bread on the premises) with various fillings, side salad and coleslaw. One of our favourite dishes is the Tandoori Chicken Salad, a mouth watering dish. If you like a 'kick' in your salad, this is the one! Spicy chicken chunks lying on a bed of lettuce, tomato and cucumber, coated in a yoghurt and mint dressing - only 4.50€ for a starter portion - which I found to be large enough for a main course. The Greek salad looked very interesting with plenty of feta cheese. They also do a wonderful garlic & cheese Ciabatta bread, one portion - two large slices - definitely enough for two people and very filling. They have a breakfast, lunchtime and evening menu and every dish sounds tempting!

Another restaurant is 'Sunrise...' in Campoamor. (Telephone 965 320 070) The Sunrise proprietors have three restaurants in all, one at La Mosca, another at Cabo Roig with the one at Campoamor being the most difficult to find as it is slightly off the main roads. Drive along the N332 towards Cabo Roig and take the exit for Campoamor Playa; follow the signs for Sunrise which will lead you under the bridge to the restaurant, which leads through an arch into a beautiful setting with plenty of inside and outside seating space. At the rear of the property there is a corral with several horses. There is also a large marquee with a fountain inside it close to the bar and restaurant if you prefer to eat there.

Sunrise describes itself as an 'American Restaurant & Grill' and features a menu with more than 160 choices. There are plenty of starters priced from 5€ upwards for nachos etc, various burgers from €8 together with steaks, pastas, pizzas and plenty of fish courses. A dish I can recommend is the beef and mushroom sandwich; this is made from crusty farmhouse bread all baked together in an oven and coated in bechamel sauce and served with chips and coleslaw. There is also a very robust and full-flavoured house red wine, 14% alcohol, at 8.50 € They hold 'Flamenco Nights' outside at 9pm on Tuesdays and Fridays, where a special menu of six starters which feature spicy mussels, chicken soup and melon & ham; six main courses which include roast lamb, sole in orange sauce and steaks and six desserts which include pancakes, tiramisu, profiteroles or coffee. All this including a bottle of wine or water for just 21.90 per person.

A menu del dia is also offered at 12€ One day we had Sopa de Mariscos with croutons for starters (no other choice), followed by a choice of a large cutlet of grilled salmon or chicken breast in mushroom sauce, both served with chips and salad garnish. There were a number of choices for dessert but we both had the strawberry cake, which was truly delicious. Although this price did not include bread, salad or wine, the portions were very generous with excellent presentation and quality produce. It was well worth the money!

This is definitely a place to visit with family or friends, where you can spend the whole evening chilling-out around the fountain.

Ashes to Ashes

Martha recently lost her skinflint husband. She had him cremated and brought his ashes home. Picking up the urn that he was in, she poured the ashes out on to the patio table. Then, tracing her fingers in the ashes, she started talking to him....'Herman, you know that dishwasher you promised me? I bought it with the insurance money!'

She paused for a minute, but still tracing her fingers in the ashes she said, 'Herman, remember that car you promised me? Well, I also bought it with the insurance money!'

Again, she paused for a few minutes and while tracing her fingers in the ashes and said, 'Herman, that diamond ring you promised me? Well, I bought that too with the insurance money!'

Finally, still tracing her fingers in the ashes, she said, 'Herman, remember that blow job I promised you?'.....'Well here it comes!' (Pete Dudman)

Quickies!

Car of the year 2010 as voted for by the readers of Cosmopolitan and Women's Own is...

A blue one!!

I saw an Indian asleep on the train, noticed the little red dot on her forehead, and thought, "Is she on standby?"

Q: Why do the French call their fighter the "Mirage"?

A: Because it's never been seen in a combat zone. Piracy is killing the music industry.

You try playing the guitar with a hook.

I went down the local fair last night and they had one of those things you have to punch as hard as you can.

A tinker.

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Gis a job!

A bloke goes into the Job Centre in London and sees a card advertising for a Gynaecologist's Assistant.

"Can you give me some more details about this?" he asks the girl behind the desk.

Oh, yes sir, the job entails you getting patients ready for the gynaecologist."

"You have to help the ladies out of their clothes and underwear, and prepare them for the gynaecologist's examination."

"There's a starting annual salary of £45,000, but you're going to have to go to Glasgow .."

"Oh, why? Is that where the job is?" he asks.

"No," replied the assistant, "that's where the end of the queue is."

(Tracy Marshall)

Sign in a bar in Spain: 'Due to the recent water shortage, beer will now be served at full strength.'

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Hail Hamilton!

50 yrs ago, 20 white men chasing
a black man were called the
Ku Klux Klan.

Today, it's called Formula One.

Caveat Emptor!

If you were troubled by damp and mould last winter, be glad you did not purchase in the newest 'prestigious' residential tower in Benidorm. The Torre Lugano in Benidorm, which was completed in July 2008, 18 months late, is the second largest tower in Benidorm, 220 metres above sea level with 42 floors and 204 apartments. It was promoted as the tallest residential building in Spain amid great ballyhoo and fanfare.

Many of the apartments were sold 'off-plan,' but once occupied by the owners it has turned into a disaster. It seems that once the first batch of flats were sold, the developers greatly reduced the specifications and budgets for the building. 71 apartments remain unsold. Once again, 'what it said on the tin' was not what the owners got.

The owners are now taking the promoter, constructor and architect to court for 28.2 million € to make up for the quality and image promised when they purchased. The community of owners has already spent 600,000 € since they took occupation, 171,000 on urgent repairs alone and 200,000 on legal fees! Among the long list of complaints are that the builders used compressed cardboard and chipboard instead of wood on many finishes. The fire alarm system has never worked and the sprinkler system has gone off accidentally as many as 50 times in one day. (Remember 'Towering Inferno'?) The poor quality of construction and concrete used in the five underground levels of garages permits regular flooding. Backed-up sewerage has also been a major problem, and the stairs to the offices have been closed for fear of collapse.

50 of the 204 flats are currently up for sale together with the empty 71. If you are daft enough, you can purchase a small flat there for around 170,000 € or a penthouse for 700,000 €.

The owners are also suing the developer for building 5 floors more than urban planning laws permit.

The development is a joint venture between Acciona – one of Spain's biggest developers and constructors – and the Valencian savings bank Bancaja.

Honour among thieves?

Well there never was really, just a romanticised notion by writers. A Serbian/Croat gang has managed to con a gang of Colombian drug traffickers for 500,000 € in a fraud carried out in Spain. The Serbians, pretending to be Italians, offered their services to the Colombian drug traffickers as money launderers. Under the deal agreed the Colombians have them 500,000 € in 50 and 100 € notes, and the Serbians gave them 800,000 € in 500 € notes in exchange. When the Colombians arrived at a Madrid hotel, the Serbs had arranged for a desk, which was specially adapted to hide a gang member, to be placed in the room. They showed the Colombians that the 500 € notes were legit before placing them in a drawer of the desk, after the money was counted. It was then that the person inside the desk swapped the money for photocopies of 500 € notes. The Colombians had travelled about 20 miles before realising that they had been 'suckered.' The police have arrested four Colombians, six Serbo-Croats and a Spanish intermediary.

The story begs two questions, first, where did the Serbs get the 800,000 in the first place and secondly, what would happen if they put them all in the same cell or prison, Colombians and Serbs not known for their pacifist ways?

Health Issues

The Spanish Minister for Health, Trinidad Jiménez, has been successful in beating off a Swedish proposal to the EU, supported by the British, which suggested that health care be paid for by the country where the EU person has residence, despite the fact that many Britons had been paying into the budgets of the British Health Service. Spain has managed to avoid paying an estimated 2 billion € a year for the medical treatment of retired Europeans who live in the country.

With so many retired Europeans resident in Spain, it was important for Jiménez to get her way at the meeting in Luxembourg in early June, and establish the principle that each country covers the health costs of its own national or foreign residents, including where 'health tourism' is involved. Under this arrangement Spain gets some 300 € per month, (not per annum as I stated in a previous issue,) for each EU foreign resident pensioner, which amounts to some 460 million € a year.

From this September, many National Health Hospitals in Spain will be telling their patients how much their treatment/operation costs. This is not to demand or even request payment but to inform patients of the true cost of their treatment.

The quoted costs will of course vary from region to region and hospital to hospital but it is worth looking at some of the procedure costs which were extrapolated by the Andalucian Health Authority in 2008. All figures quoted are in euros.

- Normal birth in hospital 1,600, if caesarian around 3,000.
- A new hip around 13,000.
- Appendicitis operations from 2,500 to 6,000.
- Heart transplant, up to 96,000.
- Biopsy including lab test 100.
- Abdominal ultrasound 35.
- Dialysis session 200.
- Radiation therapy 100.

The government hopes that the information campaign will encourage proper use of the health services.

(Source, El Mundo)

Citibreak to Paris?

A boy was upstairs playing on his computer when his granddad came in the room and sat down on the bed. "What are you doing?", asked the granddad. "You're 18 years old and wasting your life! When I was 18, I went to Paris and to the Moulin Rouge, where I drank all night, had my way with the dancers, pissed on the barman and left without paying! Now that is how to have a good time!"

A week later, the grandfather comes to visit again. He finds the boy still in his room, but with a broken nose, arm in plaster, 2 black eyes with all his front teeth gone! "What happened?", he asked.

"Well Grandfather!", replied the boy. "I did what you did! I went to Paris, went to the Moulin Rouge, drank all night, had my way with the dancers, pissed all over the barman, but he and the bouncers beat the crap out of me!" "Oh dear!", replied the granddad. "Who did you go with?" "Just some friends, why? Who did you go with?" "Oh!" replied the granddad. "The Third Panzer Division."

The History of Spain, Part 15. The Beginning of the Spanish Empire.

The death of Ferdinand in 1516 meant that his daughter, Joanna the Mad, was technically the next in line to the throne. Joanna was favoured by the nobles, probably because she was Spanish and her succession line was direct. The fact she was insane and confined to a convent in Tordesillas did not seem to be an issue to them. The irrepressible Cardinal Cisneros took charge as regent until the next in line, Ferdinand's grandson Carlos, arrived from Flanders. When the Cardinal's authority was questioned by the nobles, he pointed to a row of cannons and shouted, 'There's my authority!' Carlos was the only surviving heir of four great European dynasties, Burgundian, Habsburg, Aragonese and Castilian. 17-year-old Carlos arrived in the port of Santander with a fleet of 40 ships in September 1517. Young Carlos cut a poor figure. He had a mouth that hung open and a greatly enlarged lower jaw. This was a deformity which would grow considerably worse in successive generations of the Habsburgs due to inbreeding, and is still referred to as a 'Habsburg jaw.' He could not speak Spanish (Castilian) and knew little about peninsular affairs. He also surrounded himself with a large pampered Flemish entourage and it was not long before the Spanish nobility began to resent their new king. Carlos had his mother Joanna confined to the convent in Tordesillas, where she was to remain until her death in 1555. Although a virtual prisoner, Johanna was still the legitimate Queen and was provided with everything befitting her position including 155 servants.

However it was Carlos who now held the reins of power. By the time he was 19, this clumsy youth controlled the largest and most powerful empire since ancient Rome. It encompassed Castilla and Aragon (Spain), Naples and most of Southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, the Spanish Colonies in the Americas, part of France, the Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands), Austria, Hungary, Bohemia and sections of Germany. It was also around this time that a handful of tough *conquistadores* from the poorest areas of Spanish Extremadura, set out from Hispaniola (Cuba) and would within a decade or so, add most of South and Central America and the Philippines to the empire together with massive amounts of silver, gold and booty to the treasure chest of the new Spain. (More on the remarkable *conquistadores* in the next month's history article.)

It is impossible in just one page to give a detailed account of the reign of Carlos I of Spain, but I will attempt to trace the main events.

At the age of 19, Carlos I was elected to the title of Holy Roman Emperor - Emperor Charles V. Unfortunately war and conflict are part and parcel of having an empire, and during Carlos's forty-year reign, he spent only sixteen years in Spain because of an endless series of foreign conflicts, most against the French, who felt that they were surrounded by the Habsburgs and who also wanted territorial gain in Italy.

Within Iberia, many Spaniards initially resented their foreign king and the influx of foreigners, mostly Flemish, to important posts in Spain and the New World, while Castilians were ignored. (The Flemish courtiers came to be identified with anything flashy, and left their name with Spain's traditional music and dance, *flamenco*. Mark Williams) When Carlos tried to increase taxes, the Castilian nobility erupted in the Revolt of the Comuneros. This short but bloody civil war was crushed at the Battle of Villalar in 1521. In 1526 he married his first cousin, Isabella of Portugal, which helped endear him to the Spanish.

Although Holy Roman Emperor and self proclaimed 'defender of the faith,' his imperial troops went on a rampage and sacked Rome in 1527; Pope Clement VII being held as a virtual prisoner could not then annul the marriage of King Henry VIII of England to Charles's aunt, Catherine of Aragon. This would have serious consequences for Catholicism in England.

In what was to become Germany, Carlos's efforts to suppress the heresy of Protestantism was frustrated by the German princes, while in the Netherlands a revolt by the Frisian peasants was eventually quashed. However the Low Countries would continue to trouble the Spanish crown for centuries to come.

Although a lover of peace, Carlos did not shy from a fight. He once challenged the King of France to single combat, but unsurprisingly the French king refused. The Turk was the other great enemy of Spain and when the Ottoman Turks swept up the Balkans in 1529, thousands of Spanish troops helped repulse the invasion at the gates of Vienna.

For many years the Spanish Mediterranean coastline came under constant harassment from the Barbary pirates. They were led then by Barbarossa who now linked-up with the Ottoman Turks. Even today the Spanish coastline is still dotted with hilltop watchtowers, particularly in Andalucia, which were used to detect the arrival of the pirates. Torre Vieja - the old tower - has one of these and it is still visible near La Mata. The constant raiding forced the Spanish to move inland, which is why in our area the older towns of Orihuela, Elche and Crevillente are all inland.

In 1535 Carlos assembled a great expedition of 400 ships and 30,000 troops and attacked Tunis in North Africa. Barbarossa and the pirates fled and thousands of Christian slaves were freed from their shackles. A follow up assault on Algiers six years later was a failure with the Spanish loss of 150 ships and 12,000 men. This meant that the western Mediterranean remained under the threat of the Barbary pirates. It was not until the turn of the century that a permanent and draconian solution was found to the pirate problem.

In 1555, Carlos had enough. He abdicated his Spanish empire to his son Philip, and his brother Ferdinand held onto the dynastic Habsburg lands and became Holy Roman Emperor. Carlos, who suffered from epilepsy and crippling gout attacks, retired and lived alone in the secluded monastery of Juste in Extremadura, with his cat and a parrot for company. He lined all the walls with his huge collection of clocks and once remarked, 'How can I possibly have hoped to unite all my dominions when I cannot make these clocks strike the hour together?'

In 1558, shortly after attending a rehearsal of his own funeral, he died from malaria.

Other News Collection Plate

The Catholic Church's Conferencia Episcopal, has admitted that it gets 252 million € a year from the ticked box on the Spanish income tax returns, but claims that it invests far more than that in return. The Church says most of the funds go to pay the Social Security for the more than 20,000 priests it has across the country.

If the relevant box is ticked in your tax return it means that 0.7% of your income tax paid goes to the Catholic Church. Although some religions, such as Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Mormons, Buddhists and the Jehovah's Witnesses, already enjoy some tax breaks, Hindus and the Church of Scientology are not included yet. Now all the non-Catholic religions say that the 0.7% payment is discriminatory and unfair and that it favours the Catholic Church.

Dog Gone

A dog called Dexter, who went missing from Málaga last year, has now turned up in Barcelona, approx' 1,000 kilometres away. Nobody knows how the dog, who is chipped, got there. Unfortunately the couple who owned him in Málaga are in the process of separating and cannot decide whether to have him back or not. If they do not take him back they have just 20 days to pay over 600€ to facilitate his adoption or face a *denuncia* from the municipality in Barcelona.

One more on top?

A 63 year old woman from Gijón has been arrested by the Guardia Civil for travelling five kilometres with her 55 year old sister in law on the roof of the car. It happened in mid-June after the two women had an argument, with the younger woman jumping onto the car in an attempt to get the older woman to stop driving away. The matter was reported to the police who eventually stopped the car.

'I'm at the age where food has taken the place of sex in my life. In fact, I've just had a mirror put over the kitchen table'

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Some Norwegian Humour

Q: What is the difference between Swedes and Norwegians?

A: The Swedes have nice neighbours!

Ole and Lena were getting on in years. Ole was 92 and Lena was 89. One evening they were sitting on the porch in their rocking chairs. Ole reached over and patted Lena on her knee. "Lena, vat ever happened tew our sexual relations?" he asked. "Vell, Ole, I yust don't know," replied Lena. "I don't tink we even got a card from dem last Christmas."

Olaf & Sven were fishing one day when Sven pulled out a cigar finding he had no matches, he asked Olaf for a light. "Ya, shure, I tink I haff a lighter," he replied. Then reaching into his tackle box, he pulled out a Bic lighter 10 inches long. "Yiminy Cricket!" exclaimed Sven, taking the huge Bic lighter in his hands "Where dit yew git dat monster??" "Vell," replied Olaf, "I got it from my Genie." "You haff a genie in yor tackle box?" Sven asked. "Ya, shure It's right here in my tackle box," says Olaf. "Could I see him?"

So Olaf opens his tackle box & sure enough, out pops the genie. Addressing the genie, Sven says, "Hey dere! I'm a good friend of your master. Vill you **grant** me vun vish?"

"Yes, I will," says the genie.

So Sven asks the genie for a million bucks. The genie disappears back into the tackle box leaving Sven sitting there, **waiting** for his million bucks.

Shortly, the sky darkens & is filled with the sound of a million ducks... flying overhead.

Over the roar of the million ducks and Sven, covered in duck-shit, yells at Olaf. "Yumpin' Yimminy I asked for a million bucks, not a million ducks!"

Olaf answers, "Ya, I forgot to tell yew dat da genie is hart of hearing. Do yew really tink I asked for a 10-inch Bic?"

One morning Ole woke up to find Lena had died. Ole called the operator. "My wife Lena has died." he said. The operator said "Oh. I'm so sorry to hear that. We can send over an ambulance for her. Where do you live?" Ole replied "On Eucalyptus Street". The operator asked "Can you spell that for me?" Ole said "No. Why don't I just haul her down to Oak St?"

Ole was having eye trouble, so he went to see the optometrist. "Put this little gadget over your left eye, Ole," said the optometrist. "Now over the right eye, now the left eye. No, Ole, I said left eye. Now right . . . No Ole, your right eye!" Completely confused, Ole just looked at the optometrist. "Now, Ole," the optometrist continued, "just remember which is your left hand. OK, Ole, cover your right eye . . . No Ole, that's your left eye!"

Finally in exasperation, the optometrist took a brown paper bag, cut a hole in it, put it over Ole's head, and moved the hole back and forth from the left eye to the right eye. "Now, Ole," asked the optometrist, "How is that?"

"Vell, Doc, I guess it's all right," said Ole. "But I vas vishing I could have some wire rims like Sven."

In a terrorist outrage, 23 people have been found glued to the ceiling, walls and seats on a train in Dublin. Police now believe that Irish Muslims have set off the first 'No More Nails bomb.'

Out & About

The Mercadona which was at Punta Prima has now closed while a new larger store has opened in Los Balcones. The Eroski supermarket in Punta Prima is now a Consum one. One would wonder if the Consum **supermarket** in Los Altos will remain after the summer. I hope so. The Aldi's by Dream Hills 2 is now open but I have yet to see a crowd in there.

World Cup Mania has taken over the bars with flags of various nationalities, particularly Spanish and English in abundance. When I drifted (or meandered) into one of the bars in Via park V, there were so many people wearing white garments with a cross I thought I had drifted into a Klu Klux Klan meeting! But of course it was the *hinglish gringos*, as ever faithful and supportive to their overpaid and under-performing heroes. Now that England are out of the World Cup, it will be interesting to see if the people who were 'glued' to the England games will follow the remaining games.

Speaking of bars, while travelling down the hill towards Lago Jardin 2 - the pot-holes are back again by the way - , you might just notice what appears to be an illegal bar or *shebeen* on the right-hand side of the road, just before the dentists. It seems to be operated by the couple who had La Perla bar, which is now closed. It cannot be too long before the 'boys in green' pay them a visit.

The newest, and probably the largest bar in the Costa Blanca has just opened in the Los Dolses area. It is called **de Bassus**. You can't miss it as it has a ten food beer stein on the roof! This is a Bavarian beerkeller with lots of space inside and out, with long tables and waitresses in traditional Bavarian dress. The interior design is very striking, particularly the chandelier and the bar area. There is an open kitchen and micro-brewery, and although an awful lot of sausage, the food looked very good and reasonably priced. There is also a glassed-off play area for the ankle-biters.

The old Asturias restaurant has now reopened as a Chinese restaurant, the **Big Wok**. The interior of this very large restaurant has been gutted and it now boasts new ceilings and floors together with a good air-conditioning system. Most of these 'woks' offer much the same fare, although this is the only one I have seen frogs' legs on offer! We have been there three times for lunch, 9.80€ each plus drinks, and I have been a bit disappointed with the quantity of food on offer with each visit, particularly the starters. One lunchtime, the food was not out by 1.45pm! I used to recommend the Wok Gran Mundo in Pilar de Horadada, but now unfortunately it too has dropped its standards and it is just not worth the trip.

There have been many *ferias* or **fairs** in the general area during May and June. The one in Torreveja included a small medieval market - not a patch on the one earlier this year in Orihuela - but a big fiesta has been the **Fiesta San Juan**. Originally a pagan festival coinciding with the Summer solstice, this is the first fiesta of the summer and it is celebrated throughout Spain, the largest and best being held in Alicante. The Night of Saint John is also celebrated in Scandinavia, much of South America and the Philippines. Locally, Torreveja do it justice with special events, processions, bonfires (*hogueras*) on the beach and a big firework display at midnight on June 23/24. (As I write this I can hear the fireworks in Torreveja and our dog is hiding under my desk!) A number of large figures (*ninots*), mostly humorous, satirical and very creative, are specially made for the festival out of wood, paper maché, cardboard and polystyrene. But these lovely creations are then destroyed in the bonfires! In Alicante, the firework display is always impressive; this year, one of the fireworks released from the top of the fort overlooking the town, exploded into the shape of a giant palm tree over 400 metres wide! This year the firemen have asked that less cork and plastic products are used in future *ninots* as they raise too much black toxic smoke when they burn. There are many **traditions** associated with the festival, one being that if people jump three times over the same bonfire on the beach on San Juan's night, they will be cleansed and purified, and their problems burned away. This can be very dangerous and there are teams of Red Cross volunteers on hand for the inevitable accidents. People also write wishes on a piece of paper and throw them into the bonfire. A much safer tradition recommends placing three potatoes (peeled, un-peeled and half-peeled - the basic ingredients of an Irish mixed grill) underneath the bed before going to sleep. The next morning, one must pull out one potato (without looking) which will predict what the rest of the year has in store: the peeled potato signifies monetary problems; the one that is half-peeled means many ups and downs; and the un-peeled potato calls for great health and economic prosperity.

The Lost (or late!) Psalm

Gordon Brown is my Shepherd
 I shall not work
 He leadeth me beside the still factories
 He restoreth my faith
 in the Conservative Party
 Yea, though I wait for my dole
 I own the bank that refuses me.
 Brown has anointed my income with taxes
 My expenses runeth over my income.
 Surely poverty and hard living will follow me
 all the day's lived in a rented home with an
 overseas landlord.
 I am glad I am British, I am glad I am free,
 But I wish I were a dog
 And Brown was a tree.
 (B & K Allen)

First Grade

A group of young children were trying very hard to become accustomed to the first grade. The biggest hurdle they faced was that the teacher insisted on NO baby talk! "You need to use 'Big People' words," she was always reminding them. She asked Chris what he had done over the weekend. "I went to visit my Nana."
 "No, you went to visit your GRANDMOTHER. Use Big People' words!" She then asked Mitchell what he had done. I took a ride on a choo choo." She said "No, you took a ride on a TRAIN. You must remember to use 'Big People' words."
 She then asked little Alec what he had done. "I read a book," he replied. "That's wonderful!" the teacher said. "What book did you read?"
 Alec thought real hard about it, then puffed out his chest with great pride, and said, "Winnie the Shit."

Where do I invest?

One of the most important aspects of investing money is to understand the correlation between risk and reward. In theory at least, investments with a greater degree of risk, carry the potential for greater reward. The easiest analogy to explain this is fishing. If you fish from the quay you are only likely to catch small fry, but you are safe. If you went in a boat but stayed within the harbour walls you will probably catch slightly bigger fish. But it carries more risk to your safety. If you want to chase the big fish you need to leave the harbour walls and enter into more dangerous waters. Which option would you choose?

I bet, not even having met you, the middle option is your immediate inclination. That is human nature; the comfortable middle ground. The problem is, it's not very scientific is it?

That's why at Maypole Financial Services we have developed a model to evaluate your precise attitude to risk in relation to potential reward. By working closely together with detailed analysis tools we will, with you, find your precise comfort zone. This is represented quite simply as number between one and ten, with ten being the riskiest and most volatile. In my many years I have yet to meet anyone in either the nine or ten category. There's always a first time!

Once we've ascertained your 'risk profile' we can start to consider asset allocation. If your analysis came out to five for example this doesn't necessarily mean all your investments will be risk factor five. By using our model we are able to let clients have a small percentage of their assets in potentially higher return areas whilst keeping the whole portfolio within your chosen parameters.

Part of our service is that we will review your investments regularly and meet with you to ensure that you are still comfortable with your investment and also to rebalance.

Over time investment portfolio's become distorted as one area out grows another. This has the effect of moving the portfolio's balance away from your chosen level of risk. Regular reviews allow you to consolidate gains and move money into less volatile areas, thus preserving capital in turbulent times, such as those recently witnessed.

It is also important that your investments are as tax efficient as possible in order to maximise your gains. But, we do not let tax be the tail that wags the dog. After all, would you prefer 2% tax free or pay tax on 10%?

Finally, and I realise that I have spoken much about risk in this article, but one of the biggest risks is one that each and all of us is exposed to. Inflation risk! With your money in bank accounts typically receiving about 1% interest and inflation typically around 4% how much will your savings be worth in real terms in say five years? It isn't a pleasant thought and you should do something about it sooner rather than later!

The above relates to investments both small and large, so do not think that it's not for you.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Spanish National Police are asking people not to reveal on social networking sites such as Facebook when they are going on holiday.

If you own property in Dream Hills and have not already exchanged your old pool cards for the new one, you can now do so by going to the Administrator’s office, Inversiones Torrevieja, in Constitution Square in Torrevieja. You will need to bring your passport. If you want your neighbours to exchange your card, you will have to supply them with written authorisation or fax the administrators.

Diabetic?

If you have been diagnosed as a diabetic there is a very successful support group, which meets on the last Wednesday of every month at 11am at Hoggies Bar in San Luis. The support group is fully funded by the Help Association Vega Baja, so there are no fees.

This tends to be a large group and the support and advice is first class.

3 Lions or 11 donkeys?

England matches have been moved to a porn channel after the Algeria & German matches. The sight of 11 arseholes getting hammered for 90 minutes was far too explicit for ordinary television.

Fifa have released a statement saying the fan didn’t break into the dressing room after all, but was let in by goalkeeper Rob Green.

This World Cup is working out like WW2 - France has ‘done a runner’, the USA turned up late, and England were left to fight the Germans!

Capello asks Wayne Rooney, "Why is it that every time you get the ball you dribble it round Rio Ferdinand, Shawn Wright Phillips and Emile Heskey." Rooney replies, "Because, you told me to boss!"

"No, No," says Capello, "I told you to run round the cones."

Message to Agent Capello: Mission accomplished. Return to Scotland.

Mosquito & Insect Bites - Helpful Hints

The best mosquito repellents appear to have Deet in them. Boots Repel Extra Strength and Jungle Formula Extra Strength, both with 50% diethyltoluamide (Deet), are recommended as ‘best buys’ from the consumer organisation, *Which*. However, if you are not happy using products containing Deet, why not try the Avon product ‘Skin So Soft’ which is also well known as an insect repellent and you can also get a product from the Spanish pharmacy called ‘Halley,’ which is popular with the Spanish and very effective. There are of course many other products available.

If you have been bitten very badly go to the hospital or clinic in case there are complications. However if you want relief from the odd inflamed bite, there are plenty of remedies available at the pharmacy. Also, if you break up part of an aspirin, mix some water with it and apply to the bitten area, it will provide some relief. You can also buy a tube of Fenegan, a phenothiazine and anti-histamine, from the chemist for four or five euro but one of my favourites is a mechanical device called Aspivenin. This is a precision-made mini-pump which creates a controlled and sustained vacuum over the bite to draw out the poison from bites and stings. The device, which I have used successfully a couple of times during the last few weeks, costs just £16stg including postage. You can find out more at www.flairpath.com

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