

THE DREAM SCENE

NEWSLETTER



Helping to keep expat's informed.....and smiling.

Issue no. 83 1st of January 2014.



Bienvenido a todos and welcome to the January edition.

This autumn in Spain has been the driest since 1981. Apart from one very cold week, the temperatures have been generally pleasant. A high temperature of 35.6° was recorded on October 1 in Carcaixent, Valencia. There was some heavy rainfall in December which greatly benefited the broccoli, citrus and artichoke crops, but more rainfall is needed. Locally, there are fields and fields of artichokes, the harvest each year surpassing the previous one, but who the hell eats this vegetable? You rarely see it on your plate in a Spanish restaurant and never in an English one. When it does appear in your food, it is usually inedible!

At this time of year, Europeans normally flock to the Canaries to escape the harsher weather in their own countries. But this year they have been having a dreadful time in the Canaries due to heavy storms with very high winds and severe flooding. Thousands of islanders have been left without power; dozens of roads have been cut off due to flooding; winds have reached up to 180km/hour and a total of 3,922 lightning-bolts struck the archipelago during a single morning in early December. Several thousand home were left without electricity for several days and in some parts of Tenerife that up to 60 litres per square metre have fallen in a single hour.



The dramatic photos here, which were posted by residents on Twitter, gives an indication of the extent of the flooding. You can see additional photos and more details here - <http://www.thelocal.es/20131211/in-pictures-wind-storm-canaries-flooded-and-in-the-dark>

Well done to all those who went to the trouble of putting-up seasonal external decorations. Many of them look marvellous and are incredibly intricate. To those who didn't bother - 'Bah! Humbug!'

December 28 was the Day of the Innocents. This is the Spanish equivalent of All Fools' Day. Sometimes the pranks get 'out of hand' the police report. False bomb alerts are common and on at least one occasion, flowers and stickers were impregnated with L.S.D.!

Belushi's Bar & Restaurant will be re-opening on February 1st in Via Park V.

Many thanks to Yvonne & Harold for their very generous donation towards costs.

And remember a pub is not just for Christmas! We hope we will see you all soon.

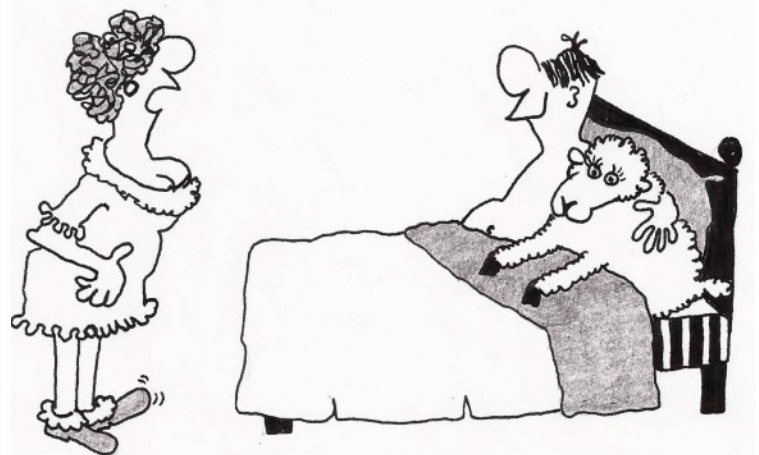
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Did you know that

...a new ferry service between Rosslare in Ireland and Gilón, Asturias, (in the north of Spain) is due to launch in January 2014. It will be a weekly service offered by LD Lines and fares start from €579 for a car and two passengers including cabin. See <http://ldlines.co.uk/> A new service from Rosslare to St Nazaire in France plus a Gijón → Pool Dorset, service will also commence in January 2014.

...a new scandal involving horsemeat has emerged in both France and Spain. It seems that hundreds of horses, including some that have been used for research purposes by the French medical giant Sanofi, have been given false veterinary papers and sold-on to abattoirs in the south of France and Northern Spain. The police in both countries have arrested 21 suspects.

...violence to women continues at a shocking level in Spain - not that any level is acceptable. In 2012 a total of 11,955 female victims of gender violence, mostly between the ages of 20 and 29, were detected by health services. 714 of the battered women were pregnant. Between 62 and 65% of the victims were Spanish, the majority of the remainder coming from countries in Latin America - Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Colombia - and those of Romania and Morocco. As disturbing as these figures are, what surely makes them worse is that these are just the cases which get to the health authorities. How many women with black eyes and split lips never get to the *salud* and make the statistics?

...you can find the cheapest petrol or diesel in your area, by going to the following web-sit - <http://preciodegasolina.es/gasolineras/provincia-alicante> The link also allows you to research historic prices at many stations for the previous seven days.



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The new houses and apartments being built in Spain appear to be getting smaller and smaller. Some friends of mine bought a new house opposite Zenia Boulevard. The rooms were so small they had to clean the windows with Optrex.

An electricity price rise of between 11 and 13% was scheduled by the supply companies following a wholesale auction in mid-December. The price at auction was atypical and very, very dubious, possibly manipulated. Consequently, the proposed price increase was annulled by the government and the rise in electricity cost for the first quarter of 2014 will now be 2.3%. The fact that electricity prices at auction can be 'manipulated' by the large providers is scarcely reassuring to the consumer. The tariff deficit which the present government inherited from the previous Socialist government was €26 billion. The present regime have failed to address the issue in a proper manner and we can all look forward to a number of years of steeply increasing electricity prices. The price has increased by 10% during the last 10 months and by 70% since 2006.

Spain's political future is looking increasingly fragmented. A projection of what Congress (parliament) might look like after the next election, based on figures from June to the present, indicate an overall collapse of the current two-party hegemony, forcing groups to achieve multilateral agreements to pass legislation on a bill-by-bill basis. Spain's political history during its democratic periods have been bedevilled by coalition governments. The absence of strong governments has allowed regions such as Basque and Catalonia to negotiate and chivy away various controls from Madrid to their own regions .

PM Mariano Rajoy announced that the Government's planned Bank Deposit Tax is to be approved in 2014, as a state tax to be allocated to the regional Governments. The Prime Minister confirmed that the levy will be imposed on the global bank deposit totals, rather than on individual customer assets, thereby – in theory – affecting banking institutions and not bank customers. Spain's Finance Minister Montoro has previously indicated that the tax might be levied at a rate varying between 0.03% & 0.05%, but no decisions have been made on the actual rate yet. The question is whether the banks will absorb the levy or pass it on? Deposit interest rates are so low anyway, it would be ridiculous. The banks will probably make up for the loss by increasing their fee based products. So keep a sharp eye out for their 'sharp practices'!

There has been a rash of senior executive resignations and dismissals from Spain's Tax Agency, the AEAT. These have followed on the heels of the agency's controversial handling of various issues, such as Princess Cristina's ID mix-up, the Néos case involving her husband Iñaki Urdangarin (the 'Dodgy' Duke), the fiscal amnesty for former Popular Party (PP) treasurer Luis Bárcenas and the appeal of a multi-million-euro fine by cement giant Cemex. In the latter case, an inspector was dismissed after she refused to allow an appeal from Cemex against a fine of €450 million. The Minister of Finance and Public Administration, Cristobal Montoro, stated that the "mess" of resignations in the Tax Agency has helped him to learn something you did not know, that he was "riddled with PSOE (socialist party) people in positions of responsibility." Montoro denies that there has been a political purge of the senior executives. To date, ten senior people have gone and more are expected.

Companies in Spain are earning more but paying less tax. Up to September, company profits had increased by 18% while the income from company tax was down by 8.4%.

The Spanish government continues to make cutbacks to the healthcare system. Even though the Ministry of Health and its leader Ana Mato assure that "all adjustments have been made already," the Healthcare team from el Economista (<http://www.economista.es/>) has discovered that the government is preparing a new law concerning drug prices that will attempt to save another 500 million euros next year. These cutbacks will reduce national subsidies for prescription drugs and add more stringent requirements to the approval process that new pharmacies have to go through in order to do business.

More than 131,000 families in the province of Alicante are unable to pay their electricity, gas or water bills.

The so-called EuroVegas planned for Madrid will now no longer be going ahead. The Las Vegas Sands CEO Sheldon Adelson has been trying to get the government to jump through various hoops before he would agree to a €2 billion investment. These not only included guarantees of compensation in the event of future legislative changes but also removal of smoking legislation, lower gambling taxes, changes to labour & employment laws and easing of controls on certain 'sexual' activities. The government finally refused to amend the legislation and Adelson walked away. 80-year-old Edelson is as sharp as a razor and I always felt that he was just 'testing the water' here in Spain. Outside of Vegas, I would think he sees the real expansion in the static gambling business - as distinct from online - in Asia, where he already has a couple of very successful ventures in China and Singapore. In the Chinese casino project in Macau, Adelson recouped his initial \$265 million investment in just one year and since this particular casino opened in 2004, he has multiplied his personal wealth by a factor of 14! The loss of EuroVegas is another bitter blow to Madrid just after losing their bid for the Olympics. Visitors to the region continue to decrease and the city is in real need of a public relations and image boost. A recent two-week strike by the rubbish collectors did not help matters.

There is possibly a tiny ray of sunshine coming from the proposed Paramount Theme Park project. Because of the lack of investors, the developers of the park, Premursa, has hired the services of a private consulting firm to raise the necessary funds to complete the project. This is now believed to be a figure of €450. Paramount originally only planned to contribute intellectual property (branding) to the project. They are now, tentatively, prepared to invest around €10 million. Now this is a trifling amount to Paramount, however this may now encourage other investors who have been notably absent to date.

Corvera Airport will not see the arrival of any aircraft for at least another 12 months, however neighbouring San Javier Airport will continue to operate while it can. This news became apparent following the IATA bi-annual conference in Fort Worth, Texas, last month, to distribute air corridors and approaches to over 300 airports. Last month's gathering saw air corridors being approved for Murcia's San Javier airport until October 2014. As such the region's smaller and older facility is the only one recognised and approved by the IATA, leaving Corvera flightless until November 2014 at the very earliest. The next meeting of the IATA in June 2014 will then review the allocation of airspace for the November 2014 to March 2015 period.

Two major investment funds linked to Deutsche Bank and BNP respectively, are taking Spain to the World Bank's arbitration agency, the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). Both funds claim that government subsidy cuts will significantly damage their renewable energy business, and constitute an unfair retroactive change to the rules of the game. At stake are millions of euros in income that was once guaranteed as a way to encourage renewable energy projects in Spain. But the economic crisis has pushed the government to try to save money in an industry where capacity is now significantly in excess of official targets, following a boom in solar energy plant construction toward the end of the last decade.

Banks will no longer be allowed to write-off debts of the political parties. The Spanish cabinet has approved a whole range of anti-corruption measures designed to introduce greater transparency. The new laws will address a number of issues such as party funding, rules for elected officials, and the criminal prosecution of corruption.

4 What's Up? continued

Police at bus and rail stations now regularly check luggage to prevent drug trafficking. A specially trained police dog is usually used to 'sniff-out' suspicious packages and suitcases. One recent arrest was made on a bus which was scheduled to travel from Barcelona to Malaga. Two men, 31 & 48, were arrested in Alicante bus station.

The scandals involving the giant UGT union in Andalucia continues to grow. It seems that between January and June this year, around 1,756 files have been deleted without authorisation at the administrative headquarters of the union. It is believed that some of these missing files may relate to an incident where the union bought around a 1,000 designer briefcases/bags for delegates at a union/labour conference. It seems however that these briefcases were not the designer items but 'knock-ups' manufactured and supplied from China. And how much did the union spend on these fakes? €8,000!! The union says they will look into the matter and report any irregularities to the police. Of course they will! The Junta de Andalucía is now investigating €7.5 million it gave to the UGT union. It seems that the UGT falsified any invoices it could - even faking the invoices for the bread rolls for the pickets, according to El Mundo.

A flood of job seekers crashed IKEA's Spanish servers twice this week after some 20,000 people applied for just 400 positions at the Swedish furniture makers' new store in Valencia, Spain. Almost a third of all unemployed in the 17-country euro zone area reside in Spain, and while the government said November's registered jobless figures showed an improvement, net job creation is not expected until next year. Applications for positions at the new store, due to open in 2014 in Alfafar, a small town outside the city of Valencia, collapsed the company's servers within hours on Nov' 4 prompting IKEA to install a backup, which also failed.

Barcelona wants to set limits on the "proliferation" of cannabis clubs, places where members purchase and consume marijuana. Although there are no official figures, municipal authorities have counted around 200 such premises, most of which are located in the city center. Just two years ago, there were only 40 cannabis clubs in the entire Catalan region. Now, officials plan to look a little deeper into these associations: first, to see whether they were legally set up; and second, to check what their stated goals are. Preliminary investigations suggest that in most cases, the clubs claim to make a therapeutic use of the drug. If this is not the case, the city will temporarily seal them off. (I think I may just head up the road now for a therapeutic vodka!)

The state prosecutor is asking for a six-year jail term for four directors of Terra Mitica, the troubled amusement park near Benidorm. The accused directors are Luis Esteban, president of Terra Mitica, Miguel Navarro, former general manager of the park; Antonio Rincón, former technical director, and Justo Valverde, the former head of recruitment. The charges relate to business fraud, forgery, invoices being paid for non-existent work and tax fraud. The Esquerra Unida party in Benidorm state that 'the construction of Terra Mitica was simply an operation for illicit enrichment companies also were close to PP and Zaplana (the former mayor of Benidorm) circles, and not for the promotion of tourism in Benidorm, which was just an excuse for the development.'

Spanish police carried out a 14-hour search of the Popular Party's (PP) main headquarters in Madrid as part of the High Court's ongoing corruption investigation into the ruling party's finances. The search was ordered by High Court Judge Pablo Ruz who issued a 15-page writ identifying a dozen reasons why he believed that the PP wasn't cooperating fully with the investigation into under-the-table money that may have ended up in the party's coffers.

The Gibraltar authorities are stepping up their actions against cigarette smuggling, obviously in an attempt to placate some of the Spanish concerns. Cigarettes are up by 10p a pack, border fences are being repaired and the police/customs-officer presence has been boosted in certain vulnerable areas.

Two policemen who worked as bodyguards for ex-foreign minister Abel Matutes were remanded in custody to prevent them from escaping and avoiding trial over the theft of 2.7 million euros from Matutes' safe. Both men were hired by Matutes to work for his business after he left the Popular Party government in 2000. They have confessed to forcing open the safe from the ex-minister's hotel business headquarters. At first, the company only reported a theft of less than 200,000 euros, but later admitted that the amount was greater. To date, only 1.7 million euros has been recovered. Seems an incredible amount of cash to keep in a safe. The fact that only a loss of €200,000 was reported initially must surely raise some questions. Large amounts of cash are kept for 'pay-offs' or to dodge tax surely. It also begs the question: Where did Matutes get so much tax from? Few people pay cash for their hotel bills.

252 people have been arrested in the Valencian Community in relation to a scam which created fictitious companies and defrauded €8.8 million from the public coffers. According to the Ministry of Employment, the fraud consisted of a network of fictitious companies which gained improper access to unemployment benefits and fraudulently obtained work authorizations in Spain for foreign workers. The General Treasury of Social Security was duped to the tune of €4.6 million and the State Public Employment service for €1.2 million. This appears to be a repeating criminal activity in Spain. Some months ago we reported on a similar but smaller scam which took place in Orihuela.

Jose María del Nido, president of Sevilla football club, has been sentenced to seven years in prison for embezzlement and perverting the course of justice. Del Nido was accused of charging the local authority in Marbella millions of euros for work that was either unnecessary or never even carried out between 1999 and 2003. A lawyer by trade, Del Nido has been in charge of the Andalusian club since 2002 and oversaw one of the most successful spells in its history as it won back-to-back UEFA Cups in 2006 and 2007.

Díaz Ferrán, a regular in these columns and former head of the Spanish Employers Association, has been given a jail sentence of two years and two months together with a whopping fine of more than €9 million! The ex-chairman of Aerolíneas Argentinas, Antonio Mata, was also included in the judgement. The offences involved the doctoring of asset values in an airline in order to reduce taxation. Ferrán remains in protective custody and he has several other charges pending.

For the first time since the year 2000, Terra Mitica has turned in an operating profit, €1.59 million. The Aqualandia Group, who took ownership of the leisure complex two years ago, introduced a number of cost-cutting exercises, including trimming the workforce, which has made it a tighter and more manageable business. They have now a major expansion plan which will add three themed hotels to the complex which they hope will attract more family holiday-makers.

The One-Wish Genie.

Harry and Tom are adrift in a lifeboat. Harry finds a lamp floating by and, giving it the customary rub, is not surprised when a genie appears. The genie apologises to Harry and Tom and says that, due to cutbacks, it can only grant one wish. Harry doesn't think, he just knows he is parched so he blurts out, 'Turn the entire ocean into beer!' The genie claps his hands and the salt water changes to beer as the genie vanishes. There is a long pause as Harry and Tom take all this in. Tom then looks at Harry in disgust and says, 'Well, isn't that great! Now we're going to have to piss in the bloody boat!'

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A Jewish child molester: 'Hey, kid.....wanna buy some candy?'
Jackie Martling

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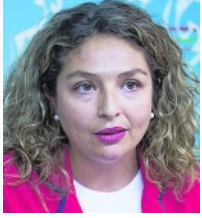
NEWSPAPERS
DAILY



A builder's estimate is a sum of money equal to half the final cost.

Neil Collins

As we go to print, it now seems highly likely that the ruling bipartite Orihuela Town Council of the Socialists and the Greens, will be ousted by another bipartite, this time the PP and Clr. Politics of course make strange bedfellows but it would have been unthinkable that these two would get together a year or so ago; but the effective removal of ex-Mayoress Monica Lorente from the helm of the local Partido Popular



facilitated the new arrangement. If and when the new council sits, Pedro Mancebo (photo above -Teleorihuela) of the Clr (Centro Liberal Renovador) will have a number of responsibilities which will include the Coastal area & beaches, together with that 'hot-potato' - the collection and disposal of rubbish. The new mayoress will probably be Pepa Ferrando of the PP(photo La Verdad) if it all goes through. However, objections have been lodged to the proposed arrangement by two individual councillors who had previously been expelled from the Clr/CLARO alliance. Nobody knows yet whether their objections carry any weight, although it does seem that the brief 'love affair' between the PP and CLARO has now been terminated. The outcome of the objections may mean yet another court hearing and judicial ruling. Some would say that local politics here is 'dynamic.' I would now say 'convoluted.'

It seems that Orihuela Town Hall have delayed expropriation payments due to individuals and companies for the land taken for the widening of the N332. The total amount now owing is €1.3 million of which almost half a million euros is now overdue. As no provision has been made in the town hall budgets for the expenditure from 2011 to 2014, the courts have now ordered the Mayor, Monserrate Guillén, to pay €400 a month out of his own salary until the appropriate payments have been made. But, as he may be unceremoniously kicked-out of office shortly, that payment will probably not follow him.

The present Councillor for the Coast, Martina Scheurer, has reported that 22 of the large rubbish containers on the coastal area have been burned or stolen during the last 11 months. I have noticed that two in the Los Altos area were burned to the ground a few weeks ago. These arson attacks are a major problem in Alicante. Let's hope it does not become one here.

A library/reading point has now been established in Orihuela Costa. It is located on the Calle el Ciprés near the Aldi supermarket in the La Cuerda urbanisation. At present it is staffed by volunteers and is only open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 14:00 - 19:00 and is closed during the school holidays. (I tried to find it but couldn't!)

A pensioner in Torrevieja has been threatened with legal action by Gas Natural Fenosa for not paying his bill. The man went to his local post office to pay the bill and amused officials there accepted his cash payment for the outstanding bill.... which was one cent!

Eight illegal immigrants, all men, were rescued 20 miles off the coast of Cabo Roig in early December. The men travelled from North Africa in a tiny dingy. This is the first time in over a year that illegals have tried to come ashore off the coastline of the Alicante province, which is not as accessible as other areas.

It is with great sadness that I report that the popular 'Mags' Johnston, passed away on Christmas Day after a long illness. The funeral service was held on Monday, December 30th.

The thoughtful Scottish husband.

Hamish was putting his coat and hat on to make his way down to the local pub. He turned to his wee wife before leaving and said, 'Maggie - put your hat and coat on, lassie.'

She replied, 'Awe Jock that 's nice - are you taking me tae the pub with you?'

'Nay,' Jock replied 'I'm switching the heating off while I'm oot.'

Pete Dudman

The Gynaecology Department in Torrevieja Hospital have recently released details of an operation they performed a year ago. During this procedure they removed a 25-kilo, 41 cm, benign ovarian tumour (See photo-Infoamacion) from a 47-year-old woman. After five days in hospital and a twenty-day rest period, the woman, who is from Los Montesinos, recovered completely and there is no sign of a tumour recurrence. The lady in question, Maria Angeles (photo,El Mundo), normally of a very slim build, first noticed a lump in 2009. However her 'fear of doctors' kept her from visiting the local *salud* or calling a doctor, while the tumour continued to grow. Finally, five years later, as she was suffering recurring digestion and intestinal problems, a friend persuaded her to go to her local doctor, who referred her to the hospital. The operation took place on December 28,



2012, details only now being released.

Ryanair, the low-cost airline, has halved its excess baggage fee in the latest attempt to improve its image. They have reduced the penalty from £20 per kilo to £10 per kilo calling it "an early Christmas present" for its passengers. The change will bring it in line with rivals such as EasyJet, which charges up to £11 per kilo for excess baggage, Bmi regional, which charges £10, and Wizz Air, which charges £9. Several airlines, including Jet2.com, Flybe and Thomson, charge considerably more. They have also introduced a 24-hour post-booking "grace" period, during which passengers can correct minor errors such as spelling mistakes free of charge. See more on page 16.

Passengers at Alicante-Elche airport for the period January to November this year, (9,142,226 in total and up 15% on the same period last year) exceeded the total annual tourist traffic to the airport for 2012. November this year was, a particularly busy month, with more than 592,000 passengers, up almost 9% on the same month last year. I wonder why? Passenger traffic from the UK in November was 266,704, followed by Spain with 77,876, 46,653 from Germany, Norway and the Netherlands - 38,105 & 37,671 respectively. Countries with the most flights during the month of November were the UK with 1,809 flights, Spain with 728, Germany 349, Netherlands and Norway with 289 & 258.



Dutch Courage?

An air plane flies into turbulent weather and starts bucking around like a boat in a storm. To try and keep the passengers' minds off the disturbance a stewardess wheels out the drinks trolley. 'Would you like a drink?' says the stewardess to one of the passengers.

'Yes, please,' says the passenger. 'I'll have whatever the pilot's having.'



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LIME BAR GOLF SOCIETY, LOS ALTOS, ORIHUELA COSTA

The golf societies venue for the 11th December 2013 was held at the Mar Minor Golf Course.

On a cool and overcast day twenty plus members teed off and with the course in good condition, some interesting golf was played and enjoyed.

The competition was in the Stapleford format and the scores recorded are as follows:

Nearest the Pin on the 2nd Hole (par 3) was Don Martin.

Nearest the Pin on the 8th hole in 2, silver class only, (par 3) was Colin Capper.

Nearest the pin on the 12th hole in 2 (par 4) was Brian Archer.

Nearest the pin on the 17th hole (par 3) was Mick Slater.

Silver Class 3rd place was Alan Hewitt with a score of 28 points.

Silver Class 2nd place was Brian Archer with a score of 29 points.

Silver Class 1st place was Chris Rowlands with a score of 32 points.

Gold Class 3rd place was Mick Slater with a score of 31 points.

Gold Class 2nd place was Digger with a score of 32 points.

Gold Class 1st place was Pat Heaney with a score of 32 points (on count-back).



A very good day in pleasant company; thank you to Captain Mick Slater for organising the event and mentioning Mick's wife Angie who helps considerably behind the scenes. Also thanks to the Staff at The Lime Bar and ladies for a most enjoyable meal. Anyone wishing join our friendly society just needs to phone Mick on 659866468.

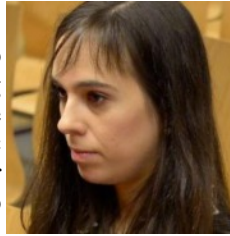
Young people nowadays moan about having to work long hours for a pittance, but they don't know the half of it. When I worked on the railways in the early 1940s, I put in 18 hours every day and got paid nothing. And I never complained once.

Mind you, if I had, the Jap's would have shot me.

What the Papers Say.

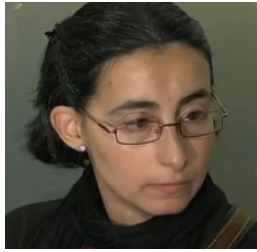
Don't shoot the piano player!

A Spanish court has acquitted a pianist who was facing seven years in prison of causing psychological damage and noise pollution. The trial attracted worldwide attention after public prosecutors demanded a custodial sentence for Laia Martin, (photo right) 28, over her piano playing.



Martin's neighbour, Sonia Bonsom, complained she suffered anxiety from hearing eight-hour practice sessions, five days a week, between 2003 and 2007. At the time, Martin was a music student in the Spanish town of Puigcerdà. She is now a professional pianist.

Bonsom (photo left) told the court that Martin's practice schedule disrupted her sleep patterns and led her to develop serious anxiety issues. "This has caused me a great deal of stress," she told the court. "There was even a moment when I couldn't move my arm because of anxiety." She claimed she and her family had moved house to escape the noise. Prosecutors eventually reduced their demand for jail time from seven years to 20 months. They asked to have Martin banned from any profession involving a piano for four years and for her to pay more than €20,000 (£16,700) in fines and damages. They also sought jail time for Martin's parents, who were named as accessories. (Obviously the prosecutors were left over from the Spanish Inquisition.)



According to the recent written ruling issued, the court in north-east Spain cleared Martin and her parents of both charges. The court said there was no evidence that the piano playing was the direct cause of Bonsom's problems, and found her claims to be unreliable and exaggerated. Noting that the family had taken measures to soundproof the room in the rental apartment where Martin practised, the judge also expressed disapproval that the case had gone as far as it had. Bonsom told the court she now hates pianos so much she cannot even stand to see them in films.

(Guardian)

Spain drops 10 places in Transparency International 2013 corruption index.

Spain fell 10 places on an annual global corruption ranking for 2013, published Tuesday by Transparency International. The country's slump to 40th on TI's Corruption Perceptions Index was based on a series of scandals enveloping the royal family, the governing Popular Party and the main opposition Socialists. Only Syria, in the throes of a vicious civil war, fell further than Spain, which lost the same amount of ground as Gambia, Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Libya.

"What the economic crisis has done is allow more public debate about corruption [...] It is being exposed more and that affects perceptions. In Spain every sector -- politics, the royal family and companies -- was implicated in graft at a time when the country is really suffering," said Anne Koch, TI's director for Europe and Central Asia.

The Luis Bárcenas affair, which suggests the former PP treasurer ran a parallel accounting system and made paid cash payments to party officials, and the investigation into the business affairs of King Juan Carlos's son-in-law, Iñaki Urdangarin, are two of the more high-profile cases to have made headlines this year, but there have been many more. Such has been the public outcry over the lack of accountability in the political sphere that lawmakers drew up the country's first freedom of information law in 2013.

"The problem in Spain is the political reaction," said Fernando Jiménez, a lecturer in political sciences at the University of Murcia. "Very few people resign here."

Denmark and New Zealand topped the 2013 list, as they did last year. Somalia, North Korea and Afghanistan shared the bottom spot for a second year running. The USA was ranked 18th while Russia improved slightly from 133rd to 127th and Greece remained the EU country with the highest perceived corruption levels, in 80th place.

(El Pais)

Top football clubs to be investigated.

Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel García-Margallo has announced that the European competition authorities are to open an investigation into seven La Liga clubs for receiving illegal public funding. The teams in question are Barcelona, Real Madrid, Osasuna, Athletic Bilbao, Valencia, Elche and Hércules.

Not all of the clubs are being investigated for the same reason. Real, Barcelona, Athletic and Osasuna are to be probed for not complying with European legislation for not becoming public limited sports companies, which promotes transparency and compliance. In the cases of Valencia, Elche and Hércules, Brussels will analyse the deals struck by the clubs with the regional government of Valencia, which 'lent' them a combined total of 118 million euros in favourable conditions, of which only 18 million has been returned. Certain inconsistencies relating to training grounds and stadiums will also be investigated.

(Reuters & others)

Tragedy.

A former Valencian policeman who had stabbed a Bankia director who had sold his parents €370,000 worth of useless preference shares in the failed bank, has died in prison reportedly from suicide. The policeman was arrested in May 2013. (Informacion)

Clever Dog!

A farmer is wondering how many sheep he has in his field, so he asks his sheepdog to count them. The dog runs into the field, counts them, and then runs back to his master. 'So,' says the farmer, 'how many sheep are there?' 'Forty,' replies the dog. 'How can there be forty?' exclaims the farmer. 'I only bought thirty-eight!' 'I know,' says the dog, but I rounded them up for you.'

China launches economy smartphone in Spain.

Chinese mobile phone handset manufacturer Doogee has announced the Spanish launch of its range of Android smartphones, all of which are unlocked and come with a 2-year guarantee.

The company's basic handset, the Doogee Collo DG100, starts at just €99 and comes with a dual SIM, 4-inch display, dual-core 1.3 GHz processor, 512 MB RAM, 4 GB storage and 5-megapixel camera.

The next model in the price range, the Doogee Hotwind DG200, costs €125 and comes with a 4.7-inch display and an 8-megapixel camera.

Meanwhile, at the top of the range the while the €175 Doogee Discovery DG500 has a 5-inch display, quad-core 1.5 GHz processor, 2 GB RAM, 32 GB storage, 16-megapixel camera and 3,500 mAh battery.

Earlier this month it was revealed how Blackberry and Apple's i-Phone range of smartphones each held less than 5% of the market share in Spain. (Telecompaper)

The Will.

Moshe has died. His solicitor is standing before the family and reads out Moshe's last Will & Testament: 'To my dear wife Sadie, I leave the house, fifty acres of land, and £1 million. To my daughter Suzy, I leave my yacht and £250,000. To my son Barry, I leave my big Lexus and £250,000. And to my brother-in-law Jeff, who always insisted that health is better than wealth, I leave my sun lamp.'

CHAOS AT THE NATIONAL PARKS AGENCY.

The Spanish National Parks Agency owns an endless list of estates, mountain huts, visitor centres, offices, workshops, warehouses, bars and recreation areas. It is similar in some ways to the National Trust in the U.K.



Its 140 employees oversee a network of 15 national parks, besides managing the regional parks of Cabañeros (photo-Wiki) in the Montes de Toledo and Tablas de Daimiel on the La Mancha plain.

Last year, the audit section of the State Public

Accounts Department warned the Parks Agency about the accounting chaos which reigned within the agency. Then the agency was forced to restate its accounts and write down €4 million in assets. But this year things seem to have deteriorated further. The auditors have now detected accounting irregularities and are refusing to issue an assessment of its 2012 accounts until it gets satisfactory explanations.

It seems that up to 87% of assets held by the National Parks Agency, worth an estimated €247 million, "have not been identified, and a lack of internal oversight makes it impossible to check whether those assets really exist or what conditions they are in, all of which hampers efforts at evaluating their impact on the accounts for the 2012 fiscal year," state the auditors. The auditors also criticized the fact that "there is no inventory as such" of existing estates, infrastructure and other assets, nor is there an independent department to keep tabs on this list. The auditors also found that the agency's publications department does not monitor the takings from the books and guides that it sells. Nor has the agency accounted for the handover of some of its assets to the various regional governments!

What are the odds that the police are straining at the leash to have a look at this shambles? Where there are no controls there is bound to be chicanery. In a remarkable communication, the Agriculture and Environment Ministry said that there are "no irregularities" and that it is working on an inventory of assets "that should have been available 10 years ago." But the real scandal and shame here is that many of Spain's beautiful environmental assets are not being managed at all. The National Parks Agency director, Basilio Rada (who is now being driven around in an unauthorised chauffeur-driven car), has been in the job for several years. What is remarkable is that he is still in the job, but then again it was a political appointment.

I've killed so many plants. I walked into a nursery once and my face was on a wanted poster. Rita Rudner

The Benefits of Rye.

Two old guys, one 70 and one 75, were sitting on a park bench one morning. The 75-year-old had just finished his morning jog and wasn't even short of breath. The 70-year-old was amazed at the guy's stamina and asked him what he did to have so much energy.

The 75-year-old said, "Well, I eat rye bread every day. It keeps your energy level high and you'll have great stamina with the ladies!"

So, on the way home the 70-year-old stopped at the bakery. As he was looking around, the saleslady asked if he needed any help. He said, "Do you have any rye bread?"

She said, "Yes, there's a whole shelf of it. Would you like some?"

He said, "I want five loaves."

She said, "My goodness, five loaves! By the time you get to the 3rd loaf, it'll be hard."

He replied, "I can't believe everybody knows about this *shit* but me!"

Pete Dudman

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CUT-OUT AND PRESENT WITH ORDER.**

Pedro was the world's only one-fingered pickpocket.
He didn't make a very good living, though; all he could steal was Polo mints.



After Switzerland, Spain is the most mountainous country in Europe. Its most distinctive geographical features are its mountains, where the scenery is majestic, dramatic and utterly beautiful. Unfortunately many expat's view Spain as just the area from their property to the Med', ignoring the beauty that stretches from the Pyrenees mountain range which borders France, to the Sierra Nevada on the south coast. But if you enjoy walking, there are a whole battery of easily available resources which can help you get out and enjoy the natural beauty of this country's stunning and often awe-inspiring scenery.

Dave Jones, a reporter for the Costa Blanca News, is also an enthusiastic hill walker. On occasions, the newspaper has included a pull-out section written by Dave, which details various hill walks grading them by difficulty and providing detailed routes. Many of these walks are suitable for all ages and groups are often organised to do them together.

There are a number of web-sites which provide first-class information on hill-walking, not just on the Costa Blanca but throughout Spain as well.

The first is <http://cbmwalkers.org/> This is a good start for the prospective or even experienced hill-walker with an interest in walking in the CB area. It also lists a detailed set of 'conventions' or recommendations, which is essential reading and will help ensure that your entry into this rewarding pastime is not your final one!

There is also <http://www.spanishtrailsco.com/index.php> Once again this is an informative site with lots of helpful information. These are not organised walks, but you can purchase a number of hill-walk details & routes throughout Spain. There are also 'free walks' which are downloadable.

Drunk as a skunk!

- A drunk guy was driving the wrong way down a one-way street. A cop pulled him over and said: 'Didn't you see the arrows?' 'Arrows?' slurred the drunk. 'I didn't even see the fuc*ing Indians!'
- A woman drove me to drink and i never had the courtesy to thank her. W.C. Fields
- A drunk staggered into a Catholic church and ended up in the confession booth. After a few moments, the priest said: 'What do you need my son?'
The drunk asked: 'Is there any paper on your side?'
- They're trying to put warning labels on liquor saying, 'Caution, alcohol can be dangerous to pregnant women.' That's ironic. If it weren't for alcohol, most women wouldn't even be that way. Rita Rudner
- One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor. Buddy Shirt



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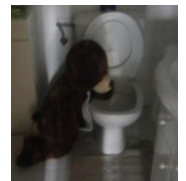
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NAME THE BEAR!

This bear is in urgent need of a name and a new home. He has been spending far too much time in the local bars and has been caught gambling and watching 'bear-porn' on-line. This bear needs a good home and lots of love. Hopefully his new owner will also encourage him to pay for his own drinks!

That Bear Again!

The bear walked into a bar and says to the bartender, 'I'll have a whiskey andsoda.'
The bartender said, 'Why the big pause?'
'I dunno,' said the bear. 'I've always had them.'

NON!

Some of you may be old enough to remember when De Gaulle blocked Britain's first attempt to join the EEC. Now of course we have Scotland and Catalonia, both lobbying very heavily for independence. However, the European Union has made it clear on many occasions that if Catalonia, or Scotland, decide to become independent, they will be excluded from the collective and will have to negotiate their re-entry with the 28 member states, all of which have a vote. Now, NATO states that the same will apply to them.

"For any nation to be incorporated into the alliance the consensus of all the NATO allies will be necessary," a spokesman for the alliance, which also has 28 member nations, recently stated, adding that it was purely a hypothetical matter. NATO has no hard-and-fast rules over the independence of part of a member state, but can invite a nation to join the treaty.

Scotland's first minister, Alex Salmond, has said that his preference is to remain within both the EU and NATO. Catalonia's stance is the same. However, membership of both organizations requires the unanimous vote of the 28 adherents, meaning that Spain, or any other country, could theoretically block Catalonia's entry into the EU.

I find it amusing that a nation clamouring for independence would want to join the EU knowing full well that they would have to devolve some of their powers/independence to it immediately anyway.

SGAE NOT 'PERFORMING' VERY WELL!

During 2010 and 2011, I covered a number of stories relating to the SGAE. This is the General Society of Authors and Editors in Spain, similar to the Performing Rights Society in the UK. They collect fees for authors, musicians etc, from bars, hotels, TV & radio stations - anywhere there is a public or even a private performance if they get wind of it! They have been quite aggressive with the collections in Spain, levelling a charge of thousands of euros to a hotel for wedding reception music.

Teddy Bautista was the president of the Board of Directors of the General Society of Authors and Editors (SGAE) between 1995 and 2011. Several hundred million euros come into the grasping hands of the SGAE annually, but up until 2011, there was no regional, state or public audit of their finances. They had often been criticized for lack of transparency but Bautista's band managed to cling on. Then in 2011, a Guardia Civil anti-corruption investigation called Operation Saga opened a whole new can of worms. Bautista and two others were arrested, Bautista being charged with corporate fraud, misappropriation of funds and fraudulent administration. Among the allegations were that millions of revenues received were re-directed to companies controlled by the accused and not handed over to the artists.

While out on bail, Bautista decided to sue the SGAE for €1.4 million euros for unfair dismissal. He lost the case but it then emerged that he had awarded himself a monthly pension of €23,000! This was stopped by the new SGAE board.

As the court case continues, one of the accused, Pedro Farre, former director of the Office of the SGAE Chairman, is alleged to have spent €39,552 in brothels with the SGAE company gold credit card. In one month alone he spent €8,000 in the 'knocking-shops' but surpassed his previous record by spending €2,000 one night in March 2009 in a single whore-house. What did he get up to? Also when he left the SGAE, he received a compensation payment of €50,000! The prosecution is looking for a jail sentence of four years and ten months for Farre.

More on the main court case as it develops.

No Scenery!

Seamus: 'How was your holiday in Switzerland? Did you like the scenery?'

Patrick: 'Not really. You couldn't see much as the mountains kept getting in the way.'

**EXPATS RETURNING TO UK
TO FACE NEW BENEFIT CURBS.**

British expatriates who work away for a short period before returning to the UK will find themselves facing benefit curbs that are being introduced to prevent Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants from claiming.

A tougher habitual residence test is to be implemented at the end of this month when immigration restrictions are lifted in relation to people from the two countries, reports the Telegraph.

Anyone who has been out of the country for 13 weeks or more will also be subject to the measure if they intend to claim benefits, confirmed the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This is because the government is not allowed to discriminate between people from the European Union under central regulation.

Returning Brits will now be faced with a bank of 200 questions to qualify for work-related benefits. Information about any property they own in the UK and the education of their children as part of the more severe test.

If they do not pass the scrutiny then these returning expats will be barred from claiming Job Seekers' Allowance and other benefits.

James Clappison, a Conservative MP on the House of Commons home affairs select committee, told the news provider: "I think we should be able to control benefits payments to migrants without affecting British citizens who have paid taxes all their lives.

"I have every sympathy for people who have paid into the system and are now being adversely affected by EU law." Keith Vaz MP, the committee's Labour chairman, also sympathised with the expats' position and suggested it could have been avoided if the government had researched the number of Romanians and Bulgarians likely to come across more carefully.

A spokesman for DWP said: "These rules will ensure the UK is less attractive to migrants who might want to come here and expect to claim benefits without contributing."

David Cameron is set to raise the issue with EU countries in Brussels, as he is currently attending a summit of member states. (Expatriate Healthcare)

ECCE HOMO.

You may recall the story we ran about the above botched restoration in a church in Borja, Zaragoza; well this story will just not leave the news. The church, which features the 'restoration' now attracts several hundred visitors weekly who pay a euro to see the 'masterpiece.' More than €60,000 has been collected to date which goes to a local charitable care home.

But the parish priest in charge of this particular church has now been arrested for allegedly pocketing church funds of about €10,000! The priest, Florencio Garces, 70, was detained by Guardia Civil on suspicion of misappropriating funds, of money laundering and sexual abuse. Five others have also been arrested on related charges. More, when it emerges.

John's latest girlfriend is called 'Doorknob' - because she's been handled by so many men.



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Govt backtracks

A commission of secretaries and sub-secretaries of state have drafted amendments to the controversial Citizens Safety Law, pulling back on some of the fines proposed in the original draft bill. The earlier proposals caused a swift response from social groups protesting against what they dubbed the government's "anti-protest law."

Chief among the tweaks made to the bill was downgrading to "serious" the offence of participating in a protest in front of Congress, the Senate or regional assemblies that has not received prior authorization. In the first draft, this was considered a "very serious" infraction and carried a fine of up to €600,000. The offence of insulting or threatening a police officer was also reduced from "serious" to "light."

Interior Minister Jorge Fernández Díaz is expected to present the draft at the regular Cabinet meeting for approval. It will then be debated on the floor of the lower house.

Opposition parties, legal bodies and social groups railed against the law when it was first aired last week, and on Tuesday Fernández said the draft was "open to all suggestions" from the judiciary. The text still maintains fines of between €30,001 and €600,000 for serious offences, as its 1992 predecessor did.

Among these are holding protests at key infrastructure points such as airports or power plants, threatening public safety at public events and a new addition, shining lasers into the eyes of pilots and rail & bus drivers.

In the list of serious offences, which carry fines of between €1,001 and €30,000, are prostitution near schools, cultivating or transporting drugs, concealing one's face during public disturbances and climbing public buildings to protest.

*Gwendolyn walks into a wine bar and asks the
barman to give her a double entendre.
So he gives her one.*



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(The Telegraph, July 12, 2013)

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The Little Treasure.

My small grandson managed to get himself lost when I took him to La Zenia Boulevard just before Christmas. He approached one of the uniformed security people and said "I've lost my grandad".

The guard said "what's his name?"

"Grandad"

The guard tried again "What's he like?"

The little gem hesitated for a moment and then replied, "Any whiskey... and women with big tits."

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Guide Dogs.

Two men try to get into a restaurant but both have their dogs with them - a Labrador and a Chihuahua - and are refused entry by the doorman. The two men put on dark glasses and try again. 'Can you let me have a table?' asks the man with the Labrador. 'I know I have a dog, but I'm blind and this is my guide dog. The man is let in, and the second man tries his luck. 'Can you let me have a table for me and my guide dog?' he asks. 'That's not a guide dog,' says the doorman, 'that's a Chihuahua.' 'A Chihuahua?' shouts the man. 'You mean those bastards gave me a Chihuahua?!'

A blind man is walking down the street with his guide dog when it leads him smack into a post. Once he's recovered, the blind man feels in his pocket and fetches out a treat to feed the dog. A passer-by remarks, 'That's marvellous. Even after he's made a mistake like that you're giving him a treat.' 'Not really,' says the blind man. 'I'm just trying to find which end's which so I can kick him in the bollocks.'

Smithers.

In the greatest days of the British Empire, a new commanding officer was sent to a jungle outpost to relieve the retiring colonel. After welcoming his replacement and showing the courtesies that protocol decrees (gin and tonic, thinly sliced cucumber sandwiches and an unsuccessful 'jump' on the cleaning lady), the retiring colonel said, "You must meet Captain Smithers, my right-hand man. God, he's really the strength of this office. His talent is simply boundless."

Smithers was summoned and introduced to the new commanding officer, who was surprised to meet a toothless, hairless, scabby and pockmarked specimen of humanity, a particularly hideous man less than three foot tall. "Smithers, old man, tell your new CO about yourself."

"Well, sir, I graduated with honours from Sandhurst, joined the regiment and won the Military Cross and Bar after three expeditions behind enemy lines. I've represented Great Britain in equestrian events and won a Silver Medal in the middleweight boxing division of the Olympics. I have researched the history of....."

Here the colonel interrupted, "Yes, yes, never mind that Smithers, the CO can find all that in your file. Tell him about the day you told the local witch-doctor to 'go and fu*k himself'."

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The above dog is Sandy, who went missing in the Los Altos area near Via Park 3 in late November. She is a 14-year-old little blond terrier and was wearing a blue multi-coloured harness. She was seen near the bins at Via Park 3 on Dec' 2, so it is possible that someone took her in during the cold period. If you can be of assistance could you please contact her owner, Mike, on 965 319 765.

Ryanair 'pulls finger out!'

Budget Airline Ryanair yesterday confirmed their plans to allow all passengers to carry a second small bag with them in the cabin of the aircraft. As from the 1st of December it will be permitted to carry a small bag of 35 x 20 x 20cms in addition to the main 10kg "Carry on" bag allowance.

Further changes to their often controversial terms and conditions include the reduction of the boarding pass reprinting charge - for those who have checked in but neglected to product their boarding pass - from €70 to €15. Additionally, the launch of the airline's new-look website has also included the introduction of a 24-Hour "Cooling off period" to allow passengers to make changes to bookings made in error. Meanwhile, those wishing to catch up on a bit of sleep during their flight can also take advantage of the introduction of "quite flights", which will operate between 21:00 - 08:00 Hrs.

Other significant changes are to include the introduction of allocated seating on all routes from the 1st of February 2014.

Ryanair also seem to have finally embraced the concept of social media and new technology, with the launch of their so-called "share a fare" service, which allows friends to alert each other the existence of cheap fares on social networks, whilst Spain in particular will also benefit from country-specific mobile phone app for ease of finding flights. (Tumbit.com)

Judge Amanda Cohen ordered the airline to pull the plug on the racy advertising for its popular Girls of Ryanair charity calendar after complaints brought forward by Spanish consumer and women's groups. In a non-binding ruling, Cohen praised Ryanair for its charity work but said online advertising of the annual calendars with pictures of flight attendants in bikinis was "discriminatory to women", local daily Diario de Sur reported. During the court hearing, Cohen also called time on the airline's 2012 "Sizzling prices! And sizzling staff!" publicity campaign, which advertised cheap tickets with images of women in bikinis. There was a "complete disconnection" between the images and the items on offer, the judge said. She ordered the budget airline headed up by the charismatic Michael O'Leary to stop both publicity campaigns and ruled that her decision would have to appear in two national newspapers and be paid-for by Ryanair. But Ryanair plans to appeal the decision that affects advertising of a calendar which has earned €700,000 for various charities. "This case and ruling only relates to specific adverts run in November and December 2012 and has no effect on Ryanair's continuing charity work or our current 2014 cabin crew charity calendar," said the airline in a statement sent to The Local website via email. (Diario de Sur & The Local)

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The Granville Memorial Darts Cup.

A great night of darts had by all at the Phoenix 27-11-2013, for Granville who was a popular character in the community but sadly passed away recently; so fittingly we had a Memorial Darts Cup in his name. I'm sure Granville would have liked it as he liked to play darts & was not a bad player either. As the evening went on we got to the Final with John Walker & Carol Pickles v Kevin Wood & Margaret Kerr. It was an exciting final with both pairs scoring well but the winners in the end were John & Carol beating Kevin & Margaret 2 - 1.



Kevin - Chrissie - Carol - John

Trophies were handed out by landlady Donna Hurst; hot food was put on by Donna & Paul which was soon consumed by all & very nice it was too. Many thanks to Donna for the evening; a special thanks also to Brian & Chrissie for helping Donna arrange the evening. Brian also held a quiz of 20 questions because Granville was a keen quizmaster. This was enjoyed by all. Brian & Chrissie organised a raffle with some excellent prizes & there was about €170 raised for Granville's wife's choice of charity. Many thanks to everyone who was there on the night for their generosity. This Memorial Darts Cup competition will now be held every year also; I will be there for sure!

Kevin (One-Dart Woody) Wood.

The Grateful Knight.

A knight goes off on the Crusades, but defends his wife's honour by equipping her with a chastity belt embedded with razor blades. A year later he returns and orders all his retainers to drop their trousers. They do so and the knight sees that all but one man have shredded privates.

He stands before the un-shredded man and says, 'For your loyalty I shall give you my best horse and one hundred acres of prime land.' The man replies, 'Oh, hank u ery uch.'

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- COURT
- TOWN HALLS
- SCHOOL MEETINGS

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Dodgy Oranges!

The *Unió de Llauradors* (Growers' Association) has reported the existence of batches of oranges and mandarins labelled as "Valencian" on the shelves of some supermarkets. The Association points out that this is "completely impossible" due to the harvesting schedule, and uses the *Ortanique* variety as an example, about which it indicates that its softness and lack of stalk "leads us to think that they come from another country."

The usual harvesting period for this variety is between late February and early May, in the best case scenario, according to Valencia's Institute for Agricultural Research (IVIA).

In addition to not meeting the labelling requirements about the product's origin, it is stressed how they present clear shortcomings in their 'organoleptic (taste/colour/odour) qualities' which make them unsuitable for marketing, as well as their high retail prices.

Another case of oranges not meeting the proper labelling criteria is that of "Lane Late/Valencia Late", also again labelled as Valencian produce.

"None of these two varieties should be on the shelves yet with the Valencian label, as due to the harvesting calendar, they are still likely to be from the Southern Hemisphere," they concluded.

Finanzas.com

Idiot of the Month Award



The beauty above (photo courtesy of Wiki) is a Lamborghini 140 Gallardo. In February 2010, the driver of one of these was stopped for reckless driving in Granada (probably jealousy!) and the car impounded. After being found guilty of the charge, a judge agreed in Feb' 2011 (a full year later) that the car be returned to him. So the driver went to the car pound but his car was gone! After an investigation, it transpired that the local police had re-classified the car as 'urban waste' and 'sold' it to a scrap merchant, so the car was supposedly destroyed. In early December 2013 a judge ordered the Granada Town Hall to reimburse the man with €76,733 in compensation, the town hall being ultimately responsible for the local police and their mistake.

Firstly you will see from the above that it took almost four years to put this right. But I must ask you: Do you believe the car ever got to the 'breakers yard' & do you think that the scrap merchant would have destroyed it? It was in perfect condition and worth a small fortune. Or do you think that the Lamborghini is now racing around some Eastern European, Middle Eastern or North African country? Personally, I have no doubt!

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Glasgow Magic!

A Weegie (Glaswegian) and a Scouser (Liverpudlian) go into Greggs the Bakers. The Scouser steals 3 pies and puts them in his pocket, then boasts to the Weegie, "Did you see that? The staff never even saw me." The weegie says, "That's nowt mate, watch this." So the Weegie goes back into the shop and says to the manager, "Gi'us a pie and I'll show you some magic," and eats the pie in front of him, and then does it twice more. The manager says, "So, where's the magic in that?" The Weegie says, "Go and check that Scouser's pocket."

Out of the mouths of

Jane was a kindergarten teacher. One day, during her art lesson, as she was walking around the classroom observing the children while they were drawing, she stopped at little Joan's desk. Joan was working away very diligently. Jane said, 'What are you drawing, Joan?' Joan replied, 'I am drawing God, Miss.' Jane paused for a moment and said, 'But no one knows what God looks like Joan.' Without looking up from her work, Joan replied, 'They will in a minute.'

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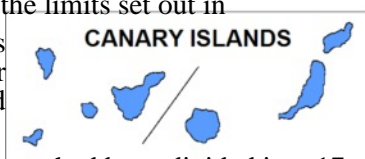
A man notices a small boy wearing a fireman's hat, sitting in a cart being pulled by his pet dog. When he gets closer he notices that the cart is tied to the dog's testicles. 'That's a nice fire engine,' says the man. 'But wouldn't the dog pull faster if you tied the rope to his collar'

'Yes,' says the boy. 'But then I wouldn't have a siren.'

The Autonomous Communities of Spain.

Following the Franco dictatorship, the authors of Spain's new democratic constitution in 1978 had to strike a balance between the mounting aspirations of a population that previously felt manacled by the dictator's policy of rigid centralism and control, and with areas such as Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia who would now settle for nothing less than full home rule.

The formula they came up with was known as *café para todos* or coffee for all. Spain would now be divided into 'autonomous communities' including the enclave cities of Ceuta and Melilla on the Moroccan coast. But sovereignty would reside in the nation as a whole—and be represented in the State-wide or central institutions of government—and not in the communities. Certain powers would be devolved to these communities which would allow them to exercise their right to self-government, but within the limits set out in the constitution. But this would not be enough for some, such as the Basque and Catalan regions.



By May 1983 the entire country had been divided into 17 *comunidades autónomas* (autonomous communities): the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, Andalusia, Asturias, Aragon, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Cantabria, Castile and León, Castile-La Mancha, Extremadura, Navarra, La Rioja, and the regions of Madrid, Murcia, and Valencia. In 1995 two autonomous cities, Ceuta and Melilla, were added. See map above.

All the autonomous communities (except Ceuta and Melilla) have -

- A Legislative Assembly or parliament, whose members are elected by universal suffrage according to a system of proportional representation, in which all areas that integrate the territory are fairly represented.
- A Council of Government, with executive and administrative powers, headed by a prime minister, whose official title is "president", elected by the Legislative Assembly—usually the leader of the party or coalition with a majority in the Assembly—and nominated by the King of Spain.
- A Supreme Court of Justice, hierarchically under the Supreme Court of Justice of Spain.

Snr. Zapatero the previous socialist prime minister once explained that the system of *comunidades autónomas* has several clear benefits. 'It spreads power and impedes its concentration,' and in that way reflects 'the best liberal thinking'. Second, by bringing decisions about services closer to the people it has improved them. Thirdly, it encourages competition between regions. And fourth, the system has reduced regional inequalities or at least stopped them widening. (Economist 6/11/2008)

But then the problem was all this 'regional freedom' went to the head of the regional governments. They all wanted their own universities, airports, contemporary art-museums, science museums and grandiose architectural follies. Each regional government also wanted their own television station. And, as Valencia has just found out, they can't afford it. The money squandered by the previous president of Valencia - Camps, and his administration was staggering. Film studios (now empty), TV station (now closed), Formula 1 races (now gone - too expensive), more airports (Castellon airport, still flightless) and a program of useless architectural exhibitionism that would embarrass a megalomaniac, are all just part of the Valencian regional lunacy. The regional government has also guaranteed some of the loans to some professional football clubs! And these are just some of the overspend problems in one region.

I have just read that the Ciudad Real International airport, which was built in the Castile-La Mancha region for a construction cost of €1.1 billion, is now up for sale. It has been flightless since 2010 and the receivers are now hoping to get just 10% (one hundred million €) of the original money invested in the project. They must be dreaming! God knows what they are getting up to in Andalusia, which has been run as a socialist fiefdom for decades? Some regions have embassies abroad which I suppose best illustrates the regionalists' mindset. They all think they are nations!

But now with a lasting economic crisis, the regions careless and often criminal spending is coming home to roost. There is no money in the pot and essential services such as health and education, are now subject to swinging cuts. The respected and crusading *El Mundo* newspaper has just revealed that both the Catalonia and Andalusia Communities have closed a number of health centres so that seven TV channels which are running deficits can be maintained. This is scandalous.

The national government is also discovering that its economic reforms are being hindered by decentralisation. As regional governments acquire more power to regulate, businesses face higher compliance costs making inter-regional business dealings difficult and costly. There is very little that the central government can do to alleviate this by decree as the regions will begin screaming that their powers are being taken away and that it is unconstitutional. And now that the government employment service is decentralised, job-seekers have to search through 17 different regional websites.

Regionalism may have solved a political problem in the 70's, but it is now apparent that it has created many others. Many would argue that the system as it stands now is a failure and was, in hindsight, a knee jerk reaction to the great political changes in the late 70's. Politicians now have the problem of reconciling the electorate to the fact that the country can no longer afford the free-spending *largesse* they came to expect in the past.

In a future issue, we will take a look at the provinces within these autonomous communities.

If at first you don't succeed.....buy her another beer.

Slogan on T-shirt

The new government of the Second Republic was made up of a plethora of parties which shared no common ideology or programme and was dominated by a coalition of the more extreme Republicans and Socialists. This encouraged a more doctrinaire approach by the government, with little compromise or accommodation to the Centre and the Centre-Right.

Ironically, it was the extreme left who engineered the first rebellion against the new regime. Here, the anarchosyndicalist CNT, who were now increasingly dominated by the revolutionaries of the FAI - Iberian Anarchist Federation, joined with the small Communist Party in an effort to promote insurrection and revolution. Their first effort failed but they committed 23 political murders in Barcelona during the early days of the Republic and launched three successive revolutionary insurrections in January 1932, January 1933, and December 1933. The anarchists hoped that these would bring about a nationwide uprising against the capitalist system. But these outbursts were poorly organised and only took place in a handful of provinces. Despite several hundred deaths and some acts of terrorism, they failed to destabilise the Republic.

The Republic introduced a special Law for the Defence of the Republic, which gave the government broad powers to suspend civil rights and constitutional guarantees. There was more censorship during this period than existed under the constitutional monarchy. The new law, which was modified in 1933, provided for three different levels of suspension of civil rights - "state of alarm", "state of prevention" and martial law. These were frequently invoked both against the moderate and the extreme right and the extreme left. Altogether the Second Republic spent as many days under suspended or partially suspended constitutional guarantees as under constitutional normality. The Republicans also supplemented the Civil Guard - who were responsible for order in the countryside, with a new force, the Assault Guards, who were designed for use in the towns and cities.



Within the first elected government of the Second Republic, Manuel Azana, (photo Wiki) a Left Republican, was made Minister of War. Azana's primary objective was to remove the ability of the army to interfere in the politics of the nation as they had done by way of *pronunciamientos* over the previous 100 years and more.

This would be done by curtailing the power of the army by drastically reducing its numbers. Ten divisions were disbanded and a new decree was announced, known as *Ley Azana*. Voluntary retirement on full pay was offered to all members of the officer corps. Almost one half of the officers took advantage of the retirement offer. (The other ranks did not benefit from such *largesse*.) The decree also stated that after thirty days, any officer who was surplus to requirements but had not opted for the scheme, would lose his commission without compensation. Although the threat was never carried out, it led to massive resentment and uncertainty within the army while the right-wing press reported that there was no doubt that the army was now being persecuted. But Azana and his advisors were about to make several more grave errors.

There then followed a purge of the significant military figures of the monarchist period in what was called the 'responsibilities' issue. This was purely a campaign to keep the Republican fervour at boiling point but it also illustrated the vindictiveness of the regime. (Ironically, during the dictatorship of Franco, a similar programme was introduced.)

Those charged included General Berenguer, the prime minister during the final part of the Alfonso XIII regime, and General Mola, a hero of the African War, who were arrested for alleged offences in North Africa. General Franco wanted to defend Berenguer during his court martial, but Azana would not allow him to do so.

But worse was to come. Azana now turned on the *Africanistas*, the most competent sector of the Spanish army. In June 1931 Azana called for a review of promotions - *revision de ascensos*. This meant that the promotions on merit awarded during the Moroccan wars were to be re-examined. As the commission carrying out the revision would not be reporting for more than eighteen months, this only introduced further anxiety to what was now a severely depleted and anxious military.

Azana then came into conflict with Franco. Franco was now heading the prestigious Military Academy at Zaragoza, which was founded by the late dictator Primo Rivera in the late 20's. Azana now decided to close the Academy down on the 30th of June 1931. Franco only heard of its closure while on manoeuvres in the Pyrenees and did not believe it at first. When it sank in, he was devastated by the decision and would now hold the deepest grudge against Azana. Franco's farewell speech to the Academy was a bitter one, earning an official reprimand from Azana in a previously unblemished military record. Franco had been the youngest general ever appointed in Europe and although a favourite of the Monarchists, he had never participated or interfered in politics, often to the annoyance and frustration of his fellow generals.

All these actions - which took place within just a four-month period - were seen by the military as further evidence of Azana's intention to '*triturar el Ejército*' - crush the Army and disrupt 'the harmony of the military family.' An arrogant Azana always made it plain to the military that he was in charge and enjoyed the plaudits of his political peers for taking the military 'down by a peg or two.' One of the most senior generals, Mola, was also stunned by Azana's treatment of the military, particularly as Mola believed that most of the military were willing to go ahead with the Republic at its outset anyway! An arrogant man, Azana would pour scorn on his opponents at every opportunity; he equated intransigence with integrity and compromise with weakness. Although Azana's apologists and hagiographers would have you believe otherwise, I do believe that his actions then and later, would be a major contributory cause of the military coup in 1936 and the subsequent civil war.

But the second target of Azana's wrath was to be the Catholic Church. 'Spain,' Azana declared, 'ceased to be a Catholic country as of April 12, 1931' and he 'intended to prove it.' A Republican Constitution was launched December 9, 1931. In this, Article 26 dealt with religion, but rather than just ending the heretofore cozy arrangement between church and state, the Socialists insisted on the inclusion of certain regulations which undemocratically restricted many Catholic activities. This led to the immediate resignation of the Catholic Prime Minister Alcalá and the Catholic Minister of the Interior Miguel Maura. The anticlerical Azana now took over the job of Prime Minister. Catholicism was now removed as the official religion; the religious orders were now forbidden from teaching; clerical salaries were abolished and divorce was legalised. The Jesuits were also disbanded - for the third time in Spain. Later, religious processions and the ringing of church bells were forbidden and a law was introduced which banned catholic burial unless requested in the deceased's will!

These restrictive policies of 1931-33 were only the beginning; by June 1936, religious services would be suppressed altogether in some districts and Catholic schools closed in most parts of the country. Once again one half of Spain was beating up the other half; this other half now seeing the Republic as an undemocratic and restrictive regime.

Lime Bar Fishing Sunbathing Club.

I hope you had a Happy Christmas and wish you a healthy New Year.

No point wishing you a prosperous one if you aren't fit enough to go fishing!

The boss & I got back from UK just in time for the Presentation Evening in November. Cold or what? I was wearing as many layers as I was in UK.

While I was away, the bamboo strimmers & dredgers had been at work on the canals. As Keith reported last month, this interfered with the planned match at the Eden, so it was rescheduled for Nancy's. The fishing was hard and several anglers "retired" before weigh in.

Ron "the hustler" Salisbury won with 10lb 11oz. His mentor Bob "the booty" came 2nd with 6lb 10oz.

The Presentation Evening went well. All winners received a main trophy, a smaller one to keep, a "fishy" cap pin (donated by Michael Lowry) and lots of abuse. A big thank you to Mike "the quill" for introducing the awards at short notice (he loves the limelight but also had to keep Anti Social Baz from singing). Sue "the landlady" & John "the boss" presented awards to;

Geoff "The Snapper" – The Knockout Cup.

"Fagin" Dave – The Winter Competition.

"3 rods" Geordie – The Summer Competition & The Largest Carp.



The presentations were followed by a buffet (thank you Lime Bar) and a raffle. The raffle was a bit special as my ticket was drawn first (thanks Belinda). Lots of tickets were sold, so "Fagin" Dave was happy to replenish his depleted coffer. Pete, Sue & family, donated a special prize of a new rod bag which was drawn between the anglers present – so make sure you attend next year! "Private" Howard won it. This may "stabilise" him next time he goes to Benijofar but it doesn't prevent blanking!

(Continued next column)

Cordon Blue?

A woman was enjoying a good game of golf with her girlfriends. "Oh, no!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Look at the time! I have to rush home and fix dinner for my husband. He'll be so annoyed if it's not ready on time."

When she got home, she discovered all she had in the fridge was a wilted lettuce leaf, an egg and a can of cat food.

With no time to go to the supermarket, she opened the can of cat food, stirred in the egg and garnished it with the lettuce leaf. She greeted her husband warmly when he came home, and then watched in horror as he sat down to his dinner. To her surprise, he seemed to be enjoying it.

"Darling, this is the best dinner you've made me in 40 years of marriage! You can make this for me any day."

Needless to say, every golf day from then on, the woman made her husband the same dish. She told her golf partners about it and they were all horrified. "You're going to kill him!" they exclaimed.

Two months later, her husband died. The women were sitting around the clubhouse, and one of them said, "You killed him! We told you that feeding him cat food every week would do him in! How can you just sit there so calmly knowing you murdered your husband?"

The wife stoically replied, "I didn't kill him. He fell off the window-sill while he was licking his arse!"

Michael Wiggington



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(Continued)

The monthly meeting was a long one! Match rules needed to be confirmed. A change to the match pegging method was agreed. An Xmas match was arranged for the old farts to fish against us youngsters, followed by a few beers. I'm not sure if "old farts" is the right term, as the average age of the youngsters is 62! Young whippersnappers!

Steve and Trevor (2 new "younger" members) joined the club. You don't know what you are letting yourselves in for! I hope you have zimmer frames to get you down the riverbank.

The monthly comp was again fished at the Eden Canal. With the banks naked, you could watch the other anglers blanking! It was a cold morning with steam rising off the water. I'm glad I had my flask of hot soup. At least it was sunny & warmed up later to about 15°C.

Fishing was very hard, with several anglers not having a bite all day. I resorted to bleak snatching, just so that I didn't blank. John the boss won with 2lbs of fish (1st bite at 13.30) beating Fagin Dave into 2nd place by about 1 ounce. 5 anglers weighed in! Lucky Bob fell asleep again.... a sun fish hooked itself while he dozed but by the time he landed it, it was dead. The autopsy report was inconclusive – either shock of the cold air or boredom waiting to be landed.

Reasons why fishing is better than sex!

There are no fishing transmitted diseases.

Nobody will tell you that you will go blind if you fish by yourself!

Next meeting is at The Lime Bar @ 17.30 Mon 6 January. (El dia de Reyes)

Fishy fingers!

The Ghost.

Catalonia and Independence.



On the left is the Catalan, Mas, 'cutting-up' the Spanish flag, held by PM Rajoy.

On the right is the Catalan 'Independence' flag.



You are no doubt aware that there are at least two regions in Europe where the question of 'independence' has become a moot topic: Scotland and Catalonia. The Scots are due to have a referendum on the subject on September 18, 2014. The British and Scottish governments agreed beforehand that a referendum could be held, but spent some time discussing what the actual referendum question should be. Initially the Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond wanted three alternatives to be posed to the Scots - current status quo, more autonomy for Scotland or independence. After some trimming of ambiguous and misleading phrases, it was finally agreed by both institutions that a single referendum question be asked - 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' This is clear and to the point.

But it is not so simple when it comes to the question of Catalonia. Here, the Spanish government see Catalonia as an integral part of Spain and will not allow a referendum on independence as they believe it would be unconstitutional and would lead to the fragmenting of Spain. But many of the Catalans believe otherwise. Artur Mas, the president of Catalonia and head of the centre-right nationalist CiU Catalan government, has been the main driver for Catalan independence. Together with the leaders of the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV) and the left-wing CUP party, they have come up with the wording they want to put in a referendum to the Catalans on November 9, 2014. There will be two questions: 'Do you want Catalonia to be a state?' is the first, and should the respondent answer yes, they will then be asked: 'Do you want Catalonia to be an independent state?' The four parties* that reached the agreement have a total of 88 seats in the 135-member Catalan regional assembly. Neither the Catalan branch of the Socialist Party (PSC) nor the conservative Partido Popular (PP) voted for the agreement.

Both the Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, and the Justice Minister Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, have already stated that the proposed referendum will not be held without the consent of Madrid. The head of the socialist party (PSOE) in Spain, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, says that the Catalan president, Mas, is 'leading Catalonia up a blind alley'. Rubalcaba would like to see a Federal Spain, that is providing the necessary changes would be made to the constitution. Both the EU and NATO have already poured cold water on the question of an independent Catalonia, saying that they would be excluded from both bodies. (See 'Non' on page 12.)

Catalan nationalism is largely a creation of the late 19th century. Together with the Basques, they became the richest industrialised regions of Spain. As its historic claim to nationhood is shaky, they have concentrated on their own perception of 'uniqueness' and on the promotion of the Catalan language against Castilian, introducing a lot of what is termed 'positive discrimination'. Cases of this are constantly going to the courts with the judiciary having to legislate so that individual Catalans can access Castilian if they wish, particularly in the classrooms. But it is a constant battle.

One of the arguments put forward by the Catalans for change is that they pay more money in taxes to Madrid than they receive in aid. But the Catalans only come in at 4th place in Spain in terms of GDP per capita. The Basque Country ranks in 1st place with a GDP per capita of €30,043, followed by Madrid in 2nd place with €28,906, and Navarre in 3rd place with €28,491. Catalonia only came in 4th place with €26,412. But surely it is an obligation of the richest to try and support their less fortunate countrymen and encourage them to succeed. The problem with the Catalans is they want it all for themselves!

*There are more than 100 registered political parties in Catalonia. Many of these are now inactive and I would guess that there are about 15 parties politically active in the region. The one that tickled me is the *Pirates de Catalunya* – The Pirates of Catalonia. These got over 9,000 votes in the local elections in May 2011, and had two of their candidates elected to two councils. The party is based on the model of the Swedish Pirate Party and is a member of the Pirate Parties International; it supports intellectual property reform, open access to culture and knowledge (probably free downloading), transparency and Direct Democracy. What a refreshing difference from the more usual Spanish politician, many whose prime goal appears to be to get rich while in the job, as most certainly do. They are the real pirates!

Private Security Guards to Get Increased Powers.

The congressional interior committee has approved a bill granting authorized private-sector security personnel some of the same powers as the police, such as the right to arrest people.

The thrust of the proposed new legislation is in response to the need "to qualify the general principle of excluding private security from acting in public places, which in its current form is excessively rigid and has made more difficult or impeded the necessary authorization of services to the benefit of the public."

The bill was approved by the ruling conservative Popular Party and by the center-right nationalist Catalan and Basque groups, CiU and PNV respectively, and will now go to the Senate for consideration. The new legislation was vigorously opposed by the main opposition Socialist Party and the United Left (IU).

Under the bill, private-security services with enhanced powers — such as the right to ask people to identify themselves and to detain them — will be allowed in certain situations and circumstances, such as at bank cash machines, at sporting and cultural events, or any event "of social importance" held in public places and thoroughfares.

The legislation also allows private security guards to pursue in public places "delinquents caught in the act of committing a crime even in cases where [the crime] has nothing to do with the people or goods that they are watching over and protecting." The bill also covers areas outside of prisons and alien detention centres.

The legislation comes on top of the controversial planned Citizens Security Law, which will see hefty fines for citizens who take part in unauthorized protests or who cover-up their faces at demonstrations. The bill has been heavily criticized as restricting fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

(El Pais)

Two little boys were paddling in the sea at Playa Flamenca. 'Coo, ain't your feet dirty,' said one little boy. 'Yes,' replied the other, 'we didn't come last year.'

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Age and Ageing.

She said she was approaching 40 and I couldn't help wondering from which direction.

Bob Hope

I said to my husband, my boobs have gone, my stomach's gone, say something nice
about my legs. He said, 'Blue goes with everything.'

Joan Rivers

I can't believe I'm thirty. Do you know how much that is in gay years?

Jack from *Will & Grace*

You know you're getting older when you have sex with someone half your age and
it's legal.

Dan Savage

Mick Jagger told me the wrinkles on his face were laughter lines but nothing is that
funny.

George Melly

First, you forget names, then you forget faces. Next, you forget to pull your zipper
up and finally you forget to pull it down.

George Burns

We've all seen them, on the street corners, many of them smoking, many of them
on drugs; they've got no jobs to go to, and once a week we see them queuing for the
state hand-outs - or pensions, as we call them.

Harry Hill

A man in a fish restaurant is waiting for his meal. The waiter comes over and says, 'I'm sorry for the delay with your order, sir. It should be with you shortly.' The man replies, 'That's okay, but if you don't mind me asking, what sort of bait are you using?'

Middle age is when you are sitting at home on a Saturday night and the telephone rings and you hope it isn't for you.

Ogden Nash

My grandmother is over 80 and still doesn't need glasses. Drinks right out of the bottle.

Groucho Marx

I attribute my long and healthy life to the fact that I never touched a cigarette, a drink, or a girl until I was ten years old.

George Moore

When I turn my hearing aid up to ten, I can hear a canary break wind six miles away.

Sophia, *The Golden Girls*

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