

A Diary of My Trip to Spain 3/26/1999 – 4/4/1999
By Daniel Barclay

March 25, 1999 (6:45 PM) PST Menlo Park, CA U.S.A.

An alert reader will have observed that my trip started on March 26, 1999. Yet I am writing this on the previous day. Why then am I doing so? Could it be because I am the studious type who wishes to provide a truly complete account of my trip? Or is it merely because I want an excuse for taking a break from writing a seemingly endless array of thank-you notes (my birthday is on March 18 and I, typical procrastinator that I am, cleverly delayed writing them until this moment)? If you know me at all, or are a sentient life-form, then you do not need to be told the answer. In addition, I would like to provide a bit of comprehensible writing to a diary which would otherwise be marked by an utter lack of sleep.

March 26, 1999 (8:15 AM) PST San Francisco, CA U.S.A

No utter lack of sleep yet, except for my getting up at 5:30 AM. I am currently aboard Flight 842 to New York and am still on the runway. Before the day is out, I will have shifted eight time zones, gone without sleep for over 24 hours, and will be on a different continent. Oh Joy.

March 26, 1999 (5:15 PM) EST New York, NY, U.S.A

I am writing this from J.F.K. Airport in New York City. There is little time. Everyone is taking pictures like mad. The food was horrible and featured frozen American cheese sandwiches. Of course now I would be hungry for a lack of food, but the long flight tempered my hunger, so I am fine. Not a good way to start a trip.

March 27, 1999 (7:00 AM) GMT Lisbon, Portugal (airport)

I have gone without sleep for 26 hours so far, with 14 yet to come. Luckily I have had some rest. Very tired for obvious reasons. Not a very dramatic moment for my first time on another continent.

March 27, 1999 (10:45 AM) GMT Barcelona, Spain (airport)

Upon arriving in Barcelona, I have learned two things: a) that 1/3 of the people here smoke, and (b) all of them are doing it in the airport. AUTHOR'S NOTE dated 3/31/99: Shortly after writing the previous entry I had the dry heaves from lack of food.

March 27, 1999 (10:45 PM) GMT Barcelona, Spain (hotel)

Here I am, twelve hours wise – and sleepier – and I have learned two more things: (a) that I was right on the first count, and (b) I was wrong on the second – TWICE as many are doing it outside! Speaking of odd things, here's a prize: the menu for a local restaurant (Spanish) is being held by a BRITISH chef! Obviously they need some major new marketing techniques. On a gloomier note, I am now working on my 41st consecutive hour without sleep! It's a record! I know it! And it's something to be proud of¹, unlike more menial accomplishments such as solving world hunger and inventing a

¹ Note: everything in this sentence is a lie except this note itself.

cure for cancer. Ha, ha! Just kidding². Now that I've got you completely confused, let me state that I could have done better. Oh, well, maybe next time.

March 28, 1999 (8:30 AM) GMT

Barcelona, Spain (hotel)

This is a quick summary of what happened yesterday. I say "quick" because breakfast starts in five minutes. Strange I can remember what happened yesterday but not last night. Basically, we boarded the metro, went to a piazza, walked around, saw the Picasso museum (all the good ones weren't there, then went for lunch. You would not believe what they call "milk" around here; "milk" appears to be warm half-and-half with sugar ready to put in. I'll know for next time.

March 28, 1999 (4:15 PM) GMT

Barcelona, Spain local park

I am writing this while waiting for the other people in my group who are late. Today we traveled to the never-will-be-finished-at-this-rate cathedral, which I forget the name of, the place where the 1992 Olympics were held, Las Ramblas, a street marketplace, and currently a park. At 7:00 we leave for Málaga on a train, where we will enjoy couchette-ette-ette-etcetera accommodations. What fun.

On a happier note, I recently learned the cats of Barcelona's opinion of me when one relieved itself on my shirt. We'll all have fun trying to tolerate the smell in three hours!

March 29, 1999 (8:00 AM) GMT

Somewhere south of Valencia, Spain Train

This compartment is small. I now affectionately call its type of style (couchette). I now know what sardines feel like. And it turns out I was wrong again. It turns out that 1-3 of the populace is smoking on my train. They seem to follow me around.

This morning we enjoyed a stale croissant and sour orange juice in a smoke-filled "dining car", although it should be called the smoking car. However, there have been pluses to this trip: lots of nice scenery. I got little or no sleep last night: we stayed up late. Doing what, I don't remember; a lack of sleep tends to do that to you.

Oh, and one more thing: there was a mix-up at first when our friends the incompetents double-booked us with some other people. We spent a relaxing 45 minutes in the two-foot wide (no kidding) hallways with our luggage before they straightened out the mess.

On to Málaga! We should arrive in two hours. Meanwhile I shall wait in the cramped "couchette" style accommodations, enduring ½" of water on the floor. You really don't want to know about the water, although I will say it was a product of last night. And by the way, these wrinkles in this journal were caused by last night. Again, don't ask.

March 29, 1999 (11:30 AM) GMT

Málaga, Spain hotel

Today we arrived at the Costa del Sol. There is nothing to do here; I do not know why we are here. The beaches may be nice, but there are beaches in the U.S.

² Everything in this sentence is a lie.

Our guide is very strange. Picture a fat woman. She lisps. Slurs her words together, speaks like a four-year-old, and has a really strange foreign accent. It is nearly impossible to understand what she is saying. Unfortunately, being out tour guide, she is the one who continually talks about what is going on. Not only can I not understand her for some reason the sound of her voice makes me infuriated. Why does a touring agency hire such people?

March 29, 1999 (4:00 PM) GMT

Málaga, Spain Hotel

This will be long journal entry; everyone else is gone and I have nothing to do but write in the journal and postcards. Let me explain how I got in this situation.

We woke up early this morning and went swimming in the Mediterranean. At first it was cold, but it was fine once you got adjusted to it. I would estimate it is 10-15° F warmer than the Pacific. Even so, most wouldn't go in. Later, lying on the beach, it was very windy, so I constructed a windbreak out of sand which protected me. For some reason everyone thought this was a stroke of genius. How is building a windbreak to block the wind genius? But I grow tedious. I will continue relating the day's events.

As everyone else wanted to avoid the wind on the beach, they decided to go shopping. Now I have no particular grudge against shopping, but I have to fill out the 3.6 x 10¹⁹ postcards Mom is requiring me to write. They will take several hours at least.

Danny Aviles, a member of my group, also wanted to return to the hotel, where he is now listening to a song which consists of a man chanting the word "Mercedes" and making clucking noises. I had better wrap up this entry if I want to have even a chance at getting the postcards done.

March 30, 1999 (11:00 PM) GMT

Málaga, Spain, hotel

Today was the trip to Morocco. We went by bus to a nearby port, took a ferry to Ceuta, bussed to Tetouan, then to Tangier, then back to Ceuta to the hotel. It was a long day.

We did not spend much time in Ceuta other than boarding and leaving the ferry and clearing customs. We actually had to clear customs twice; Ceuta, being part of Spain, nevertheless required a passport, and of course one was needed to travel from Ceuta into Morocco proper. In Tetouan we visited a pharmacy, ate lunch, then visited to shop. The pharmacy was basically a collection of cure-alls and medicinal herbs. There were no prescriptions. I purchased four large packages of saffron for only 1800 pesetas! That is about \$12. Some of the other items were really bizarre, such as a black powder you sniffed into your nose and snake/vegetable/jasmine oil.

For lunch we had a bean soup, beef shish kebab, couscous, and almond cakes for dessert. The bean soup was surprisingly good and was excellent for dipping Moroccan bread into. The shish kebabs were quite good, and the couscous was average but would have been better without the onions. The almond cakes were truly excellent and I ate 4 or 5 of

them. Strange; most people couldn't finish one. We concluded our meal with belly dancing without the belly dancing. No kidding – there actually was no belly dancing as advertised, just a bunch of men and women prancing around.

While we were winding through the narrow streets of Tetouan (on foot of course, no bus or car could get down those streets), it struck me how incredibly poor most of the inhabitants were. Many were begging openly on the streets; others had made cheap items and were attempting to make a living by selling them to foreigners. Many followed our group around; there was at all times half a dozen attached to us. They were selling their goods for a remarkably low prices considering how much effort had been put into them; after all, they were desperate and in no position to demand more.

In stark contrast therefore was the shop we visited after our lunch in Tetouan. It employed about ten highly skilled salesmen who would not openly rip you off but would come pretty darn close. They used just the right combination of pleading and acting sorrowful, making sure never to make themselves appear in the superior position. Let's look in on a typical exchange:

Scene: I am wandering aimlessly around the shop. As I stroll past a wooden table, my eye falls on a cheap little 6" stone bird, crudely carved, that looks slightly better than the other junk. A salesman immediately notices this and hurries over.

Salesman: I see you like this bird. You pay ... 5000 pesetas? [about \$33]

Me (temporarily – okay, permanently – stunned) No, no. 1000 pesetas [about \$7]

Narrator: Of course, this is still a ridiculous amount of money to spend on a small stone bird worth no more than \$3. But the salesman of course would not stop there.

Salesman: (leaning forward, whispering). I tell you what. For you, I make special price – 4000 pesetas [\$26]

Narrator: Now, I was intelligent enough to realize that 4000 pesetas for a stone bird is too much. So I made one final offer.

Me: I will pay no more than 1500 pesetas [\$10]

Salesman: Obviously in much agony) All right. 3500 pesetas [\$24]

Me: Sorry. No. (walks away)

Now it may appear that I got the better of the salesman in this occasion. And possibly I did, although I don't think so. But examine this later exchange before arriving at a decision:

Scene: I am wandering aimlessly around the shop. As I stroll past a wooden table my eye falls on a cheap little 4" brass cup, crudely made, that looks slightly better than the other junk. A salesman immediately notices this and hurries over, in fact the same salesman as last time.

Salesman: You want to buy this cup? 4000 pesetas? [\$26]

Me: (startled) Uh... 1500 pesetas [\$10]

Salesman (sorrowfully, with a sad look in his eyes) No, I am very sorry, maybe 3500 pesetas [\$24]

Me (wavering) Well....

Salesman (confident now, strides over to stone bird mentioned earlier) I tell you what. 5000 pesetas for two cups and the stone bird.

Me; Of course this sounded like a fantastic offer. I immediately accepted, forgetting that 5000 pesetas is worth \$33 and the trinkets had a net worth of maybe \$5.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Amazingly, even though I knew I had been swindled immediately after my purchases and vowed not to let it happen again, I went right out and kept getting cheated. I still cannot figure out how this happened. (4/2/99)

So you see how I rapidly saw 10,000 pesetas and \$40 go down the drain. And what do I have to show for it? Two cups, one bird, one necklace, and a cheap rug. At least I bought a decent pair of drums off of a street peddler for only 500 pesetas, not much of a swindle.

March 31, 1999 (8:45 AM) GMT Málaga, Spain Hotel

I just wanted to make a note for the record that today I blew my nose with NO HANDS! (Applause) You may be wondering how I accomplished such a remarkable feat. As today I had a particularly stuffy nose, when I happened to sneeze, it loosened boogers in one nostril. All I had to do was blow, and they fell loose. No hands! (Applause!) Incidentally, today we are visiting the Alhambra, but that is insignificant compared to this breakthrough.

March 31, 1999 (11:45 AM GMT) Somewhere in Andalusia Bus

Let the record show that just now I BURPED THROUGH MY NOSE! (Applause) We had stopped at a food store on the trip from Málaga to Granada, and I bought a lemonade I had thought it was a normal lemonade, but actually it was carbonated. I was extremely thirsty, so I gulped down about half the bottle before I realized it was carbonated. But by then it was too late. As I hardly ever drink carbonated beverages and so am not accustomed to them my body immediately reacted with a tremendous belch. It was so massive that it could not all escape through my mouth, so some went out my nose. It was incredible to know that I had done such a thing but felt horrible at the time. So I have made two breakthroughs in ONE DAY! I wonder if anything else of moment will happen to me today. Possibly the Alhambra, but of course that doesn't qualify.

March 31, 1999 (3:30 PM) GMT Granada, Spain

Just now we visited to Alhambra. It was really great. And I do not mince words. It was maybe – mind you – even better than blowing my nose with no hands and burping through my nose. Ha ha! Just kidding (I'll drop this now while it's still ambiguous)\ But seriously, to put matters simply, the palace was great but the tour was not. Our tour guide was a man named Nicholas with a Polish accent who was the starving-artist-turned-good type. He had a talent for turning meaningless babble into something that appeared to have content. Luckily I am able to ignore frills and look at content. Needless to say I grew bored rapidly.

How the tour would work is this: Nicholas would lead us into a room, start a five-minute speech, and I would wander around the room admiring the walls and ceiling and taking pictures while the rest of the groups would sit transfixed by his quasi-eloquence. Nicholas was extremely good at his job; at the end of every five-minute speech about nothing, he would close with a sound bit which would leave everyone thinking how wise he was.

We spent far less time in the Alhambra than I would have liked; only seeing four rooms. After that we moved on to the Generalife. The gardens were nice, but there are thousands of gardens and only one Alhambra. Also, there were so many people there it was hard to see anything or take pictures. We also spent an endless twenty minutes “admiring” the hideously ugly 16th century rooms added on by the Spaniards. It was at this time that I was able to study Nicholas’ sermons.

I do not need to go on at length about the Alhambra. If you go there it speaks for itself. Pictures cannot describe it. In Nicholas’ case, words cannot describe it either. You just have to see it yourself.

March 31, 1999 (5:30 PM) GMT Somewhere in Andalusia Bus
Currently we are traveling through the hills of southern Spain. There is much farmland here, particularly orchards. The land looks extremely poor and dry, from centuries of abuse and neglect. It seems to be recovering somewhat, but there is still little vegetation aside from that which is cared for. The land is so rocky that I am surprised anything grows at all. Very tired.

March 31, 1999 (9:00 PM) GMT Seville, Spain hotel
We are now in Seville. Diner stunk. End of story.

April 1, 1999 (7:45 PM) GMT Seville, Spain hotel
Today was a busy day. We toured Seville, saw its cathedrals, and saw the KKK parade. Seville is a nice little city with about 1,000,000 inhabitants, not counting of course my personal entourage of smokers. The cathedral, third largest in the world, was impressive. The architecture was very well done, but I like the Moorish style better. The Hidalga tower attached offered an impressive view at the top of 341 flights of ramps. I pity the monk who had to climb up and ring the bell every half-hour. Maybe he lived up there.

While traveling to a McDonald’s for lunch, the tour guide got lost and we spent a grueling 45 minutes tramping through the streets of Seville. Incidentally, it was an extremely hot day. It began rainy and at 50°F, then picked up. By 7:00 there was not a cloud in the sky and it was 85°F. Go figure. Anyways, I elected not to eat at McDonald’s with the other kids and had a nice paella with the adults at a nearby restaurant. After that we had one hour to kill before the parade. We spent it driving around Seville in a nice horse drawn carriage, very relaxing.

Apparently the KKK in Spain wears purple headdresses and gold insignias on their coats for some reason. They also were carrying floats depicting Nativity scenes. I am surprised the government lets them parade openly in the streets. You know, representing violence and all that...?

April 3, 1999 (12:00 noon) GMT Somewhere north of Córdoba, Spain bus
I am just writing to record an incredible thought pattern I recently had. Before I relate it, let me pose this question: In six degrees of association, can you link me wishing that some loud music on the bus was something else to a picture book about “Boss” Tweed? You can’t? Good! Let me tell you what happened. This is a true story.

So I was listening to some hideously loud music on the bus when I thought, “Why can’t this music be good music – like from West Side Story?” 1. That naturally set me thinking about the MAD magazine satire of West Side Story, East Side Story. 2. I then thought of Adlai Stevenson, a character in the satire. 3. I then recalled a book I had read, Our Times, that listed Stevenson’s profession as “Statesman” 4. Then I recalled a quote from the History of US book series in which William Marcy “Boss” Tweed, when arrested for graft, listed his profession as “Statesman”. 5. From there it was a simple matter to link “Boss” Tweed with a picture book I read about ten years ago about him. 6. And done! I warned you in my first entry about the coherency of these entries!

April 2, 1999 (12:15 PM) GMT See previous entry
I entirely forgot in the last entry to tell you about what is going on in my trip. First with last night. The flamenco dancing was good and would have been better had I been awake to see it. We got back about 12:30 and got up at 6:30 which explains my previous entry. What was I thinking?! Anyways, after getting up at 7:00 and being late for breakfast, we embarked on a two-hour bus ride to Córdoba. We saw the cathedral/mosque, which was average, bought some cheap souvenirs, and now are on a 5-hour bus ride to Madrid. In Madrid we will go on a two or three hour tour of the city. If you thought the last entry was bad, wait until you see tomorrow’s.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: The first entry was correct. I was so tired in the second entry at first I didn’t realize it was past midnight and a new day. My watch provides my knowledge of the date. 4/4/99 11:00 AM

April 4, 1999 (12:15AM) GMT Madrid, Spain Hotel
It turns out I was so tired it should have read, “the day after tomorrow’s” This will be a long entry since I have to cover two days and am very tired. Excuse the messy handwriting and grammar.

Yesterday April 3, 1000 was a busy day. But I have just realized that I never finished April 2. Sigh. It is pretty simple: we arrived in Madrid and hell broke loose. Our tour guide, who seems to grow more incompetent with time, led us on a walking tour of Madrid. Emphasis on walking, no emphasis on tour; we got lost and wandered around the city doing nothing and growing tired. Of course, we got lost. We took the subway several stations, and then for some reason the tour guide decided to have us walk back.

On hour at least. But to make matters worse for me, I had a terrible cramp from not being able to go to the bathroom on the bus. I nearly had to take a laxative in the hotel but managed to get by with hot water. I walked one or two miles before the cramp got so bad I had to go back in a taxi.

Now for April 3, 1999. We woke up bright and early at 6:45 and, after getting up at 7:15 and being late for breakfast (which incidentally, was a roll, as usual), we left for a tour of the Royal Palace. It was decent but as I will explain later I would have preferred a different arrangement. Then for some insane reason known only to the twisted mind of our tour guide, we spent half an hour in a RAILROAD STATION! There were about five trees in the station which the officials had the nerve to call a "botanical garden" and set up as a tourist trap. It was the worst waste of 30 minutes I have ever spent except for the other waiting I have done thanks to our tour guide.

Then, and only then, we went to the Prado. Of course by now it was nearly noon and the line for tickets was several miles long. We spent one hour in line, during which I experienced the uniquely Spanish activity of heatstroke. So, because of our inflexible schedule, we had five minutes in the Prado! That is ridiculous! I was hoping for three hours. Also, the people I were with got lost so I only got to see one lousy painting by Velasquez, Las Meninas. I would gripe longer but it is late and I have many more hours to go.

We left for Toledo about 2:00 and arrived about 3:30. The tour of the city was nice and the cathedrals and synagogue were good also. The El Greco painting was very well done and was expertly painted. Unfortunately we only spent two minutes seeing it after twenty in line and then it was back to Madrid. We arrived very late about 9:00. Mrs. Finstad, a few others, and I went to see Guernica while the others went to eat. The painting was very impressive and I spent a good ten minutes looking at it. Dinner was tapas and was decent. Now we arrived about 12:00 and had to attend an "emergency" meeting called by our friend the tour guide which was, as usual, about nothing. Tomorrow we fly home. Again I apologize for the sloppiness of my writing at this time.

April 4, 1999 (4:15 AM) EST (10:15 AM GMT) Madrid, Spain Airport

This is my last entry written from Spain. I have already set my watch to Eastern Standard Time. We start boarding in fifteen minutes. The trip has been nice. I hope I can sleep in tomorrow even though it is a geometry day. I have gotten no more than fifteen hours of sleep in the past three days. Farewell for now.

April 4, 1999 (5:30 AM EST, 11:30 AM GMT) Madrid, Spain Airport

So I lied. We are in the airplane on the runway. I am considerably less tired than I was when I wrote the previous entry. I have nothing in particular to say; I'm just writing because I am bored out of my skull. So I will just talk about random subjects. First, I suppose, New York City, our destination at the moment. We have to clear customs there, pick up our baggage and move it across the airport, while transferring to another airplane. Mrs. Chidichimo says that she had always cleared customs in San Francisco on her previous trips and is unsure if we will have enough time to make it. It is nice clearing

customs with a group because the officials do not spend as much time on you. I got some nice pictures of New York City from the airplane on the flight to Spain, but unfortunately those and other pictures were lost when I left that roll of film in the Barcelona hotel. I believe I have previously told you about this incident; if I haven't – ahem, if you don't remember reading it -- , then you must not be reading carefully. Shame on you. So anyways, I have no pictures before the church of the Holy Something-or-Other in Barcelona. Oh well. At least I have fifteen rolls of film to content myself with which are left.

Speaking of film, in two days (Alhambra and the day after) I took a record nine rolls of film! Breakdown: Alhambra 5, Madrid 4. Mrs. Chidichimo gave two prizes during the trip for most rolls of film taken (she gave miscellaneous prizes throughout the trip for various things, such as spotting giant black bull signboards on the side of the road, possibly as a way to boost morale but more likely to get rid of some of her treats), which I certainly would have won had not they been in a manner laid against me. The first was on the second day when there was nothing to take pictures of that was worthwhile, and the second was just before the Alhambra. Oh, well.

Luckily the plane has just started to move (it has been 20 minutes since I began writing this entry) so we may possibly be starting to begin the preliminary taxiing procedure. Since I do not feel like providing a commentary on this exciting process, I will end this entry here.