



## Antes de

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

Hoy (spanish for today) feels a bit like Oy (Yiddish for exasperation) **except** in a good way. I have a lot to figure out between hoy and 3 Octubre when I board US Air Philadelphia for Madrid. Like how to bring everything I need in one not too big suitcase, when my easel could fill the entire suitcase, plan a budget for costs at home and abroad which means I am going to have to **look** at my ever diminishing, supposed retirement account, get all my lists together for my son Reid to insure that the pipes don't freeze and that Louis, the uninformed cat, gets fed, work, ala Maynard G. Krebs, get my rowing miles in despite regattas, weather and **diminishing** light, dig up the bulbs, take down the screens, get the winter clothes out of the attic, bake a wedding cake for #120 and let friends know I am leaving and send them the link to this blog.....

The plan is that with 10 weeks of classes, five hours per day and five days each week moi or yo in this case, is going to going to return home on 25 diciembre a more fluent speaker **and** reader of espanol. Thirty seven years ago I was a college sophomore and a member of the first group of Earlham College students to spend 10 weeks mostly in Cuernavaca, Mexico with a similar mission. In my present reincarnation as a more mature and more motivated (the ever diminishing savings) to speak spanish all of the time, I am resolved not to attract a boyfriend like Carlos in Cuernavaca who wanted to improve his english. With 21% unemployment in Espana I expect to have many opportunities for conversation over glasses of vino tinto. As a dyed in the wool cook, I hope to sample and absorb the

regional fare and have you all over for a tapas party. Ole!



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## El Primero Dia

Sunday, October 4, 2009

So the wedding cake got made, the miles were rowed, the bulbs were dug and the house was left reasonably clean.....

Shortly before I left home I walked around 247 and said goodbye to my wonderful home and took good counsel with Louis, Karen, my dear friend who died of breast cancer and my Motherpeace tarot cards. I pulled the Fool, card 0, the source for everything in the deck aka life, the innocent, who is open, without preconceived ideas. I laughed and thought I surely named my blog correctly! The Fool is not foolish, the fool is the tabula rasa, available and responsive.

So the full moon guided me out of Philadelphia and there it was out my airplane window as we pulled into Madrid. I negotiated the metro for 2 euros rather than the taxi for 35, rode the train to Salamanca with a young vintner from Santa Cruz's "Windy Oaks Vineyard" who maintains that his pinot is superior and I have his card and a very old woman returning home from visiting family in Chile. We all enjoyed a young family with a son about 6, and daughters 2 and 4. It brought back many happy memories and a great sense of the continuing cycle of loving families.

I walked from the train in Salamanca to my piso, unpacked, headed out to find the building at the university where I need to be at 9 am tomorrow and walked and sat in the extraordinary plaza until I realized I could not keep my eyes open any longer. After a brief nap I joined two of my three roommates for tapas on an adjoining street and I must say it

was a perfect introduction: a very good glass of vino tinto for 2 euros, with a plate of duck with orange, sheeps' milk cheese with anchovies, roasted red peppers with asparagus, all served on toasted bread. 6 euros later I thought I may not cook a lot while I am here.

So I am weary and excited, keenly aware of how fortunate I am and I send you all lots of love!

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## Higos Profundos

Monday, October 5, 2009

I am still sinking my clock. Art it was great to hear your voice all the way from beautiful Sedona but 4 am combined with my housemates shower at 6 am (the bathroom pipes are in my room) set me back a bit. Sans coffee and the wrong choice on one of the medieval streets made for a typical off to the first day of class experience.

The man sitting next to me during my proficiency/placement exam was from Taiwan. He had previously spent two years studying business administration at Syracuse U. Many of the students in this program are oriental.

Afterwards I walked and walked. I find getting lost is the best way to learn the streets. At one point I could not believe I was where I was then I found out I was not where I thought I was. capice? Anyway, I scored a free ticket to a performance of musica antigua con la orquesta barroca de la universidad de salamanca for tomorrow night. The performance will be held in an auditorium that looks like it was built by the Romans. I found the departamento de educacion fisica y deportes and learned of a one day hiking trip to Pico del Lobo, a mountain near Segovia. **AND I secured the name of the person in charge of the boat club for el Rio Tormes.** We shall see how the path opens, they may not welcome guests and they may share the river with barges and power boats. I'll keep you posted. Grocery stores are always high on my list of places to visit and today's venture did not disappoint. Mache, goat and sheeps milk cheese, yogurt, a good baguette for .45 euros and a bottle of good vino tinto for 3.45 euros and the biggest higos (figs) I have ever seen.

So I now have my provisions, albeit it is nice to be out there in the world and feel that connection. People do not picnic in the square. They do descend upon the Plaza Mayor, (a partial image is at the top of the main page of my blog and I will hopefully attach a full image) after work for light fare, drinks and mainly conviviality. It is a profoundly gracious and social culture where people of all ages and styles merge and take in days end together. I, on the other hand was beat from a day of walking and getting in sink. I was happy to head in the opposite direction para mi piso. Nevertheless, the social creature and possibly the maternal instinct rose up in me when my neighbor Jennifer asked me if I wanted to join her for tapas. Jennifer is the gal from Minnesota who was showering at 6 am and today was her one year anniversary with her boyfriend who somehow found a way to send long stem roses to this apartment today, quite an accomplishment. Maybe this is what emboldened her to try shrimp for the first time tonight, at the age of 21. I was emboldened too. I ordered blood sausage. It arrived looking like very dark brown, use your imagination. I thought hey I am not as adventuresome as I thought. But a few sips of vino tinto and I was back on track. Much to my amazement it tasted like extraordinary pulled pork. Would have taken first prize at the North Carolina state fair. Anyhow, I am hoping for a solid 8 hours and send you all lots of love.





## Segovia

Saturday, October 10, 2009

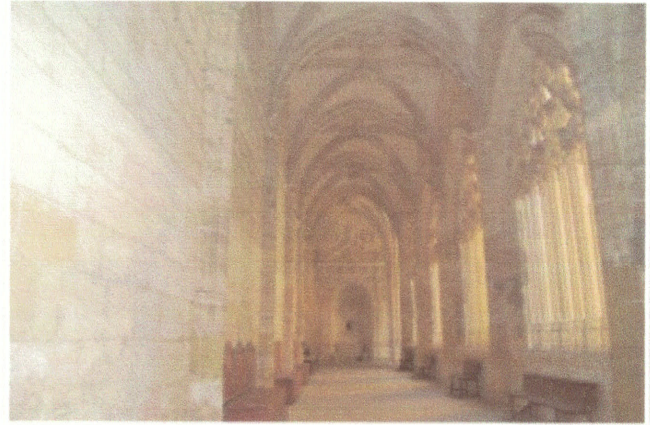
My first fin de semana en Espana and a three day weekend as well. Many students were taking advantage of the extra day off from classes to fly to Paris and journey to Portugal. I had spent much of my reserves traveling to Spain the prior weekend and jumping right into classes and chose to journey to nearby Segovia.

History looms big in Segovia with a Roman aqueduct at the end of the main street leading into town. Built without any cement or mortar in the first century it transported water to the people of Segovia until quite recently.

This was the weekend celebrating the nationhood of Spain, which is much like our 4th of July. Segovia is where Isabel was proclaimed Queen of Castile, the same Isabel who married Ferdinand, King of Aragon and whose marriage forged the nationhood of Spain. So the cathedral and the Alcazar or castle are particularly formidable in Segovia. Together Isabel and Ferdinand sourced the journey of Cristobal Colon and the many people whom they expelled for either not being Catholic or became conversos. The also instituted the Inquisition to "clarify" the new found Catholicism of the conversos.

After I returned to my piso, I read for hours about the history of Spain from the Romans to the civil war during the 1930's, of which many living Spaniards carry memories. I have merely scratched the surface in my comprehension of the confluence of differing cultures, external forces, aspirations, tragedies and great achievements that have created Spain. I particularly love doors and windows and Segovia did not disappoint. While

photographing what many might consider underwhelming given the spectacular cathedral and castle, a resident paused to notice what interested me and nodded in approval and brought me to see another great doorway on a side street and offered me one of her olives. Everything is better when you can share it. So here are a few pictures of this amazing place.



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## Lisboa

16-18 octobre 2009



Lisboa is a poem with a beautiful meter and very much as I imagined. It is a bit sucia/dirty and the once grand buildings built with the revenues of exploration and domination are crumbling and falling back into the earth. So it is a city that becomes more beautiful and very romantic as the light fades. The sidewalks and streets are made of chunks of marble. Most of the sidewalks are squarish chunks in light, cream tones bordered by larger rectangular chunks of black marble in the streets. Some of the sidewalks have geometric patterns, some undulating wave patterns. Up and down hills one often finds an appropriately installed handrail along the narrow byways. Beautiful old light fixtures, trolley cars, pink buildings, the requisite abundance of inglesias and everything bathed in the light that one finds when water surrounds.

Given what a romantic city it is I was feeling a bit sorry for myself. I passed what looked like promising wine bar as I was heading down a steep hill on my first night and considered finding a place on flatter ground to do my imbibing and decided to trust Lisboa. It was a small enoteca owned by a man who spoke a plethora of languages fluently and loved his Portuguese wines and fare. I was the only person by myself and I considered leaving but instead ordered a glass of wine, bread and sausage. The owner gifted me a dish of the most delicious olives I have ever eaten, crunchy, fresh and tossed with fresh herbs. He played only fado music, which I love, so between the wine, the music and his hospitality I relaxed into the pleasure of his creation. I was there for sometime and

left with a sense that the night was young and I was going to discover whatever I could with whatever energy I had. Walking, walking, walking. Up and down and who knows where. I ended up on the Champs de Elyses of Portugal that had extra great sidewalk patterns and I noticed many people heading for a large theatre, the Tivoli, on a corner. I followed my curiosity into the foyer and asked what was the occasion and was told it was a once a year musical gala celebrating a radio station but that it was sold out. The woman in the ticket booth said that if I waited she might be able to acquire an unused ticket. Within minutes (and 5 euros) I was heading for my seat. This grand gala focused on the popular music of Portugal from 1940-1970. It was something like the academy awards. Up on the stage was an orchestra, all men, in military uniforms. Please understand that Portuguese sounds more like french and dutch and I can pick out an occasional word here or there. I asked the man next to me in spanish if the band was affiliated with the military and he let me know he could not understand spanish. I then said, "the junta"? and he just shrugged and laughed. I learned later that in fact it was the official band of the army and they know how to swing! A man and woman would come out to thunderous applause and proceed to introduce some god or goddess of Portuguese popular music and tell jokes, of which I understood not a word, but the theatre shook with laughter and sometimes cheers and tears. Then someone would come out and given their age, sometimes hobble out, hairpiece intact and sing a song, BEAUTIFULLY, while the audience sang along and sometimes wept. The Portuguese people are very sentimental, very passionate and I felt truly fortunate to be in the presence of such an occasion. There was of course, fado and much to my surprise after the requisite stories and jokes some man with a silver pompadour sang "Hello Peggy Sue" with a more perfect Texas twang than I could ever produce. Three and a half hours later it was time to find and figure out the Lisbon metro system.

I was traveling with a group from the University of Salamanca and the average age was 20. So after we were taken up the coast to a town with a popular beach and casino we were told we could spend the rest of the day there and head back to Lisboa on the bus or we were free to figure out the rest of our day. I turned on my heels for the center of town to find a train to take me back to Lisboa. After a successful mission to find a famous pastry shop in Belem, I began what I knew would be a long walk to the center of town. After sometime I boarded a public bus and rode until I saw a huge building with a huge rodonda on top that said mercado. I quickly departed and found that that the ground floor of the mercado was closed (am only for produce etc.) but I could hear live music from above. Up the stairs I went and there in a huge rectangular room were people of varying ages dancing in the middle of the afternoon to live music. A man approached me and with perfect english asked if he could be of assistance. I inquired about the dance and he informed me that it was a regular Saturday dance in the marketplace and for 3 euros I was welcome to join in the fun and I was also welcome to watch from the door but under no circumstances was I to take any pictures. I watched longingly but hesitated to go in as I did not know if it was appropriate for single woman to attend, ask men to dance etc. I could understand the question when a man near me asked if maybe I would like to dance? Yes, I would! I plunked down my 3 euros and enjoyed the company of Antonio for some three hours. The band was superb and of course they played some fado. Many couples looked like old matrimonios who fortunately had never forgotten how lovely it is

to dance with your sweetheart, others, I suspect and possibly, my Antonio are why the no photographs sign is posted.

Of course I went to many incredible sanctuaries and a couple of amazing places outside of Lisboa. But these two memories combined with a great meal at a take out place for 5 euros will be the ones that stick and the ones that will bring me back to Lisboa.

Besides some photos, I have attached a sample of fado, sung by the reigning Queen, Marisa, I hope you love it and come to Lisboa.



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