

## **Bill and Cathy McArthur in Spain: 18**

**This past week brought a couple of developments. The weather finally started acting appropriately for the Costa del Sol during the latter part of the week. Bill got a sore neck while conducting a scientific study of the percentage of topless females on the beaches; the preliminary result is 20%. As the saying goes, "It's hard work, but ..." Cathy began to be home-schooled under the watchful eyes of Bill and our landlady, Toni. While Bill works, Cathy works through a variety of Spanish lessons.**

**On Friday, we took a bus to Almeria, 140 miles east of Malaga. This small city was the most prosperous city in Europe around the 11<sup>th</sup> century when it was occupied by the Moors. It also has the largest Alcazaba (Moorish castle) in Europe. The port is very active with commercial shipping and ferries running across to Mellila on the Moroccan coast. We would have liked to do a weekend in Morocco, but with the current world situation, we are staying away.**

**The mountains around Almeria are big and stark. This is the hottest and driest area of Spain and the mountains certainly have an appropriate look. To the east, one can see the mountains leading to the southwest corner of Spain. We have done a pretty good job covering most of the southern coast of this large country. We spent Friday evening wandering around Almeria and visiting the huge Alcazaba. At the admission window, Bill had a confusing exchange with the teller. We arrived just before 7 PM and the advertised closing hour was 6:30 PM. Bill began with the question, "Abierto?" (Open?); the teller replied in English with the question, "What country are you from?". Bill, nonplussed, said "United States". The teller asked for his passport. It was all about the fact that members of the EU gain free entrance, whereas we others must pay €1.50. We finally paid and went in. The level of restoration does not come close to the Alhambra, but its vastness is awesome anyway.**

**On Saturday, our mission was to pay homage to Clint Eastwood and the "Spaghetti Westerns" by visiting the old set of "Fistful of Dollars" and other movies near the pueblo of Tabernas, about 20 miles north of Almeria. We went to the bus station and bought a couple of tickets to Tabernas. Almeria is a busy conduit of people to and from Morocco and lots of Moroccans were in the bus station. Perhaps feeling guilty, Bill thought that they all looked like Iraqis and that some of them might be on a jihad and want to shed some American blood. After an uncomfortable wait, we traveled through the amazing terrain of the only desert in Europe and were dropped off at "Mini-Hollywood" thanks to three "chicas guapas" who asked the driver to drop them off there. As we did our tour, it was the landscape that mostly got our attention. After an hour or so, we had seen**

everything that we wanted to (for €17 each). We decided to walk toward Tabernas, about 3.5 miles down the road through the desert. Cathy was not keen on the idea since she wasn't feeling well and thought that we'd be robbed as we walked through the barren land. When we arrived at Tabernas, we found that, as the "Rough Guide to Spain" advised, "Tabernas is not a place to linger in." We walked to what passed for the center of town and Bill asked a woman if the bus to Almeria stopped there. She said yes, but qualified her answer in a way that neither of us understood. We were afraid to try to eat lunch or do anything else in case a bus might come by. We were starting to wonder if we should go to the Civil Guardia station and ask if there was a taxi in town to take us back to Almeria. Suddenly, the three chicks came up the road. Bill had taken a couple of pictures of them with their cameras while we were in Mini-Hollywood, so we were old friends by now. They told us that the next bus was due at 2:00 PM and the following bus would come by at 9:00 PM that evening. Bill looked at his watch, which read 2:00 PM, and immediately deduced that a bus was due soon. Sure enough, a bus came by, and what could have become a very bad day was restored to that of a good little adventure.

Because we were tired, the wind had begun to blow hard, and we had such a great view from our window, we hung out in our room for the latter half of the afternoon.

We spent much of Sunday exploring the paseo maritimo along the beaches of Almeria before taking a late afternoon bus back to Malaga.

Bill and Cathy