

## Bill and Cathy McArthur in Spain: 20

*Semana Santa*: it sounds like a children's Christmas special, but it's a very serious happening all over Spain. This is Holy Week, as we call it, the week before Easter Sunday. We had been told for many weeks that Malaga is known for its fabulous processions during this special week. From Palm Sunday through Good Friday, there are from 6 to 8 processions per day (on Palm Sunday) or night (the rest of the week), some of which don't finish until 5:30 AM. Each procession starts in a church or other edifice where all of the equipment is kept for that particular group. The number of participants in a single procession can number 1000, each having a role. There are many marchers dressed in multi-colored robes with hoods and tall, conical hats. These persons represent penitents. There are others carrying crosses, banners, candles, and other accoutrements. The main objects in each procession are the "Tronos", which are huge, elaborately decorated scenes involving "Cristo" or "Maria". A procession has from two to four "Tronos", each of which has an accompanying marching band and assorted other persons. The "Tronos" are carried for up to 8 hours by hundreds of men, marching in a slow, swaying rhythm. The first "Tronos" in a procession are of "Cristo" and the last is always of "Maria". There are lots of men and women and children of all ages participating. Thousands upon thousands of tourists flood the city for the week and all of the local people come out to watch also. Some rent chairs in central locations where they can sit all evening and through the night and view the processions. Most people line various streets to watch.

We got a good lesson from the older daughter of our host family who gave us an overview of the week and made some suggestions for which of the earlier processions we might want to view, since we were not about to stay up all night watching. Bill irreverently referred to the penitents as "coneheads" and Cathy remarked that the local chicas seemed to all dress up as Mary Magdalene on Good Friday night. Aside from those faux pas, we viewed 6 processions and got to see 16 "Tronos" up close. It was quite an experience; we can definitely recommend it.

Early in the day on Good Friday, our host and hostess drove us to "El Campo" (the country) to visit and eat lunch in the casa of our hostess's mother, who also accompanied us. The house is in the mountains, about 10 miles from the coast above the town of Torre del Mar. It is a beautiful area with a good sea view, lots of fruit and olive trees, good water, plenty of quiet, and many small pueblos scattered along the mountain slopes. We were taken on an extensive tour of some of the nearby pueblos and got to see some churches that dated back as far as the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In one church, we got to see the two small "Tronos" that they used later in the day (these didn't count in our 16). It was a very scenic and enjoyable outing and we enjoyed our best paella of our stay, cooked at the casa in the mountains.

Easter weekend, we stayed in El Palo and Malaga and got our last chance to experience the area. Next week we leave for Barcelona and Majorca.

**Bill and Cathy**