The Towns Times

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It's Carnival Week

By our reporter Keith Towns

Just like in Rio, it's carnival week here in the Algarve. And just like in Rio, things are done a little differently.

The other Sunday we went to a mountain town called Alte. It's a small spring town so we did not expect much of a carnival from the small population. We were wrong.

As you know, in England people spend weeks preparing a carnival float and outfits and then parade them once down the high street. It's usually over in about 20 minutes.

Well here they know how to run a carnival. It all starts with the usual Portuguese delay, if they say 3.00pm then take it to be 3.18pm. Then the music bursts into the streets and the tractors pull the floats up the high street, around the church, down the high street, around the bottom and back up the high street. This goes on for about 3 hours.

It sounds monotonous but it was not in any way. Everyone dances; they throw streamers, confetti and sweets to the children.



Ca rnival Dress

The floats are not politically correct; there was a group of 4 girls walking around pretending to be Gypsies. There were dressed like they had purchased every clothing item that didn't match from the charity shop. As they 'walked the crowd' they kept trying to sell an old pair of knickers to anyone who would listen, and just like the real thing would not leave until you had bought them. They even had the obligatory baby in a pram.



Vi vá Loulé

We were then treated to an army tank (with Bushsh*t written in flowers on the back) and American soldiers chasing bearded Muslims, one of whom had a rucksack with wires attached to it which he kept throwing around and was then pounced on by the Americans.

On the float that had a cowboy bar complete with stairs leading to a bedroom, we were treated to an enactment of a transaction between a cowboy and a (man dressed as a) prostitute. Time to divert the children's attention for that one.

However, everyone was good natured and a great time was had by all.

The next day we went to the Loule carnival. This was a more professional event with large caricatures of political characters and [very nearly] naked dancers from Brazil.

The floats were very big and a lot of money had been spent on them. However, this time the Gypsies were real and in the audience and the women were pushing the children out of the way to collect the sweets thrown from the floats.

The teenagers dress up in boiler suits and squirt each other with water or throw eggs so you have to be careful where you stand.

Any Portuguese coming to England will be very disappointed with our meagre efforts.

Give a dog a bone

I do not get on with dogs. They are fine the play with and stroke but as soon as they want to go to the toilet or lick their genital area, I am off.

The other day we went to the beach for a picnic. After staking our claim to 'our' part of the beach we were approached by a rather large Alsatian puppy.

I tried my usual alpha male deep voice *"Geroutahere"* but he would not go away, this was a persistent dog.

I was determined not to feed the little so and so as he was a stray and we would never get rid of him if I did. But his sad eyes staring up at me while I tucked into a barbequed hot sausage in a roll managed to tweak a heart string somewhere deep inside my heartless soul - and I gave in.

Following dinner I sat down for a read; the dog had other ideas. I had now made a friend and this friend wanted to play. Like other dogs, this one liked to play fetch. But being a stray he had never had the luxury of a ball, so he picked up a rock and put it at my feet. Those eyes bore into my soul again so I threw it.

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The dog ran, picked up the rock and brought it back. Instead of just dropping it at my feet for the boring repetition that dogs love, he chewed it until it broke in half.

Rocky, as we now call him, liked chewing rocks. Not any rock, but a sandstone type of rock that consisted of shells in layers of sedimentation. This process went on for some time, fetch, throw, chew and fetch.

Then the children and I went for a paddle, Rocky joined us. The tide was going out and there were fresh rocks to chew.

After a while I was determined to sit down and read my book. Rocky now thought we were an item and wanted to place his slobbery head on my lap, I advised him otherwise.



Dog telling Keith to fetch

Apart from a brief interlude where he beat Hazel into the toilet to drink from the bowl, he stayed loyal to me. When it came to leaving, Rocky joined us at the car.

I knew saying goodbye would be an issue and expected him to try to get into the car as the children got in, but he did not. He waited until my door was open and whoosh, he was into the foot well under my steering wheel. This was not a small dog, it was also not a clean dog.

I eventually managed to get him out. My seat was now covered in hair and dog slobber, lovely. I now had to get myself into the car without Rocky getting in again so I ran in circles around the car to beat him to the door. The people in the restaurant overlooking the car park though this was hilarious.

As we drove away I saw he had attached himself to a man in a van, what a shallow creature, I felt used and abused.

The children can't wait to go to the beach and see Rocky again.

The Unwelcome Party

When they arrived on mass, we were treated to the Caravan and Camping Club Rally welcome evening.

A small insignificant affair you may think. But no, the organisers have a badge, and with a badge comes perceived authority. These are pensioners with attitude.

Our first obstacle was to navigate our way through the red tape and bureaucracy that these high society social events run on. It appears the stewards can only comprehend answers that fit within their predefined criteria, for example "two" (as in *"How many tickets do you want?"*).

I totally baffled them with *"How much do we have to pay for the children?"*

This created a shocked look on the stewards' face and I could almost see the neurons making connections in her brain trying to comprehend the word "child" and its implications for their affair. Once the shock had receded and she had regained the control of her vocal chords we negotiated a two for one deal on the children. As I was currency challenged at the time, I pledged to return for the said tickets.

Later in the day I sent Debbie off with the cash to finalise the deal. Unfortunately for Debbie, she met with the other female half of the steward quartet. The wife that I met was just mildly irritating, the one Debbie had the misfortune to meet was thoroughly obnoxious.

After going through the initial shock and awe of mentioning children again, Debbie quoted the 2 for 1 discount I had arranged. She was told that as it had already been quoted, she would honour the discount *"But let's be clear, this is the last time any discount will be made for children; they take up a seat you know"*.

I was astounded, in Hazels 5 years and James's 8 I had not realised they used seats. My word, this makes them people, albeit little ones, and therefore should pay their way in the world. I'm getting on to Gordon Brown, they use seats therefore they must pay tax.

On the evening of the event we arrived fashionably late. Actually we were on time, but these are pensioners, they turn up half an hour early for everything.

As all the seats had been taken, we were shown to the stewards table, murmurs and mumbles all round. The evening's entertainment was as expected. We were told the rules of behaviour expected on the campsite followed by the itinerary (bingo and line dancing) and Max Bygraves to finish.

The buffet turned out to be chicken and chips with dry bread, no vinegar or sauces. The stewards and their friends on our table were pleased, probably as it did not get stuck under their false teeth. I expected a buffet to mean more than one option of food.

Debbie and I were having a laugh with a Scottish couple we had sat next to who also turned up fashionably late. The ogre that Debbie had encountered earlier then placed her head two inches from Debbie's and announced *"We clear our own tables here you know"*. She was then instructed on how to clear the whole table, obviously the ogre thought Debbie was having too much fun.

The evening ended early as most C&CC members like to get their sleep, so we left as well. As we were leaving, the original steward came over to say goodnight but also had something else to say that she felt awkward about.

The conversation was long and beat about the bush so I left Debbie to it. The summary is; a young family with children is a culture shock to some of the people on the Rally and comments have been made. Therefore we will have to get used to you, as well as you to us.

And this is the welcome party.

***Footnote**: It does appear to be one of the wives of the stewards that has an attitude problem. She was heard saying to someone "I'll be glad*

when it's April and you have all gone" - So will we dear!

Also, even though our children will take up seats at the dinner and dance, it is never full. We would attend to make a point, but an evening of sticking pins under your nails would be less painful and more entertaining.

Did you know?

One of our readers asked for his question to be put into our education section (yes you Paul), probably through sarcasm more than anything else, but here it is never the less. Why it the sky blue?

It so happens we were discussing this subject in the car the other day with the children, here is how the conversation went.

The sky is blue because the molecules in the atmosphere reflect the blue end of the spectrum from the sun and let the red end pass. Now here's the interesting part, you can see into your shadow as the blue sky illuminates it, otherwise it would be nearly black (totally black if there are no reflections from buildings etc.). You can test this by walking in snow, look back and the shadow in your footprints will be blue.

Not too interesting you may think, well NASA didn't consider it either when they sent man to the moon. That's why the astronauts couldn't see a damn thing in any shadows. This was a bit of a problem as they had stored all of the experimentation equipment the wrong side of the lunar lander.

You get to know a lot doing home education you know.

Gallery



Carpentry Lessons



Vogue



Cool dudes



A mighty warrior (and statue)



We found cork!



Hazel 005½



Last contact with wild birds



They sell these to children!

And finally, a quote from Hazel speaking to mummy "I love you all the atoms and quarks in the world".

All the best

Keith, Debbie, James and Hazel