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The Bears

Spanish carnival

BY JULIE VICK

A couple of weeks ago I saw a parade of devils dance, watched kids in Halloween-like costumes running through the streets at 4 a.m., and followed a giant papier-mâché fish through the city. Now, with the beginning of Lent the celebrations, called Carnival, have ended, but the week before should keep Spain fiesta filled for at least a little while.

There was talk of Carnival weeks before it actually arrived. Our teachers would stop in mid-lecture to give us tips on preparing costumes, or explanations for the celebrations. Carnival is derived from the word *came*, which means meat, and the word *vale*, which means gone. The fiesta takes place in the week before Lent during which the Catholic tradition advises against eating meat on Fridays. It's basically an excuse to party before a period of personal sacrifice.

The first Friday night we headed downtown around 11 to find a group of 30 or 40 Spaniards dressed in devil costumes parading through the streets. I was surprised not so much by the costumes, but by the large sticks that they carried. They were like huge sparklers that were being set off near a crowd of onlookers. All the stories about third-degree burns and lost appendages I had heard on TV around the Fourth of July at home came flooding back to me. While all the American students ducked for cover every time a firework was lit, the Spaniards stood still. Even the policemen nearby didn't seem too concerned about the dangers of standing close to fireworks. I eventually got over my fear and joined the parade that wound through the narrow streets. The parade ended up in a square where a band played to anxious partygoers. I left at 2 a.m., early by Spanish time, but I had to rest up for the next night.

On Saturday night I dressed all in black and grabbed a feather mask on my way out the door. It was 10:30 p.m. and my host mom was just putting on her costume. Saturday night Carnival is a Halloween for all ages, only it starts much later. My host mom was

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preparing to take her two granddaughters out for the night. I remember having to be home by dark when I was 7, but my host family was preparing to take their kids out well after sunset.

When I got downtown, I realized my hosts were not the only family taking their kids out late. The main street downtown was covered with a sea of people from every age group. The street was blocked off to traffic and two bands were playing at either end. Lights were strung up to brighten the path of partygoers, and confetti and sparklers filled the night. At 4 a.m. I still saw 8-year-olds out with their parents. I finally made it home at 6:30 in the morning.

The final celebration I attended took place on Ash Wednesday. This one wasn't done in appreciation of Lent, but rather as a protest against it. It was called the burial of the sardines. Our director explained that people buried fish as a protest to the Catholic tradition of Lent, which doesn't allow them to eat meat on Fridays. The church says only fish can be eaten, so by burying fish they are defying the orders of the church. I imagined a few protesters carrying a few little sardines through the town and then digging a hole in the sand, or perhaps throwing them out to sea. When I arrived there was a group of at least 100 people dressed all in black with traditional mourning veils. They gathered outside a tent where the fish was being kept, and a band started to practice. When the parade finally got underway they brought out the fish. It wasn't a few little sardines, but a huge papier-mâché fish attached to a motorcycle. It drove out to lead the crowd, and the band followed next playing a somber song. A procession of close to 200 Spaniards dressed in black and carrying candles walked behind and pretended to sob over the death of the fish. We had to follow.

The funeral procession wound through narrow streets and passed public buildings for about an hour before it finally came to a halt in the city square. A crowd gathered around the fish and then it burst into flames. Everyone watched the death of the fish, and when it was finally cremated fireworks were set off from the castle. After the fireworks were finished a band started to play to the crowds. I began the first day of Lent in a town square full of people dressed in black, dancing over the remains of a paper fish.

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