

December 2008

In Barcelona It's "Have a 'Crappy' Christmas!"

At this time of year we're reminded that, just two years ago, Anzie and I were in Catalonia over Christmas. We had such a great time discovering how the people of Northern Spain celebrated Christmas. For instance, Santa didn't bring gifts; the Three Wise Men brought them. We were most amazed by how scatological the Catalan Christmas is.

That's right. The Catalan Christmas has several references to pooping. Throughout Europe the Nativity scene contains several characters not seen in the U.S. You'll find the fishwife, the baker, the garlic vendor, the knife sharpener ... the list goes on. In France and Spain these little Nativity statues are called "santons". Newlyweds are often given a starter kit, which includes Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child. They then spend the rest of their lives collecting additional santons. It's a huge business around Christmastime. In Catalonia you'll find a character that you'll rarely find in other countries. He's called **The Caganer**, Translated: The Shitter.

If you look closely at any Nativity scene in Catalonia, you'll find him. He's nowhere near the Holy Family. He's off in a corner, somewhere near the sheep and the cattle. Our guide in Barcelona explained that he represents the agrarian ancestry of most Catalans. They remain closely connected to the soil. In fact, according to our guide, the Caganer is fertilizing the earth.

Here are pictures of our Caganer. You can find further details if you click on <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caganer>



Then there's **Tio de Nadal**, or **Caga Tio**, the Pooping Log. Adults fashion a hollow log into what barely resembles a donkey. Children beat the head end of the log with a stick while singing a song about pooping, and the log poops out candies from its rear end. For further info go to Caganer link above, and click on reference to Tio de Nadal.

Catalonia seemed to be rife with references to poop around this time of year. We stopped for lunch in a village located in the hills outside of Barcelona. We wandered around until we came upon a restaurant that sported a menu that was enticing and reasonable. The Euro was killing the dollar at that time, and still is. We were about to enter when we were confronted by a huge turd on the sidewalk just in front of the door. We hesitated, wondering what kind of restaurant would not clean up such a mess. We entered anyway, and were greeted warmly by the smiling proprietress. She was surrounded by a few others, who were also smiling at us. We asked for a table and then added: "By the way, you have a little 'something' in front of your door". The lady promptly opened the door, reached down and – to our shock – grabbed the turd off the sidewalk. She looked up at us and immediately broke into laughter. So did the rest of the crowd. It was a fake plastic turd!

We proceeded to eat a wonderful lunch, sharing a lot of laughs with this merry bunch. However, we wondered how many potential customers were put off and lost by this "something" on the sidewalk.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Wonderful New Year!

Chuck