

# Miss Spelling

by Jim Gold

The volcanic eruptions created by years of misspelling Spanish culminated in Juan Fernandez' misspelling acontecimiento. That's when he fell off the ladder, broke his front tooth on the sofa, spent big money on dental bills, and shrank his bank account to zero.

His inability to spell correctly brought nightmare visions of Orthographic Arnie, the spell devil, riding across the sheets.

Juan began to increase his Hebrew studies to improve his spelling, but that didn't work. He added Bulgarian, Hungarian, Albanian, Polish, Serbian, and bits of Arabic. Soon he had increased his internal pressure to the breaking point. When his landlady, Mrs. Delaruso, wandered into his apartment speaking Portuguese, he panicked, ran out the door, and visited his mother.

The lad wanted to release himself. But by then as a thirty-three year old, he had lost his infant vision.

How could he retrieve the pristine consciousness of that distant world?

For advice, he decided to ask his father-out-law, Sidney.

Sitting in shorts and a jacket by his mansion pool filled with bags of money, the wealthy iron-ore magnate turned toward his genealogical heir and planted a kiss on his forehead.

"How are you, my lad?" he barked in a stellar voice radiating its usual aura of triumph. "Why do you come to Papa? Do you wish to pluck one of my wealth bags? Or is there a higher, spiritual purpose to your visit?"

"The latter," said Juan. "I come for your wisdom."

"My wisdom is free. And I sense from your hunched-up posture that you have a poor living situation."

"Correct, Uncle. Where to begin? As you know, I am no longer a child. I'm ready to leave home and enter the world. But how? What will I do to live?"

Sidney beckoned to his housekeeper, Mary Juana, who brought him his pot stick. After a restorative inhalation, he asked Juan, “What does your mother say?”

“I no longer speak to her.”

“You sound angry.”

“I am. Last time I visited my parents, I couldn’t even spell the name of their street correctly. I’m getting worse and worse.”

“Juan, you are wasting your rage.”

“... Wasting?”

“Uh-huh”

“I don’t like waste.”

“That’s a good sign.” Sidney patted his cheek. “You have no reason to worry, my lad. I’m here to change your path. That is why you came today.”

Downcast, forlorn, Juan studied a busy ant crawling over a blade of grass. His voice sank deeper in his throat as he grumbled, “Yes Uncle, my Spanish and all my other linguistic projects have lost their sparkle. I’ve gone as far as I can go. It feels like the molecules in my brain are menstruating. and the cells are evolving into what, I don’t know. My blood flow has slowed to a trickle. I sit in boredom with my books. I’m dried up, scared, and only worry about spelling. What should I do?”

“My boy, you’re suffering from dry brain syndrome, a common malady in this modern world. To reconnect with your energy source, drink lots of water.”

“... Water?”

“Water encourages the flow of words. Obviously, you’ve run dry. Your brain has become a midbar of Hebrew suppliants.”

Juan stiffened. “I don’t want to spend forty years in any desert.”

“Then it’s time to visit Sinai.”

“With water? It’s so boring.”

“Is Niagara Falls boring?”

Juan considered the question. “No,” he admitted. “But speed is not what I’m after. And water just doesn’t feel right. Too mild. After my visit to the vineyards in Mendoza, I prefer wine.”

“Aha, I see your trip to Argentina was a worthwhile graduation present. But the

Greek philosopher Thales pointed out that the world is made of water.”

“Who cares what he said?”

“Well, it could be that the hydrogen and oxygen are too mild for you. But you still need to irrigate your brain. Maybe a Dionysian solution would be better.”

“Now there’s a Greek I can relate to.”

“Precisely.”

“But I still misspell words.”

“Look, you may just need a new view of spelling.”

“That’s sweet of you, Uncle.”

”Misspelling does not always equal a mistake.”

Juan tilted his head wistfully. “I wish that were true, but I think you’re wrong. The business world wants correct spelling and standard pronunciation. I can’t spell!” he cried in desperation. “Who will hire me if this keeps up?”

Sidney laid a calming hand on his nephew’s shoulder. “Your mother told me about your spelling worries and how you’ve brought these concerns to seventeen therapists in order to free yourself from the curse.”

“ . . . She did?”

“Yes. And your complaining has its virtues. It reveals and builds an inner library of clarifying concerns. Once these are organized in a sound hierarchy, the rest is easy.”

“Hah! Nothing is easy for me.”

“Except complaining. Complaining is good. It leads to innovative thinking, the kind I do in my wine cellar.”

“What?”

“Some call it whining but I call it wining. I contemplate situations over a glass of chardonnay, a sauvignon blanc, a merlot. Sometimes I use pinot or a sparkling zinfandel. It helps me remember that ‘misspellings’ can be the creative new workings of old, worn-out words. Often they result in the artistic production of new ones! Take the Old English saga Beowulf. The Vikings stole the language and turned it into Swedish. So-called ‘misspellings’ can be new word creations in disguise.”

Juan listened in silence. “Really?”

“Of course.”

“That’s hopeful.”

“A good start.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Excellent. And while you’re doing that, a glass of merlot from my wine cellar can smooth the process.”

Juan considered the proposal. “Why would yours be better than others?”

Sidney straightened his back and rose to his full height. “As your mother may have explained but you may not know, part of my fortune derives from oenology workshops I give all over the country. The secret to my Bottles of Happiness brand is that I play Gregorian chant twenty-four hours a day in my wine cellar. Especially “Ferment Forever,” the chant written by Pope Gregory himself in 598 A.D., after his visit to a winery in Sicily. The chant makes the wine barrels dance—taking small steps, of course—and inspires grapes to ferment celestially, thus creating their heavenly taste.”

Sidney led Juan into the mansion. They climbed the spiral staircase to his library, where, on a heavy bookshelf, he found Himmel von Strassel’s 1968 edition of Freude Zwischen den Weintraub (Joy Among the Grapes). Behind it stood an aged bottle of wine. Withdrawing a corkscrew from his vest pocket, he opened a bottle and poured some for Juan.

“You’ll like this.”

Juan swirled the wine in the glass and lifted it to his lips. Sidney watched his eyes disappear in pleasure behind his lids.

“Have another sip,” Sidney suggested when the lids rose again.

“This tastes sooo good.”

Sidney smiled. “My best. Only \$19.95.”

“Can I take it home with me?”

“Of course.”

“If my spelling improves, I’ll send you a check.”

“You mean your misspelling.”

“Well, I’ll have to get a job first.”

“That sounds practical, very businesslike.”

Juan took another sip.

“What about my dry brain syndrome?” he asked. “Will it go away?”

“Slowly. You’ve become more fluid already.”

“You could be right, Uncle. I feel it already. I never thought wisdom could come in this form. Thank you.”

“My pleasure. So shall I expect a check in the mail? Do we have a deal?”

“Yes, we do.”

Juan embraced his uncle. Filled with a future of new ideas, he headed home to start his new life.

from Carlos the Cloud

Available on Amazon and BN.com, or visit [www.jimgold.com](http://www.jimgold.com)