

## MELANIE MARTIN WANTS TO MEET YOU!

You know I always love to tell you about books I've read, but an extraordinary book demands that I tell you about it right this moment: WITH LOVE FROM SPAIN, MELANIE MARTIN by Carol Weston (Knopf, \$15.95) and my one major regret is that I haven't read the first two books in the series, MELANIE MARTIN GOES DUTCH and THE DIARY OF MELANIE MARTIN.

But I promise you I'll scare them up somewhere and let you know if they are as wonderful as this one. It started off kind of slow, with 11 year old Melanie on the plane for a spring-break trip with her mom, dad and brother, Matt the Brat to Spain (but I bet you guessed that?). She is very proud of being able to speak Spanish (it's sort of Dog-Spanish—you know, enough to talk to the family cocker spaniel so he understands you—but phonetically transcribed by Melanie, just in case you have missed the boat).

Once there, they hook up with (don't retch) her mother's old boyfriend, Antonionio and his son, Miguel. This is the beginning of *muchas aventuras* as Melanie learns about *beso beso*, art, *tapas*, bullfights, las fallas, Las Mascleta, tiny thin slices of jamon, and museos.

Melanie's mother is an art teacher, and she loves taking the kids to museums. Even if you're NOT an art fan, you're going to

want to go and see these things after you read this book! You'll know all about Miro, Picasso, Dali, Gaudi, and more!

I can only imagine that the other two books are as wonderful as this. It's like Paul Theroux joins the Mickey Mouse club and Rick Steves is in charge. You know, though, that my favorite form of punishment for kids has always been to say, "Okay, get in the car / airplane / train / camper. Travel is my weakness and this one really smacked me upside the head and made me want to go right along with Melanie and Matt and Miranda and Marc (the 4Ms) on whatever adventure they invite to share in the next book. Which I can hardly wait for, because I know it will be even better than this one, which is saying some.

It's funny, it's snappy, it's got some good food stories in it (a requisite for me), great characters and I want ALL OF YOU TO READ IT even if you have to wrap it in brown paper so your friends don't know you've stooped to reading children's books. Which, as I have always said, are FAR FAR BETTER than anything in the grownup world. Oh, I hate to gush, but wait until you get to the flamenco part. And the scene where they try to fry an egg on the sidewalk (which I've always wanted to try).

This one will make you want to pack up the kids, or borrow some kids to pack up, and head out for...MANCOS or SOUTH

AFRICA or ENGLAND or who knows where. And when you get to the end of the book, even if it's not three in the morning like it was for me, you'll love the mom-Melanie bonding scene. It will bring a tear to your eye faster than you can say, "Ladies and gentlemen in the boarding area..." I only wish I had the talent to write something like this, something funny and witty and enlightening and savvy and memorable. So, go forth and find it at the bookstore or library and READ IT. There will be a test later. And as the Sweet Potato Queen, world traveler Jill Conner Brown, her ownself would say, "Be Particular." Melanie Martin would say that too!

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