

# Messages to Mars

*by* Hugh Barlow

## Full Header

John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via Earthnet.com  
Mon Aug 10 03:23:32 Greenwich Mean Earth Standard 2133  
Return#Path: <bounce#13876419#2604777@Earthnet.net>  
Authentication#Results: mta113.MarsNet Mail.re2.Earthnet.com  
from=Eathnet.com; domainkeys=neutral (no sig);  
from=Earthnet.com; dkim=neutral (no sig)  
Received: from 154.732.867.5392 (EHLO flpi184.prodigy.net)  
(207.115.20.186)  
by mta113.MarsNet Mail.re2.Earthnet.com with SMTP; Mon, 10  
Aug 2133 10:23:32 #0600  
Received: from Earthnet.com (Earthnet.com [66.160.176.130])  
by flpi184.prodigy.net (8.13.8 inb ipv6 jeff0203/8.13.8) with SMTP  
id n783FNiw020500  
for <Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com>; Mon, 10  
Aug 2133 10:23:32 #0600  
Received#SPF: Pass client#ip=72.3.249.107; helo=rs1.John  
Darling;  
envelope#from=<John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com>;  
Date: Mon, 10 Aug 2133 10:23:32 #0600  
To: Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com  
From: John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com  
<13876419#2604777@Earthnet.net>  
Subject: I have arrived  
Mime#Version: 110.0  
Content#Type: text/plain; charset="us#ascii"; format=flowed  
Reply#To: "John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com" <John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com>  
Message#ID: <Earthnet#2604777#13876419#147.562.177  
2133.08.10#10:23:32#John Darling

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154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via Earthnet.com>  
Content#Length: 8412

From: John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com To: Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com.  
Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
177.2133.08.10 Time of transmission: 03:23:32 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.85 C  
Subject: I have arrived

Dear Mary:

As I write to you, I am sitting near an actual "Campfire" with a group from the ranch where I will be staying for a while. It seems that this is an evening ritual around here. The whole ranch gathers at the fire for the evening meal, and the kids roast marshmallows just as they do in the old movies we would watch. It is fun! There is little light, so I have to write using the light from the touch screen. I have a virtual keyboard set up on the screen itself so that I can see what I type. You know that I hate these virtual keyboards because there is no tactical sensations, or "feel" to the keys, but I can't see to type on an ACTUAL keyboard, so I will limp along with what I have for now. My day has been quite full, and it sounds like my visit here will be busy, so I will use the "downtime" at dinner to write to you.

I will not bore you with the details of the trip here from Mars. You know how these trips are; long and boring. Paying the cost of communication would have expensive, so I stayed incommunicado. I spent most of the trip from Mars to Earth orbit watching old Vids. As you know, I have become a big fan of the ancient "Movies" from the early 20th century. I think I like the old "Black and White" films best. These films may be simple, but the villains were villains, and the heros were heros. The heros did not end up being some sort of

twisted and misunderstood creep that was hiding a dark side, while the villain is some misunderstood soul that everyone is supposed to feel sorry for. I think that the people who are making Vids today are trying to say too much, and are trying too hard to not insult people. Instead, they make these vanilla Vids that no-one wants to see. It was like that on the ship. 1000 channels of nothing to watch. The only things that were any good were the old shows. I like the old Sci Fi series, but I sure wish that their vision of the future had come about instead of the one we have now. Everything seems so perfect in the future for Earth and the Solar system in the futures that are predicted in those series. It seems that almost nothing turned out the way they thought it would. Man is still cruel. It seems we never learned to get along with one another and probably never will..

Babylon Tower is AWESOME! The captain of the ship announced our arrival in time for everyone to view it on the screens. First Class got to view it from the viewing room, and they disembarked first. Steerage got off last. What we saw upon arrival was what looked like a city hanging by a thread from the face of the Earth. There was a string of these cities hanging from the face of the planet. The Spacers on board the ship called this "Mother Earth's String of Pearls," and it was a beautiful sight. We approached the "Pearl" that was hanging off of the coast of South America. We disembarked into Babylon Station, and then I went straight to the observation lounge to get something to eat. I am very grateful to you for all of the goodies that you packed for the trip, but they did not last long. By the time I got to the station, I was ready for some REAL food! I was quite tired of eating the prepacked heat-and-eat meals that they served to the steerage passengers. The VIEW from the tower is fantastic. The dining room on the "Top" floor has a "Glass" ceiling, and the Earth hangs overhead like a huge chandelier. During the day, the view is breath taking. At night, it is truly spectacular! The lights on the Earth sparkle like diamonds. If you ever get the chance to come here, I HIGHLY recommend that you dine at The Hanging Gardens. They are the BEST restaurant on the top floor in

## Babylon Tower.

The ride down from the tower was almost boring. If it wasn't for the view, it would have been just another long elevator ride. The only difference is that part of the way it feels like you are losing weight until you are weightless, and then you flip over. You then start to gain weight until you reach the platform on the Earth. There are several "levels" on the tower that have varying degrees of "gravity". There are two levels each that have "Martian Standard" gravity, and "Lunar Standard" gravity. There was even a level at "Zero" gravity, but I did not stop at any of these levels. I took the express elevator to the base, since I was in a hurry to get to my destination. As it was, it took HOURS to get down from the "top" of the tower to the base. I would not suggest that someone with acrophobia take this trip unless they stay away from the observation lounge. The station at the bottom was on a platform in the ocean. From what I understand, they locate all of the towers in the ocean and on the equator. They locate them on the oceans for reasons of security, and in case the cables break. They don't want the cables coming down on any populated areas. They use the equator for the "spin" to hold the towers up. The security comes from being able to see what is coming for kilometers in every direction. It appears that there are a number of crazy people on Earth who would just love to destroy one or more of these towers. The towers have extremely tight security. NO-ONE gets near them that has not been inspected seven ways to Sunday. The base of the tower is as fascinating as the top. There are many levels that go down into the ocean, and there are windows in the structure that allow travelers and tourists to look out underwater and watch the life in the ocean. Guides are there to explain what you are seeing, and they kept telling us that during certain times of the year you could occasionally glimpse large aquatic mammals such as whales and dolphins from these windows, but I did not see any while I was there. I did see a few sharks. It seems that they like to hang out at the base of the tower to eat the scraps that are thrown away by the kitchen staff of the many dining

establishments on the tower. The proprietors of the tower encourage the practice of throwing kitchen scraps to the sharks to help discourage divers from sneaking onto the platform. From what I understand, that would not discourage any trained attack group, but it would discourage amateurs. In keeping with my low profile, I took a boat from the tower's base to the mainland. We made port in Panama City, Panama. That is where I caught the Mag Lev to Brownsville. It seems that the train runs all the way from Alaska to Argentina. It even crosses the Beiring Straights to Russia and into Asia, and thence on to Europe. There is some sort of tunnel that goes under the ocean at the Beiring Straights that is supposed to be the longest under water tunnel in the world. It sounds impressive. I would like to see it some day. I had better take a pressure suit, however. I hear it gets cold there. Not as cold as Mars gets, but colder than it is in the domes. You DON'T need a pressure suit in Brownville, however! Goodness, it's hot! These folks are still using the old Fahrenheit scale for measuring temperature, but when they say it is 100 degrees out, let me tell you, you FEEL like it is boiling water! It really is only 38 degrees Celsius, but that is plenty hot. The people here tell me that it is like this about 8 months out of the year. Of course, the year is only 12 months long, so that is most of the time, unlike a Martian year, which is twice as long as an Earth year. I am sure you remember. I know, we still use Earth Standard when dealing with the Terries, but we tend to THINK in MARTIAN years when at home and dealing with our own.

The mag-lev here on Earth is similar to the one on Mars Between Olympus Mons Station and Hellas Basin Station. The main difference is that the trip seems longer because gravity pulls on you relentlessly, and the heat seems unbearable. It was a good thing that I had worked out continuously throughout the trip to get ready for the visit. Even with the air conditioning in the train, you can feel the humidity in the air. I miss the warrens of home, and the controlled conditions of the domes. The weather here is almost never the same on two days in a row. One day it is sunny and hot.

The next day it rains. You can't tell what it is going to do from one day to the next. Even the supposed "Weather Men" can't tell what the weather is going to do.

I took the bus to the "Bar Lazy O Stretch Ranch," and walked through the gates from the highway. The ranch ran along the highway for kilometers from the outskirts of Brownsville. All I could see the whole way was fence and what looked like cameras on the fenceposts from time to time. I could not figure out what the cameras were for, but they were there. Pretty tight security for a bunch of birds. It almost looked like a prison fence, with the concertina wire strung along the top, and the cameras mounted every few fence posts. As I pulled up to the ranch gates, the fence changed from the wire type of fence to the old fashioned adobe brick wall. The wall was tall enough that you could drive a truck through, and the gate was made of wood and opened like two doors. The doors were open when I arrived, and I walked in and crossed what appeared to be a large gravel parking lot. Across the lot from the gate was a compound that looked like it came right out of one of the old black and white western movies that I had been watching while I had traveled here. It was the very picture of an old Mexican village, right down to the adobe houses. There was the "Big Hacienda," which I assumed belonged to the people who ran the place, and the smaller houses either belonged to the help, or were guest houses for people like myself. I was greeted first by a pack of dogs ranging in size from very tiny to very large. All of them were loud. They all were wagging their tails. About a minute after the dogs started barking, a big fellow in a big hat came out and shook my hand. He introduced himself as the owner of the place and told me that there was no better alarm system than a pack of dogs. He called a few of his workers over, and they began to get me settled in. Anyway, now that I have finally reached my destination, I should be able to write you occasionally. I wish we could talk, but as you know, the time delay is maddening. If you get desperate to hear my voice, I suppose I could shoot you a Vid, but for now, this will do. I will do

my best to see what kind of deal we can get on some high quality protein in the morning.

Love,  
Darling

Standard Header

From John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com to Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com.  
Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
240.2133.08.11 Time of transmission: 03:37:25 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.59 C  
Subject: WOW! What a day!

Dear Mary:

I went out with Paco and Pancho this morning to harvest the eggs! First of all, they have some AMAZING FOOD here! What WE call burritos are NOT the real thing, let me tell you! They don't even call them that here, they call them tacos, but that is besides the point. You have not TASTED a burrito until you have tasted one that has been made by the cook at the cantina at the Bar Lazy O Stretch Ranch! From what I understand, hers are not all that unusual, unless you want to consider the fact that she uses Ostrich Eggs and Ostrich meat in hers instead of chicken eggs and chicken meat or beef. She certainly doesn't use SOY! The Ostrich actually is supposed to taste more like beef than chicken. I don't know, since I have never had beef. All I have ever had was the Soy substitute. Ostrich tastes a lot like that, only quite a bit better. Even the bean burritos here are different than the ones we have at home. I am going to have to get the recipe from Lupita. The ranch actually does have a few cows on it, but they are mostly used for milking, and not for meat. From what I understand, the Bar Lazy O Stretch Ranch is fairly self sufficient. They also have what they call a "Truck Farm"

on the property. They use this farm to raise food for the ranch, and for sale to their neighbors. They also have a few chickens for their own use, but mostly they eat ostrich. They eat beef when it is time to get rid of a cow, and on special occasion. Most of the ranchers in the area raise beef, and they will barter ostrich for beef occasionally. The ranch can get more beef for their ostrich, but mostly these folks eat ostrich.

Paco and Pancho took me out early to get eggs. I was not allowed to leave the vehicle, since I was there strictly as an observer. It was exciting, none-the-less. Paco would drive up to the nest in the buggy with the siren blaring and Pancho would have the tranquilizer rifle ready just in case the male would attack. Usually the ostriches would run away, but on one occasion, the male actually snuck back and attacked Paco while he was harvesting the eggs! It was a good thing that Paco was wearing armor. Otherwise, he would have been severely injured, as it was, he ended up with a sprained wrist and a cracked rib since the bird attacked him with his wings, and then kicked him with his foot right in the chest. The kick actually threw him several meters through the air, and the bird would have attacked him again, if Pancho had not shot him with a dart and tranquilized him. In the wild, most of the eggs would not hatch or would be lost. By harvesting the eggs, the crew hope to save the chicks, and force the hens to lay more. A male will have a harem of several hens, and they all lay eggs in one big nest. At the end of the season, they will stop harvesting and allow a few eggs to hatch naturally. This way, they will let the flock continue to run free range. The eggs that they harvest are then checked to see if they are fertilized. If not, they become someone's breakfast. Those that are fertilized are then incubated and allowed to hatch. The hatchlings are then put in with some older birds so that they can learn how to eat and take care of themselves, and when they reach a certain age, they are let loose on the ranch to run free, after being radio tagged. That is part of what the cameras were for. The cameras help keep track of the ostriches, and they help keep track



of intruders. Not only do the cameras see in natural light, but they see in infra-red, and in radio frequencies. Using those cameras, the people on the ranch can track down any bird that they desire. They can also track down any intruder. I discovered this when there was an alarm that went off during the night, and the whole compound came alive with military precision. A whole crew of men drove off in those little off road buggies, and they were all sporting rifles and night vision glasses. They came back with a about 6 people all tied up. They looked doped up, and the boss was quite upset. He had his guys take their fingerprints, and in a few minutes he was making some calls to one of the local businesses in the area. He read the captives' boss the riot act, and told him to come and get them. He said that he did not want to see them again, and that he would see him in court. I asked Mr. O'Neil why he did not just call the police, and he just laughed at me. "What police?" he said. "There are no police around here. We have the corporate enforcers. There have been no police around here for about a century!" He explained that if you wanted justice around here, you had to sue in civil court. Since these people were employed by a company that excavated the old dumps in the area for usable plastics and metals, he was holding the company responsible for their behavior, just as they would for his people. He did not expect monetary compensation, but instead, he expected to get them fired. If it was found that the company was responsible for the raid, then he expected that the people involved would be compensated for their trouble, and the COMPANY would never do this again. Either way, his hope was that these people would not do this again. This was not the first raid that his company had to deal with. Most of the people that lived in the area could not afford to eat the meat that grew around them. It wasn't that they were hungry, it was that they were tired of the vegetarian diet that they were forced to eat, and they decided that they were going to steal some meat from him. They figured that since there were no police, it would be an easy thing to do. They did not figure on the crew that protected the birds from just that sort of thing. Many also failed to count on the birds themselves. The ostrich is the fastest

bird alive. It is also the fiercest fighting bird when cornered. The kick of an ostrich can kill a man. Most don't know these things about the birds when they set out to hunt them. They have this mistaken idea that the ostrich will just stick it's head in a hole and wait for them to catch it. I didn't know these things about the birds myself. I learned by working with Paco and Pancho. I now understand why ostrich meat is so expensive! It is hard work trying to keep these animals alive and getting them to market! It certainly is NOT like growing SOYBEANS!

Paco and Pancho showed me a javalina kill today. They told me that this was a bit unusual, but that it was getting more common lately. It seems that javalinas are making a comeback into the area. They collected the radio tag from the bird and called the kill in to the office. That one is going to be written down as a loss. The crew is now warned to keep an eye out for javalina on the ranch. They have been told not to kill the animal, but to trap or tranq it if they can. The boss wants to relocate the animal to another part of Texas so that it can survive, but not kill his birds.

It was a busy day, and I can't wait to get to bed. This gravity keeps dragging me down, even though I don't really do anything but go along for the ride. I am wiped out. Tomorrow is going to be another busy day. I am supposed to see how the birds are processed. I don't know that I will like that, but it is part of the reason I am here.

All of my love,  
Darling

Standard Header

From John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com to Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com.  
Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
389.2133.08.12 Time of transmission: 04:07:53 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.35 C

Subject: Day Three

Dear Mary:

The processing plant was not actually in Texas, as I thought it was, but in Mexico, just across the river. There is a HUGE city there called Matamoros, and it is quite dirty and filled with people! I have never seen a place like this before. Everywhere you go, there are people doing things that I don't understand. There are people on the street begging for money, which I had seen in Panama City, but I did not see the dirt that I see here. Panama City is a modern city, Matamoros looks like a city that time forgot. There are people who are selling wares from bicycles, and others who are using horse drawn wagons to get around. It is quite odd to see a horse drawn wagon with modern wheels! Most of the people who do travel in the city, travel by bicycle or by bus. There are few private vehicles. It seems that every time it rains here, the streets get flooded, and that is why everything looks so dirty. It is actually the mud from the frequent flooding. No-one has bothered to put storm drains in this city, so there is no way for the flood waters to recede. The water just sits until it dries and leaves the mud behind. The processing plant is in an old brick building that sits on top of a hill. There does not seem to be a problem with flooding here. The building is in good repair, and all of the equipment seems to be made of stainless steel. I watched the procedure from beginning to end, and I won't go into all of the details, but it seems that the facility is sanitary. The birds don't suffer, and the procedure used to kill them is humane. The process used to sanitize the birds seems fairly foolproof.

Today, I learned that the ranch that I have been staying at is not the only one that the company owns. Most of the ranches it owns are set up so that the birds can run "Free Range." This means that they can scour the land like they do in nature, and not be cooped up in a small enclosure and fed "Feed." However, not every bird that the company hatches goes to one of these ranches. Since nature tends

to provide a ratio of 1 male to one female (roughly) and they usually only need about 1 male to about 7 females, they tend to remove the sexual reproductive organs of about 6 of 7 of the male ostriches that they hatch. These "Capon" are then raised in a separate facility. They are fed in a field that is sewn with alfalfa. This is the company's premium brand of ostrich meat. It is not free range, but it is not as if the birds were kept in a small enclosure. I was taken to see one of these "Capon Ranches" today. They also house their extra females at these capon ranches. From them, they get unfertilized ostrich eggs for eating. These females are also fed the same alfalfa that the capons are, and they too are considered one of the prime cuts of meat when slaughtered. The birds seemed quite happy, and were quite docile. They were very unlike the birds on the other side of the river. These were almost like pets! You could actually walk up to them and PET them! They seemed quite enamored with their human keepers. The children were even RIDING some of them as if they were PONIES! It seems as if a few of the birds have been trained for just that purpose. A full grown adult could not ride a bird, but he could attach a bird to a small two wheeled cart and use the bird for transportation that way. I actually saw a contraption like that at the ranch. It was just two bicycle wheels with a seat between them. There were poles sticking out with a harness for the bird. Someone hooked the cart up to the bird and offered to let me try it out, but I had no idea how to steer the thing, so I declined. I watched as this gentleman sat on the seat, took a little whip, snapped it next to the bird's head, and the bird started to trot around the ranch towing this little cart behind him. The guy held the reigns in his hands just like he was riding a horse, but it seemed that most of his work was done with the whip. I don't think he actually hit the bird, he just seemed to startle it in one direction or another. It seemed a bit cruel to me. From what I understand, there are several of these ranches scattered around the area. They are all owned by the wonderful people who are my hosts.

Darling

Standard Header

From John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com to Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com.  
Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
256.2133.08.13 Time of transmission: 3:23:50 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.25 C  
Subject: HELP!

Dear Mary:

I have a bit of a quandary that I need some help with. Give me some sisterly advice if you will. It appears that Lupita's daughter has taken a liking to me, and sits with me at every meal. She asks all kinds of questions about me, and asks about what things are like out in space. It is obvious that she is interested. I would not mind the attention, if it were not for the fact that the man who owns the ranch has a son who likes Lupita's daughter. I like the boy, and I certainly don't want to get him or his father upset with me. This girl seems determined to ruin a good business deal. How do I get her to back off without hurting her too much? I don't blame her for wanting to get away from the misery that I see around here, but there is much beauty here as well. If it were not for the fact that there was so much gravity, I could actually enjoy myself here. Maybe with a few years of therapy, I could actually live here and enjoy it. Right now, it is too much work just to walk.

I woke up this morning and saw some black flakes falling to the ground. At first, I thought that maybe there was a volcano nearby, but then I remembered that this part of Earth did not have any active volcanos. I looked up in the sky and saw a large plume of smoke, and I realized that there was quite a large fire not too far from the ranch. I ran to the office, and tried to warn someone, but they just laughed at me. I did not understand why they were

laughing until someone explained that they were just burning sugar cane down the road, and it was nothing to be worried about. Nothing to be worried about? There was an extremely large fire just down the road, and no-one was worried? Are these people INSANE? Apparently not. By the end of the day, the fire had burned itself out. All that was left were the little black flakes that were everywhere. As a courtesy, the owner of the ranch took me to see the cane field that was burned. All that was left were the blackened stubs of the huge stalks of cane. He explained to me that they would come back after the field had cooled and harvest it with some large machinery. They would then crush and squeeze the cane until the juice was out. After processing the cane, it would become sugar. He showed me a field that had not yet been burned. It looked like nothing more than very big, tall blades of unmowed grass. I guess that is what sugar cane is, after all. Some sort of grass. I had ridden past this stuff on the way to the ranch, and never even knew what it was. All of OUR sugar comes from beets, if we use "Sugar" at all. We don't have room for cane in the hydroponics area or in the gardens. We don't have room to grow much meat either. That is why I am here. Of course, you know that. Mars' people want something to eat that isn't soy based, rabbit, or chicken. As you know, not that many of us can even get rabbit or chicken on Mars.

Anyway, this has been my day today. I hope that yours has been better, and that you can help me figure out an honorable way out of my dilemma.

Sincerely,

Your "Darling" baby brother

Standard Header

From John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com to Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com.  
Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet

337.2133.08.14 Time of transmission: 03:50:45 GMES. Cost of transmission: 0.23 C  
Subject: Thanks for the advice

Dear Mary:

I have been quite impressed with the ranch lately. They have been showing me around the "Infrastructure" today. I did not know, but the ranch uses brackish ground water to water the birds. Do you know what "Brackish" means? I didn't, but I know now. It is part salt water, and part fresh water. How do the birds DRINK this water you ask? I know that I did! They use a solar still to DISTILL the ground water so that the birds can drink the water! They have these stills set up at various areas scattered about the ranch so that the birds don't have to come to one place to get their water. They use the SAME water for HUMAN consumption! I had been drinking salt water, and never even knew it! Not that it matters, since we drink our own urine on Mars, and in fact, throughout space, but the novelty is still new to me. Most of the energy on the ranch comes from the sun. We use nuclear on Mars. It makes my stay here feel even more quaint. Of course, being so close to the sun, I guess it is easier for them to get their energy from the sun. Every now and again, they send a crew out to collect the salts from the stills, and then they SELL the salts that are collected to the cattle ranchers in the area as salt licks. They make money on this without even trying.

When I first came to the ranch, I wondered why there were so many houses at the main compound. Now I know. It actually takes quite a few people to run this operation. It isn't just like the old days when a few cowboys would push a bunch of cows around on a pasture and then bring them in to be sold. I am surprised, but the whole time I have been here, no-one has been willing to talk to me about "Price." I keep getting told , "We'll get to that. Go with this guy and see what he has to show you today." It seems that nothing gets done in

a hurry around here. I know what the market rates are for the meat, I just want to know what kind of price I can get for a large order from this company. I want to know the details of how we can ship the order all the way to Mars. We need to work those things out. The longer I am here, the more nervous I get about those details. Maybe that is this guy's angle. He gets me keyed up before negotiation. I need to keep my calm. Learn all I can about his business.

Your advice about talking to the father is good. I was worried about talking to the son. He seems too emotional. I am as likely to get a fist in the face as a, "Good day." from him. I think that I need to explain to the father that I have no designs on Lupita's daughter. I see her for what she is, a girl who is trying to take advantage of a way out, and I have no desire to be used in that fashion. Perhaps he can help cool his son's passion.

I will write to you tomorrow and let you know how my talk with the father went. Thanks for the advice.

Darling

Standard Header

From John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com to Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com.  
Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
455.2133.08.15 Time of transmission: 04:35:47 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.24 C  
Subject: Thanks for the advice

MARY:

WOW! The talk was just what we needed! Not only did it get me off the hook with the son, but it helped loosen up the old man! As soon as I explained what was going on with Lupita's daughter, he



laughed! He told me that this happens every time that someone from space comes around. The girl is quite fickle, and when there is no-one better, she lavishes her attention on his son. As soon as someone more interesting comes along, she drops him like a rock, and the son is out of sorts for a few weeks. It has become a routine around the place. The father doesn't blame me, and he keeps telling his son that he really needs to look elsewhere for attention, but the boy has his heart set on Lupita's daughter. Not that I can blame him, really. I mean, if it weren't for the fact that she wasn't involved in this business deal, I would gladly have dallied with her, myself. Perhaps something could have come of it, who knows? Unfortunately, this deal is too important to throw away on a minor dalliance. The old man had another talk with the son. He explained the situation, and how I had come to him looking for advice and stating that I did not want to take his girl. The boy is STILL angry, but at least it is not at ME. The old man assures me that he will get over it in a few weeks, as soon as I am gone and things return to normal.

We started talking price. I commented that we wanted a large shipment of his product, and that we expected a good price for it. He quoted me a price, but it seemed a bit high. I told him so. Mr. O'Neil said to me, "You have been here for a few days, and you have seen my operation from top to bottom. This was NOT by accident. I did this because of this very reason. I want you to go to my competitors and see how they treat their birds. We sell Organic Free Range birds. No-one else does that. Our Capons are also Organic. They are not free range, true, but they are premium, top quality birds that are well cared for. You have seen this with your own eyes. I want you to go to our competitors and see how their operation is run. Then come back and quibble with me on price. This is your first time in Earth, right?" I replied that it was. Mr. O'Neil then said, "I will even provide you with a guide a body guard of sorts to help you get around in unfamiliar territory. I am THAT CERTAIN that you will be back to purchase my products. Which

other companies were you interested in looking at?" I provided the names of the other companies in Africa and Australia that we were interested in speaking with. "GREAT," he said. "See which of these companies will allow you to come and inspect their operations. Let me know when you are ready, and I will provide your escort." This sounds too good to be true, but what the heck. I'll give it a shot. It is not like this guy is giving me a guided tour of the opposition, or anything. I will write back when I have something to tell you. It may be a few days.

Darling

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From John Darling 154.732.867.5392@MarsNet.com via  
Earthnet.com to Mary Satterley 154.732.867.6720@MarsNet.com.  
Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
373.2133.08.17 Time of transmission: 03:35:21 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.22 C  
Subject: It's me again

Dear Mary:

As you know, it has been a couple days since I last wrote. I have spent my time trying to contact several of Mr. O'Neil's competitors to see if I could set up a meeting for an inspection of their facilities. Most were glad to meet me and discuss price, few were willing to let me inspect their facilities. The 3 that were, were in Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. I have scheduled meetings there with the people that run the places, and I have spoken to Mr. O'Neil about it. He was quite pleased, and not at all surprised to find that two of the locations were in his ancestral homeland. His people came from Australia and New Zealand. He told me that his great grandfather purchased the land that he owned when the US Government condemned it because of global warming. His great grandfather purchased it for the purpose of raising shrimp, thinking

that the ocean was going to rise, and inundate the area. The government allowed him to purchase it for that purpose, but when this did not happen, his great grandfather turned to cattle ranching instead. It was Mr. O'Neil's grandfather that brought the ostriches to the ranch. He discovered that the ostrich was better suited to the location than the cattle were. They also were a more healthy, leaner cut of meat. They required less care than the cattle did, and required no feed. They could live off the land, where no cattle could survive. All they needed was a small amount of water, and some sort of plant life to eat. As long as those requirements were met, the ostriches were happy. The family has ever since been perfecting the raising of ostriches. They pretty well have it down to a science now.

Once I gave my list to Mr. O'Neil, he began packing and making his goodbyes. It seems that the escort that he was going to provide me was himself. I did not expect that. I thanked him for taking the time to escort me PERSONALLY while I was on this trip, and he told me, "Think nothing of it. It gives me an excuse to go visit relatives." I am not quite sure what that means, but I guess I will find out. Our first stop is going to be in Africa. This time we are going by plane to Jacob's Ladder. That is the other tower on the other side of South America. We are going to ride the elevator up to the top of the tower, and then take a cable car along one of the cables BETWEEN the towers. We will go as far as the World Tree Tower in Africa. Then we will ride the elevator down, and take another plane ride to the Sudan. We will land in Omdurman, and make contact with the people who run the company there. I will let you know more when I get there. It will probably be a day or so before I have news.

Darling

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Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
5237.2133.08.19 Time of transmission: 21:23:11 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.21 C  
Subject: Awesome trip!

Mary:

Jacob's Ladder was almost exactly like Babylon Tower. Even the observation lounge was pretty much the same. The World Tree Tower was COMPLETELY different, however. It was like we had entered a different world! There were completely new sounds, smells and colors. The people were different too. They were dressed differently, and smelled differently, and looked differently. I was enthralled. Mr. O'Neil almost had to drag me out of the observation lounge to get me on the elevator. I was so enraptured with people watching. Everything was so new and different. If it wasn't for him, I would have been late for my meeting with the people down on the planet below. I am glad that he came along, but I regret the lost opportunity to just sit and watch as the people walked by. Another flight had us in Omdurman, and Mr. O'Neil insisted that we stay at one of the more expensive hotels in the city. He explained that the security at the more expensive hotels was much better than the cheap hotels, and it wasn't worth saving a few dollars if you lost your life. When he put it THAT way, it made sense. He paid for his own room, and I paid for mine. He offered to pay for mine, claiming that he could write it off as a business expense, but since I could do the same, it didn't much matter, and I did not want to be that much in his debt.

We had dinner at one of the better Indian restaurants in town. They did not seem to have many locals dining there, but there were quite a few people from out of town, like us. The food was fantastic, as had been promised at the hotel, and we went back quite satisfied. I don't know how these people on Earth do what they do with food, but I am going to have to find out! There were flavors in that food that I had never tasted before. We are going to have to find out

what those spices are. I had a curried tofu dish that was like nothing I had never had before. I have had tofu, you know, but I have never had tofu that tasted like that! They also had some kind of dumpling with potatoes and peas that was quite spicy. I forget what they called it, but it was good, and it seemed very simple to make. Again, we split the check. Mr. O'Neil did offer to pay, but I did not feel comfortable in imposing on his hospitality too much.

I am shutting down for the night, and I will be getting up early in the morning to meet with the owners of the company here in the Sudan. They will hopefully show me around and we will get to see what their operation is like.

Darling

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Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
6255.2133.08.20 Time of transmission: 21:20:22 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.88 C  
Subject: WHAT a day!

Dear Mary:

WHAT a DIFFERENCE! I flew into the city yesterday, and all I really saw of it was the "Modern" portion of the city near the airport. Once we got in a cab and got to the edges of the city, it became something else entirely! I thought that Matamoros was dirty! My GOODNESS! These people live in HUTS! The streets are covered in dust and sand. This place has garbage thrown everywhere! It is FILTHY! How people can LIVE like this is BEYOND me! Why doesn't someone DO something about this? Is there no way to HELP these people? My heart HURTS from looking at the children. Many sat on the street with broken limbs. They had their hands out

begging for money. Some were blind. I wanted to give them something, but I did not have any cash. I asked Mr. O'Neil about them, and he said that many of them were professional beggars. They came from families who were professional beggars. They would deliberately maim their children so that they could make more money begging. He told me that some were orphans, and others simply ran away from home because things were too bad there. They came to the street to live because it was better than living at home. I passed them all with a heavy heart. If I could, I would save them all. What can be done for these kids?

The cab dropped us off in front of a fairly nondescript building in a newer industrial section of town. The building was made of metal, which seemed like a poor choice for the climate. When I walked in to the building, the first thing that hit me was the heat. As hot as it was outside, it was hotter inside the building. Even with the windows open and the fans blowing at full speed, they could not keep the building cool. Air conditioning would have been nice, but the cost of air conditioning a metal building in this environment was probably cost prohibitive. The smells, and the noise were overpowering. Even though we could not see the processing floor, we could hear what was going on, and smell the animals being processed. Having entered through a shipping door, we located the office, and entered. The office was air conditioned. This was good, since the temperature outside was quite oppressive. I thought it was hot in the Rio Grande Valley, but when I asked Mr. O'Neil how hot it was outside, he told me that it was about 115 degrees! This translates to about 46 degrees Celsius. I didn't think it could GET this hot on Earth! Even he was sweating! The secretary introduced himself and told us that his boss was busy on the phone at the moment, but that he would be right out. He asked us to wait, and offered us some coffee. I have had coffee before, but not like this. I am not sure what it was, but I did not like it. It was too strong for my tastes. I am sure that other people like it that way, and Mr. O'Neil seemed to not mind it too much, but I just took a few sips of it

and put my cup down without comment. I won't be looking for any of THAT, unless one of our CUSTOMERS wants to PAY for it!

After waiting for a few minutes, a Mr. Abdul Mohamed came out to meet us. He greeted us warmly and shook hands and asked me what my purpose for visiting was. I explained that I was interested in making a rather large purchase of ostrich meat to send back to Mars, but first I wanted to see what the facility was like that produced and processed the animals. I explained that I ran a Health Food company, and my customers were quite conscious about the health and treatment of the animals that they consumed. Mr. Mohamed was quite pleased to show me around the facility. He explained to me that his company did not raise it's own stock, but purchased it from local growers who raised the animals and then sold them at auction. His company purchased the animals at auction, and then processed them at this facility. Most of the building was not air conditioned. The kill floor and the processing area were. The loading docks were not. While the kill floor and processing areas all had modern stainless steel equipment, the absence of an air conditioned loading dock worries me. This is a place where disease can be introduced into the processed food. I also do not like the fact that there are no controls over how the animals are treated prior to their being purchased by this company. While they do seem to support many small growers, this company has no way of knowing if the animal they have is diseased or not. One of the reasons that a small farmer would have for getting rid of an animal at an auction is that the animal is not well. His hope would be that the buyer would not know that the animal was ill until after the purchase was made, and it was too late to get the money back. A big processor like this would have no way of keeping tabs on diseased animals that were just purchased before slaughter. It is possible that a diseased animal could get into the food supply without anyone knowing in this way. I left the plant with the promise to Mr. Mohamed that I would think about it, and pass on my recommendation to the committee. Since it was lunch time when we

left, Mr. O'Neil suggested that we go to the auction house and check it out. We could have lunch there. I acquiesced.

We both ate something called a Kabob that I think was made of goat. We purchased them at a vendor at the auction house. This time, I let Mr. O'Neil pay, since I did not have cash, and the meal was cheap. I only did this with the promise that he let me repay the favor some time by buying HIM a meal in return. The Kabob came with some kind of yogurt sauce that I think had cucumber in it. You were supposed to dip the char-grilled meat on a stick into the sauce and eat it off of the stick or something. At least that was what Mr. O'Neil was doing. He seemed to be familiar with the place, and led me around explaining what was going on. I was completely lost. The auction looked more like a zoo, with people screaming and yelling at each other, than an auction. If it was an auction, it was unlike any I have ever seen. There did not seem to be any rules to the bidding that I could tell. There were multiple auctions going on at one time. People were selling camels, goats, chickens, horses, ostriches, cows, and just about any kind of animal that you could eat that you can imagine. I did not see any pigs or dogs. There must have been some kind of rule against selling those animals. After a few hours of wandering around the auction lot, Mr. O'Neil asked if I had seen enough. I had. We left the property and hailed a cab. Inside the vehicle, he asked if I wanted to see where ostriches were raised around here. I replied, "Please!" Mr. O'Neil then instructed the driver to take us out into the countryside. We drove for about an hour into the wilderness surrounding the city, until we reached a small village. Mr. O'Neil instructed the driver to pull up in front of one of the houses in the village, and he told the driver to wait for us. We walked up to the door of the house and knocked, and a young boy came and answered the door. Mr. O'Neil nodded to the youngster and said something in a language that I did not understand, and the child disappeared. Within a few moments, a middle aged man came to the door and greeted us in English. He seemed to know Mr. O'Neil personally. We were invited into the



home, and I was instructed by Mr. O'Neil to take my shoes off at the door. At that time, I noticed that there was a line of shoes on either side of the door under the benches that lined the walkway. We sat and removed our shoes, and entered. We were introduced, and I discovered that our host's name was Ahmed Mohamed. Mr. O'Neil assured me that he was no relation to the Mr. Abdul Mohamed that we had met earlier that morning. He explained that Mohamed was a common name in that region of the world. Mr. O'Neil explained that I was a customer of his that was interested in finding out where his birds came from. Mr. Mohamed seemed quite eager to show us around his farm, and we went back outside and once again got into the cab.

Just a few miles outside of the village, we took a side road that ended up taking us to Mr. Mohamed's farm. There really wasn't much to it. There were a few trees, a few patches of grass, a small well, a couple of children who were busy hauling water from the well to irrigate the grass, a few camels, and some ostriches. I don't really know how much livestock Mr. Mohamed had, but he seemed quite proud of his little farm. I guess for where he lived, it was a great piece of property, but compared to what I had seen elsewhere, it was pitiful. I did not say that to HIM, though. I thanked him for taking the time to show me his farm. He invited me to his home and invited me and Mr. O'Neil to dine with him. I was going to decline, but Mr. O'Neil accepted for both of us. I asked about the taxi driver, and I was told that he was included in the invitation. For dinner that night I dined on camel. We had some of that same type of yogurt, and a dish called "Tabouli." It was some kind of cracked wheat that was soaked or boiled and served with cucumber, tomato, onion, and spices. It was quite good. This is another dish that I am going to have to get the recipe for and bring it home. Mr. Mohamed said that this was his wife's favorite dish, and so, they ate this quite a bit. Dinner at this house was a bit odd. Us men ate alone. The women of the house served us, and apparently, they ate after the men, and with the children. I asked about this after we left, and Mr. O'Neil

said that this was the custom in some of the homes in this region of the world. I also asked why he accepted the invitation, when it seemed that the gentleman could barely afford to feed his own family. Mr. O'Neil told me that it was a matter of pride. He said that if we had not accepted the invitation, that Mr. Mohamed would have been insulted. This would have damaged Mr. O'Neil's business relationship with him. I was told that Mr. O'Neil would make up for the meal by purchasing some of Mr. Mohammed's birds even though he did not need them. In this way, the man could help feed his family and make up for the loss incurred by feeding us. By coming to the house and asking the favor, Mr. O'Neil had put himself in debt to Mr. Mohamed, and feeding us was one way that Mr. Mohamed could insure that he would get paid for the favor.

It was quite late by the time we got back to the hotel. I paid the cab driver for his time, and I tipped him well. I thanked him for his patience with us, and he asked me to give him a call if I ever needed a ride again. He seemed quite pleased with the money that he made for the day's work. He even gave me a card with his number on it so that I could call him if I needed him.

Anyway, it is time for bed. I will write to you again when I have something to say.

Darling

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Routed via LazerCom Stations 147 and 562 in packet  
3455.2133.08.22 Time of transmission: 12:01:34 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.24 C  
Subject: NOW I understand

Mary:

It is COLD here in Australia! The temperature outside is about 46 degrees F or about 4 degrees C. It is almost cold enough to freeze WATER!

The trip to Australia was pretty much the same as it was from Texas to the Sudan. A plane ride to the tower, a ride on the cable car, another ride DOWN the elevator. The difference was again the people. Kojiki Tower had different food and different people. Again, Mr. O'Neil had to pull me away to get me on the elevator. Another plane ride to the continent of Australia, and I finally figured out what Mr. O'Neil meant when he said that he had an excuse to meet family. One of his competitors is a cousin! The place was nice, and I have to say that I am impressed, but it was not as nice as the Bar Lazy O Stretch Ranch. For starters, the birds are not allowed to run. There is no "free range" around here. All of the ostriches are penned in their little pens, and they are moved from one pen to another to rotate the feed, and allow the grass to grow. There seems to be quite a bit of fighting among the males. There doesn't seem to be enough space between the pens, and they can get at each other if they try. It seems that the crew spends quite a bit of time trying to keep the birds from hurting each other, and they would be better off if they figured out how to keep them separated. We spent a couple of days at this ranch, and I am shocked at how much water they used, even though they were in an area that was quite dry. It seems that ALL of the people of Earth are quite wasteful of water. Do you know that they let the shower RUN while they bathe? Even in the areas of the Earth where water is SCARCE, they do this! I have started doing this myself, since I have burned myself several times trying to turn the water OFF! They do not HAVE a simple way to shut the water OFF while they bathe! They simply let the water run, and waste GOOD CLEAN WATER as it runs down the sewer!

This reminds me. Do you remember our little discussion about Terry-cloth towels? You seemed to think that they were called "Terry-Cloth" because they came from Terra. Remember? Well, I was toweling off one morning, and I was reminded of this by the "Terry-Cloth" towel that I was using. So, I asked Mr. O'Neil about this. He told me that they have been called "Terry-Cloth" for a LONG time. They have been called that for much longer than people have been going to space. He is fairly sure that it has nothing to do with the cloth being manufactured on Earth. He pointed out that if this was the case, most of our clothes would be called "Terry-Cloth" as well. He has a point there.

Tomorrow we will be going to New Zealand to check out the last competitor. I will be glad when all this travel on Earth is over. This gravity is quite tiresome. Even in a wheelchair, I get wiped out!

I will write again when I have more to tell you.

Darling

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2345.2133.08.24 Time of transmission: 13:22:45 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.13 C  
Subject: Not quite what we are looking for.

Mary:

I got another surprise today. The trip over from Australia to New Zealand was fine, and uneventful. A short trip in a cab to the airport, a short ride in a plane to the island of New Zealand, and another cab ride to the facility. The New Zealand facility is different than the others. It seems to be some sort of Co-Op that is run by

several different ranchers in the area. These ranchers not only process ostrich, but they process kiwi and emu. I saw several of these ranches, and they mostly seemed to be feedlots. Nothing about these places seemed to be organic in nature. These people seemed to be about mass production and not at all about quality. I was polite, but I was quite glad to get out of the place. The processing facility did seem to be top notch, but other than that, I have nothing good to say about their operation.

I thought it was cold in Australia, but it is even colder here in New Zealand! The temperature today is about 36 degrees F which makes it about 2 degrees C! Another couple of degrees colder and water WOULD freeze! I guess this is what winter is like on Earth. I haven't seen any snow yet, but MAN is it cold! I wish I had brought my pressure suit instead of having to wear these "Winter clothes" that I bought when I got to Australia. I guess that it is not quite as cold as a winter on Mars, but then we don't go out dressed in just CLOTH either. Come to think of it, we rarely go OUT.

We are closing up here tomorrow and heading back to Texas. I am fairly certain that we will be getting our meat from Mr. O'Neil. He has been nothing but honest with me throughout, and he was quite correct when he said that I would not be happy with what I saw at the other operations. We are taking a plane directly to Kojiki Tower in the morning. From there, we will take the cable car over to Jacob's ladder and back to Texas. I will finalize the deal at the ranch when we get there. I think Mr. O'Neil wants to share the news with his people in person.

I will write to you when I have more news.

Darling

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235.2133.08.27 Time of transmission: 03:42:22 GMES. Cost of  
transmission: 0.13 C  
Subject: Back at the ranch

Mary:

Well, it took a couple of days of traveling, but we are finally back in Texas! It sure is nice to be back where it is WARM. I have WONDERFUL news! We have a couple of metric tonnes of ostrich meat contracted to be shipped to Mars in the next few months! We will also be getting some ostrich EGGS! They will not be fertilized, but the type used for eating. You have NO IDEA how good they are. You are in for such a TREAT! The whole compound has been invited to a party that they are throwing in honor of the signing of the contract. Lupita's daughter has even asked me to dance with her, and I had to beg off by telling her that I was not quite up to that kind of activity. The boss's son seemed quite pleased to hear that!

I look forward to finishing this task. I actually want to start looking for some of the other things that I had found while I was traveling about. I want to find a source for that spice, "Curry," and find some recipes for it. I want to see if I can find the recipe for that dish called "Tabouli." This time I am going to be smart and do my business from the TOWER! I am going to stay at one of the lower stages where the gravity is not at Earth normal. Perhaps I will stay where it is at Lunar standard for a while, just to see what that is like! I can always change my mind and stay at the Mars standard level later. I don't think I want to stay. While this trip has been quite educational, I am not sure that I would like to do it as an old man. It certainly takes stamina to fight this gravity all the time. I look forward to coming home soon. Thanks for minding the store while I am away.

Love,  
Darling

