**The Journal of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea**

***July 15, 1492***

As I prepare for my expedition to the Indies, I wanted to write about my life so far so that when I return triumphantly, everyone shall remember my greatness!

My name is Cristoforo Colombo, but most people know me as Christopher Columbus. I was born in Genoa, Italy in 1451, the oldest of five children. I was an obedient son.

I had little schooling, so I did not learn to read or write as a young boy. But I always loved the sea. I vowed as a young boy that as soon as I was old enough, I would go to sea.

I traveled to Greece and Portugal, and I became a sailor in my early teens. In 1476, I was a crewman on a ship that was attacked by French pirates. I was lucky and found a piece of what was left of the ship. Fortunately, I was able to swim the six miles to shore. I traveled to Lisbon, Portugal where my brother, Bartholomew, owned a book and map store. I read many of the books and studied the maps until I had taught myself all I could learn about navigation and mapmaking.

I was fascinated by Marco Polo’s accounts of his journey to Asia in 1271. I believe that the quickest and most direct route to this fascinating place is to cross the unknown waters that we call the "Sea of Darkness." [Editor’s note: Europeans did not know that the North and South American continents and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans all lay between the Indies and Spain.]

Starting in 1484, I tried to convince King John of Portugal to pay for supplies, ships, and a crew to make the voyage to Marco Polo’s amazing gold mine. He refused to pay for my voyage saying that I would fail. At least he knew the world isn’t flat like so many others. He just thought the world is much larger than I do. [Editor’s note: King John was correct, Columbus thought the world was much smaller than it really was.] I decided to ask King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain to pay for my voyage instead. It took me a couple of tries, but they agreed to supply me with the things I needed. Let the Portuguese sail all the way around Africa and across the Indian Ocean. That is the long way to go! The Portuguese king will regret not paying for my voyage!

*August 3, 1492*

The rulers of Spain gave me three ships—the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. They also paid for 90 crewmen and supplies.

I am so excited! I cannot believe that I am the captain of my own voyage to find spices, gold, and precious jewels. I plan to sail to the Canary Islands and then make a long jump across the Ocean Sea to the gold treasures of the Indies. [Editor’s note: The Ocean Sea that Columbus sailed across was actually the Atlantic Ocean. Columbus and the rest of Europe’s explorers believed there was only one huge sea that connected Europe to Asia.]

*October 1, 1492*

This is killing me! Where is land? We have sailed for days and days, and there has been no sight of land. We have had clear skies and steady winds, but my crew is angry and fighting. There is even talk of turning back. The crew has even threatened to push me overboard and sail back to Spain. I am not letting that happen. I have gone too far to turn back now.

Land must be near, I know. Crewmen have spotted branches in the waters and birds that could not possibly go very far from land. From these signs I am sure land is near.

*October 7, 1492*

I am growing impatient. There are more signs, but no land. According to my calculations, we should have spotted land many days ago. I have decided to offer a reward for any sailor that spots land. I only hope that the reward will buy me a few more days before the crew revolts.

*October 12, 1492*

We have spotted land! I have named it San Salvador. I believe that Japan is only a short distance to the west. [Editor’s note: Columbus landed in the Bahamas south of Florida. He believed that he was on islands off the coast of Japan.]

There are strange looking people here, very different from my men and me. They wear little clothing and are of a different color. Our giant ships with enormous white sails amaze them. These Indians are not what I expected, and there are no cities of gold like Marco Polo described. [Editor’s note: Columbus had actually met members of the Taino tribe, but he believed he was in the Indies. This is why he called them Indians.]

I spotted several of them wearing GOLD! They tell me that islands to the north and south are where the gold will be found, so I ordered my men to set sail for the gold!

*December 5, 1492*

We searched many different islands, but we found only more Indians. There were no cities and no gold. We traveled north to a much larger island, but still more Indians and no gold. The King and Queen will not be happy if I do not find gold!

*December 25, 1492*

As we prepared to return to Spain, the Santa Maria ran into a coral reef. It tore holes in the bottom of the ship. We were forced to build a fort out of the wreckage of the Santa Maria. With only two ships, we could not take everyone back to Spain with us, so I found 40 volunteers to stay behind to build a small colony.

*March 15, 1493*

We sailed back across the Ocean Sea. Despite terrible storms, my navigation skills have brought us back to Spain. I have received a letter from the king and queen. They have named me Admiral of the Ocean Sea and the governor of all of the islands that I discovered. News of my discoveries has traveled across Europe. My voyage is known by all, and I am a hero! I would like to see the look on King John of Portugal’s face! I bet he regrets not paying for my voyage now. I am anxious to return to the land that I discovered because I still have not found the gold that I know is there.

*September 29, 1494*

I have spent the last year on my second voyage across the Ocean Sea. Sadly, I found the fort and the men that I left behind from the first voyage dead. I do not know what happened to them. I built a new village on another island. My men found gold on this island! I sent a load of gold back to Spain. The Indians were not as friendly this time, and I was forced to kill many of them. I still have not found the great cities that Marco Polo described.

*October 9, 1501*

The king and queen are ungrateful! They have thrown me in jail because the men in the new colony complain that I am not a good governor. How dare them! I have now sailed across the Ocean Sea three times. I have claimed many islands for Spain, and this is how they treat me?

*November 7, 1504*

The king and queen realized their mistake and freed me from jail. They even paid for another voyage across the Ocean Sea. Unfortunately, my ships leaked so badly that I was stranded for an entire year on an island I called Jamaica. I have decided that my explorations have come to an end. The king and queen refuse to pay for a fifth voyage. At least I can retire a hero!

[Editor’s note: Columbus died on May 20, 1506, never getting to the Indies. Still, Columbus may have been the greatest sailor of his time. He sailed across almost 5,000 miles of ocean and was able to find the same island over and over, without the knowledge of how a compass worked or an accurate map. He was the first European to travel to the island of the Caribbean Sea, and he would touch on South America and Central America. He never made it to the United States, but he did make it as far north as Cuba, only 90 miles from Florida.]