

Old Clothes

By Jeremy Quinton



(and old shoes!)

Think of “old clothes”, and what do you think of ? I’ve recently been looking at old photos and have noticed (*ouch!*) the clothes I used to wear. I have been reminded that “fashion sense” and “colour coordination” are, without doubt, relative concepts that we didn’t study at my school. I knew that I was never fashionable...but I had forgotten how *unfashionable* I was!

Take, for example, a pair of big and baggy yellow tracksuit bottoms that I bought on the Kilburn High Road. I think that an ex-girlfriend really *did* take them – literally – and did “I don’t know what” with them. They disappeared, together with other bizarre items of clothing that...“en su momento”... I had lovingly purchased. I wasn’t happy to see that they had gone. You have to understand that together with football, cricket, and rugby, another major English sport is “collecting things, and *not* throwing things away”. I keep everything, even if I no longer need it. It’s a habit that I’d like to change this year!

Meanwhile, let’s change continents. New Year’s Eve is an occasion when the people of most cultures celebrate the coming of the New Year. Ecuador is unique in having a ceremony to say goodbye to the Old Year. All over the country on the 31st of December, people of all ages form groups, and go to extraordinary efforts to maintain one of the magical traditions of Ecuador.

Symbolism is rife. The Old Year, or “Año Viejo” is represented by various creations. A model house is made of branches and is then burnt to ashes. Life-size dummies (similar to the English figure “Guy Fawkes” celebrated on November 5th), made of sawdust and dressed in old clothes, are sold in the streets. Ornate masks are sold for adornment of the models.

The idea is to represent some happening, activity, or person, that has resulted in a negative impact on your community, or on your own well-being. Often this is a politician, judge, army leader etc, whose actions you disapprove of. The appropriate mask is worn by the dummy.

The creativity of the people is encouraged by a competition for the best effort. You have to register your creation and explain what or who it represents and why you give it importance. Prizes are given.

“At about midnight the groups light their bonfires. Sparks are flying from a particularly big construction one block away. I watch them beat the dummies with sticks and then hurl them onto the bonfire. There is great cheering and revelry as the dummies burst into flames and fireworks soar into the night” explains a friend who witnessed the event last year...

The outcome of the burning is that it releases a great euphoria. Misfortunes and bad memories of the past year are burned away. There is a purification of one’s thoughts. The path ahead is made clear for new hope and happiness. In this moment, resolutions for the New year are made. The old year has gone. There is hugging and kissing and tears of happiness. This is how many Ecuadorians celebrate on New Year’s Eve.

Let’s switch continents again...and return to Europe. We hope the new year has started well for you, and that the negative things of the past (like my old clothes) are now well and truly forgotten. Perhaps now, at the start of the new year, it’s still a good time to try and to develop some new and effective habits and techniques regarding your English. If you have any New Year’s Resolutions regarding your English, please let us know if you haven’t already done so.

In the meantime...**Happy carnivals !**

P.S. And if you find those yellow tracksuit bottoms, let me know. I might need them on Sunday !!