

Kara's Corner

A Phrase to Fit Every Occasion

By Kara Martin

It is Sunday, May 16, and I have just returned from a walk on what finally may be the first of many warm days. In fact, I was reminded of a lovely saying my mother-in-law likes to spring on me this time of year, "*Hasta el quince de mayo, no te quites el sayo.*" In other words, here in Madrid, you better keep your jacket handy until after May 15. *

Refranes are those lovely phrases designed to illustrate concepts and drive any student of languages nutty. Invariably when my in-laws drop a quip like the above *refran* into a conversation, I will get hung up on one word and lose all the charm of the *dicho*. Over the years I have perfected the quizzical look that lets my in-laws know they need to take the saying a step further and explain it to me. There are a couple of *refranes* and *dichos*, though, that are easy to understand and even easier for the beginning Spanish linguist to drop into conversation.

As a teacher here in the early 90s, I would spend many a weekend at my then-boyfriend's parent's house to enjoy a free meal and some much-needed rest. My favorite thing to say when I walked into the kitchen was, "*Tengo más hambre...*" and my now mother-in-law would say, "...*que el perro de un ciego?*" Yes! I was hungrier than the blind man's dog! She would then proceed to drop a plate of 15 *croquetas* in front of me and shake her head as I devoured them all. I like *croquetas*.

With my stomach full of food and my mind reeling from an hour or so of trying to follow the rapid-fire *refran* repartee, I would depart to the bodega for a siesta. Stumbling back into the kitchen after enjoying the afternoon nap this country is so famous for, I would find my mother-in-law, who would shake her head again and say, "*Hija, duermes mas que las mantas.*" After 15 *croquetas*, anyone would sleep more than the blankets, right?

Years later, as I am becoming more and more accustomed to Spain, I have become fond of a couple of *refranes*: "*El buey no es de donde nazca, sino de donde pazca.*" Or, the steer is from where he grazes, not from where he was born. And, "*A mal tiempo, buena cara,*" which, loosely translated by way of a popular English-language saying means, "Don't let the chips get you down."

Perhaps my fondness for sayings can be traced back to my childhood in Texas. My grandfather was an expert at throwing his own variations on sayings into conversation. In my mind I can still hear him say after settling in for a visit at my house with a cool drink in hand, "Ahh! I feel more like I do now than I did when I got here." That is indeed a wonderful feeling.

*One week later with the temperature hovering around 9-degrees and a cool rain falling, a friend commented that she had learned this *refran* as, "*Antes del cuarenta de mayo, no te quites el sayo.*" Have a great summer, everyone, and remember these cool days on *el quince de agosto*!
