

*Christine Tipper*



*Rubbish in Spain*

## **English criminals cause a stink in Elche? What a load of rubbish!**

I'm sorry to have to announce this but last Saturday night I discovered that I have committed the same crime on several occasions here in Elche. It was the shocked expression on my daughter-in-law's face when I unwittingly admitted to this crime - and the fact that her dropping jaw almost knocked my granddaughter off her lap - that brought home the gravity of the offence committed. Although the truth is that Alan has probably committed the offence more often than me, it has usually been at my bidding. So what have we been doing over the last few months that could have got us arrested or brought to the attention of the local constabulary?

We have been putting out rubbish on a Saturday night! Yep, it is not only England that has made the disposal of rubbish such a risky business punishable by fines or imprisonment.

Here in Spain the system for disposing of rubbish is to put the bags in big containers that are parked at intervals along the street. On these containers it is pointed out that rubbish should not be deposited before 9pm (or 21 horas in Spanish speak) or after 24 horas - midnight. This is for the obvious reason that in Spain it gets very hot and rotting food deposited at intervals along the street would make life rather smelly. Mind you in England we have to have it decomposing in our wheelie bins in our own back gardens for a fortnight before the council deigns to come and relieve us of it and heaven forbid that we should have a lid that doesn't shut properly – but I digress. In Spain the bins are emptied - very noisily because the Spaniards have no concept of doing anything quietly! – in the wee hours of the morning so that the streets do not smell of decaying foodstuffs during the day. If any of you have ever been to Spain you will know that Spanish streets have a wild and heady mix of scents – both good and bad – but they don't smell of decomposing trash.

Now pay attention because this next section is very important and I will be using it in my defence should a nosey neighbour decide to shop me to the local policia – it does NOT say anything about this practice of putting the bins out (or in?) being acceptable only from Sunday through to Friday. Nowhere does it say “not on a Saturday”, so how are we foreigners to know?

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Now a while back I was caught in the lift returning from putting the bins out dressed eccentrically as any self respecting Brit would be at 9.15pm – snug stretchy red jogging pants (5€ from Santa Pola market so you can imagine the quality!), fluorescent pink rain jacket (well it was a bit chilly), stripy blue socks (ditto – I don't like cold feet) and blue adjustable sandals (these were easier to slip on than my lace ups). When I travelled back up to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor, sharing the restricted lift space with a neighbour from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, I believed that the reason for the incredulous look on my lift companion's face as she surveyed my appearance was because of my colourful attire – but what if it was because she had witnessed my criminal act? Now if only I could remember which day of the week it was...

On a more serious note there has been a horrible news story here in Spain that has been playing out over the last 5 months. In Sevilla a teenager called Marta disappeared after a night out with her boyfriend and some of his friends. First of all the police thought that she might have fallen into the river Guadalquivir as her friends reported seeing her near there that evening. When I visited Sevilla I saw the riverside and it is a favourite haunt of the young who go there for their "botellón". This is a practice whereby the young bring drinks and have a party. So that the content of the bottles is not obvious they usually have bottles of cola or fruit juices with a spirit mixed in. It was therefore a perfectly plausible story that she had been drinking with friends and could have fallen in the river. The river was dredged and no evidence of Marta ever having been in there was found.

Then in April the news broke that she had been killed by her boyfriend and his friends and they had dumped her body in one of these rubbish bins that line the streets. The boys concerned showed the police which one and then the politicians vowed that they would search the entire landfill rubbish site to find her body. This was an enormous task and the odds of finding a body that had probably been crushed when the bin contents were compacted down – and the fact that almost 3 months had passed since the event, so would the remains be recognisable? – was discounted by the politicians who were anxious to show their interest and goodwill. After the enormous task of dividing the landfill site into numerous sections and searching through each pile her body had still not been found. Considering that the boys involved have changed their stories so often that no one knows when they are telling the truth or not it is not surprising that Marta has never been found.

It is a sad and disturbing tale of young people who lack any respect for their fellow beings and who regard telling the truth as an optional extra.