

FALL 2012

MOONLITE MADNESS

Her VOICE

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- To Market, To Market
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- Path to the Poetry Tribe

by women...
for women...
about women...



Sugar Skulls for sale at Cuernavaca market are part of the Dia de los Muertos celebration.



Buying Pan de Muerto in Ocototec.



Altar in Ocototec includes effigy with life sized sugar skull and running shoes.

Dia de Muertos will be the topic of Central Lakes College Cultural Thursday on October 4th at Noon in the Chalberg Theatre, complete with recipes for deadbread, craft ideas and altars.

Dia de Muertos:

Día de los Muertos. Day of the Dead. As the half moon rises and the flicker of the candles grow brighter with the night's darkness, I feel them approach. The wind carries them over the land, searching for their earthly homes. Below, their family members have strewn a thick path of golden and orange marigold petals from the street to the altars they have lovingly prepared. Days have been spent at the markets, at the bakery, in their kitchens, going through photos, and going through their savings to make ready for the visit of their "dearly departed ancestors."

Perhaps it is because my Grandma Nellie used to sit me down with the family tintypes, recounting tales of stoic people, long dead. Perhaps it is because I was widowed at age 25 and my culture offered no viable grieving process. Perhaps, when I scattered my brother's ashes, my soul finally demanded a sacred ritual. It came in the mystical combination of the pre-Hispanic Aztec afterworld melded with a convoluted interpretation of Catholicism. I would pilgrimage to Mexico!

Jamy and I were on the heels of Rosalba, our teacher guide. We descended into the lower level of the market and it was all there. The tables were laid out with artistically arranged rows of sugar and seed skulls. Stacks of brightly colored papel picado, cut-outs in the shapes of skeletons and Catrinas, (the female version of the Grim-Reaper), were piled on counters. Young boys hauling long stemmed marigolds, thrown over their shoulders, made their way through the stream of marketers. Rosalba led us past the piñatas of devils and coffins to the section of incense and their burners. The sweet pungent copal clouds floated over the scene like a lost ghost.

On to Jardin Borda, where altars and Catrinas were the theme for artistic competitions. The Catrinas were larger than life figures, symbolizing legends, history or persons important to the artists. The altars were designed in layers representing the levels journeyed through to reach heaven. Bowls of water, statues of saints, decorated candles, baskets of mangos and the customary Pan de Muertos/ "dead bread" were thoughtfully placed among the photos.

As we left to hail a taxi, we were drawn by drumbeat and the clatter of a gathering crowd. There, dancing down the street, were giant Catrinas, swaying on their stilts, leading groups of people whose faces were painted

Jan Kurtz travels to Mexico to experience Dia de los Muertos, (Day of the Dead), a holiday where friends and family pray for and remember those who have died.

Honoring your Ancestors

in the black and whites of skeletons. They bowed, dipped their hats and tried to keep pace with the wild Catrinas, careening around the corner in front of Corte's palace. Cortes would not have recognized this remnant of his enforced Catholicism.

But, the real ceremony was in the village of Ocotopoc. We boarded our van and entered the flow of bikes, cars and pedestrians, now slowing to a crawl before the cemetery. Family mausoleums glowed with shiny fresh coats of turquoise and pink paints. Lush garlands draped themselves over crosses. A group of mariachis, all in tight black pants with silver trim, embraced their guitars as they entered the pantheon. Dusk was settling in and so were the vendors. They pulled the strings on glow-in-the-dark puppet skeletons or pointed to the fresh dead bread, chanting, "Compre... compre uno, buy one."

Maru and Rosita motioned us toward the colonial cathedral. Passing through its doors, we saw intricately carved statues of saints

gazing down upon the descendants of those Indians who had given up the Sun God for the Son of God.

Back in the streets we searched for the doorways with large banners proclaiming: "Bienvenido! Welcome!" followed by the name of the deceased. Inside, the petal paths led both the living and the dead to the altars. Placed there was Grandpa's whiskey next to a saint's medallion. Grandma's picture sat inside her ceramic cacerola dish. A mannequin was dressed in Juan's futbol uniform. Some had effigies of the recently dead, laid out at the top of the altar with a life-sized sugar skull as the head, and empty shoes at the "foot."

And the food? The dearly departed, having traveled long, arrive hungry and thirsty. They will pass over these offerings, partaking of their spirit. When they have finished, the living will feast, noting that the bread is a bit stale and the Coke is a bit flat.

Having reverently given their respects, the guests retreat to the patio for a good

laugh, a good cry... and possibly, a good shot of tequila in the hot punch being served with tamales. They recall their dead and the saying: "The first death is physical. The second is when your name is no longer uttered."

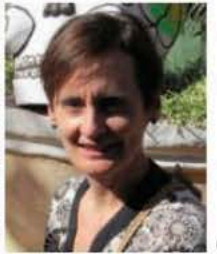
So, next year, as the moon rises, I will light copal. I will lift my mug of punch and utter their names: Jim... Steven... Wilma... Nellie...

All will be ready. Just follow the marigold path lit by candles! ¡Bienvenidos!



Jan Kurtz

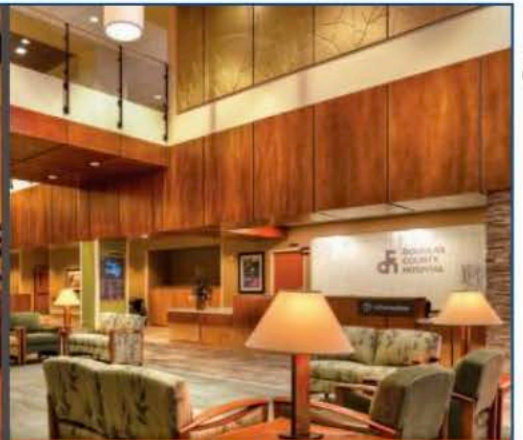
Jan's travels, professional and personal time, are a blend of her northern roots sprinkled with a dash of Spanish. She is equally inspired by the family cabin and downtown Madrid. Her business card reads: "Bilingual optimist."



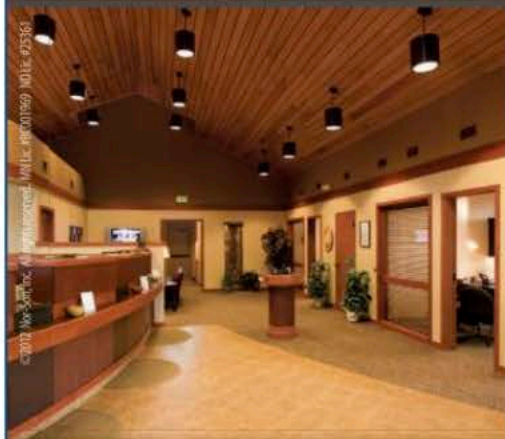
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