

Day of the Dead Celebration
By Olivia Diaz

Have you ever seen a Día de los Muertos ceremony? Come to Clair Tappaan Lodge on Halloween weekend October 31-November 1 where I will set up an “Ofrenda” a form as practiced in Central Mexico. In Mexico it is celebrated the eve of November 2, All Souls’ Day. As it has been assimilated into American culture, it typically is scheduled the day after Halloween. Clair Tappaan Lodge is located at 19940 Donner Pass Road, Soda Springs/Norden, in the Sierra Nevada of California at 7000 feet.

Día de los Muertos commemorations can take many shapes – parades, altars, elaborate dinner tables, skeleton costumes, installations and fireworks - very different from the American funeral.

My family background is Mexican and my husband and I have adopted the Ofrenda as practiced by my grandmother Soledad Diaz who was from Vera Cruz. Every year she set an elaborate table with favorite foods and drinks for her beloved dead next to a remembrance of that person - a photograph, a handkerchief, a lock of hair. Flowers and a platter of Mexican breads were centerpieces. She prepared the food before dark to be there for the ghosts returning in the early hours of All Souls’ Day.

My father told us that the next morning his mother would find the food and bread half eaten and all of the drinks gone. She believed the ghosts had returned, but he knew he and his brothers had eaten it.

Our offering is not as elaborate as my Nana Soledad’s but has a different ceremony attached to it. We skip the food, but set 12 places on the table with a doily and a candle and a bouquet of flowers and Mexican bread in the center. We have made place cards for each of the people in our lives who have died whom we want to honor. Each year that list gets longer. With only 12 places at our table we have to decide whom to include. We have organized it so each year we take out a box with the name cards and mementos of people who have died since the last time.

Reviewing the list has turned out to be the most important part of the ritual, the act of remembering each one. The final part of the ritual is to go around the table by the light of the candles and share with each other the importance of that person.

Even after 10 years the ritual has not grown old even for those recalled every year. Each time I remember something different, another appreciation, for I am a year older and my perspective has changed. Something once overlooked may emerge that is now significant. Many times I get teary, not for sadness, but for gratitude for what they gave me.

At the Halloween/Day of the Dead weekend at Clair Tappaan Lodge, I will set out an Ofrenda on Sunday, November 1 to share with people who are interested. If you feel inspired, bring something to add to the table as an offering to your loved ones, one or many, who have passed through your life.

For information and reservations, call the Lodge at 1 800 679-6775.

I will bring a supply of tea candles and doilies to set on the table and a variety of Mexican bread. Be creative and remember it is a ritual to honor your loved ones. Have fun with it. It’s all about love.