

Boundaries blurred on the Day of the Dead

BY MERARI CALDERON RUIZ

No one is ever truly gone as long as they are remembered. Día de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, is a holiday that originated in Mexico and Central America and has spread to other parts of the world.

It's a convergence of indigenous and European religious beliefs, and a tradition that has been going on for more than 500 years.

The celebration starts on Oct. 31 and ends Nov. 2. These three days are known as All Saints' Eve, All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day respectively.

Guadalupe Martinez, a counselor at Clackamas Community College, explained some of the history of the Day of the Dead.

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— Robert Keeler

"The traditions have sort of merged together," Martinez said. "Some of what the indigenous population used to do, like set up an altar at the cemetery, is not something necessarily that Christians do but it's something that the indigenous population has always done and so that has persisted as a tradition in middle America mostly, so Mexico and Central America."

Robert Keeler, a social science instructor at CCC, also had some background information.

"All over the world, the celebrations that have to do with the dead tend to be times when anthropologists call liminal times," said Keeler. "They are seen as times when the boundaries between our living world and the spirit world are particularly thin and permeable."

Traditionally, on the Day of the Dead,

family members get together and honor their deceased loved ones. Communities and organizations also hold a variety of events in celebration of the holiday.

Teatro Milagro, the Northwest's Latino arts and culture organization, is having its 21st annual Day of the Dead celebration this year. One of the productions the group is featuring is called "El Muerto Vagabundo." It's an entertaining play about an orphan who wants to build an altar for his deceased parents; instead, a dead homeless veteran takes the offering by mistake, but that's only the beginning.

At the end of the production, some of the actors shared their thoughts on the Day of the Dead.

"I started celebrating it when my dad died three years ago," said Carrie Anne Huneycutt. "I lived in a house with a lot of friends and we all gathered together and made this really big feast. One time someone brought the name of their grandmother who died and

the door swung open. It was a very real, beautiful and powerful moment for me."

When it comes to families, this tradition usually takes place at the cemetery or at home. On the altars that people set up, they may light candles and put up pictures to honor their dead loved ones.

"It's a very personal type of holiday for families," said Martinez. "So what people do is they take decorations, particularly flowers, and food and beverage to the gravesites of their departed and they set them up on their grave..."

They celebrate by having pan de muerto and atole or champurrado."

This holiday has been spreading, not just in Mexico, but in America and other places too. Although not everyone celebrates the Day of the Dead in the same way, the meaning remains the same.

"It's a wonderful tradition because it's a convergence of our cultural past and present of Latinos, and I also think it's a very nice way to pay tribute to people who have passed," said Martinez.



Patricia Alvitez plays La Catrina in the production of "El Muerto Vagabundo" at Teatro Milagro in Portland.

photo contributed by Teatro Milagro