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Through the Eyes of the Soul: Day of the Dead in Mexico Yucatan

Mary J. Andrade
La Oferta (September 2003)
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The Mayan people of the state of Yucatan believe that during the Day of the Dead celebration, the spirits of their deceased relatives eat the essence of the food prepared for them. Some Mayans insist that, after this occurs, the food lacks a vital quality, even though its appearance hasn't changed.

This informative book is the fifth in a series that focuses on this beautiful celebration. Each volume describes the Day of the Dead tradition in a different area of Mexico. The bilingual text emphasizes Mayan customs and their syncretism with Catholicism. An introduction by an anthropologist and historian, four poems by a Spanish poet, and the author's abundant, beautiful color photographs enhance the presentation.

Andrade is co-publisher and editor of La Oferta, a bilingual newspaper in San Jose, California. In addition to the other four books in this series, she has written a children's book on the Day of the Dead, and has received The Mexican Silver Pen and the Latino Literary Hall of Fame awards. She visits Mexico every year to do firsthand research.

A photo of a Mayan home altar depicts a cross with white cloth hanging on both halves of the crossbar. On each side of the cross is a picture of a deceased relative. In the foreground are two multicolored bouquets and numerous bowls containing a variety of foods. Mucbil chicken is a dish served only for this celebration, and the author includes a recipe that reads like a narrative rather than an ordinary recipe. In spite of its name, the dish doesn't necessarily contain chicken. Andrade states, "Mucbil chicken is similar to a large cake made with corn and fowl, pork, or beef, or with a type of bean called espelon."

This book shows evidence of abundant research. Many quotes from authorities in Yucatan add authenticity to the text. A glossary of Mayan terms would have been helpful, because readers may have difficulty remembering the meaning of these words. The photography has a professional appearance and relates well to the text.

This book will appeal to people interested in thorough information on Mexican culture and religious practices. In fact, readers may well develop a yearning to visit Yucatan to witness in person the beautiful traditions of the Day of the Dead celebration.

NORMA D. KELLAM (December 16, 2003)

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