

**Diana del Ángel**

### **My Ofrenda**

When my grandmother died, I was nine years old. I remember my strangeness because my aunt's house looked like a preparation for a party: women were cooking mole and tamales, and there was huapango, traditional music of La Huasteca, which is the region my family comes from.

I asked my mother, "Why does this look like a party?" And she answered, "Because this is the last party the dead woman invites you to." That was my first encounter with the idea of death.

My mother also gave me some pieces of advice concerning my death. One piece of advice has to do with dogs. "Take care of your dog because you will need her help to cross the river in Mictlan." In the Nahuatl worldview, Mictlan is the land of the dead. When you die, you go there to exist in another way.

The other one was also related to animals, "Take care of your cat, because if you treat your cat badly when you go to Mictlan, the Mictlan's Lords will punish you and they will ask you to count the hair of a cat."

The third one is my favorite, because more than advice, it is a story. My mother told me that her grandmother had a box in which she put her teeth and strands of hair that fell out. When my mother asked why, my great-grandmother answered, "Because when you die, you have to carry your own body with you. Otherwise, the Mictlan's Lords will make you look for the pieces of your body, and you will not rest in peace."

My mother says—when my great-grandmother died, they put this box in her coffin. When she told me this story, I thought it was wonderful because in my mind, as a child, I thought it was a great opportunity for traveling again and again, and in some way, staying alive.

In my mind, it does not matter that I have never traveled in real life, because then my hair would be everywhere, and I have heard the all the trash is dumped in the ocean. Rather I trust that I will travel in the future. And to reinforce this destiny, I have also decided to leave strands of hair in all the places I would like to come back.

"Tradición" comes from "tradere," a Latin verb that means "to carry." So, traditions are the things we take with us wherever we go. In my family, it is very important to celebrate Día de Muertos. Sometimes we may not celebrate Christmas, but we always make the offering for our ancestors. Día de Muertos is the most significant celebration in my family. We also called it Xantolo, which it's its name in Nahuatl.

Since I live alone, my ofrenda is to my grandmother, my great-grandmother, my two grandfathers, and now, my two uncles, who died by COVID-19, and my friend. November 2021 is the first time I'm not in México, so it was complicated to make bread, tamales, light a candle, or burn copal. So, I decided to make my ofrenda of words.

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