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USU marks Day of the Dead with procession across campus

By Kevin Opsahl staff writer Nov 2, 2017



Natalia Lopez, in blue, and Daniella Lopez, in red, walk in the Día de los Muertos parade on Thursday at USU.
Eli Lucero/Herald Journal

Utah State University students and others sang Spanish songs to the sounds of acoustic guitar and brass on Thursday as they marched on campus to mark Day of the Dead.

The procession honoring the Mexican holiday, which is commonly celebrated by Latino populations in the United States, was organized by the USU Latinx Creative Society and included several people who have participated in years past as well as some newcomers.

Two of those newcomers were Maria Huebner and her daughter, Olive India. Huebner, a Wisconsin native, is new to Cache Valley but grew up participating in Day of the Dead festivities every year.

"This is one way to connect with my culture," said Huebner, dressed immaculately and her face painted like a skull. "It actually has a lot to do with celebrating life (and) other people's lives that have actually passed."

Day of the Dead, or Día de los Muertos in Spanish, is a holiday in which people in Mexico, Latin America and Latinos throughout the U.S. honor deceased loved ones.

Families often set up altars that include the deceased person's favorite food or personal mementos. Another common element of Day of the Dead are skeletons and skulls, which appear in the form of things like face masks — hand-painted or plastic — decorations or candy.

Crescencio López González, USU assistant professor of Spanish, talked about the meaning of Day of the Dead.

"Death is the ultimate equalizer of every individual," González said. "From the point of view of Latinos, it is something not to be afraid of and to be celebrated. ... Day of the Dead is also a reminder that life is fragile. ... You can die the next day, in an instant, any moment, and be gone forever."

During Monday's procession, Huebner hung two small framed pictures of her father, who died at age 49, and her brother, who died at 26, around her neck.

"Today is the day I celebrate their life," she said. "It's a great experience. It makes me remember things that I haven't thought about for a little while."

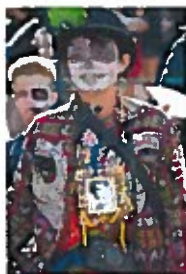
The procession on Thursday started with a "wedding" ceremony between González, who was dressed as El Catrín, and his wife, Christina Ledesma, who was dressed as Lady of the Dead. The ceremony, González said, represented the start of the celebration of life and the children who were present represented the cycle of life.

According to González, El Catrín is the character of a wealthy businessman whose appearance "reminds everyone that even rich people will meet the ultimate equalizer" that is death.

After the ceremony, the procession got on its way, with González and his wife leading it. All the while, an acoustic guitarist and two horn players led everyone in Mexican folk songs.

González said it was important to share Day of the Dead with the campus community and general public.

"It has been in our family and our culture for 3,000 years," he said. "As we embrace this tradition, we recognize that it is a wonderful culture that can be shared with others."



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Photo Gallery: Día de los Muertos Parade
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