

## Dancing with the Dead – Todos Santos (All Saints Day)



On Nov. 1, All Saints Day, Bolivianos party with the souls of their lost loved ones. Days prior to the fiesta street markets teem with 50-kilo bags of flour and sugar, buckets full of lard, and tables and blankets spread with myriad, hand-painted, miniature plaster-of-Paris faces.

Families use these to make “Tantawawas,” Aymara for Bread Babies. The term refers generally to the many, many, shaped bread loaves -- those decorated with human faces symbolize the dead; others formed like horses, ladders or stairs are meant to help transport the spirits from heaven.



*“Today Me Tomorrow You”*



Since most families don't have an oven, they either buy bread or make dough and rent oven time from those who do.



Every family prepares carefully to receive their returning spirits, who descend at noon and visit for 24 hours. Tables are decorated with flowers, veils, fruits, sweets, biscuits, cookies, sugar cane, drinks, and the late beloveds' favorite foods -- and many tantawawas. The celebrations go on through the night.



For those 24 hours and beyond cemeteries swarm with bands and families, who picnic, sing, dance and drink to welcome

and rejoice with the returning spirits, lofted back from heaven on hundreds of kites. "We don't **know** that the spirits come back to us," says our friend Elisa Barrigola Machaca, *but it's our **belief** that they do.*"



We flew a kite for my (Deb's) brother, Jim, who died unexpectedly in June. In Jim's honor, we baked and gave Tantawawas to our Bolivian friends. In return, they prayed for his soul from noon to 2 p.m. on All Saints Day.



With visiting friends Bev and Scott Pressman, who founded Mision Fronteras, we also enjoyed some of Jim's favorite foods.





While dashing around and laughing with a throng of Bolivian kids, all of us flying kites, I couldn't help but notice: I'm rusty at kite flying. These gleeful kids, who re-taught me and anchored my wayward kite with a long shred of recycled plastic-bag tail, are naturals. Some kites soar almost out of sight. Others wobble, can't quite find the wind. Some dive, crash, and need to be re-launched.

You learn when to spool out more line, when to reel in.  
Knots happen. Lines cross and need to be untangled.

Just like life.

