

SAN ANTONIO TALK

Easter has come and gone for another year. Yet visit some of our city cemeteries and you will see evidence of *cascarones* and of *coronas*, reminders of San Antonio's Mexican heritage and reminders of the uniqueness of our present-day San Antonio talk.

We've discussed *cascarones* in previous columns. We borrowed the word, now recognized in major English language dictionaries as a southwestern dialect word, from the Spanish word for "eggshells."

Locally, we dye the eggshells, fill them with confetti, then break the *cascarones* over each others' heads and let the confetti spill.

Thus, some of our cemeteries will still have broken shells and spilled confetti.

Why the cemeteries? And why "only some"? It's the Mexican-American influence, of course. Mexican Americans in San Antonio have expanded the Mexican custom of visiting and decorating cemeteries on *Dies de los Muertos*--a three-day celebration that combines All Saints' Day, Halloween, and All Souls' Day.

Instead of the Mexican once-a-year autumn celebration, San Antonians visit and decorate family grave plots on numerous public holidays--including Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter. In addition, lots of San Antonians visit and decorate their families' gravesites on special private days, like wedding anniversaries, birthdays, and death dates.

According to local scholar Lynn Gosnell, "within the personalized and often highly decorated space of the gravesite, there are a variety of communications directed toward the deceased." As

our cemeteries attest, part of that communication includes the use of *cascarones*.

Also included in that communication are *coronas*. We have not discussed *coronas* before. According to Lynn, *coronas*, or "[Large floral arrangements and] standing wreaths, purchased at nearby vending stands or florist shops, almost always have greetings to the deceased printed or written in glitter or ink on the center."

The word *corona* has a long, well-established, history within the English language. Even minor dictionaries recognize it. Old English speakers, as did Spanish language speakers later, borrowed the word from Latin--where it meant "garland" or "crown" or "cornice."

In modern English a *corona* may refer to (1) a cornice in a building, (2) a crown, (3) a "medullary sheath," (4) a musical "pause," (5) a rosary, or (6) a saddle blanket.

Understanding, of course, that I should in no way dismiss meaning number (6), "a saddle blanket," in any discussion of San Antonio Talk, none of the accepted English definitions of the word *corona* include the San Antonio usage of *corona* as a flower arrangement--especially as *coronas* are used in cemeteries.

And, yes, I do know that *Corona* is also the brand name of a popular Mexican beer. This trademark utilizes the "crown," however, not the floral arrangement. Come to think of it, you might even find evidence of that *corona* in the cemeteries also.

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