

Home is Where the Rooster Crows



By Randi M. Romo

My mother lives and works in a rural agricultural farmworker community that sits on the outskirts of Dade City, Florida. I love to go home to visit, this place where I too have lived and worked. But no matter how often I go home, it always takes me a bit of time to adjust to the sounds. Just outside the window there are lots of cars going by on the street at all hours with their stereos usually blasting really loud Mexican music.

It's always the whine followed by the quick riffs of the accordion that you hear first. Sometimes it's other folk who come driving through and the bass rattles the windows, boom, boom and you can feel it all the way into the back of your teeth. Sirens at intervals punctuate the days and nights, their piercing cries a sharp reminder that it's not only angels who walk among us. And every now and then a sheriff's car rockets down the main street of this little community so fast it lifts shirt tails and blows back your hair.

There are a lot of people who walk in this neighborhood; workers going to and from their jobs, mothers with strollers and little ones tagging behind like little ducklings all in a row. And there are always lots of teens trying to hold themselves at just the right angle to be considered cool enough, as they laughingly jostle one another while ambling down the street. Often the elders are out and about for their daily constitution, sometimes with grandchildren in tow. Calls of buenos dias along with the ensuing conversations fall like sporadic spring showers as people pass one another. Sure, this place where my mother lives is poor and it can even be called a "rough neighborhood", but here in its humble poverty, manners still matter.

The taco stand that sits across from my mom's house stays busy. Cars and trucks pull in and out, doors slamming all hours of the day as people stop by for something to eat and perhaps a little visit with whomever else is waiting for their food. You can get the best aguas frescas there. I like the sandia the best. They also have my favorite tacos, barbacoa con cilantro, lime and onion with just the perfect salsa verde on freshly made hot corn tortillas. On Sundays the men line

up for their menudo to counter the cruda from their celebrations of the night before. The covered tables are filled with people eating, talking and laughing. Children dart between the tables and race around the little trailer that is the heart of this enterprise. An errant dog picks its way carefully between the feet and legs tucked up under the tables searching for bits of food that may have fallen to the ground.

Serving as a backdrop to this Sunday ritual at the taco trailer is a mixture of Mexican music from nearby houses and cars driving by as well as the small African-American church on the opposite corner. The church has a speaker wired up outside and they broadcast their services. The musicians and singers are quite good and in some odd way all of the sounds mix together and sounds just right. And it is in the midst of this cacophony that I feel it most—that, this is home.

But I must confess that there is one bit of noise that no matter where I have encountered it, I have never become accustomed to it; the crowing of a rooster. At home it is not uncommon for there to be various broods of chickens ranging about different parts of the community. Despite her claims that they are not her chickens, one such brood has taken up residence in my mother's backyard, accompanied by their very own rooster. He's a handsome devil; all brilliant greens, golds and reds with a swagger to match that of any player.

This past trip home, this very same rude and overly ambitious rooster crowed me awake every morning around two am. Once he stopped—I would eventually fall back asleep, whereupon he would almost immediately begin his next round of crowing. It was as if he had a little chicken spy peering in the side of the blinds giving him the signal of when to commence again. Talk about your "peeps"!

I truly desire to bring none harm, but I fear that had I not left and returned to my own home when I did—that there may well have been a rooster gone missing. And if anyone thought to notice the absence of Señor Gallo—that loud, raucous early morning songster—I would have smiled serenely as I ladled out servings of a delicious pollo en mole pobalno.