

# La Vaca

1/25/24

In August 2023, the Carson National Forest burnt in places it never had before. The state told us to pack a bag. Nothing was in our control, so I prayed. It is what I was taught to do. I prayed for rain, I prayed for the firefighters, I prayed for Penasqo and Vadito. I went to church and I asked God directly to make it better. I only pray when I feel like I have nothing left.

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The drive home has a certain patch of badland where people leave their cows during the monsoon season. It's about a mile and a half from the Santuario de Chimayo, arguably the holiest tourist trap. Every Holy Week, tens of thousands people complete a pilgrimage to the church. Some are searching for healing, some for the famous holy dirt (which is just a dirt pit blessed by the father, 5 bucks a pop), others for the sport of it all. For me, it means traffic, and cops making rounds on the previously untouched, far out county roads.

I saw a cow staring at a cross in this badlands patch when I was driving home from Santa Fe this summer. The drive is long, about an hour. I'd completed it hundreds of times before, but I'd never noticed that cross before then. It wasn't exactly tucked away, I've just seen my fair share of roadside memorials in my life. This wasn't that. This was a permanent trail marker on the holy high road. Follow me to the Santuaido!

She caught me off guard. I didn't expect a cow to be standing that close to the road. I didn't expect a cow to be staring so intently at anything, much less a cross. She could've been praying, I thought, if I asserted my ideas of faith and God onto her.

Although, she probably wasn't praying. In reality, she was probably just eating. I imagine somewhere, a fence broke. We have issues with that, especially around monsoon season. I wonder if the cow knows God as intimately as I do. I wonder if she feels as strongly about her state as I do.

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6/23

#### Untitled (poem)

**get out because you can, not because we want you gone.  
we want your life to mean something to someone other than us.  
go out, make a name for yourself and tell them we raised you.  
were not keeping you here, you are.  
go out and get our name on a map, because really mi hijita,  
everyone else is just as stir crazy as you are.  
we wont blame you.**

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Spanish was my grandpa's first language. He never learned to read or write it, but he's never forgotten how to speak it. He was born in the late 40s, and he went to the Presbyterian

mission school in Truchas for elementary. They only spoke to him in english. They only responded to english. He learned to read and write and speak english as a kid, because it was what the teachers were teaching him.

The presbyterian mission schools came to new mexico in the late 1800s. The presbyterian church was widespread in parts of Ohio and Pennsylvania, and it provided a different approach to christianity. The mission schools were their take on the traditional catholic school, the difference being that majority of them were free. In 1867, the first presbyterian mission school was established in Santa Fe. In 1900, a school and church was established in Truchas.

The teachers were presbyterian missionaries. They spoke English only. They wrote with their right hands. They taught using the presbyterian interpretation of the bible. They were white. In the 1940s and 50s, English was seen as the more respected language, and the mission teachers, still coming from Ohio and Pennsylvania didn't know Spanish. My grandpa was chastised for speaking Spanish in school.

The word for cow in Spanish is *vaca*. I learned it in first grade spanish class, and I always mistook it for *boca*, the spanish word for mouth. I loved pointing them out on the ride to the bus stop with my new vocabulary.

“Mira the boca papa, mira!”

“Vaca, you mean. What are they teaching you in that school?”

Since I was a kid, my grandpa would always default to Spanish when he was talking with his brothers and friends. My grandma told me it was just so they could talk about things I wasn't supposed to hear, but I think it was just the preferred language.

The Spanish spoken in truchas, New Mexico, is a very special dialect of the language. Truchanos, the local name for Truchas dwellers, being isolated (by distance) in the 1500's, very rarely left the town. Because of this, the Spanish reflects that of 1500's Spain, even to this day. The language spoken by truchas natives is very reminiscent of that spoken by the conquistadors.

As civilization and technology improved, the language stayed stuck in time. Words like refrigerator and car had no translation, so they were referred to in English. This dialect is recognized as spanglish, officially. There are different spanglish dialects, but the truchano one is special.

This is the dialect I grew up around. Frankly, it was very uncommon to meet someone whose only language was English. However, language fluidity has died out, to an extent, thanks to the "modernisation" created by the 40s and 50s.

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**6/11/23**

**I really like to believe that God made everyone perfect, but I guess I always thought you knew god better than I did, so I always thought god messed up with me. If God didn't make me like this though, then maybe I deserved it. I still know I'll get into heaven. I know God loves me, so I don't need you to love me if this is really such a deal breaker.**

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As a kid, I'd do a science and art summer camp every year in my tiny hometown of Truchas. The lady who ran it, a chemist from Berklee, was the science part. A sculpture from

Minnesota was the art part. We'd learn how to sculpt clay, how to use acrylic paint, and how to look at art. Although the last part wasn't as interesting to me as playing with clay, I'd listen anyway.

The camp took us on a field trip to the Georgia O'Keeffe museum in Santa Fe at least twice while I attended. Some museum employee would take us on a tour, showing us all the New Mexico inspired paintings she'd done.

Georgia O'Keeffe loved New Mexico, she felt as if it were "her county." Originally born in Wisconsin, she moved to (what I consider) the major art cities. New York and Chicago saw her quite often, as she lived in both for a number of years. In 1929, she traveled to New Mexico for the first time, but more specifically, Northern New Mexico. She fell in love with the landscape and the culture out here, going back and forth in between New York and New Mexico for almost 20 years.

Of course, she's known for her large and vibrant flowers, but I was never particularly interested in those ones. The paintings that caught my eye the most were her skulls. The cow skulls, in particular. I'd never seen a painting so detailed before, it was like she took a photo and stretched it out on a canvas. Admittedly, 8 year old me just thought they were cooler than the flowers.

Her cows were incredibly detailed. Famously, she commented she had a need to "create an equivalent for what I felt about what I was looking at - not copy it." It was clear she wasn't exactly copying them, as her cows always had horns. It's very uncommon to find a horned skull out and about, in my experience. At least, I've never seen one. The cows' skulls I've seen have always been dehorned, domestic. Trapped in the badlands.

I think everything that's raised in northern New Mexico has a sense of territorialism etched into its bones. I've found it on the discarded skulls and femurs my dogs bring back. I've found it on

the teeth me and my siblings lost as littler kids. It's a certain pattern in the cracks maybe, or the permanent bite marks on the edges.

None of Georgia's skulls have those. How can you describe something you've never felt? I take a level of offense for her deceased subjects. Her skill is beautiful, but it lacks the emotion I've come to look for. I've grown up surrounded by a certain amount of praise for this woman, but I cannot match the sentiment in the same way. These cows, who were born, raised their babies, and died in my backyard, painted by a woman who never understood how they felt. I find it upsetting that New Mexico is known for the art of an outsider, when there are so many artists already from here.

She'll never know what it feels like to live and die an inch apart. She'll never understand the level of passion we are taught to harbor for a place that fails us so often.

I drove past her house last weekend. I drove past her country this morning. I hope these cows, who were immortalized in death, not life, are resting easy.

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**9/12/23**

**I find myself thanking god for the rain.  
I've never prayed for rain the way the rest of the desert does,  
But now when i hear a crack of thunder,  
A thick fog laid out over the highway,  
Even the feeling of rain splashing onto my dry hands and face,  
I know i have something to say,**

**And I've seen very few things more beautiful than a string the very few things more beautiful**

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