

Chamisa: A Journal of Literary, Performance, and Visual Arts of the Greater Southwest

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Identity, Culture, and Art in New Mexico*

Article 45

2021

The Place That Takes You In

Sylvia Ramos Cruz
none, SRCPoeta@outlook.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/chamisa>



Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ramos Cruz, Sylvia. "The Place That Takes You In." *Chamisa: A Journal of Literary, Performance, and Visual Arts of the Greater Southwest* 1, 1 (2021). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/chamisa/vol1/iss1/45>

This Literary and other Creative Work is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Chamisa: A Journal of Literary, Performance, and Visual Arts of the Greater Southwest by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

The Place That Takes You In

by Sylvia Ramos Cruz

Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

May 25, 2020. Memorial Day. Thirty years in New Mexico. Arrived from New York looking for a slower-paced life in a place that celebrates its diverse culture. The city I love and will always, had become too crowded, too troubled, too difficult to maneuver, too full of day-to-day vicissitudes. The tense balance between the bounty of its myriad shiny offerings and opportunities and the cost of averting my eyes from everyday inequalities and injustices had shifted. I needed to reclaim my soul.

Maybe I'd seen too many western movies and TV shows growing up in the Bronx. Somehow, the West became the place I set sight on. Though the frontera had long closed, it seemed a place where, if things didn't work out here, I could move to that unseen place just beyond. Start over. And, maybe, I was harkening to my childhood in a small pueblo where we lived immersed in nature and everyone knew everyone else. A town where I sounded and looked just like my neighbors.

I was born in Puerto Rico. Celebrated in poems as *Isla del Encanto*—Isle of Enchantment. Colony rocked in the arms of the Atlantic Ocean and *Mar Caribe*. Caressed by trade winds and waves. The same trade winds that brought *Cristóbal Colón* to the archipelago in 1493. The same trade winds that fan our *Boricuas*—amalgam of *Taino*, African, and European blood—today. Oddly, surf and sand have never called to me, though I love the line where aqua becomes azure, as sea meets *cielo*, and the sway of slender palmas to the *boleros del viento*. Growing up, it was a rare day we went to the beach. Boys learned to swim in rivers. Girls did not swim. In fact, didn't engage in sports—not ladylike. Instead, I learned el océano was a scary place. Foaming dark waters raging against sharp-edged rocks where saw-toothed sharks ripped apart boys foolish enough to venture into them. Perhaps that's why, despite several formal classes and lessons from friends (who were always sure I could) I never have learned to swim. I can float on my back and paddle across a pool if I don't think about its depth. If I do, I flail and flounder. I have seen some of the Coral Reef off Australia's coast, in a partly submerged boat with clear bottom and sides. Know that the marvels I saw in no way compare to what divers or, even, snorkelers can see. It will have to do.

The faceted beauty of land-locked New Mexico captured me. Cactus and mesquite-dotted gently rolling desert. *Montañas* teeming with all varieties of *pinos*. *El Rio Grande* lined by cottonwoods—leaves tessellated in early autumn, castaneting in winter winds. Pronghorns, *javelina*, bobcats roaming just outside arm's reach. Roadrunners, Cooper's hawks, Pileated woodpeckers, even coyotes, within. Its multihued endless sky, hanging sometimes so low one can almost lasso clouds. Its ever-shifting horizon. The sing-song accent of northern New Mexicans. The warm breeze that rushes in dry, dances my hair when I crank open my window at day's end. Land of Enchantment.

For a year before I moved here, I woke in the middle of the night, obsessed for a few hours about life in a new place. A place where no one knew me. (Oddly, it didn't trouble me, I would know no one.) A place where all my years of building a reputation as a well-trained, assiduous, and compassionate surgeon would be for naught, if I killed my first patient. And what about my daughter, away at college? Self-proclaimed New York City girl, already mad at me for wanting to uproot her. (Tear up by the roots—how well I understood that!) How would my family do without me to lend support and a steadying hand?

I had no answers. Knew I needed to be somewhere else. Somewhere my countenance would clear of clouds. My eyes open to that horizon I craved. At some point, I began again to sleep through the night, as a baby whose hunger no longer plagues her in the dark. Moved ahead with plans, made peace with my fears and my family. Left the place that had, amid chaos and loneliness, nurtured me. Allowed me to achieve dreams I may not have dreamt had I not crossed the ocean from *mi patria querida* to *Nuevayork*. Left my second home 30 years older than I had arrived. Journeyed cross-country with a reluctant, angry daughter and a frightened cat to start anew. Carried my experience, talents, expectations to a place I hoped would not disappoint. Would be as fair to me as the Big Apple had been. Would, maybe, even welcome me. I arrived in New York May 1959. Arrived in New Mexico May 1990. My third home.

I did not kill my first patient or any patient in my 25 years in practice here. I loved, and still love, my work and my patients. I know the word patient has many definitions. It may be, “one bearing or enduring pain, trouble, a long wait, etc. without complaining or losing self-control.” I prefer the meaning, “a person receiving care or treatment, especially from a doctor,” though I cannot remember any one of my patients who did not face her diagnosis and treatment “without complaining or losing self-control.” I built a fulfilling private practice in general and breast surgery. Made friends along the way. Retired at the end of 2015 to travel more creative, new roads. Spend time looking around. Record, in photographs, prose and poetry, what I see and learn. I have always loved words and what they can do. New Mexico has a lot of history, people, places that intrigue me. A world of stories waiting for me to wed them to the right words.

My ex-husband died of swine flu in the H1N1 pandemic of 2009. Pandemic, from *pan* and *dēmos*, (affecting) all the people. Sounds egalitarian. Yet we see, as in every other aspect of our democracy (root word also *dēmos*), stark inequities in who dies. Disproportionately, the black and brown, many of those now being termed “essential.” (Until COVID-19 dispels and they're not.)

I walk today with my fiancé in the conifer forest of the Juan Tomás Open Space in Albuquerque. We were to marry on May 9th, fly to Puerto Rico May 21st. Those plans, on hold. Victims of this new scourge. A crown-wearing virus. A thing of beauty under electron microscopy. And deadly.

We hike, don masks when hikers or bikers approach. Lose the fragrance of *piñón* pines and junipers behind double-layered cotton. Small price. In our seventies, we want to stay safe. One trail opens to another, winds narrow and furrowed among scrub oak stands—tender green leaves coruscating in midday sun. An old ponderosa touches heaven with limbs gnarled by its need for light. Like us, it has adapted to survive.

We sit on a cushion of needles, picnic, lie for a while lulled by the sibilant dance of pines vanishing into the faraway *horizonte azul*. I think of my life in this home. No, it did not disappoint.

Sylvia Ramos-Cruz is a retired general surgeon, world traveler, avid gardener, amateur historian, and women's rights activist still working to get the Equal Rights Amendment into the Constitution. Art in all its forms, women's lives, and every-day injustices inspire me to write. Her interest in women's history has led her to research and write about historic New Mexico women, road markers, and suffragists. Her prize-winning poetry, prose, and photographs have appeared in local and national publications including, *Malpais Review*, *Encore: Prize Poems 2017*, *Journal of Latina Critical Feminism*, *Southwest American Literature Journal*, *Artemis*, *Boricua en la Luna: Anthology of Puerto Rican Poets*, and *La Crónica de Nuevo México*, among others. Her May 29, 2020, *In the Year of Our Peril* was named "Best" non-fiction work in the 2020 SOMOS contest. *Railyards Trilogy: Poems and Photographs*, a multimedia collage work, is in the City of Albuquerque's Public Art collection. "The Place That Takes You In" speaks about her journey from Puerto Rico through New York to New Mexico, her *tercer hogar*. The richness and beauty of this land manifested in its geographies, histories, and cultures attracted her, welcomed her, and keeps her rooted here. SRCPoeta@outlook.com