

## Corn Dance

The mountains still have their crisp frosting of the recent snows when we arrive in Taos. Mary and Connie live on a mesa on the north side of town in a lovely adobe house that Mary built, largely with her own hands, a few decades ago.



They have offered us the spare bedroom but the view is so fabulous that we ask if we can just park Zillie in the yard and sleep in her.



We get a chance to meet Elvie, Mary and Connie's dog. She is a year old, smart, energetic and full of personality. She keeps us busy and very entertained.

We go to Orlando's, a Taos institution, where I get to have another hit of New Mexico enchiladas in green chili. They are even better than Tomasita's. Tempting as it was, neither Susan nor I, in spite of our long standing love of Fritos, had the Frito Pie. (Yes, it is made with real Fritos.)

Tuesday afternoon we all (except Elvie) go to Taos Pueblo. It is a feast day. Usually the tribe charges non-members to enter the old pueblo but on a feast day the price is no cameras, no binoculars no cell phones, no note taking. If you are going to be there with them you are required, it appears, to be living fully in the present. It is the spring festival celebrated by the corn dance. It is a bit windy and dusty as we walk around the plaza. The shops are all closed for the day. There are few tourists. Village dogs wander about. Groups of children have gathered, occasionally taunting each other. Villagers and their guests from the greater Taos community stand about visiting. It is an occasion where one might wear one's best turquoise, silver, shawls and blankets.

No schedule is published for the dance. Mary says, "You just go and wait and hope something happens." We sit. We wait.

After a time people emerge from various points and gather in front of the church. The singers, drummers and dancers form themselves. The singers and drummers are the older men. The dancers are all young women and a few teen-aged boys. The women hold corn sprouts in each hand, have one thin braid down the back of their hair, wear soft white leather boots and colorful dresses with one bared shoulder. The boys' chests and arms are streaked with white. They wear fringed kilts with fox pelt tails and carry a rattle in their free right hand. They hold their left hand on their belts. The women form two lines facing each other with the line of boys between.

The drums start. The singers start. The women start to dance gently, moving from foot to foot moving the corn sprouts up and down in alternating hands. The boys start to dance. More energetically and more intently than the women who are move more subtly. The rattles strike suddenly like lightning. The dancers move in and out of figures, synchronizing their successive forms with the phrases of the singers; setting time to the punctuation of the drums. After many figures the dance completes and one of the elders offers a prayer.

All then move in procession to the next point on the edge of the plaza and repeat the dance. Mary tells us they always repeat their dances a number of times on a circuit around the pueblo. They always start in front of the church.

We leave feeling grateful and profoundly moved.

We spend the afternoon of the following day exploring the Rio Grande Del Norte Gorge, looking back through time on fields of ancient volcanoes. We peer into the deep rift and small cracks.

There are indeed many mysteries and enchantments in New Mexico.



From the road,  
Jane and Susan