



Nancy Marsh Price. *Rancho de Valentino*. Santa Fe: Western Edge Press Publishing, 2018. 120 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-889921-55-6.

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Rancho de Valentino: A Complicated Memoir

Rancho de Valentino is a memoir of settling ranchland along the Tecolote River in New Mexico interspersed with bits of regional history. The book focuses on the activities of the author and her family in New Mexico starting in the late 1960s and their struggles with purchasing land that was originally part of a Spanish land grant. Early chapters reveal the author's trajectory—from growing up in a small town in Michigan to spending time in Chicago and San Antonio to settling in New Mexico in 1967 after her husband is assigned to White Sands Missile Range. Their time in southern New Mexico captures life along the United States-Mexico border—complete with trips to El Paso, crossings into Juárez, Mexico, and the quotidian activities of building a community, making friends, and engaging in social activities.

The memoir teeters between the romanticized notion of the Southwest and complex local histories. For example, Price recalls early visits to the Southwest that reinforce the romanticized image of the region, revealing how it was “amazing to see ‘real’ Indians around the trading post” in an early trip to Arizona (p. 14). Eventually making her way to Santa Fe in 1968, Price once again makes note of the local landscape: the “strange, round state capitol building” and “artists from the nearby pueblos sitting under the portal of the Palace of the Governors selling jewelry ... felt like a scene out of *National Geographic*” (p. 18).

After time spent in Korea and a brief move back to Michigan, the family, now with son Jay, moves to Santa

Fe where Ted is offered a job at the Acoma Animal Hospital. It is now that the memoir turns from the romantic to the daily struggles of fitting in, competing local histories, and self-reflection. Living in an all-Hispanic neighborhood in Santa Fe, Price reflects on how language functioned as an identity marker that signaled her as an outsider:

[We] did have nice neighbors on either side and across the street, but when I pushed Jay in his stroller around the block, the ladies down the street switched from English to Spanish and continued talking to each other. That was something I hadn't even considered. That also happened in the grocery stores, as the cashier spoke in Spanish to the person in front of me, rang up my purchase while talking to the person behind me in Spanish and only telling me what I owed in English. In other stores, Spanish-speaking [customers] were waited on first. I felt it was a good lesson to learn what discrimination looked like. (p. 21)

It is perhaps this realization of discrimination that causes Price to reconsider her early perceptions of this regional space. While Price's encounter with language hardly constitutes the racial, political, and social ramifications of discrimination, there is some critical reflection regarding their attempt to settle land originally part of the Spanish land grants. Though the memoir details the struggles of obtaining land deeds, establishing the ranch, and local family politics, Price recognizes the colonial legacy of land in New Mexico: “too many gringos had come in hoping to remake a place to their own liking,

not appreciating that things had been done a certain way for generations” (p. 49). The book counters this remarking by “gringos” and her family’s role in settling ranch land in northern New Mexico by providing local histories of place names and local traditions and lore—like ditch cleanings and *brujas* (witches). To make the point, the author also describes the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the subsequent reconquest, refers to the implications of Spanish land grants, and delves into the complexities of

clashing cultures.

The book opens and closes by reconciling shifting worldviews of place and space—from colonization of the land to communal traditions and the eventual selling of their Rancho de Valentino. Because the text reads as part memoir and part regional history, the book is a good resource for those interested in how local history and life-writings intersect to inform and challenge preconceived notions.

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