

“La Placita a de San Rafael”

“What good is a hometown when everyone you know is gone?”

-John Nichols, “*Milagro Beanfield War*”

The truth is, you never outgrow where you come from. You carry it with you everywhere you go. I was raised in the shadow of the church of San Pedro y San Rafael, not the San Rafael Presbyterian church in Mogote but the Catholic church by the same name. Sufficed to say that since I lived right across the fence from church, I spent a lot of my time there; attending mass, helping in the maintenance and upkeep and even playing guitar in the three-person choir.

When I’m asked where I grew up, a sense of pride and satisfaction comes over me. I was brought up in San Rafael and educated by Catholic nuns, it was all I knew. As far as other religions were concerned, they didn’t exist, everybody was Catholic. I’m not proud to say that my church attendance has lessened over the years but I’m still a Catholic, it’s my identity, my culture. The entire population of the “placita” felt similarly, and we all felt as if the little church belonged to all of us.

My family, as well as our relatives and neighbors all shared a common bond, our little church. From the changing of "mayordomos" to the annual "función" and our monthly mass, it was all about family and community. Father Felix Lopez was the pastor, he was from Spain and spoke little English, all our interactions with him, including mass, were in Spanish. That was fine though, since it was our native language anyway. When my father passed in 2014, my aunt Fedelina and I rang the church bell to announce his passing. I was told that it was the tradition.

Who I became and my perception of the people and places around me was forged in this placita. I don't live there anymore and I wish could spend more time there. But I carry it with me everywhere I go.

I hope you enjoy this documentary as much as I enjoyed growing up "en la placita de San Rafael".

Toby A. Madrid Jr.