

# cuadernos

Winter 2022 Vol. II, Issue 4



Invierno:  
Humo y Hielo  
(Smoke and Ice)



cuadernos

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# Invierno: Humo y Hielo



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This cuaderno was developed for the  
*Manitos Community Memory Project*

Written by Jesús Cuahtémoc Villa

# Preface

Winter is a special time in New Mexico. We may be in the Southwest, but Winter reminds us that even deserts grow cold: it's not uncommon to see snow and ice as far south as Las Cruces, even if only on the mountains. Our northerly relations might scoff at our idea of Winter, but the cold here is real: it creeps into homes and into bones, stiffening the joints and cracking the skin of those not careful to cover up properly. Red chile powder is sprinkled into boots and gloves to keep the frost away from vulnerable fingers and toes.

There are many ways to stay warm in the New Mexican winter. Fire is perhaps the most obvious, and people take full advantage of it: in my mind, the smell of juniper, mesquite, pecan, and piñón woodsmoke say "Winter" even more than snow, ice, or the high holy days celebrated throughout much of the state. Food is perhaps my favorite way of keeping warm: the cold means that you can use the oven and stove in ways that would be unthinkable in summer. Winter foods stick to the ribs and warm the heart in ways that, in my opinion at least, just don't (or can't) happen in other seasons. Above all, Winter is a time for the warmth of community: whether in dance circles, houses of worship, kitchens, kivas, living rooms, or watering holes,

the cold brings people closer together...even if only for the body heat! No matter how they gather, *nuevomejicanos* in Winter are some of the warmest and most welcoming people in the world, and you can't tell me otherwise.

Now, I won't lie – I've really come to love Winter in my adopted home of Arizona! Temperatures in the mid-60s to low 70s are exceedingly comfortable, and I will never miss shoveling snow (no matter how rare an activity that might have been in Nuevo México). However, I've always made a point of returning to my *querencia* at least a few times a year to remind myself what a real Fall and real Winter feels like. Every year, that is, except the last few (for sadly obvious reasons). It was therefore a real joy and privilege to be asked to write these Fall and Winter *cuadernos*. In my COVID- and grad school-necessitated exile, it's been a special joy and comfort to revisit Fall and Winter in Nuevo México through writing and reflecting. I hope that reading this *cuaderno* will help you, wherever you are, to understand or reconnect with the wonder of Winter in New Mexico.

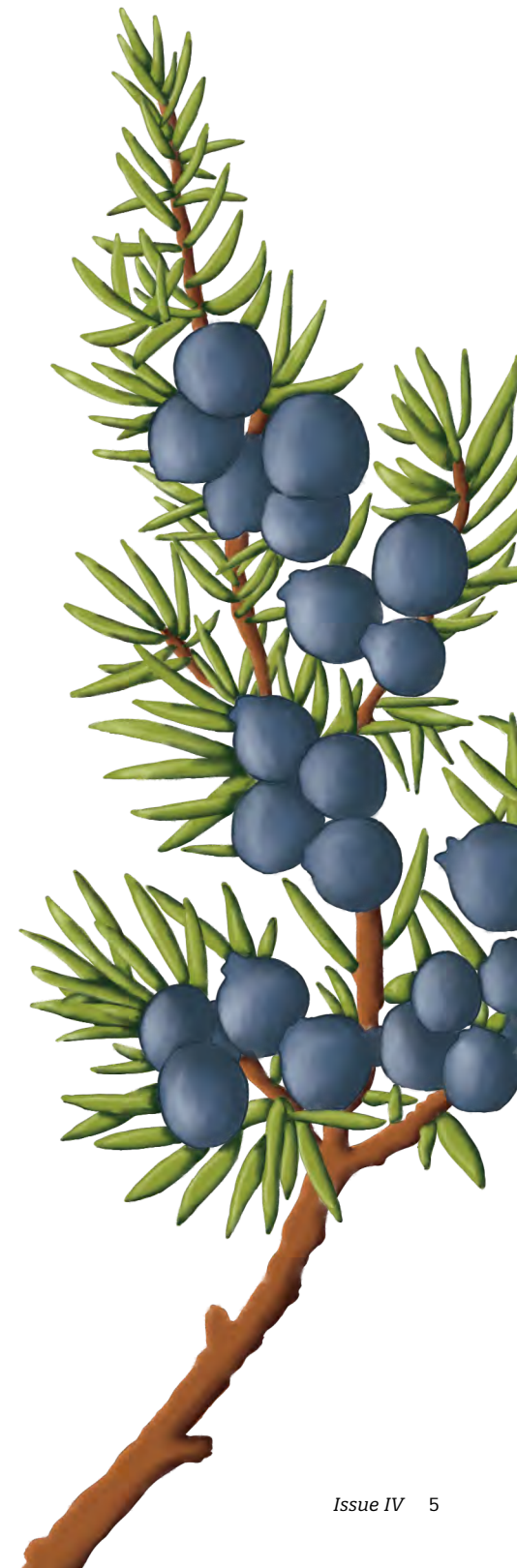
*Bendiciones, Jesús Cuauhtémoc Villa*

# Weather: Humo y Hielo

Winter has come to our *querencia*. The trees are bare, their leaves long since fallen and wind scattered. Their branches twist and reach for the sky like gnarled, bony fingers. The pleasant chill of Fall has grown into the deep cold of Winter, the kind that bites the lungs, waters the eyes, and burns any skin left uncovered. The snow may come as a light dusting, or it may fall in thick drifts that bend tree branches and make weary *techos* (roofs) groan. All but the bravest of *pajaritos* (birds) have fled South for the Winter; *los osos*

(the bears) have gone into hibernation. In their absence, the coyotes, *liones* (mountain lions), and *lobos* (wolves) grow thicker coats and bolder attitudes as food grows scarcer. The only green that remains are the muted, dusty tones of *cedro* (cedar), *enebro* (juniper), *pino* (pine), and *piñón*. The Winter stars in New Mexico are unrivaled: the stars shine so sharp and clear in the night that it feels as if they could cut you like glass. You know you shouldn't stay outside so long to stare at them, but it's almost impossible not to.

The land has earned its long rest. It has provided us with beans and chile, corn and squash, cotton and pecans and alfalfón and more edible and medicinal plants than can almost be named or numbered. The rivers that watered our crops shrink and freeze; most of the *acequias* stand dry and empty. The days are at their shortest and the nights their longest. The time of planting, tending, and harvesting are at an end. Now is the time for reflecting, listening, and stillness.



# Storytelling: Cuentos Cálidos para Noches Frías

**W**inter has always been a time for storytelling. In the old days, before electricity and television and smart phones, one of the only ways to pass the time during the long, cold New Mexico nights was to tell stories. For many of our Indigenous ancestors and friends (both here and in México), Winter is the time to tell Coyote stories: tales about that wily old trickster who is equal parts clown and creator. He's the guy whose failures we cheer for as much as we celebrate his wins. His stories are only told in Winter; it's improper to tell them at any other time, and hearing them in the correct season makes them feel that much more powerful and special. Coyote still finds many ways to teach us important lessons!

Many new Winter stories came to New Mexico after the Spanish arrived. They brought with them European tales of princesses and knights, fairies and goblins, angels and demons, the saints and the Devil. The Spanish also brought enslaved and free Africans, who in turn brought their own stories – tales of Anansi the spider, High John the Conqueror, elephants, lions, and rabbits. Their historical



presence in New Mexico is often ignored, but they left their signature in many ways. Black herbalists used the medicinal globemallow plant (*Spharalcea* spp.) so often and successfully that it came to be known among Spanish speakers as *yerba de la negrita* (the little black woman's herb) or *yerba del negro* (the black man's herb). The Cha'kwaina katsina of the Indigenous A:shiwi (Zuni), Hopi, and Keresan-speaking peoples is thought to be a representation of Mustafa Azemmouri (يروم زلای فطصم), the first African man to explore North America. In later centuries, free and escaped Black people came to New Mexico from the American South and

East to escape slavery and Jim Crow laws. They formed their own free towns, like Blackdom and Vado (among many others), joined existing towns and pueblos, and added their stories to the long history of our beautiful *querencia*.





# Christmastime: “¡Mis Crismes!”

The best-known story in New Mexico is probably the Christian story of *la Navidad* (the Nativity), also known as the Christmas story. Some families reenact the Christmas story in a Nativity play called *las posadas* (the inns). It is a ceremony that goes back to the days when there were few Churches to hold Christmas mass, but people still wanted to connect with their God and their communities.

Sometimes *las posadas* are a procession inside one family's home, in which each room is an inn and each different family member plays an innkeeper, a farm animal, or Mary and Joseph. Sometimes *las posadas* are a community play, in which a neighborhood comes together to decide whose houses will serve as inn and manger and who will play which parts. Jesus is almost always represented by a doll or carved figure in a Nativity scene. Most Spanish speakers wish each other a merry Christmas by saying “¡Feliz Navidad!”, but you might hear speakers of New Mexican Spanish say “¡Mis Crismes!” instead.

Christmas time means many people place *farolitos* (little lanterns) around their homes: brown paper bags weighted down with sand and lit with tea candles (or more often these days, store-bought plastic lines of electric lights shaped like brown lunch bags). People with enough time and space might also build *luminarias*, little bonfires that are built by stacking pieces of firewood two-by-two in neat rows leading up to the house. *Farolitos* and *luminarias* are both meant to guide the *Reyes Magos* (Three Wise Men), *Espíritu Santo* (Holy Spirit), and/or *San Nicolás* (St. Nicholas of Myra, aka Santa Claus) to the family home. It's easy to confuse *farolitos* with *luminarias*, but always remember – *farol* means lantern (and *farolito*, a small paper lantern), while *luminaria* means a small bonfire!





# Los Matachines: Bailando en Tres

Some of the most beautiful and powerful Winter celebrations are the dances of the *matachines* (singular: *matachín*). From Peru to northern New Mexico and beyond, matachines are found almost everywhere that Spanish, African, and Indigenous dance traditions met and mixed in the Western Hemisphere. Depending on where you are, the *matachín* dances might look more African, more Indigenous, more Spanish, or some beautiful mix thereof. No matter what, though, they are always a reflection of the place that they come from. Matachín dances in La Costa Chica, México will look different than the ones in Phoenix, Arizona or in Alcalde, Nuevo México.

In northern New Mexico, the matachines' regalia, dances, and ceremonies represent a beautiful mix of Pueblo and Iberian Catholic traditions; in fact, you'll often see the same dancers in a *matachín* dance one day and a *katsina* dance the next! As they dance, you might see *el bison* (the bison/buffalo) chasing off *el abuelo* (the grandfather, a Krampus-like ogre figure). The matachines' headdresses and some of their dance styles likely come from North African Tuareg

warrior dances, brought to Iberia by the Moors and to New Mexico by the *españoles*. The matachines represent the deep historical and familial ties between three continents of ancestors in our beloved Nuevo México. They remind us that our *cultura* (and most of our *familias*) come from the mixing of African, European, Indigenous, and many other people over the centuries.



# Winter Dishes

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Winter food must be hearty, filling, and comforting to get you through the cold, dark nights and bright, blustery days! Thankfully, our ancestors were up to the task.



# Posole

*Recipe from Natasha Vasquez*

*Posole is one of those recipes that can vary in families. It is common to see it served as menudo, I have had posole where it is served al-dente, but my mom's was cooked overnight til dinner the next day, and the white kernels were soft as I bit into them. She would carefully pull out the bones from the pork after it was cooked. She said that it had to be cooked with the bones because they added "sabor" or flavor. "It is easier to not add the bone but the lack of bone leads to a lack of flavor to save on the labor just leads to a bland meal," my mom would say. At my grandmas it was common to see posole served on Christmas Eve.*

*- Natasha Vasquez*



## INGREDIENTS:

- 8 Pork Chops Bone-In
- 1 Package of Posole
- 1 Tablespoon of Parsley
- 2 Tablespoons Red Chile Powder
- 1 Teaspoon of Garlic Salt
- 1 Teaspoon of Pepper
- 1 Tablespoon of Salt

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1** To start, add thawed pork chops to the slow cooker.
- 2** Add a bag of posole. It can be dried or frozen, but I prefer dried.
- 3** Add all the spices and fill up the slow cooker with water. Cook on high for 10 to 15 hours checking occasionally on the water levels to avoid drying up.
- 4** Serve warm with a small loaf of homemade bread. Dipping the bread in the warm juices is just an extra treat of the meal.

# Biscochitos

Recipe from Lily Padilla

## INGREDIENTS:

- 2 Cups of Manteca (Lard)
- 1 Cup Sugar
- 1/2 Teaspoon Vanilla Extract
- 1 Tablespoon Crushed Anise Seeds
- 2 Eggs
- 6 Cups of Flour
- 3 Teaspoons Baking Powder
- 1 Teaspoon Salt
- 1/4 cup of Preferred liquid (Water, orange juice, brandy)

### *Sprinkle Mixture*

- 1/2 Sugar
- 2 Teaspoons Cinnamon

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1** Cream manteca in a bowl, then add sugar, vanilla extract and anise seeds and mix.
- 2** In a separate bowl, beat eggs until they are fluffy. Then combine with manteca, sugar and anise seed combination and mix together.
- 3** Add flour, baking powder, and salt to the mixture. Add liquid element and knead until all is well mixed into a dough.
- 4** Roll dough until it is 1/2 inch thick, then cut into desired shape with a cookie cutter.

- 5** Put the cookies on a baking sheet and place into the oven and bake at 350° until they are browned for around 25-30 minutes.
- 6** Dip the cookies while they are warm into the sprinkle mixture.



# Red Chile

*Recipe from Lily Padilla*

## INGREDIENTS:

- 2 Pounds of Ground Beef
- 2 Tablespoons White Flour
- 2 – 3 Tablespoons of (Medium or Hot) Red Chile Powder (Flavor to desire)
- 2.5 Cups of Water
- Garlic Salt (Flavor to desire)
- Regular Salt

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1** Brown ground beef and drain excess grease.
- 2** Add flour and red chile to ground beef
- 3** Brown on low heat and sprinkle with garlic salt to taste.
- 4** Add cold water and let it simmer on low for roughly 10 – 12 minutes.
- 5** Salt to taste

**Note:** *For thicker chile, use less water.  
For thinner, use more water in chile.*



# Word Translations

**Invierno: Humo y Hielo: Winter:** Smoke and Ice  
**Cuentos Cálidos para Noches Frías:** Warm Tales for Cold Nights  
**Mis Crismes:** Merry Christmas  
**Bailando en Tres Mundos:** Dancing in Three Worlds

**Cedro:** Cedar  
**Cultura:** Culture  
**El Abuelo:** The Grandfather  
**El Bisonte:** The Bison/Buffalo  
**Enebro:** Juniper  
**Espíritu Santo:** Holy Spirit  
**Familias:** Families  
**Farol:** Lantern  
**Farolitos:** Little Lanterns  
**Feliz Navidad:** Happy Nativity  
**La Navidad:** The Nativity  
**Los Osos:** The Bears  
**Las Posadas:** The Inns  
**Luminarias:** Small Bonfire  
**Matachines:** Ritual Dancers  
**Mis Crismes:** Merry Christmas  
**Pajaritos:** Birds  
**Pino:** Pine  
**Reyes Magos:** Three Wise Men  
**San Nicolás:** St. Nicholas of Myra, aka Santa Claus  
**Techos:** Roofs  
**Yerba de la Negrita:** The Little Black Woman's Herb  
**Yerba del Negro:** The Black Man's Herb



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