

## GRADUATION DAY

*Raymond Lerma*

“Ni te pareces,” Mom had said  
as I put on my only tie  
and brand new tirantes.

“El tiempo se ha ido como agua  
and look what a fine, young,  
handsome man you’ve become,”  
she said with her vocesita  
as she wiped her eyes with  
her delantal.

“We’ll see you down on the field  
after the ceremony, mijo,”  
she had added as I walked out  
the door.

She said “We!” Man, who could  
she mean? It’s just graduation.  
It’s not a quiceañera or a funeral.  
Jefas sure can be escandalosas at  
times.

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Raymond Lerma was born in El Paso, Texas in 1953. His parents moved to Corcoran, California in 1955. Corcoran was the home base for the family as they followed the crops up and down the state. A lifetime learner, he graduated from UC Berkeley with a BA in ethnic studies and Spanish and his teaching credential. His teaching career began in 1977 and continued onto the rest of his life. Always a reader and a writer, Raymond also served as a community leader in Corcoran.

Lerma, R. “Graduation Day”. *Camino Real*, 12:15. Alcalá de Henares: Instituto Franklin-UAH, (2020). 197-201. Print.

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“Cálmate, hijo, just a few relatives  
and a few friends,” she had assured me.

I look up at the sea of people  
as a large group is calling out my name.  
I can’t believe my eyes!

Abuelita and Abuelito, all my Tíos and  
Tías from both sides of the family, my  
padrinos, the parish priest, countless  
primos and primas along with friends  
and neighbors of la familia. Looks  
like the whole barrio’s here!

¡Qué verguenza! What are the homeboys  
going to think? To top it off, Abuelita  
is even leading the charge:

A la vío  
A la váo  
A la bim, bom, ba  
Ramón, Ramón  
!Ra, ra, ra!  
A LA VIO  
A LA VAO  
A LA BIM, BOM, BA  
RAMON, RAMON  
!RA, RA, RA!

“Please Stand For Our National Anthem  
And Remain Standing for the Invocation,”  
the loud speaker blares out as the crowd  
quiets down and faces the flag.

As the drummers begin their drum roll  
the crowd becomes a blur and I become  
oblivious to the many speakers and  
dignitaries as the rich smell of Abuelita’s  
sopa de fideo envelopes the air just as

when we would get home from grade  
school.

“A lavarse esas manos cochinas,”  
she would yell out from her old  
singer sewing machine as I would  
reach out for a warm flour tortilla  
to roll up and eat with my fideo.

My mind jumps to the time Tío Rudy  
showed up in Mrs. Montoya’s bilingual  
class and taught the boys and girls all  
the different soccer drills and movidas.  
Our class was the school champion  
and we even got our picture in the  
local paper.

The pride and sadness we all felt  
as we sang Noche de Paz for our  
Christmas Program. All the parents  
joined in and at the end of our  
presentation we all came off the stage  
and hugged our mothers as tears  
streamed down our cheeks unashamedly.

The quietness and attentiveness of the  
largely Mexicano crowd as I presented  
my Eighth Grade graduation speech  
in Spanish, and then in English.

I crumpled up my themed speech  
and instead,  
with a cracking voice, sniffles and sobs,  
dedicated my graduation to  
my farmworker parents y mis abuelos  
for working so hard to clothe,  
feed, and provide a home  
for me and my eight siblings.

I thanked them for teaching me  
to work hard, to respect others,  
the importance of familia,  
and to be humble.

The crowd gave me a standing ovation.  
I never did figure out why.  
The motherly care that I received  
from Doña Juana when my parents  
had to go to Mexico to bury my  
other Abuelito. She refused  
compensation for walking me to  
and from high school.

“I told your Mamá that I would take care  
of you and that’s what I’m doing,” she  
would answer when I would mumble  
that I knew the way.

The support that I received from my  
parents and family for all school  
affiliated activities.

“Don’t tell me what you’re selling,  
just tell me how much.”

“Gracias, Tío. I knew I could count  
on you. I’m not selling anything  
this time, I’m asking for your support.”

“Support? Support for what?”  
“To sign the petition. We’re asking  
the School Board to name the new school  
in honor of César Chávez.”

“Seguro que sí, you got my vote.  
Chávez did a lot to help out people like me  
and your abuelitos. Where did you  
learn about Chávez, anyway? It wasn’t

like that when I was in school. Back then,  
it was “Our Way” or the Highway.”

The unwavering support and encouragement,  
I received from my high school counselor, Mr. Barajas,  
in filling out the intimidating paperwork for financial aid,  
scholarships, and loans.

“J.C’s fine, don’t get me wrong, state’s  
even better, but you’ll do just fine at U.C,  
hombre. Who knows? In a few years  
you’ll be taking my place. I ain’t getting  
any younger.”

I awaken from my trance surrounded by  
Abuelita, Mom, Tíos and Tías plus all the  
primos and primas, my padrinos, vecinos  
y amigos.

I’m sobbing uncontrollably, mocos running  
down my nose as I hug and kiss all the  
different people that have made a difference  
in my life.

“You big chavala,” one of my primos says to me.  
I hug him anyway.

“Gracias Tío, gracias Tía, Mom, Doña Juana  
primo, prima,” I mumble through my sobs.

Finally, I bend down to hug my Abuelita  
and she slowly nods her head and says to me,  
“¡Tan grandote y tan llorón!”

“So grown up and such a Crybaby!”