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Folklore 250

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La Lechuza

I dedicate the following project to my loving father whom I've always admired. May God answer our prayers and continue to bless us with your presence. *Te quiero mucho.*

I remember waking up early, one Saturday morning for a walk with my father. The air was crisp, the leaves' colors were as warm as the rising sun. As a kid, I didn't like walking, or hiking, or anything that required me to walk more than a hundred meters. My father dragged me out of the house to go to the trails, I was tired and hoped it was worth waking up early. I recall tying my laces on my blue vans, making sure I didn't step over them in the five-mile trek that was ahead. As we started to walk, I asked my father to tell me any scary stories he knew. I, being interested in Halloween and the paranormal was excited to hear what my father had to offer. "Oh, I know so many of them!" he replied with a smile. He started telling countless stories about when he was a young boy and how he came across several witches or *brujas* in his small village of *Jomulquillo* Mexico. My eyes grew bigger with excitement and fright about how my father described these shapeshifting creatures called *Lechuzas*. An old woman who preys on young children, having the power to shape-shift into a birdlike animal, ultimately flying off with the hopeless victims into the mountains. The fieldwork project allowed me to share the folklore of the Rodriguez family, the small village of *Jomulquillo*, and of many Mexican-Americans. The project is a culmination and the result of several weeks worth of material and conducting research on the particular subject, which I'm more than happy to share with you.

My father is the culture bearer of my family, the story-teller, the jokester. Whether it's his scary stories or his Dad jokes, my father has a great amount of repertoire in various genres. Whenever we have family reunions or holiday gatherings, my cousins, aunts, and uncles always ask my father to tell them new jokes. They gather their chairs around my father as he amuses everyone with his witty humor. My cousin Veronica always asks "Hey Tio! *No te sabes uno nuevos chistes?* (Hey, Uncle do you know of any more new jokes?). Whenever she sees my father, hoping to hear another clever punchline. With my father being back at home in Los Angeles, I didn't have the opportunity to interview him in person. Flying back home to be with

my parents and interview my dad would have meant a lot, but that was an unlikely option. Instead, I decided to interview my father, via FaceTime and recorded our conversation. My schedule being filled with four rigorous classes along with all my extracurricular activities, I finally had a chance to talk to my father. The experience of interviewing my father for the fieldwork project was challenging for me and unexpectedly emotional as well. I had scheduled the interview with my father on Monday of last week (Week 7) at 6:00 pm. I called my mother that Monday evening around 5:30 pm to set up the interview, but she said that my father wasn't feeling well. Sadly, she asked if we could reschedule the interview for a time when my father was feeling better. I went on with the rest of my week studying for two midterms, waking up early every day for 5:30 am rowing practice, and rushing to the library for math tutoring in my free time. I just wondered when my father would feel better in hopes of getting the interview done on time, with the transcription deadline quickly approaching. Just to add more context, my father is battling prostate cancer back home and is the main reason why the interview process was challenging for me. His medications have been taking a toll on him recently, making him feel fatigued, nauseous and depressed. It feels like it's every month, my father is being put on a new medication, or medical trial to help lower the numbers of his cancer. He fights through the pain because he wants to live, to be healthy, to see me graduate from college. With every pill, or injection that the oncologist prescribes my father, I feel like I lose him even more. He's not the person I used to go out on morning walks with; the person who used to tell me all the scary stories, and jokes is gone. I apologize for getting sidetracked in my inner monolog, let us get back to the timeline. We rescheduled the interview with my father on Wednesday at 7:30 pm, the Wednesday before the interview transcription was due in my 4:00 pm folklore discussion class. I rushed home from an exhausting day, to get ready to interview my father. As my mother set up the iPad at home, I was collecting all the questions I was going to ask my father and got situated. Around 7:15 pm I called my parents over FaceTime on my laptop and watched as my screen filled with the familiar faces that I missed so much. My mother appeared on the screen "Hey Mijo! Your Dad isn't feeling very well tonight, but he thinks he can get through the interview." she said, warning me of my father's status. "It's okay. It'll be a quick thirty-minute interview," I assured them. During the past couple of weeks, I hadn't known much about my father's current condition. I was in for a big surprise. I asked to talk to my father, and he looked tired, he slouched his body, and I could see the pain in his eyes; he had taken his medication twenty minutes earlier. My father's condition was worse than I expected it to be, he was nauseous, had trouble talking and expressing himself. There were moments where he would look straight at the

camera with frustration because he wasn't able to speak at all. He had so much to say, but the words couldn't come out of his mouth. We spent the next two hours helping him write notes about what he was trying to say. He felt under a lot of pressure because he knew the transcription was due the next day and was worried I wasn't going to do well on the project because of him. By now it was 9:10 pm and we were getting ready to record the actual interview. By this time I came to realize that my room was unfit to interview my father. My housemates didn't care that I was on the phone with my parents the past couple of hours. They were rowdy and kept making noise, disrupting me from the process, and I couldn't count on them to be quiet while I was recording. Frustrated with the situation, I grabbed my laptop, my headphones, my interview questions and my cell phone and headed outside to my driveway, where I got in my car and called my parents back on FaceTime with the little to no wifi signal I could receive from outside my house. After a couple of practice takes, I was finally able to interview my father from inside my car. Around 10:19 pm (three hours after my father's bedtime) we finally started the actual interview. My mother recorded the interview with her phone back at home, while I recorded it with my phone over here in Eugene; making sure there were two fail-proof options of recording. He seemed to express himself better in Spanish, considering it is his first language, I conducted the interview mostly in Spanish. I later transcribed the Spanish into English. I asked him simple questions about himself, who he was, what his beliefs are and about his background, giving anybody who reads this chance to get to know my father too. I explained to my father what I was doing with the project and why. I also explained why I believe he is the culture bearer of my family, and why he's the best person to interview for my project. I asked him to tell me more about the lechuzas and his experiences as a kid. Asked him to tell me more about how he and several of his friends chased down the village witches, how he saw them on the way to another town. The same stories he told me as a kid, were now part of a fieldwork project. We finally finished up the interview around 11:03 pm, him and I were exhausted. I thanked my father for his time and endurance in getting the interview done in time. There was a huge weight taken off my shoulders, and I was able to start working on the transcription. There was an overwhelming feeling of nostalgia; I felt like a kid again. Sometimes I'm so busy thinking about growing up, that I forget my parents are also growing old. I have to take advantage of all the time I have with them and tell them how much I love them. I'm looking forward to seeing them tomorrow morning for Thanksgiving break and being able to hear any new jokes my father has come up with.

The following description comes with twenty years of rapport with the culture bearer of my family, my father:

My father Jesus Rodriguez-Perez is fifty-eight years of age. He was born and raised in a small town called Jomulquillo, in the Mexican state of Zacatecas until he immigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen. My father grew up in a large Catholic Mexican family, being the middle child of eight brothers and three sisters. His father became an alcoholic soon after the tragic death of my grandmother, who died giving birth to identical twins. My father was only five years old when he lost his mother and had to look to his older siblings to raise him and keep him out of trouble. My father has fond memories of his childhood even though he faced extreme poverty, the loss of a mother, and an alcoholic father. My father said he always enjoyed going to school and hanging out with his best friends. He remembers playing baseball, volleyball, and basketball with all the kids in the fifty family village. In the interview, my father said " I enjoyed everything that a child could enjoy in their youth." and that struck my heart because he made the best out of everything as a young boy. His childhood was stripped away from him, and he didn't have a chance to enjoy being a kid to the full extent. He lost an important individual, his mother. A mother's love and affection are crucial to a child's development, especially at the young age of five. My father and his siblings endured a lot when they were kids, but they I believe that the reason why my father is so funny and a goofball nowadays is because he was forced to grow up quicker than the average child. My father lived with his older sister Elvira, whom he loves dearly and several other of his siblings in a house. My father told me stories about how his sister would rush home from class, to prepare the frijoles, so that she and the rest of her younger siblings could have something to eat that day. She had to use a stepping stool to be able to reach the stove, to flip the freshly made tortillas. It goes to show how young my aunt was, and how big of a responsibility it was to take care of her younger siblings.

These were all stories about him and his family, his siblings. About growing up, and being a young boy in the town of *Jomulquillo*. These are my stories too; these are my people, my culture, my family. My father would also tell me several stories of his childhood experiences, with the paranormal. One night, in the house where all the siblings lived there was chaos outside in the corral. The kids were woken up by the squealing pigs, the ruckus of chickens running around like crazy, and the dogs barking. All of a sudden, they heard noise coming from inside the house, the kitchen. It sounded like someone was inside, pulling out all the drawers, throwing silverware all around, breaking plates. My father said that he clearly heard a pot spinning around

as if it were a spinning coin. My father and his older brother got up quickly, to see who had trashed their kitchen; they were surprised. When they opened the kitchen door, everything was in its place, nothing on the ground, not one plate shattered, everything was how they left it when they went to bed. My father says he gets goosebumps whenever he tells the story, because of how freaky that experience was for him.

Taking folklore 250 with Dr. Gilman made me realize that the stories that my father told me as a kid aren't just stories. They are history, the folklore of my very own family, it is our identity. My grandfather telling those stories to my father, and my father doing the same with me has created a cycle of oral tradition. With that in mind, I decided to base my fieldwork and interview project on the contemporary legend of the *Lechuzas* (Owls/Witches) because of my interest in witchcraft in Mexico and my father's repertoire on the subject. Out of all the scary stories my father has told me, the ones that frightened me the most were the ones about the *Lechuzas*. I knew from my father's stories that *Lechuzas* were *brujas*, or witches that shape shifted into birds, and balls of fire. After conducting my research on the subject, I found out that local contemporary legend of "*La Lechuza*" is known nationally across the country of Mexico and South Western United States, and not just in the small town of the *Jomulquillo*. This information made the legend even more credible as multiple eye-witnesses all around Mexico, and the United States claimed to have seen a *Lechuza*. Monday of this week I came across an interesting text by Rafaela G. Castro titled Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and ...Religious Practices of Mexican Americans. It was great flipping through the pages, finding out about different Chicano legends such as "*El Cucui*" and "*La Lechuza*." Although a skeptic, everything my father had told me, his stories, seemed to be true! Many others had experienced what my father had experienced in places like New Mexico, and the Northern States of Mexico. Hundreds of miles apart, yet there is this common belief that the folks of Northern New Mexico, and *Jomulquillo* share.

In my interview, I asked my father what a *lechuza* was and the superstitions behind them. He said that "A "*lechuza*" is another word for an owl. It is possible to have more than one word for one specific animal, it all depends on where the person is from. The superstitions in the town of *Jomulquillo* regarding the witches is that they shape-shift into birds. They can transform into owls, vultures, crows, and other animals like cats and dogs". My father talks about the word

“*Lechuza*” and what it means in Spanish. *Lechuza* or *Tecolote* are both Spanish words for the bird of prey with menacing eyes, the owl. Castro, like my father, illustrates an understanding of the source of the word *Tecolote* with “Neo-Mexican Spanish called a *Tecolote*, which stemmed from the Nahuatl word *teotl*”(Castro). The origin of the belief of infant killing, shapeshifting, bloodsucking women dates back to the pre-Columbian era of the Aztecs; with the Greeks having very similar monsters in ancient Greek mythology known as a Harpy. The Aztec legend of the “*Tlahuelpuchi*” is well known in the Mexican state of Tlaxcala, especially amongst the indigenous Nahuatl culture within the region. Although the belief that witches transform into other creatures at night is a world-wide one, we’ll focus our attention on the Aztec/Mexican-American belief. The origin of *Lechuzas* began with the belief of the *Tlahuelpuchi*, in the Aztec empire. The *tlahuelpuchi* were blood thirsty women who fed on pregnant mothers and children younger than six months. Often seen as turkeys, they possessed hypnotic powers over individuals that caused them to kill themselves. The word *tlahuelpuchi* derives from the Nahuatl *tlāhuihpochtli*, which ultimately translates to, the “glowing haze.” The glowing aura that once described the *tlahuelpuchi* several hundred of years ago, can now be described as balls of fire today. When I asked my father to describe the *Lechuzas*, he said “They looked like flying torches. I don't know what they use to make the fire, but that's what they look like.” He remembers seeing balls of fire shooting across the sky, at times, jumping from roof to roof. An old Aztec legend says that a *tlahuelpuchi* had to perform a ritual before she could enter the house of a victim; this is very similar to my father’s story of a young girl who was stalked by a group of *lechuzas* almost fifty years ago.

My father described the *Lechuza's* human form more in depth during the interview. "The *Lechuza(s)*, is an old woman that dresses in all black. They most often shape shift into owls. There are also times where they shapeshift into vultures, crows, and sometimes other animals like cats and dogs and cats. The townspeople say that the witches only leave their house at night.” It was fascinating to know that an individual such as Castro had conducted thorough research from all over the Southwestern United States and Mexico, and came to the same conclusion about the *Lechuzas*. I’m going to take a minute and talk about a perfect example of a witch or lechuza in modern day pop culture. In Harry Potter, Minerva McGonagall is an older woman who wears all black and has the power to shapeshift into a cat or any other animal. McGonagall is also the Transfiguration professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Transfiguration for all the non-Harry Potter fans is a branch of magic that focuses on the alteration of the form or

appearance of an object. In lay terms, it means shapeshifting. When I interviewed my father on the subject, McGonagall was the first person that came to mind when he first described a lechuza. With her black pointy hat, all black attire, and flowing cape, I was sure she was a modern day lechuza. I attached a picture of Professor McGonagall, at the end of the project for your reference. Curious to know how the witches of Jomulquillo flew from place to place I asked my father if they had wings. Surprisingly he said “No, they have capes. They open their capes when they fly”. It’s interesting to know that with the influence of JK Rowling, generations of Harry Potter fans had little to no idea of shapeshifting *Lechuzas* in the Aztec culture. JK Rowling made witchcraft popular, where anyone can fantasize about being a wizard without the judgment of it being taboo. The only significant difference between Professor McGonagall and a *Lechuza* from *Jomulquillo* is McGonagall speaks British English, and the *Lechuzas* speak Spanish.

Stories about *Lechuzas* had diffused from the state Tlaxcala to the rest of Mexico and Southern United States, even up to Oklahoma (Bloodsucking Witchcraft: An Epistemological Study of Anthropomorphic Supernaturalism in Rural Tlaxcala)! The modern day state of Tlaxcala is only a few hundred miles away from Mexico City, which was the heart of the Aztec empire, Tenochtitlan. The Tlahuelpuchi stories diffused all over, and still have many of the similarities that people tell today. The information that was passed down in my family from generation to generation has still been intact, and the experiences my father had experienced was a well-shared event. I could not help but point out the parallels my father's interview has with Castro's text on Mexican American Folklore. When I asked my father "What do the lechuzas do, the witches?" he replied with "They put certain curses on people. People ask them for favors for putting curses on people that they do not like. “For example, someone can tell the witch " Hey I do not like Maria, and I don't want her to get married to Jose." Then the witch could say "Okay I will put a curse on them, and that person will not be able to marry that other person. Those are their beliefs. That is how they work"(Rodriguez). My father was describing the Lechuza's ability to curse people and prepare love potions or cause illnesses and harm to others. Castro puts it almost identically, which goes to show that the beliefs are far spread, and consistent wherever they are being told. Castro talks about how "The hoot of an owl is an evil omen, so one must be careful to stay away from owls" (Castro). My maternal grandmother, who is from Guerrero, Mexico (couple states away from Tlaxcala) is superstitious of owls. She is against the idea of having a painting, picture, jewelry or figurine of an owl inside her house. She thinks it is an omen of the devil which brings evil. She says that “the Devil can use the owl's huge eyes to spy

on you and do you harm.” However, it is also funny to think that many businesses buy fake owl figurines, putting them outside of their shops because they believe it will keep pigeons, and other pests away; since owls are considered birds of prey. Those are complete polar opposite beliefs on the same subject.

Several years ago a viral video from the Mexican state of Durango spread like wildfire across Mexico. A large white barn was caught on film, stuck in a cage, being burned and abused. The title read, "Real Lechuza Caught on Tape" and created an uproar with animal abuse protestors. People believed that they had captured a witch in owl form and threatened to kill the owl by asking the animal to give up its human identity or else it would be burned alive. The poor creature shrieked with fear and pain, as locals kept on harassing it, demanding a name. After several weeks of research I've seen how extensive these beliefs are and how far they go back in Mexican history, especially in the town of Tlaxcala, dating back to the days of the Aztecs. They firmly believe in these stories, as they are presented and considered to be true, allowing for this behavior to happen. One day during lecture, Dr. Gilman asked the class if the death of folklore is imminent, because of the common perception of changes in the social, political, economic, and cultural environment. My answer to that is no, and not for a long time. Folklore in the context of my fieldwork project and to many Mexican Americans is culture. The stories that my grandfather told my father, and then passed on to me, I consider a family heirloom. Similar to a pocket watch, or ring. The only difference is that the stories aren't tangible, they are told through oral tradition, through conversations, and at campfires.

While the belief has been mostly eradicated among the “educated” and the “rational,” the fact is that many people, even hardened skeptics, have had encounters with these creatures.” (Traditional Witchcraft&Occultism.wordpress). Yes, being an educated individual I know better, whether to believe in them or not, but I still consider the stories a part of my family, part of who we are. I will be more than glad to share these stories with my children in hopes of keeping the culture of the Rodriguez family alive. I, now having understood why people could believe in the legends and superstitions behind the *lechuzas*; was interested to know my father's perspective on the issue. "Do you think that people in the town believe in the legends and superstitions to this day?" I asked. "Yes, there are still people who are ignorant and believe in that stuff." "Why do you think they are ignorant? I asked. "Well over there, the people live in ignorance, they live under a rock; they are not exposed to what we are exposed to over here in the States. They do not know any better; they just know their side of town. They believe in what people tell them, with

the stories, and the superstitions. They are unable to advance if they think like that.” my father said. I continued to ask him "What part of when you were little made the *Lechuzas* easy to believe in?" My father replied with "There was no electricity. It was dark in the streets, and it was easier for the witches to hide in the dark outside. We had no idea what was in the dark.” As my father stated above, the people who seem to believe in the witchcraft and superstitions, he considers ignorant, for not making an effort to think openly. The belief in the *lechuzas* being eradicated among the educated and rational individuals couldn't be more valid. The reasons why the legends have survived hundreds of years is because they have a strong basic story appeal. The foundation of actual belief, and belief in the truth behind the legends and superstitions. The moral of the story that pushes families to baptize their children right away. I asked my father to tell me the story about how he chased down the *Lechuzas*. He recalls a time when he and several of his friends were strolling around the streets of *Jomulquillo* hanging out at night. They were strolling around the streets of *Jomulquillo*, as they stopped by this one house. He remembers sinister laughter and celebratory chuckles coming from high upon a tree. There were five, old women, perched up on the branches then my father and his friends picked up rocks from the road and started throwing them at the tree. Hoping to knock the *lechuzas* out of the tree; scaring them away. The old women, yelled back, cursing at them. They saw that they were surrounded and shape shifted into balls of fire, in an attempt to evade my father's group. My dad recalls balls of fire flying from the tree and then jumping across from roof to roof all the way back to the dark side of the "*Cerro*" or mountain. The very next morning, the family of the house where the *lechuzas* were found perched outside, suffered a loss. The family's young daughter had died "unexpectedly." It is a common belief that a witches sell their soul to the devil and possesses the ability to shapes shift into any animal by night. They are to feed upon unbaptized children as a sacrificial right to show their loyalty to the occult. News about the deceased child being unbaptized spread like wildfire. It was assumed that the soul of the young girl had been sacrificed by the *lechuzas*. To many, the omen of death brought by the congregation of *lechuzas* outside the house was correct; approving the superstition.

My father said "It is believed that the soul of an unbaptized child is worth more. The *lechuzas* are accustomed of killing children. This superstition amongst Mexicans, and the folks that belief in the *lechuzas* encourages parents to baptize children quickly. That is the custom, and it is how we think as Catholics. It should be a very short time between the child's birth and it's baptism. Children are usually baptized within a week, or a month at the latest. Those who believe

in the legends, try to baptize their children as soon as possible." Catholic missionaries at the time of the Aztec conquest saw the savagery of the Aztec culture, with human sacrifices and pagan Gods. The missionaries decided to wipe away the Aztec religion and put upon the Aztec people their Catholic beliefs. The missionaries considered owls, goats, and cats minions of the devil and associated them with witchcraft. The Aztec and European cultures collided, creating legends that encouraged the people to baptize their children. The sacrament of baptism is very important to Catholics, as it is the first step to becoming part of the faith. Unbaptized babies are believed to be carrying the Original Sin that was brought upon by Adam and Eve. It is not until they are baptized that the Original Sin is wiped away and considered children of God. During the middle of the term I had a great conversation with GTF Jacob, because we shared many similarities in our research on infant mortality and baptism. It was great talking to him because he encouraged me to continue to research more on the topic and gave me tips as well.

My father told me the story of when parents were looking for a set of God Parents. In *Jomulquillo* it's a custom to propose to the expected God Parents and celebrate with them by toasting the event with some tequila or beer, enjoying the company. My father told me a story about when his parents were looking for Godparents for him. He said that his parents were in a hurry looking for godparents for him. They wanted to get him baptized as soon as possible for he was only a couple weeks old. My grandparents went over to my father's Godparents house to propose the question of being my father's godparents. After several hours of talking and hanging out at the house, my grandparents were ready to leave. In *Jomulquillo* it is a custom or the social norm to say good evening or good night if you meet someone late at night. My grandfather on the way back home from the God Parents, saw someone move in a dark corner of the street. When they walked by the dark corner, my grandfather said "have a good evening." No response came from the corner. When no one responded, he knew that something was strange, as it was out of the norm. My grandfather had walked about four meters and then turned around looking towards the dark corner. It was the devil, standing in the dark corner. Two brightly red balls, staring at him. My grandfather just grabbed my grandmother even tighter with my two-week old father in her arms and walked as fast as they could back home to safety. My grandparents prayed the entire way back home, asking God to deliver them from evil. If one encounters a *Lechuza* it is customary to pray the "Our Father" backwards or throw rocks, driving them away. I have attached a prayer meant to keep the *lechuzas* away; which must be recited at night in a low voice (see the end of essay). Many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are devout

Catholics. It is against the Catholic church to believe in superstitions or the power of witchcraft; as it is putting the witchcraft and those beliefs over the power and will of God.

As a devout Catholic myself, I wanted to gain a greater perspective on both sides of the issue, Catholicism and Witchcraft. I utilized the folklore archives and picked up a project by Ashley Caulder, on the pagan religion of Wicca. Her sister was a Wiccan and talked about how media and pop culture painted Wicca negatively as a Satan-worshipping cult. She explained how Wicca is a religion just like any other, with its rituals and followers. The Aztecs practiced a similar pagan religion, which could have been seen as witchcraft to the missionaries at the time. It all depends on what you believe and what you consider to be true.

Over the summer I asked my father to put together a collection of his jokes and the scary stories he told me as a child. I asked him to write down the stories that my grandfather would tell him as a child, as I intend to share them with my children. The fieldwork project gave me the opportunity to think analytically and conduct research as a folklorist would. I gained valuable knowledge on several subjects, and within the past nine weeks, I have learned a new language; the language of folklore.

Oral tradition has passed down a legacy of folklore belonging to my family that will travel through generations ; keeping the lore of the Rodriguez family 'eternal' sort of speak. The book of stories and jokes will be a tangible representation of the oral tradition that has been passed down from generation. I plan on telling these same stories to my children; I will tell them of how their grandfather encountered a *lechuza*. My father is the culture-bearer of the family; he is the story-teller, the jokester. My father was the first person I thought about when I saw the rubric for the project proposal. He is the best person I could have interviewed. He has so much knowledge or repertoire on the subject of *Lechuzas* and other scary stories. In regards to the project, the folk group is my family, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and any other group of individuals who believe in the *Lechuzas* and the superstitions behind them. I consider my family to be the highest context group, where the people of *Jomulquillo* follow after that. There is a considerable amount of interaction between my family, as well as to the individuals of the *Jomulquillo* community. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as a whole are the lower context group, as they have a broader and more diffused relationship. Let's take the example, an individual who is born in the small town of *Jomulquillo* is Mexican. But not all Mexicans come from the town of *Jomulquillo*. Individuals that are a part of a high context groups have more

opportunities to interact with the people of that particular group. They can identify easier with each other because of a smaller community. They could have more personal stories to tell or inside jokes that an "out group individual" would not understand. The folks of *Jomulquillo* are a homogenous group as a vast majority of them identify as Catholic Mexicans. The origin, or where the legends of the *Lechuzas* emerged dates back to the Aztec era, in the modern Mexican state of Tlaxcala. The strange tales of the Tlahuelpuchi transformed into the contemporary legends of today, *La Lechuza* (Nutini). The stories of *La Lechuza* have survived for several hundreds of years. Although parts of the legend have changed a bit over time, the legend still holds many similarities that were told at the time of the Aztec people. The changes and similarities of a particular folklore over a period of time is called continuity and change. In one of my peer-reviewed sources, Castro talked about the *Lechuzas* in the context of being a contemporary Chicano folktale. The information that Castro had collected over her research was very similar to what my father had experienced as a young child, almost fifty years ago. The stories from Tlaxcala are similar to the stories told in Northern New Mexico. As a folklorist, we have to ask ourselves why have they survived for so long, why do they have the same motifs, why are these stories being told. That is when we conduct our research, interview individuals, and immerse ourselves in the particular folklore. Immersing ourselves allows us to understand why the folk group does what they do or why they believe in their legends. Unbaptized children or very young children are a common motif found in stories of the lechuzas, as they are often the victims of the blood thirsty owls.

I hypothesize that the reason why the stories have stood the test of time is that they encourage parents to baptize their children early. They feed on the fear and the consequence of not baptizing infants early on. As a young boy living in *Jomulquillo*, my father experienced the folklore in its natural context, first hand. Those who believe in the *Lechuzas* will continue to live the culture associated with them and continue to pass on the superstitions to their children. As with those who do not believe, the legends can stand as folklore with the intention of being believable. The stories would not of have been told today if people did not think there was some truth behind them.

Concluding my fieldwork project, I realized that it was more than a mandatory assignment in my introductory folklore course. To me, it was more than just that. I saw it as an opportunity to call home and say hello to my parents in the midst of a busy school term. An opportunity to research more about the bloodthirsty witches that haunted my dreams as a kid.

The stories and jokes and everything that my father knows I consider a family heirloom, an extraordinary gift that should be preserved. I hope to present this project to my father as a gift, appreciating everything he has done to help me. With my father being very ill with cancer back home, it is tough living with the idea of losing him. But knowing he will be able to live on with the stories he told and his experiences, gives me peace of mind. The project has ignited in me, a passion for folklore and in pursuing my own research on the subjects that I enjoy and appreciate. I now think critically through the perspective of a folklorist, as I see the world differently. I appreciate everything I've learned from this class continuing to utilize the terms, ideas and concepts to analyze family traditions, culture and activities.

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