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## LA BODA DEL LA HIJA DE TECO (TECO'S DAUGHTER'S WEDDING)

BY MANUEL F. MEDRANO<sup>1</sup>

Anyone in South Texas who knows bodas (weddings) understands that those in the city are different from those on the rancho. The food is different. The city boda usually caters God-forsaken Chicken Bleu Cordon with asparagus and mashed potatoes served on dinnerware and linen tablecloths. The rancho boda may have cabrito (young goat) or barbacoa (cow cheek) en pozo (underground) as their main dish and serve it cafeteria-style on Styrofoam plates and cups. Additionally, carne guisada (stewed meat), arroz (Mexican rice) and frijoles a la charra (pinto beans prepared with bacon slab, tomato, onion, and cilantro), salsa (hot sauce) and corn tortillas may be part of the menu. The music and baile (dance) are also distinct. At the urban boda, the music may be Hip-Hop, Rap, Tejano or norteno. The rancho wedding may have conjunto, norteno and mariachi music. People dress differently and the actual wedding environment is different. For example, the bridesmaids at the rancho wedding may not wear high heels because the meal and the dance are held outside, and the soil may be soft. Their escorts may wear clothing with a more western motif than their city counterparts. What they have in common, however, is that they bring together generations of families to celebrate a pre-Columbian and Spanish-origin devotion to the sanctity of marriage. What do these distinctions have to do with this story? Simply stated, this story is about a 1984 wedding, and not just any wedding, the rancho wedding of Big Bad Teco's daughter, Maria Isabel Rodriguez de Medrano, known by most as "la Chavela." Her father's reputation often preceded him. From migrant worker to Golden Gloves boxer, from Korean War soldier to gin operator, from bouncer to

around him. Teco gritted his teeth and reluctantly smiled. After all, it was his oldest daughter's wedding.

A local conjunto (music ensemble with an accordion) played past midnight. Some couples danced el taquachito (the little possum) on the grass. Others just listened and remembered dances and weddings they attended when iconic accordionists like Narciso Martinez and Valerio Longoria performed throughout the night. They were much older now, but the corridos (folk ballads) and polkas seemed timeless. Young children, less than ten years old, mimicked the older dancers and ran across the makeshift dance floor with an unbridled joy and a purity in their laughter.

The newlyweds left the reception at 5 p.m. It had been a long day for both, and Chavela was hungry, so they drove to Brownsville and ate burgers at The Vermillion Watering Hole. The music at the reception continued and the spirits flowed until after midnight. Teco had strategically placed pacas de cana (bales of hay) throughout the reception area in case someone passed out or just wanted to sleep, and some did. According to the boda lore, those who remained until the next morning resembled zombies—zombies listening for one more corrido or savoring one more serving of carne guisada. They, like other guests and the bride and groom understood how special the rancho community and la boda de la hija de Teco really were.

## Notes

1. MANUEL F. MEDRANO is Emeritus Professor of History at UTRGV. He is producer/director of the Los del Valle oral history documentaries and author/coauthor of six books and over twenty-five articles and essays about people, history, and culture in the Rio Grande Valley.