

Origin Story of Three Feathers

In 2004, Michael and I were living in Phoenix Arizona. We had been increasingly worn down by the brutal heat and the stifling atmosphere. Our careers at that time, unfortunately, tethered us to Phoenix. Thus, we decided, for our own sanity, to seek an alternate locale for escape over the long weekends. Even though we could not precisely articulate where this mythical place might be, we knew it would include a higher elevation with a more enlightened temperament. Our search began within the borders of Arizona, exploring places like Flagstaff and Sedona; however, they just did not feel bountiful enough.

Just as we were on the verge of giving up, we remembered visiting Taos years before with friends, staying at the Mabel Dodge Luhan house and enjoying a lovely mini break. We were curious if Taos would be a good fit, and if it would even be possible to drive to Taos within a day from Phoenix. On a whim, over the Christmas holidays, we decided to make the journey.

On Christmas Eve, as we drove through Velarde, people were emerging from their homes and lighting farolitos on both sides of the highway. Caught in this web of charm, as we drove deeper through the canyon, wedged between the rippling waters of the Rio Grande on our left and the rising pink granite walls on our right, we both fell silent. We were being pulled through a magical portal and recognized with anticipation that this might be it. By the time we emerged on the plateau, it was too dark to notice the dramatic gorge views, but we could still see the outlines of the mountain sentinels in an encompassing circle all around us.

Arriving at the Mabel Dodge Luhan house, we stepped inside the cozy living room greeted by the warmth of a fire emanating from a kiva fireplace, and the intoxicating aroma of posole brewing in a large pot. Immediately, the hostess ushered us into the dining room/kitchen area to imbibe. It was then that we were told about the bonfire celebration at the Pueblo, but it was already late, so we stayed tucked in. Between the posole, farolitos, dramatic canyon, river and mountains, the kiva fireplace, viga ceilings, and adobe walls, we had already fallen in love.

The next day, we contacted a realtor and began exploring the possibilities of a second home. Over the next four months, we searched for a small passive-solar off-grid home near Arroyo Seco and were not finding a good match. After our third trip, quite despondent, wondering if it was not meant to be, our realtor contacted us with an unusual suggestion. She said I have seen this house and well, I know it is not anything like you have said you would like, but I just have a feeling. She sent photos. And yes, it was not a small passive-solar off-grid home near Arroyo Seco. Yet, we were so smitten that we drove up the next weekend to see it immediately.

The house was distressed and large, but had so many incredible details - the carvings, the staircase, the ceilings, the earth floors, the luscious flow, the Aga oven... we found ourselves lingering in each room, not wanting to leave. After seeing the last room upstairs and the incredible views from the deck, we made our way back to the living room to debrief. We had already been in the living room, which was as empty as the rest of the house. As we were standing and talking to our realtor and the selling agent, though, something caught our eye, something we had not noticed previously. Before I go further with this story, I must give a bit of back story.

Back in Phoenix, I was in the middle of a yearlong preparation for a solo exhibition at the Shemer Museum in Scottsdale. I had really been delving deep in research. I would take long walks to think and process and was noticing the strangest thing. Often when I reached a new conclusion of clarity, an epiphany if you like, three whitish feathers laying in close proximity would present themselves along the path where I was hiking. It was becoming a bit uncanny and mysterious. I shared this wild phenomena with Michael, and began to view this as a litmus test indicating when I was on the right track. I know it sounds strange and highly improbable. Actually in the retelling now, it is even hard for me to believe, yet it really was happening. In fact, I gathered those feathers and later incorporated them in a textile piece included in the exhibition.

Back in the living room for the second time on our lingering tour of the house, speaking to our realtor and the selling agent, in my minds-eye I asked for a sign that this house, this wildly improbable house, this house we had already fallen in love with, was it really the one? It would be a massive undertaking. Should we take the leap? I needed a sign... and in that moment, I noticed something on the floor. And yes, I'm sure you can guess... three feathers. I bent down and picked them up, and everyone was surprised. I mean how did three feathers get inside the house? And how had none of us noticed them before? We all agreed we did not believe they had been there moments ago when we had first walked through the living room. Now these were not white feathers, but brown and orange. After I collected the feathers and handed them to Michael, he turned to Mary, our realtor, and asked when we could put in an offer.

The story of the feathers does not end here. Most people thought we were insane to take on such a project. Originally there had been a faulty canale construction that deposited rain in the wrong spot and had left part of the adobe wall dissolved on the living room floor. There was no heating because the in-floor heating pipes had failed. There was no water, the well had not been drilled deep enough for the 6 properties sharing the well, and it had silted up. Yet, we had been utterly seduced by the house and with the appearance of the three feathers, we had an unflinching conviction it was destined.

As the roof was being renewed and the canale fixed, we decided quite illogically that we should prioritize putting on all new handles on the fireplace flues. And Charlie, our roofer, knew just the person, his cousin Joe, the welder. Joe arrived and sparks flew as he crafted each handle. I held my breath, knowing we did not have water yet on the property, and there was a chance he might burn the place down. I'm still astonished by how much faith we had at the time that it was all going to work out. Joe was a fascinating guy who had grown up on the Apache reservation in Arizona, even though he was Spanish. As we got to know him, one day I decided to share the story about the feathers. He asked me if he could see them. When I showed them to him, he said, oh that makes sense. Those are flicker feathers, and in his tradition, he said, they are worn in the braid of a young man to indicate his availability. He said the spirit of the house was indicating it was available to you. Later, Joe crafted the driveway gates with feathers.

This is how our home became known as Three Feathers, and why we have feathers on the gates.