

The Taco Stand

by Robert Nagle

One morning, on the way to work, I stopped at a taco stand for breakfast. A small mustached man stood behind a table, busily taking money from customers and handing out tacos from one of six bins. The smell was enchanting. About a dozen hungry people crowded around, peering at the small foil-wrapped packages and eagerly vying for the seller's attention.

"One fifty," the man said to a woman in a business suit. "Everything one fifty."

The woman took out a ten and asked what kinds of tacos he had while three more passersby approached.

The vendor pointed to the individual bins and rattled off the types: "Bean and cheese, egg, bacon, potatoes and egg, bacon and egg, chorizo, everything."

"These are great," said one man to his friend after biting into one.

"How much are they?" called a business man from the sidewalk.

"One fifty. Everything one fifty."

"Is this sauce hot?" asked another woman, pointing to a bowl of green sauce on the table.

"What kinds do you have?" asked another.

The Mexican tried to explain. "No, es not so hot--" "I'll have 2 bean and egg, 1 bacon, 1 everything and one with potato and egg." "How much are the tacos?" "One fifty." "Do you have any without meat?" "Yes, bean and cheese no have meat." "Thank you." "What kind is

this?" "Bacon and egg." "Can I have three bacon and egg?" Here you go." "Thank you." "How much?" "One dollar fifty cents." "What kinds do you have?" Bean and cheese, egg, bacon, potatoes and egg, bacon and egg, chorizo, everything." "What is chorizo?" "How much are they?" "Are these fresh?" "Si, señor!" The Mexican laughed. "Excuse me, what do you say this was?" "Chorizo. It's a sausage." "Give me two bacon, one with everything." "Thank you." "Do you make them fresh?" "Oh, yes," he said. "Everything fresh. I make tortillas at home." "Do you have a bag?" "Can I have a bean and cheese?" "Do you come here everyday?" "Yes, here you go. Yes, everyday. I come here seven o'clock. Everyday." "I'd like a potato and egg." "What kinds you got?" "Bean and cheese, egg, bacon, potato and egg, bacon and egg, chorizo, everything." "Can you break a twenty?" "No problem, no problem, thank you." "I don't have any money. I have to get some. How long will you be here?" "I stay here, but when I have no more, I go." "How much?" "One fifty." "Does everything cost the same?" "The same." "Do any of the tacos have cheese?" "Only bean and cheese and everything have cheese." "I'd like to have 3 of each taco." "One moment." The Mexican reached for his calculator and punched a few numbers, then punched them again. "Thirty one, fifty."

When the man before me had gotten his change, I was next.

"One with bacon and eggs, " I said, stepping forward. "And one with everything."

The man grabbed two hot package from the appropriate bins. "Wait," I said. "Does uh...the taco with everything have cheese?"

The seller looked at me in amazement and smiled. "Yes, es Everything. Of course, it have cheese."

I paid my money and was about to use the spoon to pour some sauce over my tacos, when the seller shoved my hand away. "No sauce.

Taco with everything already have sauce. Who's next?"

I started walking toward the building where I worked. I passed several people coming to the taco stand while one or two others had already removed the wrappers and started eating their tacos on the street. Deciding that I couldn't wait either, I unwrapped a package and put the taco with everything into my mouth, leaning forward slightly so as not to get any sauce over my dress shirt and tie.

That was probably a smart thing to do, because the taco was messier than expected; when I poured the taco contents into my mouth, I realized that it contained the delightfully piquant taste of chorizo and the reassuring saltiness of bacon, not to mention the scorching hot sauce. But there were other surprises. I slowly put the rest of the taco into my mouth, hardly aware (and secretly pleased) that the taco which contained "everything" in fact contained bananas, strawberry slices, yogurt, cereal, cinnamon, nutmeg -- yes, that was nutmeg, I was sure of it! -- an ice cube, tequila, a large chunk of cucumber and a diced onion. And then I realized -- yes, it was true -- there was coca cola on my taco, not just a few spoonfuls but the aluminum can! And while my tastebuds tried savoring the nuances of what was passing through, it was missing the rabble of enchiladas, ice cream sundaes and even a whole lobster flowing quickly past; next came a bottle of 1980 champagne along with a French garcon (who had opened it and was preparing to pour some into glasses for two guests nonplussed at their sudden change in circumstances). Behind them came a mule braying noisily, a row of faculty from Rice University in formal graduation gowns, a truckload of cow manure (whose smell, fortunately, was offset by a field of tulips), Uma Thurman feeding her daughter breakfast ("Who the hell are you?" she said), a Coney Island ferris wheel loaded with dizzy elderly people who tried valiantly to refrain from puking, the Israeli prime minister in the bathroom shaving (who ordered me arrested and convicted as a terrorist), a bowling alley full of bowlers surprised to find themselves falling in the same direction as the balls

they had thrown, a billboard reading "have you hugged your child today?" followed by my 3rd grade math teacher sighing as she graded a stack of tests, behind which sat a ski lift full of people glancing around nonchalantly and wondering when this loony ride would end. Then (after a group of bears from the Brooklyn Zoo) came Louise, my Canadian girlfriend who had run off a few years ago with a nuclear engineer (and was pretending not to notice me-- see *note 1*), a parade of Irish homosexuals yelling at the top of their lungs, a Boeing 747 full of NBA basketball players (most of whom were playing video games), a burning barn full of cows which determined fireman were trying to rescue, a sewer containing the lost key from my Ukrainian apartment and hundreds of tourists waiting to view the Mona Lisa, followed by a stadium of rowdy Nigerian football fans and a quasar or two.

As my surroundings quickly changed to black and I felt myself rapidly falling into the ever-widening hole that was my mouth, I realized (with relief) that my earlier worry about arriving to work on time was no longer important and that my work (with office building, parking garage, copy machine and security guard) was instead arriving to me.

Notes:

1. Upon noticing her, I realize that perhaps I was unduly judgmental about the whole escapade and probably should have accepted her apology, but alas, by the time you have reached the bottom of this page, the boyfriend (as well as you the reader), will already be eaten up, leaving little point in seeking a reconciliation, or even putting this footnote here in the first place.

