

The Plaza

by Doug Hoekstra

I recognized the Plaza in Santa Fe from the movie *Two-Lane Blacktop*, the one with James Taylor and Warren Oates racing down Route 66. Dennis Wilson was in it, too.

Warren Oates was underrated.

I'd been there once before with my ex-wife.

At the time she wasn't my wife yet, but Uncle Felix died

left me a little money, just enough for a vacation

so we drove from Chicago to New Mexico, although...

we didn't take Route 66 because I wasn't nostalgic at the time.

I think I thought I knew everything back then.

Which may be one of the many reasons we wound up divorced,

although I'm sure that wasn't the only one.

Most of the time we spent in Taos at a bed and breakfast,

but we visited the Plaza one day because among other things,

there was a showing of D.H. Lawrence's paintings I wanted to see.

Lawrence was and is one of my favorite writers

although one could argue he was overrated.

This day, the Plaza was filled with tourists, as it often is.

The Pow-Wow on the square had just gotten underway,

tribal Nations from across the country gathering to honor

Indigenous People's Day, with vendors selling paintings and

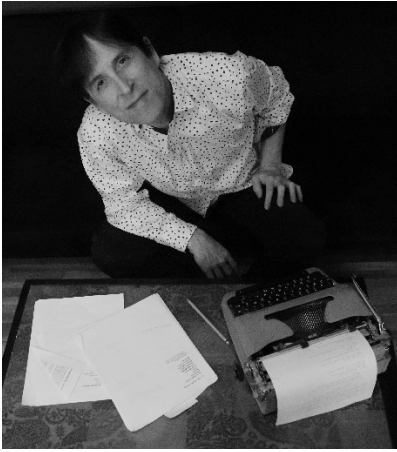
jewelry and anti-colonialism merchandise, which I loved.

Standing on the sidewalk across the street watching, waiting,

a woman stepped out of a storefront, grabbed me lightly

by the arm and said it would only take a minute, tugging pointing to a chair, motioning me to sit. No time to say no. She put something on my face, despite my protestations. "Are you married or are you happy?" she asked. "I'm single, how about you," I replied. "I'm happy too." She smiled, quoting me a price. Outrageous. It made me like my wrinkles, which really weren't that bad After I declined, she said, with a sharpness in her tone, "I hope that you spend more money on your future girlfriend, than you do on yourself." And that was that.

Back on the plaza, there was drumming and dancing and fry bread with strawberries I bought from a food truck and girls dressed in traditional clothes, beadwork hoop skirts accessorized with tricked out high-top tennis shoes. They held their cell phones, scrolling, and texting whispering to each other, telling secrets of the young. I met a Hopi artist who came from Albuquerque selling paintings, whose work I really liked. He said, "I use a lot of traditional shapes and colors but I add contemporary stuff, because that's where it's at." We took a picture he amplified on social media, smiling as I left the plaza, carrying my painting under my arm I took it all in slowly, to remember. Wondering why the last time I was there, I never noticed the way people sat together under the trees turning colors, a touch of gold holding off the winter gray that would soon be coming. I think I thought I knew everything back then.



Doug Hoekstra is a Chicago-bred, Nashville-based writer and musician, whose prose, poetry, non-fiction, songs, and records, have been featured all over the place; *Ten Seconds In-Between*, his latest collection of short stories, was a Royal Dragonfly Award Best Short Story Collection of 2021 and Next Generation Indie Book Award Finalist 2022. To learn more, visit his [website](#). (Photo credit: Jude Hoekstra)