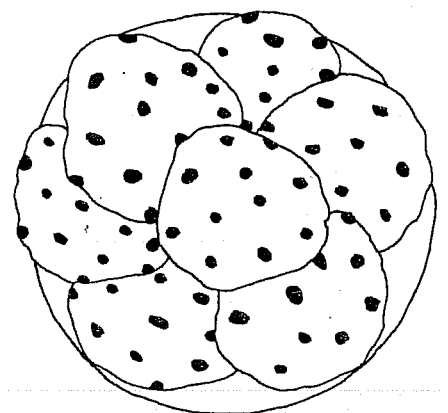
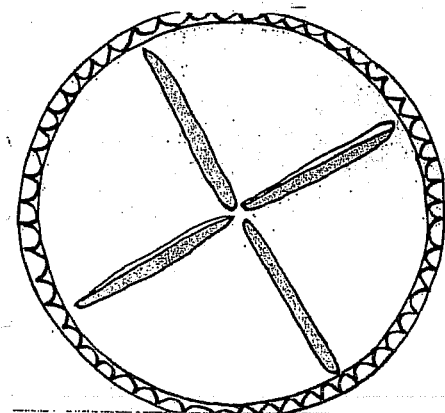
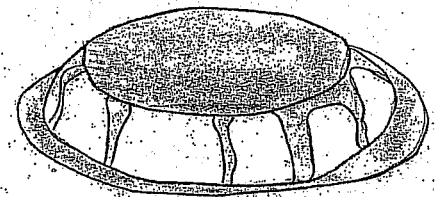
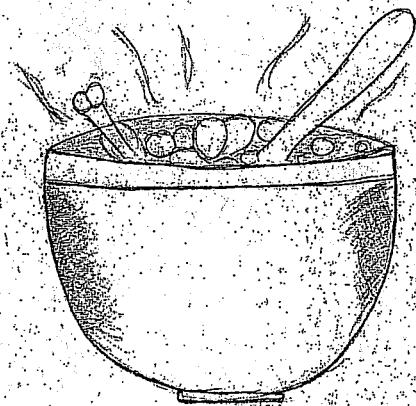
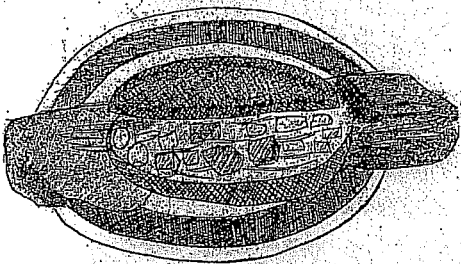
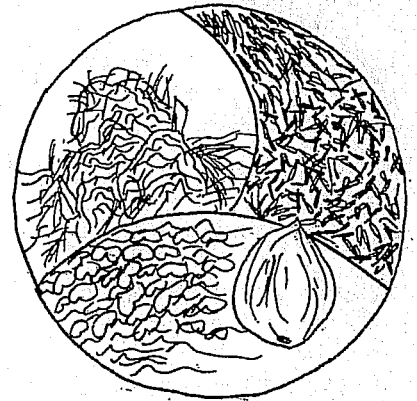
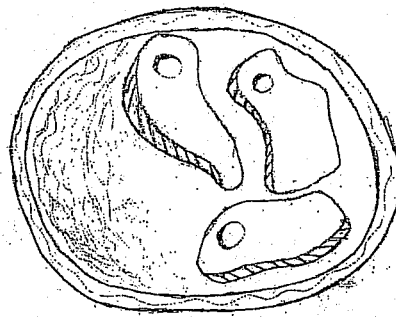
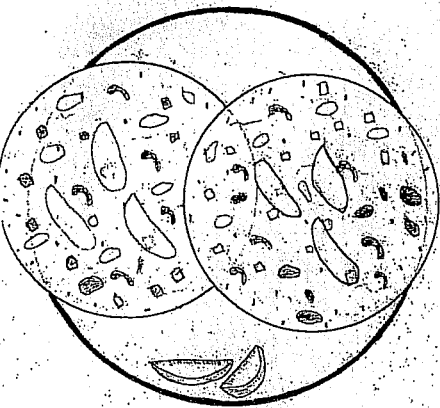


The Unity Cookbook



FOREWORD

This cookbook, produced by Unity High School students and staff and Oakland Food Connection, is a step toward educating students, their families, and fellow community members about organic, sustainable foods and where they may find them in Oakland and the greater East Bay. What inspired its direction is the construction of Unity's new school garden, developed in partnership with OFC. The garden inspired several of Unity's teachers to assign *Chew On This: Everything You Don't Want to Know About Fast Food* by Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*. Thereafter, several classroom discussions focused on the pros and cons of processed fast foods and safe sustainable foods.

After peeling back several dialogue layers, each student discovered just how complex their food system has grown with stores stocked full of highly refined, unhealthy processed foods. They then decided to carry their discoveries home to their kitchens to prepare their favorite cultural dish. Certainly it was difficult for them to locate key substitutes for sustainable ingredients to use in their recipes. Fairtrade, biodynamic, organic, and transitional products, as well as many other natural food growing processes, simply were not within a short traveling distance of their homes.

Unity High School's garden has opened the natural foods conversation wide open for students and teachers to discuss why more nutritious foods are located through the greater East Bay and not within their own neighborhoods. By witnessing and experiencing the growth of their garden, planting seeds, tasting garden-fresh seasonal vegetables and herbs in their daily prepared lunches, students thus were, again, prompted to redesign their home recipes to reflect the same. Not only does Unity's Cookbook contain fun, creative cultural family recipes, it also has an essential food analysis attached to several recipes that indicate the amount of fats, proteins, carbohydrates and other essential food components. Each student learned about the components of food within each recipe and how they interact and support our body's well being. We invite you to check out their new creations and the nutritional information contained within this uniquely designed cookbook.

Although the organic movement is new to mainstream markets across the United States, it is still widely unknown to most consumers. More often than not, their prices make them unaffordable to most consumers. Their prices are creeping down while our choices increase, and stores are responding to consumer requests to stock sustainable food products. According to the Organic Trade Association, "the number of certified farmers tending their fields organically has risen from 5,500 in 1997 to 7,800 in 2000, and organic acreage nationwide has more than doubled since 1995." As the organic movement grows, more and more people are curious about organic foods and their differences to conventional foods.

Organic fruits and vegetables contain a third as many pesticide residues as conventionally grown food. Moreover, kids under the age of five and under, for example, consume an average of eight pesticides in their food each day in the U.S., according to the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org). Numerous researchers have found that many of these pesticides may harm a child's developing brain, disrupt delicate hormonal systems, and impair proper immune system function.

Out on the farm, organic farming is essential to maintaining healthy soil ecology. Organic farming increases soil fertility and diversity of species. Furthermore, it also requires less water and emits 40-60 percent less CO₂ into the air, which is known by researchers as the principal global-warming gas. Over the last 10 years, more than 40 million acres of prime farmland has been lost to nonagricultural development, such as strip malls, housing and other uses. All over the U.S., communities are losing access to farmland and lessening their ability to maintain a safe and secure local food system. In order to slow this ever increasing trend, we have educated our students at Unity High School on how to strategically choose locally or regionally grown fruits and vegetables sold at farmers' markets, natural-foods stores and supermarkets such as Farmer Joes, Food Mill, Whole Foods or to ask their local store if they are willing to carry organic produce.

Supporting locally grown produce from farmers who use sustainable practices essentially helps to preserve prime farmland, local ecologies and strengthen local economies and the people who mold and sustain them. In time, your demand for healthier sources of food will encourage more stores to procure and sell healthy food, as the students of Unity High School are learning. This political choice will strengthen more local farms, cutting down on the use of fungicides transferred in foods transported around the United States and, most importantly, decrease the use of fossil fuels required to ship foods great distances. With this in mind, we invite you to join us in supporting our effort to engage and support our local organic economy.

Jason A. Harvey, Executive Director
Oakland Food Connection
www.foodcommunityculture.org

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Maffé

By Roman Barry

Sensational! What is this mouthwatering, peanut buttery, spicy, carnivorous smell? My tongue is starting to fight my teeth to escape to this delightful waft of heaven. What could it be, this smell that makes me feel like a blade of grass in a field over vast plains? Relaxation, yet such excitement!

I enter the kitchen after a frantic running of my whole house in search of this heavenly smell, and there it is: the food of my dreams. It must have been passed down from the Gods to my people. Maffé! Peanut butter, meat from a goat or chicken (this time it's goat), hot sauce, rice! Let me humble myself. A delicacy in my book, no other food is above it. At last my life has a purpose.

Maffé is a dish made in Senegal. It comes from the many tribes and is made not only there but also in Gambia, Mauritania, and other surrounding areas in West Africa close to the Atlantic. It's a family dish, and it is traditionally served in a big bowl like all Senegalese foods. It's not a special event type of dish; it's a dish to converse to and have time with your family.

Now I have never made Maffé ever in my life, but I've watched my auntie make it. She grabs two big pots out of the kitchen cupboard, one for the rice and the other for the sauce. She fills the rice pot about one-third away from the top and lets it sit on the stove above an inch high flame. She fills the second pot with enormous amounts of peanut butter, and then she squirts in the hot sauce. She mixes it with a thick wooden spoon and then dumps about three pounds of meat into the concoction. She places it on the stove at about the same temperature as the rice and stirs occasionally.

An hour and a half later, she sprinkles the white rice in a big two by two foot bowl and spreads it out neatly. Now, *la pièce de resistance*. She pours the sauce lightly over the rice and adds spritzes of lemon all over. She wipes her face off, and her blue eyes widen. Finally, showing her exhaustion, she smiles with her huge African lips and is ready to serve dinner.

No smell on earth matches the intensity of the mixture of spices, lemon, meat and peanut butter all in one. Just one sniff takes me from the living room to a feeling of being high in the sky. I look at this prized possession of Senegal: Oily and sticky sauce with red and brownish spots of roasted peanut butter blanketing the rice. The taste makes me want to do two back flips and a cartwheel. The lemon makes me pucker while the hot sauce burns the inside of my mouth. Luscious goat meat, juicy goat meat—this is the greatest dish alive.

My auntie is overjoyed and is thanked by everyone in the family for her hard work. All right, I've got my spoon. Everybody is gathered around ready to devastate this immense bowl of delight. We pray first, say our blessings, and then everyone digs in. I start to carve my part of the bowl out as I take bite after bite of this... this... wonderful dish. It starts to use my taste buds to its advantage, and now I can only think of eating this food right here. As we eat, the smell attracts wandering people in the street to our open window just to get a glimpse of this wondrous aroma.

My family is huge, you know, BIG! We have twelve people sitting around a two foot bowl. Men mostly wear T-shirts and blue jeans as well as traditional clothing called Kaftans. They're long-sleeved, colorful shirt-like suits with no buttons with matching pants. They are

baggy and have many curvy designs on them and resemble traditional clothing worn at the Mosque. Women wear clothing that covers most of their body except their face and feet, a Muslim type look. We're ready to start conversation, gossip about people next door. Who is ready to see these gluttons? Who clears farms like locusts? My family does! But when our family eats together there is an ambiance of love and mellowness. This is obvious that it is because of the delicious taste of Maffé! Smacking, just all around good eating. Savor it while it lasts, because it's almost gone, gone...sniff, gone.

My escapade to this world of great foods has come to an end. We have tasted a little bit of life in Senegal and the warmth of family. Until another day when we will savor this together: The love of food. The love of cultures. And most importantly, the love of Maffé.

Ingredients

3 pounds cubed meat (goat or chicken)
5 pounds rice
2 jars peanut butter
½ bottle hot sauce
20 mL lemon juice
cooking oil

Directions

Get two large pots 1 foot wide by 1 foot tall. One will serve as the sauce pot and the other as the rice pot. In the sauce pot, add enough cooking oil to grease up the entire surface of the interior. About half a centimeter of oil should be left at the bottom. Now scoop out the peanut butter from the two jars and put it into the pot. Add half a bottle of hot sauce to the concoction and a thin layer of oil. Stir for 2-5 minutes. Place the pot on the stove for 90 minutes on medium heat. Once the sauce starts to simmer, it is done.

Fill the second pot 2/5 to the top with water and ½ of the pot with rice. Heat on high for 20 minutes, stirring every 2 minutes. Start this process close to the end of the simmering of the sauce.

Once all is done, spread the rice evenly over a 2 by 2 foot bowl. Pour the sauce lightly all over to make a thick blanket. Add light spritzes of lemon juice all over the sauce, and it is ready to serve. Bon appétit.

Serves 10

Water-132.30g, Energy-1221kcal, Energy-5109kJ, Protein-41.10g, Total lipid-112.89g, Ash-6.66g, Carbohydrate-7.08g, Calcium-45mg, Iron-3.36mg, Magnesium-42mg, Phosphorous-348mg, Potassium-636mg, Sodium-2067mg, Zinc-4.35mg, Copper-0.198mg, Manganese-0.237mg, Selenium-49.8mcg, Thiamin- 1.440mg, Riboflavin-0.360mg, Niacin-10.050mg, Vitamin B6-0.600mg, Folate-36mcg, Vitamin B12-3.90mcg, Vitamin E-0.66mg, Vitamin K-10.2mcg, Saturated fats-45.948, Cholesterol-198mg

Pambazos

By Amado Rosas

"Hola Mama, ya llegue," I said as I entered my beloved home in my natal town of Tlalnepantla in Mexico. Tired from a busy day and an exhausting P.E class, I opened the front door. As I stepped into the house, a cold chill ran through the living room. I became excited by an attractive fragrance that came from the kitchen. At the end of the hallway, I turned my body ninety degrees to observe the beautiful shape of my mom. My eyes wrinkled as I noticed her. I didn't know if it was my imagination, but I spotted a bright light surrounding her body.

I tiptoed silently into the kitchen, going around the central dinner table, and positioned myself around her. I curved my back and turned my head to reach her cheek. I gave her a kiss, and with a lovely voice she said, "Como te fue, hijo? *How was your day, son?*"

I felt like I was in another world, but then I responded, "Bien mama, pero que estas cocinando? *I did o.k. at school, but tell me, what are you cooking?*" As she moved her lips, I heard the word "Pambazos" come out of her mouth.

At that moment I thought that my life was starting. This special dish is my favorite Mexican food. It is similar to a torta, filled with potatoes, chorizo, lettuce, sour cream, Mexican queso fresco and hot sauce, all covered with a thin layer of red chile sauce. I studied how my mom prepared each delicacy with such agility that it seemed supersonic. Her hands were stretching and contracting in many different directions, catching a little of everything and then neatly organizing it to make the perfect piece. The love she put into her duty made me happy.

With her typical beauty, she turned her body, and with a sweet voice, she called everyone to come to the table. As the words traveled in the air and bounced against their ears, my dad and my two small brothers leapt from their seats and sprinted desperately to the kitchen. We all took a seat and waited impatiently for the food to be served. At last, my mom took a seat and whispered, "Hoy es el cumpleaños de Amado, y tenemos que dar gracias por estar aqui todos unidos. *Today is Amado's birthday, and we must say grace for being all united.*" We didn't like to say grace, but she forced us to do so by making her typical "mad" face. Her eyes were squinted and her lips drawn into a straight line. After a minute or two, my mom stood up and paced towards the stove. She took a plate and placed it in front of me.

It contained a pambazo. The red colored bolillo was bubbling. The blend of smells on the inside opened my appetite. The combination of potatoes and chorizo emitted a spicy scent that filled my body with happiness. The sour cream lay on top of the serpenty cut lettuce. It was just wonderful.

I turned my head to see how the excitement had taken over my family. I could see how my brothers were just desperate to get started. My dad was trying to convince my mom that we needed to start eating. Even with all this arguing and desperation, a feeling of togetherness surrounded the table. A warm sensation came from my brothers. They were very excited, like I had never seen them before. Their eyes sparkled in excitement. My parents were very happy to be right there, sharing that special moment with their children. They hugged me tightly, which made me the happiest person in the whole world.

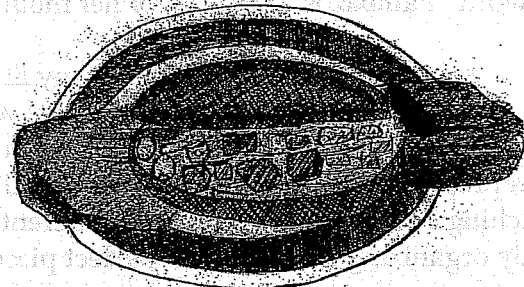
I decided to take the lead and started eating. The first bite was the best. The spicy flavor of the soft cover combined with the salty flavor of the potatoes was heavenly good. There were

all kind of textures blended together, from the crunchy texture of the green lettuce to the smooth texture of the white Mexican cheese. As I prolonged my eating, I saw my mom's eyes staring right at me, happy that I was enjoying my treat.

Every time I eat pambazos, I remember that one day, especially that moment where I felt that special connection with my family: all of us together as a family and enjoying our favorite food. Unfortunately, I can no longer experience this connection. Back in Mexico, my family and I enjoyed most of the time together everyday after school. We would always sit down at the table and eat while having an interesting conversation, and it was even better when we consumed this delicacy. Everyone spoke openly about their day, and laughter was always present. Now that we live here in the U.S, my family is separating in different ways. Our busy schedules do not allow us to enjoy a good time together. Not even pambazos bring our family together anymore, and I would do anything to bring us together again.

Ingredients

5 boiled potatoes, chopped
10 guajillo chiles
5 ounces chorizo
9 bolillo rolls, cut in half horizontally
½ a head of lettuce, shredded
white sour cream
Mexican queso fresco
hot sauce (if desired)



PAMBAZOS

Directions

Place the guajillo chiles in a small saucepan. Add enough water to cover the chiles. Cook them on medium heat for about 10 minutes or until the chiles are tender. Drain the chiles and put them in a blender. Add water to the blender, and blend until the sauce is smooth. Pour through a strainer and take out any solids, then set the sauce aside.

Next, cook the chorizo and the potatoes in a frying pan on medium heat for approximately 15 minutes or until the chorizo is cooked well and the potatoes are tender. Place a good amount of the chorizo with potatoes in the bottom half of the bolillos.

Carefully dip the filled bolillo into the guajillo sauce until it's thoroughly covered with sauce. Put the sandwiches in a frying pan. Cook for 3 minutes, and then turn them over. Continue to cook for 5 minutes until the sauce is absorbed and both sides are slightly toasted. Serve with lettuce, sour cream and Mexican queso fresco. Add hot sauce if desired.

Serves 9

Calories-350, Total fat-19g, Saturated fat-7g, Cholesterol-35mg,
Sodium-990mg, Carbohydrates-30g, Dietary fiber-2g, Sugars-5g, Protein-12g,
Vitamin A-16µg, Vitamin C-3.6mg, Calcium-80mg, Iron-1.2mg

Caldo de Gallina India

By Mabel Orellana

"Mabuu, anda ayudar a Chanda agarrar la gallina! *Mabel, go help Chanda get the hen!*" my mom shrieked from the front porch while gossiping with my grandma.

"Nooo, yo no voy! *Nooo, I'm not going!*" I yelled back in a scared voice.

"Apurate ya te dije; nombre si esas animales no te van a hacer nada, voz! *Hurry up, I already told you; come on, those animals won't do anything to you!*" she said to motivate me, but by the time she finished that sentence, Chanda had already caught one. I was relieved because I didn't have to go help him anymore.

This was when the murder began. My mom tied the gallina by one foot with a rope and hung it from a small blue window.

"Crack!" was the sound the neck of the terrified hen made when my mom twisted its living neck so hard that feathers were left in her fingers. After the process of assassinating the hen in a brutal way, my grandmother would go to el barranco, or the embankment, left of my house to take the feathers out of the chicken. When that was done they both would clean it in la pila, a sink made out of rock, and disinfect it with lemon. They would kill two at a time because there were a lot of hungry little stomachs that wanted to eat a lot, especially mine.

After disinfecting the hens, they would put them to boil in the pot. They would sprinkle in many different spices native to El Salvador and other seasonings. They would start to cut up all the vegetables that they were going to put in el caldo or the soup. Once the gallina was ready, they tossed all of the vegetables into the pot so it could boil some more. They would take out the gallina and put it on the comal or griddle. El Caldo de Gallina India was served in a bowl with the green vegetables swimming in the oily spotted soup and the steaming gallina to the side. With some homemade tortillas, the exquisite caldo was ready to kiss my stomach.

Hmmm, oohh, the oily, garlicky, gallina boiled over the fuego my cousin made. The scent dispersed throughout the whole house. My nose sniffed and inhaled. I loved the decadent thought of devouring a bowl of caldo with some carrots, pippin, potato, and green beans and the piece of deliciously boiled and grilled hen, full of love and care. It was a thought that made my stomach go wild and my saliva drool.

When I remember the scent of El Caldo de Gallina India, I feel so "libre," and I can almost feel the moist, burning weather of El Salvador. I love going to El Salvador, not only because of the exquisite caldo but because when I am over there, I feel full, full of freedom, full of life, full of energy, full of happiness, and full of love. Maybe because I have everyone around me that I deeply love and esteem so profoundly – my mother, my grandmother, my cousins, and my sister.

While waiting on my grandma's delicacy, my cousins and I would play on my favorite part of the house, the porch. My house was on a hill, and the porch contained a table and a "mac" or swing. It was my favorite place because I could see the sunset and the sunrise, the most beautiful view I could imagine. The hills in front with green jungle mountains and the

spectacular horizon made me wonder if I was in heaven. What made me know that I wasn't was the tremendous heat of the tropical country and the boiling herbal essence of my hen dancing around the house. With its essence creeping through my nose, my taste buds could almost feel and taste the acid of the lemon, the grease of the oil, and the juice of the moist gallina.

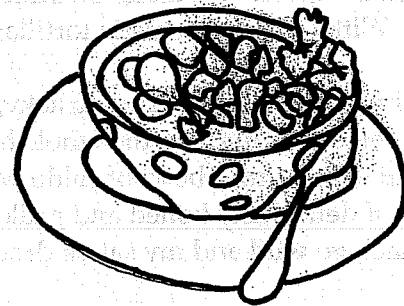
Once my mother announced that the food was ready, everyone would dash in and wash their faces, hands, and feet. All cleaned up, we would rush and sit on the border of the porch to wait for my mom and grandma to serve the table. All of us eyed the plate we wanted. Some wanted a little bit with less vegetables, but some like me wanted the plate that had the most on it. My small grandma would carry each plate with both her bronze, wrinkly hands, walking ever so slowly so the soup wouldn't spill. She placed it with care on the table with a small grin on her face.

Once everything was served, we would all rush over with grins on our faces from ear to ear. There were seven kids and two adults; we didn't fit at the table. We would start elbowing each other playfully. All of a sudden, everyone would start swinging their hands in the air to scare off the flies. When I started sipping my soup, I could already feel the sweat running down my back. The heat was deliciously extreme, but that didn't stop my tongue from caressing each bit of juicy carrots and savoring each bit of mixed flavor. When I looked up to observe other people, their faces had a wide smile on them, feeling the pleasure of feeding themselves such a decadent meal.

The last time I felt this warmth and joy was when I was thirteen; it was the last time I saw my grandmother alive. I had Caldo de Gallina India when I went to El Salvador this past year, but it wasn't the same. I hope one day I can feel the joy and liberty I once felt when I ate this dish.

Ingredients

- 1 medium freshly killed hen
- 10 medium limes
- 4 potatoes cut into big box-shaped pieces
- 5 small pippins cut into thick circles
- 1 medium cabbage cut into 5 big pieces
- 3 teaspoons chicken seasoning
- 2 garlic heads peeled
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 4 teaspoons oil
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 medium tomatoes diced
- 1 big bell pepper cut into thin strips
- 1/2 medium white onion cut into circles
- 1/3 pound rice



Directions

Kill a hen. If you don't have a live one, buy a fresh hen from the store. Clean the hen thoroughly in hot water and squirt 10 limes on it to disinfect it. Remove the fatty skin and the rest of the fat.

Once the hen is clean, put it in a big bowl with the tomatoes, bell pepper, and onion. Let the hen sit there for about 10 minutes.

Fill half of a medium sized pot with water, and heat on medium. Add the garlic. Then place the hen into the pot with the tomatoes, bell pepper, and onions, along with 4 teaspoons of oil. The heat should still be on medium.

Let the hen boil for about 30 minutes. Check if the hen is fully cooked by poking it with a fork to see if the inside is white and soft. When the hen is fully cooked, take it out and put the cut potatoes and carrots into the water.

Add water until the pot is half way full again. Add the chicken seasoning, garlic salt, salt, and rice. Stir with a wooden spoon. Let boil for 15 minutes. Add the pippins and the cabbage. Let boil until vegetables are soft.

Meanwhile, cut the hen into pieces—the legs, thighs, and breasts. Cover a grill with a piece of aluminum, and place it over a medium sized flame. Put some butter on the aluminum. Then, place the pieces of hen on the aluminum and grill until they are half brown on both sides of the hen piece.

Serve the soup in a bowl. The piece of hen can be served in the soup or separately.

Serves 6

Tryptophan 121g, Vitamin B3 72 g, Protein 67g, Selenium 45g, Vitamin B6 34g, Phosphorous 26g

Copy Cat Chicken

By Phillesha Brown

I woke up suddenly from my daily nap. I raised my hands over my head, opened my mouth wide, and took a deep yawn as a rush of hunger came over my body. I rose up out of my bed and proceeded into the kitchen, where I expected some type of delectable meal that my grandma had prepared. There was nothing. As I scanned the empty stove, I could not even find one little crumb. I began to inspect the refrigerator. There sat a bag of chicken in the freezer. I pulled it out and rested it on the corner. The thought of how many ways I could prepare the chicken came to my mind. I thought to myself, "This time, I'll try something new."

I knew that the seasonings make the chicken taste good. That's what my grandma had told me. I was meditating really hard when it came to me. "What if? What if I soak the chicken in something?" I started to pace the floor as I tried to discover just the right flavor to make my chicken excellent. Then, it came to me, soy sauce. I pulled out a big ziplock bag and placed the chicken in it. I poured the soy sauce into the bag, covered most of the chicken, and let it sit.

That wasn't enough. I needed more flavor. I opened up the cabinet and started pushing bottles around trying to find just the right seasoning. The first seasoning that I found was the seasoning salt. I did not want to use it because I used that all the time, so I shoved it aside. I kept scanning, and then there it was, right there in my face all that time. Garlic salt. It was good, and I never really used it at all. I poured it in the bag. Then, I added a little onion salt and zipped up the bag. As I was zipping up the bag, I could feel eyes staring, but I thought it was just me.

As the oil began to sizzle and pop, it sounded as if it was playing a new type of music that was unheard of. As I placed the chicken into the skillet, the oil popped on my hand. After awhile the chicken began to turn a brown crisp color. I turned it till I was sure it was all done. I left it there for about fifteen minutes, and then I took it out. I placed it on a plate with a napkin, so that it could soak up the oil oozing from the chicken.

I grabbed the chicken, placed it on an oversized plate, and moved it on to the table. I began to imagine devouring it. The chicken rested there on the plate, a dark brown color with steam coming off of it and small crumbs surrounding it. As I brought the plate to my nose and smelled the seasoning of the garlic, I was all alone at the table. It felt as if I was in the room all alone. I brought the fork up to my mouth and took a bite out of the chicken. I could taste the salty skin as I got to the meat. I could feel the warmth. As I consumed the chicken, it felt as if nothing mattered but that.

A couple weeks later, I walked up on the porch of my house, and I could smell something cooking. I put my key into the door and opened it. I could see my grandma standing at the stove. My grandma stood medium height with her big wide shoulders and her dark brown skin. As I strolled over to her, the aroma became more familiar, the garlic, onion and the sound of chicken running through the air. I noticed that she was surprised to see me home so early. Her eyes opened wide as I approached the stove.

"I see what's going on," I said. "You copied me."

"What are you talking about?" she said.

"You, you copied me!"

"Child, I been doing this for years."

"No you haven't!"

"Whatever, Phillesha. You're crazy."

As my grandma finished her chicken, I sat at the table ready to taste it. It didn't matter anyways. Mine was better than hers. Now when I do something new, I try not to let her see me do it. Everyone should beware of copy cats like my grandma.

Ingredients

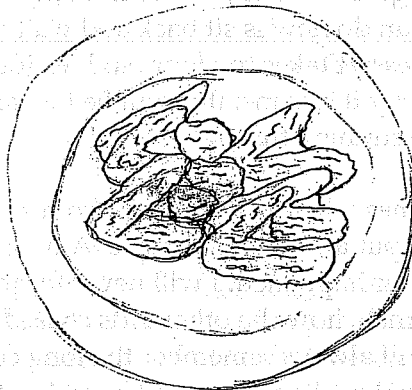
10 chicken wings
½ cup onion salt
½ cup garlic salt
cooking oil
3 cups soy sauce

Directions

First, take the chicken wings, and tuck the wings of the chicken behind. Put the chicken in a ziplock bag. Pour the 3 cups of soy sauce in the bag. Add the onion salt and garlic salt. Allow the bag to sit for about 10 minutes.

While you're doing that, heat up the cooking oil in a skillet. After about 10 minutes, the oil should be hot enough. Place the chicken in the skillet, and allow the chicken to brown. Then, it should be done.

Serves 3



Fried Chicken

By Jestin Ryles

The feeling of the heat coming from the stove makes me want to run to a clock and fast forward time. The sound of the chicken sizzling in the pan full of grease makes my mouth water. One wing after another, after another, after another gets thrown into the pot. The loud sound of the smoke detector goes off.

Beep-Beep-Beep-Beep!

Specks of chicken grease fly out of the pot. The feeling of it burns my skin. It feels like little needles are poking me. The chicken is almost done now. My mother runs around the kitchen setting up the table. I walk into the kitchen, and there it is. A huge bowl with a napkin and chicken on top. The chicken just sits there and glows a bright golden color. The food is now complete, and everyone in the house is acting like hungry lions. Neither I nor my family can control ourselves.

"Come and get it!" my mother screams.

The floor begins to vibrate, and the sounds of thunderous stomps begin to fill the air. My mother stops us all at the doorway. She stands there with her apron covered in flour. Her hair is tied into a ponytail.

"Everyone form a line, youngest to oldest."

Everyone is disappointed. By the time we all get our plates and sit at the dinner table, grace is already being said.

"God is good, God is great, let us thank him for our food. Amen!" says my grandmother.

Without any hesitation we all dig in. After every bite it feels like I am floating on clouds. The spicy, crunchy, tender taste makes my jaw numb. My brother across from me is greedy. His massive body is able to hold at least three bowls of chicken, but that doesn't scare me. I am still able to out eat him. All I have to do is get my hands on a bottle of hot sauce. The addition of the hot sauce gives the chicken that sweet and hot taste needed just to give it the right kick. After eating about five huge chicken wings and thighs, I sit back in my seat and lick the grease and the hot sauce off my fingers. All I can do now is sit back and wait until everyone is finished eating, so I can have dessert. The dessert takes too long, so I decide to grab another piece of chicken and pick at it, when suddenly it hits me: this will be the last time I'll ever have this dish again. All types of memories begin running through my head.

I'll always remember the times when I came home from school having a bad day, and the first bite of that chicken always put a smile on my face. Any problem I had at all, the chicken always made it seem like it had never happened. I will never forget back in elementary school when I brought fried chicken for lunch, how the other kids chased me around the playground just for a morsel of my chicken. I will always remember the long conversations my father and I had over a hot steaming bowl of chicken. I will always remember the days I was extremely hungry, and chicken was always waiting there to fill the open space in my stomach. I will always remember the eating contest at the dinner table I had with my family. I was

unstoppable: it was always a guaranteed win whenever I ripped the meat off the bone, stuffed my mouth, and shredded the meat with my teeth.

Goodbye, my love. I must now go through life without you, but before I leave, please let me take one last bite. One last bite of a piece of heaven. Let me smell the marinated spices again. I will never again be able to enjoy the warm, juicy, slippery taste of the grease bursting into my mouth after every bite. I set the bowl of chicken in the center of the table. Everyone around me disappears. It's completely dark all around me, and the only thing I can see is the table with a bright light shining down directly on the bowl of chicken. I take one last stare, then I walk away without looking back. A tear slowly falls from my eye. I hear the bowl of chicken calling me, but I never look back.

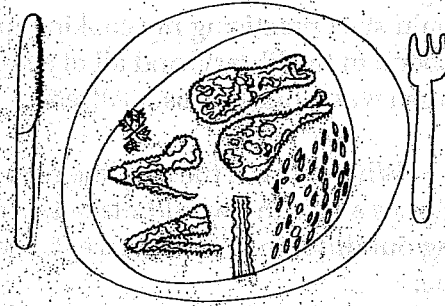
"Jestin, wake up, dude. Wake up." I hear a voice that sounds like my friend Joel.

"Dude, come on. Your family is already outside playing football. Come on. Let's go play."

Joel takes off running out the door. I sit back in my chair, still at the dinner table. I see all the food that my mom fixed, half eaten with dirty stacked up plates. In the middle of the table, I see a whole chicken ripped and torn apart. It then occurs to me that it was just a nightmare.

Ingredients

- 1 pack chicken wings or thighs
- olive oil
- 1 cup flour
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon "Season All"
- ¼ teaspoon garlic



Directions

Wash the chicken. Grab each piece of chicken individually and set on a clean tray. Each piece of chicken must be set side by side. Sprinkle pepper over all pieces of chicken on the tray. Turn each piece over, and season with pepper. Repeat these steps with every remaining seasoning ingredient.

While chicken is sitting on the tray, begin to pour vegetable oil into the skillet. Fill only a quarter of the skillet. Set the oven to medium heat. This will slowly warm up the stove. Let the stove heat up for about ten minutes. Set the skillet with the hot oil on top of the stove. While the oil is heating, grab a plastic Ziploc bag, and fill it halfway with flour. Grab two pieces of chicken and set into the bag of flour. Shake the bag constantly until the chicken is completely coated. Repeat this step with the remaining pieces of chicken. Let the hot oil heat up. When the oil begins to bubble, throw two pieces of chicken into the skillet.

Let the coated floured chicken sit in the skillet until a golden brown color is formed. Flip over chicken if necessary. Repeat these steps with the remaining pieces of chicken. Set the chicken in a bowl with a napkin underneath. This will drain out all unnecessary oil.

Serves 2

Protein-28g, Sugar-1g, Sodium-350mg, Calcium-250mg, Vitamin A-250mg, Niacin-80g, Thiamin-300g, Iron-3g, Cholesterol-0g, Total carbohydrate-22g, Folic acid-300g, Calories-100g, Riboflavin-3g, Vitamin C-1g

Chicken Pasta Alfredo

By Ernesto Urzua

My cousin waddled in my front door on a spring like afternoon. The smooth aroma in the air paralyzed him in the brain. His stomach grumbled like crazy, while the soft hissing sound echoed throughout the entire house. Each time he walked towards the kitchen, the aroma would get stronger, and the hissing sound would get louder.

Finally reaching the kitchen, he saw a bright light. Out of nowhere, he heard the sound of angels starting to sing, but I think it was his stomach growling. He saw seasoned chicken grilling on one side of the stove, on the other side pasta Alfredo in a pot, and on the counter, a big bowl of dark green spinach and fresh squeezed lemonade. He tried it, and his mouth started to dance as if it was a Cinco de Mayo festival. At the end, he spaced out, just thinking how delicious this food was.

I can cook almost everything, but this dish is special to me. It all started when I was young, about the age of twelve. Back in the day, I didn't like cooking at all. My parents told me I should start practicing my cooking for the future. Well, one day I was skimming through a cookbook in the library, and all of a sudden, I found this recipe. It looked easy and delicious; this dish was Chicken Pasta Alfredo.

When I made the dish the next day, it came out ok but not what I was expecting. At least two times a month I would make this dish. Sometimes I would add different spices just for fun, trying out different ways to give it a better taste. Each time I found another way to upgrade my recipe.

To start I get the pasta from a bakery market because it has this soft fresh taste. I always get the sauce in a glass container because it conserves the flavor; garlic Alfredo is the one I usually choose. Olive oil, why? It cooks easily and thoroughly, does not carry a lot of fat, and one thing for sure, it does not make a mess. The chicken breast from a butcher shop gives my dish a fresh real flavor unlike the one wrapped and packed in a bag. Yellow lemons can be bought anywhere, but I prefer the ones that the farmer's market sells on certain days. Finally, spinach: the ones in a bag are good, but the ones fresh in the produce aisle are best with this fluffy watery taste.

I start basically from scratch, not that easy bake stuff, the real thing. First, I cut the chicken breast into thin pinky-sized pieces so the chicken can cook thoroughly. Then, I sprinkle the spices on the chicken and cook it on a grill pan with olive oil. I always take my time because there is no rush on perfection. I know if the chicken is cooked right by looking at the color of the chicken. The color has to be khaki. Sometimes I let it have light brown lines just to make sure it's cooked right. Next, I get the sauce. I always cook it on low or medium heat because I want the sauce to be heated just right. Too much and the sauce will get thick, basically burned. Now with the pasta, when boiling water in the pot, I add oregano to give it a taste. I always check every once in a while to make sure the pasta is not soggy. If it is too soggy, then when I mix the sauce and the pasta, it will not come out right. Finally, I mix the pasta and sauce in a pan. I stir it for five minutes on low heat, and I'm done.

As for the spinach, I just wash it thoroughly with cold water, cut the stems, and put the leaves in a big bowl. That's it.

I like cooking this dish this way because I have control over my food, and I can change the ingredients and the way it's cooked. Cooking with a microwave is easy, but it's not the same. I believe that cooking old school tastes best. It's not the best dish in the world, but I like it. Everyone has his or her special dish. Well, this one is mine.

Ingredients

½ jar of Alfredo sauce
8 ounces angel hair pasta
½ pound chicken breast
½ teaspoon Montreal chicken seasoning
½ teaspoon oregano
extra virgin olive oil
5 ounces spinach

Directions

Pasta: First, get the jar of Alfredo sauce and a saucepan. Turn the stove on, put the sauce in the saucepan, and stir every once in awhile for 5 minutes. Next, get an 8 quart pot and add 4 quarts water. Add the oregano. Let it boil, and then turn the stove off. Cook the pasta inside the pot for about 5 minutes. It will be ready when the pasta color turns a light yellow. Get a pan about 12 inches wide and leave it on low heat. Mix the pasta and the sauce in the pan, and stir for 2 minutes. Now you're done. Turn off the stove. This dish can be heated up anytime on low heat.

Chicken: First, get ½ pound of chicken breast, and cut it into pinky sized pieces from left to right. Add a teaspoon of extra virgin olive oil to the grill pan. Spread the olive oil around the pan. Turn the heat to medium. Add the Montreal chicken seasoning to both sides of the chicken. Add the chicken to the grill pan, and let it grill until the chicken turns a light brown, khaki color.

Spinach: Wash the spinach with cold water. Cut off the stems. Put the leaves in a bowl, and that's it.

Serves 4-5

Calories-688, Calories of fat-1, Total fat-15g, Saturated fat-7g,
Sodium-110g, Carbohydrates-100g, Proteins-38g, Fiber-3g, Calcium-82.8g, Iron-2.5g,
Magnesium-64.3g, Phosphorus-333.7g, Potassium-3525g, Zinc-1.6g, Copper-0.1g,
Manganese-0.3g, Selenium-38.9mcg, Vitamin A-2934.3IU, Vitamin E-1mg, Vitamin C-43.7mg,
Vitamin K-145.4mg, Thiamin-0.1mg, Riboflavin-0.3mg, Niacin-19.4mg, Vitamin B6-0.9mg,
Folate-63.8mg, Vitamin B12-0.7mg, Pantothenic Acid-1.4mg

Quinceañera Birria

By Edgar Bautista

The smell creeps under my door. There I am tossing and turning from left to right in my bed struggling to get two more hours of sleep, but I can't. The smell is so good that even in my dream I am hungry. It just makes me want to get up and pace straight to my refrigerator and start munching on anything. All I can do is wait for the quinceañera to start so I can start eating the delicious spicy birria that my little sister's godmother makes. No one can make birria as well as she can.

There she is, Mrs. Graciliano, opening her eyes early in the morning so she can start cooking. My little sister's godmother is old but not too old, in her mid 50s, short and chubby with short hair. Since I have known her, she has always dyed her hair red like the blood that runs through my veins. While I'm getting all pachucoed out, she is preparing the carne de res by heating it up in the pan, which looks like a gray oversized shiny bucket. With the heat very high so it can get warm faster, the oversized bucket takes up all the space on the stove.

As much as the food is making me hungry, I patiently wait so I can have enough space in my stomach. While her daughter, the quinceañera, is getting ready, Mrs. Graciliano is preparing the rice and beans because you can't have birria without the frijoles and arroz.

With not enough space for her to move because the kitchen is too small, she waits for everyone to go to church. When the chambelanes and the quinceañera are in church, she and her oldest daughter take advantage of the empty kitchen to cut the cilantro and onion and smash down the frijoles. She is late for church, but for her it doesn't matter because she wants to make sure that the birria comes out delicious. While the birria is being cooked, I'm in church just daydreaming of how I am going to attack the birria with my two hands. I can already picture myself clutching my right hand to a spoon, just dipping it to the plate, with my left hand grabbing a tortilla just searching for the red spicy birria. I can just feel the juice of the meat run down my throat.

This birria is made of carne de res. In Mexico, to make birria they use the inside of a goat, but here they get the meat from the inside of a cow. It sounds kind of nasty to think about where the meat comes from, but after taking the first bite, that's all it takes. The birria is so soft and chewy that it takes me to heaven.

When church is finally over, the quinceañera and the chambelanes go to pose so the cameramen can snap some pictures. While he is snapping away, clutching both of his hands to the camera, all that is going through my head is how nervous I am because it is my first quinceañera.

Arriving to the hall is the best part of the day because now I know that I am just a couple of steps away from attacking that plate. When I take my first gigantic step inside the hall, the same delicious smell just sneaks up on my nose. As my stomach starts getting louder and louder, I pace straight into the kitchen of the hall so my stomach will be quiet. As soon as I get inside, I open the sarten to scoop some birria out of it, so I can dump it onto a plate.

"Hey shorty, there is still more time!" my mom screams.

"What's left?"

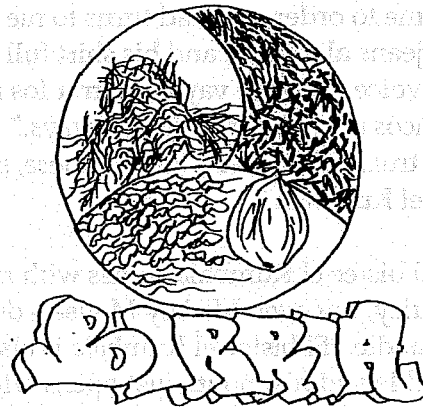
My mom replies, "For you guys to sit down so we can serve you guys." So the rest of the chambelanes and I rush back straight to our table.

There we are, seven chambelanes and the gorgeous quinceañera at our own personal table. As they place the plate in front of my face, I take a good glance at it. There is some red spicy carne de res, which is birria with some beans and arroz sprinkled all over. Chopped pieces of cilantro float on top of the birria. Don't forget the vegetable that makes people cry, the mini squares of onion. To give it a better and bitter taste, I squirt half a lemon on it. As I glance to my right side, I see the quinceañera sitting down eating like a princess. On my left side, I glimpse my little cousin Kevin trying to chunk my tortillas because he has already finished his.

After I finish my plate, I take a long stare at all of us sitting at our table. I draw that picture inside my head because all I have now are memories of the first quinceañera where I came out. As people come in the hall, they stare hard at us because of the way that we are dressed up. We, the chambelanes, are dressed as "Pachucos," an old school way to dress a Mexican gangster. It is really something that you don't see nowadays, only at quinceañeras. My eyes just aim straight into the entrance of the hall so I can target all the girls that I am going to end up dancing with. It is early and the party has not really started, but I see people beginning to dance cumbia and little kids playing around in the center of the hall, taking advantage of the fact that the hall is kind of empty. With only a little bit of birria to go, I try to finish every single piece of carne and every last drop of the juicy caldo.

Ingredients

- 15 chiles California
- 1 bag clavos spice
- 1 bag pimienta (black pepper)
- ¼ of a garlic
- 1 tablespoon comino spice
- 3 tablespoons ajonjolí
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 ounce vinagre blanco (white vinegar)
- 5 pounds carne de res (beef)



Directions

In one pot, cook the chiles California. Mix in the clavos and the pimienta. Throw in the garlic. Pour in the ajonjoli, the comina, and the salt. Mix it all.

In another pot, add the carne de res. Pour in the white vinegar. Pour in some water to cover at least ¾ of the pot.

Pour the mixture from the first pot into the carne de res pot. Turn the heat to medium, and let it boil for at least 90 minutes.

Serves 15

Tryptophan-0.36 g, Protein-32.04g, Vitamin B12-2.92mcg=.00000292g, Zinc-6.33 mg, Selenium-27.67 mcg=.00002767g, Vitamin B6-0.49 mg, Iron-4.05 mg, Vitamin B3-4.44mg

El Bistec el Kumbala

By Juan Cerna

As soon I step inside the restaurant Kumbala, my face turns from the good side to the great side. While I'm there it just gives me the chills because of the freshness. It's so clean it makes me feel like when I go and buy a brand new triple A white tee from the 55th liquor store. As soon as I take a few steps, I navigate to the table that my family would like best, especially when the mariachi is playing on Sundays. Everyone likes to eat right next to the mariachi.

I swear to god the restaurant is the bomb like an atomic bomb. Seeing the mariachi playing live just makes me feel like I am in my Pueblo up in Mexico "en las fiestas de Diciembre." The restaurant Kumbala in Castro Valley has a gigantic long table, and it's just like a buffet. People can help themselves to a botana, a plate with a variety of vegetables and meat mixed together.

The tables are very neat and well organized. As I sit at the table, I gaze at the fresh made chips with the Kumbala salsa picante made with tomatoes, onions and tomatillos. I just open my mouth, and saliva is dripping down like a waterhole. I can spy the oil glowing and glossing like a star.

When the waitress comes and takes the order, there are times that I don't feel like munching on my best dish because I am just macking on the tortilla chips like a pig. When it's time for me to order, my dad turns to me looking a hot mess because he just got out of work with his jeans all ripped and his shirt full of dirt. He hands me the menu and says with a grumpy voice, "No me vayas agarrar los mendigos tacos o el burrito carbon," meaning "Don't get the tacos or the burritos like always." Restaurants are made for special dishes. I could just go to a taco truck and order a burrito there, so I reply back, "I am going to order my favorite dish, el bistec el Kumbala."

El bistec el Kumbala comes with rice and beans and sometimes fries. El bistec is just so fat and juicy, not even Mickey Mouse's dog Pluto could eat it all because it'd be too much for him to handle. El bistec el Kumbala is also my pop's favorite dish. Every time he sees it, his eyes sparkle and his mouth just opens wide ready for him to kill that bad boy.

When the chef sees my order, he goes to the refrigerator with a fast walk, grabs the big fat juicy steak, and lays it down on the stove. As soon as he does, that steam just burns out everywhere.

When they make the rice and the beans, they make it right in the morning, but they keep it in a fresh pot and it's always warm. The crazy thing about Kumbala is that customers can see the chef rushing all over the place prepared to make more than ten orders at a certain time.

When the waitress brings the food to the table, my stomach just growls like a tiger. She sets down the plate with a pretty hot temperature. I don't know what to eat first. When I grab the soft tortillas de arena, fresh handmade, they are just so soft. They feel like the ones that my grandmas used to make back in the day.

When I'm eating my favorite dish, it tastes so delicious that I can't get enough of it. I'd like to get married with that bistec and those frijoles and that rice. When it goes down my

throat, it feels so unique as if the chef invented an unknown spice for the steak. When I'm with my family at Kumbala, it feels very good because we are spending time with each other. Everyone is talking to my brother about him dropping out of high school, and my dad is talking about what we are going to do later on in the future. It just looks good like the picture of God when he had his last meal. When I'm with my family, we put away all the negative things and we bring all the good times to the table. I see my pops who just smirks at me because he is so happy that he could eat with his family one more time. I know that I will never forget this dish, no matter what. I know that if something happens to my dad, I'm always going to remember him eating with me in the restaurant, eating el bistec el Kumbala.

Ingredients

- 1 bag charcoal
- 1 pound cilantro, finely diced
- 4 limes
- 4 tomatoes, finely diced
- 1 onion, cut into rings
- 1 cup consommé
- 1 gallon water
- beans
- ¾ cup salt

Directions

As the steak cooks on the grill, squeeze the lime juice onto the steak to make it juicy. Place the onion rings on the steak.

Pour a gallon of water into a pot of beans and cook on high heat until steamy and brown.

Cook the rice until it appears orange and no water remains. Halfway through the cooking, add the tomato pieces and the cilantro to the rice.

Serves 4-5

Calories-390, Total Fat-13g, % Calories from fat-30%,
Protein-22g, Carbohydrate-45g, Cholesterol-39mg, Sodium-495mg.

Enchiladas

By Mori Franklin

My dad makes the best enchiladas in the world. I think my dad learned how to make them from either my grandma, grandpa or my great uncle because they're all some wonderful cooks. My dad was real young when he learned how to make them. It had to be before my older relatives passed away.

The very first time I had enchiladas was on my seventh birthday. Just thinking back if I was that same age again, I could smell all the aromas floating from the kitchen. I would be able to smell fried ground beef, fresh chopped onions, and a garlicky smell. While walking in the kitchen, I could see my dad standing six feet tall over the hot stove like a chef off a TV cooking show.

He would always have a serious look on his face while he was cooking in the kitchen. He would always get mad if we tried to put our fingers in the food before he was done cooking. I could see he was working really hard in the kitchen with the sweat dripping down his face like water gushing out of the faucet.

When my dad finished cooking the ground beef, he got the enchilada shells. He took them out of the bag and placed them one by one in a rectangular oven pan. After he was done placing them one by one in the pan, he placed the meat in the shells with a spoon. Then, he folded the enchiladas into an oval shaped envelope with the meat inside. He took the cheese and enchilada sauce and dressed the enchiladas. Then he took the pan of enchiladas and placed them in the oven for about an hour.

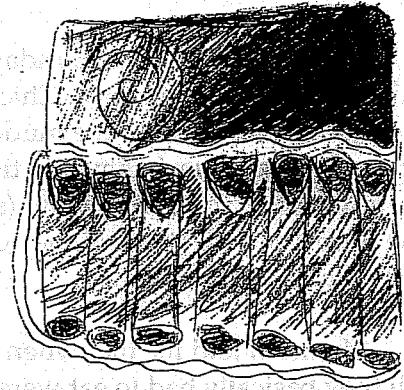
After an hour passed, he took the pan of enchiladas out and placed them on the stove. From the heat everyone could smell the aromas from the enchiladas. When I took a bite into the enchilada, I could taste the chopped onions and the strange taste of garlic, but most of all, I could taste the topping on this delicious dish, all of the melted cheese and the sauce mixed together.

I fell in love with this mouthwatering dish because it has different types of spices in it. You can't tell what is in these enchiladas because it has mystery to it. Enchiladas bring my family together on days like this. Sitting at the table shows that we care for one another. We smile at each other at the table laughing and cracking jokes. We sit at this big table like crazy animals in a zoo waiting to be fed.

The way we show our appreciation is by just going up to our dad and giving him a great big hug, saying thank you. He always smiles when the family comes together like this because it brings him back to his old days when he was young. This dish has been in my family for years, and it might be one of our family traditions.

Ingredients

- 1 pound ground beef
- ½ an onion chopped
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 enchilada seasoning packet
- 1 jalapeno (optional)
- 8 corn tortillas
- 1 small can enchilada sauce
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- green onion garnish



Directions

Place the ground beef in the frying pan, and set it on the burner. Let the meat fry for 10 minutes. Add the enchilada seasoning to the meat, and let it simmer for about 5 to 10 minutes until the meat turns brown.

Take the pan of fried meat, and place it in a strainer so that the fat of the meat can drain out.

Take the 8 tortilla shells and place them in a 6 or 8 inch rectangular pan. With a spoon, add the drained meat to each tortilla.

Take each tortilla and fold it into a rectangular envelope. Pour a little bit of the sauce on top of each enchilada. Then, spread the shredded cheese on each enchilada.

Turn the oven to 350 degrees, and place the enchiladas inside the oven. Let the enchiladas warm up for 10 minutes.

Serves 8

Jamon en Pedasitos

By Juan Contreras

All I heard on that Sunday morning were pigs squealing because they were about to die. Every Sunday at Cimmaron Chico, a ranch in Jalisco, Mexico, it was a hustle trying to catch the pigs running all around the muddy dirt. They made the ranchers sweat when they chased them. I heard a final squeal; they had tied the pigs up by the legs and killed them to make ham. My grandma went to the Comercio (store) to order this ham. Since she had chickens at her house, she didn't have to waste money on eggs. These two ingredients were to make a delicious dish called Jamon en Pedasitos.

My mom told me that when she was little in Mexico, they didn't have much money. All they basically had to eat were eggs, cheese, and beans all the time. Every once in awhile, when they had money, they would go and buy some ham and make Jamon en Pedasitos. She watched my grandma make it all the time, and she thought it was easy. When my grandma taught my mom how to cook, the Jamon en Pedasitos was one of the first dishes she learned how to make. She was only ten years old at the time, and she's been doing it ever since.

The ingredients to make Jamon en Pedasitos are very simple to understand. My mom tries to make me do it but I'd probably burn it, so she forces me to help her at least a little. My mom is the perfect height, not too tall and not too short. She pulls her jet black hair back in a ponytail, washes her hands, and starts cooking. With a grin on her face, she tells me to get four pieces of ham out and cut them into little squares. She feels special because I do the first part and she cooks it. I grab one egg, crack it, and put it in the pan. Then, she grabs the spatula with her right hand and mixes all of it together, and it's done in less than five minutes. She serves me the Jamon en Pedasitos with the same white plate I always use. She just blinks her long eyelashes at me and gives me this look with her light brown eyes that I better like it.

I can add any toppings I want. Personally I like to squirt Tapatio hot sauce on it. It gives it that final touch. I eat my Jamon with tortillas. My mom heats them up on the stove because she knows I like them that way. When I ask my mom for a second helping, her face lights up, just happy because I liked her food. My mom likes to satisfy her family, and she can do it fast and easily by making this dish.

The Jamon en Pedasitos looks very different and abstract to me. The color of the ham is pink, and the egg is bright yellow. It looks like a mess when I throw a little bit of Tapatio hot sauce on top of it, like a volcano just erupted and splattered through the whole Jamon en Pedasitos. The hot smoke coming out of it and the warm tortillas made from maize puts the cherry on top of a perfect dish.

When my family eats, the table is always full. Sitting in the corner are me and my little niece Crystal with the luscious brown curly sue locks, her nostrils flaring because she is smelling the Jamon en Pedasitos with all her power. My brother sits across from me rubbing his humongous stomach because he hasn't eaten all day and is trying to get a piece of my Jamon en Pedasitos. My mom watches us eat, looking at our facial expressions to see if we like it or not. Her eyes glare right at me. I think I have something stuck in my teeth, and we both look at each other and laugh.

This dish means a lot to me because it's something that my mom takes time to do for me because she knows how much I enjoy it. It's a little part of Mexico brought over to our family. It

takes me back to when I was small in Mexico, all crusty, complaining that there wasn't anything to eat. Then my grandma just made that Jamon and shut me up, and we all ate out on the patio looking out at the blue sky. Every time I eat it just reminds me of those good old times in Mexico. My mom told me she used to feed me this dish when I was just a baby. I guess that's why I like it so much. My memories will never fade as long as I eat Jamon en Pedasitos. They'll keep living on.

Ingredients

4 pieces ham
2 eggs
3-4 tortillas
hot sauce
cooking oil

Directions

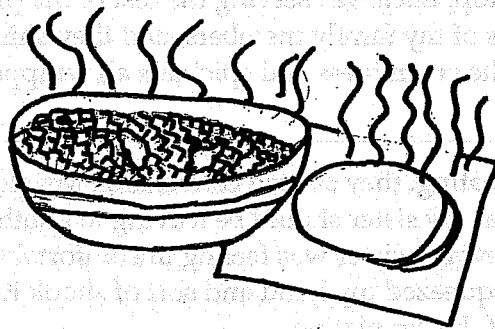
Get a flat skinny pan, and put 2 spoonfuls of cooking oil in it. Set temperature to high until the grease melts.

Break the two eggs in a little bowl, and scramble it with a spoon.

Cut the ham into cubed pieces. Throw them in the pan when ready. Just let them cook for at least 2 minutes before adding the eggs. Then grab a spoon and scramble the dish for 2 minutes.

Turn off the heat, and remove the Jamon. Put some tortillas in the microwave for exactly one minute. Serve the tortillas with the Jamon.

Serves 1



Sopa en Frio

By Ofelia Navarro

Sopa en frio, sounds kind of weird, doesn't it? It means cold soup in English. My mother would always make it when we had a special occasion or a barbecue. She would grab a big pot and fling it on the stove. All of a sudden, I would hear the crumbling sound of the pasta bag when she opened it to add it into the boiling water. As the pasta cooked, she would assemble slices of ham into a pile and cut them up into little squares.

When the pasta was done and cooled down, she got a giant bowl and mixed the pasta with the ham. She scooped a cup of cream and a cup of mayonnaise into the bowl. She grabbed two spoons and began mixing until she saw that the cream and mayonnaise were evenly distributed. Then, it would go into the fridge to become even cooler.

We were having a family gathering because Elica, my sister, was leaving for L.A. She and I were really close. I would always turn to her for help if I had a problem or to get advice. Elica would always cover for me or she would constantly tell me what was good or bad about what I was doing with my life. She inspired me not to hold back and to believe in myself.

It really hurt me to think that she would be so far away from me. It was her last day in Oakland, and we wanted to remember this day as a celebration. We had a lot of family members come over, and my mom made a lot of delicious food including my favorite, the sopa en frio. I remember seeing Elica come very early to our house and seeing the glow in her beautiful brown eyes. Her hair was down with a glistening shine.

I gazed at all of my family, and it seemed very rare to me since we didn't really get together that often. Everyone was seated around two long tables, and we were whining because it was so crowded. Elica snatched my plate and gently slapped food on it. My plate looked really neat and perfect even though she had arranged it quickly. I couldn't stop gazing at the rough and hard surface of the tostada and how it was dabbed with the cream and mayonnaise and the pasta with ham. It was a perfect mixture of crunchiness and creaminess; the only thing missing was the hot sauce on top. Elica was serving the rest of the plates for our family members. I glanced at the eyes of my family members, and they shined when they ogled all of the delicious food. I savored the creaminess and spiciness all wrapped together with a crunchy tostada.

As everyone stopped eating, they started conversing. My elders gave their opinions about whether they agreed that my sister should be leaving to another city. Some opinions were positive, others negative. I knew my sister was feeling uncomfortable when the negative comments came because she squeezed my hand and sort of shook it as if a dumbbell had just landed in my hand, cutting off the circulation.

I just gave her a hug and told her that I would always be there as she was there for me, so I could feel the relief of getting my circulation back. She glanced at me and gave me a smile that slid out slowly. After that small moment, we all just kept enjoying the food and chatting about other events. I decided to put some music on, so we could have something else to do. My aunties and uncles started dancing to banda and cumbia. That was a way for us to let the food go down.

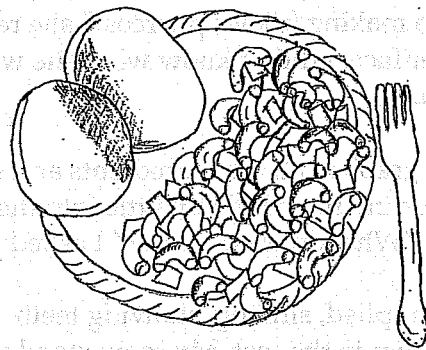
There are a lot of different variations of the sopa en frio. There is the original recipe with the pasta and the ham mixed with the mayonnaise and the cream. Another ingredient I toss into the sopa en frio are slices of square jalapenos. It gives the flavor a kick and makes me savor it even more. Also, if I have cans of mixed vegetables, I use them by tumbling them with water and adding them to the ham and the pasta. This variation makes me think that I am eating healthy because I am having a portion of vegetables while also enjoying the creamy goodness. Usually, I put the sopa en frio in any type of bread to make it a sandwich or dip it into crackers.

As the time kept wandering, people started leaving the barbecue. I grabbed a trash bag and helped my sister clean the tables and pick up trash. I started picking up some disposable plates and observed that one had a little bit of cream still dabbed on it. I stared at the empty plate and realized that I also was going to be empty inside when Elica left. Her shadow darkened the plate I was holding while she came closer to me. As I turned, tears came crashing down, and Elica looked deeply into my eyes. She gently wiped them off. She knew I was sad at the moment but felt that it was a good decision for her.

This dish is important to me because it reminds me of home and family. It brings back the memories of my sister and how she would give me advice about learning from the mistakes she had made in her life. It reminds me that even though our family can't really see each other a lot, we do reunite and spend some time together. When this dish is made, it always means that it will be a good day because there will be peace and unity around me. Whenever I am feeling down and hungry, I can make this dish, and it will remind me of all those times when I am not alone and with my family.

Ingredients

- 1 cup cream
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 pack elbow pasta
- 4 wedges onion
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 pack thin ham



Directions

Set a heavy pot filled with water halfway on the stove and set on high heat. Add a pinch of salt and the 4 wedges of onion. When the water boils, add the entire pasta bag and leave it to boil.

Get 4 thin slices of ham out of the pack and stack them up. Chop them into little squares. Repeat this until you have the amount needed for the whole pack of pasta. Just eyeball it.

Drain the pasta when done boiling, and let it cool for 10-15 minutes. In a large bowl, add the ham squares and the cooled pasta. Add 2 teaspoons of cream and 2 teaspoons of mayonnaise into the bowl or container. Mix together until the cream and mayonnaise are evenly shared among the ham and pasta. Put aluminum foil over the bowl and place in the refrigerator for 20-35 minutes, so the soup can get cooler. When not serving or eating this dish, keep refrigerated.

Serves 6

Frijoles Puercos

By Carolina Cordero

"Ama!" I yelled in protest as she announced what we were doing. "I don't want to make frijoles! We eat those everyday. I'm tired of them! We need something different. It's a party!" I exclaimed as I slumped down in the kitchen chair, arms crossed, pouting. I had my mind set. I didn't want frijoles.

"Oh stop being such a brat, and come over here. You're going to help me make them whether you want to or not. And you're going to eat them like the rest of us," she expressed while extracting a huge pot. She wore a weird expression on her face, so I knew she meant business. Her lips were tightened into a straight line, and her cheeks were flushed. I had to help her or else. "Go get the beans from the refrigerator. Since you're there already, get the bacon, ham and hot dogs," she uttered, pointing to the refrigerator.

As I stood up I grumbled, "I know where they are. I'm not stupid."

"Que dijiste? *What did you say?*" she questioned, turning towards me. Her fingers were clasped on the pot, so she just turned her head. Her eyebrows scrunched up and her eyes squinted.

I just ignored her and grabbed what she wanted. As I handed them to her, I asked her, "What do you need everything else for? You're just making beans."

"I'm making frijoles puercos," she responded with little hesitation. She had a little wry smile on her face. I didn't know what she was talking about, but I didn't ask her. I just thought she was crazy.

She grabbed all the ingredients and started cutting them up. After she had finished, she began by adding them little by little into the pot. She finally put the lid on and came to sit down next to me. "What do we do now?" I asked yawning.

She replied, smiling, showing teeth. "Nada. We wait." I rolled my eyes at the ceiling and slumped down in the seat. My mom stood up and came behind me. She grabbed and pulled my ponytail back. "You're going to eat the beans, and you're going to like them," she said with an evil smile.

I smiled back wickedly and said, "I'd rather starve." She then kissed my forehead and smacked flour all over my face. That was the beginning of the flour fight. Once it was over we looked like we were ready for Halloween. We could barely see our eyebrows, which had turned light gray because of the flour. We looked like ghosts; the only part that wasn't covered with flour was our eyes. She grabbed her camera, and we proceeded to take funny pictures. My mom's curly and crazy hair stood up all over the place. Her rosy cheeks and dark brown eyes squinted as if she was in the sun. Her lips, dabbed with a little lipstick, parted in a smile.

After we had cleaned up, she went to go check on the beans. They were done. She grabbed a ladle and poured some into a bowl. As she was bringing it towards me, I could observe all the steam radiating off of them. It smelled of bacon and ham fused together with chorizo and beans. I couldn't place the scent, but it was so intoxicating that I was dumbfounded

for a few seconds. I took in large breathfuls of air. It smelled as if I was in my own little piece of heaven, but I decided against telling my mother that.

As she set the plate down in front of me, I stared at the finished dish for the very first time in my life. It looked like little piggies floating along a murky ocean filled with trash and snakes. It didn't look edible. It made me want to throw up. No matter how good it smelled, I didn't want to eat it.

I quickly changed my mind once I saw my mother's expectant face. I grabbed the spoon with dread and put it up to my mouth slowly. Eventually though, I had to scoop it in my mouth. At first I didn't want to chew the food. I could feel it in my mouth floating along and bumping into my inner cheeks.

As I bit into them, I was surprised. The beans and weenies were soft and chewy, but the ham and bacon were nice and crunchy. I didn't know which I liked best. They all had their different textures, but at the same time they all came together into one very unique dish. It was delicious. The smokiness of the bacon was overpowered slightly by the chorizo and beans. They had fused together, leaving the ham and its sugary sourness by itself.

As I was devouring my dish, I took a glance over at my mom. She was sitting hunched on her chair. She looked tired but had a satisfied look on her face. Her eyes and mouth were closed as if she were sleeping calmly. She opened her eyes, saw me looking at her, and gave me a beautiful smile. I gave her one back, and she winked at me. "Ya sabia que te iban a gustar. I knew that you were going to like them," she said with a nod. I just stayed quiet thinking back on all the fun we had had making it and hoping we would get to do it again. This dish helped my mom and I share something secret about us that no one else knew. That day, I saw my mom as a friend, not just my mom. It's something I will never forget and will always share with her.

Ingredients

- 1 pound pinto beans
- 7 slices ham
- 3 hot dogs
- 6 strips bacon
- ½ pack of chorizo
- 1 liter water

Directions

Allow beans to cook in water for 90 minutes. Once beans are soft, add pinch of salt.

Fry the ham, hot dogs, bacon, and chorizo.

Add to beans, and simmer for 5 minutes.

Ceviche de Camaron

By Cesar Fernandez

My mom starts off the day by waking up before everyone else. As always she looks glamorous with her hair tucked in a chef's hat. She then takes all the ingredients from the refrigerator and gently lays them on top of the table. She dices tomatoes, onions, cucumbers and cilantro like a chef trying to win a dicing contest. She places it all in a round bowl, then starts to heat up a pot of water, and adds two pounds of tiger shrimp. It has been fifteen minutes now that my mom has been standing up preparing the ceviche. Preparing the ceviche takes twenty-five minutes or so to make. She waits till the shrimp turn red, which shows her it's ready. She takes them off the heat and lets them cool down. The shrimp are then diced up in four parts and added to the bowl. She saves a little of the water that was used to boil the shrimp; this will be the sauce just to make the ceviche juicier and give it a kick of flavor. The dish is almost complete. She adds a pinch of salt and squeezed lime juice and ketchup. The ceviche is then served on tostadas and topped off with slices of avocado.

I wake up smelling boiled shrimp and tangy smells like lime and onions. The aroma of chopped shrimp and tomatoes and fresh squeezed lime wakes up my nose, and my nose leads me straight to the kitchen. I begin to feel the summer heat, but as soon as I fix myself a plate, I take a bite and BAM! I feel refreshed. Ceviche gets me ready for the hot summer days.

When the summer comes, I know the memories will come back of eating ceviche. The history of ceviche goes way back to my grandma's foods in Michoacan, Mexico where it was much too hot for hot meals. My grandma was the one who taught my mom how to make this recipe. My grandma learned this recipe from her ancestors who first started experimenting by mixing salsa and shrimp together and adding enough lime juice. People then brought it to the U.S and started to remake the dish to their tastes.

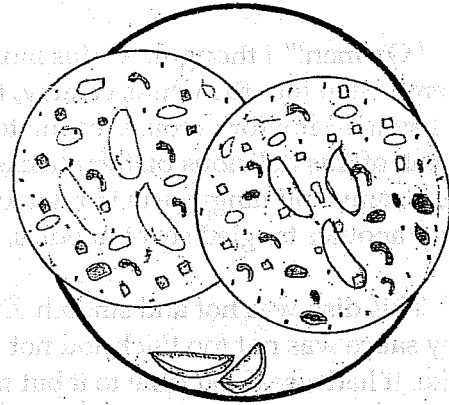
Every summer we come out of the house and hurry to the backyard. There we join together like one big family. The food is prepared, and as always the specialty is ceviche. We eat it as a side dish with everything – steak, hamburgers, hot dogs, even with our breakfast. This has been a food custom for us. We laugh and converse while snacking on ceviche, watching the football game and dipping on ceviche.

Ceviche makes my summer and reminds me of all the fun memories that I had in the summer. In my memories, when I'm going to the park or the beach, I always have my ceviche in hand. It's my summer energy.

When I have my own family, I will follow this tradition as well. I will be an old man watching my grandchildren eat ceviche the same way I ate it when I was young. Nothing will change. The original recipe will still be the same, and as always the ceviche will be delicious.

Ingredients

2 pounds tiger shrimp
½ cup lime juice
½ onion, chopped into ¼ inch pieces
1/3 cup chopped cilantro
½ cup ketchup
1 cup diced, peeled cucumber
1 large peeled avocado chopped into cubes
saltine crackers or tostadas
½ teaspoon salt



Directions

Peel the tiger shrimp.

Bring 1 quart water to a boil. Add the shrimp to the pot. As soon as they turn red, scoop them up and let them settle.

Once the shrimps have cooled down, make a small slash in their backs and scrape out the waste. Toss them in a bowl with lime juice, and let them marinate in the refrigerator for an hour.

While waiting, chop the cilantro, onion, and avocado, and dice the cucumber.

Mix all of the ingredients in a bowl, and serve with crackers or tostadas.

Serves 4

Shrimp Pasta

By Tayler Davis

"Oh man!" I thought. At this moment my eyes were bigger than my stomach. My fork wandered deep into the white, creamy, long noodled pasta, with the small sized shrimp in them. I swirled my fork around trying to obtain as much of the noodles on it as I possibly could. The smell of this delicious platter attacked my nose, making my taste buds anxious to have its warm, creamy and tangy taste in my mouth. As soon as my fork was wiped clean and ready to swirl up another tangled set of noodles, I chewed, getting ready for the next mouthwatering set.

This dish was hot and smooth. Everything was so soft. It was just right though. The creamy sauce was not too thick and not too watery. I could almost taste every ingredient in just one bite. It had a seafood taste to it but not entirely.

The whole family was here munching and slurping away on this delightful dish. There were people in the living room, kitchen, my room, and even outside. Everyone was having a good time. My cousins Iscah, Umi, and Jabreel outside were yelling as if they were maniacal maniacs. The adults, which were my mom, Aunt Donne, Aunt Kitty and Uncle Doug, were in the living room sounding as if they were gossipy sixteen year olds in high school, and all of the elders were in the kitchen complaining about their past and how everything's too easy for my generation. My grandmother, Lizzie, was the main one talking, of course. All of her friends looked like a Crayola box full of different shaded browns. My grandmother would be the original brown with short, curly, silvery-gray hair and a set of glasses that covered her tight brown eyes.

I loved it when my family cooked. It brought everyone together, especially this sensational pasta. That's why I liked it so much. It was not just because of its scrumptious taste, but because it made everyone happy. My Aunt Donne was stuffing her face and trying to talk at the same time. My cousins were slurping up the pasta and making a mess. The younger adults and elders had come together to eat and gossip, and I would just be listening to them.

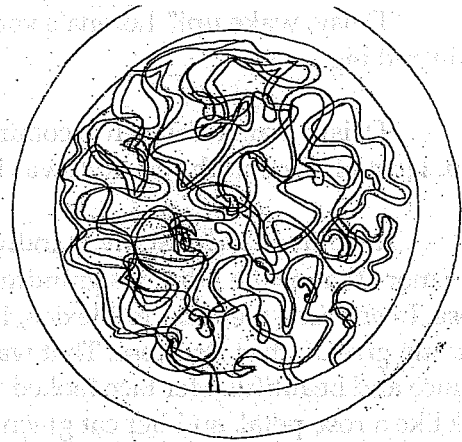
I can still remember me as a child waiting anxiously for the decadent plate to be ready for me to eat. I played with my cousins, saw my Aunt Kitty and Uncle Jerry whom I hadn't seen in a long time, and was complimented by my grandmother's friends on how big I was getting. Sometimes I would sit in the kitchen and watch my mom or grandmother prepare the pasta. I would beg to help too. Everything fascinated me. The mixing, the stirring, the checking and adding. First, my mom would unthaw the dark green chopped spinach. While waiting for it to unthaw, she would use my hand as if I were a puppet to chop the vegetables. Mom would do all of the measuring and would push me up on my tippy toes to add in the ingredients. At the end, my favorite part was to be the first person to taste it.

When the pasta was ready, my mom would step over to me with a beaming smile and set my plate in front of me. My mother is a honey molasses skin tone. She is built very well and has glasses that go over her medium sized brown eyes. When she zipped away and left me to pig out on it, I observed a white, creamy sauce over a big pile of noodles. I stared at tomatoes and shrimp everywhere and a little bit of sauce dripping over the plate. The steam danced upwards from the pasta as it cooled down. The smell of it was irresistible. It made me want to consume it in one bite. The smell gave my nose a signal to alert my stomach it was in for a treat.

This pasta is more than just a regular dish, not only to me but to my family. It represents many of my memories with my family. I would be so sad if for any reason we couldn't make this tantalizing pasta anymore, simply because it represents happiness, fun, and togetherness to me.

Ingredients

- 8 ounce bag of frozen spinach
- 2 pound bag of large peeled shrimp
- 1 small red onion
- 8 ounce box of mushrooms
- 3 cloves of garlic chopped
- 2-3 firm tomatoes
- 2-3 tablespoons butter
- 2 12-ounce bags of cheese tortellini/pasta of choice
- 16 ounce tub of soft cream cheese
- 1 to 1 ½ cups of milk
(depends on how thick you want the sauce)



Directions

First, unthaw the chopped spinach and shrimp. While waiting for spinach to unthaw, chop vegetables (red onion, mushrooms, garlic, and tomatoes) into your desired size, preferably medium sized.

Put water on to boil, and pour a little bit of salt in it. Then, sauté red onions, garlic, and spinach in butter. Add the milk, and then melt in cream cheese. Add seasonings and parmesan cheese to taste. Pour sauce over cooked pasta. Add shrimp, and when it's cooked, add the mushrooms and chopped tomatoes. Toss well and serve hot!

Serves 10-12

Camarones a la Diabla

By Deisy Cortes

It was Saturday morning. The warmth of the sun touched my soft caramel skin. I anxiously turned from side to side to hit the right spot, but I couldn't find it. Then I heard my sister shouting, "Deisy, wake up! Help me do the chores because we have guests today." I really didn't care at all because all I wanted to do was sleep like the bears in winter.

"Deisy, wake up!" Lorena's vociferous voice woke me up instantly. My eyes opened wide and big.

"Deisy, mama Carmen is coming as a guest today with our uncles and cousins," she said. I just glanced at the clock. It was barely 8:42 am.

Then I realized that my grandma was coming to the house. I loved mama Carmen. She was more than just a fabulous grandmother to me. She was my best friend, she and I were so close. Every time we went to México, I used to sleep with her in the room, right between her and my grandfather Don Jose. That was one of so many memories we shared together. She was so nice and beautiful. Her face looked like a little angel sent from heaven. Her black hair was soft like a rose petal, and her cat green eyes had that little funky touch.

Next thing I knew I felt so happy and energetic that I instantly got up. I walked outside the room when I heard some voices. Then I saw that my family was already here. I glanced at everyone, giving everyone hugs and kisses. After I said hi to everyone, I looked around for mama Carmen, but I didn't see her anywhere. I finally felt the warmth of my grandma giving me a big bear hug that covered every inch of my soft arms. I looked at her and responded back with a harder hug. Then I heard my sister Lorena say, "Today is Camarones a la Diabla," mama Carmen's special. She loved Camarones a la Diabla because it was passed to her from her mother back when she was a little girl. The first time I tried this dish was when I was five years old. Only my mama Carmen knew how to prepare them the way I liked it, real spicy and hot.

She put hard time in the kitchen preparing this dish. I saw her placing every detail, making sure everything came out tasty and marvelous. Her face looked so red like a tomato; her hand moved fast like a snake. She moved her fingers as if she were typing an essay for an English class. She moved them from side to side to reach for her ingredients. When my mama Carmen prepared her dish, she didn't like anyone to help her because she didn't like anyone to mess with her food. She loved that everything came out the way she desired it.

The only thing I did was stay seated and watch her prepare the food. She grabbed fresh shrimp and washed them until they were clean and sparkling. Then, she grabbed them and tossed them in a pot to cook them with some onions in order to get flavor. After she did that, she diced the garlic and then poured it into the pot so it could give the shrimp more spice. When she observed that the shrimp were gaining a pinkish color, she took one out and tasted it to see if she liked how it tasted. If my grandmother didn't like the way it tasted, she would keep adding whatever she needed to give it the perfect taste. As soon as they were ready and cooked, she added chile chipotle and apple juice to make it extremely perfect. Then, she mixed them all together. When she felt like they already had that great spicy and juicy flavor, she started to prepare the rice soup that would go with it.

After she was done, then she tasted them again and said, "Que rico esta, esto asi comemos, los Mexicanos! *This is so delicious; this is how Mexicans eat!*" Then she called my sister Lorena and me to come and fix the table so we could start serving the food. My mom and I just looked at her and then smirked because she acted so funny when she was serving the food. She stood on one leg and then started dancing some banda songs with my uncle Gustavo. All my aunties were giggling with each other because they thought they brought joy to the house. All we could hear in the house was laughter, music, and people dancing. My uncles kicked it back, relaxing on the couch and drinking some Coronas. Everyone was just waiting for mama Carmen to say, "Come and eat."

The reason why this dish reminds me of mama Carmen is because, unfortunately, she is not with us anymore. Now she is in heaven next to God maybe teaching little angels how to make my favorite food, Camarones a la Diabla. One day I'm going to teach my daughters how to make this dish and tell them the story of why I love it so much. Since mama Carmen died, Camarones a la Diabla has not ever tasted the same.

Ingredients

3 pounds shrimp
6 tomatoes
5 chiles chipotles
1 onion
2 pieces garlic
2 teaspoons of oil
¼ cup apple juice
salt as desired

Directions

Wash the shrimp until they look clean and fresh and have no smell. Put the shrimp in a pan and let them fry until the shrimp get a pink color. This means the shrimp are ready to be prepared.

Grab an onion, dice it, and add the onion to the pan with the shrimp in it.

Place the tomatoes in the blender with the chiles chipotles and diced garlic. Mix them all together. Add this mixture to the shrimp.

With a big spoon make sure to mix all the ingredients again. This way the shrimp will be covered with the taste of spicy chile and garlic.

Add the apple juice to make the taste even better. Finally, mix it all together and let it boil. When it boils, it is ready.

Serves 8

Caldo Loco

By Patty Barraza

Shrimp, chicken, carne de res, weenies, carrots, potatoes, and corn are some of the ingredients that are found in a caldo loco. My uncle also adds fish. To get the soup red, my uncle uses chiles chipotle. He also adds salt and other spices for his mouthwatering soup.

Even though my uncle has a bad foot, he still manages to gather all the ingredients fresh. He wakes up early in morning and goes to the market and buys all the food he needs. He scoops his corn from the field he has planted outside of his house. He also grabs his fish fresh from the rio; he has my cousins get the fish for him. When he has all the ingredients, he cleans them off. He leaves them there covered with a cloth until he is ready to use them.

Then he gets a big cazo, which is a big metal pot. He heats it up with water at a very high temperature. He grabs his propane, and on top he places the cazo. He sits his cazo to boil outside in the yard. My uncle continues to add the carne de res, then the pollo. He leaves in the bones of the carne de res because it gives the caldo a better taste.

Last, he adds all the vegetables in, so they won't overcook. If they overcook, the vegetables turn too soft. My uncle stirs the soup with a branch. He picks out a branch from a tree that's not too tall because my uncle is short. He pulls off a stick that is thick enough. He grabs his knife from his pocket and starts to clean the branch. He rips all the darker parts from the branch and leaves the branch clean white.

As soon as my uncle is making the soup, I can see his eyes full with joy, his dark brown skin getting darker from the hot sun. He likes making food for his family. He enjoys us eating it and liking the soup. He always made this soup especially for my grandpa Melito. My grandpa loved this soup a lot; he always used to suck the fish bones. My grandpa loved my uncle because he was always so kind and polite, his brown eyes so tender.

As my uncle finishes with the soup, he wipes off all that sweat from his forehead, tired, but at the same time happy for what he's done. As soon as the soup starts to boil, all that spicy scent goes through my nose. The hot and soothing smell makes me feel happy and energetic.

As it's done, my uncle swings on to his horse and speeds around the Barrio, our block where we live. He tells all my uncles and cousins the caldo is ready. My dad and I always jump on the horses and make our way to the Rio. As we get there, all my cousins are in the Rio playing soccer. There's a spot in the river where the water is very low, and there is sand on the bottom. All my cousins play and swim.

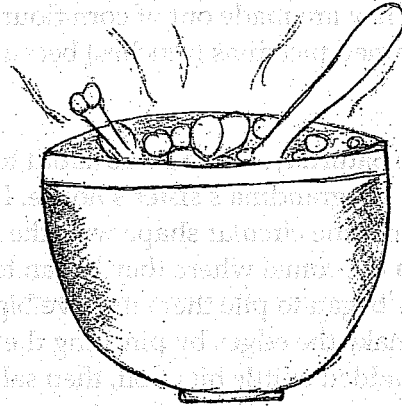
When they start to serve, we all head up to my uncle's house. We all eat and blabber at the same time. We shout about bailes that are coming up. My cousins and I gossip about the girls in our neighborhood, the way they dress. All my uncles except my dad are drinking their Coronas.

As soon as I take a spoon of the hot caldo, my tongue burns, feeling like a volcano ready to erupt. As soon as I taste it, my grandpa's face comes to my thoughts, him smiling and drinking his tequila. As I continue to eat, I taste different kinds of spices, all that soft and chewy meat and the carrots and potatoes, so tender and sweet.

This plate is important to me because I always eat this dish when I go to Zacatecas. We eat it close to the Rio where my dad and all his brothers used to play when they were kids. Drinking the warm soup I keep remembering the old days.

Ingredients

- 3 pieces pork
- ½ pound fresh shrimp
- 2 pounds of sliced fish
- ½ cup chopped carrots
- 2 pieces calabaza squash
- 2 ears of corns sliced in half
- 1 stripped cabbage
- 2 diced potatoes
- 12 pieces chopped beef



Directions

Clean the meat, and chop it into slices. Cut all vegetables in half.

Heat a big pot filled with water to medium high. Add the pork, beef, and fish. Cook for 30 minutes at a high temperature. After 30 minutes, add the chicken for another 15 minutes.

Add the chopped onions, and add all the vegetables. Add the chili chipotle, garlic, tomatoes, and oregano. Boil 15 minutes, and it's ready to eat.

Serves 5

Calories-78, Total fat-1g, Saturated fat-0g, Trans fat-0g, Cholesterol-41mg,
Sodium-46mg, Total carbohydrate-0g, Dietary fiber-0g, Sugars-0g, Protein-16g

Picaditas Veracruzanas

By J.M. Zamora

Picaditas or memelas, as people in other parts of Veracruz call them, are a circular looking tortilla but much smaller and simpler. This is a Veracruzano dish, but a lot of people confuse them with sopes. Picaditas are an old Olmec recipe passed down from our ancestors in Veracruz. They are made out of corn flour or masa with cooking oil, salsa, and queso fresco. They are named picaditas (pinches) because when making them, the cook has to pinch the edges.

One Saturday, when I was about to leave for the U.S.A., the whole family gathered together in my grandma's sister's house. I observed my grandma and Tia Socorro with their hands making the circular shape with the masa. With her soft hands, my grandma put the picaditas in the comal where they began to inflate like a balloon. Then, taking them off the comal, they began to pile them up, five big towers of not-yet-done picaditas. My aunt Hilda started to make the edges by pinching them. After that, they put the picaditas back into the comal and added a little bit of oil, then salsa verde or roja and the queso fresco. When I spied that the first one was done, I found a way to sneak into the kitchen and snatch it just for me.

I grabbed it with my hands, and even though it burned, it was worth it. I carefully placed my precious treasure on a plate and stared at it. All hungry as if I was lost in the woods, I was finally going to eat it. I gazed at the white smoke puff coming out of the brownish yellow masa and the bubble of the hot oil. The salsa was still burning like hot lava. The cheese, oh god, and how could I forget the cheese? With my arms straight and my hands open, I grabbed it and took a huge bite, so crunchy like a tostada but soft. I tasted the hot salsa and savored the fresh cheese. Then, I sped up like a late train, so that I could help my cousins set up three tables. No one saw me eating my treasure or committing the crime of taking the first picadita.

After my mom and my dad moved to the U.S.A., I stayed with my grandparents for three more years, which meant picaditas for three more years, but then my parents requested that I move with them to the U.S.A. I accepted because I thought everything would be the same as down in Mexico. But for a year I did not taste a single picadita. Almost every Saturday that passed, I had McDonalds. But then news struck my ear. My grandmother was coming to the U.S.A., and I knew exactly what that meant, more picaditas in the house. After a year of gross frozen food, I was finally going to eat a delectable picadita.

Barely a month had passed after my grandmother arrived, and I already told her I wanted picaditas for breakfast. She smiled and said, "Si, mijo, picaditas con chicharron y aguacate, que son tus favoritas. Yes, darling, picaditas with pork skin and avocado, those are your favorite ones." She looked the same as always, strict as Fidel Castro but sweet as a cup of hot chocolate on a cold winter day. When she had finished cooking, we called my uncle who hadn't eaten a picadita in seven years. He arrived in less time than it takes to make a hot pocket in the microwave. We all gathered and ate, all the family, la familia. It was the happiest day I ever had.

These days, I still miss Veracruz, but not as much as I used to because now I have a Veracruzana in my house, my lovely grandmother, and I still have the taste of Veracruz in the U.S.A.

Ingredients

- 1 pound masa (dough) for the tortillas
- 1 cup cooking oil
- 2 cups salsa verde
- 1 cup queso fresco
- 1 white onion, finely chopped

Directions

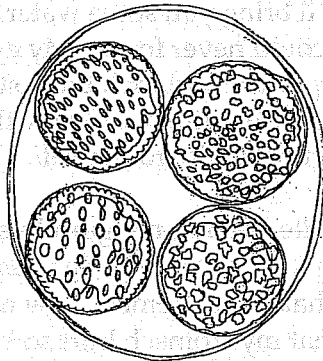
Grab a handful of masa and make it into a ball. Place the masa ball on a circular plastic sheet, and cover it with another circular plastic sheet. Smash it with your hands until it looks like a small tortilla about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and 3 inches in diameter. Over low heat, warm up the comal or grill. Place the small tortilla on the comal. Wait 5 to 10 minutes or until it's yellowish on that side. Then, turn it over and repeat until the sides are well done. Remove from the comal.

Carefully, because it is hot, pinch the edges of the small tortilla. **Do not use gloves or anything to cover your hand.** Make sure that the entire edge of the tortilla is made into a border. Let it cool down.

While that picadita cools, repeat the procedure for the rest of the masa. In another deep container, break the queso fresco into morsels. When the picaditas are done and cool down, use the same comal with the same medium heat. Place a picadita in the comal, let it warm for a few seconds, and then add a teaspoon of cooking oil. Make sure it covers the entire picadita.

Add a tablespoon of salsa to the picadita and as much onion as desired. Pull it out of the comal, and place it on a plate. Serve hot. Depending on the size of the comal, you can make 3-4 picaditas at the same time.

Serves 12



Tamales de Raja

By Emmanuel Gutierrez

Once upon a time, there was a happy family celebrating an old man's sixtieth birthday. As they were starting to prepare the dinner, my grandma started to make some tamales in a large pot that had boiling water inside. As she was putting the tamales in, I could see the steam and smell the rajas and cheese as it melted. My mouth was watery, as if it was a waterfall, and the smell spread all over the house.

It took over six hours for the tamales to get ready. Finally, as my grandma started to pass out the tamales, a rich smell of heaven filtered through the whole house. It was a gentle odor. Then, a vociferous noise came from the front door. It was my grandpa's brothers, Jose and Martin, and the rest of their family came in a rush. "You came right in time," my grandma told them. As they walked right inside the house, they went directly to the table, and my grandma offered them some tamales to eat. My grandpa was really excited because his two brothers had decided to join him on his birthday.

This day was very important to me. I was barely eight years old when I got to have my very own tamal de rajas. I was very happy because of that, and the main reason why I had a tamal de rajas was because they are very spicy the way my grandma makes them. Usually young kids don't really like these kinds of tamales because of their hot spicy taste, but this was the very first time that I was able to have one. As I opened my first tamal, I saw the steam evaporating out of the chewy tamales, which contained juicy green rajas and melted white cheese pouring out. The soft creamy cheese melted in my mouth, and the taste was spicy and going through my stomach.

I quickly devoured it and asked for two more. My grandma brought them for me.

"Gracias abuelita," I said to my grandma.

"Don't eat that many peppers. I'll bring you some water," my grandma replied. As I was eating them, it was a moment I could never forget. My eyes started to water, yet I did not care. Then, my mom stumbled up to me and took the rest of my tamales, with the excuse that supposedly they were too spicy for me still, but I knew the real reason why she took them. It was because she wanted all the tamales for herself.

The day before I came to the United States, my grandma made many tamales de rajas. That day I knew that I was not going to have tamales de rajas for a long time, so I decided to eat as many as I could. It was really hard to remember how many tamales I ate because they were so good. All I remember was that my stomach hurt so badly, I must have eaten around fifteen or sixteen. The next day I had to come to the USA. I remember being sick, but for tamales like that, it was worth it.

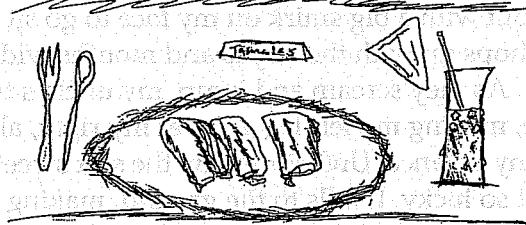
One day, for my sixteenth birthday, I wanted tamales de rajas. My grandma agreed to make them, but with one condition, if I volunteered to help her make them. I said yes, and wow, was I in for it. I had never in my life made tamales before, so inside of my head, I thought that it was very easy. Just get the dough, put jalapenos and cheese inside, close it, and put them inside the pot. But noooo! It was then that I realized how difficult it was to prepare tamales de rajas because there were a lot of steps that I had to follow and a lot of

different ingredients that I had to add. Also, joining the tamales together took a lot of time. Once they were ready, I had to put them in a big pot and let them boil. This took a little longer to be completed to perfection.

The day of my sixteenth birthday, I could see how much effort my grandma was putting into the tamales so they would come out perfect. When I stayed in the hot steamy kitchen for one or two minutes, it didn't really bother me, but when I spent around four to five hours in there, I could see how difficult it was. I felt like I was going to dehydrate. As my grandma was working in there, I could see the drops of sweat running through her face. Looking at my grandma working so hard made me appreciate more of her meals because they were not as easy as they looked. When the tamales that my grandma and I had made were finally ready, we started passing them out to my guests and to my family. It seemed like they all liked them. I had to admit that the tamales that I made were delicious. Either I was a good chef or it was all the help that I received from my grandma. The only difference was that I made my tamales a lot bigger and cheesier, but they were still really good. I will never forget that moment. It was fun cooking with my grandma.

Ingredients

- 6 ounces white cheese
- 5 large bell peppers
- 24 ounces of dough
- 30 corn leaves
- 3 onions
- 4 tomatoes
- 5 hot peppers



Directions

Open the corn leaves, and place three tablespoons of dough in each leaf.

Add small pieces of cheese in the dough. Also add the small pieces of bell pepper.

Close the tamales. Place them in a pot of hot steaming water. Make sure that the heat is on high. Constantly check the pot to make sure the water does not all evaporate away.

Serves 20-30

Calories-220, Total fat-10g, Saturated fat-6g, Cholesterol-30g,
Sodium-260g, Carbohydrate-22g, Fiber-6g, Sugars-20g, Protein 19g

Flan

By Kevin Lopez

My grandma takes the flan out of the oven with her hardworking wrinkly hands. The sweet cinnamon smell just reaches my nostrils, and my nostrils open up wide, wanting to keep on smelling the rich flavor. As she places it on top of a wooden cutting board waiting to cool down, she heads outside, exhausted, to water the plants. With her away and me so close to the flan, I am tempted to take a bite, but the extreme heat coming from that caramel coated substance stops me.

As I sit there waiting for the flan to cool down, my cousins, uncles, and aunties start barging in with smiles on their faces. My little cousins speed all around the house, and the grownups sprawl on the couch watching the Chivas game and conversing, talking about how they used to get in trouble when they were little. My grandma returns to the kitchen to check on the flan. As she announces that the flan is ready, I rush to the kitchen to be the first one to get a piece. The glossy brown smooth texture makes me want to eat it slowly so I can enjoy it more, but the fact that everyone is going to want seconds spurs to me eat it as fast as I can.

With the flan still in my mouth, I sprint to the kitchen and ask for seconds. My humble, generous grandma hands me another piece, not as big as the one before, but she gives it to me. As I strut out with a big smirk on my face to go sit on the couch, the Chivas score a goal. Everyone hops up with their eyes and mouths wide open, screaming and yelling encouraging comments. As they scream and jump, my uncle's two hundred and something pound self shoves me, making my left leg go over my right, almost knocking me down, but I am able to maintain my balance. Unfortunately, the soft sweet scented dessert that I was treating like a baby is not so lucky. It falls to the ground, making my heart fall even farther.

With the flan on the ground, my shoulders slouch down and my head tilts down. I do not know whether to pick it up and throw it away or forget the five second rule and eat it. I grab it and just throw it away because it's coated with sand that my little cousins dropped on the floor. It isn't easy throwing the flan away, but I just have to. When I first spotted it on the ground, my jaw dropped, and I stared at it for thirty seconds or a minute. With that much time on the ground, I just have to throw it away.

My uncles see my face as I toss it sadly in the garbage. On my way back to the living room, my brown haired uncle starts laughing at me. I get mad and ask him why he is laughing. My uncle Martin with his semi droopy eyes tells me that I brought him back memories of when he was small and living in Mexico.

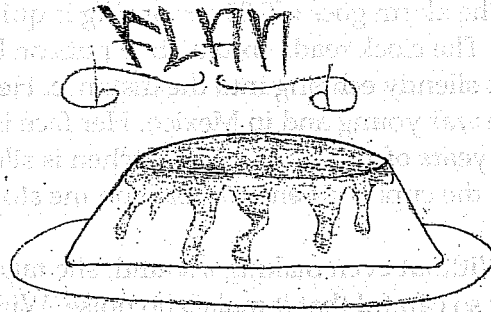
He tells me that when he was younger, my grandma used to make flan all the time on special occasions. One day my grandma had prepared flan because some relatives he hadn't seen before were coming to the house. When they arrived they started watching the game, Mexico vs. U.S. My uncle said that he was just like me, always trying to be the first in line to the flan. Once he had the flan, he was going to the living room to watch the game and eat the flan at the same time. The same thing that happened to me happened to him. A team scored, and they jumped up, knocking my uncle's flan to the ground.

I think that without my grandma and her delicious famous dish, my uncles and aunties would not see each other for months, even years. She brings the family together. Also, if there are any problems within the family, they will leave it at the door. Without this special dish and

the special person that makes it, our family would not really interact with each other. That's why my grandma's flan is so good, and that's why I love my grandma.

Ingredients

- 1 can leche Nestle
- 6 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 teaspoon flour
- 1 cup sugar



Directions

First, get a pan so it can be ready. Mix all the ingredients together until it turns into a nice smooth texture.

Melt the cup of sugar until it turns into a thick brown liquid. Then, put the melted sugar, while still hot, in the pan and move it around so the sugar covers the whole inside of the pan.

Set the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Put the pan in the oven, and let it sit there for about 35 minutes. After 35 minutes, check to see if it's thoroughly done by sticking a fork in the flan and taking it out. If the fork comes out clean, then it's ready. If the fork comes out with some mixture on it, then it needs more time. Repeat checking with the fork until the flan is done.

Arroz con Leche

By Alfredo Moran

The alarm goes off. The morning is quiet. Not a bird is singing. My grandmother opens her eyes. The clock reads six a.m. She puts on her nightgown and walks down the hall, her footsteps silently echoing into the distance. Her wavy hair is the same hair style she has worn since she was young and in Mexico. Her face is oval and with a few wrinkles, but her face contains years of experience. The kitchen is silent; the only sound is of the fridge. She takes a pot from the cupboard and places it on the stove, silently, like a thief in the night.

Without even making a sound, she takes two cups of white rice and pours them in the pot, ever so careful that it makes no noise. Without thinking about it, the energy just flows. She fills two cups with water and pours them into the pot. She turns on the stove and sets it to a low flame. Once the rice is cooked, that's where the magic happens.

Next, she adds the milk to the cooked rice. To keep the milk and rice from burning, she stirs it with a metal spoon. With each turn she adds a little bit of sugar and love to give it flavor. As she stirs one can see the rice that is hiding within the milk. As she continues to stir, what at first glance seems to be small minuscule pieces of driftwood are actually sticks of cinnamon.

A few minutes later, the sweet aroma creeps into the room. I wake to its most delicious smell. From the waft of its sweet flavor, I can practically taste it. The sweet smell reminds me of every bowl I have ever eaten.

The sweet smell of milk honey is intoxicating. With each sniff I am in a swirl of ecstasy. Like a vulture drawn to a carcass, I am drawn to this dish from the heavens. The power of this dish is too dominating, and I quickly realize I must have it.

As I hurry to get dressed, I notice the morning is still asleep. I wonder if it will ever get up. I arrive in the kitchen and find a pot of steaming hot arroz on the stove. I find a seat at the head of the table, like a king at his court.

When the arroz is done, my abuela gets a Driscoll sized bowl and serves me till the milk spills almost over the rim. The bowl sits there, steaming, the rice concealed by the milk. Impatiently, I take the spoon and have a bite. Exactly like I dreamed, the sweet, sugary milk rice is soft to the bite, and the milk is like nectar from the gods. Each spoonful is more deliciously intoxicating than the last.

To this day, and until the day I die, a bowl of arroz con leche will always be like a hot spring full of memories. Since as far back as I can remember, I have always eaten it.

The earliest of memories I can recall are of my grandmother making it for me before I went to school. Each day I would have arroz and it would remind me of the tranquility of the early morning. Each bite reminds me of my childhood and the friends I had since elementary school like Yareli. The day she pushed me down a flight of stairs I had eaten arroz for breakfast. With each spoonful, the memories come rushing back. One such memory is of my father. I was eating arroz, and he was eating eggs and frijoles next to me. I was playing around and not eating, while he was getting furious and telling me to eat.

Over the years the memories have grown, and new ones have been added. The bowl of rice has never lost its sweet taste or the love that it contains. It will always remind me of those who are close to me. I grew up with this dish and will continue to treasure it. The future is uncertain, but what I do know is I will always have a bowl of arroz and the memories that it contains.

Ingredients

- 2 ½ cups water
- 2 cups uncooked white rice
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 cups milk
- 2 cinnamon sticks

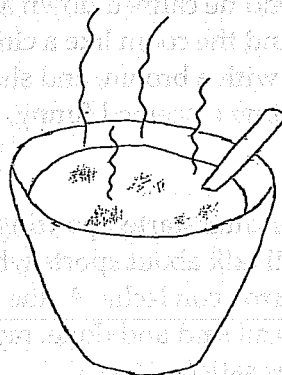
Directions

Put rice, cinnamon sticks, and water into the pot. Stir and bring to a quick boil. Reduce heat, cover, and let simmer until rice is cooked and water is absorbed.

Add milk and sugar; cook uncovered for 10 to 15 minutes. Stir to keep rice from burning.

Remove from heat, and let sit for 5 minutes.

Serves 2-4



Arroz

Con Leche

Arroz con Leche

By Leo Zubiri

As a little boy, I remember impatiently heading to my grandma's house and imagining her hot steamy arroz con leche with a hint of cinnamon flavor. I gazed towards the window and observed my grandma's white curly hair and her colorful apron. As I raced into her kitchen, I hoped that she would greet me with a hot cup of her arroz con leche. This dessert is very delectable. It can be eaten any time of the day, especially on a cold day. My family mostly eats it on Christmas. As I looked towards the pot, I saw the hot steam come out, pouring from the sides, making the whole house smell like arroz con leche. This dish is made with milk and rice and a stick of cinnamon that gives it a desirable taste. When I was a little boy in México, my grandma always used to make this gigantic pot of arroz con leche, and I loved going to her house because she would always cook my favorite dessert.

As I checked to see if the pot was finally done, I could smell the savory scent of the cinnamon that made my stomach grumble and my mouth water. My cousin Julio loved it even more than I did. He had these rolls of fat sticking out from the sides of his shirt, and they would bounce as if they were in slow motion when he ran. When he heard the word arroz con leche, his face would light up as if he were at a candy store. My uncles would actually drink most of it when they were drunk, and my grandma would often have to make more. I remember that on this Christmas it was different because as I waited impatiently, I did not show any sign of my impatience because I knew I would get in trouble like my chubby cousin Julio did.

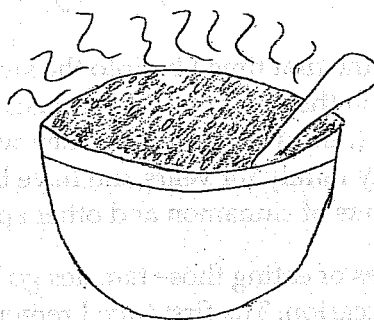
Julio got in trouble because he threw a fit when he didn't get some arroz con leche. My aunt spanked him and told him that he was not going to get any because he was acting stubborn and very annoying. At the end he calmed down and got some. It was funny because when he got a whooping, he ran around the room like a chicken without a head and hid under the bed. My aunt tried to get him out with a broom, and she would grunt when she was ready to whoop on my cousin Julio. At the time it seemed funny, but I didn't laugh because I knew I would be next if I did.

After finishing dinner, my grandma started pouring the arroz con leche. She poured a cup for everyone. My uncles would all talk about sports while my aunts gossiped, and all my cousins and I stuffed our faces with arroz con leche. At the table, we would all get along, even my girl cousins. After everything was all said and done, my grandma would have this satisfied look on her face because everyone was satisfied too.

This dessert is very important to me because it reminds me of my family in Mexico. When I was little I used to go to my grandma's all the time, and she always made me feel at home. Now that I don't live in México, I don't get to see her as much as I used to. She spent so much time just to put together this dish, and she always made it for everyone.

Ingredients

- ½ gallon milk
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 cups rice
- 1 cup sugar



Directions

Boil the milk in a pot for 5 minutes on low heat. Stir constantly.

Add rice into the milk, along with the cinnamon sticks and sugar.

Boil everything for 30 minutes on low heat. Check that the rice is soft and moist.

Cool off for 5 minutes before eating.

Serves 10-15

Tamales de Piña

By Alejandra Ruiz

I remember the first time I bit into the sweet taste of those sizzling hot tamales. Yes, I did say sweet. The reason they were sweet was because they were a special kind of *tamale*: they were *tamales de piña* (pineapple tamales). They were a mixture of dough and special ingredients that have been in my family for years and have been passed on from one generation to another; they also included bits of cinnamon and other spices.

My memories of eating those tamales go back so far that I can not remember not eating them on a special occasion. The first time I remember my mom making them was when I was about four or five. I can recall my mom and aunts meeting early at my house the morning of Christmas Eve. They would hurry off to buy the ingredients at the local Mexican grocery stores.

When they had all the ingredients they needed, they would hurry home and pick up clothes, makeup, their kids, and pots and pans or anything else they needed and bring it to my house. Once they returned to my house, they would wash their hands and clear off any dishes or any junk that was on the kitchen table. They would prepare the *masa* (dough) and scoop it into large bins that were separated by what type of *tamal* the dough was going to make.

As they were making the tamales, they would go on and on chit-chatting about *las novedades de la familia* (what's going on in the family), in other words, *los chismes de la familia* (the family's gossip).

"Sabias que Linda va a tener otro chiquillo? *Did you know Linda's having another baby?*" one of my aunts would say while lifting her eyebrows up so high it looked as if they almost touched the sky. My mom and my other aunts would open their eyes and mouths into big "o's" and respond in a chorus of "De veras! *Really!*" They would gossip, making these funny faces where their eyebrows went up as if they were surprised. Their eyes would open wide as if to say, "Oh my gosh!"

They would make the tamales, spreading the special dough mixture onto the yellow crisp corn husk. Then, they would fold the outer corners of the husk into the middle and then tie the top part. Next, they would arrange the different kinds of tamales in the *vaporeara* (steamer pot) they belonged in and wait until my mom or one of my aunts said the magic words, "Ya están listos. *They're ready.*"

Our moms would give us each one tamal just to shut us up. They would tell us to go away and get ready for dinner. My cousins would dash to their houses. Some of them who lived too far would have brought their clothes to my house, and we would all change into our brand new outfits for Christmas. Our mothers would scream at us not to get dirty and that dinner was going to be ready in a bit. We would wait for my uncles to arrive, and then we would be ready to eat!

All of us, the kids, would sit spread out all around in the living room watching TV, playing pranks, or talking with each other and eat our chicken, meat, or cheese tamales. We would guzzle the traditional drink to go with them, *atole*, which is made out of milk, sometimes dough, and different ingredients to create a thick milk drink. The adults would sit or stand around roaring with laughter, making fun of each other with crude jokes. After that we finally would move on to the pineapple tamales. I remember being served two pineapple tamales and unwrapping them slowly one by one and letting the hot steam hit me in the face. The sweet smells made me just want to stuff both tamales in my mouth at the same time. I would study

them and see beautiful fluffy rectangular shaped tamales. They were a glistening gold color like an astonishing gold necklace. I remember picking up my fork and cutting into the soft breadlike texture of the tamal and then stabbing it with my fork and rushing it straight into my mouth.

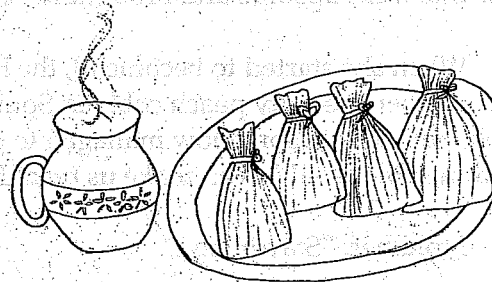
Every bite was wonderful. I could taste the sweetness of the pineapple with the zestiness of the little bit of cinnamon reminding me of *te de canela* (cinnamon tea). Chewing the tamal felt like chewing on the softest piece of bread that had ever been created. It was like Jesus dancing on my tongue barefoot, all the flavors and textures together making my taste buds go crazy because of the delicious tamal in my mouth. I couldn't wait for my next one.

My stomach was so full it felt like it could explode at any time, but I still wanted to keep on eating the delicious tamales. Every tamal I ate reminded me of the awesome time I was having with my family. After eating, it was off to play for my cousins and me. We would run around the house enjoying the second of usually three nights a year we got to spend awake until whatever time we wanted to without anyone suggesting we go to sleep. We would wait until midnight and open our presents. In our excitement we would get the munchies and go off to the kitchen for more *tamales de piña*.

Now, every time I eat *tamales de piña*, I remember being a crazy kid with my cousins on Christmas. I remember the fun times my family once had together as a family. Every time I have a tamal, I am reminded of much happier times that have now all gone away.

Ingredients

1 pack corn husks
2 pounds tamale dough
½ pound vegetable butter
1 ½ cups sugar
½ teaspoon salt
½ pineapple



Directions

Begin by washing the corn husks. Lay them out in a tray and prepare the dough. To prepare the dough, add the vegetable butter to the tamale dough, and add the sugar and the salt. Dice the pineapple into small pieces and also add it in. Mix everything together with washed hands, and add a tiny bit of water.

After preparing the dough, get the corn husks and grab a spoon. Spread the dough mixture on to the corn husk, moving up and trying to create as smooth a surface as possible. After spreading the dough, fold the right corner of the husk in, then the left, and then the bottom. As is the custom with pineapple tamales, tie the ends together with a thin piece of husk.

To cook the tamales, place them in a large steamer pot that is filled with water in the bottom and has a round piece of metal with holes to let the steam through. Place them in the pot in rows that go around the pot. Close the pot, and leave it on medium heat for about four hours.

Serves 12-16

Peach Cobbler

By Walter Baker

My grandmother did not use the peaches that come in a can. She said, "It destroys the essence of the peaches." Instead, she always went to the grocery store and picked the ripest of peaches.

She washed the peaches underneath the sink. Then, she began to cut the fresh peaches in half and sliced the halves in half. Now, all the split peaches were moon-shaped. She left them there and started on the crust.

Peach cobbler reminds me of my grandmother in so many different ways. Peach cobbler is known to have a "rough" crust on the outside. The crust reminds me of my grandmother because nothing, and I mean nothing at all, could break her spirit. She was hard as cement.

As soon as you open the "rough" crust, you enter the softness of the peaches. Even though my grandmother was "rough" on the outside, she had a soft and kind heart. She always came by the table and asked if we wanted more and if everything was all right. My grandmother would also be ready to cook more because she felt that we did not have enough.

As soon as you put the peaches in your mouth, you can taste the tenderness of them. My grandmother was also tender. When I cut myself chopping the vegetables, she told me to sit down. She went upstairs and brought me back a band-aid even though she knew she was ill.

When she started to become ill, the harder it became for her to cook. She could barely even make her specialty peach cobbler. Some days she was so sick, she couldn't even get out of the bed, but she still somehow managed to get out of the bed and cook. She could make everything. She would even make us breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

I told her, "Stay in bed."

"Ain't no sickness is going to keep me in bed, child," she replied with an Oklahoma accent.

I always wondered where I got my stubbornness from — my grandmother. I made her cooking a lot easier because I started to help her in the kitchen. I would help her cut up the food and pass the ingredients to her when she needed them.

Before she was admitted to the hospital, she was lying in the bed, and she couldn't get out of the bed at all. She called my mom. My mother bent down, and my grandmother whispered something in her ear.

After she was done, a big grin appeared on my momma's face. I asked my momma, "What did she tell you?"

She said, "The secret ingredients to the peach cobbler."

"What was it?" I asked.

The "secret" was love.

This is why the memory of my grandmother is important to me. The making of the peach cobbler is the only thing that brings me closer to her. I could sense her presence being there and doing all the things she used to do when she was alive. Memory was important to me because even though my grandmother was not feeling well, she would always cook and even make her peach cobbler. It was the will of my grandmother that helped her get out of bed. It was her will that helped her cook for us. Her will was also her downfall. Because of her sheer will, her sickness got worse. She passed a few months later, after she told my mom the "secret" ingredients to her peach cobbler. The will of my grandmother was not giving up no matter what.

Ingredients

Biscuit Dough:

1 tablespoon shortening

1 cup flour

2 ½ teaspoons baking powder

¼ teaspoon salt

½ cup milk

Cobbler:

6 ripe peaches

½ cup sugar

1 tablespoon cinnamon

¼ cup butter

a few drops of lemon juice

biscuit dough topping

Directions

Biscuit Dough:

Mix the dry ingredients. Cut shortening in with a pastry blender or knives. Add milk gradually to make dough soft. If too soft, add a little more flour. Put the dough in the baking pan before the filling.

Cobbler:

Cut the peaches in halves, and begin cutting the halves in moon shaped pieces. Put the sliced peaches in a pot for 45 minutes. Add the cinnamon, sugar, lemon juice, and butter in the pot with the peaches. Stir it for 2 minutes.

Put the peach filling in the pan with the biscuit dough. Cover the filling with more biscuit dough. Poke holes in the peach cobbler on top with a fork, so that the juice can come through. Put the peach cobbler in the oven, and bake at 350 degrees for an hour until light brown. Pull it out of the oven, and let it cool down for about 20 minutes.

Serves 8

Cheesecake

By Gorgonio Enriquez

I remember taking my first bite of cheesecake. It was my mom's special cake. I was only seven years old, gazing at the TV playing video games. My mom brought me a glass of milk with her cake. It was the sweetest thing I had ever tasted. At an early age, I decided to help her make the cake to learn to make it myself.

She would be careful not to drop too much sugar in the other ingredients. I always licked the spoon clean after mixing the ingredients. I loved the smooth and squishy feeling as I stirred the mix. The eggshells would always land in the mix when I cracked them. One time I was stirring the mix when all of a sudden, I pushed too hard and it landed on my little brother's head. He was crying because he didn't want to take a shower.

I can still remember living in Berkeley during my elementary days. I would take the school bus every day waiting to go home. My parents would be home doing their daily chores. My mom spent hours preparing her specialties. She would make taquitos de al pastor or asada. My little brother would take a peek inside the oven for dessert. His mouth watered as the steam of air filled our kitchen. Its sweet aroma of vanilla angered my tummy.

My dad was a funny man. He liked to play video games. His favorite game was Super Mario. We would spend days and nights trying to defeat the game. Our eyes would not blink for a second. He always screamed and yelled his lungs out when he lost. If he won he would put it all in my face.

"Esto es la vida," my dad would say as he rubbed his stomach. He ate even the smallest crumb if there was no more cake. His plate would be spot clean. His mustache would be soaked in milk. He would just smile while sticking his tongue out for milk droppings.

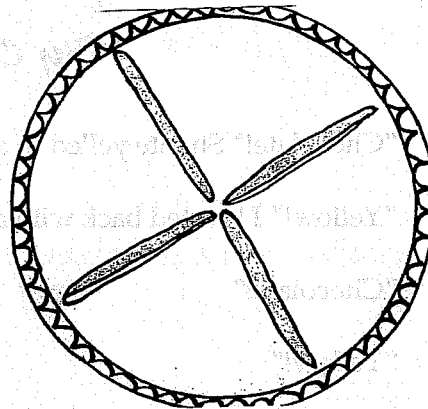
Its light and fluffy mouthwatering creamy taste would send my taste buds out of this world. On top of the cake I would drop a cherry. It was so irresistible that I'd want more and more. My little brother would squeeze chocolate syrup on his dessert. His face would be covered in sticky syrup. Sometimes he would take an hour in the bathroom to get the mess off. Its warm feeling inside my belly cooled down with a glass of milk. My whole family loved the cake. It was so good everyone would fight over a slice.

The cake throughout the years became a family treasure. As I grew older it meant a lot more than just a cake. It was the only thing that reminded me of my father. My parents divorced, but the cake stayed the same. Now every time I taste the soft and creamy cheesecake, I feel like my dad is next to me enjoying the cake.

In the end everyone would be groaning about their tummies hurting. My dad would just say, "It's worth the pain" as he opened a bottle of Pepto Bismol.

Ingredients

½ cup butter or margarine
¾ cup sugar
1½ teaspoons vanilla
1 cup flour
4 eggs
4 packages 8 oz. softened cream cheese



Directions

Mix butter, ¼ cup of the sugar, and ½ teaspoon of vanilla with electric mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy.

Mix cream cheese, remaining ½ cup of sugar, and 1 teaspoon vanilla with mixer on medium speed until well blended. Add eggs.

Gradually add flour, mixing on low speed until blended. Press onto bottom of 9-inch spring form pan.

Bake at 325 degrees for 25 minutes or until the edges are light golden brown.

Serves 12

Yellow-Chocolate Cake

By Clinnesha Givans

"Chocolate!" Shante yelled in a joking way.

"Yellow!" I blurted back with a huge grin on my face.

"Chocolate!"

"Yellow!"

"How about yellow with chocolate frosting?" Jovan suggested with a slightly devilish yet goofy grin on her face.

"UGH...Boring! I say chocolate," Shante replied, throwing the cake mix in the shopping cart.

"You're a super loser. I say yellow. Plus I'm a house guest, so what I say goes," I said in a playful tone.

Still unsure of what kind of cake mix to get, we wound up getting both. Everyone in the supermarket looked at us, amazed at how much fun we were having while shopping for the rest of the ingredients we needed to make our cake. We raced up and down the aisle tossing all types of extra goodies in our basket.

My sister Shante is the type of person who is serious but also knows how to have a good time. She doesn't care what other people think of her. Therefore, she didn't mind us running around the store like children. Shante is a nineteen-year-old college student. Even with the age gap, she's my and Jovan's third best friend.

Jovan is my stepsister and best friend. People have always told Jovan and me that we resemble one another, but we're not even blood related. At times I forget that because we're so much alike. As far as our looks, we both have really chubby cheeks, our hair is usually the same length, and our attitudes are almost identical. We get irritated really quickly. We used to be the same height, but she and Shante have outgrown me.

As soon as we arrived at my sister Shante's apartment, we began to prepare the cake. First off, we had to find a bowl big enough to hold the cake mix. Still unsure of what kind of cake to make, we argued back and forth just laughing and having a ball. Then, I had this splendid idea.

"How about we mix them...that way we can both be satisfied," I said, compromising what I really wanted just to make my sister happy.

"As nasty as that sounds, I'm willing to try it," Jovan announced with a disgusted yet interested smile on her face.

"That sounds gross...but hey, let's try it," Shante mumbled.

I was already two steps ahead of them, pouring half of the yellow cake mix into the bowl. Then, Jovan began to pour the other half. Even though we were no baking experts, we knew not to pour all of each mix into the bowl because then we would have had too much cake. We all took turns mixing the cake, making sure all the lumps evened out. By the time we finished that, we were tired but curious to see how it would taste. While mixing it, the cake turned numerous shades of brown. I had to admit, it looked so nasty. Once the lumps were all gone, it was time to transfer the cake mix into a cake pan. But first we had to grease and flour the pan. That was fun: flour ended up everywhere. It was all over us. It looked like we had rolled around in it rather than putting it in the pan. With flour all over my face, I looked ready to be a ghost for Halloween.

Meanwhile, with the cakes in the oven, we had girl talk. We had so much to catch up on. We had all been through lots in the past weeks and just needed to vent all of our emotions. This started off really calm and cool; then it just escalated. We began to talk and laugh very loudly. We hadn't seen our sister in at least a month, and this was just a happy time for Jovan and me. All the while, we tried not to make too much noise because we knew that could prevent our cake from rising.

Next thing I knew I got a *whiff* of something so sweet. It smelled excellent. I jumped up and speed-walked to the kitchen to check on our cake. To my surprise, when I opened the oven, our cake was nice and brown. The edges of the cake appeared to be nice and crispy whereas the center looked soft and moist.

Now it was time to frost the cake. Jovan was really confused when I just put the frosting in the microwave. She said I was lazy because I didn't frost the whole cake by hand. I told her this way was fast and easy because the faster it was frosted the faster we could eat it. I poured the hot milk chocolate frosting on top of the cake, and it just glistened. I poured on so much frosting that it ran off the plate that our cake now rested on. I hoped it tasted as good as it looked.

Now it was time to taste the yellow-chocolate cake creation.

"Oh My God!" I said, stunned by how delicious the cake was. It tasted so luscious, satisfying my taste buds on numerous levels. I could definitely taste the yellow cake, but chocolate cake just gave it this exotic taste. The frosting was what set it off, still warm and just melting through the cake. I had to say this was a tasty creation.

This memory means so much to me because this was my and my sisters' time to bond. We had really missed each other and needed this time to catch up on the latest events. All my life Shante has been like my life-sized diary. Now with her gone away to college, I really miss her. Baking this cake was symbolic because it was just like old times. Just the three of us.

Ingredients

- 3 large eggs
- 1/3 cup oil
- 1 1/3 cup water
- 2 boxes Duncan Hines cake mix (one yellow, one chocolate)
- 1 can Duncan Hines milk chocolate frosting

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour 10-inch Bundt pan.

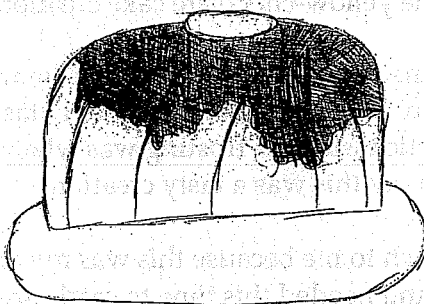
Combine half of each cake mix, water, and oil in large bowl. Beat for 2 minutes or until the lumps are out. Pour into pan.

Bake at 350 degrees for 50-60 minutes or until toothpick inserted into center comes out clean. Cool in pan for 25 minutes. Invert onto heat resistant serving plate. Cool completely.

For glaze, place frosting in a microwave safe bowl. Microwave on high power for 10-15 seconds. Stir until smooth. Drizzle over cake.

Serves 12

Calories-431.61, Total fat-19.72, Cholesterol-75.8mg,
Sodium-445.71mg, Total carbohydrates-66.84g, Protein-4.39g



Super Sundaes

By Brittany Douglas

"Zach, no!" I yelled trying to stop my little cousin from squirting me with chocolate syrup. We had only been in the kitchen five minutes before we started making a mess. "Stop being scared and take it like a man!" he roared at me, taking one step forward, with an evil grin on his face. As he pressed down on the bottle, I staggered out of the way, leaving him to cover the oven in chocolate sauce.

"Haha." My youngest cousin Isaiah chuckled, with a huge smile on his smooth brown skin while sticking his spoon in his sundae. He opened his mouth wide and took a bite out of what we called a super sundae. I grabbed my bowl and munched on a treat that would be shared among just the three of us.

Earlier that day we had been out at a restaurant not far from my cousin's house. We sat in the restaurant snacking and joking for about an hour before it was time to leave. On our way out of the restaurant, we passed by the ice cream bar and noticed them making these huge sundaes. We all wanted one, but after paying the bill there were barely two dollars left over. We left the restaurant knowing that we could not afford sundaes, but on the stroll back home, Zach came up with an idea to make our own.

Sundaes were never a tradition in my family until my cousins and I made them. Now, whenever we see each other, we have to make these special treats.

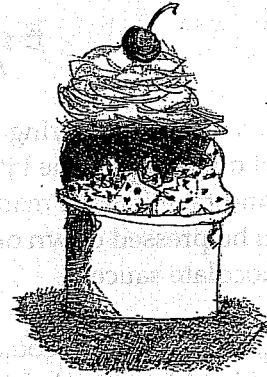
We begged my uncle to drop us off at the store to buy ingredients. Once we arrived back home, Zach, Isaiah, and I assembled our sundaes on the kitchen counter. We passed around the ingredients—ice cream, syrup, whipped cream, and sprinkles—and each snatched what we wanted. We didn't have a real recipe so we just threw on them what and how much we wanted. Between scooping ice cream and spraying whipped cream everywhere, it took us about five minutes to make the sundaes. I accidentally spilled some sprinkles on Zach, which led to the "chocolate incident." After all the fighting and making a mess, we had the finished product: chocolate syrup with three huge scoops of vanilla ice cream, followed by more syrup, and topped with whipped cream and sprinkles.

We ate decadent sundaes in the kitchen at a gigantic round table. Zach sat on my left and Isaiah on my right. Isaiah had gobbled down his sundae very quickly. He left whipped cream on his shirt and chin. By the time Zach and I had finished making our sundaes and started to chow down, Isaiah was almost finished. He threw his hand on his round stomach, and he was hunched over, making him seem shorter than his actual height. Once again he managed to outdo himself. The sundaes tasted rich from the chocolate, so I couldn't blame him for devouring his so fast. Daydreaming while I ate, Zach took this opportunity to steal some of my whipped cream. I was not in that big of a daze because I shoved his hand away from me. Just as I did that, he leaned over and burped in my ear.

Eating sundaes are so important to me because they remind me of my cousins who live far away. We don't get to visit each other very often, so when we do get together, we always have to make super sundaes. We use these as a way to have fun and create memories with each other. Whenever we get together and make sundaes, we can always expect a big mess. In fact, it's one of the main parts of the tradition that we relish.

Ingredients

3 scoops ice cream
2/3 cup chocolate syrup
1 tablespoon chocolate sprinkles
whipped cream



Directions

Heat syrup in sauce until warm.

When the syrup is warm, put half in bowl (or cup) and add 3 scoops of ice cream.

Top with the remaining chocolate syrup. Add desired amount of whipped cream. Finish off by adding chocolate sprinkles, and enjoy!

Serves 1

Christmas Cookies

By Zakiyah Murray

Right now, I'm lying in bed contemplating whether I want to get up or just lie there. Today feels different for some reason. It's not just another day. I hear "Jingle Bell Rock" playing in the kitchen....oh duh, it's Christmas! All of a sudden, a whiff of something sweet interrupts my thoughts. Cake? No...Pie? Wrong again...Cookies? Ding-Ding-Ding! An aromatic cloud of butter, eggs, and brown sugar rests above my head.

It's early Christmas morning. The phone is constantly ringing. Pots and pans are dropping on the kitchen floor. It sounds like Mom and Dad are baking holiday goodies. This is something they do exceptionally well. I can't take it anymore. I get up, brush my teeth, and stroll into the kitchen to taste a warm, chewy, and moist chocolate chip cookie. Unfortunately, my sister beats me to the kitchen and is now reaching for the cookie with the most chips in it.

"Kiyah!"

"Yeah, mom?"

"C'mon, let's go!"

"Coming!"

My parents and I are preparing to deliver sweet treats to friends and loved ones. Their cookies are more famous than Amos's! This is something we do each Christmas. Everyone looks forward to this time of year. My parents are the most kind-hearted people I know, not just around holiday time, either. They just love being a blessing to people.

I love baking fresh homemade goodies with my family; the warm sugary sweet taste, the chocolate melting in my mouth, and the desire to eat the leftover dough. When my parents are making cookies, they don't rush. They take time and effort in putting lots of love in the cookies. Teamwork is a big value in my family. We help each other out by working together. When you have someone helping you out, the job is usually done better not to mention faster. First the sugar, then the eggs, making sure no eggshells fall in! After the dough is made, they use an ice cream scoop to shape the cookies. It's used so they all come out to be about the same size. They often wear aprons to keep their clothes from getting dirty. When the cookies are removed from the oven, they're placed on a wire rack to cool. If the treats are stacked on top of each other while they're hot, they'll stick together.

We often give freshly-baked cookies to family members and friends. Since several friends have moved to different states, I ship goodies to them. Giving out fresh cookies to some of the young people at church has become a habit. We even share treats with our neighbors during the holidays. I've never met anyone who doesn't like some type of cookie.

Giving a gift of cookies is a small way of making people happy. It's often not the big things you can do for a person, but the small, simple things in life. A gift of freshly-baked treats is a way of showing that you care.

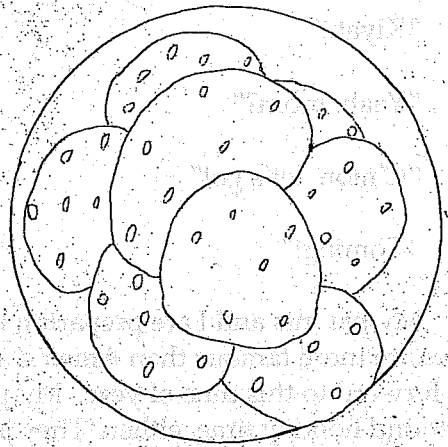
Words can't really describe the look I see on people's faces when they receive my parents' cookies. Sometimes, based on their facial expression, you might think they won the

Lotto! Their faces light up with joy, and their smiles gleam like the sun. Some people we give baked goods to don't have much money. They're not able to spend and splurge at Christmas time like most people do. Giving these sweet treats as gifts during the holidays are extra special gifts to the people who receive them. One of the first things people do is smell the gift bag to make sure there are edible treats inside. The second thing they do is put on a big smile. The last thing they do is dig in, making sure not to drop any crumbs!

Most people commercialize the holidays. They shop, run up their credit. They do everything except remember the true meaning of Christmas. It's not about what's under the tree. The holidays are about the little things and the joy they bring. Cookies brought me "sweet joy" around the holidays when I was a child. They still do to this day. I guess some things never change.

Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups butter or margarine, softened
- 1 ¼ cups granulated sugar
- 1 ¼ cups packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- 2 eggs
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 package (24 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips



Directions

Heat oven to 350° F. Mix butter, sugars, vanilla and eggs in large bowl using spoon. Stir in flour, baking soda, and salt. Stir in chocolate chips.

Drop dough by rounded measuring tablespoonfuls about 2 inches apart onto ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake 12 to 15 minutes or until light brown. Cool slightly. Remove from cookie sheet to wire rack. Cool.

Makes 3 ½ dozen cookies

1 Serving: Calories 240 (Calories from Fat 110), Total Fat 12 g (Saturated Fat 7 g),
Cholesterol 25 mg; Sodium 170 mg, Total Carbohydrate 32 g (Dietary Fiber 1 g),
Protein 2 g, Percent Daily Value: Vitamin A 4 %, Vitamin C 0%, Calcium 2 %

Chocolate Chip Cookies

By Lucia Sieng

As I sat alone in the empty History classroom, I bit into my chocolate chip cookie. Only the sounds of me munching on my treat echoed in my ears and possibly around the room. I gazed out the door and spotted students already leaving school with their friends.

The kids always left in their little groups. I focused on a few of them and wondered why I was always by myself. It never used to be this way, but there wasn't much I could do anyway. As I drifted on and off my thoughts, my hold on the crisp, circular cookie loosened until my precious, little treat fell onto the ground and rolled a few feet away.

I stared at the tiled floor where the brownish cookie sat and blinked once, then twice, after registering that my cookie had *actually* fallen down. "OH MY GOSH, NO!" I shrieked.

I stood up from my chair, ready to bolt over to my cookie as if it was an invalid in need of the emergency room. Instead, I just stood there, gazing at the hypnotic cookie. It looked exactly like the one my childhood friend, Julio, had made for me years ago. The memories of him were a bit foggy, but I had always managed to put the pieces together. I slumped into the nearest chair as the memories came flooding back to me....

I was eleven years old at the time while Julio was thirteen, and we had gone to the arcade. I had totally forgotten the name of the arcade or how it looked, but what I did remember were lots of tables where kids could play air hockey or ping pong. Also, I remembered Julio wearing his usual slate colored sweater with blue jeans and plain white shoes that very day.

Julio was carrying a little white box of homemade chocolate chip cookies. He glanced about the room, smirking all the while, and said that winner takes all the cookies in air hockey. So we both started playing the game, and he won seven times in a row. (It was still fun, nonetheless!) Julio's full, pinkish lips beamed victoriously at me as he sprinted about the room, holding up a cookie as if it was the first trophy he had ever won. His gelled, jet black hair and dark brown eyes were reflecting little specks of light everywhere he went. People were giving him odd expressions of stark-raving terror and occasionally stepped out of his way in fear of getting run into, though I doubted that Julio could knock someone over with his skinny body.

My gaze followed him around as he went until he dashed out the door. I gasped, grabbed the box of cookies and followed him out the opened metallic doors because I thought he had run outside by accident. I bumped into someone along the way, but quickly apologized and glanced at the person.

I couldn't even see the stranger's face because he or she was wearing a black hooded robe. The person reminded me greatly of the grim reaper but without the skulled face and scythe. Even after all this time registering the appearance of the stranger, I was still paralyzed by his or her looks and towering height. What scared me even more was when the stranger stepped up close to me, squatted down to my eye level and seemed to be reaching for me. I had no idea if the person was trying to get debris off my arm or was about to drag me somewhere to kill me, but I knew I had to react.

Out of nowhere, a half-eaten cookie was thrown to the side of the person's head. As the stranger turned to look at where the cookie had come from, I took this distraction as an opportunity and smashed my fist into the stranger's jaw.

The person toppled backwards onto the ground, and I shook my hand vigorously because pain was pulsating rapidly through my fingers. Julio stepped into my sights, amazed at how I had actually knocked someone over because I never threw punches at anonymous people. The stranger was about to get up, but Julio grabbed my arm and dragged me down the dimly lit street. It was so dark without the light posts working, and all I could see were outlines of the shadowy buildings.

Julio and I were laughing almost all of the way because my knocking the stranger down was so hilariously random. I was nearly gasping for air and had to move my legs twice as fast because Julio's were longer. We sped towards his house because it was way closer than mine. Once we had finally reached his house, Julio and I didn't even turn on the lights because we had forgotten in our rush. We stumbled through the living room, the hallway, and finally collapsed in what we guessed was Julio's room.

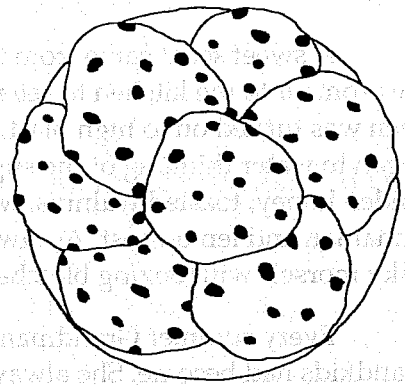
We were both panting heavily and tried catching our breaths. Julio pushed himself onto his knees and reached for the light switch. Then, he took a good look at my hand as I placed the box of cookies onto the table. Julio stood up, walked out the door, and after some moments, came back with an ice pack and another box of cookies. Julio told me he had made them himself at school and had gotten an A for it.

I stared at the cream colored box and placed the ice pack onto my hand. I was able to sniff out a cinnamon and bread mixture emitting from the cookie. He took out a cookie from the box and handed it to me. I stared at the brownish, chocolate chip dappled cookie in wonder. After I finished the first one, I got another of the scrumptious treat. I held it in my hand, but my fingers began seeping in through its soft, mushy center. Its chocolaty taste was so overwhelming that I could practically swirl it around in my mouth with my tongue and the flavor would still get to me. All the while, Julio kept staring at me, which made me kind of nervous because I couldn't eat like this. It was obvious that he was worried the cookies tasted like crap and I was just eating another to put on a sugar coated act concealing my disgust. So I told him out loud how delicious they were, and he gave me a random hug, which surprised me so much that we both started laughing.

That was really one of the best times in my life even though it may not be a big deal to others. It was the first time I had ever taken a swing at a stranger and gotten saved (even though I may have not been in any real danger) by both Julio and a *cookie*. I kept thinking about this memory until the History teacher came back and asked me what I was doing. I blinked and managed to snap out of my thoughts to pick up the cookie. I walked over to the trash can, dropped it in, and told him I wasn't doing anything. I took my backpack and left out the door thinking more on the memory. Cookies just don't taste as delicious as when I was spending time with Julio, and I'm sure they never will again.

Ingredients

1 cup flour
½ tablespoon salt
½ cup butter
2/3 cup brown sugar
1 egg
½ cup chocolate chips
1 tablespoon vanilla



Directions

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Place the flour, brown sugar and salt into a large bowl, and mix them a little bit.

Then, get the egg and crack it open over the bowl. Put both the butter and the vanilla into the bowl as well. Stir all the ingredients until mixture turns into one even color. After that, dump all of the chocolate chips in, and stir until the chips are dappled in random areas of the mixture.

Get a lightly greased cookie pan. Sprinkle the flour throughout the pan so the dough will not become sticky on it. Take some of the cookie dough, and make them into the size of golf balls. Continue on with the rest. Then, place each "ball" onto the pan at least three inches from one another. With a fork, try to flatten the cookie dough a bit, but do not make them too thin.

Bake the cookie dough for 10 minutes or until they look golden. Let the cookies cool down for 2 to 5 minutes before serving.

Serves 2-3

Protein-1g, Riboflavin-2g, Iron-2g, Thiamin-2g, Folate-2g

Baklava

By Yareli Ortiz

A sweet scent came from the kitchen, gently luring me in. I began to tiptoe, following the aroma into the kitchen to see my Grandmama standing tall over the marble counter. The oven was turned on to high blast, the assembled baklava sitting on the baking trays. My mouth began to water thinking of the sugary goodness. I filled my head with images of the sweet golden honey, toasted walnuts, with tons and tons of sugar and never forgetting the hints of cinnamon and lemon zest. As always, the final piece seemed even better than the first of the flaky morsels with oozing blotches of honey once broken in half.

Every summer Grandmama flew in from Russia to see how tall every one of her grandkids had become. She always complained, with her hand flinging all over the place, how Americanized baklava was so disgusting. Before her visits my mother knew exactly what ingredients to place on the counter, cinnamon, butter, sugar, walnuts and lemons. Grandmama's eyes would gleam in astonishment as she saw her favorite ingredients sitting on the marble counter. On every visit she would look at me and tell me to put on an apron and be her little helper. My face always became lit with a smile brighter than the sun. As I opened up the flour, it fell and made a white mess. Seeing my face covered in flour, my grandmama would reach for a moist paper towel and gently wipe my face of the mess, chuckling slightly.

Every time we made baklava, the mess would decrease. Each visit was a class. I learned how to roll dough and how to blend ingredients together. As Grandmama placed the phyllo dough on the butter pan, we'd exchange stories. Grandmama would tell me about Russia's beauty, and as for me, I would teach her how to groove like the BackStreet Boys. Laughter always overcame us as Grandmama attempted to disco dance while stirring the boiling sugar water.

Since I was her only special helper, she taught me to roll the phyllo dough back and forth, side to side. I would finish rolling, and she'd cut small pieces of phyllo dough on to the baking sheet rubbed in butter. Once I had nothing to do, I'd look at my Grandmama's handiwork, pouring honey, vanilla, and lemon zest into a hot pan on the stove. The summer was blazing so hot that it made her sweat; she wiped the small drops off her semi-wrinkled forehead, as she pushed back her bushy grey hair with a sliver hair clip.

The family dinner table was rarely put to use. It was for "special occasions" like Grandmama's visits, my mother always told us. They were special because she wanted to cook for us. She never wanted us to cook for her. Grandmama treated us like the guests even though we tried to snatch the pots and pans from her. After dinner was over, my lovely Grandmama would be the first one to grab all the plates from the table like a NASCAR driver in a race. She'd place the dishes in the sink as she pulled out the prepared baklava and decorated it with drizzles of chocolate syrup for good tasting.

Grandmama would assemble every delicate plate for each person and await our response. We'd take a bite, and our eyes would begin to dance in joy realizing that we had missed her baklava since last summer. The sugar rush energized the family's taste buds. After the family was finished, we seemed as if we were going to explode like an atomic bomb from the fullness. Baklava was always the sensational dish of every visit.

Summer of 2001 was a special visit from Russia. When Grandmama came to our home, for some reason it seemed as if it was to be the last. She seemed to be growing very weak and frail, yet I always brought a smile to her face. I was so glad to see Grandmama that I asked her if

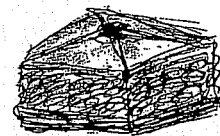
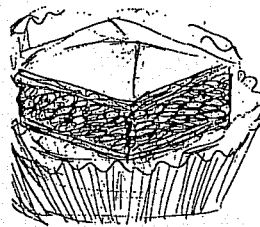
she'd help me bake baklava for her. She became emotional as she sat on the chair regaining energy. I rolled the phyllo dough and combined the rest of the ingredients. Once the final piece was done, I grabbed plates for my Grandmama and me to eat. I assembled the baklava on the plate, serving her as she once did for me.

My Grandmama gently ate my creation. Her eyes lit up, giving me a sign that it was scrumptious. I took a bite of the baklava, tasting its sweet honey taste and the flakiness. The flakes drizzled like rain onto the plate after a bite. The baklava was not sour or too sweet, yet it wasn't as good as the original instructor of baklava's. Once she finished the piece of baklava, she began to cry tears of joy. I hugged her and asked why she was crying. She gently grasped my hand, looking straight into my eyes, and said, "I'm so happy that you've prepared this wonderful and delicious recipe for me. You did a wonderful job." She wiped the tears from her eyes with a napkin as both of us rose in a swell of emotion.

The year went by, and my Grandmama passed away. My life became gloomy as it set into reality that I would never get to bond again with my amazing great grandmother. Baking together was long gone. Yet reality split upon me, I knew I still had a piece of her in the palms of my hands. I had her baklava recipe, one of my Grandmama's favorite desserts. I vowed to myself that I would never forget her recipe, for it was better than a golden locket or a diamond. Instead of letting go, I received a piece of my Grandmama's loving heart. Now each time I eat baklava, the great memories flow back; from the laughter to the tears, those were the best. Now those memories lay in the baklava's good old taste.

Ingredients

1 pound walnuts finely chopped
½ cup sugar
½ cup melted butter
1 package frozen phyllo dough
1 cup water
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 cup honey



Directions

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Combine and set aside walnuts, 1/2 cup sugar, and cinnamon. Using a pastry brush, lightly brush the bottom and side of a 10 x 14" pan with melted butter. Open the phyllo dough layer, 6 whole leaves (or half leaves), in the pan, buttering each layer as you go. Spread 1 cup of the walnut mixture.

Layer 8 half sheets of phyllo dough. Butter each layer. Each sheet will be an inch or so short. Stagger the sheet from corner to corner to cover the baking pan. Spread 1 cup of the walnut mixture. Repeat 8 sheets and walnut mixture twice. You will end up with 4 layers of nuts. Bake 1 hour or until golden brown.

Fifteen minutes before the baklava is done, mix 1 cup sugar, water, and lemon juice in saucepan. Cook sauce over medium heat, and stir occasionally for 15 minutes. Remove sauce from heat, and add the honey and vanilla. Stir until well blended. Remove the baklava from the oven, and finish cutting through the layers. Pour the sauce over the hot baklava. Let it cool. Let the baklava sit in the fridge for about four hours.

Makes 36 pieces

