

Personal Insights from the Old Pueblo Group

Sharing our world with you.

Food for Thought

Replenish the Soul, Nourish the Body – Blanca Arellano

It has been a little over a year since I joined the Old Pueblo Group. In this short time, the team has become more than just a group of coworkers – they have become family. After all, we do spend at least one-third of our waking hours at the office together. Like family, we depend on each other every single day. We provide support when facing challenges in our lives. We listen to each other with patience and understanding. We depend on one another to guide the team to success. And like a family, we share in laughter when we gather around a dinner table. For me, these moments have become a cherished aspect of being part of the team.

Growing up in a border town and as part of two very close-knit Hispanic families, I quickly learned the importance and the value of family. On my dad's side, my grandparents had six children: three girls and three boys. On my mom's side, my *Abuelita Crucita*, who was widowed at a young age, raised eight children: one boy and seven girls. My childhood was full of weekends at grandpa and grandma's house, running around and playing tag with my cousins. Most of the time, though, I was at my abuelita's house. When I wasn't outside making real mudpies, I would lounge around and watch PBS. I loved watching Bob Ross and Julia Child and was amazed at how creative they were as they designed beautiful masterpieces all in 30 minutes. Looking back though, the person I should have been watching in the kitchen was my Abuelita Crucita.

My grandma was a very modest woman. Her mornings started off with a coffee. Every evening she watched *Primer Impacto*. She had the most beautiful garden. Her green thumb could revive a dead plant. Trust me, I know this because she revived TWO gardenias that I killed. The only thing better than her green thumb was her *sazón*. She never followed recipes, only her heart. Something was always cooking. She always had something ready for you to eat. I close my eyes and I can still smell the aromas of homemade *mole* wafting from the kitchen through the house, out the front door, and down the sidewalk. I can see the glass pitcher sitting out in the sun all day for the most refreshing sun tea. You never needed to add sugar because it was perfectly sweet all the time. Even though she lived alone, she would prepare meals as if she were feeding an army. All her dishes were made from love. Love was all she had to give. She poured her heart and soul into her cooking and that is how she would bring the family together. She knew this very well and she did it as often as she could. She knew that during the week, my uncles would drop by unannounced just because they were in the area. In reality, it was lunch time, they were hungry, and they knew where to go for the best *carne con papas* or *chile colorado* with homemade *tortillas de harina*.

As a kid, I never truly appreciated my grandma's cooking nor the time she spent in the kitchen preparing her dishes. All I knew was that it smelled good and it tasted delicious. I wish I would have sat her down and written down her recipes. I have never been able to figure out how she made *mole ranchero*. I asked her for that recipe once and she recited it as I was eating. I wasn't paying attention since my tastebuds were having a glorious party and my brain could not focus as I ate. The only thing I remember about that recipe was that she added breadcrumbs. As an adult, I have learned my way around the kitchen and have mastered a few recipes of my own that I like to cook for my family. Some of the most requested dishes have been red pozole and the homemade version of Chico's Tacos (those of you familiar with El Paso will know what I am talking about). I have made tortillas from scratch with my daughter as I used to do with my grandma. My aunts have continued the tradition of making tamales for the family during Christmas time just like they used to do with my grandma.

My grandma passed away in 2017. Although she has been gone for almost ten years, her memory still lives on in our hearts. Without her ever knowing it, my grandma taught me one of the most beautiful life lessons I know: food is love. If you have food on the table and family in your home, your heart will be full. My extended family has spread out all across the southwest but we get together at least once every three months. We make up any excuse to gather around a table anytime we can. I hope to carry her legacy of bringing people together around a table. Nothing warms my heart more than a table surrounded by loved ones in a room full of laughter mixed with the sounds of clanking dishes.

When we feed the body, we feed the soul! I am grateful the OPG team gave me a seat at their table and chose me to break bread with their family.



Blanca making tortillas alongside her Grandma Cruz in 1988

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