

# FOOD AND CULTURE

## Comfort Food

The current issue has medicine as its main theme, and I would like to talk to you about a certain type of food. On one hand, we have the food that is considered to be medicinal because of its curative characteristics. One important example across all times is garlic.

On the other hand, we have foods that are curative not only because of their chemical elements but also because they cause a certain type of comfort, which creates a feeling of wellness in our soul, like endorphins. Comfort food is that which brings back memories of our childhood and that which smells so good, it makes us think of the people or family with whom we ate those foods.

It is because of this feeling of comfort and wellness that we have expressions such as “caldo de pollo para el alma,” or in English “chicken soup for the soul.”

My grandmother, Seena, recently passed away at 90. She was a woman who had a strong impact on my life. The special smell of her house and her food are two things that I will always carry in my memory. She and I shared a very special love for the kitchen, and when possible, she cooked with me and loved to see me on my television segments about food. I loved to eat in her house and feel the love that her food caused in me. I grew up in Mexico, and they lived in the United States. When they came to visit us, my grandparents really enjoyed Mexican food. My grandfather devoured all the sweet bread and bolillos in the bakery, and my grandmother loved to walk in the vegetable and fruit markets as well as the artisan markets, absorbing all the smells, flavors and colors with her artistic eyes and spirit.

She was an excellent cook and enjoyed collecting recipes. She had a red binder in which she glued all the recipes that were important to her that

signified a lot in her life. She always told me that she wanted to leave me this book when she was gone. Since my grandmother is gone, my uncle sent me my grandmother’s famous red binder. My heart beat very strongly when I received the book, and right away, I opened the package and put it to my nose to smell it because I wanted it to smell like my grandmother.” It did have that particular smell of her house and of her kitchen with years of cooking. It was like she had never left.

These recipes made me nostalgic because I do not have her sitting next to me to tell me what each of these recipes, so neatly cut from magazines and newspapers, meant to her, as well as some hand-written ones she had also included.

The last recipe that she gave me before leaving us was one of pickled vegetables, which she often prepared and was so delicious. The only thing that I can say is that you should enjoy each and every moment with the people who give you comfort and who feed the soul, because grandmothers are not eternal. Their soups and dishes, even though the recipe exists, are not made by their beautiful hands forever. What is left and that which comforts us is the beautiful memory of their hugs and kisses and their delicious dishes that spoiled our soul.

For ever my dear BIBI (Abuelita)

### Pickled Salad

- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 C. white vinegar
- ½ C. sugar
- 1 tsp. celery seeds
- ¼ C. vegetable oil
- 5 or more C. of finely sliced cucumber
- 1 finely sliced onion

(You can use other vegetables such as bell pepper, carrots, etc.)

1. In a medium pot on high flame, put the salt, vinegar, sugar, celery seeds and oil to boil. Remove from the heat, and let cool for 20 minutes.

2. In a large recipient, put the sliced cucumber and onion along with the cooled vinegar solution. Let soak all night in the refrigerator. If you make more than 5 C. of vegetables, you will need to make more liquid.

At the end of my grandmother’s recipe is the word “enjoy.” This is the lesson of life that she left me because she always had the wisdom to enjoy and take life in the best way possible. She always said, “If life gives you lemons, then you have to make lemonade!” ♦

