

**Topic:** Growing Up At My Grandparent's

**Abstract:** Growing up, I spent a lot of time at my grandparent's house. I could always find my grandmother in the kitchen cooking up something like fresh pinto beans, nopales, and in December tamales. I was brought up with a combination of Mexican and American cultures when it came to food. With my mother, I ate more American food like grilled cheese sandwiches, macaroni and cheese, barbeque chicken, and the occasional drive thru restaurants. However, I could always count my grandmother to have a pot of fresh pinto beans to eat.

**Keywords:** Food, Frijoles, Fresh Pinto Beans, Tamales, Nopales, Grandmother, Grandparent's House, Mother

**Ethnic Designation:** *Mexican-American*

**Cultural Category:** Food Practices

### There's Always Fresh Frijoles

When I think of ethnic food, I think of fresh cooked pinto beans (or as I referred to them growing up as *frijoles*) and as luxury tamales at Christmas. As I was growing up, I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house while my mother was at work. My grandmother would always be cooking up something for my grandfather or uncles. Whether it was for breakfast, lunch, or dinner I could always find my grandmother in the kitchen. I remember looking forward to breakfast in the morning when my mom would drop me off at my grandparents' house. Breakfast would consist of fresh beans, eggs, bacon, and corn tortillas, with a glass of orange juice. When lunchtime came around my grandmother and I would take lunch to my grandfather at his job site. She would usually take fresh pinto beans, warm corn tortillas and some fresh homemade chile. When I

entered kindergarten I would look forward to being picked up after school by my grandmother and then go to Mc Donald's for a happy meal. Everyday after school I would get a happy meal and I thought that it was the best after school pick me up.

Once it became 5 o'clock I knew my mother would be on her way to pick me up and since it was only my mother and I at home I knew dinner would consist of grilled cheese sandwiches and tater tots, another one of my favorites. On weekends, my mother would barbeque chicken, make white rice and steam vegetables for dinner. With my mother, I ate more American food like macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and the occasional drive thru restaurant. No matter what I ate for dinner with my mother, I would always make sure to take home from my grandmother's some fresh beans. This was for just in case I got a little hungry later and wanted something to eat.

As December neared I knew that my grandmother would make tamales for Christmas dinner. As a child, I can remember my grandmother and mother making tamales at Christmas time. As I grew older making tamales in December just became the norm. In high school, I played sports and was not able to help make tamales, but my friends and I would go to my grandmother's house after practice and eat some with fresh pinto beans. It wasn't till a few years ago when I moved back home that I help make tamales from start to finish.

In the past we would make tamales at my grandmother's, but over the last few years tamale making moved to my mother's house. The move ended up being good for the whole operation because my mother had all the equipment and space and it got my grandmother out of her house. My mother starts cooking the meat early in the morning and by 9 AM my grandmother would show up and make sure the meat was seasoned and

cooked correctly. My mother would also have the cornhusks soaking in water that made them more pliable. My grandmother would go and get the fresh *masa* (ground dried corn kernels) and bring it back to my mother's house. My mother would prep the masa and put it all into a large bowl. Once the masa was ready all three of us would grab a spatula and start spreading the masa onto the cornhusks. My grandmother would add the meat and fold the tamales and place it into a pot with water to cook.

Today my mother and I have taken the tradition over and my grandmother stops by to "supervise" and make sure we are making the tamales the right way or her way. This past Christmas a friend wanted to learn how to make tamales so my mother and I set up all the ingredients. We brought out all the equipment, made the masa, the meat, and taught her how to make tamales.

Another staple in my culture was fresh *nopales* (cactus is Spanish). When I was ten years old I visited Mexico and I remember eating nopales. My grandfather would have a side of nopales with his meal. He even had a few cacti in the back yard at his home. My grandmother would simply take off all the *spinas* (thorns on the cactus in Spanish) from the cactus then cut the cactus into small rectangle pieces and boil them to cook.

As a child, I was brought up with both Mexican and American culture influences when it came to food. I grew up having the best of both sides of my family. Having fresh beans and nopales at my grandparents' house to barbeques and grilled cheese sandwiches at my mothers. However, having fresh beans takes me back to growing up at my grandparent's I knew there was always something to eat if there were fresh beans. I

remember asking my grandfather, “If there was anything other than beans to eat?” and he would tell me, “Mija, you will never go hungry as long as you have beans to eat.”