

## A SPOONFUL OF MY PAST

(A homage to my mother and her food)

By José Vásquez

It always starts with the smell... Every time when I smell some homemade Mexican food I start travelling right away: a flashback to the past...I know that smell. I know that place. It was centuries ago and the aroma almost takes me there...Almost, but not quite. The smell is similar, but never the same. Still, I can see myself: running barefoot, playing soccer all day shirtless under the sun in those summer days that were so long and yet so short. Then the music. Well at least it sounded like music to me. My mother calling me in for dinner, I'd walk in the kitchen and she'd be standing in front of the stove, stirring a pot of glory, making the smell of the food fill every corner of the house. "Go wash your hands", she would say without taking her eyes off the pot. She didn't have to; she knew where my hands had been.

At the center of the table a pile of tortillas adding to the rainbow of aromas of spices and herbs, meat and vegetables. I'd sit at the table and there it was: glory on a plate, hitting me first with the smell and then the taste. I'd start with a tortilla, no spoon, no fork; tortillas were my silverware. Mole, chorizo, eggs...anything, I would eat anything with a tortilla. If you think that eating Chinese food with chopsticks requires some skills, then, you should see me eat soup, that's right, soup with a tortilla...Now that's a spoonful and I'll have seconds of that.

It has been many years since my mother stopped cooking because of her arthritis. Since then, when I smell and taste the food that my aunts or sisters cook, I almost go back there to that time, to that place...Almost, but not quite. Will I ever be able to *smell* and *taste* that time and place again? Probably not, because the food that could take me there is no longer on the menu. And I know that my mother longs for those days, those days when she could make chicken necks taste like the best dish in the world.

If I could, I would take her back to that time, to that place, because I know that, as much as I miss her food, she regrets even more not being able to cook it for me. If I could, I would trade years of my life for a spoonful of my past, and then...then I would have seconds of that.