

Oral History



HALLY CHIRINOS *El Pulgarcito de America*

Salvadoran food is this beautiful piece of gold that's trapped within the quartz. Not a lot of people can find it. Not a lot of people will be able to appreciate it. But whoever has seen it, whoever lived through it, they cherish it so much. If it weren't for it, I would not have any of the things that I have today. I would not have any of the privileges that I have today.

La comida salvadoreña es esta hermosa pieza de oro que está atrapada dentro del cuarzo. No mucha gente puede encontrarla. No mucha gente será capaz de apreciarla. Pero quienquiera que la haya visto, quien la vivió, la aprecia tanto. Si no fuera por eso, yo no tendría ninguna de las cosas que tengo hoy. No tendría ninguno de los privilegios que tengo hoy.

TUAN (JOHN) NGUYEN *Le's Sandwiches & Café*

When my parents took me to Vietnam for the first time, the culture, the hard work, the working people, it made me feel something. So when I came back, I

wanted to show that small part of Vietnam to the people of Charlotte, so it's a part of me now. It's a Charlotte thing. We brought something to Charlotte.

NORA GUERRA *Guate-Linda*

It's different to work for someone than to be your own boss. There's a lot of difference. My brother is my partner. When he opened his bakery, he said, *Why don't you start doing tamales?* When I got here, I made tamales and I started selling them out of my house. And there, little by little, I started to say, I want to have a business, I want to have a restaurant. And then the day came. And here I am.

Es diferente trabajar para alguien que ser tu propio jefe. Hay mucha diferencia. Mi hermano es mi socio. Cuando abrió su panadería, me dijo: ¿Por qué no empiezas a hacer tamales? Cuando llegué, hice tamales y empecé a venderlos de mi casa. Y allí, poco a poco, empecé a decir, quiero tener un negocio, quiero tener un restaurante. Y entonces llegó el día. Y aquí estoy yo.

TUAN (JOHN) NGUYEN

LE'S SANDWICHES & CAFÉ



Visit the SFA oral history archive at southernfoodways.org/oral-history.

Recipe Box



DIRTY PAGES

Nelssy Toro's Colombian empanadas

AS TOLD TO JENNIFER JUSTUS BY NELSSY TORO

Dirty Pages is an ongoing recipe exhibit based in Nashville, inspired by the time-worn recipe pages in home collections. In this installment, we hear from Nelssy Toro, an Atlantan by way of Colombia. She learned to make empanadas from her mother, who learned from her mother. One day, Toro hopes to teach her three grown children how to make them. Until then, the instructions remain, handwritten, in her kitchen. —Jennifer Justus

Photos by Vanessa Toro

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, I always wanted to do what my mother was doing. But when she made empanadas, she would say, "No, no. You're going to get burned or hurt." So I just watched, and that's how I learned to make them.

My mother made them once a week and when we had company. I remember making my first batch when I was maybe eleven years old.

These days, I save making them for special occasions like Christmas or birthdays. That's usually the only time I have for all that preparation. But I know the recipe in my head. I don't have to measure anything.

I also do it the same way every time, whether I'm making forty or one hundred. I always use beef for the filling. Some people use chicken or pork or vegetables. But I like the real thing.

One of my daughters says she doesn't even like empanadas. She has tried them from different countries, but she likes mine. They're the only empanadas she will eat.

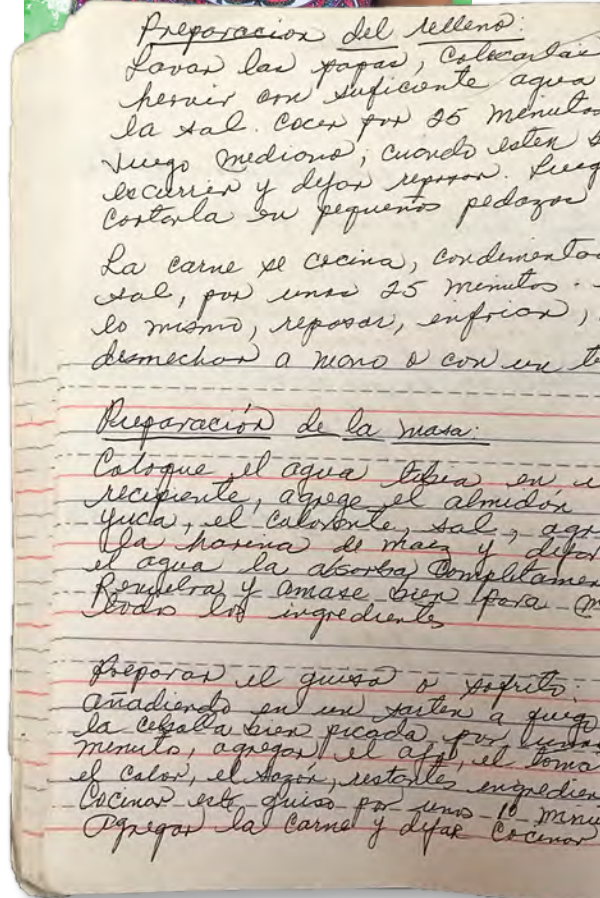
I do make other folk dishes at the holidays, but empanadas get requested the most. It might be for my son's birthday or because cousins are coming in from out of town. It's usually when we're all getting together.

It's nice to be able to share that part of our culture with people. It brings me a lot of joy to make them, and people love them.

I say my daughter begged me to come to Atlanta so she doesn't have to come home for the empanadas. But really, we're just a very close family. We picked up and moved here about four years ago.

Now this is our home. Making empanadas, no matter where I am, makes me think of my childhood, happy times, and bringing the family together. 🍷

Toro's empanadas form a crisp outer layer that holds saffron-scented hunks of beef and potato. Find her recipe at southernfoodways.org.



Jennifer Justus is a Nashville-based writer and the author of Nashville Eats.

GRAVY

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EDITOR

Sara Camp Milam
saracamp@southernfoodways.org

DEPUTY EDITOR

Osayi Endolyn
osayi@southernfoodways.org

DESIGNER

Richie Swann
richieswann@gmail.com

PUBLISHER

Mary Beth Lasseter
marybeth@southernfoodways.org

FACT CHECKER

Katie King

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

John T. Edge
info@southernfoodways.org



THE MISSION of the Southern Foodways Alliance is to document, study, and explore the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

Our work sets a welcome table where all may consider our history and our future in a spirit of respect and reconciliation.

SFA membership is open to all. Not a member?

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info@southernfoodways.org

662-915-3368