

PARK PLAZAS

Community Connections



In My Mom's Kitchen

A New Mexican folklorist remembers the warmth of family gatherings and scrumptious food during Christmas feasts

Story by Nasario García
Illustrations by Dolores Aragón

A solemn mood embraced us. The long slim candles that brightened the altar twinkled like stars in the heavens as if to extend a warm welcome to all the faithful. A Baby Jesus gypsum santo rested peacefully on a makeshift cradle atop a small table in front of the altar. Worshippers, mostly women, stopped, genuflected, and uttered brief prayers.

At midnight, the campanero rang the bell and the priest emerged from the sacristy. The choir headed by Grandma Lale, my paternal grandmother, sang “Vamos todos a Belén” and “Noche de Paz,” two signature songs that announced the birth of Christ.

As soon as the Midnight Mass had ended, my family headed home. By now it was well past bedtime for me and my siblings, and boy was I famished, even after I munched on a piece of flour tortilla in church that Mom carried in her purse. When we reached home, Mom smiled wryly at me. “¿Tienes hambre, hijito?” she said. (Are you hungry, dear son?)

The rituals at church may have marked the start of Christmas in New Mexico, but for me, the holiday was less about the church and more about my mother’s kitchen. In the 1940s, my family and I lived about a mile from the tiny village of Ojo del Padre, along the Río Puerco southeast of Chaco Canyon. Back then, Christmas did not revolve around a brightly decked tree—there was no such thing—or an abundance of colorful wrapped gifts. Rather, what brought utmost joy to my family’s heart, soul, and palate was an assortment of Mom’s traditional Nativity foods. I couldn’t always count on presents, but I always looked forward to the gifts that came out of my mother’s kitchen.

(Please continue reading on Pages 2 and 3)

INTERNATIONAL MILESTONE FOR OUR CELEBRATED FOLKLORIST

In December, the University of Alcalá, founded in 1293 in Spain, will premiere the documentary *Nasario Remembers the Río Puerco*. If you are interested in purchasing one of Nasario Garcia’s books, including the book from which our holiday essay was taken, or this program’s DVD, you can reach him at 505-473-1361. Nasario and his wife Janice live in Papagayo. For more information about this special friend and neighbor, check out his website,

<http://nasariogarciaphd.com>.



"It's posole time!" Mom said after putting the younger kids to bed. "I'm ravenous," replied Dad. Mom cracked a smile. Posole time: For me, these were magical words.

We joined her at the dinner table. Despite being tired, I relished the posole. Dad dunked pieces of tortilla in his posole and ate with gusto. Among the traditional holiday delicacies that Mom cooked and baked, posole was our favorite. The main ingredients were hominy, cubed pork, red chile sauce or pods, garlic (optional), pig's feet (also optional), water, and salt. Mom also prepared posole without chile, but at age 7, I enjoyed the red chile combination as long as it wasn't too spicy.

Mom also made menudo. The ingredients were similar to those in posole except Mom added *cueritos* (pork rinds) and beef tripe. Like posole, menudo could be served with or without red chile, and throughout the year, some men ate it to cure a hangover. As soon as I ate my two bowls of posole, one with chile and the second one plain, Mom said to me, "*Bueno, a la cama.*" (All right, on to bed.)

At dawn, Grandpa's rooster woke me up with his melodious cock-a-doodle-do. I arrived at Mom's kitchen table, adorned with her repertoire of Nativity dishes: *empanaditas* (small turnovers), *pastelitos* (little pies), *sopa* or *capirotada* (bread pudding), and *chiles rellenos*.

Unlike the roasted green chiles filled with melted cheddar cheese served at restaurants, Mom's chiles rellenos were the old-fashioned kind. Chopped roasted green chile, mincemeat, shelled piñón nuts, raisins, cinnamon, and sugar were mixed together and wrapped in flour dough like croquettes — then fried in lard. I enjoyed Mom's scrumptious chiles rellenos unless the chile was unbearably spicy. Mom also had a stack of tamales prominently displayed in the middle of the table. She learned from Grandma Lale next door how to prepare her tamales in the *horno* (adobe oven). They were Grandma's specialty.

The tamale preparation started as early as fall, after the traditional *matanza* (hog butchering). Dad would store the pig's head in the adobe *dispensa* (storage shed) until Christmastime just as Grandma did, an old family custom. Once the hog's head was cooked in the adobe oven, Mom pulled the meat by hand, whereas I used Grandpa's awl to pluck every little piece of meat. Every now and then I sneaked a bite. Nothing was wasted. These days most people use regular pork.

After red chile sauce and salt were added to the meat, cornmeal paste was spread on top of two unfolded corn husks before adding a modest amount of meat. Then the corn husks were folded and tied in order to steam the tamales in a deep aluminum pot either on top of the wood stove or in the adobe oven. Then they were ready to eat — without the corn husks, of course. Of the remaining delicious sweets for Christmas Day, empanadas, often called empanaditas, were my favorite. The main ingredient was cow's tongue with the thin veiled skin removed after the tongue was cooked in boiling water. I would grind the tongue piece by piece on Mom's hand-grinding machine. Today, most cooks use regular beef. Sugar, cinnamon, piñón nuts, and raisins were added to the tongue. After mixing all of them, Mom rolled out a small flour tortilla and placed a *puño* (fistful) of the ingredients on top before folding the dough over in the shape of a half-moon. Then she pinched the two edges together either using her thumb and forefinger or a fork. The final step was to drop each empanadita into a frying pan of hot lard until it was golden brown and ready to eat. Mom's mincemeat turnovers were mouthwatering.

To complement the turnovers, Mom prepared her tasty fruit or pumpkin pastelitos. The fruit, either apricots or peaches, came from Jémez Pueblo northwest of Albuquerque; the pumpkins were always homegrown. Both the fruit and *tasajos* (strips) of pumpkin meat were sun dried on a tarpaulin and then cooked in boiling water. Sugar and cinnamon were added to the fruit or pumpkin purée. After using a rolling pin to spread the dough, it was placed on a cookie sheet. Next, Mom



spread by hand a thin layer of fruit on top of the dough. She then covered the fruit with another layer of dough and sealed both top and bottom layers using a fork around the edges. Mom baked her pastelitos in the wood stove oven. She used the same process for making her small pumpkin pies. My siblings and I loved both fruit and pumpkin pastelitos.

Last but not least was the sopa, deemed the “poor man’s dessert.” It consisted of at least two layers of toast, homemade cow’s cheese, raisins, caramel (sugar and water), and cinnamon, all sandwiched in between each layer. Mom baked this humble but scrumptious dessert in her wood stove oven.

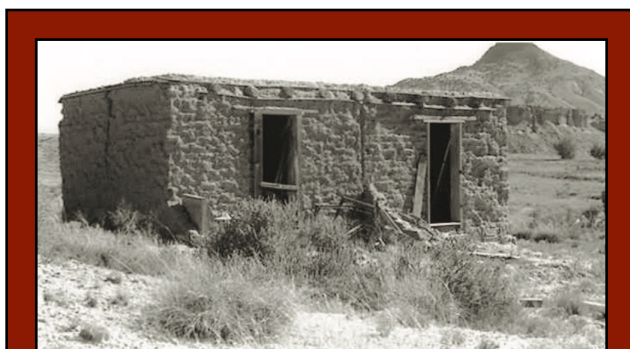
To this day, I fondly recall Mom’s mouthwatering delights that bedecked her kitchen table during the holidays. My sisters still make tamales, the old-fashioned chiles rellenos, pastelitos, and empanaditas. Meanwhile, my wife and I always eat posole on Christmas Day. The ubiquitous folk saying “*Panza llena corazón contento*” (A full stomach yields a happy heart) encapsulates the spirit of Christmas that once filled with joy our home in my village of Guadalupe.



Folklorist, oral historian, and poet Nasario García has published more than 32 books, including *Hoe, Heaven, and Hell: My Boyhood in Rural New Mexico* and *Grandma Lale’s Magical Adobe Oven*.

(This story originally appeared in the November/December 2018 issue of *AAA New Mexico Journey*.)

Beginnings in Ojo del Padre

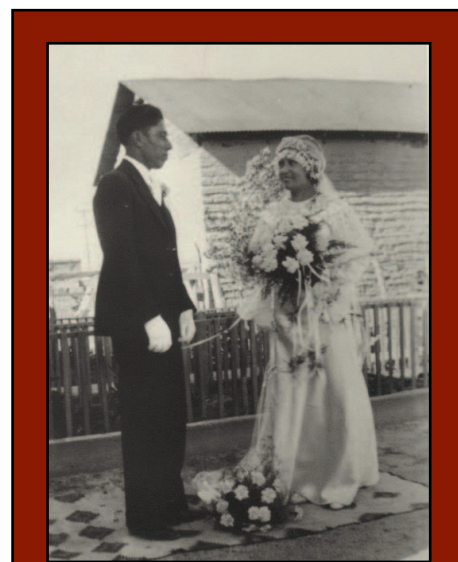


Author Nasario García’s boyhood home

Now a ghost town, Ojo del Padre (a.k.a. Guadalupe) was once home to around 90 people. The village layout was typical of small Hispanic villages of northern New Mexico. The church, the principal building, was surrounded by the school, dance hall, and oratory where the Penitente Brotherhood prayed during Holy Week. The rest of the buildings, about eight to 10, were private residences. There was also a community artesian well and a cemetery nearby. Although remote and humble, Ojo del Padre was abuzz with all kinds of secular and religious festivities throughout the year. And starting the evening of December 12, a genuine Christmas esprit de corps could be felt when the local patron saint, the Virgen de Guadalupe, was honored. Each succeeding night until December 24, the sacristan and compadres built a *luminario*, a teepee-type stack of wood that aimed at the heavens. Pitch or torch pine was placed inside for a fast starter at dusk during the frigid December nights. The ritual of lighting a luminario each night added to the glow of the village as the *rezadora* (local prayer leader) led a procession of worshippers around the placita that started and ended at the church’s entrance. The religious fervor of this solemn ceremony ended the evening of Nochebuena (the Good Night), that is, Christmas Eve, and it reached a high point with Misa del Gallo (Rooster Mass), Midnight Mass, announcing and commemorating the birth of the Baby Jesus.

Our Legacy

My family’s New Mexico roots date back at least 200 years, perhaps longer. My father’s ancestors probably came from Mexico; Mom’s came from Spain. My paternal grandparents migrated to the Río Puerco Valley during the 1880s and 1890s. They married in 1898. My father was born in 1912 at his parents’ ranch near Guadalupe. My mother was born in a tiny place called San Miguel near Cuba, New Mexico, in 1919. They married in Albuquerque and subsequently moved to the Río Puerco Valley, where my family lived from 1935 to 1945.



The author’s parents

CREATING CONNECTIONS

JAMIE IS THE WINNER!

Congratulations to Jamie Cassutt-Sanchez (Narciso), our new City Council member for District 4. We're delighted to have a Park Plazas neighbor and friend as one of our Santa Fe City Councilors!



BRING YOUR NEEDLEWORK AND JOIN THE FUN!

If you enjoy portable handwork—knitting, crocheting, embroidery, needle weaving, etc.—you're invited to join a "come if you can" craft group that gets together the first and third Wednesday afternoons of every month. The group meets in members' homes with an occasional "field trip," which is also a great excuse to go out to lunch. For more information, call Karen McGrath (longtime Rosa Plaza resident), 505-490-9363.

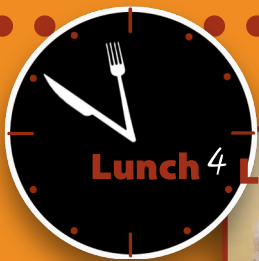


DON'T MISS THE HOLIDAY HOME TOUR!

Delight in the spirit of the holidays as seven Santa Fe residents, including New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, open their homes on Saturday, December 14, for the 4th annual Santa Fe Woman's Club Holiday Home Tour. Two of our Park Plazas neighbors, Trudy Eiron (Chamisa) and Kathy Hargrave (Junipero), are members of the committee that's working hard to ensure a fun, festive day—all for the benefit of the Woman's Club Scholarship Fund.

The self-guided tour starts at 10:00 AM at the Clubhouse, 1616 Old Pecos Trail, where you'll pick up tickets and a guide. The first home you'll visit is the Governor's Mansion, which is only open until noon. Be sure to get a timely start! The tour then continues until 4:00 PM with three homes in central Santa Fe and three homes in Eldorado. It's a diverse collection of special residences, all festively decorated.

Tour tickets are \$25. You can call 505-983-9455 for reservations or go online at <http://sfwcholidayhometour.org>. Tickets can also be purchased (cash or check only) the day of the Tour at the Clubhouse.



On Wednesday, October 23, 17 Park Plazas residents attended our last Lunch4Life event of 2019 featuring Sheila Doran-Benyon, co-founder of Villages of Santa Fe. Sheila introduced us to the Villages concept and their programs that help Seniors age in place. More information at: <https://www.villagesofsantafe.org/>.

Helpful TIP



DETECTING A GAS LEAK

With winter coming on in Santa Fe, many folks are cranking up the heat and starting holiday cooking projects. Here in Park Plazas, most of us use natural gas in one way or another: furnaces, water heaters, stoves and even gas fireplace inserts. For safety's sake, it's important to recognize the signs of a natural gas leak. Never ignore even the slightest indication of natural gas in or around your home.

While natural gas is odorless, it is delivered with an odor additive that makes a leak easier to detect. The smell is described as a "rotten egg" odor. If you can smell gas anywhere in your home, it's an indication that you may have a gas leak.

You should also be on the alert for a hissing sound coming from the area around a gas appliance. And notice the color of the flame as you turn on your gas stove or oven. Natural gas burns blue, so yellow flames are another warning sign of a possible leak.

If you suspect a gas leak in or around your home, the watchword is "Don't delay—Get away!" Inhaling high concentrations of natural gas can lead to asphyxia and even death. Stop what you're doing, don't turn any electrical switches on or off or unplug anything, and go outside. Once you're at a safe distance from your house, call 911 and then the 24/7 New Mexico Gas hotline, 1-888-664-2726 (1-888-NM-GAS-CO).

For those of us whose senses aren't as keen as they once might have been, we suggest a plug-in gas leak detector. In just a few seconds of online research, we found several explosive gas and carbon monoxide detectors. They are similar in size to a standard carbon monoxide detector, but will also detect natural/methane gas and propane, in addition to carbon monoxide. One website we found helpful is:

<https://www.thespruce.com/best-gas-leak-detectors-4154555>.

Book Review

"THE WOLF WHO HOWLED AT CARNEGIE HALL"

Geri Aron (Fresa) calls this "a must-read book for wolf lovers and environmentalists." She adds: "Until I finished it, I was hardly able to put this book down!" With her permission, we've paraphrased Geri's Nextdoor.com writeup here.

If any of you remember meeting a real live wolf at the Santa Fe Woman's Club back in the 1980s (and you will, if you were there), you'll find this book as engrossing as I did. And if you were not there, but are at all interested in wolves and our environment, you will still find the book engrossing. Pamela Brown, the woman who gave the presentation (and whom I am fortunate to know), has written this long-overdue story about the love between a man, a woman and a wolf. Together, they traveled the U.S. in a van, spreading the word about the plight of wolves everywhere—and about the ecological disaster being created by the aerial wolf hunts taking place at that time. The book is full of information, laughs, some tears—about many good people and some bad—and it provides a deep understanding of how the Fish & Game Department caves to hunters and the NRA. *The Wolf Who Howled at Carnegie Hall* is available through Amazon.com. Pamela will be speaking at Op.Cit Books, De Vargas Mall, on Saturday, November 23, at 2:00 pm. She will also have copies of her book for sale.



Lise Knouse & Associates
Park Plazas Specialist
505-501-3385

kw
KELLERWILLIAMS.



THANK YOU

to our *Community Connections* sponsors
whose support will enable us to continue
growing and enhancing outreach!

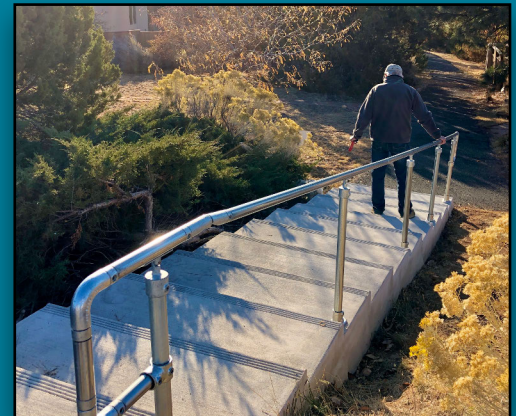
OCTOBER BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Board Member(s) Absent: Ken Coldwell
Number of Residents in Attendance: 5

NOV.
Board Meeting
Wed., Nov. 20
6:30 pm

Residents are encouraged
to attend.

- **Financial** – Treasurer Arnold Valerio reported that, as of September 30 (75% of fiscal year), the operating budget was at 94% of projected budget. As a matter of policy, he noted that earnings accrued through the CDs will likely need to be reinvested into the reserve fund, since that fund is the source of the CDs. The Board discussed whether this same policy would permit certain other expenses, including the legal fees being incurred for the bylaws work, to be paid through the reserve fund.
- **Architectural Committee** – Gary Lutes reported that fall re-inspections are almost completed and letters will be mailed to homeowners. He stated that the Board will begin assessing fines as well as using the power given through the CC&Rs to remedy long-standing unaddressed problem areas.
- **Bylaws Review Committee** – Diane Graves reported that the group continues to review documents (bylaws and CC&Rs). Richard White reported that once a final draft is produced, the committee will review it and will also obtain a second opinion.
- **Manager's Report** – Manager Stephanie Davis-Namm reported that paving of the six cul-de-sacs has been completed; that the maintenance staff is installing handrails on the newly rebuilt stairs leading to the walking path from the parking area between Cisne and Cordero; and that a standing water spigot will be installed in La Luz.
- **Nominations Process** – The Board is working on procedures for the Nominating Committee and these will be approved by the Board.
- **Communication Boxes Maintenance** – Stephanie reported that CenturyLink inspected and repaired all of its communication boxes last week. The Board asked that she obtain permission from CenturyLink to paint the boxes, as needed.
- **Weed Control** – The Board and Stephanie discussed the systematic maintenance schedule for regular on-going maintenance of common areas. Resident asked about progress on a request to cut back the chamisa that is blocking newly rebuilt stairs between Cisne and Cordero.
- **Board adjourned and went into Executive Session.**



Sharing News/Creating Connections/Building Community

Mission Statement:

To produce a warm, personal, engaging and timely community-focused publication that creates and nurtures connections among all residents of Park Plazas. *Community Connections* is about people — highlighting what makes our neighbors interesting, makes them real, and makes others want to learn more about them.

ParkPlazasCommunityConnections@gmail.com
www.ParkPlazasCommunityConnections.org

PPCC Staff

Managing Editor: Laurie Glaze
Content/Copy Editor: Jane Morris
Layout/Photo Editor: Kathy Bell Hargrave
Contributors: Karen McGrath, Geri Aron

