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Guillotine of Love

Anyone who sat at my grandma's kitchen table was sure to catch sight of the big, square, heavy monstrosity sitting in the corner of her kitchen counter. To anyone except my family, it might have appeared to be some kind of medieval torture device. On more than one occasion, when little fingers got caught between those heavy pieces of wood, it did become a torture device. Torture device or not, as children, we always got excited when grandma would say "Who wants to help me make the tortillas?"

It's amazing at how a simple object can turn back the hands of time. As a child, my favorite television show was *Bewitched*; I would stand in the mirror practicing my nose twitch, hoping that if I got it just right, I too could transport myself to a different time or place. Imagine being able to go back in time and change something you did wrong, or stay at a favorite place in time, a favorite memory that you would never have to leave. If only childhood fantasies were real. I didn't have to twitch my nose to go back in time. All I had to do was lay my hands on the old piece of wood that sat in the corner of my grandma's kitchen counter. It was like touching an old friend, and the memories flooded me from head to toe. It is like walking through a fog cloud, and in the distance I hear grandma calling out "Who wants to help me make the tortillas?"

The kitchen is abuzz with little voices yelling out “me, me, oh pick me!” With a big smile on her face, grandma would say in the most serious voice she could muster up: “Everyone will have a turn, and everyone will get to help, ’cause we need lots of tortillas.” It was almost like an assembly line in a factory. Grandma would have the older granddaughters operate the guillotine, while the little granddaughters rolled the *masa* (tortilla dough) into the perfect sized balls. It was a weekly routine that never got old. Grandma would have grandpa carry the heavy tortilla press to the kitchen table. Like little soldiers, we all knew what our job would be. We would all take our place around the kitchen table and start the assembly line of tortilla making. It wouldn’t be long before one of the older granddaughters would ask grandma to tell us the story of the guillotine. With a little chuckle, she would start.

“One day your grandpa came home from work starving. I was busy rolling out the tortillas between two pieces of plastic, and every five minutes your grandpa would ask, ‘Are the tortillas were ready yet?’ After the fourth time, I yelled ‘No, and if you want tortillas faster than I can make them, then make a machine that does it!’ A week later your grandpa came home from work with a tortilla press. He made it from pieces of scrap wood and metal he had found lying around his work site; I thought it was the ugliest thing I ever saw.”

The kitchen would roar with laughter as grandma’s forehead would rise as she squinched her nose. Like clockwork, we knew that this was the part where grandpa would stand up and puff out his chest like a rooster in a henhouse.

He would clear his throat and then say, “Well if I remember right, your grandma would always say ‘This tortilla press works better than any store-bought tortilla press I have ever used!’”

As teenagers, we picked up on the sarcasm in grandpa's voice, and would burst out in laughter. The younger kids would just laugh at the way grandpa strutted around the kitchen with his chest puffed out and how he would stop right behind grandma and wrap her in a big bear hug. After grandpa laid a big kiss on grandma's cheek, he would slowly start to walk out of the kitchen, and would give a quick glance back. As if on cue, we would all yell "wait, you forgot the part of how the tortilla press got its name!" Grandpa would take a deep breath, exhale, and say "ok." He would sit on the stool which was in the corner of the kitchen and say "I call it the guillotine, because one day your grandma smashed her finger while making the tortillas. She was so mad, she yelled out 'I asked you for a tortilla press, not a damn guillotine!' From that day on, your grandma and I have always called it the guillotine."

Back then, when grandma and grandpa's story came to an end, we would continue the assembly line of making tortillas, all the while laughing and talking until the task at hand was done.

Now as I look back, it amazes me that a simple object could fill grandma's kitchen with more than just tortillas. This ugly old tortilla press brought our family together and filled grandma's kitchen with love.

I can feel the fog lift and the laughter in the kitchen fading off into the distance. I twitch my nose in hopes of staying here in this memory, but like my favorite television show, it too comes to an end. Holding the tortilla press in my arms, I look down and think no matter how ugly the guillotine looks, or where it came from, or how it got its name, the memory will always stay the same. As kids, all we knew is that it was fun to help grandma make the tortillas, a job we always fought for. I know, for grandma it was a labor of love.