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More than Just Tortillas

One of the most special things I own is not worth much money. It is not worth much money, but it gets used many times a week. Not only does it get used a lot, but it is special to me and has sentimental value that cannot be replaced. A tortilla napkin that my *abuela* gave me over twelve years ago is one of my most special possessions, and even though it is small and it does not cost much, having this tortilla napkin makes me feel like one of the richest people in the world.

The tortilla napkin is about a twenty-inch square piece of white cotton. It has colorful designs of flowers and butterflies on it. The design is simple, but it is so pretty. The design is not a copy or a pattern; it is a freehand work of art like a painting or a sketch. There are butterflies flying around flowers. It is really a work of art representing what my *abuela* was thinking and feeling at the time she made it. Maybe she was thinking of the cycle of life and the season of rebirth, or maybe she was just thinking of what would look pretty on the tortilla napkin with the thread she had available. It may be something deep and symbolic or something very simple, but it is a wonderful and useful piece of art. It also has pretty diamond lace sewn around the edges; however, the tortilla napkin is not perfect. It has yellow stains on it from years of use. These stains do not wash out even when it is clean, and even when it is clean, it has a slight smell of tortillas. The smell is nice, and it reminds me of walking down the street to buy freshly made tortillas for dinner and carrying them back in the napkin to keep them warm.

My *abuela* started sewing the tortilla napkins after my grandpa died. We would visit her more often then so she would not feel lonely. We would eat dinner with her, and we usually brought the fresh tortillas in the paper wrapper they came in from the store. She started sewing the napkins and giving them out to family, her friends, and even her doctors. It was a way for her to help cope with the loss of my grandpa, and it was also a way she wanted to help people and say thanks for supporting her.

I remember the day my *abuela* gave me my tortilla napkin. I was a newlywed and went to see visit her in her apartment. As she was elderly and not in the best of health, it was hard for her to get out and be active in the city, so visits happened at her place. I remember standing there in the doorway. She didn't notice me at first. She was looking down at her artwork. She was sitting in a little wooden chair in front of her bedroom window, the sunlight was coming in, and it seemed to be such a peaceful moment. She had a piece of cloth in one hand and her needle and thread in the other. There were many colorful threads spread out on her bed like an artist would spread paints out on a table. She looked so peaceful and happy doing what she loved to do. She was sewing something and creating something that was not only useful but pretty, and it would be something to remember her by.

After a moment of watching her sew, I greeted my grandma with "*Hola abuela.*"

"*Pasale hija,*" (come in, sweetie) she replied. She took my hand and sat me down and immediately showed me the tortilla napkins she had been sewing. She told me to choose one. She was just as happy to give me one as I was to receive it.

"*Gracias abuela,*" I said to her.

She started to explain the design to me. She showed me that if I turn it over, it looks exactly the same on the other side. In fact, she showed me that it was hard to tell which side was

the front and which side was the back. Both sides of the tortilla napkin were beautiful and held the design of flowers and butterflies. She was proud of her work, and it was a special moment to be visiting her and learning from her.

My grandmother passed away almost three years ago, and it wasn't until recently that I understood the significance of what she had given me. It is almost as if she had left a little bit of her heart and soul in that tortilla napkin. She lives on in memory with something as small and light as a napkin. Now that I have been married for more than twelve years and have two young children, I understand this. I did not understand it back then, but I do now. The other day, we were eating fajitas, and my daughter asked me for another tortilla, and for a slight moment, I fell into a daydream as I unfolded the tortilla napkin to pass her a warm tortilla. For a brief second, I felt my *abuela* there, having dinner with us, even if it was just a memory in the napkin she gave me years ago.

Now that I am older, I understand the meaning of what she did. What she gave me was not worth much. It did not cost a lot to make. It is small and light and easy to carry with us on our adventures in life. However, it is something that will be used all the time. It is something that will be a way to remember her, and the memory will often bring me back to that day when she was sewing in her room with the sunlight coming in and the birds singing outside her window. It was a time that was so peaceful and relaxing, and the napkin gives me comfort and security. It links me to my past and carries me into the future. Even after the people we love in our lives are gone, simple things, like the tortilla napkin, open the door to the wonderful memories we have of them, and most of all, my memories taste good, too.