

# Workshop evokes memories of family recipes and stories

By Vincent T. Davis, San Antonio Express-News

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Photos By Marvin Pfeiffer / Southside Reporter

ABOVE: Barbara Renaud Gonzalez (from left) conducts a workshop called “Recetas de mi Vida” where attendees, including Velitta Prather, Edna Hinojosa and Dolores Zapate-Murff, share life stories at Bexar County BiblioTech, 3505 Pleasanton Road. Seniors from the South Side are sharing treasured family recipes and stories at the workshop that will be compiled in an e-book and published on the BiblioTech's web page. RIGHT: Stories by Eddie Sanchez, 67, will be included in the e-book.

Inside of the community room of the Bexar County BiblioTech on Pleasanton Road, a group of seniors spin tales of food that's defined their lives.

There was a father's request for coffee with chicory and sweet potatoes dusted with cinnamon, roasted in a wood burning stove. A newlywed scrambling eggs with loving care before sunrise for her husband, an Air Force pilot, flying sorties in the 1970s. Shrimp used to entice a lover for a late-night tryst and the tasty remembrance of a chorizo and bean taco that was akin to a sensual experience.

Their tales blend with remembered criticism from naysayers who said words would never pay the rent. Poems, a mother told a participant, wouldn't feed a husband. True in a physical sense, perhaps. But for these new authors, words and poems nourish the soul.

Since Sept. 8, author Bárbara Renaud González has helped the group recall stories for “Recetas de mi Vida” or Recipes of My Life, a bilingual, bi-cultural cookbook and storytelling workshop for seniors.

Participants have told stories, seasoned with joy and pain. Recently the group included Dolores Zapata Murff, 57; Eddie Sanchez, 67; Edna Hinojosa, 69; Velitta Prather, 71; Guadalupe Lucio, 66; Dolores Patino, 65 and Nancy Dunn Thompson, 65.

“This is where our hearts open,” Thompson said, “And our eyes flow tears.”

Their stories will be published in a digital e-book on the BiblioTech website. González said the book will include chapters entitled, “Armadillo Soup, I Don't Know How to Cook,” “Menudo and Love,” “Empanadas, First Breakfast,” “Barbacoa and Big Red” and “Sexy Tacos.”

The workshop is one of four writing residencies sponsored by Tinta Digital, a year-long literary arts education festival for all ages on the South Side.

The group has told decade-old yarns of foods prepared over wood burning stoves and fire pits across Texas and beyond. The stories have drawn tears, raised blood pressures and opened minds to new ways of thinking.



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“We become another family, we have the same addiction,” González said.

Gemini Ink executive director Sheila Black and Lisa Cortez Walden developed the idea to recruit seniors to record family recipes and stories.

Publications director Anisa Onofre said in an age of fast food and microwaves, there's a need to get back to creating home-cooked meals. Onofre said she's collected recipes from her mother and mother-in-law to pass down to her nieces.

“What we wanted to do was document the stories of our elders to pass down,” Onofre said, as González asked her students to think of dishes from their childhood. “We're going to lose these recipes. There are stories involved with being with your family and sitting down to the table; we don't do it enough anymore.”

Since attending the workshop they've learned a variety of writing techniques from González. She taught them how to find their voice; she said this was the most vital thing about writing. She's encouraged them to use their five senses to recall foods that evoke memories and infuse their stories with dialogue.

Hinojosa said the writing sessions have become a key ingredient in her life. She said children are learning about family culture and old recipes of descendants who rarely noted how much seasoning they sprinkled in their dishes.

“I truly believe we should have more of this type of work as we retire,” she said. “As

we're writing these stories we come into the reality of the life we have lived. You sit and smell food and it brings memories of your aunts, tías and abuelitas.”

Sanchez said he writes until it hurts. He admitted it took time for him to be able to listen to critiques about his work. Now, he values fellow writers' comments, but the road to acceptance wasn't an easy one.

“Sometimes I have thin skin,” he said. “It's been humbling, but I can say it only now, because I'm a writer.”

*vtDavis@express-news.net*