



Suzette Cuizon

Family Story

In 1906, many Filipinos ventured across the Pacific Ocean to seek a better life in Hawai'i. The Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association (HSPA) was a major influence in getting immigrants to work in the sugar cane fields and sugar processing mills. My grandparents moved to Hawai'i and my parents were born in Hawai'i. I am the youngest of 5, born on Kaua'i, Hawai'i. My older brothers worked in the sugar cane fields in high school and my father worked as a lab supervisor in a sugar processing mill.

Growing up on Kaua'i, the Garden Isle, I recall many family gatherings that were large or small. Relatives would come to Kaua'i to spend time with grandma and grandpa. It would be at their house, or our house, or at the beach, etc. Those gatherings were a way to keep connected and were always filled with fun, music, and most of all FOOD. My mother was known for her desserts and all the relatives looked forward to it on the huge buffet table. It was the kankanen (coconut based dessert) that everyone craved. To this day, I try to recreate it, but it's just not the same.

In 1972, at the age of 17, I packed my orange, hardcover suitcases and moved to the state of Washington to go to college and have been here ever since.

In 1989, with a two year old in tow and another child on the way, I took on the project of creating a family cookbook to preserve and share heirloom recipes. I contacted all the relatives and asked them to send me their favorite recipe along with a short description of why it was their favorite recipe or what memory was brought up when making the dish. Typing out the pages, making copies, and finally binding the books with a plastic comb binding, our FIRST family cookbook was created.



The preface for that book reads as follows:

“At our family gatherings, mealtime is always important. Every occasion celebrated (birthdays, holidays, baby/wedding showers, etc.) includes a meal that could 'feed an army'. Traditionally, it is a potluck, and a chance for everyone to enjoy their favorite dish or a new recipe.

I have fond memories of when our families got together and felt that a family cookbook would be a special collection for everyone to have. My thanks to everyone who shared their recipes with me. Enjoy this book and continue sharing this with others.”

In 2005, my oldest sister Marsha took on the project of creating our SECOND family cookbook. It is filled with favorite recipes from those who contributed to the first cookbook and also from newer members of the family. She shared that with everyone at a family reunion on O‘ahu.

This story and tradition is continuing because our THIRD family cookbook is in the process of being created. My cousin, who lives on O‘ahu, will be compiling the heirloom recipes. This time, each person will include a photo of the finished dish along with their recipe and fond memory. We are all looking forward to the final copy. It's a special way to keep connected and share heirloom recipes.

Looking back, the heirloom recipes in the cookbooks kept me connected to Hawai'i/home. For me, home is where we feel welcomed, joy, comfort, and secure no matter where you are or who you are with. It can be with family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. We gather there to reconnect, to celebrate, and to remember.

Hawai'i is my original home and the Pacific Northwest has become another home for me. Who knows what lies in the future. These heirloom recipes in our cookbooks will continue to keep our family connected as we move forward in life.

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