

Memory Stew

Shortly after Mama died from a heart attack Papa went downhill very fast and needed almost constant care so we have made the heart wrenching decision to put him into a home. On one of my visits he smelt the lemons I had in my shopping bag and a smile returned to his face.

‘What is making you smile Papa’

‘I was just remembering when I first met your mother picking lemons in the grove outside the family home’

I had read that smell is one of the best senses to aid memory recovery and I decided to make his most favourite dish, a lamb stew, but Mama’s version. I don’t often cook these days so I had to hunt for the special herbs she used to flavour the stew. Then I got down to it. I seasoned the meat and browned it on all sides before putting it aside to rest. Then I added the diced onion and garlic to the oil and after they had softened added the wine, tomatoes, honey, herbs and brought it to the boil. Such pictures flooded my mind. My mother sipping some of the leftover wine as she stirred the ingredients until it was time to reduce the heat, add the lamb and leave it to stew. The aroma that filled my kitchen was heaven and as was my mother’s habit, I had a sip of wine before it was time to prepare and add the potatoes and leave it to cook until everything was tender. As it was his birthday we had collected him from his care home for the day, to enjoy his meal in a family home. I hope I did you proud Mama I whispered to myself before ladling the stew into the bowls and taking it into the dining room with a plate of crusty Italian bread to soak up the juices.

‘This smells wonderful, as all your cooking does. Rosa, Rosa come and sit down so that we can enjoy your wonderful stew together. Leave the clearing up for later, I will give you a hand as usual’.

Papa looked expectantly at the door.

‘Where is your mother going to sit, I can’t see a place for her?’

Papa had been told so many times that she had died but the smell had worked too well and he was in the moment of the last time she had made this stew for him.

My heart broke as I told him yet again, and every time she dies for me again.