

# THE SALSA LEGACY

BY ALONZO OROZCO

Being one of seven children, David Hernandez was accustomed to having a lot of people around the house. "Everyone had been to our house, one time or another to eat. My mother always had food cooking," says Hernandez, who grew up in Carpinteria.

His mother, Lupe Hernandez, began to cook at a very young age. Born in Yahualica, Jalisco, Mexico, she moved to Santa Barbara with her family at the age of 2. The eldest of four kids, she cooked meals for the entire family on a regular basis at the age of 13. "She was the one who was responsible for the evening meal because both her parents worked," explains David of his "Mama Lupe."

As a result, Lupe became a fabulous cook, developing her own recipes over the years. When the neighbors

frequented the Hernandez household for dinner, they took a liking to one recipe in particular. "Everybody would say, your mother should do something with that salsa," recalls David.

Despite coaxing from her son, Lupe had no interest in turning her specialty into a moneymaker. About 15 years ago, David with the blessing and skepticism of his mother decided to take matters into his own hands by attempting to put the salsa on the market. After researching, he discovered that selling it could be a complicated and costly process.

David learned how to make the salsa, but converting it into large quantities proved to be somewhat tricky. "You have to do the nutritional facts, so [the salsa] has to go to the lab. You have to decipher this and that," says Hernandez whose mother's

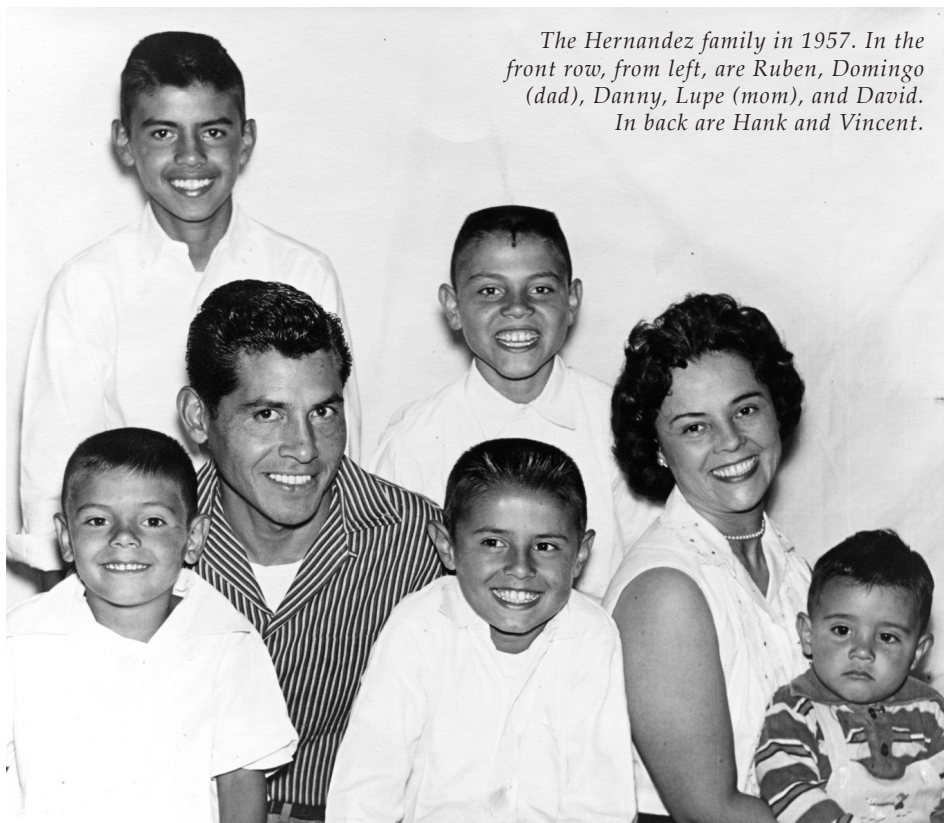


formula wasn't concocted with precise amounts in mind. On top of all the analyses, the product also needed to meet state approval and be fitted for a UPC code.

Then David caught a big break when a firefighter friend, who had connections indirectly with Naked Juice, was able to get someone within the company to taste the salsa. Shortly after that, the salsa was introduced to Trader Joe's, where the Hernandez elixir in both medium and mild, would soon be bottled under the grocer's "Salsa Especial" label. For both Lupe and David, the concept of having the family recipe converted into jars for market shelves was difficult to fathom. "It's kind of nice and great to hear, but until I see it in the stores, it's a whole different story," says the son.

Unfortunately, Lupe passed away before her popular recipe actually made it to Trader Joe's. Today, the family bottles another salsa that can be found at smaller markets in the area, such as Pacific Health Foods on Linden, Albertsons and Cantwell's Market in Summerland. Soon to hit the larger markets, the salsa embodies a spicy, smoky, roasted garlic and tomato flavor, and carries the label, Casa Hernandez, complete with a picture of the matriarch who created it.

"I feel [the label] is kind of a tribute to my mom, and that way we can carry on her legacy," explains Hernandez. A legacy that will undoubtedly be passed around the kitchen table for generations to come.



*The Hernandez family in 1957. In the front row, from left, are Ruben, Domingo (dad), Danny, Lupe (mom), and David. In back are Hank and Vincent.*





*David Hernandez shops the Carpintería Farmers Market for tomatoes for his salsa.*

JOSHUA CURRY