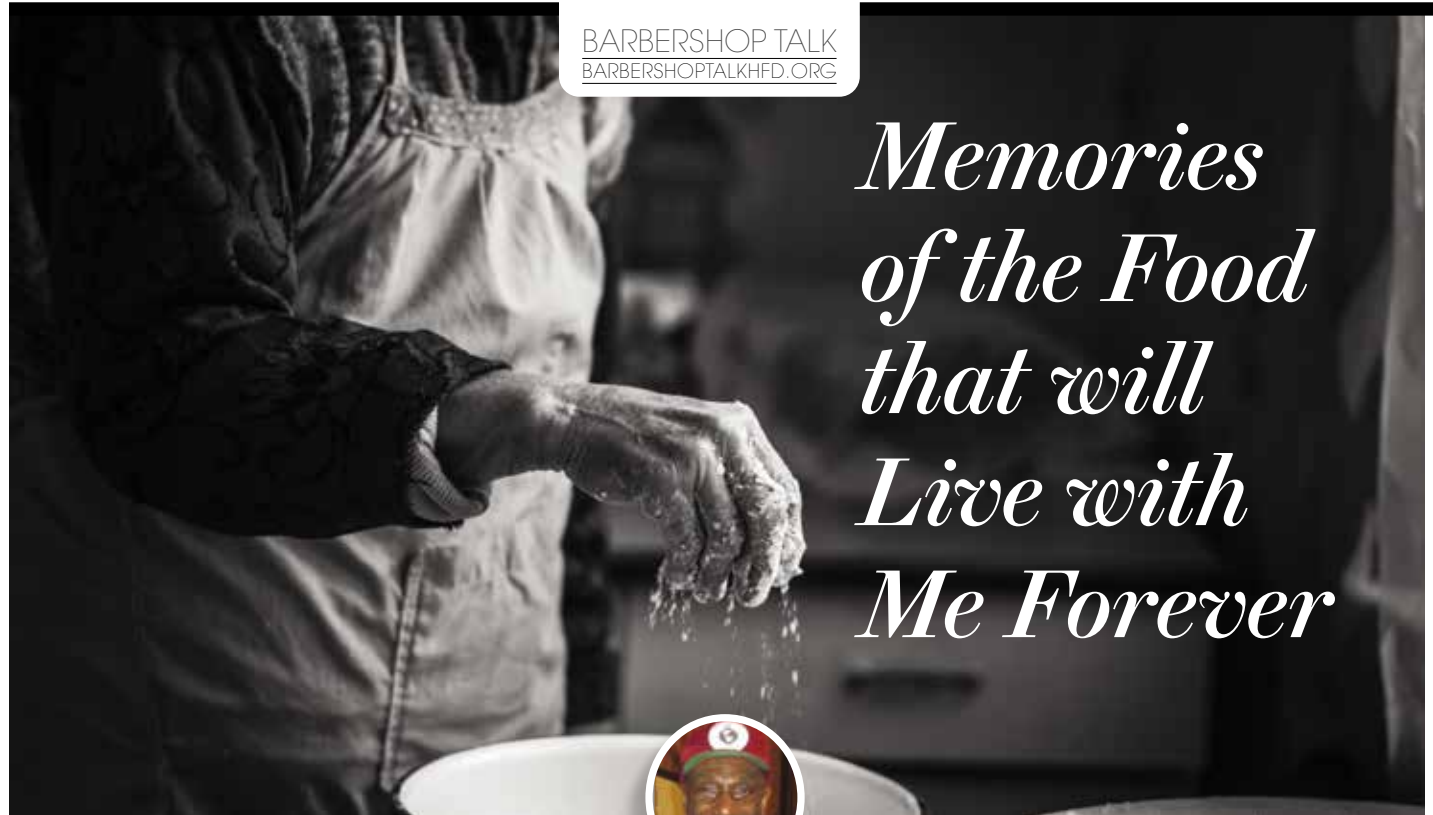


Memories of the Food that will Live with Me Forever



by **Robert L. Woodard**
The Wynnefield Barber

As a child freshly out of the womb, mother and child are still connected. Once the umbilical cord is cut, the child is born again into individualism. Now this single life becomes two parts of one whole. The connection of mother and child is forever. Even after a child has developed into adulthood, that person will still cry out to its mother from time to time. This wonderful connection is never ever broken throughout a person's lifetime. The breast milk of a mother is essential and an emotional part of our taste-buds as we become adults.

WRITERSBLOCK

Eating my mother's cooking helped me understand how putting love in her food made me realize just what love had to do with it. My mother had 10 children and a husband to feed on a daily basis. That is a lot of food and a lot of love. Every day, she always prepared breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I've lived and loved to eat her good cooking. Before fast foods were introduced to our South Philly neighborhoods, homemade cooking was a community's way of identify-

ing the specialty smells of food in every household. Each mother on our block had a special dish that she cooked better than anyone else. As children, we would visit each other's homes and compare each mother's food to our own mom's cooking. Of course, my mother, Gloria Lee Woodard, was the best chef of all time. My taste-buds still seek her food and all the love she put into every meal. As my mom grew older and eventually passed away, she shared many of her original recipes with my youngest brother Nathaniel. He was the baby of 10 children. However, my father, James Woodard Jr., would remind us that he was my mother's original baby, because he loved mom so much. Dad would let all 10 of us know that he was always first in line on my mother's love list.

As a fat kid, I could always get something to eat, and all my troubles seemed to fade away. Some of the restaurants in our neighborhood were B Bea's Barbecue on 1700 South Street, Eddie's Hoagie Shop on 22nd and Bainbridge, and the Italian Bakery on 17th and Montrose Street. Also, Melrose Diner at 15th and Passyunk and Malino's at 15th and

Ellsworth Streets. Many of these places are gone, yet I can still see and smell the scent of the food from my memories, as if my nose had eyes. Gentrification happened and caused me to go to sleep in the ghetto and wake up in Center City.

The love for your community helps you grow up with pride. There were many older people that we younger people loved and respected. If you got out of line, the Elders in your neighborhood would straighten you out, then call your parents who would reprimand you, again. The Elders are supposed to pass on the history of their community to our youth. Hence, if the youth have nothing left to be proud of, their feelings of belonging disappear. If you can't remember where you came from, it will be challenging to find out where you are going. I am thankful for the Elders who shared their foods with me as a child. I am even more appreciative for their wisdom and food for thought they left with me. And that will live as food with me, forever.

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