

Food, _____ Family, & Empire

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A Cross-Cultural Oral History Project



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Introduction

Setting the Table



Food is often seen as personal, domestic, or apolitical, yet it is almost the opposite. Food has been deeply shaped by empire, migration, and global systems of power. The ingredients people cook with, the recipes they preserve, and the foods they associate with home are all products of historical processes such as colonialism, trade, and displacement. By examining food within families, history becomes visible not only in archives and institutions, but also in kitchens, memories, and everyday routines.

This project uses interviews to explore how large-scale historical forces are experienced at the family level. Interviews were conducted with family members across French, Indian, and Mexican backgrounds, focusing on food traditions, migration histories, and the meanings attached to specific dishes. Oral history allows personal memory to function as historical evidence, revealing how individuals interpret and carry the legacies of empire across generations.

Rather than presenting interviews in full, this digital zine organizes excerpts thematically. Interview quotes, recipes, and images are treated as historical artifacts, illustrating how food operates as a site of cultural continuity, adaptation, and negotiation. Together, these materials highlight how empire persists not as an abstract concept, but through everyday practices of cooking, eating, and remembering.



Vasseur Family Background & Family Memories



Mrs. Vasseur (France, rural upbringing)

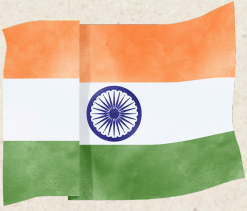
Mr. Vasseur (France, urban upbringing)

Mrs. Vasseur's early food memories are tied to rural France and seasonal eating. She described weekends spent at her grandparents' farm, returning home with fresh vegetables, eggs, and meat, food shaped by what was available and when. Winter, especially, carried its own rituals, there were pork feasts around slaughter time and "eat-every-part" traditions that emphasized both abundance and practicality. Her strongest holiday memories come from Christmas, when the family treated the meal as an event. Fondue with beef was cooked at the table, followed by homemade chocolate desserts (a family staple because her father loved chocolate).

Mr. Vasseur's childhood traditions were shaped more by city life and regional identity. He remembered Epiphany (Twelfth Night) on January 6 as a moment of ritual and symbolism through galette des rois (King Cake), a flaky almond pastry with a hidden token and a crown. Even within France, he noted how traditions vary by place. For example, the Paris-style almond cake versus the brioche version common in other regions. Together, their memories show how "French food" isn't one fixed cuisine, it's deeply regional, seasonal, and tied to family roles and routines.

Certain dishes functioned as emotional anchors to childhood. For Mrs. Vasseur, snow peas cooked low and slow, often alongside roasted chicken, represent winter comfort and nostalgia, but she finds the dish hard to recreate in the U.S. because the ingredients and cooking context aren't the same. Mr. Vasseur's comfort food memory is more hybrid. His father's Sunday curry was served with a French sensibility, rich, creamy, and time-intensive, showing how "family food" can be just as defining as national cuisine.

Food roles were also part of the memory. Both parents emphasized that everyday meals were usually handled by their mothers, while fathers cooked mainly for special occasions (or in Mrs. Vasseur's case, when her mother was out). Small tasks, like setting the table or picking up bread from the bakery, were part of how children participated in the rhythm of home life, even when they weren't responsible for cooking. Across both experiences, food memories weren't just about taste, they were about routine, responsibility, and togetherness.



Arun Family Background & Family Memories



Mrs. Arun (India, rural upbringing)

Mr. Arun (India, urban upbringing)

Tamil Nadu shaped the Arun family's food identity through language, region, and routine. Mr. Arun described growing up in Chennai, a major city in southern India where "Tamil culture, Tamil food, and Tamil language" are tightly linked. Meals followed clear patterns, with distinct foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, reflecting a cuisine built on tradition and repetition rather than constant reinvention.

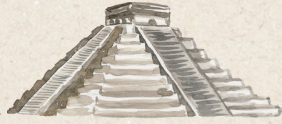
Rice formed the foundation of everyday Tamil food in both their childhoods. Mr. Arun explained that most meals were either rice-based or made from rice flour, served with gravies and side dishes. While wheat and other grains existed, rice was the default, making it not just an ingredient, but a cultural baseline for what "real food" looked like.

Mrs. Arun's childhood food memories were deeply tied to farming, seasonality, and self-sufficiency. Mrs. Arun grew up in small district towns, in an agricultural family that stocked rice (paddy) for the year, sold the surplus, and relied on rotating crops like peanuts, yams, tapioca, and multiple varieties of sweet potato. Her family also grew vegetables at home and kept cows for dairy, and she reflected on how earlier generations depended heavily on what was grown locally, before fertilizer became common with the Green Revolution.

Specific seasonal ingredients became emotional anchors for childhood. Mrs. Arun associated childhood with moringa (drumsticks), a favorite vegetable that many households had growing nearby, but only during certain seasons. She described heirloom family preparations such as a moringa-based dish tied to her district, along with tamarind-based curries and unripe mango dishes that balance sweet and sour. Mr. Arun emphasized that while common staples like dosa are widely available, it is the "heirloom dishes" made only within the family, like thokku, a thick paste of greens, tamarind, chili, and salt, that most strongly triggers the feeling of childhood.



Prieto Family Background & Family Memories



Mrs. Garcia-Prieto (Mexico/RGV, rural upbringing)
Mr. Prieto (Mexico/RGV, urban upbringing)

The Prieto family's food story begins in two borderland origins: the Rio Grande Valley and rural Mexico. Mr. Prieto grew up in the Valley surrounded by "Mexico-style" everyday dishes like fideo soups, carne guisada, flour tortillas, and Sunday barbacoa, while Mrs. Garcia-Prieto grew up in La Carreta, Mexico, where food traditions were shaped by a small community with no stores and heavy reliance on what the family could raise, grow, or source locally.

Family meals were daily routines, but they also functioned as a form of togetherness and structure. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto remembers eating with her sisters at the table as her mother prepared breakfast and lunch (and lighter dinners), reinforcing food as both nourishment and family discipline, where table manners, shared time, and being "together" mattered as much as the meal itself. Mr. Prieto's childhood food memories similarly emphasize familiarity and ritual: food wasn't a performance, it was what held the week in place.

Certain dishes became emotional shorthand for childhood. Both parents independently returned to fideo as a deep comfort memory, Mrs. Garcia-Prieto specifically naming pollo con fideo as a dish tied to family closeness and care, and Mr. Prieto identifying fideo as one of the earliest foods that felt foundational. For Mr. Prieto, chile rellenos also stood out as a powerful memory trigger, especially when prepared in a way that resembles his mother's version.

Holiday dishes marked time and amplified the meaning of food through labor and gathering. In both backgrounds, celebration foods were tied to extended family. These celebratory foods included tamales, menudo, pozole, mole, all holiday meals that required multiple people and shared work. Even when the dishes were not eaten daily, they carried cultural weight precisely because they arrived with cousins, grandparents, and the feeling that "something special is happening."



Vasseur Family Migration, Change, & Adaptation



Migration reshaped the Vasseur family's food traditions in lasting and unexpected ways. Both parents described multiple moves across countries, from France to England and eventually to the United States, each relocation expanding what they cooked and how they ate. While food in their childhood homes was largely regional and consistent across generations, living abroad exposed them to new flavors, ingredients, and cuisines that gradually became part of their everyday meals.

The most immediate shift came through exposure to unfamiliar tastes, particularly spice. Mr. Vasseur emphasized that traditional French cooking relied almost entirely on salt, pepper, butter, and local ingredients, with little tolerance for heat. Living in the United States, and especially in Texas, introduced the family not only to spicier cuisines such as Cajun, Mexican, and Tex-Mex food, but also to ingredients that had been entirely unfamiliar in their childhood, including avocados. Over time, these flavors became normalized rather than exotic, signaling how migration can transform what once felt "foreign" into something familiar and even expected.

Adaptation also required substitution. Several dishes from France proved difficult to recreate in the U.S. due to differences in ingredients. Mrs. Vasseur noted that snow peas, a winter comfort food from her childhood, lacked the same taste and texture without access to the produce she grew up with. Similarly, recipes dependent on crème fraîche, French butter, or specific breads had to be modified, or abandoned altogether, when equivalent ingredients were unavailable. Even attempts to substitute sour cream for crème fraîche revealed how small differences in ingredients can fundamentally alter a dish.

At the same time, globalization eased some of these challenges. Over the years, increased access to international ingredients, specialty grocery stores, and online recipes allowed the family to reintroduce foods that once felt lost. Mr. Vasseur reflected on how the internet made it easier to experiment with new cuisines and recreate dishes from travel experiences, even if they could never be perfectly replicated. Migration, in this sense, did not erase food traditions, it reshaped them, blending memory with adaptation and expanding what counted as "home cooking."





Arun Family Migration, Change, & Adaptation



Migration expanded what the Arun family ate by slowly widening their regional exposure over time. Mrs. Arun described moving within Tamil Nadu for her undergrad, where she experienced new food combinations and cafeteria routines that differed from home. For example, she noticed unfamiliar pairings like puttlu with banana, compared to her family's usual way of eating puttlu with sugar, coconut flakes, or lentil curry.

College and relocation reshaped Mr. Arun's palate through geography, daily dining halls, and necessity. When he left the south for college in North India, he encountered a more wheat-based food culture built around roti and bread rather than rice. Over time, he acquired a taste for these staples, and he also began exploring non-vegetarian food for the first time, moving away from the strict vegetarian norms of home to include seafood and chicken (while still avoiding red meat).

Moving to the United States introduced a wider world of cuisines, especially through parenting and daily routine. Mrs. Arun described the U.S. as a place shaped by immigration, where food variety is constant, noting foods like Mexican, Italian, Thai, Chinese, Greek, and more. She noted that once their children grew older, they started requesting foods like pasta, tacos, and homemade pizza, which naturally pulled the family into more experimentation in their home cooking.

Adaptation became both practical and symbolic through ingredient substitutions that preserved "taste memory." The family described replacing Maggi noodles with healthier ramen noodles from Costco while keeping the Indian spice packets and preparation style. They also used wheat tortillas as a convenient substitute for homemade roti, and relied on spinach as a "catch-all" replacement for tropical greens (keerai) that are difficult to find in the U.S. These changes show how migration doesn't erase tradition, instead it often forces creativity, keeping cultural flavor alive even when the original ingredients aren't accessible.





Prieto Family Migration, Change, & Adaptation



Migration reshaped the family's food system more than it changed their food identity. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto describes a major shift at age 12, moving from La Carreta to San Juan, Texas: the family went from farm-to-table to grocery-to-table, trading home-raised chickens and local ingredients for store-bought meats, packaged goods, and purchased tortillas. Mr. Prieto's earlier moves were smaller at first, crossing a short distance within a shared region, so recipes stayed intact, but later life in Houston expanded his palate and everyday habits.

The United States introduced new foods through school, affordability, and sheer availability. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto remembers being introduced to bread, sandwiches, and cheese as snack staples after moving, plus school foods like pizza, hamburgers, and Texas-style enchiladas that differed sharply from Mexican enchiladas (including the use of yellow American cheese). Mr. Prieto similarly notes that leaving home for college and moving to Houston widened his options, there was more seafood, baked goods, and international flavors, creating a noticeable break from the "mostly Mexican food" rhythm of childhood.

Adaptation often happened through substitution, replacing what was seasonal or wild with what was available in stores. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto points to losing access to specific plants and ingredients, things like wild peppers, chochas, and easily available nopales, while changing dishes like capirotada by swapping traditional bolillo-style bread for sliced store bread. Even familiar ingredients shifted in meaning, cheese moved from locally made to purchased, tortillas moved from scratch-made to store-bought, and meats became more frequent simply because they were cheaper and easier to acquire.

Both parents link modernization to health changes and a heavier "American" diet environment. Mr. Prieto reflects that city-living increased fast food and sugar intake, and he associates the shift away from home-cooked food with weight gain and poorer health outcomes over time. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto echoes this, describing a present-day crossroads of trying to preserve cultural food while resisting the metabolic consequences of high carbohydrate and high sugar access in the U.S.





Vasseur Family Tradition, Memory, & Identity



Food traditions within the Vasseur family function as living links between generations. Several recipes and cooking practices described in the interviews have been passed down not simply as instructions, but as shared experiences. Mrs. Vasseur recalled her grandmother, a professional caterer, preparing food for large weddings and celebrations, including an almond-based cake that became a family staple. This recipe, still prepared today, embodies continuity, connecting present-day family gatherings to past moments of collective celebration.

Preservation practices further reinforced this sense of continuity. Seasonal routines such as making strawberry jam or preserves ensured food would last through the winter, transforming practical necessity into tradition. These practices reflected a family history shaped by seasonality, planning, and self-sufficiency, where food preparation was tied to foresight and care rather than convenience.

Beyond specific recipes, the act of eating together emerged as a defining cultural value. Both parents emphasized the importance of sitting down at the table as a family, treating meals as time for conversation, connection, and shared presence. Even after migrating to the United States and adopting busier schedules, the family maintained the practice of eating dinner together, resisting the fragmentation of meals common in contemporary life. In this way, food served not only as nourishment but as a structure for maintaining family identity.

Cooking also triggered powerful emotional memory. Mr. Vasseur described how spending time in the kitchen often prompted reflection on his father's cooking and on earlier moments of family life. The slow, intentional nature of cooking allowed memories to surface organically, reinforcing the idea that food preparation is as meaningful as consumption. Together, these traditions reveal how food operates as both memory and identity, carrying history forward through everyday practice rather than formal ritual.



Arun Family

Tradition, Memory, & Identity



Family tradition in the Arun household is preserved not only through recipes, but through private language and shared codes. Mr. Arun explained that some dishes are known by names that make sense only within their family network, names that even childhood friends from the same street might not recognize. At the same time, distant relatives across generations instantly understand those terms, showing how food vocabulary can act like an inherited family “dialect.”

These inside names reveal how food can function like a living archive of ancestry. Mr. Arun reflected that some terms seem to mix Tamil with Telugu influences, suggesting possible ancestral movement from a neighboring region over centuries. Both parents described this as using food like a kind of “ancestry.com,” where the names and methods might hold clues about where their family came from, even if no one can fully trace the origin anymore.

Food memory also appears through sudden nostalgia and sensory association. Mr. Arun shared an example that happened recently: he bought jalebi during Diwali season, heated it with milk (“doodh jalebi”), and felt instantly transported back to his college breakfast routine after nearly three decades. Mrs. Arun described another memory trigger rooted in process rather than taste alone: packing food in banana leaves for travel, which creates a distinct aroma and flavor that she associates directly with childhood trips and school tours.

Tradition can also produce a sense of loss as rituals change across generations. Mrs. Arun described the harvest festival Pongal as something that once reflected farming life, creating rice-flour kolam (rangoli), using pumpkin flowers, and cooking over fires fueled by dried cow dung. She reflected that families today are smaller, busier, and less able to perform older practices in full, meaning cultural rituals have “shrunk” or shifted. In this way, food becomes not only a connection to identity, but also a reminder that time and tradition do not stand still.

Prieto Family Tradition, Memory, & Identity




In the Prieto household, tradition is strongest in eating and gathering—not always in passing down cooking skills. Mr. Prieto notes that neither he nor his sister adopted their mother's cooking practices, while Mrs. Garcia-Prieto explains she was one of the younger sisters and didn't receive the same "training" as the older girls. As a result, many recipes survive most visibly through holiday repetition, such as tamales at Christmas, mole for birthdays, and pozole in cooler months, even when not everyone in the family can make them from scratch.


Despite limited formal "recipe passing," childhood food labor still shaped identity through participation and routine. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto describes waking before dawn to take corn to be ground into masa because the community didn't sell tortillas, the corn was boiled at night, ground in the morning, then formed into tortillas by her mother. Even when she wasn't the primary cook, her role shows how food tradition was built through collective contribution rather than written recipes.

Memory attaches to both the food and the social world surrounding it. Mr. Prieto remembers tamales as a "big production," where adults worked and children played, tying the dish to cousins and shared family time rather than just flavor. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto describes holidays at her grandparents' home as "absolute fun," where food was inseparable from fireworks, cousins arriving from other communities, and the sense of joy that came from being together all day.

Religious and seasonal rituals added another layer of meaning to what the family ate. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto recalls traditions like posadas, pan de rosca with the baby figure inside, and the holiday rhythm of Catholic celebration shaping when and why certain foods appeared. Thanksgiving, by contrast, entered the family later, it was an American holiday adopted after moving to the U.S., reflecting assimilation not as replacement, but as an added calendar layer alongside Christmas and Easter traditions.



Vasseur Family Empire, Trade, & Influence



Discussions of ingredients revealed how deeply empire and trade are embedded in everyday cooking. When reflecting on where food came from, both parents emphasized that much of their childhood diet was shaped by geography and access rather than choice. In western France, cooking relied heavily on butter, local vegetables, and seasonal products, while spices were rare and mild. Pepper stood out as one of the few common spices, an everyday reminder of colonial trade routes that connected France to its overseas empire.

Regional variation within France further highlighted the relationship between food and power. Mr. Vasseur described how moving from western France to the south exposed him to olive oil as the dominant cooking fat, a shift rooted in climate, agriculture, and Mediterranean trade networks. These differences made clear that food traditions are not only cultural, but also economic and environmental, shaped by what regions could grow and exchange.

Colonial history and global conflict left visible marks on French cuisine. Mr. Vasseur traced the widespread use of beet sugar to Napoleon's blockade, which cut France off from sugarcane colonies and forced the development of alternative sources. Similarly, chicory emerged as a coffee substitute during World War II shortages, illustrating how war and imperial disruption reshaped daily consumption. These examples reveal how large-scale political events translated directly into changes at the table.

Immigration and cultural blending further transformed what came to be considered "French food." Dishes such as couscous, originally associated with North Africa, have become fully integrated into French culinary identity, reflecting France's colonial history and patterns of migration. At the same time, the relative absence of Indian food in France, contrasted with its prevalence in the United States, highlighted how colonial relationships and migration networks determine which cuisines circulate and become normalized.

Rather than resisting these influences, the Vasseur family embraced culinary mixing as an expansion of possibility. Exposure to new foods through travel, immigration, and life in the United States broadened what they cooked and how they thought about cuisine. Cooking dishes inspired by other cultures became a way of "traveling in the kitchen," blending memory with experimentation. In this way, empire and trade were not abstract historical forces, but lived realities, shaping taste, access, and identity through everyday meals.

Arun Family Empire, Trade, & Influence



The Arun family connected modern food habits to empire by tracing where key ingredients actually came from. Mr. Arun described learning that chilies, now central to Indian cuisine, were not originally in India and arrived only through colonial-era exchange routes linking the Americas, Europe, and South Asia. This discovery reframed “traditional spice” as something historically recent, shaped directly by trade and imperial movement.

Colonial influence also appears in the everyday language used to describe vegetables. Mr. Arun explained that certain produce items, like carrots, beets, potatoes, beans, and similar crops, are still casually referred to as “English vegetables” in India. Even when these vegetables are now grown locally, the label reflects the cultural memory of how foreign influence became normalized over time.

Cultural blending shaped Indian cuisine long before British rule through conquest, migration, and regional exchange. Mr. Arun pointed to biryani as a well-known example of Persian and Muslim influence becoming deeply integrated into Indian food traditions. Mrs. Arun also shared a regional story about sambhar, connecting the dish’s evolution to historical movement and ingredient substitution, whether fully true or partly myth, the story itself shows how communities interpret cuisine through historical narratives.

Rather than resisting influence, the Arun family views culinary mixing as a creative gain. They described adopting and adapting foods across cultures, including “cheese dosa,” a fusion idea inspired by the logic of a quesadilla. Between substitutions (tortillas for roti, spinach for keerai) and new combinations, their cooking reflects how trade, travel, and migration don’t dilute identity, instead they often expand it.



Prieto Family Empire, Trade, & Influence



For both parents, ingredient origins were historically understood through access rather than global mapping. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto frames Mexico as “mostly local” for staples, like corn, beans, and farm-raised meats, while spices and packaged goods came through her father’s trips to a bigger city two hours away, often for both family use and his small store inventory. Mr. Prieto similarly recalls local markets supplying traditional seasonings and chilies without much focus on where they originated beyond “parts of Mexico.”

Cultural blending became more visible through migration into U.S. food systems and Tex-Mex reinterpretations. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto distinguishes Mexican enchiladas (white cheese, spicier, different preparation) from the Texan versions she encountered in schools and communities in the Valley, where American cheese and flour tortillas became common. Mr. Prieto describes this same evolution more broadly: once in Houston, Mexican food increasingly existed alongside, and sometimes fused with, fast food, Asian cuisines, and other international flavors.

When asked to connect cuisine to colonization and trade, their answers reveal an important truth, many influences feel invisible because they are normalized. Mr. Prieto emphasizes lived experience, migration changing his palate, barbecue entering his cooking life, and the modern “availability explosion” of spices, rather than tracing historical routes directly. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto gestures to colonization mainly through spices and inherited culinary habits, while acknowledging that much of this history wasn’t framed explicitly in daily life.

Their most concrete examples of “influence” are the ones that altered practice, for example, what gets substituted, what becomes common, and what becomes routine. For Mr. Prieto, barbecue became a form of cultural crossover that taught him to cook through heat, time, and technique, bringing him “into the kitchen from the pit.” For Mrs. Garcia-Prieto, outside influence appears through spaghetti, attempts at Chinese-style meals, and the gradual normalization of eating out and purchasing prepared foods rather than making everything at home.

Vasseur Family Present and Future



In the present, food traditions within the Vasseur family continue through reinterpretation rather than strict preservation. While many childhood dishes remain meaningful, the way food is prepared and shared has evolved with changing schedules, locations, and family roles. Cooking today reflects a blend of inherited practices and new influences, shaped by migration, travel, and the tastes of younger generations.

Intergenerational exchange now flows in both directions. Rather than recipes being passed only from parents to children, the Vasseurs described how their children often introduce new dishes, ingredients, and techniques into the household. Foods such as kale salads or avocado-based preparations, once unfamiliar, have become part of the family repertoire through this exchange. Sharing food, in this sense, is no longer about preserving a single tradition, but about remaining open to adaptation and learning.

Cooking together has become a central way of sustaining family connection. Weekend and holiday meals, particularly Sundays and vacations, serve as intentional moments for collaboration in the kitchen. Involving children in food preparation encourages participation, curiosity, and care for what is being eaten, reinforcing the social role of meals even as daily routines grow busier. These shared cooking practices transform food from an individual task into a collective experience.

Migration also introduced new food traditions that were learned rather than inherited. After moving to the United States, the family adopted Thanksgiving not as a national ritual, but as a communal one, participating in shared meals organized among immigrants, colleagues, and students far from home. In this context, food became a way to create belonging and temporary family, reinforcing the role of meals as social glue rather than fixed tradition.

When asked about culinary legacy, both parents resisted the idea of a single dish being remembered as “theirs.” Instead, they emphasized memory over mastery, valuing the time spent cooking together rather than the permanence of a specific recipe. This response underscores a broader understanding of food tradition as process rather than product. In the Vasseur family, what endures is not one defining dish, but the act of gathering, cooking, and eating together, a practice that continues to carry meaning into the future.

Recipe

One Cup of Love

Two Teaspoons of Care

One Sprinkle of Creativity

Four Dashes of Hugs

Three Heaps of Kindness

One Delicious Meal

Arun Family Present and Future



Today, the Arun family maintains tradition most strongly through festival-specific foods and intentional repetition. Mr. Arun explained that many Hindu festivals have signature dishes tied to religious stories and seasonal practice, similar to how certain foods are expected during Thanksgiving or Christmas. Even when these foods aren't made in large quantities, preparing them at least once helps preserve meaning and connect children to cultural memory through taste.

Passing down tradition is framed as exposure rather than enforcement. Mr. Arun emphasized that the purpose is for the children to recognize the association, so that Krishna Jayanti, for example, still "means" certain foods even if the next generation changes how often they make them. He reflected that becoming a parent can shift priorities, making tradition feel more urgent to preserve than it did earlier in adulthood.

Recipe-sharing in this family is open and community-oriented rather than secretive. Mrs. Arun explained that when guests enjoy a dish and ask for the recipe, she is happy to share it, including family-style preparations such as bottle gourd curry. Instead of treating recipes as private property, she treats them as something meant to circulate, especially when food becomes a bridge between families and friends.

Their version of legacy is less about one signature dish and more about the memory of care and creativity. When asked what she hopes will be remembered as "hers," Mrs. Arun suggested that her children will ultimately decide. Mr. Arun pointed to something small but lasting: her habit of shaping dosa into smiley faces or stars to make food fun and personal. In this way, legacy becomes not a single recipe, but the feeling children carry forward, the way home cooking looked, felt, and was made with them in mind.



Prieto Family Present and Future

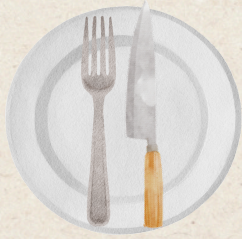


Today, the Prieto family continues tradition through a mix of preservation, substitution, and selective reinvention. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto still keeps certain foods alive, like migas, frijoles, basic tacos, occasional mole, and nopales (even if others in the family resist them), while Mr. Prieto continues cultural continuity through the foods he returns to repeatedly, especially tacos and the dishes that still “transport” him back to childhood. What stays constant is not perfection, but the impulse to return to familiar flavors when they matter most.

Health constraints and modern convenience have reshaped what gets cooked, who cooks it, and how often. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto is honest about how allergies, gluten limits, picky preferences, and the reality of fast food convenience pushed the family toward fragmented eating routines. Mr. Prieto echoes the health consequences of this shift, describing nostalgia for traditional home cooking as partly tied to recognizing how modern eating patterns changed his body over time.

Even with these constraints, both parents still describe food as a living connection to heritage rather than a fixed museum piece. Mrs. Garcia-Prieto reinterprets nopales as salads or dips with pico de gallo, and she notes how American corn’s sweetness changed dishes like esquites compared to the white corn she grew up with in Mexico. This is adaptation with intention: keeping the ingredient and memory, while changing the format to fit the present.

When asked what they hope will be remembered as “theirs,” their answers show two different kinds of legacy, craft and continuity. Mr. Prieto identifies his brisket as a personal signature, something he learned to replicate, share, and become known for across people and places, while Mrs. Garcia-Prieto points to calabacitas con pollo as her own evolving version of a familiar dish. Together, they represent the family’s current food future, one part heritage, one part reinvention, and both grounded in the desire to keep feeding people with meaning.



Conclusion

After the Last Bite



No matter our differences in geography, culture, or cuisine, food plays the same role in all three families.

Across the French and Mexican households, similar patterns emerged despite vastly different cultural contexts. In each couple, one partner grew up rurally and the other more urban, shaping early access to ingredients and cooking styles.

Notably, in all three cases, it was the **women who grew up closer to farming or rural food systems**, while the **men were raised in more urban environments**. This parallel highlights how place quietly structures food knowledge long before migration or globalization enters the picture.

Across all families, **mothers (and often grandmothers) were the primary cooks**, responsible not only for feeding the household but also for passing down traditions, table rituals, and expectations around shared meals. While fathers occasionally cooked for special occasions, everyday food labor and culinary memory consistently centered around women.

Migration and modernization altered ingredients, access, and health outcomes, yet **food remained a key anchor of identity**. Whether adapting recipes to grocery stores, incorporating new cuisines, or navigating fast food and dietary change, each family used food as a way to stay connected to their past while adjusting to new environments.

Ultimately, food functions as a shared language.

Across cultures, it marks celebration, signals belonging, carries memory, and brings people together. Even when dishes differ, **the meaning of food remains the same**: a way to remember where we come from and who we share life with.