



COOKING FOR LOVE

A CAREER-DRIVEN LATINA SETS FOOT IN THE KITCHEN AND NEVER LOOKS BACK.

BY WANDA MARTUCCI

■ **FROM MY EARLIEST MEMORY, I WANTED TO BE JUST LIKE MY MOTHER.** I wanted to look like her, smell like her, and be blonde like her. I wanted to do everything she did—except cook.

When my parents arrived in the United States (my mother from Cuba, my father from Puerto Rico), with them came the old-world notion that a woman's place is in the kitchen. And while my mother's cooking has always been exquisite, I just didn't think it was fair that a woman was expected to spend hours making a meal from scratch.

As I grew older, I vowed to break tradition. I pursued a post-collegiate degree and embarked on a career so I'd stay in the boardroom and out of the kitchen. When I was single, my life was less

The author and her mom with their arroz con pollo.

¿Qué Pasa, U.S.A.? and more *Sex and the City*. Dinner was usually takeout, and my oven was a haven for displaced shoes and sweaters.

Everything changed when my now husband tasted my mother's masterpiece, arroz con pollo, during one of his first visits to my family. As a non-Latino, it was obvious he had never had anything quite like it. When he asked my mother what was in it, she casually but confidently answered, "Just a little saffron, a little adobo, *iy mucho sazón!*" After the meal, he was so visibly satisfied that his skin was practically glowing. He was impressed and transfixed, and it reminded me of the expression on my father's face every time he ate one of my mother's homemade feasts. It was a look of adoration and admiration.

After seeing the power that one dish had over the man I loved, I was determined to make it myself and asked my mother for the recipe. It took me three hours from start to finish. I'm not sure if it was the aroma of the spices coming together or the emotion I felt while channeling my mother, but I never felt as connected to my heritage as I did when I was literally sweating over the stove. Even though I spent so much energy battling that stereotype, when my husband gave me that look after tasting my first arroz con pollo, I knew it was time to get over my aversion—and I did.

Cooking is an expression of love and passion. When I create a meal from scratch, it does as much for my self-esteem as giving an amazing presentation in front of corporate executives does. And now, after being showered with compliments following my own exquisite meals, I casually thank my husband and walk away with a little confidence, a little swagger, *iy mucho sazón!*