

# A Passion for Salsa

## The Story of Roberto Salazar By Angee Turnbull

**B**rantford is a long way from Chile and a lifetime ago for Roberto Salazar. He sits surrounded by the buzz of the Brantford market, reflects on his sixty years and how he ended up moving to Brantford. Roberto and his partner Flora run Flocita's Latin Foods and have a regular stall at our Brantford Market. Roberto began working at markets in Chile when he was only six years old. He would climb trees to pick the pomegranates and sell them at the side of the road. He would often help out friends and sell watermelons in the market. Was his motivation to make money and help out the family? Roberta says it was more the motivation he felt to simply work. He loved to work. Roberto was the son of a hard working mother who worked tirelessly to support her family. Roberto spent many hours in the care of his Godmother who ran her own restaurant in their town. His desire to work and work hard can be attributed to both his inner desire and strengths and the strong female role models he had as a child.

On March, 1974 he fled Chile after a military coup to travel to his new homeland of Canada. He had to quickly learn English and the ways of this foreign country. It was cold and his borrowed coat was not warm enough. He learned that his paycheque didn't go very far and saving money was going to be a challenge. Roberto moved around a lot and worked in a variety of different positions but his fondest memories are of his days in Elliot Lake where he worked in the mining industry. His description of the days working in the dark underground almost sounds magical and he compares it going back to his mother's womb. As year's past Roberto married and started a family. This increased the demand for him to find work that would support his growing family.

An unexpected stop during a bike trip landed him in Brantford. Not realizing that this small community would become his home. Roberto went back to school and became a social service worker and settled in Brantford. It was during his volunteer job one evening at the Latin Village that he met Flora who would later

become his wife. Side by side they cooked the menu for the evening. She was cooking the Pupusas and he was making the salsas. So began a partnership that would take an unexpected turn as they formed Flocita's Latin Foods in later years.

Roberto confesses to be a self taught cook and does not stick to a recipe. He simply knows how much is required in each of his dishes.



Photos Courtesy of Brian Thompson

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What is really heartwarming that this new business venture has very little to do with the bottom line and more to do with his passion of cooking he shares with Flora. This is not his day job. He works in the day as a social service worker and returns home to spend the evening cooking

with Flora. They have a certified kitchen in their home where they create an extensive array of products made from scratch to be sold at the market.

Roberta shops for most of his ingredients locally but travels to Toronto for his special spices. True to a culinary artist he does not reveal what those spices are. His regular clients are appreciative of the quality of the food he produces. If you try one of their salsas the very thought of buying a jarred commercial product from your local supermarket will no longer be an option. Flocita's Latin Foods doesn't advertise or have a website. It is popular by word of mouth. They have a solid dedicated client base that wouldn't dream of a having a

salsa night without using one of their dips. The summer has been extremely busy this year and Roberto admits he just took off his first Friday night since February.

He admits his corn pies, a staple in his lineup; he gets from Toronto during his monthly buying trips. Roberto is enjoying his life in Brantford and the opportunity to meet the community as they pass by his stall at the market each week.

What is evident is his passion for cooking and his personal fulfillment in sharing his recipes with the Brantford community. Chile suddenly doesn't feel that far away. However, what is obvious is the close partnership he has with his wife. This is a love affair in and out of the kitchen. He will not take the credit for this new venture; it is a shared success with his wife. When you approach the counter they both smile and welcome

you as if you were stepping into their kitchen. It is a pleasure for them to explain any of the products in their cases. They are eager to provide you with a sample of anything to try.

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The salsa has the most incredible kick. Such flavor. Rich and colourful and so distinctively tasteful it is an extraordinary culinary experience. His chicken soup is a proven remedy for whatever ails you. The hardest thing is to sample the guacamole. One sample is not enough, taking a spoon and eating the entire bowl would be more like it. There are no premade corn chips served at this counter. Everything is made from scratch and fresh.

The menu items available to purchase at the market is quite extensive. A variety of salsas and dips with corn chips. Pupusas made of chicken or spinach or mixed. Burritos made with chicken, beef, curried vegetables, and beans and rice. A variety of empanadas made with chicken, beef, roasted vegetables, and spinach and feta. There are six types of lasagnas to take home and freeze for future dinners.

An interesting product to help those kick the caffeine coffee habit is Yerba Mate. A South American beverage has been shown to be better than coffee or green tea. One teaspoon is good for two cups so it definitely is worth every penny. Roberta enjoys sipping away on it during his morning.

What is so evident is the love and warmth that is put into every creation that is sold by Roberta and Flora. What does every customer want to hear, "Would you like to try some of the dips we have"? What a better way to experience this authentic Latin cuisine. Stopping by Flocita's Latin Foods should definitely be the first stop on your list the next time you venture down to the Brantford Food market.

