

THE SEARCH FOR

MENUDO

Finding family and home in the hunt for a Mexican dish

BY HENRY HOUSTON



One of the fondest memories I have of my late aunt is when she taught me how to make *menudo*. I can still remember holding tripe under warm water, removing any remnants of grit and gunk — you know, the stuff one finds in a cow’s stomach, aka the tripe. I haven’t made it since, but menudo maintains the status as one of my favorite meals, whether I have a hangover or not.

For those who don’t know what menudo is, it’s a soup usually only served on the weekend at Mexican restaurants. Depending on which region the recipe originates from, the soup’s composition can vary. It could contain hominy. The broth could be red or white. So, saying a certain bowl of menudo is the best is subjective. Now, I’m not from Mexico, nor is my family. But a bowl of menudo is, regardless, still a reminder of home, and I have a pretty good idea of what home is like.

Burrito Amigos provided the first bowl of menudo I ever had in Eugene, about four years ago. It’s a good one to start with, especially if someone is new to menudo. Because it has hominy, there’s less room for tripe, and the broth is mild with chili. Mi Tierra Taqueria, on the other hand, serves a full bowl of broth, tripe and pata (foot). However, with the pata in the bowl, there isn’t much room for tripe.

Just like Goldilocks, the menudo I found at Las Morenas Taqueria was just right. It’s a large bowl, filled with quality tripe that has the fat trimmed off. The broth has a kick to it, but doesn’t overwhelm you with chili. They provide all of the fixings — lime, diced jalapenos, tortillas cooked on a grill and cilantro.

Las Morenas Taqueria, much like its owner, Ismael Morelos, is straight to the point. The only decorations are hanging piñatas, a menu sign and some groceries for sale. It’s clear the place is here to make food, nothing else.

Morelos says menudo is a popular dish for Christmas or New Year’s Day for Latin American families. Cooking menudo takes several hours, and, since families are already up late on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve, the soup can be prepared at night and cook while the family sleeps. That way, it’s ready to eat in the morning, he says.

In 2000, Morelos asked his Aunt Dolores, who made menudo in Guadalajara, Jalisco, if she could show him how to make menudo since he liked her recipe. However, she didn’t want to show him how to make it. He needed to convince her.

“Well, you’re going to end up — not being crass — dying and no one is gonna know your secret recipe for the menudo,” he told her.

She finally decided to show him the recipe, and, despite a few tweaks, her recipe is what’s served at Las Morenas Taqueria. Since he started selling menudo nearly 20 years ago, menudo has been a popular menu item. It often sells out before the weekend is over and is popular with the Latino community.

However, what Las Morenas Taqueria serves is more than a bowl of menudo. Sarai Morelos, Ismael’s daughter, tells me that Morelos, living in the U.S. for around 25 years, has been able to provide opportunities for his children; for instance, Sarai Morelos is about to start her junior year at George Fox University. Each bowl of menudo, taco and torta the restaurant serves has helped put Morelos’ children through college.

Las Morenas Taqueria is open 10 am to 8 pm every day, 585 River Road. For more information, search Facebook for their page. Burrito Amigos has five restaurants as well as two kiosks outside of Jerry’s Home Improvement. Visit their website, burritoamigos.com for specific location and hours of operation. Mi Tierra Taqueria is open 9 am to 9 pm every day, 628 Blair Boulevard. For more information, visit mitierraeugene.com.