

Taco Queen brought good food to Q-C

By **Bill Wundram** | Wednesday, January 09, 2008

THE biggest smile and the curliest hair in the Quad-Cities belonged to Louise Perez. But now, Louise — the Taco Queen — is dead, and those who love Mexican food will be weeping over her hot tamales.

She'd beam and say "I love you" to customers, whether she knew them or not. She'd call out "wow" with every fajita platter, and might dance. She'd do a little cha-cha, but ballads were her thing, like the dreamy tango-like "Besame Mucho."

She was class, in her beaded dress, when stealing the show with her husband, Adolph, on some Quad-City dance floor. But behind the counter at Adolph's Mexican Food in Moline or East Moline, there were no sequins. She wore a white peasant blouse with frilly neckline and sleeves. A smile was attached to her face.

Once, I complained there was no place to get a good hot tamale, served with salted crackers. The ink had hardly dried on this noospaper before Louise was scolding on the phone.

"You never ate my tamales."

She coaxed me into sampling them. The smoke rolled out my ears and tears ran down my cheeks.

Ever since, I have been hooked on Louise's hot tamales.

Well, Louise is dead of cancer, age 81. She was working until a few months ago.

This week, as homage to Louise and to eat tamales, I sat down at Adolph's on Kennedy Drive in East Moline. Smoke rolled from my ears. My eyes had tears. Those tamales were still as hot as a swig of tabasco sauce.

It's not correct to say Louise and Adolph — who died eight years ago — brought the first tacos to the Quad-Cities. But they were among the first, in 1951, to sell crispy shells wrapped around ground beef, tomato, lettuce and blistering hot sauce in a tiny place called El Sombrero along Railroad Avenue in East Moline.

They may not have been first but, Louise used to say, "we are the best, because all the recipes are mine."

It was mid-afternoon this week when the Perez family and friends gathered at the East Moline Adolph's to chat about Louise. Pictures of legendary Mexican hero Pancho Villa anchored the walls. The place had all the elements of Juarez, notwithstanding the merry maraca music on the sound system.

"Dad began serving the Mexican trade, but look at all the people in here today," said Louise's son, John. "There isn't a Mexican in the whole place. Dad and mom introduced tacos to everyone in the Quad-Cities in a big way."

That is why they called Louise the Taco Queen. Adolph, always smoothing his suave moustache, was the front man, bowing and greeting the customers while Louise was sweating over the stove in the kitchen, fine-tuning the chicken bean tostadas.

Louise wasn't Mexican. She was a Scots-Irish and Guatemalan who met a handsome Casanova named Adolph Perez in Chicago. "She was only 16," says her daughter, Leslie. "Dad made the right moves, a rico suave." Louise was not a cook, but she learned fast when they moved to East Moline to open a Mexican restaurant.

Adolph and Louise became the happiest couple in our towns. They danced like professionals. Other dancers would step aside and watch the couple whirl the floor doing the mambo at places like the Flamingo, Ship's Wheel and Danceland.

"She was my best friend and the happiest person in the world," says Margaret Carpio, Moline.

Louise loved to cook and to see patrons fill up. If any down-and-outer showed up without a nickel, it was always her kind order, "Give them all they want to eat."

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