Dina Paz has come across a box of old photos. As she thumbs through all the memories, one stands out to her – one that sums up her first memory of food.

“I’m sitting at the kitchen table and my feet don’t touch the floor. I must’ve been around four because my smile is missing a few front teeth. Someone, probably my dad, told me to look up and smile. On my plate is a torn piece of soft Cuban bread and a fried egg, the yolk oozing from its center. I’m happy because it’s my favorite thing to eat. And still is. So simple, the dish has all of my favorite ingredients – bread, egg, butter, and salt.”

Dina’s culinary upbringing was a Latin-Caribbean influence. She was born in 1976 in a town off the Atlantic coast of Honduras, but before the end of the decade she and her family would land in Miami, Fla. Still, she’d spend her summers back in Honduras with her grandmothers and extended family.

“I still visit, but not as often as I’d like, about every other year.”

She’s filled with memories – memories of her dad and her eating fried snapper and plantains in a little hut by the beach. Of her grandmother Pearl’s Johnnycakes. Of her other grandmother’s cuajada cheese, soft and fresh like mozzarella, but sweeter. And of her sister’s caramel cake. Of her mom’s conch soup. Deep and rich roots of delectable food.

She says her passion for that food comes from her mom. “She cooked for us every day. It was one of the ways she expressed her love – she didn’t mind cooking even after working long days cleaning other people’s houses.”

Despite all the fond recollections of food, right after college, Dina entered an information technology career.

“I bumped into the IT field so it was a transitional career for me - a placeholder. After three years of it, I knew it wasn’t for me. I wanted to work with my hands and get away from the office life.”

It wasn’t a complete waste of time though. “Both IT and the culinary field are customer service driven, both are great for geeks because there is always learning to be done, a newfangled idea, concept, technique or technology to catch up with.”

She wasted little time catching up in culinary work. First, she went into research and development – “the sciencey side of food” for a company that developed syrups and sauces for the beverage industry.

“It was a wild ride learning manufacturing from a grand scale, but eventually, I needed to get back to my roots.”

So in early 2013 Dina started Pazitive Provisions, what she calls her “venture into culinary consulting and food advocacy.”

“My goal is to be a part of the solution, to reduce hunger and obesity,” she says. “The sky’s the limit in this industry. I’ve been fortunate enough to see it from many sides – the kitchen, the development lab, the cafeteria. I love the flexibility of it, that it can be a visceral experience and a brainy one. There’s always something new to learn, and it’s never boring.”

COMPANY: Pazitive Provisions, LLC
EDUCATION: B.A. Florida State University in creative writing and history. Culinary degree from the Art Institute in Denver. Trained at Strings Restaurant in Denver.
HONORS: Placed in a county fair baking competition for zucchini bread.