**My memories** are recipes, and I wished I wrote things down,

Rather than remember.

A familiar meal, ham, greens, black eyed peas,

Cornbread made in a cast iron pan.

It is my turn to make it this year;

The black eyed peas were my mother’s,

Though the sofrito I stirred in was a new addition.

The greens were her mother’s,

Though I used cured pork belly instead of her ham hock.

The cornbread was someone’s mother’s,

Because cornbread never seems to change.

When the recipes are memories, then the blessing is your life.

One dish for health, one for wealth, and the other for luck;

My mother would tell us this as she spooned it on our plates,

Every year, just as her mother had.

She would have had wealth too,

 But she spent so much on meals

for friends, and strangers, and anyone who’d gather around her table.

On gas to get her to the hospital, and to the church, and to her job,

On a pair of skateboard shoes her son couldn’t live without.

She would have had health too,

But she poured all her energy into her relationships,

Strained her body to meet the needs of her patients,

And shouldered the responsibilities of her family.

Perhaps her luck would be different, had she not grown sick,

Too sick to work, or walk, or make meals.

When the recipes are memories, then the blessing is your life.

Not the expectations of what you hope to get;

It’s the acknowledgement of what you know you’ll give.

And what has been given.

So when I bless the food, and when we all eat it,

It will be my mother, and her mother, continuing to feed us.

That we may be a blessing and our lives might be…**A Meal** might last more than ninety minutes.

This may seem typical to us who are able to fill silence with words,

Between bites.

We chew and swallow and speak, and the minutes fly by.

But not for her.

For her, each bite is a battle.

Her tongue is too weak to move the food to her throat,

And so she chews and chews and chews and chews.

She chews, but it’s not her choice.

She had to give up texture.

Can that be blended into a puree, we would ask?

If the answer was no,

It was one more thing on the list of what she couldn’t have.

Even water needs to be thick as syrup, no ice, no straw.

It’s exhausting to chew without eating,

So after ten minutes, a break was needed.

And repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat until an hour later,

The small portion of sweet potatoes is finished.

I remember the days when she loved to eat;

The days when she would spend hours at the table,

Eating and talking and enjoying the company of others.

And when I am asked of what I recall, I speak of these moments

the moments when her body still brought her joy.

But I will also speak of when dinners got longer,

When eating together became feeding her,

When the menu became soft foods only.

When “what are we having for dinner?” became “Hey Mom, open up.”

When twenty minutes, became forty minutes became ninety minutes.

And I settle into the chair, with a spoon and patience,

And in the midst of my remembering,

wait for her to finish

what was in**…**.**Her mouth** let out one final breath, and then was still.

For her this was healing; for us, the final breaking.

What joy… what sorrow.

How incomplete our gatherings now felt,

Like when she would leave the country for a few weeks,

And the house would descend into chaos.

What joy it was to be complete again,

When her face would peak out from the behind the gate of the airport,

Bag in hand, ready to hear about all that happened since she left.

She carried a little clay elephant with her when she travelled,

And when she arrived back, she would hand it to me.

When I dropped it and broke one of its legs, I cried.

She glued it back on and said,

“Some things you just can’t break”, and kissed me on the head.

What joy… what sorrow.

When healing doesn’t mean living,

And when it does.

I disembark the plane, stepping out into the gate.

Around the corner, I see it standing… waiting.

First its trunk, then tusks, then legs, then ears,

A statue of an elephant twice as tall as me.

“Some things you just can’t break” she says,

And I am complete again,

Because she is more than **my memories.**