

ASK & ANSWER

If you were given a 10 million dollar check tomorrow what would you do?

1. Invest/save
2. Start a cafe/cooking school that develops working skills for people to help prepare them for the industry, life, and the world. This can range from culinary classes, to business classes. Most importantly Organizational psychology. Everything made in the classes will be sold in the cafe/ little shop at checkout. Using all local produce and products from the community.
3. Start a brewery with a friend of mine
4. Give back, invest in community and the environment.
5. Start an endowment for a scholarship at my alma mater.”

What is one ingredient that you couldn't see yourself living without?

“If you asked me this growing up or ten years ago my parents would tell you peanut butter with a big exclamation point. I now would say hot sauce. In college I was the kid who put hot sauce on everything. Even carried it around. Now I do love spicy food, but I like balance and to be able to test my food. Also in Ayurveda Spice/Hot aggravates Pitta Dosha show it is something that I have to use wisely. But hot sauce works wonders in food. All you may need is a drop or two, but it will bring out so many flavors. If something tastes like it is missing, add a drop or two and see what happens. Stay away from tabasco. Find a hot sauce you like, but also one neutral enough to not change the flavor profile. I usually use a habanero Hot sauce, but on my food rather than in it? Chipotle all the way!!

Also.....do not underestimate my love for chick peas.....and quinoa”

What is something that most people don't know about you? what would you do?

“ I am fascinated by Mythology and the supernatural. Ever since I was a kid and it grows everyday. It is amazing how much we do today in society that we do not even think twice about that comes from superstitions or mythological stories from hundreds or thousand of years ago. I have also always believed in past lives and reincarnation. Growing up I used to say I was Albert Einstein in past life. In the 4th or 5th grade I did a book report on him that talked about how he would ask soooo many questions. In the report my argument to being his reincarnation was the amount of questions I asked growing up (and still do). When stating the amount of questions I always ask in the book report, my teach even circled it and wrote “YES!!!” In the margins. Speaking about Albert Einstein. My Great Uncle knew him. I remember his sister (my grandma)

If you were not a chef what profession would you choose?

“When it came time to make the decision to choose the culinary route I found it because of my interest in science. I always love nutrition and biology. As time went on I found food science which led me the culinary direction. Traveling has also reminded men of my love for ancient civilizations. If I was to do something completely out fo the culinary field it would have chosen Medical or Archaeology.”

Being that cooking is a form of the arts it really is about creativity as well, what inspires you to come up with new dishes or new plating styles?

“There are a lot of things that inspire me to come up with new dishes and plating styles. Colors. We eat with our eyes. I always love color in my plating. Travel is a big one. Finding new ingredients and new ways to use them. The whole cooking experience from start to finish, finding the ingredients, cooking, the plating. It is all one from start to finish. One thing I used to do with many of my jobs and special events was go to local farms and ask what they had fresh, I would even pick it. Once I had my list then I would make my meal. I always love to push the bar. Putting ingredients together people say never go together. Try me! Is what I say. One dinner I was doing at an Organic Vegetable and Herb Farm I used to work on in upstate New York. Amongst the ingredients they had one dish I made was a roasted chicken topped with a chutney that had apples, tomatoes, and rosemary. Some white balsamic vinegar to bring it all together. Everyone who ordered it at the end of the dinner said things like “apples and tomatoes, I didn’t know what to expect, but you pulled it off!” Challenge your mind, challenge yourself, challenge the world. One thing I love to do on my time off is just take a whole day to cook and plate. Different dishes different designs. Even now when I cook for my family, every family member may get the same dish, but each one is plated differently. Some platings work better than others, but you don’t know unless you try! “

With no specific time frame on either, what is a short term and long term culinary goal of yours at the moment?

“My main goal is to continue to love what I do. Life and the universe has a good way of telling me to move on. I have been concentrating on stay present and staying open to opportunities. It is what got me here. I want to continue to travel the world. Understand where our food really comes from and how it can change but be so similar from country to country. I have thoughts of having a cute and cozy cafe one day. A brewery with a good friend of mine. Life always brings me back reminding me of how much I love the farm and product production. Jams Jellies baked goods. There is so much out there. We will see where things leave, but for now I am living in the moment, taking in as much as I can because I know every day leads to whatever is next. ”

What do you have coming up, or what’s your next adventure?

“I have about a month left here on board ms Zuiderdam. Then I have about 5 weeks off. This will consist of exploring some parts of the US: Boston, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, New York City. Remember rest and self care is important. So I will spend a week in Upstate New York hiking the high peaks I have 15 out of 46 to become a 46er. Before I head back to work on ms Rotterdam. I am spending time in both Luxembourg and The Netherlands. That’s the stuff that is next that most people would label an adventure, but the truth is life is an adventure. You can find excitement and exploration in just about anything if not all of it.”

What is one of your proudest moments in your career so far?

“There have been a few I can choose from, but one of the first that always sticks with me comes from my first chef job. I was the Head Chef of an environmental education summer camp in Warrensburg New York. One of my passions about being a chef as I mentioned is opening people minds through food. Interesting people in trying new things. At the camp I pushed the envelope on seeing what I could get the kids to eat. I was very involved and interactive. From day one I would tell them to “ try everything, if you don’t like it you do not have to eat it, BUT! If you do not try it, then you do not know if you like it.” (this was how my parents raised me when it came to food). So for the less interested eaters we always had peanut butter and jelly. Two days before the week ended I was having a special pierogi lunch. A camper asked me what a pierogi was. I told her that they were Polish dumplings with potato and cheese. She wasn’t interested, “I will just stick with Peanut butter and Jelly,” she said. I rebutted with “Just try one, and if you don’t like it, I will give you your own loaf of bread for all the peanut butter and jellies you want!” Excited to get a whole loaf of bread she took my offer. That lunch she came up 5 or 6 more times for pierogis. She loved them! That was one of the first time I knew I loved this industry and helping people explore food.”

In a society where chefs are not held in the same light as other professions, do you let it get to you when people don’t take what you do seriously?

“This is a very interesting question because I have seen this change over time.

I wouldn’t say that I haven’t been taken seriously because I am a chef. I, at least, have found myself not taken seriously more because of my age rather than my profession. My life and jobs have always been a bit unconventional. Many always thought the “phase would end” or one day I would “get a real job”. Especially currently while working on ships, even the guests one day think it will end, but the majority of people working on board have made this their careers. 20-30 years in the business. I do not let it get to me. If anything it encourages me to keep going. As I get older I find myself gaining more and more support. But if anything it encourages motivation. I think Chefs are very much respected in the world. I find where they are not taken seriously are in the threads of what society gears us to believe is the way life has to be. 9-5 jobs, the movie or fairytale life etc. But outside of that life people seems to understand what it takes to be a chef and stay in the business. The food industry is one that touches everyone. It helps people continue pursuing their dreams and other jobs. Most people you run into have been a waiter/waitress, a busser, a bartender, a line cook. You find a lot more respect in the people who have lived it, especially the ones who have lived it and decide it is not for them. I think the respect is very much there, just not always in the mainstream. Funny thing is, the majority of the world does not work or live in the mainstream. The world does not shut off after 5pm. I think also now the trend of cafes, restaurants, and bars and coffee shops becoming more “hip” is shedding a different light on the industry and people that are a part of it.”

What is your favorite style of food to eat, and what draws you to it? Is this also your favorite style to cook or is that different?

“Ah ha! The 1,000 dollar question Drake. I always love this questions because it is one that really showcases my journey through the world of food and also the body. Even mind. I am always amazed when I look back or when people ask me when did this all start because it has molded over the years and fine tuned itself, but the core is always there. So I mentioned early that I started cooking to maintain my weight for wrestling through my diet. So I looked into nutrition and Holistic health. I was eating Greek yogurt and quinoa in the tenth grade and everyone thought I was nuts! Yes a tenth grader’s school lunch was a quinoa salad...believe it. Today people call me quinoa because of how much I love it. So through this research I started to cook, I started cooking healthier meals. They were delicious. I always challenged myself growing up. Picking recipes I never cooked before to make for dinner. Some times when my family really liked something I would repeat it every now and then, but I just always loved making new things. Exploring flavors and ingredients. I realized that healthy options and meals can actually taste good. This was in the mid 2000’s when healthy food had a bad reputation. I realized that the reason healthy food had a bad reputation because it wasn’t being cooked correctly. Veggies were always severely over cooked. So was chicken and other meats....especially pork. We have this experience now too....even for unhealthy food, if it isn’t cooked correctly it doesn’t taste good. But usually that can be covered up with adding extra fat and sugar. The first time I had a salad I was 15.... Before then my mom would make a salad and I would eat it, but I always ate the veggies...individually. Never together. I just loved vegetables. Thai flavors and textures of all of them. It would drive my mom nuts.....”Why don’t you just eat it as a salad!?” She would say. I still pick out the vegetable from the salads she makes before the salad hits the table....I still drive her nuts.

Anyway, my favorite eating style is vegetarian. For a few reasons. Mainly, it is an incredible way to understand flavor. Chicken will always taste like chicken. Beef will always taste like beef. Grain or Grass fed, there is still a security blanket of generic flavors we know we are going to get when we order a meat dish. But a vegetarian dish? Good luck. You have to make lentils edible. Tofu, tempeh, seitan, chick peas. I can go on. All of these ingredients have some sort of generic taste, but you have to really work with them for them to test interesting. I love it! There is so much more flexibility. A great way to explain it took is with Chicken. I went to a restaurant in Texas at the beginning of the year. The vegetarian options were either completely deep fried, pasta, or covered in cheese. No actual vegetables in the options (that’s another argument for another time, most vegetarians are looking for a substantial meal...just because there isn’t any meat doesn’t mean it is what a vegetarian wants) so I opted for the chicken special....this delicious looking BBQ rubbed chicken. When my meal came I had a chicken breast three times the normal size of a chicken breast, but it looked delicious. After three bites the skin (which had all the delicious seasoning) was gone and all was left was this flavorless chicken. I was no longer interested. It really showed me, what I love about food is the flavors. The seasonings. Vegetarian food forces you to be creative with flavors and nutrition. Making your meals balanced and with a variety of colors.

As I looked back through he years I noticed this was always my style of eating and cooking. Growing up I didn’t always cook vegetarian, but many of the side dishes were. As the years progressed I noticed I naturally rarely ate or cooked meat. It was never a personal choice and giving myself a label. One day someone asked if Was a vegetarian. I told them no, but I had to think about when the last time I had a meat dish was. Even in a restaurant I was always drawn to the vegetarian combinations. The exciting flavors. It’s a great challenge and I love it. It also makes me feel good. Between the nutrition and holistic health I became very in-tuned with my body. You have to listen to it. Food feeds everything. The body and the mind. Your body will tell you how to eat. And we are all different. That is why diets do not work. Eating and the way you eat needs to be a lifestyle. No restrictions, just understanding what your body needs. And what works for me may not and probably doesn’t work for you. Bio-individuality is very important. I didn’t even realize for years I primarily ate a vegetarian diet. I just did. Something that has followed me around almost my whole life too is a lifestyle called Ayurveda. It’s one of the of not the oldest out there. Ayurveda translated into “life” “Knowledge”. It is all about understanding your body, listening to it.

This most interesting part of this journey is how the jobs I have had have always complimented my cooking style. The “healthy chef” is what I was know as a lot. My first Chef job was at the summer camp. I had kids and teenagers eating quinoa...I couldn’t even believe it. The days I would walk into the dining hall and campers would come up to me saying “you’ve changed my life when it comes to food”. Throughout my career this seems to be the case and I am very grateful for the experience I am able to provide. “You just have to make it taste good”