



Brett Reichler

by Laura Vasilion



Executive Chef Brett Reichler

RESTAURANT
SUCCESS IS A
JUGGLING ACT



Brett Reichler is Executive Chef at Gallaghers, an iconic New York City steakhouse established in 1927. One of the most versatile, creative, and disciplined chefs in the restaurant industry, Reichler has experience that ranges from creating beautiful wedding pastries to managing – all at once – 22 chefs at restaurants turning out steak, seafood, barbeque, sushi, and burgers.

Chef Reichler was trained at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. From 1993 to 1996, he was chef at London Lennie's Restaurant in Forest Hills, N.Y., where he instituted specialty menus for pairing with select wines and beers. From 1996-2014, he worked for BR Guest Hospitality, part of Starwood Capital, with 22 restaurants in New York City, Atlantic City, Ft. Lauderdale, and Las Vegas. He rose from chef at the Blue Water Grill to corporate executive chef and managing partner, in charge of all of the company's back-of-house operations.

Like Gallaghers, Chef Reichler is a native New Yorker.

In this column we profile leaders and luminaries in the culinary and foodservice industry. We hope their insights, experiences, and stories of perseverance will help inspire you to achieve your career goals.

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Q How did your upbringing influence your interest in cooking?

My mother was a great cook. She cooked for all the Jewish holidays. Many of my food memories come from family memories. As far as New York goes, there is a lot going on. Food from every ethnicity. Just growing up here, we always went out for different cuisines.

Q Do any ethnic influences from your childhood make their way into your cooking?

From my mother, I saw how to make the perfect brisket with a great glaze. And of course latkes. I make little potato latke hors d'oeuvres with smoked salmon, caviar, and dill.

Q When did you first know you wanted to cook for a living?

Not until I went to college. I went to Boston University for two years. I had a job in the foodservice department and at a deli across the street. I loved it, but my grades started to tank. My parents came to the school to talk to the guidance counselor about it. What it came down to, after a very uncomfortable conversation, was that I was cooking more than I was going to class. I took a couple of culinary classes and really liked them, but my parents were not going to spend the money to send me to Boston University for culinary studies. Therefore, I took a year off, worked, and then went to the Culinary Institute of America.

Q What is the best part of your day and which is the most challenging part?

The best part is when you serve people and get that instant gratification of doing it right, especially when you are serving a high volume of people. That is what keeps me coming back.

The hardest part is staffing. Hiring staff, training staff, making sure they show up.

Q If you could prepare a meal of your choice for anyone, living or dead, who would that be and what would you cook?

I would cook a meal for my father. My father loved to cook. He cooked in the Army. He passed away from Alzheimer's disease, which is just a miserable disease. Anyway, my father never got to see who I was as a man, as a chef. He never really got to see or enjoy what I do. I think he would really dig it.

What I would cook for him is salami and eggs. It was his go-to meal whenever he was hungry. I remember him crisping up every single piece of salami so that it was perfectly caramelized on each side, then adding his eggs and making omelets for himself and for us.

That is what I would like to make for him. I think he would get a kick out of that.

FROM MY MOTHER, I SAW HOW TO MAKE THE PERFECT BRISKET WITH A GREAT GLAZE.

Q If you were unable to cook for a living, what other profession would you have pursued?

I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I never had a plan. Some kids know they're going to dental school or that they want to be an architect. Not me. I just went off to college because that's what you are supposed to do. And then I fell into cooking.

Looking back, I do think I could have done all right in the movie or television industry. Maybe in comedy. Also, I always thought if I'd just made the high school football team my life would have taken another course.

Q What is one of the most important life lessons you have learned from being a chef?

What I have learned is that you must treat people with respect. This is a tough business. It is a grind. I wouldn't want my kids to go into it. Really. It's rough. But at the end of the day, it teaches you that you must treat people with respect in order to make things work.

Q What would I never see you do in the kitchen?

You would never see me serve food that wasn't servable.

Q What advice would you give someone wanting to do what you are doing?

You have to love it and be prepared to give up a big part of your life. Holidays, birthdays, all those special occasions where everyone else is—you have to be prepared to give those up, because chefs are always working then. It's a huge sacrifice. No one shows you that on television.

Q What is always in your fridge?

Hot sauce. Any kind of hot sauce. And ketchup. I grew up on ketchup.

Q What is never in your fridge?

Gosh, I really don't know. I'll eat anything. **E**

Laura Vasilion is a freelance writer with 25 years of experience writing for various publications including Newsweek and Reader's Digest. In her Chicago Tribune ChicagoNow blog, she interviews one person from each country in the world about their life. Visit www.chicagonow.com/talking-world/

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