

A healthy passion for food harmony

By Griffin Cooper
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Food is easy – right? Its sustenance is directly related to our survival as a species and yet, the ways in which we choose to procure that nourishment and our philosophies on cooking remain as varied as society itself. In fact, the term “nourishment” has often found itself wedged apart from food thanks to modern eating habits. While the proliferation of exposé style documentaries like *Super Size Me* and *Rotten* have raised the public’s awareness of some of the less-than savory practices involved in commercial food production, modern eating habits are still understandably tailored very much to individual preference, culture, tradition, and budget. The modern American nutrition gap has resulted in the consumption of disproportionate amounts of highly-processed foods to the detriment of dairy, vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.

Caloric debates aside, today, the concept of eating healthy is again evolving and an entirely holistic

philosophy has risen among chefs and food artisans. One that focuses on food’s ability to help reduce sickness and disease, encourage restful sleep, energy, stamina, sexual health, and mental wellbeing simply by putting naturally-sourced foods into our bodies.

Eat well and you will feel well

“Of all the complicated things in life – this seems very simple to me,” says Gina Trivelli, one of the area’s most talented young chef caterers and owner/operator/chef at Manna Catering, whose philosophy seeks to maintain the essence and integrity of her ingredients and employ them in a way that nourishes body, mind and spirit. “Eat well and you will feel well.”

After being trained at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY, where she learned everything from classical to contemporary cuisines, Gina has developed a unique approach that she professes rather than a style of cooking, is a way of respecting food and bringing it to the table in a way that accentuates its natural flavors and conserves its healing properties. Her methodology is a reflection of a greater trend in cooking that signifies a return to food’s communal nature. A philosophy spurred on by the farm-to-table movement that utilizes the former’s natural ingredients to emphasize the holistic properties of the cooking experience to produce meals that reintroduce the idea of full-body nourishment.

For Gina, the past 21 years as a private chef, caterer, and Holistic Health coach in the Tri-state area has been a journey toward helping people make healthy lifestyle choices and heal from sickness through a proper diet based on locally-grown



produce, clean poultry and meats, and anti-cancer-healing foods. A journey that began in the aroma-filled Italian kitchens of her youth and continues to head toward the horizon of making food easy once again.

How did you cultivate your passion for cooking? Do you feel cooking toward a simpler philosophy is a more honest way to approach food?

I came to my passion for food early and naturally as a child while savoring the aromas of my mother’s Italian kitchen where there was always something fresh and healthy simmering on the stove. My family was always very involved with cooking and eating home-cooked and delicious, well-prepared meals. Growing up, there was lots of emphasis on healthy and nourishing foods. I often observed my parents and grandparents while they cooked to absorb how they prepared dinner and what ingredients were

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used. Both sides of my family were passionate about food. No one ever used a recipe and as a result, I learned to cook without ever using a recipe. I believe if there is a basic understanding of how to prepare food and cook, one can be creative and experimental without ever using recipes.

In high school, I worked at a health food store and joined a healthy cooking club. I would say this was truly the beginning of my journey toward healthy and nutritious cooking. After I graduated from the Culinary Institute, I opened Manna Dew Cafe in Millerton, NY, where I spent years as a chef cooking for clients with special alternative diets or for those who were seeking out healthy food that was meticulously prepared.

Adelle Davis once said, “We are indeed much more than what we eat, but what we eat can nevertheless help us to be much more than what we are.” This sentiment is precisely why my holistic health coaching certification helps me combine my culinary training with important health and wellness knowledge. I combine skill with my passion for promoting pure foods and ingredients that meet the needs of the mind-body connection and that, I believe, is the honesty in food.



Is there a parallel between food being natural and taste?

I feel very much so that food should be prepared as purely as possible with as much integrity as possible. My approach to cooking is simple – let the food speak for itself. I try to enhance that idea with healthy cooking preparations, simple, pure ingredients, local, natural and organic, pasture-raised-grass fed meats and poultry, clean fish, fresh herbs, spices and natural olive, coconut and avocado oils. I custom design menus for the client based

on their needs, preferences, and diet. So I can cook for client’s taste and excitement and not just “earthy crunchy” healthy food.

I believe that we should eat with the thought in mind that what we consume will encourage health and wellbeing or alternatively produce unwellness. Food in its most pure and natural state is – in my view – the best way to feel alive and connect. Taste buds create an instant pleasurable response. When we eat purely, we unlock the ability to enjoy the simple taste and flavors the way food was meant to be enjoyed.

You’re clearly a star on the catering stage, but many business models have changed in the last few months. Has the pandemic shifted any paradigms for you business or otherwise?

A distinct advantage of being a “one woman show” is being able to prepare all my food from start to finish and – during this uncertain time – potential clients feel safe knowing that I am extremely conscientious and clean in this regard. My philosophy exists within the food I prepare for gatherings as well as the entrees I deliver because I custom design menus that work within the established framework set by my clients. I’m the only person preparing their menu. Like many

other small businesses within the food industry, I have added grocery delivery to my business model due to the pandemic.

Ultimately and undeniably, I feel for the restaurants in our area that are either closing or struggling in some capacity. Much about food preparation has changed and confused the lives of many. Perhaps now more than ever though, we need to eat as healthy and honestly as possible in order to continue to build up our immune systems and encourage health and wellness. Eating well plays a huge role in health and happiness. Moving forward, I see myself working to promote the practice of eating healthy as a lifestyle and choice not just because it tastes good but because this way, we collectively cultivate harmony in the body through food and the act of nourishing ourselves. •

To discover Gina’s food philosophy or to hire her for your next event, email her at wholefoodschef1@gmail.com.

