



MOTHER KNOWS BEST

IN THE KITCHEN | Chicago chefs credit moms, grandmas for their passion for food, cooking



Giulia Sindler (left) and her mother, Sharon Perazzoli, learned a lot about the restaurant industry from Perazzoli's mother, Marion Konishi (inset photo). Konishi tackled the male dominated restaurant industry when she opened Kamehachi in Old Town 40 years ago. | JOHN J. KIM~SUN-TIMES

BY SANDY THORN CLARK

In conversations with chefs, it's very obvious there's one thing they share more than a passion for food.

It doesn't matter whether they are natives of Chicago, Mexico, France or England or whether their specialties are sushi, eggplant, tacos, morels, lamb shanks, chocolate chip cookies or braised octopus. All give credit to their mothers and grandmothers for their appreciation of food and cooking.

Early childhood lessons and observations have been instrumental in the success of some of Chicago's brightest culinary experts and restaurateurs, including Sharon Perazzoli and her daughter, Giulia Sindler, owners of five Kamehachi

restaurants; Michael Taus of Zealous; Freddy Sanchez of Adobo Grill in two Chicago locations and Indianapolis; Christophe David of NoMI in the Park-Hyatt Chicago; Mark Payne of the Ritz-Carlton Chicago; Carol Goldman, owner of Carol's Cookies, and Mike Sheerin of Blackbird.

Sharon Perazzoli and Giulia Sindler inherited more than a restaurant from their mother and grandmother, Marion Konishi, a pioneer in a male-dominated restaurant industry when she opened Kamehachi in Old Town 40 years ago.

The two gleaned courage from Konishi who, as a Japanese American at the outbreak of World War II, faced an uncertain future in an Arizona internment camp where Perazzoli was born. Following the war, Konishi divorced her husband

from an arranged marriage and set out to care for her two daughters, eventually becoming a Chicago restaurateur.

"It left an impression with me that nothing was ever stable," says Perazzoli, 62, who prefers fonder memories such as licking the bowl after her mother prepared desserts.

When Konishi died in 1990, Perazzoli had learned what it takes to operate a restaurant. Soon was joined by Sindler, fascinated with Konishi's ability to build a strong, loyal clientele. "I can still picture my grandmother sitting with patrons," says Sindler, 42, of Northbrook.

Michael Taus believes he gained lessons in cr

MOM | Food brings back many memories

ativity, organization and the need for flexibility from his grandmother; the late Jennie Guintoli, while growing up in Chicago's Riverside neighborhood. "If my grandmother were young today, she would be a famous chef. She was very creative and inventive," Taus says.

The 39-year-old Zealous chef still adheres to Guintoli's much-repeated advice about the importance of freshness and good quality ("not just any tomato, but the best tomato") and salt. "It's not about the salt — it's about the flavor," he says. "Use just enough salt to bring out the flavor."

Taus has versions of his grandmother's white pizza, eggplant gateau, pasta dough and gnocchi on his menu.

Freddy Sanchez grew up watching his mother, Unbelina, and grandmother, the late Columba Juarez, create tacos, tamales and moles in the family's mercado (food kiosk) in his native Mexico. As a youngster, he helped after school by peeling onions and tomatoes. His mother, who now lives in Chicago's Fullerton neighborhood, showed him how to use his sense of smell to select the ripest mango.

Sanchez swears his exceptional taste buds are because of his mother's emphasis on "authentic" flavors. "I can't forget those flavors I grew up with," says Sanchez, 36. "And Mom always says, 'A clean kitchen is always going to be a happy kitchen.' That's true."

Christophe David experienced the pleasure of family meals while growing up in France with



MARK PAYNE | Ritz-Carlton Executive Chef, Mark Payne with his mother, Lorna, on vacation.

his mother, Claudette David, and grandmother, Lucienne Mula.

"It was that wonderful moment to be together, to prepare everything, to have out the good china, to have everything beautiful. I've carried that over — that's a big part of the restaurant business."

David, 39, says his mother, who still lives in France, taught him "about basic, simple flavors; about traditional plates like a beautiful chicken with morels and mashed potatoes, winter couscous, green peas and Italian sausage; about going out and finding the freshest produce of the season; about not only hav-

ing a passion to cook but sharing it with family and friends."

Mark Payne was taught to cook from scratch by his mother, Lorna, in his native England.

"I'm a big believer in cooking from scratch — I got that from her," says Payne, 40, who loves his mother's Shepard's Pie, seafood and chicken curries and gooseberry pie.

He began cooking in his early teens because his mother who worked outside the home was keen to get a day out of the kitchen. "I was allowed to experiment and burn things in the kitchen," Payne says admiringly of his mother's support.

Carol Goldman, whose Carol's Cookies were judged fourth best cookies in the United States by People magazine, says she would not have known the difference between baking powder and baking soda had it not been for her mother, the late Ann Diamond.

Diamond, a cake and pie baker, left the time-consuming task of baking cookies to her daughter after teaching her about the oven and timing.

"My mom made the tallest angel food cakes. She always said, 'The bigger, the better.' So when I began my business, I baked bigger cookies," explains Goldman, 63, whose son, Jeff, is vice president of the family business.

Blackbird's Mike Sheerin was tutored on simplicity by his mother, Carol, and his grandmother, the late Helen Ganze. "I was a chubby little kid who loved to eat my grandmother's pickled beets, salad of fresh tomatoes and scallions, spaghetti squash, banana cream pie, and pumpkin pie. For Easter, she baked pound cake in a lamb mold."

"I'm a minimalist because my grandma was all about 'cook slow and keep it simple,'" says Sheerin, 30, who still has Sunday dinner at his mother's South Loop home with his brother Patrick (executive chef of the Signature Room at the 95th) and twin, Tim.

"Foods like my mom's cabbage rolls bring me back to Magnolia Street where I grew up in Lakeview," Sheerin says.

"That's what food can do — it can bring back memories like yesterday."

Sandy Thorn Clark is a Chicago-based free-lance writer.



CAROL GOLDMAN | Carol's Cookies owner and pastry chef, Carol Goldman, on her wedding day with her mother, Ann Diamond.

ANN DIAMOND'S CINNAMON COFFEE CAKE

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

- ½ cup sifted all-purpose flour
- 2½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 egg white
- ¼ cup oil
- ¾ cup skim milk

TOPPING

- ½ cup light brown sugar
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Sift together flour, baking powder, salt and sugar. Blend in egg white, oil and milk. Stir together until moist. In separate bowl, mix together all topping ingredients.

Spread half of batter into greased 8-inch square pan. Sprinkle with half of topping. Add remainder of batter, and then sprinkle with rest of topping. Bake 30 minutes or until done (when inserted toothpick comes out clean).

**Carol Goldman
of Carol's Cookies**

Nutrition facts per serving: 267 calories, 15 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 1 mg cholesterol, 31 g carbohydrates, 2 g protein, 167 mg sodium, 1 g fiber