



“My grandmother was Miss Cuba in 1938. When she won the pageant, she was awarded a trip to NYC and a modeling contract. She arrived in the U.S. speaking very little English but came packing with her family recipes so she could cook up some comforting dishes that made her feel at home. She would make her grandmother’s paella for all her new American friends and it quickly became their Sunday tradition. Her recipe is still something that we make and love at Marcia Selden Catering and every time someone tastes it, they taste the love that it’s made with.”

ROBIN SELDEN
 MARCIA SELDEN CATERING,
 STAMFORD, CT



JP Foundation Co-founders Rollie Wessen (left) and Jacques Pépin (center) with Jacques’ students in the culinary program The Kitchen at Forge City Works in Hartford, CT, in 2019.

Jacques Pépin has built a reputation for bringing people together with food, as chef, author, culinary educator and now as the founder of The Jacques Pépin Foundation (jp.foundation). The organization supports free culinary and life skills training through community-based organizations. They help those who are unemployed gain skills and confidence to garner a position in the food service industry. *Serendipity* talked to Pépin about his belief in the ability of food to bring people together and a few of the amazing chefs he has worked with along the way.

How does hospitality and food service work to create communities?

When you cook together, you become friends. When you eat together, you become even more friends. And this is the most basic need of humans, rich and poor. You have to eat together, several times a day. Cooking for someone may be the greatest expression of love. Cooking, eating together creates a very tight community.

Whom do you admire in food?

Many of my friends starting with José Andrés, Andrew Zimmern, Thomas Keller, Tom Colicchio, Daniel Boulud, Michel Nischan, and many, many others. Those chefs do great work in their communities. They are so kind and generous.

What has the pandemic shown us about the relationship between chefs, restaurants and their communities?

I think the people have never realized before how important their local restaurant is as a place to come with the family, a place of gathering to be with friends. People realize now more than ever that chefs do that. The restaurant business really brings a community together. They realize they need to support their local restau-

rants and help bring them back to life.

How do you preserve that tie between food and loved ones in recent months?

Well, for me I still cook every day. I still go to my garden, I still go to the farm. I still cook every day for my friends and more than everything else in the last year and a half, I have done over 200 videos of very simple recipes to make your life easier, to bring people together. And that has for me been very gratifying.

Tell us about a recipe or inspiration from a childhood memory.

There is no question that the food you eat as a child is very visceral. It stays in your memory forever. I do those eggs that I learned from my mother. And those are half-cooked eggs she used to cut in half, take the yoke out and crush it with a fork. She puts a lot of garlic, chopped garlic and chopped parsley, she mixes it with the eggs and a little milk to make it soft. She wisks the eggs, then she cooks it stuff side down in the skillet, browns it with a little bit of butter, and with the rest of the inside, she mixes a little vinegar and a lot of mustard and olive oil. And because of those eggs I call them eggs Jeannette.