

# MISSY!

"If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him...the people who give you their food give you their heart." -

Cesar Chavez

"We all have each other - that's what makes this place work." -

Missy



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There are luminous beings in the world who are so special they can be known by just a first name. Madonna, Beyoncé, Pele (for those of you of a certain age), Peyton, Prince. We have one of our own, our force of nature, our luminous being, a creator of love in the form of food: *Missy*. That's all you have to hear, and you know exactly who is being discussed. I have known Missy since she came on board with the College. I light up every time I see her, which has been hundreds of times. She lives about an hour from me when the College is not in session. I've had a hundred conversations with Missy. I spent two hours interviewing her for this article. I adore Missy and I consider her a close friend.

I do not know Missy's last name. She doesn't need one.<sup>1</sup>

Most people first come into contact with Missy at a Ranch program—the College, In Defense of the Damned, Trial Skills Foundations, or a graduating Seven-Stepper might meet her at a Grad Course. Missy runs our cookhouse with both artistry and efficiency. The quality of the food we eat, and the love and care taken in its preparation, all flows from Missy. To the surprise of absolutely no one, her devotion to the art of food is as strong as her devotion to our beloved College.

She is part of the fabric of the TLC experience. And as the TLC experience is part of the fabric of our lives, Missy is very much part of the fabric of my life. Missy is one of those true hearts and old souls who we are naturally drawn to. She wears her love and presence and compassion on her sleeve. She makes everyone comfortable and at home because she always shows hers first. If you have spent five minutes with her in your entire life, you are certain that you have a friend—unflagging, authentic and genuine.

Coming up on 35 years old, and at the College since 2014, Missy's path to TLC was like all of ours, which is to say circuitous and unexpected. Missy hails from Los Banos, California, population 8,000, located somewhere in the San Joaquin Valley. She played sports in high school, softball and basketball, which is very easy to imagine when she is in your presence. Yes, she is tall, but more noticeable is her energy. She is an alpha girl. It is awesome to behold.

Cooking and food were a focus in her family when Missy was growing up. Her father George was a BBQ genius who grilled love, food and kindness for his family and friends. Missy misses

him, and one can see in her eyes what he meant to her. If she could only make one phone call to anyone in the universe, it would be to her father: a man with demons, but brimming with love and a love of life. Mom is Mickey, a personality, and talented with food, especially baking—we might see her at the 25<sup>th</sup> reunion. For an aspiring chef, this was an excellent gene pool. Love and food. That's what it's all about.

The path to a life of cooking for others is a long one. You pay your dues, and you move around. Missy's first dues payment was at Mings, a restaurant in Los Banos. It was there that she developed and learned the nuances of the kitchen. She's 15 when she starts there. Stops at other kitchens enabled her pick up more skills and more mastery of what is a very complex endeavor. Missy hits her stride. Not one for the drudgery of academics, for the boredom of a standard-fare life, and after her father's passing, Missy sets off for Alaska. Friends, whom she knows for years, are settling down and starting families, but that structured, predictable life is not in Missy's DNA at the time. In Alaska, there is Waterfall Resort. The tipping point came with the camaraderie, cooking, pace and connection. She has found her calling. *It's a rush*. Missy is in and there is no turning back.

If you have ever spent any time working in a kitchen, whether as a line cook, a sous chef, a dishwasher, or the person who runs the show, you know that a kitchen has a certain rhythm and flow. Some kitchens are fun with enormous productivity, some are miserable with enormous productivity, and some are just miserable. It all depends on who's running the place and what kind of a team they put together. It matters how much they care about what they do, how much they are willing to work (and suffer—it's demanding—for their art, and how much they love what they do. A well functioning kitchen that turns out great food and the dining experience, is the definition of a team. They care about what they are doing and they care about each other. Sound familiar? The kitchen tribe is similar to our tribe. We make something out of nothing, we create, we care, we love.... We love what we do and we love each other. We show ourselves with stories—kitchen people show themselves with food - and we all show ourselves with each other.

When Missy is asked "*why cooking? Why a kitchen?*", the answer comes easy. It's the choreographed chaos. She thrives on it, and it is gratifying. Kitchen work can also be seasonal work if

you are inclined to move around during the course of the year. A classic example of the seasonal gig is the College: buffet-style food and lots of it, and lots of people, three times a day. People who work seasonal can be found creating love through their food in national parks, fishing lodges in Alaska, resorts in the Poconos, you name it. Missy loves it. The adrenaline aspect of cranking it up and laying it down. Then you move onto the next one and maybe you come back, maybe you don't. No hard feelings. The thing about seasonal work, and the thing about working at Trial Lawyers College, at least when Missy started, is the fact that there's a beginning, middle, and end. This resemblance to the structure of a story is no coincidence. Some people love that, and at the college, we love a story. So does Missy.

So what makes Missy tick? *Love*. "At Trial Lawyers College, I can get my loving face-to-face," says Missy, who is stretched to her full six feet in a chair on the back porch of the Rose Cabin as we chat. So what exactly does that mean? Typically, someone who loves the art of food preparation and creation has their product consumed by faceless, nameless people who are paying for it. In resorts and fishing lodges, which are a bit more intimate, the kitchen still tends to be segregated and hidden behind doors. There is not much interaction with the end consumer.

But at the College, not only does Missy create culinary delights for us every single day, she is also one of us. The power of our tribe flows to her, and she adds to it. We love her and she loves us. The love is face-to-face. It's a big deal. I think as trial lawyers we also get our love face-to-face. We see the end result of our work, and it's part of the pressure and part of the allure of being a trial lawyer. Missy is a seasonal maestro who interacts with the end user of her genius—and she loves it. She experiences gratitude coming and going. There is gratitude for being part of the tribe, and the tribe is grateful for Missy. It's how it should be. "I love taking care of people. It's my thing."

Her first responsibility at the College was baking, and that means sweets. Ironically, Missy herself doesn't eat sweets. On one of the days we spoke in June, the dessert at lunch was a mixed berry shortcake, with berry compote and lemon zest whipped cream. I ate three of them. Just about the greatest sweet eating experience I had ever had, and I have a very serious thing for sweets.

*Mike:* That dessert today was amazing. I could live off that. I would trade my cat for one of your berry cake things. Do you need a cat? Would you agree that those were screaming tasty treats?

*Missy:* I hope so.

*Mike:* What do you mean? Didn't you eat one...or ten?

*Missy:* Nope, I don't eat sweets.

*Mike:* OMG. That's insane.

*Missy:* Right?

Missy came to us through a connection with our former chef, Mike Bales who was cooking at the College on a seasonal gig. He needed help for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ranch just when Missy was looking for something to do—she has been ours ever since. A blur of energy, food and fun.

In the five years since her introduction to TLC, she has become a fixture and an important part of the TLC family. Our 25<sup>th</sup> birthday will mark five years of service to the College for Missy, and she has every intention of staying for awhile. There is physical discomfort involved in running a kitchen, and now, Missy manages a crew, so it's not something you can do forever. But this kitchen belongs to her. How long will she do it? "I am open to the possibilities in life, for TLC as far as the eye can see."

There is no doubt that cooking will always be Missy's first passion, but she is a woman of many talents. Missy knows everyone. Like nobody else except Laurie Goodman, Missy knows what's going on. These two ladies are the beating heart of the operation and functioning of the College. A few years after Missy had been cooking for TLC, the College recognized Missy's talent for connecting with and listening to Warriors and, on Laurie's inspired suggestion, created the Alumni Liaison position for her.

In that role, Missy has become an institutional databank. She's a full-time employee of TLC, participates in psychodrama (Louise Lipman is her psychodrama momma), has extremely well-developed listening skills, and understands that what we do is bigger than any of us. She personally knows everyone who passes through the Ranch. Even more incredibly, she *connects* with everyone who comes through. As Alumni Liaison, Missy keeps her finger on the pulse of what is going on with the College, and what is going on with our greatest resource—students who become alumni. She is in constant communication with the F Warrior Board, and she feeds and laughs with the TLC Board when she is with them on the ranch or assisting them at Regional Seminars. She ferrets out needs and communicates them. It is not a job for everyone. It requires having a feel for what is going on, where the fault lines are, where the joy is. She is perfect for the job. She sees a lot from the kitchen; but she also attends regionals, alumni events, and F-Warrior board meetings. Wherever the mission of the College is being carried out and lawyers are learning and connecting, Missy is there.

When I asked Missy to tell me three things that were absolutely critical for someone to know about her, she gave me five:

*I hate talking about myself.*

*I always do my best.*

*I am what I am.*

*I miss the ocean.*

*I'm speechless and in awe of this place.*

Like most people of enormous talent who positively affect so many people around them, Missy has a hard time accepting how wonderful she is. She says that she "is working on that." Life is full of strange and seemingly random connections and disconnections. The ultimate pairing of Missy and Trial Lawyers College may have seemed unlikely, if not improbable. But to know Missy and to know TLC, they go together like that berry compote paired with lemon zest whipped cream.

Perfect. 🍓

## Endnote

1. *Ed. note:* Yes she does. It's Adrian.