



COASTAL CHARACTERS

KELLY COCHRANE, CRUISE SHIP EXECUTIVE CHEF

How does a guy from Campbell River grow up to be the executive chef responsible for the production of 3,000 meals a day, seven days a week aboard a luxurious cruise ship?

BY MARIANNE SCOTT



Kelly Cochrane's answers remind me of Malcolm Gladwell's theory, described in *Outliers*, that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert in your field. Practice does make perfect, as the old adage goes, but I'd add talent and passion as requirements to the thousands of hours of preparation and discipline.

"I had a love of food at an early age," Kelly told me aboard the 650-passenger *Regent Seven Seas Voyager* during a journey from Hong Kong to Bangkok. He'd positioned us in a quiet, but strategic, restaurant corner just outside one of the four galleys. In the middle of

our interview, Kelly rose and said, "Give me a few minutes. I've got to taste some things," and darted into the galley. "It's very good," he said, after returning. "I've got excellent sous-chefs."

Kelly, now in his early 50s, was exposed to a restaurant kitchen from toddlerhood. "My grandfather founded the Sequoia Springs Golf and Country Club in Campbell River in the late 1950s," he said. "We spent much time there during summer holidays. Already as a kid, I worked in the kitchen. We also had a 50-foot converted fishboat and we'd often go out on the water, crabbing and catching salmon and halibut."

WHEN KELLY FINISHED high school at age 17, his dad decided it would be good for his son to work on Captain Graham Snider's freezer fishboat for the summer. "It was my first paying job," Kelly recalled. "We went 550 miles offshore. I caught and cleaned fish. And I cooked for the crew. A great introduction to my later profession."

The fishing season over, he took a job as a cook in a small Nanaimo restaurant. He liked working with food, but resolved quickly he needed to learn the trade in more demanding restaurants. "My parents counselled me to spend a year exploring restaurant kitchens," he said. "Just to test if, despite those long hours and fierce pressure, I'd still choose a chef's career."

"I'd bought a beat-up old Datsun," Kelly said, grinning at the recollection. "The foam was bulging out of the car seats. The floorboards had holes in them, but I'd saved up \$300 and was determined to find a job in Vancouver. After the ferry ride across the Strait of Georgia, I went

to the number one French restaurant in Vancouver, with three handwritten references in hand, and asked for a job."

The French-Canadian chef laughed at Kelly. "Go somewhere else," he said. "No room for you here." But Kelly hung in. He stayed near the restaurant for the next two

weeks, sleeping in the Datsun. "I'd noticed the chef took smoke breaks outside the restaurant's back door," he said. "Every time he popped out, I'd walk up and ask him to reconsider giving me a job." Finally, the chef relented. "I'll give you one night, one shot," he told Kelly.

The one night turned into years. Kelly learned the basics of gourmet food preparation—the chopping, sautéing, roasting, searing and steaming of meats and vegetables. The preparation of sauces, pastries and desserts. And he mastered the art of food presentation (plating) which

MK Bay Marina Kitimat BC

A thousand reasons to make us your next destination.

Complete the trifecta to win \$1000 in moorage
Stay at any 3 of our five properties between Mar 31 and sept 30th to be entered. Visit our website for details. www.mbmgroup.ca

MILL BAY MARINE GROUP
passion.integrity.commitment

Mill Bay Marina
Mill Bay BC

Pacific Gateway Marina
Port Renfrew BC

Port Browning Marina
Pender Island BC

MK Bay Marina
Kitimat BC

Port Sidney Marina
Sidney BC



emphasizes the aesthetics and styling of food as much as its taste.

OVER THE FOLLOWING years, Kelly progressed to different restaurants, at each one he added to his expertise in preparing fine fare and also learned about the diverse management styles of the chef-in-charge. "I was employed at the Lonsdale Key Hotel during the 1986 Expo," he said. "Later, while working part-time, I entered a formal apprenticeship—four years at BCIT. It offered lots of proper experience."

His apprenticeship complete, he took on the position of sous-chef at the Fish House in Stanley Park, owned by the near-legendary restaurateur Bud Kanke. Next was the Salmon House

on the Hill, a "best seafood" award winner. Whistler's Araxi Restaurant & Oyster Bar, a James Beard award nominee, attracted him for a time, as did the Howe Sound Inn and Brew Pub.

"I usually did three-year stints at restaurants," Kelly said. "And in 2001, I became the executive chef at Vancouver's Seasons in the Park. It was super exciting." He prepared repasts for special, high-end occasions, like the 50th General Governor's dinner with Adrienne Clarkson and the International Olympic Committee meeting. He developed daily menus too and won many awards.

"While I was at Seasons, I received my first cruise ship assignment," Kelly continued. "They asked me

to consult on West Coast cuisine. Eventually I joined that cruise line, which will remain nameless. But I did meet my wife Marjorie aboard. We live in the Philippines during my time off, with our daughter Christina."

Six years ago, Kelly joined the Regent cruise line. As executive chef, he's the decision-maker, the leader of the brigade working in the ship's six galleys. All meals are made from scratch by a team of 83 galley crew—prep teams, pastry chefs, bakers, meat and fish specialists—although they all cross-train to fill other posts as needed. Each day, the luncheon on the outdoor deck follows an ethnic theme—it could be Mexican, Thai or Middle Eastern. Four main restaurants are supplemented by

room service, snack bars and ice cream stands. Kelly continually supervises his crew who hail mostly from the Philippines, India, Indonesia and Central America. "They're skilled, dedicated, hard working seafarers," he said. "In addition to passenger meals, we also prepare food for the crew of 450. Much of it is ethnic cuisine, giving the crew a taste of home, important for morale when they're away for so many months."

Regent's Miami headquarters, with input from the executive chefs, set the menus for the four Regent Seven Seas ships. "These are provisioning pros who shop all over the world," said Kelly. "We have huge fridge and freezer storage and we take delivery of fresh fish,

TOFINO'S NEWEST MARINA WITH THE ONLY FULL SERVICE DOCK IN TOWN

Located in the heart of Tofino, our state-of-the-art, full-service marina is the only one on the west coast of Vancouver Island that can accommodate vessels up to 130' long. No boat to moor? No problem, we can send

you out on a charter into Clayoquot Sound with its calm waters and white sandy beaches—a boater's paradise. Bring your catch back to 1909 Kitchen and our Chef will have it prepared just the way you like it.

- 58 SLIPS, VESSELS UP TO 130'
- GATED MARINA
- SHOWER + LAUNDRY SERVICES
- DEDICATED POWER AND DOMESTIC WATER
- ON-SITE FUEL
- FREE WATERFRONT GYM

Tofino Resort + Marina
634 Campbell Street, Tofino B.C.

1.844.680.4184

 TofinoMarina



vegetables and fruits in various ports. Today, computers and spread sheets make the food inventory control much easier than in the past.”

The galley crew are especially vigilant about sanitation. When Kelly took me on a galley tour, I noted all equipment is made of seamless stainless steel. The surfaces are sanitized several times a day and the food handling policy is extremely strict. “It’s our number one priority,” said Kelly.

Aboard, I sampled the food every day. Of great variety, each meal was individually prepared and always arrived hot. The system is streamlined: servers enter orders on iPads; orders arrive instantly at the appropriate galley. Once the meal is ready, the server is notified



and the meal delivered quickly.

Kelly, who wears the tallest executive chef toque, seemed to be everywhere, interacting with both staff and passengers. Although the ship’s daily food preparations are highly scheduled and structured, he appeared to manage his crew “by walking around”—he continually roamed the various galleys, talking with crew, evaluating a dish, tasting, suggesting, inserting a sprig of something on a plate. “The biggest challenge for a chef in a high-end environment is to motivate the staff,” he says emphatically.

His management methods, joined to his outstanding cuisine, show that the passion for food that enticed him as a youth hasn’t waned. 🚢



MARINE SALES & SERVICE -
MARINE SUPPLIES • FULL SERVICE
BOATYARD • 50 TON TRAVELIFT



850 BARNET HIGHWAY, PORT MOODY,
AT REED POINT MARINA
604-936-4602 | WWW.INLETMARINE.CA