Reading Time: 5 minutes

I wanted to write an article about how the 23rd December 1999 (25 years ago) was the time when a small little restaurant called Harveys shut its (assumedly heavy) doors.

Harveys wasn't just any restaurant though, it was the place that not only made a certain Marco Pierre White the youngest ever chef to win two stars of Michelin, it also was the place where Marco became one of this generation's first 'celebrity chefs'. Oh, it was also the place where Gordon Ramsey chose to cry. It was his choice after all.

Harveys looks like it was a great restaurant, but like many people who metaphorically shoot for the stars, there's always the chance that it takes over that little thing called life, so the doors closed, and the Michelin stars were handed back. To quote the man:

> I was being judged by people who had less knowledge than me, so what was it truly worth? I gave Michelin inspectors too much respect, and I belittled myself. I had three options: I could be a prisoner of my world and continue to work six days a week, I could live a lie and charge high prices and not be behind the stove or I could give my stars back, spend time with my children and re-invent myself.

When I Get Bored, I Watch / Read.

When I'm bored or looking for motivation, I turn to a couple of different genres of reading and watching. I can't quite believe that I've never spoken openly about my fascination with post World War II history, movies such as 'The History Boys' and so on. History and 'modern' historical events, coupled with their impact on society and the human race fascinate me. If I hadn't have had to make some tough choices when I was younger (Choosing between history / geography as a GCSE subject, going into the RAF, and applying for Planning degrees), I would most likely have chosen to read History somewhere. It'd be a much easier way of getting my Ph.D. also; not because it's an easier topic, but because I could approach my current topic from a different angle.

If it's not history, it's transportation / logistics and the like, or cooking. I have liked then

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grown to dislike a number of YouTube channels featuring cooking, such as Joshua Wiseman, Babish, even Uncle Roger. Why? Because in my opinion they kinda sold out, becoming less of who they were, and more ‘algorithm happy’. Heck, where’s my B-Roll Joshua? I must say before I forget, Andy Cooks is perhaps the best YouTube chef on there right now, from him actually explaining things, to using his partner and friend / editor as characters in his

MPW Is However, A True Chef.

One chef I do return to a lot is MPW. If you look hard enough on YouTube, you can find a plethora of his work, from the first two shows he did at Harveys for Thames Television (Now part of ITV), to snippets from his Maestro cooking courses for BBC Worldwide, to his appearances on Australian Masterchef (Presumably as there’s not an Italian one for him to appear in), to the best cooking series perhaps in all of cooking, his Knorr partnership from the early 2000s.

This has been described as somewhere from the home of the best YouTube comment section of all time, to the ultimate drinking game; working out how Knorr products can be used in some form of home cooking environment. Most of the time it’s stock pot / stock cube, but Touch of Taste and Aromat seasoning make guest appearances. I think two of the strangest videos I’ve seen include him making a curry out of essentially fruit and stockpot, then him making a béchamel sauce, with stockpot instead of a bouquet garni.

It is so easy to sit there and take the piss, until you goto your fridge / freezer and wonder how to make your own stock in the absence of a ton of bones and the like. That’s before you consider the electric bill for roasting these bones and boiling items, plus the time it takes to do so. I believe that I can make a pretty good ramen, but doing so takes about a day to produce. That’s the issue when it comes to trying to match restaurant quality food. When you work out the time, labour, produce costs and production costs (Electricity / gas), it can be cheaper to go out, something I learned a lot when I visited friends in America.

Watch The Damn Video Objectively

In his BBC Maestro classes, there’s not a stock pot in sight. Everything is made from scratch. Why? It’s because it’s a ridiculously expensive cookery course. Aside from BBC bias issues, people pay good money to learn how to elevate from what MPW calls a domestic

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cook to something more artisan. Making fresh pasta, making elements of a dish and bringing it together, that's what a multi part cookery course, either in person or online is all about. The only thing about BBC Maestro is that you don't have MPW observing that your pan's too hot, or you've not used enough olive oil.

The Knorr series however, despite the original videos seemingly disappearing and being replaced by anyone who downloaded them in anticipation of filling a void, shows both improvisation and also how to cook and present decent meals on a budget. His repeated mention of time, effort and the like make that obvious. There's some short cuts yes, but it's still home cooked food… Better than anything you'd get at a Spoons / Sizzling Pubs for example.

I would love to have a freezer drawer full of meat bones. Aside from potentially scaring off any future partner, it's a *like to have* rather than a *must have*, and anyone who's ever used gravy granules can simply move on to another argument. It's the same principle; simplicity to complete a dish to feed people.

Even more importantly, the other skills in these videos are fantastic. I agree wholeheartedly with the concept of making meat in a stew 'chunky'. I hate tiny cubes of meat that look like they've been previously in a freezer bag at your local Farmfoods. The concept of temperature control is vitally important. I love how he gently takes the piss out of Gordon Ramsey over his 'off again, on again' approach to scrambled eggs, perhaps a bit like MPW's relationships in the 90s.

Ending Thoughts

Perhaps most importantly though, MPW's videos, along with some others such as Andy Cooks, have renewed my love for cooking, by cooking meals that are easy, but tasty. My Christmas dinner is inspired by a random YouTube chef who basically re-enforced my theory that what I wanted to do was correct, rather than necessarily teaching me something new.

That's the thing. As a former chef, I know most of the tricks in the book. But I don't have time to spend 2 hours doing mise-en-place. I certainly don't have the space, oven, stovetop / otherwise to be constantly dealing with 4 pans, 6 pots, and 3 oven trays. These days I like simple cooking. I prefer home cooking to the processed shit you get in a ready meal, and after all, I try these days to be healthy. Despite living alone.

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If you want three stars from Michelin, then make your own stock. If you want to enjoy your food, do what you need to to make it interesting, tasty, fun. I still critique everything I cook, but I do so because I want to improve on what I do. As afterall, perfection, Is a lot of little things done well.

Peace and Love xx

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