

March 22, 2016 Tuesday Food Fairy/Say Yes to the Chef

(music)

J: Welcome to *Say Yes to the Chef*, where we interview chefs and restaurateurs, food producers, cookbook authors, and many local community organizations. I'm Janice Escott, a certified cordon bleu chef and instructor. Good morning, Kelly.

K: Good morning. I'm Kelly Taylor, a natural chef and instructor. How are you today?

J: I'm great today. It's a beautiful day here in North Carolina, isn't it, Terri?

T: It so is!

J: We have with us Terri McLernon. She is the Food Fairy, the famous Food Fairy! Because you've been around for 19 years?

T: It will be 20 at the end of this year.

J: Almost 20 years. So you're kind of a household name, because so many people know you and know about you. Tell us about how this all began. Who are you and how did this all start?

T: Well, I was living off the land in the 70's and had a lot of time to grow good, and cook food, and experiment. I was a vegetarian at the time. That's really where I started my love of food, because I was growing it and living next to it and having my hands in the dirt. And then as life progressed, and I moved out of that environment and actually remarried after a divorce, he ate meat so then I had to learn how to eat meat and cook meat. Did a little catering from home at the time. People were asking me for things like Beef Tenderloin. I remember frantically calling my mom on the phone— "What is it? What do I do with it? I have no idea!"

Then, moving on, once I moved to North Carolina 19 years ago— I had been a mom, really. I had taught dance. I had done a little cooking at home. I cooked for a summer sock theater. I performed in the summer sock theater, also. I served in their cabaret as a waitress, anything I could do to make a little money.

Then I came here. It's like, I know I'm comfortable in a kitchen, any kitchen. Because at a party, I was the one that would always be in the kitchen.

J: Sounds like us!

K: We'd be right in there with you!

T: You didn't have to hang out with too many people. You knew what needed to be done. You didn't feel hesitant to open cupboard doors or dishwashers. So I put an ad in the Village Advocate, that was popular at the time, in 1996, saying that I was a personal chef. And I got two calls, and that one call lasted for a year, and the second call, I'm still cooking for her to this day!

J: That's remarkable...

T: Every Tuesday, except I moved her to tomorrow!

K: Well you'll have to thank her for us.

J: Yes, please do that.

T: And the variety the Food Fairy specializes in is because over the years, over my lifetime, I've had a variety of interests and loves and food— feeding children, feeding friends, feeding a vegetarian husband and a meat-eating husband.

J: So anyone who happens to come along and is hungry, and wants to sit at your table...

T: Yes, yes, absolutely.

J: That's a lot of people, over a lifetime. Or over 20 years. It really is. And people are so appreciative of the good food. Haven't you found that to be true? (T: Absolutely.) It's amazing, isn't it, how many people will say, "This is wonderful. How did you do it?" And they are so appreciative of that.

T: And that feeds us.

J: It does.

T: It feeds our creative spirit. It feeds our nurturing spirit. We want to just give more.

J: That's exactly right.

T: Our very appreciative clients who are articulate with that, every week or every time we go to cook for them— because it could be weekly or monthly or every other week— it's like I'm trying to outdo myself, "Oh, what did I do last time?" And trying to plan a menu is challenging because it's, what do I not cook? The world is...

J: There's so much food...

K: You must have a large database now of recipes and menus that you have created.

T: I have a large database of menus, because it's going on 20 years of menu plans, and they've all been saved. We've been through all the different phases of, you know, low fat, no eggs, you know, all that stuff.

K: It's just a history of food, it's fascinating.

T: Recipes, when I started the business I didn't anticipate being around this long. It's not that I *didn't* think I would be, it's just my vision was so immediate. As a single mother, I was trying to support my family. So that's how I started, with this ad in the paper; it was just, getting through this week and this month, paying the mortgage. So thinking 20 years ahead was not really in my head.

So I didn't start really saving a database of recipes. Once I did, I started putting them in notebooks. And now I have many notebooks that need to be scanned and filed. But now we do save our recipes. And we're all rewriting our recipes, because there are 6 other chefs that work for the Food Fairy. So one of the things we actually just collectively decided on was a pay scale for rewriting your recipe.

J: Oh, that's interesting...

T: So we may find a recipe for chicken enchiladas, and Jan actually one day created chicken "uncharredladas".

J: Kelly has had some influence about Jan.

K: Oh yes, but she's really creative. She was one of the most students of mine.

J: Kelly knows her from being a student.

T: When I saw it in the client's book the next time, I was floored— why did I not think of that??

J: Very sweet.

T: So then Jan will rewrite that, and she'll actually get reimbursed from the Food Fairy for the time it takes to rewrite that and put it in our database.

J: So rewriting is an important part of that. I hadn't really thought about that. Over 20 years, or 19, things have really changed. What have you experienced in that time? What kinds of changes have you actually experienced?

T: Well, the major is the fat thing, I think, mostly. The no-fat, throwing away egg yolks and not being allowed— my very first client wouldn't let me cook with nuts, put nuts in anything, because it was a fatty food. This is 1996... I personally never really fell for any of those. Moderation, right?

J: We didn't either, so it's good to hear you say that. But that's true...

T: Well, I did fall for the low fat when I was in college... I did, I totally was on board with that when I was in college. Which I paid for it for years after. I did, that's not a good diet.

J: No, it isn't. It's really interesting because even though I saw that and read it and kind of paid attention to it, the only place that I remember thinking that it should be low fat was in dairy products. Other than that, I couldn't, it just didn't work, somehow. And I always thought that there were redeeming qualities in foods that were slightly fatty. And I always thought to myself, well, I will eat that but not very much.

T: Perfect.

J: So that's really how I did my eating, my diet, whatever— I don't like the word diet, it means deprivation to me. Anyway, I really feel that the changes are so wonderful now, that people are realizing that normalcy is the best thing we can do. And understanding our own bodies.

T: And that's it, that's really right where it is. And that's one of the things that I've learned, is seeing that one person, they need to be a vegetarian. And that doesn't mean we should all be vegetarians or vegans, or that nuts, that you have nut allergies. We're doing a part on Friday night— someone's allergic to cinnamon. It does come from a tree.

J: I know someone who's allergic to cinnamon, so I understand that. And Kelly doesn't eat gluten.

K: No, and I just taught a class this morning, actually, before here, on gluten-free, I was teaching about gluten free. And someone asked me, you know, just about, well is it healthy to eat these other grains, you know, because I was talking about all the other thousands of grains that there are. Is it good for me? Should I include that in a good healthy diet? There isn't a magic answer. Every person has what is good for them. And there isn't a way for me to give you an answer that's for that person and that person and that person. The only way for you to know what is good for you is to try things out and to become more aware of what you're eating and how you feel when eat them. There are really quite good tests now, blood tests for allergies and things like that. But there isn't a magic answer.

T: I wish the doctors would tell everybody that, what you said to her. You've got to figure it out for yourself and for your body.

K: But people don't think that, because we've been trained, I think, to say, what's the diet we're supposed to follow? Okay? That's how we get public health information. This is the diet: eat this amount of this, this amount of that. But that's for a general blanket kind of statement. And then within that you need to start to learn what's good for you. And there is no little quick way around it other than to just pay attention when you eat. I wish people would pay attention when they ate! And they would notice when they don't feel good. I think so many people just don't even make that connection...

J: ...that it is food that is something that's not making them feel well.

K: And there could be a lot of reasons why; not only what you're eating but the quality of what you're eating, which is a big issue.

T: Do you think we could say, "Everybody should eat more vegetables"?

K: Well that's an easy one! That's true. Vegetables are very easy to say, "You should eat more vegetables." But unfortunately most people don't want to do that. They never ask, "Can I eat three more cups of vegetables?" I've never had anybody ask me that.

T: We have a client, every other Friday for years, 5-6 years. The wife travels a lot so she has to eat and get things that she can microwave, like in the little kitchen. They actually take our food to their house in Washington, D.C. because they don't want to eat out. But anyway, she has such a great way of getting more vegetables. Everything that we make, when they warm it up they put it on a big bed of baby greens. So they're each getting probably another 2 or 3 handfuls of baby greens. I think that's just brilliant.

K: I sneak greens into everything. I use greens like you use herbs. So I'm always chopping those, mincing them, and putting them into everything.

T: I puree collards or greens and put them in my chili. You can't even see them.

J: No, you can't.

T: They're all minced up in the food processor, they cook...

K: It's great. I put it in all my sauces and it's fantastic. My <bolognese> I made the other day had chard in it— yes, everything. It is not that difficult, you just have to think about doing it.

T: It is time-consuming. When we cook for our vegetarian families it definitely takes a lot more time than just making simple proteins — lamb chops or fish.

K: What are you making for them that's taking longer?

T: Well, it's just cutting all the vegetables— all the greens, all the onions, all the broccoli and cauliflower. Cauliflower rice, have you made that yet with your class?...

K: ..Cauliflower pizza crust, have you made that?

T: Actually that's going to be served at a party. One of our chefs, Krista, is doing on Friday. She makes all of our pizzas with roasted veggies as one of the appetizers. But you don't just, you know, pull out a frozen pie crust; you've got to make it.

K: All of that making bit requires you do some work. But that's why they're paying you.

T: Yes, yes.

J: Do you want to explain what a private chef is?

T: Sure. Well, I kind of think we're different than a private chef, but I never really Wikipedia'd it to see exactly. I think that we're more a personal chef. In my head, a private chef is someone who basically you would hire and they would cook only for you. Like the president might have a private chef or movie stars. As a personal chef, usually people have us come maybe once a week. We do have one client who is ill and on a very low sodium, low caloric diet due to congestive heart failure and some other issues. So we go twice a week so she can have lots of fresh food. But most of our clients are once a week, or once every other week and then they put half in the freezer. And then we also have every 4 weeks, we have clients every 6 weeks. I have a client who's 91 and she of course eats tiny amounts of food. So when her freezer's empty, about every 4 or 5 or 6 months, she calls. I love to go help her out.

So, we each have our own client, though. It's not like we send a different person in, it's not like a cleaning service, we're very personalized. So we're very tuned in to you, and we very much are an extension of your family, and we love you and we hug you.

J: You're creating relationships with your clients.

T: Very much so, yes. And feedback, even if it is a little bit owie— because we don't want to take it personally, but we do have sensitive souls— but we want to know, we want to know what worked and what didn't work, because then we can tune into your body. We do an hour and a half interview with each of our clients first.

J: Before you even work with them...

T: Yes, and that gets into the details, not only if they have a specific diet, maybe a diet recommended by a nutritionist or a doctor, congestive heart failure, renal diet. We have a new client who's also 88 and she's got Stage IV kidney disease. So her diet with sodium, potassium, and phosphorus is very specific. We're not diagnosing that, and we're not prescribing. We're doing what they tell us.

J: And that's an important part of it.

And you're listening to Community Radio, WCOM, 103.5 FM in <Carborough>. Our guest today is Terri McLernon. And she is the Food Fairy.

So when you are working as a personal chef, do you go into the person's home to do the cooking?

T: Yes.

J: So you take with you the ingredients, and then you use their kitchen to prepare whatever it is that you're preparing for them.

T: Yes, exactly. So we'll make a menu plan and that plan could be made in conjunction with the client, if they want to be part of that. We had a client once who actually had a file, a "cooking-lite" file, where she would plop in recipes and we'd go to that side and pull out her recipes. We might just send ideas via email or text, what might sound good to the client. Or they might just say, "Just surprise me." Like Christmas. Just open your fridge and go, "Oh, what did that Food Fairy make today?"

So we arrive with the groceries. We prepare the food. We package it in the client's containers. We recommend glass. Not everybody agrees with that, so we just do what they ask us to do. That way they can heat it up. We also don't recommend microwaving. But everybody has their own path. And then we make a coversheet and we tell you, the client, what has been made and what we would serve it with. And how we created the menu so that it was balanced.

K: Oh, that's clever.

J: It is.

T: And then the reheating instructions.

K: So how do you mean, "what we created so that it was balanced"? Can you give me an example of what that would look like?

T: If I made a lemon basil chicken, and I made a couscous to go with it—although I don't think anybody eats couscous anymore because everybody's gluten-free, seems like!

K: That's my world!

T: I mean, so many people. And we also tend to, I don't know, it's sort of like an old hat food. But anyway, let's say couscous, and Moroccan carrots, and then we made a turkey fennel meatloaf with baked sweet potatoes, I might prefer that they serve the sweet potatoes with the turkey meatloaf rather than having the couscous with the turkey meatloaf.

K: Okay, so each thing is separate in there. The potatoes are different and they're in a container, you could mix and match whatever you wanted. But you're just giving them sort of a guideline of how you created it in the first place.

T: Exactly, the taste profile of what we think would taste good together.

K: I've always wondered, when you make a lot of food for someone, then, you know, when you go and freeze foods, then you have to think about that ahead of time what you can freeze, so that later when they defrost it and cook it, the texture is okay. That's a real issue, I think. How do you manage that? Because do you even know what they're going to be freezing?

T: Well, if we're cooking for a monthly client, we do know what's going to be frozen, because we're going to put one serving of everything in the fridge and the other 4, 5, 6 or 8 servings, however many they've asked in the freezer. For a weekly client, it's not really going in the freezer. We recommend they eat their fish or their shellfish the first night, at the latest the second night. And some people have asked us: tell me the order I should eat this. You know? So if you have a spicy curry or a chili, you can put that off closer to the end of the week. It's going to keep better than your fresh fish.

But knowing what freezes is definitely challenging. And my clients have taught me some things.

K: Like what? What have you learned? Because it's an interesting dilemma, I think, knowing how to freeze things that freeze well.

T: Well mostly, the generic answer is winter vegetables freeze well, right? Kale, collards, broccoli, cauliflower— all those things that can withstand cold weather freeze much better than zucchini, right? It just gets water.

I personally don't love frozen food, so I'm very picky about what I'll put in a freezer. Things that are juicy do really well, right? Soups, stews— winter foods freeze better than summer foods. It's really hard to make summer foods that go in the freezer because you have to add lots of juices and broths. Chicken cacciatore, tomato-based things freeze well.

J: So ordinarily when you go to someone's home once a week, how many meals do you prepare when you are there?

T: An average client will ask us for about three different dinners. And a dinner could constitute a one-pot meal, or we could have it be a three-pot meal. Generally they don't ask for dessert because generally they're wanting this to be healthy. That's the upside. Then they can go out on weekends, or they can celebrate with the so-called naughty foods. I don't really like that word, but...

J: Or just prepare <their own> salad, if that's what they choose to do, in between times...

T: And that's one of our questions on our interview: if the salad goes with the meal, do you want us to make it or do you want to make it?

K: You ""cook it""— you pre-cook it or is it fully cooked? All your dishes, because that's another whole thing. I don't think people are realizing the amount of thought process that goes into your meal planning.

T: And thank you for bringing it up! Well, fish we try not to pre-cook for people because it is so delicate and it can get overdone. But I have clients who just want to come home, and maybe their teenage daughter likes to pick at it, you know, before they get home from work, so they want their fish pre-cooked. So it really depends on the food. We tend to undercook meat so that they're not— especially like a chicken breast— because it's going to be so dry, unless it's in a sauce or cacciatore or whatever. So it is very individualized.

Thank you for acknowledging that, because it's a very deep process. We think about our clients all the time. It's like they're running in the background all the time. Because you might eat out and go, "Oh, I could create this for so-and-so on Friday, they would love this!" It's this background program of thinking about them all the time.

Or like the low sodium client that Crystal cooks for. She actually made sausage, home-made sausage, because it isn't so salty for this client.

K: That's really nice!

J: It is, it is.

T: So it's something that she probably was eating one day and said, "Oh, you know, so-and-so would really love this, but she can't have it. Oh, I'll just make it," you know. And it's very personal, and it's very intuitive, also. You kind of have to feel for the client, for the day, for the weather, what's in the market, and then what they like and don't like. We have two clients that rotate on elimination diets.

K: Those are difficult to cook for.

T: Oh, I think they're my favorite. They are really my favorite. So the first one recently who came this year was on I think about 25 foods. That included salt. That included basil. That included parsley. And I think she could have cumin. So of the 25 foods, 4 of them were seasonings. I loved it.

K: But salt's important...

T: Yes, considering the other one's that can't have salt. I just jumped right in and made, she could have buckwheat. Not too many people do I make buckwheat groats for. So that was fun. So I made like a spring roll with paleo wraps that I found, I bumped into, at Whole Foods made out of coconut, and lentils, coconut oil, a little sweet potato, some sugar snap peas that I cut up and made almost like a salad; mango, she could have mango, and lime. I put the mango in for tang and sweetness.

K: What an interesting list of foods she could have. Mango and buckwheat, that's just not your normal elimination diet.

T: And then avocado, she could have it with avocado on top. It was delicious, it was absolutely delicious.

K: It sounds delicious. It's nice that it's so personalized. So I liked the, you know, the personal chef part of personal. I mean, it's very personal. It's like you were cooking it for yourself, your family. The amount of attention and time and thought you put into it is quite a lot, actually. So I'm sure your clients are appreciative and they can taste it in the food. Which is why you've been around for 19, almost 20 years, even when you didn't plan on it! Right? Because when you do something, when you do it well, people appreciate it.

T: And when you love what you do, it isn't just that we do it well but we do it with love. We love our clients. If they're receptive, we hug them. If they're there— sometimes we don't see them very often because they're at work.

That was where the name came from, actually. Want to hear that story?

K/J: Yes! We're waiting!

T: So I started the business and was cooking for a couple of ladies who lived in Raleigh and had a computer lab. That was the days when not everybody even had a computer, right? They were in business, so there I am trying to figure out how to be in business. And I had written a little blurb that I was going to put on windshields, like in parking lots. And I read it to them:

"Imagine coming home after a hard day at work, and the fragrances and the aromas of delicious food are lingering. And you open your fridge and — viola! There's all this amazing food!"

And as I was reading, she interrupted me and said, "Oh, you sound just like a food fairy!" My eyes got wide and my mouth fell open, and I said, "I *am*. I am." I was maybe 9 months into the business, I'm not really sure. And so that's when I became the Food Fairy.

And then I was cooking for a family, cooking kosher. On Friday nights I did their shabbas dinner, and then food that they were to eat during the week. I had lived 23 years in the Catskills mountains of New York, and being a little WASP from Cincinnati, Ohio, I learned a lot about Jewish people and their diet and kosher and Passover and all that with my friends, it was all part of my life. So when this family asked me to cook kosher, I'm like, "Oh yeah, I can do that." I don't *look* like I can, but...

So their son was quite a techie, for 1997 or 1998. He was maybe 13, and he said, "Do you have the .url for that?" I'm like, the what?? "You need to get the website." And he went and looked for me, came into the kitchen and said, "Nope. Somebody's got it. Somebody in San Diego is delivering groceries." So I took food-fairy.com until maybe 2 or 3 years ago, because I watched that website. She let it go and I bought it.

K: You even have little fairy-winged-looking earrings on today, I wish people could see...very sweet.

T: Well Crystal, who's one of my head fairies, she's been with me the longest. She and her family gave me fairy wings for Christmas one year. Next year I bought them for her.

J: We've been talking about different kinds of diets and food and what people want, but I know that you understand about the healing power of food. So talk about that a bit.

K: Why don't we take a break, and then when we come back you can talk about that too, because we do need to take a break. And when we come back we will talk more with Terri McLernon.

(break)

K: Welcome to *Say Yes to the Chef*. We're broadcasting live from Carborough on 103. 5, and today our guest is Terri McLernon from the Food Fairy...

Today we're talking about Food Fairy — I do love that name, it's a really great name. But we were going to talk a little bit about the health and the nutrition side of what you do. We've kind of already been talking about that, because I can see you have a lot of clients who are coming to

you that have particular needs that have been diagnosed by doctors, which is a great way—I often run into this problem as a person who specializes in health and nutrition. I am not a nutritionist. I am not a doctor, and I don't pretend to be one. And so there is this line where you have to figure out, how do I really support people with the knowledge that I have, right? Because I'm sure you who have been doing this for a while have a lot of knowledge about food and nutrition and wellness, but not push it so much to the fact that you're trying to prescribe a diet.

T: Exactly. That's exactly true. But we can always sneak in more vegetables!

K: Well we know that, that is true, we're all going to sneak in more vegetables! But that is a line. People will start to ask you about different things. I'm sure you get a lot of questions and your other chefs get a lot of questions about health trends and things like that. So I worry sometimes that people are going to take what I say and then, I don't know, not find it useful, or have something go wrong and I'll be held responsible for it. So it's a line that I walk. I don't know how you guys do...

T: But we're not really in conversation with them so much about what it is they want or need. When we do our hour and a half interview, they're talking to us. And if they say, "Well, what do you think?" then I can say, well, I'd rather use butter than margarine, for me. And then we can go from there.

K: And you tell them why.

T: Yes.

K: I think because you have that relationship with them, and even at the beginning they can see you're forming that relationship, there is trust that you form with them. I mean, they let you into their house, often when they're not there, right? So you really better trust the Food Fairy.

T: Some of them leave us blank checks. I'm serious! Not just one or two. Gosh, back in the beginning I was doing a party for a dentist in Raleigh. I never met him. I was really within the first couple years of the business, and he left his door open for me. I'd never met him. I was coming to do a romantic dinner. His wife or girlfriend was coming. I needed to get in there ahead of time while he was working. I said, "You don't even me." And he said, "Oh, down South we're very friendly. We're very trusting down here." I'm like, Okay...

J: Well he must have trusted the right person.

T: Off-track a little bit, but that day his wife actually came home early and saw this strange woman in her kitchen!

K: What happened!

T: I said, "Surprise! I'm your Food Fairy for today! Your husband's planned a very special romantic dinner for you." And she went in and looked at the table, which had rose petals all over it. She forgave me.

K: I'm glad she didn't jump to conclusions very fast.

T: Well, her eyes indicated she was a little jumping, deeply inside.

But back to learning from our clients about nutrition, too. One of my clients in the 1990s, I believe, was on a weight-loss diet that a doctor, a local holistic doctor, had recommended. And it was an online diet, “Body Makeover Diet.” I didn’t think I would ever learn it, it had so many particulars, and he was a particular eater. He didn’t really like a lot of vegetables. And it was so many ounces— if it was fish, you could have 4 or 5 ounces. If it was pork or beef, you could have 2 or 3 ounces. But you ate 6 times a day.

We cooked twice a week and put little containers that said— he had his own breakfast, which was cereal with milk. He wasn’t supposed to have have dairy. That was his body type. Some people could; it depended on your body type. Once I learned it, it went very smoothly. He had containers in his refrigerator stacked from the top: AM snack, lunch, PM snack, dinner, bedtime snack. He lost 150 lbs that year! He worked out. The kitchen was mine. He ate nothing anywhere else. He was overweight from fast food, from a stressful job and on the run. I really learned about what helps you lose weight. And the portion sizes, I learned that from cooking for him. And then he fell in love and got married, and I catered his wedding!

J: That’s a great story, too! That’s a wonderful story.

K: Wow. So what did you learn from that experience about weight loss? Because that’s a tricky subject.

T: Well, it was eating frequently, portion control. I mean, I saw, he couldn’t eat a whole apple. That freaked me out. I was like, any diet that says you can’t eat a whole apple... But, I would cut it. He ate a whole apple throughout the day. So when he ate an apple— a third of an apple, maybe a quarter of an apple if it was a really big one. It was always with protein, a little piece of leftover pork or chicken or whatever, because there was no dairy so there was a piece of meat. So over the course of a day, he would probably eat a pound of protein, yeah, maybe 14, 16 oz of protein. And he would maybe have a whole apple. He could have other fruit but he was fussy, like I said. Berries weren’t as recognized as a power food back then. I don’t remember where berries were in his diet, or if he didn’t even like them; I don’t remember.

K: But that’s remarkable.

T: Yes. He could have mashed potatoes, but like a third of a cup.

K: He really got his money’s worth with you!

T: And so did I! Because I learned so much.

K: What a great experience, though. And really interesting that it lasted that long, that he kept up with it. And I bet he kept up with it because you made it easy for him to keep up with it. Right? Can you imagine someone doing all of that and working and whatever else? They wouldn’t keep up with it. That’s the problem with a lot of diets is it’s just a lot of work.

T: Yeah, a lot of prep.

K: So if you have somebody else to do it for you, then that’s fantastic.

T: And he could grab those containers and be gone all day.

K: That is really impressive.

T: And he was eating just the right foods.

K: It was his fast food! It was his new fast food. That's really clever. You can probably have a branch just around that, because a lot of people try to do that but they aren't successful because they just don't have the time or the knowledge of how to put all those things in place to make it very easy for people to succeed, which is what you did.

T: Yeah. It was a little pricey, though. So not everybody could do it. But you could do it for yourself. You know, you could take a Sunday afternoon and pack it all up. My DVD, my cook-along DVD.

J: Yes, talk about that.

T: It's called, "Cook Once, Eat for Weeks." It was done a few years ago but it's still very trendy, and it's still very pertinent to today's life. When you get the DVD, it's basically doing for yourself what we do for you as personal chefs. Because I realize not everybody can afford a personal chef, myself included, right? And so we need to think ahead. The planning, the organization of it is the biggest part. I can liken it to painting a wall. Right? What do you have to do first? You've got to spackle, and sand, and do all that, then you've got to prime it, and then finally you get to put the paint on. That's the fun part.

K: You've got to pick out the paint, which is a whole other... that can take me a long time!

T: And that's like menu planning, right? So then you finally get to put the paint on. So getting into the kitchen is the fun part. But all that stuff leading up to that takes a lot of time and takes organization.

So when the cook (client?) wants to eat for weeks, it's done for you. You have three different dinners that will be created, 8 to 12 servings of each. You'll download the grocery list. You can do the vegetarian version or the meat version. You'll download an equipment checklist so that all your pots and pans are handy, so that you don't have to go looking for them. Everything will be put out. You'll go to the store, and if you already have fish sauce in your fridge, you have to take it out. Because then we cook for 90 minutes in real time.

K: Oh, so people turn the DVD on and cook with you on the DVD.

T: Yes...

J: Oh, that's wonderful!

T: They cook along, so at the end of 90 minutes you have all this food prepared, that then you can turn around and package and put in the fridge or freezer. And then you have to do the dishes!...

K: How fascinating. So you have the one video, and you have three meals on that video.

T: Exactly.

K: So do you have other meal plans on other videos?

T: No, unfortunately the woman that was my videographer and my very dear friend, at the end of the filming of that, she was diagnosed with cancer. And so everything got put on hold and was delayed. And I was her friend, instead of the business comrade at that time. She did end up passing away, gosh, it's going to be four years ago. We had plans for many more. But I had borrowed money for this, and I always knew the Food Fairy could help me and support me to pay those loans back, if the DVD didn't actually make enough money to pay it back. And that's pretty much what happened.

I always thought that the DVD might go into wellness programs for corporations and be sold, not one by one but thousand by thousand.

K: Right, that would be a good idea...

T: So recently a company, a startup, Advanced Wellness Systems, is creating software for companies, and they actually did my cook-along. Three of the women in this group did it and gave me direct feedback, which was so awesome, so exciting. And their feedback was amazing. They loved it! I said, "Is it still current?" and they're like, "Yes, it totally is." Very important, because we have little lines that go across the screen telling you little nutritional tips and little stories, little things <come by, you can buy>. It's fun. You can see a trailer for it on my website. It's fun; I pop in...

K: Like the Food Fairy is magical.

T: I remember I said to Linda, "I want to do that." She said, "I don't know how we're going to do that." I said, "Samantha on *Bewitched* did it!"

K: Then certainly you can do it!

T: "You can make this happen!" And she did.

J: Well, you set the bar pretty high, Samantha and *Bewitched*! So the healing power of food is the thread that I see through everything that you do.

T: Oh, you're so right! Thank you for acknowledging that...

J: It is. It's there, I can hear it...

K: But in many ways, not in the actual food content...

J: So your philosophy about that, and how did that come about?

T: Oh, gosh. Well, it started off simply that I love what I do.

J: Key ingredient.

T: Key ingredient. You love what you do. And I remember my very first client, my very first day, I took a knife— it wasn't even a very good knife— wrapped in a dish towel into her house and cooked. And then at the end, she said, "Okay, let me pay you." And I thought, "Oh. Oh— wow! I get paid." I read in a book somewhere if you're trying to figure out what you should do for a

living, think about what you would do for free. And if you would do it for free, that might be a good career. So yes, love. Love what you do.

Falling in love with your clients. That interview is so helpful for us to open our hearts to hear their story, to listen to them, and know that we can meet them where they need to be. That we don't have to use *our* agenda. This isn't about what I want. This isn't about butter versus margarine. This is about what do you want and what you need.

And of course I love food. It's kind of like, people ask me what my religion is, and I go, "It's food." Well no, not really! Actually my religion really is love and kindness.

J: So you've spent some time in Brazil. Did that have any influence on this philosophy?

T: Well it supported it, yes. That's a great question, thank you. So I did go to this place in Brazil in a little town called Abidiana. There's a healer there, his name is John of God, or Joao de Deus. You can google him with Oprah, she went.

J: And I have a friend who goes, for what, 11 years or something.

T: I've been 6 years, and actually this year I was an assistant to Barbara Brodsky, who's a vipassana meditation teacher.

J: Yes, I know her.

T: She asked for an assistant, and I had been 5 years, so I was able to facilitate her spending more time on her own healing. For me, I don't have cancer or anything that's really a strong physical problem. Pretty much I'm going for my own emotional, my soul healing. I don't know. It's time to get in touch with me. I also get fed!

J: More than just food.

T: Oh, more than just food. The vegetables! I mean, three meals a day in the little pousada.

J: It's all vegetarian, too.

T: Oh well no, there's chicken.

J: Oh they do have chicken— for some reason I was under the impression they were doing vegetarian.

T: They offer that. I mean, that is there. There's vegetarian. There's very little cheese, which I love cheese but I get along great without it there. Because instead you get watermelon after lunch, and you get flan and pudding after dinner. But I actually lost weight, and, I do have an underactive thyroid. And coincidentally I had it tested right when I got back this year, and for the first time since 1990 I actually need less medication.

K: Oh my goodness.

T: So, I don't know. I didn't specifically ask for help with that while I was there. But just delving within, having quiet time. Sitting in the place, the room where people are coming to see John of God, to ask for help. He himself is not doing the work. He's actually in trance and he's channeling

entities. So this all is very woo-woo. They're all Catholic. It's a very Catholic country. They say the Lord's Prayer and they say the Hail Mary always before and after. It's very God-driven. But it is a spiritist philosophy. Meaning that you believe there are spirits on the other side of life that can help us.

So he's channeling. People are coming from all over the world to go past him.

J: Thousands of people.

T: Thousands, sometimes a day. I like to sit in what they call the "current". So, it's the first room that you would pass through, where people are sitting with their eyes closed and they're praying or meditating or calming themselves, finding themselves in a clear space in the center as best they can. Not everybody's a trained meditator or pray-er. But I like to sit there. And sometimes you sit there for at least probably 2 - 3 hours, often 4 or 5 hours. And that's the miracle! Like, I can hardly sit still in my own house.

K: I was just thinking, how do you sit still for that long!

T: Because there's magic there. You have the energy of all the people. I like to sit there and send out light and love to the people. And I get distracted, obviously. I'm human. My brain goes other places.

J: Oh yes, and it's allowed.

T: I send light and love, yes. So that's one of my favorite things to do. But this year I was thinking about the Food Fairy, and I've asked for help there for the Food Fairy. Last year was the best year in all the years, the best year. I had the most amazing staff— Crystal, <Corinne>, Becket, Annette, Jan and Krista. Amazing beautiful women. I asked for help. They've all showed up in my life, in the life of the Food Fairy and in the life of our clients.

So I asked, what is it I do? How can I teach what I do? Like, what makes what I've created and I've done special? I was just walking down the street one day, and I was like, "Oh, duh— it's love!" It's love!

J: The missing ingredient.

T: Yeah. It was just so apparent and so much of, I guess, who I am and what I do.

J: And you have a quote by Deepak Chopra that I think is lovely.

T: I do. Here it is. He said, "Prana is the vital life force of the universe, the cosmic force. And it goes into you, into me, with food. When you cook with love, you transfer the love into the food and it is metabolized."

J: That's perfect. That is exactly right.

T: It is. So one of the things I want to reaffirm for all of the Food Fairies— and actually I just want to say as an aside, all women, but that's not planned, it just seems to be a perfect job for moms.

J: Moms with kids can do that easily because they can make their own hours.

T: Yeah— the kids are in bed, they can plan the menu. They get up, get the kids to school— I was a single mom. That's when I started it. So I'm not opposed to a Dude Fairy showing up. But right now it's all ladies.

So the idea of when I'm sitting in that current and I'm sending out light, someone taught me to allow that light to enter through the top of my head and come out of my heart. It was also made aware to me that we could actually send it into my, through the top of my head down to the base chakra, if you're into chakras, or down your spine, however you want to think about your body and your energy, and then back up to the heart and out the arms and out through your fingers. And that was, yes! Just do a couple of breaths and imagine, pretend this light, this divine loving light is there. And then we can literally put even more healing energy into the food than we are just naturally doing.

So one of the things I am really eager to do— this idea came to me sitting in the current a couple of years ago, I wrote it in a journal. You know, on the other side of life or, you know, in the bigger scheme of things, I think time is very different than it is for us. So two years might not have been that long for me to catch on. So at the Casa— they call it the Casa, the Casa de Dom Inacio, they give you blessed soup. So after the morning current, you can go have the soup that is made by volunteers. People cut all the vegetables, and then I think volunteers actually put together these huge, huge vats of soup. And Joao also has a soup kitchen on the other side of town for just anybody, not associated with the Casa. So it's free soup. So I got this idea that, wow, wouldn't it be great if the Food Fairy could actually, you know, give out free soup! So I sort of envisioned like a food truck with wings...

K: Oh, that open up! You know, like where the door pops up. The window, the ordering window pops up. You could have one on each side, with the wings going up like that. That would be great.

T: Then it would be blessed soup. And I asked Barbara Brodsky, well how's it going to be blessed? (And she said), "Well you can do it. You can do it. Or you can also invite saints or higher powers that you believe in to come and help you bless the soup." And then I said, well is it more powerful nutritionally if it's blessed? And the answer was yes, absolutely. Two times more nutritionally beneficial.

K: How do they know two times?

T: I don't know!

K: "Yes, I'm pretty sure, it's two times!"

T: But whether it is or isn't...

J: But if you believe it is...

T: Ask our clients how much love they taste in the food. So then I'm just moving forward with this idea, well let's see, what if we took a bunch of food trucks that were on their off-duty days and supplied them with this soup that was made in a commercial kitchen, made by volunteers who are loving and nurturing and care. The vegetables could be donated by the farmer's market or restaurants or grocery stores who aren't using it. And then we could have these mobile units go, you know, everywhere. I mean, right here in Carborough we don't have as many people who

need it. I've heard our poverty on the eastern part of North Carolina is quite profound. So I would love to see it move.

K: Even within Orange County we have a lot of, I mean people don't think...

J: We do...

K: We have talked to a lot of people who support, that's the service they're in, and we have a lot. One in four children go hungry here, in Orange county.

T: And Chatham too... As the Food Fairy has grown, I've been giving more dollars towards food. But if I could bring about this mobile soup kitchen...

K: That's a great idea...

J: It's a wonderful idea...

T: Thank you.

J: We have to go... Terri McLernon, we could talk for another hour, I'm sure. Thank you so much for being here. We've been talking to the Food Fairy for the last hour. So if you or someone you know has a food message appropriate to the show, please contact us at our Facebook page, *Yes to the Chef*. We would love to hear from you. And please Like us on our Facebook page, *Yes to the Chef*. For more information, and to listen to all of the previous podcasts, and to this one in particular, be sure to visit our website, www.YesToTheChef.com. And we're Kelly Taylor, natural chef and instructor, and I'm Janice Escott, cordon blue chef and instructor. And we thank Weaver Street Markets in Southern Village, Carborough, and Hillsborough for their support. And please join us here on WCOM 103.5 FM every Tuesday at 11 o'clock. Happy cooking, Kelly!

K: Happy cooking!

J: Happy cooking, Terri. Thank you so much for coming, it's been delightful

T: It *has* been delightful. Thank you so much for the opportunity. Happy cooking to everyone.

J: Thank you.

(music)