

Surrendering to The Sweet Life: Cindy Pawlcyn's Back Street Kitchen

What is the dessert protocol, the behaviors; cultural, intimate or otherwise, that determine who gets a dessert and how it is given?

And what about when you treat yourself to a dessert?

I knew that out of all the jobs I have ever taken on, that this "cake job" which everyone wants, would only be as good as my ability to recall all my past work and family experiences, and how well I could compel my audience to engage in this consuming effort with me.

I immediately grabbed longtime friend and artist Christine George and drove up to Cindy Pawlcyn's Back Street Kitchen in St Helena. Yes, I know that the Napa Valley is NOT the Silicon Valley - but I had to start with a standard we can live up to, perhaps, succeed?

Cindy and I met 20 years ago in Napa. I was working as a machine room operator during the post production of Rumble fish A time when passions were fueled by food and wine – and artful experiences manifested even in the smallest venues; wild flowers blanketed our picnic dinners, and converging patterns of vines and vineyards placed us at the epicenter of the Napa Valley paradise.

Already at the top of her game in the restaurant business, Cindy was more famous for to us for being Cindy the passionate culinary artist to her adoring extended family – which was pretty much anyone who had the luck to get to meet her.

Twenty years later, the three of us sat at Cindy's Back Street Kitchen and embraced each others histories. We sang the stories of our success, whispered our failures; laughed about ex-husbands, children, change, wisdom. Last but not least, the persistence of art and design in life and work.

Then, with encouragement from Cindy and her staff, we proceeded to order every dessert on the menu! Now, this is exactly what I am talking about; if there was ever a time to celebrate the taste buds – this was it.

I now have much more to say about desserts than I ever thought possible – so stay tuned while I develop the South Bay Dessert Index.

As a trusted friend, Cindy's expertise will grace several of the following issues, as each of those desserts we enjoyed deserves a more thorough examination, and will give us a counterpoint to the South Bay's contributions. I know we are

capable of coming up to the plate, I look forward to putting your favorite recipe in my next article. Yes, this is a concerted effort.

My success will be measured by your ability to respond to my request for the many 'recipes for life' which you have tucked away in your memory – it will include not only the ingredients for a great chocolate cake. It will require you to relate to me the environment surrounding the event that manifested this chocolate cake. This is what makes a recipe worth sharing.

My goal is to find a way to get all you passionate deserters on board. I look forward to hearing from you, so please e mail me your favorite dessert recipes, or the places you go to get them. Please remember to include contact information, all recipe details, the moments that shaped the experience, any one you want to credit – wine or drink pairings, where to go to get ingredients, the importance of specific brands in the cooking process, and so on. Surrender to the sweet life!