

# COOKING CLASS: A Sit-Down with Cameron Cavida

By SUTTON RETTIG

ONE OF THE GREAT JOYS IN LIFE is realizing what you are meant to do and, more importantly, how to exercise your passion to the fullest degree. Artists and inventors are blessed with creative and cerebral gifts, athletes hone exceptional physical skill, and doctors use their gifts for the betterment of mankind's health. Cameron Cavida, Barrington High School graduate of 2015, is an aspiring food technologist who has passionately studied the culinary arts since the age of 10, pondering original recipes, observing various palates, and constantly spending time concocting dishes in his kitchenette. Over a decade following the inception of his fascination, Cavida continues to be inspired by his craft on a regular basis. Food technologists typically conduct sensory tests, develop new recipes, and assess quality assurance levels. Cavida currently attends the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

**QB: What was your initial incentive to pursue the culinary arts?**

**C:** I've been surrounded by good food all my life; I am very thankful for that. My Dad exposed me to different cuisines at a very young age. Trips to Chinatown, as well as the occasional ethnic restaurant widened my palate. My Aunt Gina did the same as well. Every time she would take me out, she would always bring me to a new restaurant in the city. Because of this early exposure, I started to cook on my own around the age of 10 due to curiosity. I experimented with basic recipes and techniques at first. As I got older, I took on difficult recipes and techniques.

My Aunt Gina unfortunately died my freshman year of high school and I made a promise to myself that I would pursue a career in the field of culinary arts for her. This, combined with my knowledge and skill in cooking made the decision a 'no brainer'.

**QB: What has been your greatest learning curve upon entering school?**

**C:** The way that the Culinary Institute of America works is that during the first two years at the school, which we call 'Associates', is almost all cooking. Students take academic classes during this time, as well such as culinary math, food

safety, menu development, etc. Our first cooking class is culinary fundamentals which is a 15-week course where the fundamentals of cooking are taught. After that, all kitchen classes, for the most part are 14 days, also known as a "block". Having to adapt to a new teacher, new environment, and new recipes was definitely a struggle. This, on top of academic classes, made me stressed my first few weeks, but I ended up getting used to it and did very well in all my classes.

**QB: What is the best piece of advice you would offer an aspiring chef/food technologist?**

**C:** If a child is 100 percent certain that they want to be a chef, I will tell the parents to bring them out to eat. The reason why is because it will widen their palate and make them more aware of different cuisines and cultures. Having this type of knowledge is very important.

If someone is serious about wanting to become a chef, I will tell them to work in a restaurant to know what it's like. I've lost a lot of friends and classmates because they realized during our first few months of school that this wasn't for them. All of them hadn't worked in a restaurant before. Home cooking and cooking in a restaurant are completely different. In a restaurant, there are deadlines that need to be made before service and the intense pressure, plus the long hours (12-14 in most cases), are very stressful.

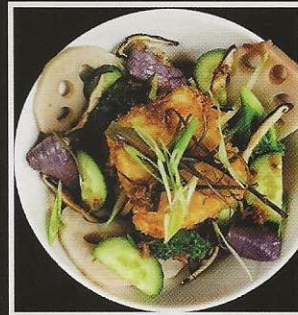
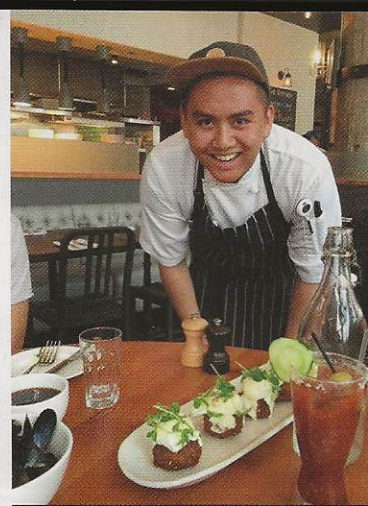
One thing to note is that they shouldn't limit themselves to being a chef. Growing up, I thought that's what I wanted to be. After working as a busser at Francesca's in Barrington, as well as working as a line cook at a restaurant called The Kitchen Restaurant Group in Chicago for 6 months, made me realize that the long hours and odd schedules weren't for me. This hands-on experience made me sit down and question what I valued. There are so many avenues in the food business, it's just a matter of finding what works for you.

**QB: What are a few of your personal favorite dishes to prepare?**

**C:** I've recently been on this Korean food kick and I love making dishes like yangnyeom (Korean fried chicken), jjajangmyeon (noodles in a black bean sauce) and kimchi-jjigae (kimchi stew). Non-Asian food that I enjoy making include any type of barbecue, risotto, and making my own sausage to name a few.

**QB: What professional endeavors do you partake in when outside the classroom?**

**C:** I enjoy photography and filmography, constantly snapping shots of unique and intriguing scenery through lenses of vintage cameras.



Japanese harvest bowl with soy dashi and fried tofu



Rosemary gougères with black pepper, parmesan and chive aioli



Jjajangmyeon



Blackened white fish with avocado cilantro crema, cucumber mango salsa and red cabbage