

RACHEL ZELL
Chef, Waitress, Caterer, Food Stylist – Richmond, Virginia

* * *

Date: March 5, 2013
Location: Richmond, Virginia
Interviewer: Sara Wood
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 1:24
Project: Women, Work & Food in Richmond, Virginia

[Begin Rachel Zell-March 5, 2013]

00:00:00

Sara Wood: Okay; so this is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance and it's March 5, 2013 and I'm in the home of Rachel Zell on Weyburn Road in Richmond. And Rachel if I could please have you introduce yourself and tell me who you are and what we're doing right now?

00:00:20

Rachel Zell: My name is Rachel Zell and I'm from Richmond, Virginia, born and raised, and you're here to interview me about my life and times with food in the South and thereof as far as I know.

00:00:37

SW: And for the record, could you tell me your birth date?

00:00:40

RZ: Sure; it's December 26, 1973. It's a big year for me this year – 4-0.

00:00:49

SW: In December?

00:00:50

RZ: Yes.

00:00:51

SW: How are you going to celebrate it?

00:00:52

RZ: I'm not sure yet, but I got a trampoline, a giant 16-foot trampoline. It's going to be a little difficult to top that. *[Laughs]* But I'm going to try somehow and keep it youthful.

00:01:04

SW: Maybe a water park?

00:01:07

RZ: That sounds great. *[Laughs]* I like that. I like that a lot. I wanted to go to surf camp, so if I could do that – that would be great, too.

00:01:17

SW: Is there surfing around here? Do you go out to like Virginia Beach? Do people surf out there?

00:01:21

RZ: Outer Banks is where I would go, yeah. That's my place to go. I hope I get to. I'm planning; I'm working on the muscles necessary for surfing, so when it gets to be that time I'll be ready.

00:01:37

SW: So Rachel I think one of the unique things about you and all of these interviews, you're a fourth-generation, fourth-generational Richmonder. Can you talk a little bit about your family's history here just growing up in Richmond and the scene and – ?

00:01:56

RZ: Sure; mostly I just know about my father and grandfather. My grandfather Nathan [Zell] started Nathan's Custom Tailors in 1938, still a business today run by my Uncle Michael [Zell], my dad's brother. My dad took over for my grandfather in the '80s and my mother worked with him as well. And I was in the advertisements from when I was two to 17 or 18 years old so that was definitely part of our life for a really long time.

00:02:32

Before that my great-grandfather had a shoe store down in the farmers' market area. And my dad and parents – family lived above that shoe store. You can still see the building there though it's been many things since then. So there's been a Zell-business in Richmond for many generations, which is nice to be a part of and to be known for. And when you meet other people around town who have been here forever you can say you know Nathan's Custom Tailors and they've heard of it. It's something to be proud of – to be a part of.

00:03:10

SW: And you were saying that you used to dress very well in your youth because of that. Can you talk a little bit about that?

00:03:15

RZ: Well I was kind of forced to dress really well because I represented the family business so I always had every – everything fit perfectly. All my clothes were nice and fit perfectly and matched and ribbons that matched all the outfits and dressed very proper and formal for a child – but spend a lot of my adult life making up for that. *[Laughs]* And dress really casually, and I've ever since always had jobs where I have uniforms and feel really comfortable and not having to choose what I wear anymore. *[Laughs]*

00:03:59

SW: Can you talk about some of – I mean your earliest memories in terms of food traditions in your family or here in Richmond if there is anything prevalent that you remember just like before you started working with food, just food as itself growing up?

00:04:15

RZ: Definitely going out to dinner, every Sunday we would go out to dinner with my grandmother and usually to Italian restaurants – big in our family. And then one thing that got me really into food was once a month my parents would go to the symphony and it was always on a Monday night and I would be sort of left alone to make my own dinner. And it was the most exciting day of the year – I mean of the month for me and I would plan everything out and put everything in little bowls like on television and I would put out a candle and put water in a wine glass and set my little place and just I mean even if it was like a cheese sandwich sometimes I would just get really into whatever it was that I was making and making it really special. And I just – I really enjoyed that.

00:05:08

And then my very first job was working for a catering company at – that was the best catering company in town. It was very formal. It was called the Butlery and the first thing I ever did was skewer like 1,300 pieces of chicken and I – that first day I came home and I was just beaming and I was just like I know what – “I love this so much!” And then they had a gourmet grocery store called the Butler’s Pantry that I worked at for the summer after my – after I graduated from high school. And that was my first real big job. And it had all different departments. It had a wine area. It had a bakery. It had gourmet to-go foods. It had you know raw chicken that was marinated six different ways and fish and I liked it. It was important to me to work in every area of the place even the register. I was so obsessed with everything there and all the – it was you know the early ‘90s gourmet – was just a – a sort of a niche thing. It wasn’t as everywhere like it is now. So it was the only place where you could find certain salts or things that you can find in any grocery store now. That was the only place where you could find you know European butter or anything like that.

00:06:40

So that’s when I really started to develop my passion for food. And then every job I’ve had since then has just been a building on it.

00:06:56

SW: So while you – it was while you were at the Butler’s Pantry that you decided this is something I will do as a livelihood?

00:07:03

RZ: I really wanted to. I still went to college and I have a degree in theater, directing and design and it was really important to my parents that I do that and I’m – I’m glad, I’m grateful for that.

At – there was a time also where I wanted to be in the FBI and be like a Clarice Starling behavioral analyst [*Laughs*]. I still have that in me. I still like to analyze people’s behaviors, so – . [*Laughs*] But I always came back to food and one of the reasons is when I started preparing food and seeing the reaction that people would have when they enjoyed it that’s what made me happy, more than the food itself. I definitely love learning about every kind of cuisine and have tried to cook every – from every area around the world and shop at specialty stores to learn all about strange ingredients and just buy random things and taste them and everything. But really the base of it is that I’m a people pleaser and I like to make people happy and that’s what ultimately makes me happy. And food is a really easy and quick way to do that. So that’s probably psychologically the reason that I got into it [*Laughs*] in the first place is to win people over and do it in a way that was – was easy for them to enjoy, so – . That’s sort of how I got into it in the first place and why I still like doing it. And the things that I like doing the most are cooking for people that I like and you know having that experience of their – of their experience.

00:09:04

My experience is their experience and not them saying, you know, “Oh this tasted so good,” but them saying you know, “Life is great and it’s great to be here you know.” That’s more important than the actual food. And it just so happens that you know after doing it for a while I can do it kind of well, so that worked out pretty good. [*Laughs*]

00:09:31

SW: Now what happened after you left college? I mean can you talk about how you – ‘cause you went to culinary school right?

00:09:37

RZ: Yeah.

00:09:37

SW: Did that come after college?

00:09:38

RZ: That was after college. I moved to New York City. Actually after college my first job before culinary school I lived in Northeast Harbor, Maine and I – I wanted to go to culinary school. And I called a woman who had been to culinary school to ask her you know some questions about it and where should I go and what should I do. And she was working as a private chef for a family and she was leaving to move to Los Angeles and she said, “Well, why don’t you take my job?” And I just thought that was crazy and I had never really professionally cooked before and just worked in little cafes and like the Butler’s Pantry and whatnot. And she – so I went the last month of college to the family’s house, one of their many houses in New York and I cooked for them for the night and all their staff, and they hired me; they liked me. And they were very low-key, very easy-going and casual people even though they were extremely – extremely wealthy people. They were really down to earth and they wanted me to come and cook for them for the summer in their summer house in Northeast Harbor, Maine which is near Bar Harbor.

00:10:52

So a week after I graduated from college I went and went to Maine for almost five months and cooked for them and they had a cookbook that had dog-eared pages of the things that they liked and it wasn’t plated food. I would make a platter of whatever protein – chicken or fish, a lot of fish since we were in Maine on the coast and a platter of a vegetable and a starch and you know and then they would serve themselves onto their own plate and I would do pretty casual

salads and soups for lunch and breakfast was a tray that I would set out and they would come up pick up their tray that was just cut-up fruit and yogurt and granola – very simple things like that.

00:11:37

And then once a week we would have a lobster picnic; it was really fun where I would call in the morning based on if they had guests or not and order the number of lobsters for people that would be there. And then go down to the dock where they – in Cranberry Island off the coast of Maine is where the lobsters were caught and they would be caught and then delivered to me in a little box right off the boat from when they were caught. And then we would hike down to the water. The whole family would go down there and we would start the fire and put seaweed at the bottom of the pot and put the lobsters in there and their family tradition is that you couldn't have a drink unless you went into the water. So we would – you'd have to go in the water first, which is really cold in Maine and then as soon as you get out they have a – a mug of bourbon and beef broth mixed together and you would have that and that would warm you up. And then you would have the lobsters and we would have drawn butter and then we would take the lobster pot off and everyone would make s'mores in the fire from the lobster.

00:12:44

So that was a really fun food experience especially to do as your job with your employers and my later private chef jobs were nothing of that familiar nature. *[Laughs]* And so that was really my first real professional cooking job and then I moved to New York City to go to culinary school and worked some retail for Giorgio Armani for a little while and did some high-end retail and had a business card with my name on it and everything and sold accessories and shoes and ties and sunglasses and wrote thank you notes to everyone that bought them. And then got into culinary school and went to the French Culinary Institute. And that's a six-month program, which is nice.

00:13:35

And so I did that and it was very intensive. It was Monday through Friday and at night you studied for your tests and you have a final project and it's not more – it's not a lot about grades. It's more about performance and attendance. You can't miss any days and you have to be attentive in class. So no – no problem there for me and –

00:14:07

SW: Were there a lot of women in the program?

00:14:09

RZ: There were a lot of women. I was definitely one of the youngest people in the program. It was 1996 – '97 and it was a lot of career changers, so it was a lot of people – I was in my early 20s. I was 22 I think and it was a lot of people in their late 30s and this was really before the celebrity chef and before *Food Network* and *Food Channel* and foodies in general. So the career changers weren't people that now are probably looking for like fame and fortune in the food industry and the – and the cache of it all and the excitement. This was more people that had been you know investment bankers but had been really into food and thought they wanted to open up a restaurant or you know people who just had always wanted to go to culinary school and so that's what they did.

00:15:08

And you know it was mostly older people, but there were a lot of women in the program, which was nice.

00:15:17

SW: So then what happened after you left culinary school?

00:15:21

RZ: After I left culinary school I worked for a – as a private chef over the summer in Fire Island for a couple and I would go on the ferry on Thursdays out to their house and cook for them for the weekend, over the weekend and they would have parties and entertain. And I did that for a couple months and then I worked as a private chef in the Hamptons for an extremely wealthy couple where I didn't even have to wash the dishes. They had a staff of maybe 17 people and it was working from sun up to sundown. It was a very strange environment. I cooked for the dogs. I had to make broccoli and carrot and chicken and put it in a sterling silver bowl for the dogs. And I had to cook for the staff and the au pair as well. And I never saw the house at all; I only ever saw the dining room and the kitchen and the staff quarters where I stayed.

00:16:33

And I was one of seven chefs that they had that summer because of the sort of personality involved in that family. *[Laughs]* And it was a very stressful environment. It was very lucrative financially but ultimately I had to quit because it – the people were crazy. I mean they would say just for example, this is just a crazy example in my opinion, they were having a luncheon and they would say there would be four people and then all of the sudden there'd be sixteen and then there'd be seven and then there'd be twelve and this would all happen in one day. You would never know how many people. And the woman would say you know, "I want to have you know a chicken salad and a lobster salad, so you know I want to do lobsters," and I would say you know, "I lived in Maine. I can cook lobsters." And she would say, "Oh, I don't want the house to smell. Just go and buy already-cooked lobster meat, get 10 pounds of cooked lobster meat; we'll need some – there will be some for the staff and then there will be some leftover for the dogs as well."

00:17:40

And I went to buy the cooked lobster meat and you – you would never know how much 10 pounds of cooked lobster meat for one dish on one luncheon. That was \$600 just for the cooked lobster meat. And I remember bringing that receipt back to one of their many assistants and just sheepishly like handing it over scared like am, “I going to get in trouble for spending this amount of money?” [*Laughs*] And just no problem; she just whipped it out of my hand and wrote it down – onto the next. Just they could just spend that kind of money, so that was kind of nuts.

00:18:20

And then I went back to the city and decided I really wanted to work you know for a really good chef in the city and tried to figure out how I was going to do that, so that’s what I did next.

00:18:35

So for that I went through all the *New York* magazines and *Time Out* magazines and made a list of restaurants that I wanted to work in. And just went to each one and I had a list of maybe 15 places and the third one was a restaurant called Quilty’s and I had read about this woman chef and I was really excited about the prospect of working for a woman. It’s definitely different and

–

00:19:04

SW: How so?

00:19:06

RZ: Just because it's such a boys' club I thought you know it would be more inclusive and I could have more of a mentor scenario and I would just feel more comfortable. And it would just be exciting and just – just something that I wanted to do and be able to tell people and you know someone that could understand where I was coming from.

00:19:32

And I remember going and interviewing and then you did what's called a stage or a trail so you'd go and you'd basically work for free for a night or two to see – it's a really great way to find employment because you really see if you like – it's not only if they like you but if you like them, so you get to see what it's like there on a busy night and if that's the kind of atmosphere you want to work in and then you do it. And so they hired me and I started as a garde manger, the salad station and the chef was Katie Sparks and she had worked for Bobby Flay and worked at Quilted Giraffe and just had a really impressive background. And she was very even-tempered, like she never lost her temper. She was very strict in terms of what she expected and what she wanted out of us but she also you know when we would have staff meals she would be encouraging us to experiment and use staff meals as a way to try new things with the products that we had. And when we were slow she would do great things like if we were really slow we would blind – she would blindfold us and then open up the spices and make us like name what each spice was, you know. She would always do fun stuff like that and she was really a – a great mentor because I learned to write everything down from her, every recipe, every list, to keep copious notes about everything I did no matter if I thought you know I've done this every night for three months. I'm never going to forget how to do it and she was like, "Write it down anyway." And to this day I have every piece of paper and I'm so grateful because it started that sort of journalistic aspect of it for me where I keep notes about everything that I do and write down every recipe. Even if I'm copying from something I'll rewrite it down so that I have it in

my own handwriting. That helps me figure out the processes of things anyway recipe-wise; I always like to re-write things.

00:21:48

But just you know learning about putting everything back in the same place every single time, so whenever you – if you're a line cook you have to do everything by rote, so you really have to be able to just whip around with your hand behind you and know that whatever it is that you're looking for is going to be sitting – is going to be right where you left it the last time. And just really instilling really good behavior, good kitchen behavior you know, perfectly clean station, everything tidy, making sure you have plenty of prep, you know making sure you're there early enough if you think you need to do more prep, just everything that makes a good line cook, a good line cook I learned from her for sure and learned on that job from other people that worked there that she had taught as well.

00:22:38

SW: So what happened after that; I mean how long were you there for and then – ?

00:22:41

RZ: There? I was there for over a year and I worked six days a week. I had Wednesdays off which is the slowest night of the week in New York City and the most boring night to go out so that was my day off and not very fun [*Laughs*] although I was exhausted because I had worked 1:00 [PM] until 1:00 [AM] every day for six days a week and it was something that you do while you're young in my opinion. And I mean it was a lot of sweat, a lot of – a lot of hard work, a lot of – .

00:23:19

In New York kitchens you'll have the kitchen that you cook in and then you have your prep kitchen mostly down – downstairs and so you have this steep stairs that you have to carry everything up and down all day long and then when you do all your prep and you have to bring it up for the night you carry it on a big tray and you – you know even though it's a woman chef and I'm a woman, mostly everybody else in the kitchen is a man and you just – you have to be tough and you have to just suck it up and carry the heavy stuff, even though it's heavy [*Laughs*] and you want help. You have to just do it.

00:23:57

And I definitely burned out a little bit from all that work and I moved to California where I managed a pottery studio and worked in the dot-com world for a year and kind of took a breather and then just – .

00:24:17

SW: Were you burned out?

00:24:18

RZ: I was burned out a little bit. I mean that is a lot of work. It was in SoHo, very busy every single night. While I worked there she was reviewed – got a great review from the *New York Times*. She was *Food and Wine Best New – Top 10 Best New Chef*. There was a lot of press, a lot of traffic, a lot of pressure put on us every night. Everything was always executed perfectly. She – every plate went by the chef and she tasted every sauce, every plate that went out and if it was something that she didn't approve of she would have you re-plate it.

00:24:55

I was pretty lucky. I didn't get a lot of re-plates but that was always something that would happen. And – which is great to see a chef that is so committed to their product that they need to see every single thing that leaves the kitchen. And she would do these beautiful garnishes, some fried garnishes, some really pretty oils, and always some fresh herb salad that she would put on things, so she was always touching every single plate, too. And that's not been the same in every restaurant that I've worked in since then. But it's sort of a high standard that was set for me that I – you don't really see a lot of people live up to.

00:25:38

And I definitely got a little burned out from all that hard work and when you move to California in general you just breathe a little easier and it was during the dot-com boom, so there was just so many jobs. If you had graduated from college you could get an amazing job easily. So I just took advantage of that and you know after a year I was itching to get back into the kitchen and back cooking and back into food.

00:26:08

SW: So is that when you came back to Richmond?

00:26:11

RZ: Soon after; I first worked in a restaurant in California. That was a really strange restaurant where they changed the cuisine every month to reflect a different country's cuisine, so it was – it was – it was interesting but it just it never really made sense. And that's why it's not there anymore [*Laughs*] – in my opinion, but it was a fun place to work, for sure.

00:26:42

SW: Okay; so you were talking about women in –

00:26:50

RZ: Okay; so after a while of living in San Francisco I moved back to Richmond. My – my dad was having some kind of surgery and my – my mom was like, “Why don’t you come home?” They really begged me to move home. They missed me. California is really far away. And you know maybe a year and a half after I moved back they ended up retiring and moving to Florida, which is just really funny but – . *[Laughs]* So they – I moved back not really knowing what I was going to do but knowing I wanted to get you know back into the restaurant industry and a friend of a friend of theirs had this restaurant and they actually needed somebody and they called me and said, “You know we hear that you cooked you know in New York and California and can you come in for an interview?” And so I did and that was my first job back here in Richmond at Patina Grill where I met my husband *[Bob Butt]* and he was the sous chef there.

00:28:00

And we were just friends and then you know love over an open flame happened *[Laughs]* and we’re actually one of five marriages to come out of that place from when we worked there. And it was a real family you know working there. And worked hard there; it’s a big kitchen so it was a lot of cleaning also, a lot of labor in kitchen – it’s just the actual cleaning at the end of the night that people don’t realize you know how much cleaning actually goes into the end of the night at a kitchen. It’s not just putting the food away. It’s scrubbing everything – scrubbing all the stainless steel and then wiping down what you’ve scrubbed and then sweeping and then scrubbing the floor after you’ve sweep(ed) it and then mopping up what you’ve scrubbed and then wiping everything down again and making everything shiny and then going back through

and making sure everything is wrapped properly and labeled for the next day. There's just a lot in the breakdown that's physical and did that for over – a little over a year.

00:29:13

And once again decided to move on and decided to do something else and decided I kind of wanted to get out of the line cook arena and I still wanted to cook but I just didn't want that pressure, the daily pressure of pushing plates out and just all the labor that was involved in that. So I went to my boss at the time and he suggested to go to a friend of his, who they had a catering company/sort of gourmet store where they made fresh pasta and then other entrees and desserts and that was my next move – was to go to them. And I worked there for three years and I learned a lot about baking and making cakes and they were sort of a really cool hippie type people that really laid back and really low pressure and you know there was a lot of everything written on little pieces of paper everywhere. And there was some disorganization and it was a little bit of a chaos but I loved it. It was – you know it was really good food. The food was delicious and people just loved it. They didn't care that it was sort of a chaotic sort of atmosphere. You know there was – the people that I worked for they had a new baby and the baby was there every day on her back in a little backpack growing up with all the food and would wave to all the customers and she was sort of our mascot and you know sort of an irreverent place to work.

00:31:03

And it was during that time that I decided you know I really wanted to do my own catering and make my own menus and knowing a lot of people from growing up here people started asking me and that's sort of what it – it sort of blossomed from people saying you know, "I'm having this dinner party. Can you do the dinner?" And I would say, "Yeah." And I would come up with the menu and – and it was a really satisfying feeling to have done the whole thing

start to finish on my own and have just to have created it on my own. And even I like to set the table and do the flowers and make place cards and be very Martha Stewart about the whole thing and I was always into the whole look of everything.

00:31:49

And so that's what I started doing and then it just kind of grew from there where someone said you know, "I'm having this 30-person wedding. Do you think you could do that?" And I would – I had – I got into this habit of just saying yes before I really thought things through [Laughs] so I would be all of the sudden like involved in this – in this catering of this gig that I really didn't know what I was getting myself into when I had said "Yes," but I just had to sort of figure my way out through it. And you know call up a rental company and sort of not know how many forks to get or how many plates to get you know and I sort of had to kind of wing it and just kind of ask a lot of questions and really just play things out in my mind. And that was where like keeping copious notes really came in handy and where I started really diagramming everything that I do ahead of time, so when I have an event I've thought of you know everything that I'm going to pack with me to take with me, you know from not having to remember to bring trash bags to everything. Everything that I could possibly need I try to visualize the whole event from the beginning until the very end, so that I can foresee anything that I may not have come into before.

00:33:11

So I started doing that and I left Mainly Pasta for a little while and I had a friend who was a pharmaceutical rep and so I started doing lunches for her and got a credit card machine for my house and [Laughs] 'cause she only did – could do American Express so I had to take American Express [Laughs] and then she would tell her friends that were also reps and so I started doing a lot of lunches and dinners for drug reps and those are always fun too because they you know on

the flipside they really have no budget, so you know I could kind of go – go crazy with those and then the pasta shop that I had worked for had sort of fallen out of business and then man that I had worked for at Patina Grill had bought that business. And he asked me to come in and run it, so I went back to working at the pasta shop only this time it was just me. And it was on a smaller scale, the business was on a smaller scale because we didn't have a staff. It was really just me and maybe on other person 10-hours a week that would come in and make pasta. But other than that I made all the food, ordered everything, washed all the dishes, did all the books, everything – did the windows, displays – everything, everything.

00:34:48

And that got to be a lot for one person to do and just the business. I think also it was during the no carb craze so [*Laughs*] it was not a great time to be in the pasta industry at the time 'cause people were suddenly afraid of pasta, so that was not a good time to be in the pasta industry. And it was at that time that a friend of mine who has a – had a restaurant was having some difficulties with her staff and – and someone had left and sort of left her in a lurch and she didn't really know how to cook. And so she asked me to come and show her and then she asked me to just come and work there. So I ended up going and working there for her and –

00:35:39

SW: What was the name of the place?

00:35:40

RZ: And that was at Ipanema Café, my good friend Kendra [*Feather*], and you know just a completely different atmosphere, all of the sudden back into the kitchen and back you know working a – not so much of a line 'cause really it was only me and one other person in the

kitchen but there is a rail of tickets and they keep coming in. So it's a small kitchen and it was actually a great kitchen because I'm only five-feet and it's a basement so I could for the first and only time of any kitchen I've worked in reach everything that I needed to reach. *[Laughs]* I never had to ask anyone to reach anything for me, which is you know a satisfying feeling. *[Laughs]*

00:36:28

So I worked there and I worked with David [Rohrer, of the WPA Bakery], the other chef and he and I would you know we worked on alternate days and come up with the menu items and that was really fun. It was sort of thinking outside the box because it's vegetarian and vegan and so it forces you to be creative and you know it wasn't about doing fake meat. That's not what that place is about. So it wasn't about like substituting a fake meat for this; it was about creating really good food and not really thinking about the fact that there was not a meat on the plate. So that was really interesting and fun for me.

00:37:12

SW: Rachel, I have this question that I've been wanting to ask you; the difference between having a set job and in a kitchen and working for yourself is there a difference in terms of like you know it sounds like you kind of took off running with the catering business and working for private events because you were so well-connected in Richmond and you knew people and then they passed that along. But I'm wondering is there more security in having a job in a restaurant as opposed to working for yourself. Is there a difference – was there a difference for you?

00:37:48

RZ: Yeah; for sure, and you know when I started doing the catering I – I worked you know here and there for friends and different catering companies on the side to keep money coming in but

it's stressful when you're working for yourself and you really don't know from gig to gig what – what's coming next or you know are these people going to keep hiring me and you know you – it's all on you; it's all up to you to make it happen. And there's something really comforting about working in a restaurant where you have a dedicated clientele that you know is coming in and they're coming in to eat and you have a job and you have a list of stuff to make every day and all you have to do is go in and make the stuff on your list and make the food that comes in, clock out, go home. You're – it's not on you to worry about the business aspect. It's not on you to worry about you know volume or anything. You just you can really concentrate on your prep, your knife skills, your creativity in that arena and you really don't have to think about you know your livelihood as much 'cause you're getting that paycheck no matter what.

00:39:02

SW: So why did you decide to take that risk at moments and – and go off on your own and you still do your own thing now? I mean why – what made you decide to take that risk?

00:39:12

RZ: I think I was just excited by the idea; I mean to be able to you know when you work for other people for so long you always think like, “If it was my place of I had to do it, like this is how I'd do it.” And when you get that opportunity to have your own events you're in control. You know and – and I like that [*Laughs*] and I like to be the one saying you know, “This is how we're going to do this and this is what this – this is how we're going to cook these potatoes and this is how we're going to serve this and this is when we're going to serve it and this is when we're going to clear it and this is when we're going to stop cooking and you know this is how

much I'm going to charge for it and this is how much I'm going to make." And you say – you decide all those things and there's something really empowering about that.

00:40:05

You know to this day I – I think I will always now like really like to have a steady job at the same time. After you know I left working at Ipanema I – I waitressed and then I started a – my – one of my more important jobs ever was working as a private chef for this couple and that is another thing that just sort of happened. Like I really wasn't looking for it; it's one of those golden opportunities of things – of sort of a dream job that you think could never really happen. And it did happen and there's always downsides you know. If – I would probably still be working there today if it didn't become stressful in terms of there was no job security. The people that I worked for would at a moment's notice say I don't – "We're going to France for two weeks," or, "We're going to New York tomorrow," and then suddenly I would have no work. And that is just no way to live. And it took me a really long time to realize that – that is not how I wanted to do.

00:41:17

But that was a – a great job for me. It really opened up my creativity and my mind to my own worth and talent you know and it gave me a lot of encouragement because they were really enthusiastic about everything that I did and you know it was only two people and that sounds so strange. I mean it was a strange environment. It's cooking for two people, very formal, every night – crystal, china, silver, linens, four courses, they dressed for dinner; it's strange. It's not something real. You know that – I have nothing to compare it to. And it's always fun to talk about because it's just so weird. And they – you know I had no budget. I could spend as much money as I wanted to which makes shopping for yourself very difficult because [*Laughs*] that's not how normal people live, but when I would cook for them I could just take things off the shelf

and be like, “Oh truffle salt, cool.” Oh you know, “This kind of olive oil, you know from this you know single ranch in California that’s the best olive oil; they’ve got to have it.” They were all about having the very best of everything and very adventurous palate and so it really gave me an opportunity to experiment with all kinds of cuisines and – and spices and spice levels and even though there was some structure in there you know they would – there was very few fish that they would eat. They would like to have fish every night, so I would have to be really creative with halibut, their favorite fish. I have probably cooked halibut every way it can possibly [Laughs] be cooked.

00:43:16

And then sometimes I would get other fish and just say it was halibut because I knew they would eat it and then they would say how good it was and I wouldn’t ever say, “Oh that was actually cod,” you know. Like they would want fish and chips; well you know sometimes there’s better fish so I would just get whatever the best was. And so that was a great opportunity and you know they – they have a place in the Bahamas so I went three Christmas seasons down and cooked down there and that was a wild – a wild ride of nothing that’s in the Bahamas is made there. There’s very little that’s actually local that you can buy there that was made there. Everything is flown in, so everything is just ridiculously expensive and they just had accounts at every place that I would shop so I would just really sign for things. And I would just blow my mind how much money that we would end up spending on just a block of cheese that would be you know \$4.00 at the store here and \$7.00 at the store here would be like \$27.00 there. And just again, like people with that kind of money just it doesn’t faze them at all. You know that’s why they – that’s why they’re living the good life you know to – to really live it up.

00:44:46

And so I really tried to rise to the occasion and when I worked for them for three years I made something different every single night you know. They would get their favorites, so I would maybe – you know tuna tartar was their favorite but I probably made that more than I’ve made halibut. I’ve made tuna tartar which is a specific item; I’ve made it a million different ways and always trying to be creative. And I would go through phases where I would be really into Mexican and just research and it would give me an opportunity to go to the library and get like every Mexican book and you know try to make really authentic Mexican sauces and salsas.

00:45:28

And then I went through a Japanese phase and I – you know I bought the Nobu cookbooks and you know would even go up to New York and buy specialty items you can't get here in Richmond. Although now I’ve found a lot more of them; if there is something food-wise to be bought or sold here in Richmond I’ve found it. *[Laughs]* I know where everything – I know every shop and I know where it is on the shelf. If you’re going to the Asian market I can tell you, you know third shelf down in the center that’s where you’re going to find the shichimi togarashi. So that’s the thing – you know and I like to do that for people and they’re like, “Where do you find this?” And I’m like, “Oh well, let me tell you *[Laughs]*; I can tell you where to find it,” so I like that.

00:46:23

SW: You know you brought up a restaurant earlier that you said that every month – it was in San Francisco and every month they would change the region of the world that the food was from. And it seems to me like when I first met you, you just talked about such a breadth of knowledge like a lot of chefs tend to stick to something that you know they – they take risks but you know they don’t take great risk ‘cause they want it to stay like their signature thing. And I just felt like

in just talking to you it just seems like your thing is to be adventurous all the time, like to have no boundaries. And I'm wondering because of that if you agree with that – I think that's true; I don't know how you feel about it and so that's why I'm asking you, how do you decide – I mean you have all this freedom, you know you talk about working for this particular family and working these events, I mean how do you focus and decide on what you're going to do?

00:47:18

RZ: Well sometimes – I mean a lot of places even back to Quilty's and Katie Sparks, she definitely pulled from all over the world for her food. Patina Grill also; their tagline was something like ethnically influenced world-cuisine I think is the tagline for that – from there. And so it's definitely been a theme, a current of places that I've worked at that mimic that same behavior. So it's something that I like and also places that I like to work also feel similarly. Even Ipanema, even with the vegetarian dishes you would have something sort of Asian and you would have something sort of Mexican and maybe Thai and you know it's always been like that there. And it just when I go to – to a client's house for example if I'm going to do a dinner party or something like that I usually don't have an idea going into the meeting of exactly what I'm going to do. I sort of go in and you know look around their house and maybe you know talk to them about the kind of restaurants that they like to go to, the kind of food that they like to eat, and then that informs what I'm going to do and how I'm going to make it my own. And there are certain things that I like to cook and I'll consistently you know bring those up in a conversation and just sort of I'll throw a bunch of stuff out. Like I'll throw out a bunch of Asian ideas or Thai or you know French or you know Spanish – whatever, whatever it is, American, Virginian – whatever and just see what kind of catches in their eye. You know I really look for visual clues and in their body language and that goes back to what I said about being a people pleaser, like

whatever I can do that I know is going to make them the happiest is what I'm going to want to cook for them.

00:49:14

And the way that I like to cook is – is not so people are like, “What is this?” It's more like I might take one thing that they've never heard of and put it with something that they're really comfortable with, so if it's a spice they've never heard of it's going to be with a food that they're very comfortable with. So you know I don't – I think there's some people that go really overboard creatively and it alienates the customer or the client you know or the person that's eating and then they feel like they should like it because it's interesting and there's pressure put on them to like something because they were told you know that it's got this you know this pressed down into this and this you know distilled this way or you know what have you. And it's worded in a way that makes it sound you know so interesting and creative and clever but really the people are like , “What actually is this that I'm eating?”

00:50:20

And that's not enjoyable. I don't – that's not how I like to eat and I don't think that's how most people like to eat. So I really go at it from the opposite way of like what can I do to make this person like extremely happy? So I start with what I already know makes them happy and I try to go from there, like what they say I'm like tofu and I take on the flavor of the person. So that's I – that's my goal is to make the person happy and make them enjoy life 'cause that's what good food should do. It should be less about the food and more about your quality of life and you're enjoying it in that way.

00:51:04

SW: And you've kind of worked all over the spectrum like from very wealthy families to you know well I don't want to say like – but you worked in restaurants as well and I'm wondering, you – when you say that you know it's about enjoying the quality of life, do you think that that's like everyone is eligible for that? It's not necessarily like your – your status.

00:51:24

RZ: Yeah for sure; I mean for the people that are really wealthy what's going to make them happy a lot of times is knowing that they got the highest end quality of beef and that they have you know the best of everything and you know a lot of times presentation is really important. And then you have other people that you know you can make an amazing meal that doesn't cost a lot of money but you put the love into it and you – the – you take care of the ingredient. You really put a lot of care into even a potato. You can take a potato and you can cut it into cubes and you can blanch it and then you can dry it out and then you can drip – make sure it's dry and then you can fry it at a low temperature and then you can drain it from that frying and then you can put it back in the fryer at a higher temperature and you can have this crispy cube of potato. And there's like five things that you did for that one ingredient that you know doesn't cost but \$1.00 but you can put all this effort into it and make it really special and you know it's – it's – that's what's important is really putting the love and – and care into the ingredient.

00:52:43

It doesn't really matter what the ingredient is and it can be a high-end ingredient; it can be you know – a lot of things now even that are considered high-end in food are – are the less thought of parts of the animal only because we're at that point where we're like you have to have something new and something creative. So it's always now a lot of the cheapest parts of the animal are becoming what's "cuisine" so I think that's really interesting because they're not

necessarily the most expensive parts. You know the tenderloin for example of beef is known as you know a – a big thing for a lot of dinner parties, people are like you know, “Let’s do beef tenderloin.” And that is so boring and it has you know there’s no – there’s not flavor, there’s not flavor, but if that’s what they want to do then you figure out a way to make it the best or if they don’t have the money then you can do you know – you can take a tri-tip or you know another less expensive cut of beef and you can make it just as delicious just by the care that you put into it. So you can do for anyone the same –

00:53:52

SW: I have a couple more questions for you if – are you game?

00:53:55

RZ: Yeah.

00:53:55

SW: Okay; I wanted to ask you – I’m just making sure the battery is okay. The batteries are good. You know you left Richmond and worked in bigger cities where people are really intense about food. And I’m wondering after doing that and coming back and seeing the scene here in Richmond if you can talk about how you’ve seen it change in terms of the food scene here or – . And I’ve been asking people, this is sort of a two-part(er) – that and if there is – you know you’ve worked with so many different types of cuisine and – and you do a lot of crazy things with food, a lot of cool things with food, if there’s something particular here like a dish that’s signature Richmond? And nobody has really been able to answer that so maybe that doesn’t exist but you know it seems like Southern food has just – you know the whole country has – the last

decade everyone is like it's all about Southern food and soul food and I'm wondering where you – like if you've seen that trend and just where Richmond sits along that line.

00:54:57

RZ: Yeah for sure; even when I first moved back from living in California and in New York it was the year 2000 and definitely the food scene has changed dramatically since then especially in Richmond. You've gone to just more chef-driven restaurants. You just have more culture of chef-driven restaurants that are about their vision and less about the consumer. It used to be you know Richmonders will only eat a crab cake. You used to say that – that's what I would have said – if you had asked me that question maybe seven years ago, I would have been like crab cake. Richmond has to have a crab cake. And I'm not saying that's not true anymore because as much as things change in Richmond they stay the same. You know you can leave here for 10 years and you can come back and there's still going to be the same things and people are still interested in bacon, in crab cakes, in that's soulful comfort food.

00:56:01

Definitely the soul food/comfort food thing has taken off but it was definitely always here in Richmond and something you just saw. It was – probably now it's more authentic than it was. I think you know earlier on in my culinary experience it was sort of a melding of '80s style food with the idea of comfort food, so it was sort of a combo, so you would have delicate comfort food, which doesn't really make any sense and there's really no place for that anymore. It's sort of a joke now to have something like that. But –

00:56:52

SW: What is – what do you mean by '80s style food?

00:56:54

RZ: Just – just the introduction of gourmet as a concept and as an idea of food as an elevated idea of that you know, just of that concept of food being elevated, the palate is just starting to – people’s plates just starting to expand beyond what they already knew or American food and just having other countries’ cuisines you know in – you know people would pick one and go with it, or they would do – they would be like Latin fusion or Asian fusion whereas now you don’t really have that. You just – you would say – you could have all of it all in one and no one would – no one would really call it fusion anymore. It just – it’s just food now and it’s – and so I think a lot of that is more accepted.

00:57:52

So in terms of now what’s very Richmond, I really don’t know. It seems like layering of fats is really important here, you know people really pile – pile it on. If you’re going to go out to eat here in Richmond it’s not going to be you know a real light meal normally – unless you’re having maybe small plates. That’s another big thing. That’s not something that I’ve been a part of but that is a trend is to have these small plates. But even on the small plate itself it’s going to be something rich and decadent. You know I think people like if they’re going to go out now they want to see something that they wouldn’t make at home, and I think that’s exciting. I think that’s something fun to be a part of and you know the more interesting the better in that – in that respect.

00:58:50

SW: I also wanted to ask you about Chef Undercover. Can you talk about – sorry I don’t mean to be poking you with the – I hope it’s not bothering you.

00:58:58

RZ: No; it's okay.

00:58:58

SW: Could you talk about what Chef Undercover is and who Chef Undercover is and how you started that and when and what is going on with that?

00:59:08

RZ: Chef Undercover is the name that I chose from being a private chef and I just had this vision of it – of the logo being you know like the old private eye detective with the hat and the spy, the magnifying glass only it was going to be a frying pan and a little wisp of like hair coming out so you could tell it was a girl chef you know. That's what I always thought. And the idea was like it became a thing where I was going to go into your house and cook the food and then disappear before anyone saw me and it would be like you know “did – did Anne cook this? Or was it Chef Undercover,” you know? “I don't know and I don't care,” like that's what I would always think you know.

00:59:58

Like that's how I kind of wanted to be sort of behind the scenes. You know my degree in Theater is a behind-the-scenes degree and not an acting degree. I'm more of a behind the scenes person. I always get uncomfortable when I work at a party and they're like, “Come out and say hello to everybody,” you know. I'm always like “Oh okay; that's – I'll do it,” and you know I – I get really tongue-tied and you know when they say you know, “Come out before each course and

tell us what we're eating," I do it, but I'm always like nervous to talk in front of a crowd that way.

01:00:32

And so I've just continued that business. It's sort of evolved into different things, you know dinner parties, you know catering, bridal showers, baby showers, private chef you know – I did work for three years for one couple and then I had another woman that I would cook for once a week. And I would go to the store and buy all the food and then go to her house and cook for four hours and that would be her food for the week. And I really loved that idea; I would love to do that all the time. That would be really fun for me to go and when I do something like that I'll take the client to the grocery store. It's really important to me. It's a really good tool and we'll walk around and look at everything and look at all the produce and so I can see firsthand when they're like, "I don't really like broccoli," or you know, "I've never really cooked pork tenderloin but I like it." You know and it's easier than just sitting there with a list of ingredients or a list of things that I could cook and then picking from a menu. It's more informative to go and just really look at the food that they're going to eat and the place that they want me to buy it from and pick it out that way. And so that's sort of the Chef Undercover you know motto is to get you what – the food you want to eat and how you want it to be cooked.

01:02:05

SW: Do you see yourself, I mean you mentioned that you think you're always going to have, like something else going on while you're doing that, but do you think it's possible to do that full-time?

01:02:15

RZ: I would like to think that it is. I just have always been so busy that I've never really stopped to really give it a shot, you know to really dig in and – and put myself out there in that way. But I think I could make it work.

01:02:35

You know I really like the food styling; that's another thing that I really like doing –

01:02:39

SW: Can you talk about how that got started and how it's different from cooking or talk about – just talk about how that happened?

01:02:46

RZ: Yeah.

01:02:46

SW: What year was it?

01:02:49

RZ: That was – I guess it was two years ago or maybe three years ago; I'm not entirely sure. But a magazine [Richmond magazine] contacted me to do a story where they wanted to take pictures of me and to have me come up with a food and so I did. And it was – it was really scary for me to be in front of the camera you know having my picture taken. And – and somebody else was styling the food and I thought, "Oh that's so cool"; you know and I asked the person about it. And then a couple months later the woman, Brandon [Fox] who wrote the article asked me to

style – to do some recipes and styling for another story she was doing and I said, “Okay.” And then I just went out to the library and went to the internet and looked up food styling and just sort of jumped into the pool hip-deep. I mean definitely don’t have a photography background and that’s something that I want to remedy you know; if it’s something that you’re serious about you really need to know all aspects of it. And so learning about photography and light and – and it’s very different. It’s very different from cooking because no one is eating the food that you’re taking a picture of. So it’s not about making it taste good. So therein lies my difficulty because my whole goal with cooking is to make food that tastes really great and makes people happy so with food styling it has to look really good. So you have to approach it from a completely new way, so you have to learn about making things shiny and it’s just a whole different way of doing things. But I really enjoy it; I really like creating the scene and setting the scene and you know when you open up the magazine and you see that it’s something that you made and you did the background and you did the flowers and you did the paper that the food is written on and did the writing and everything there’s just something really satisfying about that – that just is nothing – it’s like nothing I’ve ever done before because it’s like a full start to finish project. And you can always look back on it; it stays there. Whereas food is – is so fleeting; it’s so Zen. You know you make it and then it’s gone, like you just can’t be too precious about it.

01:05:21

And so that’s something I really like; like I did a lot of flower work for a year or two and I really used a lot of my food like making boutonnières and – and pin-ons you know for mother-in-law pin-ons or what they call wristlets and things like that. I would always say it’s like making a really beautiful salad that no one is going to eat you know [*Laughs*] – would really – it’s the same thing. You really have to just focus more on your attention to detail and just you know I have really tiny freakishly small hands, so it really comes in handy when you’re doing little tiny

handiwork. And with the food styling thing to really get in the – between the camera and the subject and just brush that one little dot away and if you're a perfectionist like me then it really speaks to that part of you where you can really tweak everything to make it like the perfect image. And you really don't have to worry about what it tastes like so that pressure is off. So that's really fun; so I like that.

01:06:27

SW: So are you still – so you're still doing that now?

01:06:31

RZ: Still doing the food styling. I – every time I get a call I just get so jazzed about it. I get so excited and you know I'm always like, "Why me? Why did they pick me?" And you know and then I love the finished product and you know it's just a really fun – it's a really, really fun job. It really – it goes – it goes to – it speaks to all my creative juices that I have like just going through me, so – . I love it; I love doing that.

01:07:04

SW: And then you're still – right now you're doing your – the Chef Undercover is a constant thing?

01:07:11

RZ: Right; it's few and far between. I sort of slowed down a lot when I worked for that one family so I sort of had to say no to every opportunity because I was just busy with them the whole time. And then now after that I started waitressing and I really enjoyed that because after

working for three years by myself alone in the kitchen I had the hood vent and I nicknamed it Wilson like my only friend in the kitchen [*Laughs*] and so I – I really like the other aspect of it. I love the hospitality and food industry as a whole so being a waitress and serving people is a natural extension of that for me. It just I could only really do that in a place where I really thought that the food was really great because if I can't cook it then I have to know it's going to be something I feel proud to serve. That's really important to me, so I like to – I like to do that. I like to – it's the same thing; I can convince people to get certain things on the menu that I know they'll like. I can tell from you know – I'll ask them questions and I can tell them what to get, what not to get, and then just sort of see that experience from the time they sit down until they walk out the door. And it's the same thing; I want to make them happy. I want to – them to have a great time and not just because of the food but because you know they get to go out into the world and like have a great experience of life. And like you're there for people's engagements or for their birthday dinner or you know sometimes their breakup dinner and that's not so good. But then you can be there to make sure they have plenty of bread and water and you know nothing – you can hurry it along if you see something like that. [*Laughs*] You know there's always the human experience that is fun – fun to be a part of.

01:09:10

SW: I just have a couple more questions. One of them is can you – do you do most – and I asked you this earlier but since we're on the tape now, do you cook from your own personal kitchen when you do events or private dinners? You don't want to say? Okay; we'll strike that from the record.

01:09:31

And the other thing, so right now you're waitressing at Can-Can, which is on Cary Street. And I'm wondering if you could – there was something that you said earlier before we sat down here about waiting tables one night and one of your tables said something like not meaning this in a bad way but they said, "You're so good at what you do," and I'm wondering if you could talk about that moment.

01:10:01

RZ: Yeah; you know it's something that luckily I hear a lot which is a great feeling. It's when you know people say you know, "You're a really good waitress. You're really good at this or you're really good at what you do," and I know it's meant in earnest and – and I – 99-percent of me accepts it as such and is proud of that. And of course you know you want to be good at your job and you want to be good at what you do. And a lot of times especially here in Richmond, the wait staff is sort of a weigh-station job. It's in between – it's while you're a student or it's while you're you know a musician or an artist. It's something you do just to make money.

01:10:46

It's for a lot of people that's what it is; it's not what their passion is. It's not what their interest is. Hospitality and food industry is just not what they're passionate about. So you know and some of those people are honestly very good at it also; they just happen to be good at – good at that. And for me it's something deeper. So when someone tells me something like that on the one hand it makes me very happy because I know I'm doing the right thing and I know I'm doing my job but I want to also you know scream out loud like they're – "I do so much more! You know I can – you know I also went to culinary school [*Laughs*] and I can cook and I used to be in – in the back in the kitchen." And you know there's so many times where I want to just like pull my resume out and drop it on the table and be like look at – "I've done other stuff and you

know I'm not just a server. I'm not just your servant for the night you know. I happen to be good at it because of all of these other things and add them all up and that's what makes me good at this you know."

01:11:52

So it can be a little frustrating because you know I don't say that and I don't tell them that. I just you know accept it and move on and you know I really try to take it for what it is, which is a compliment and a testimony to my hard work. So I try to take it like that but I – there is part of me that is yearning to let them know that I'm – I can do more. *[Laughs]*

01:12:18

SW: I'm also wondering too, just you have so much experience and it – you know you say that it's – that you do what you do because you love making people happy. And I'm wondering if part of that is also something that goes with it is that you get to see people – this is – I don't – you get to see people in closer – you get to see a close up version of the human condition like you get to see people in ways that a lot of people don't get to – or you understand people in a way that other people don't understand people. Do you think that's true?

01:12:54

RZ: Yeah; I mean even from especially being in someone's home and cooking for them in their home I mean that's unlike anything else. And it's actually you know it's unlike any other job because you're in someone's home. And people are different when they're in their home. And so you know they might be having an argument and you're in the next room or they might be you know drinking more alcohol than they would in public and then you see them in that respect. So you do see – and when you're in someone's home and then when you're waiting tables you know

you can really tell a lot about people by the way that they somehow treat wait staff you know. It – you can tell if they’ve ever worked in a restaurant before or in the service industry before or if they’re just used to having people wait on them or if they’re uncomfortable with it. You know you can really – there’s a thing called reading your table and it lets you know whether to go on and on about the menu or whether they’re wrapped in conversation and they just – you’re just an order-taker. You know you really learn that from body language and you know just from doing it over and over again.

01:14:17

And – and some people get it better than others and that’s just something you know that’s one of the things that I think that I happen to be good at is really reading people and – and kind of seeing emotionally or you know where they are when they’re sitting down at the table and what they need from me, and again, like to be like tofu and – and be whatever it is that they need. If they need me to do a song and dance and tell them how the food was cooked from start to finish that’s something I can do for them. Or if they just want to say, “I’ll take the chicken,” and you know wave me away with their hand then that’s what I’ll do – bring them the chicken and I’ll smile when I bring it to them. So either way –

01:15:00

SW: Do you think that there’s something particular about Richmond in terms of women and food and – and starting their own business or – or taking the leap and doing something risky like that? Do you think – do you see that; I mean because the – the project is focusing on that and I just think it’s interesting because I don’t – I don’t know if it’s a – this place or if it’s there’s a community here that’s supportive of it. I’m wondering what – how you feel about that.

01:15:25

RZ: I think there is. I think there is a supportive community and of people especially not in the food industry that are maybe in like social media or journalism or TV or art that all support other women you know when they – . There's a – women supporting other women is basically what I'm trying to say, so in – in that respect you know you'll support an artist – you know a group of artists or you know a magazine that's women-driven, female-driven or a restaurant you know and it sort of breeds exponentially that way. It can only get better that way. And the more women the better and there's not women hating women, which is really great.

01:16:18

If you're a woman you're going to be supported by the other women in the community. There's – where men probably don't have it that way; you know there is no well, "We're dudes, so we're all friends," you know. There's a lot of – a lot more in-fighting that you see in that respect than you do with women. Women will support women just because they are. And so I think that's something really to be proud of.

01:16:43

SW: Have you see it a lot in the food – in terms of the food community here?

01:16:47

RZ: In the food community and in you know with blogger type people and then also especially at the farmers' markets for example, like any woman that has a farmers' market business is supported by the other women that are in the farmers' – and probably all the businesses support each other. I'm just generalizing to women 'cause that is what we're talking about, but for sure you know there's – there's not a competitive aspect to it. There's just – and I think that's what it

boils down to is – it's not competitive. It's supportive. And I think that's something to be proud of.

01:17:28

SW: I'm wondering – this is my last question for you and then if there's other things you want to add then please do. Thank you; it's an hour and 17 minutes. You know you've – you've worked in places where you know it can be a boys' club and so I'm wondering if you've ever felt like you had to work harder because –

01:17:48

RZ: For sure.

01:17:48

SW: – can you – ?

01:17:50

RZ: For sure I've felt that way and one place, I won't mention the name of, but one time I – I went in and I moved a trash can and it apparently was moved in a – in a place that one of the cooks did not want it to be moved to and they picked it up and they threw it at me. And they hit me with the trash can and I was mad. I was really mad.

01:18:14

And I went to the owner and I said – and I said what happened and he said, 'You know when you leave here you'll be a lot tougher than you are now.' And that made me even madder because it meant that I wasn't tough and that I had no legitimate reason to complain about

something like that. And it's just not behavior that's becoming to anyone – male or female and there's just like a gruffness that happens a lot – the boys' club and you know there's a lot of you know – sorry, you know humor that's filthy and things like that. And – and that – you know at first it could be a little shocking. I'm – I can be a little prudish so some – sometimes when people talk about stuff I'm like, “Oh guys; my ears,” you know or whatever. But then you get desensitized to it and then you know sometimes it's fun to be the only girl and then sometimes you know – sometimes you know like I'm saying at Ipanema when everything was low and I could reach everything it was great because at other places I always had to ask for help to reach something or to lift something or carry something. And it's – it – you already are trying so hard and then to have to have that on top of it, it can be frustrating and you're just – you have to prove yourself 10-times more than you know any dude that just walks in off the street. He can already you know lift and carry everything.

01:19:45

And you know I have good upper body strength now because I forced that – I forced myself to [*Laughs*] not have to ask for as much help.

01:19:55

SW: Rachel is there anything else you want to add to this that you think is important that we didn't talk about?

01:20:03

RZ: I can't think of anything. You know I never was really the type of person that had like a single minded vision of my future. You know people are always asking me like, “Do you want to be – don't you want to be the chef of a place or own your own place?” You know and I've never

been the type of person that really has sort of an end-game or an end-goal. Everything just sort of begets the next thing and things just sort of happen organically for me that way. And my career sort of evolved that way.

01:20:35

I was even shocked that you would even want to talk to me in the first place; I still don't know for sure [*Laughs*] why because you know I really don't have you know a goal in mind or a – you know a success point that – that will be like something that I'm reaching towards. I just – I really try to focus more on my quality of life and – and making other people's quality of life great more than you know being extremely successful as a career.

01:21:10

SW: I don't think that – I don't – but the reason – I don't know; I just think that you have a unique perspective and story and that just something doesn't have to – . And I – what we think of as successful is a – it's different for everyone.

01:21:27

RZ: I think about it too because you know I think about Julia Child and you know what a – what an important person she is for any cook, especially women and you know she didn't really start cooking until she was in her early 40s which I'm about to be in. And you know that – it – it always has given me hope, like the vision and the concept of Julia Child as – as this visionary has always given me hope that like I don't have to know right now and I don't have to have a goal because there's still time. There's still time for me to figure something out and maybe I will do something really successful or maybe I'll continue to just slowly and quietly make people happy and that will be good for me, too.

01:22:16

SW: Do you see that as success though? You don't see that as successful?

01:22:18

RZ: I do; I just in terms of other people's measures of success and you know other people always want to tell you what to do – constantly, my whole career people have been like, “Oh, well you should you know do food science or you should go and work for this person or that person, or start a catering company, or you know go manage this person's catering company, or be a chef at this restaurant,” or you know – . People always have what they think would be the best for you to do. And I've just never really played into that; I've always just sort of done what I want to do and what's going to make me the happiest. And when it doesn't make me happy anymore then I do something else.

01:23:01

SW: I don't see anything wrong with that.

01:23:03

RZ: [*Laughs*] So far so good.

01:23:06

SW: Well Rachel thank you very much for taking the time to do this. It's been really wonderful.

01:23:11

RZ: Thank you so much for asking me. I appreciate it.

01:23:14

[End Rachel Zell-March 5, 2013]