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ENG 101

Sept. 13, 2020

In the often chaotic meanderings of life, making bad choices is a powerful way to learn. Most bad decisions come from an outspoken place of inner passion. It's easy to take passion to heroic heights and still lose direction. Focus can metamorphose into a blinding spotlight, destroying any chance of progress that you've been cautiously crawling towards. My first foray into the professional culinary world taught, indulged, dismissed, and reinforced all these things all at once. It takes a special kind of person to embrace the culture because it's a crazy place to want to be. That's where I was, in the gestalt of the human condition, as a frequent flyer of social misunderstandings. However, things were about to change thanks to a new front-of-house manager named Patrick. His influence would one day improve my attitude, integrity, and abilities. They say that with every best friend a person gains, they lose two friends in reciprocity unto the forgotten blurred masses. Those willing to stick it out, the ones who have become closer than family—those are the ones I count on one hand.

Patrick York arrived in the world on December fifth, 1987, in Grand Island, Nebraska. I speculate that instead of screaming in confused terror like the other newborns, he was preoccupied with learning and singing scales in preparation for coming recitals. As he grew, he discovered the foundations of a focused and passionate life in the expanse of integrity. He later reflected about the stark reality of life with often-absent parents, "when they were [around] we learned what most kids learned I suppose; work hard, do well in school, but the single most important thing was respect—we grew up very poor, and our word and our character was one of the only things we really had" (York P). Fast forward beyond high school to adulthood and

university life at UNK, where he majored in vocal performance and minored in dance—more about this later. Realizing and developing his passion for vocals was Mount Everest reflecting on the changes needed while being a student. "Dr. Andrew White was extremely influential on how I looked at music and opened me up to the world of Opera" (York P). It was about this time that he was hired as a front of house manager at the restaurant I was employed. As he walked to shake the line cooks' hands to introduce himself, I knew right out of the gate, he wasn't the typical stick in the mud boss. The style was magnetic for a-personalities; he joked with employees to keep spirits high and then made them clean something to maintain discipline. He managed people like the method I had years earlier at a now-defunct video store. Their methodology was that if employees are having fun at work, the energy will be contagious. The customers will also enjoy being there. That's how I learned it. As far as his reason: it was irrelevant; it kept a balance in an otherwise chaotic restaurant.

Service industry workers all have the same nightly decompression technique: gathering at a coworker's house to drink as much as possible while retelling the day's events. Luck would have it, the watering hole we gathered at was my house, which I shared with my bandmates as a practice spot. Since we never were bothered by the authorities for our band practices, we knew any parties could also fall through the cracks. It took more or less three shifts before Patrick was invited over after hours. Because of his social fluency, he clicked immediately—and I'm sure it didn't hurt that almost every female employee found him attractive. Michael Judd—the most outspoken of my closest friends—remembered, " the way he carried himself made me take inventory of how cool I actually was" (Judd). I remember months later looking back and feeling like I knew him my whole life as if he had always been in our circle. We connected on varying intellectual levels from music theory, philosophy, theoretical physics to advanced linguistics.

Something whispered to me to keep him around for as long as possible. As a middle child, I was the negotiator: breaking up fights between my brothers and sisters. Later on, it evolved into an armchair psychology service for my friends. People confided all sorts of crazy things in me. If they wanted advice, I'd give it, and then it was locked away in my head and—like most of my socks—would never be seen again. A week or two later, Patrick had told me he wanted to break up with his girlfriend. I suddenly remembered my sister Anastasia saying she was miserable from the week earlier. She was busy making bad choices of her own. Knowing they both have nearly the same birthdays, passions, and politics, I decided to play cupid and introduce them. Four months later, in the summer of 2010, they announced their engagement and a baby girl on the way. At their wedding reception, while watching Patrick breakdance for a screaming and cheering crowd—in the briefest of moments, I wondered if I did the right thing in introducing them.

Things in my world had begun to crack and crumble. My band decided to move to Lincoln, and my girlfriend decided to move to Colorado. Although the decisions on both fronts were mutual, it didn't make them uncomplicated and painless. On the bright side, I was promoted to a sous chef at the new restaurant. That meant better pay, more responsibilities, and a chance to learn directly from the best chef I know, Eli Fichtner—I'll let you take a guess who hired him. However, now that I had no roommates, it also meant I was homeless. Patrick and Stasia graciously reached out and gave me a place to stay until I got my life sorted out. Being optimistic wasn't usually difficult for me to muster, but it was different now; I was bitterly broken and alone. I couldn't help but notice that no matter how bad a day Patrick was having, he always responded positively and enthusiastically to almost anything asked of him. It flipped a switch to try and emulate that mental place—which was a first for me. I usually deal with my issues alone.

It's an understatement to say I was taken aback by the amount of support and modest hints sent in my direction. "We had always done late nights of talks and just a general trying to see the light at the end of the tunnel" (York P). They kept me from making many bad choices in those dark times. When asked about her perspective of his attitude, his wife said, "his attitude towards goals he sets always remain optimistic—he never leaves anything unfinished" (York A). Through his optimistic attitude, I reemerged from the pit of despair to get back on the path of becoming who I am today.

Little did I know, the time of being coworkers was rapidly coming to an end. One afternoon while I was organizing and cleaning dry storage, Patrick approached me with a look of shock. After some numbers failed to make any sense in the weekly inventory, he told me he caught an employee stealing red-handed. He fired her immediately. She responded by making sexual advances in an attempt to keep her job. Although this caught him off guard, he shook it off and again asked her to leave. There's no doubt I knew I had witnessed some ego humbling integrity: the value that people should do the right thing even when no one is looking. When I asked him who influences him the most, he said, "in life, there has been no bigger influence than my wife, Anastasia" (York P). Soon after, Patrick announced they were pregnant with a boy and that he was leaving the restaurant and the service industry for realistic opportunities. Recently I asked Eli his thoughts on Patrick's managing skills, "[he] gave the culinary side a fighting chance at stability, all of which to say speaks to Patrick's foresight concerning the path that the food and beverage side of the club should've been on—even if his stint there wasn't very long" (Fichtner). His decision to leave began to reflect my own desire for growth. As it happens, there were rumors of a new grocery store with an attached restaurant coming into town. Not even expecting a phone call back from my application, I was interviewed and hired as an executive chef.

In the throes of saving money to buy a house and to give the growing York family the space they need, I moved out and into a temporary place. It was during these months that I began to record local musicians in my makeshift studio. Weeks turned into months when out of the blue, Patrick approached me to record a handful of the arias he'd been singing. Finally, to work with a real singer and a chance to give something back. I obliged without missing a beat. Up to this point, I had recorded nearly every instrument known to man, but this was new: an operatic voice to an orchestra. I researched tricks and techniques of achieving the auditorium sound in a small studio. The sessions of his performances went abundantly smoothly. I've heard musicians singing and screaming before, but a properly trained vocalist singing at full voice is a different animal in terms of volume and control. It's incredibly moving to hear in person. We did several takes of each track until he was satisfied—the entire time my arms crawling with goosebumps. It seemed like his confidence was unwavering. "It was a very different experience than when I would sing on stage, so it was difficult to settle into, but you seemed like a professional who knew it all at the time so I felt behind in that sense" (York P). I joked earlier, stating he was a natural-born opera singer, he would tell you how much work he put into getting to this place. I had spent most of my life not taking any of my skills or abilities seriously. It occurred to me just how much hard work can pay off if you put in the time and utilize discipline—another spark of inspiration for improvement. My father, who was also present at the sessions, remarked on Patrick's talent, "The recording was well done, the singer was excellent, and that's where his priorities should lie" (McCue). We all should find our passions, fuel them, and see how far they will take us, even though that can be impractical or difficult to keep up with. Since recording Patrick in 2013, I've written and recorded two albums. I recently finished composing a full-length orchestral album in which Patrick is very interested in adding his voice. None of these

accomplishments would have likely happened without Patrick's character as a quiet guide pushing me away from content mediocrity.

All things good and evil must eventually be concluded. Oscar Wilde once said that the basis of optimism is sheer terror. I disagree, always seeing the good in people—even when they've hurt you multiple times—doesn't come from fear; it comes from faith in others and faith in yourself. Lest we forget, even optimists need to be picked back up and reminded that tomorrow will be a brighter day. Nowadays, when I look back at the reception night and if I made a bad choice. I don't believe it for a second; I'm confident I made the right one.

## Works Cited

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