

TOUR D'ARGENT

A FOODIE'S ADVENTURE IN *Paris*

Kitchen Chat founder
Margaret McSweeney
shines her *joie-de-vivre*
in the "City of Lights"

Words and Photography
by **LISA STAMOS**





*"Paris is always
a good idea."*

- AUDREY HEPBURN

ON MARCH 9, 2020, MARGARET MCSWEENEY, a long-time Barrington area resident was inducted into the TASTE AWARDS Hall of Fame. She gathered with friends and industry colleagues before the awards show in Beverly Hills, California, to celebrate and of course, to make introductions, one of the many hallmarks of this successful entrepreneur and the award-winning creator and podcaster of "Kitchen Chat", which has a whopping 300 episodes recorded with prominent chefs from around the world.

Wearing her signature pearls and a flowing pink gown, McSweeney graciously accepted this award with her charismatic co-host Chef Jaime Laurita. McSweeney shared the touching story of her late father and how she began an unexpected culinary journey to honor him and discover his *joie de vivre*.

Dr Claude H. Rhea, Jr. was a Renaissance man. As an accomplished lyric tenor, he recorded his "Majestic Themes" album with the London Concert Orchestra. He authored several books and was a gourmet home chef who even prepared meals for students in his role as a college president. On Father's Day 2021, McSweeney received a call from her brother who said he had discovered a collection of 200 recipes that their father had collected from missionaries throughout his global travels. This discovery was a "hug from heaven" and an inspiration for McSweeney to consider creating a show that will focus on the heirloom recipes and conversations that bring generations of families together around the table.

Forever Connected to Paris

McSweeney's father truly loved Paris. In 1973, her father sent a postcard from Paris which said, "Hi, Meg, Greetings from Paris. It's lovely here...Love to you and Mother-Dad." On September 19, 1990 while in Paris on a business trip to develop a show about Europe's gardens and kitchens, her father passed away from a massive heart attack in the Charles de Gaulle Airport.

Her dad's final lesson was that of forgiveness. Before heading to the airport, he and his colleague visited Notre Dame de Paris. At the altar with light streaming through the Rose-stained glass windows, Dr. Rhea lit a candle as an act of forgiveness and said a prayer for someone who had wronged him in a business deal. McSweeney had booked a trip to Paris to be there on September 19, 2019. Even though the fire severely damaged the church on April 15, 2019, McSweeney had hopes of tracing her father's steps. During the May 2019 James Beard awards in Chicago, McSweeney and her dear friend Barbara Lazaroff enjoyed a lunch at Blackbird. While walking to the car after lunch, Lazaroff noticed a beautiful photograph of Notre-Dame de Paris in the front window of Primitive Gallery. They went inside and learned that the photographer was Tom Rossiter. The gallery owner introduced McSweeney and Rossiter by email. The two soon spoke by phone to discuss her upcoming trip to Paris.

Incredible Connections

In late July of 2019, McSweeney fell and broke her knee which put an abrupt end to her plans to travel overseas. When Rossiter heard that McSweeney was unable to be in Paris on 9/19/19, he and Leslie Hindman invited her to be their guest at a fundraiser held in Chicago for Friends of Notre-Dame de Paris to help restore the cathedral. Hindman and Rossiter graciously seated McSweeney next to Andre Finot, the Communications Director for Notre Dame and Michel Picaud, president of Friends of Notre Dame. Serendipitously, the date of this fundraiser was September 19, 2019. Both Picaud and Finot encouraged McSweeney to let them know of any future travel plans to Paris.

Live Your Joy

McSweeney's life is propelled by an extraordinary serendipity, seeming to float over obstacles with a profound sense of faith and imagined good outcomes. She counts her husband, David, as central to her success. "Dave is encouraging and a blessing in my life," McSweeney said.

What makes McSweeney's culinary journey so smooth? We asked her friend and Kitchen Chat producer, Lynn Gentile, for her insight. "Margaret is good at what she does; she is 100% authentic and people respond to that," Gentile said. "Margaret inspires me. She gets the stories no one else gets in her interviews because she is able to connect with her guests in a sincere and meaningful way."

Fast forward to April 2022 and McSweeney realized some long-awaited moments that were put on hold due to her knee injury and the pandemic. This is a special year for McSweeney as she celebrated a milestone birthday along with her 10th anniversary of surviving breast cancer. She was ready to celebrate in Paris.

McSweeney was invited to be a featured guest on an episode of Recipe.TV's "Paris Bistro Cooking: with host and star Edward Delling-Williams". This invitation was made by multi-Emmy-award-winning Executive Producer Lisa-Renee Ramirez who she had met at the TASTE AWARDS. As her father always said, "God's trains run on time".

It was an extraordinary moment for McSweeney when she filmed with Recipe.TV in front of Notre Dame with Michel Picaud and Andre Finot. McSweeney's heartfelt dream is to one day host a show that is in harmony with her father's vision.

McSweeney invited us and a few close friends to join her on this full-circle moment to help her celebrate an exciting culinary adventure in Paris. In the pages ahead, she shares insights in her words about the special moments of the trip. U



I will always remember my first taste of Crepes Suzette as a teenager in Paris with my parents. This was my father's favorite dessert. How special for Recipe.TV to feature Crepes Suzette on the episode we filmed and to share this dessert with Chef Edward Delling-Williams and Recipe.TV Producer Lisa-Renee-Ramirez at Breizh Cafe.



Easter Brunch at Hotel de Crillon with Lisa-Renee Ramirez was the perfect first meal in Paris, featuring exquisite sweets and chocolates prepared by the talented Pastry Chef Matthieu Carlin. Paris creates lasting taste memories.



What a culinary dream to have a special invitation by Chef Alain Ducasse's team to tour his Manufacture de Chocolat in Paris. Many thanks to my friend and fellow member of Les Dames d'Escoffier and owner of La Caravelle Champagne, Rita Jammet.





My friend May Wong and George, her dog, joined us from London. We enjoyed lunch at Benoit Paris. May is the creator of Miss Darcy's Adventures.



Claude Monet was a true gourmand who enjoyed delicious meals with Renoir at his home in Giverny, France. Aileen Bordman, founder of "Monet's Palette: A Gastronomic View from the Gardens of Giverny" introduced me to Monet's culinary talents during our Kitchen Chat.



E. Dehillerin was Julia Child's favorite place to shop for kitchen supplies in Paris. With me is a family descendent of the founder Eugene de Hillerin.





I held a blowtorch for the first-time during pastry class at La Cuisine Paris. Classes are taught in English, and my friend Anne Bertch, president of the Paris chapter for Les Dames d'Escoffier is the owner. Our pastry chef guided us through a process of making choux pastries. From the choux, we made a variety of French pastries along with our fellow classmates.

My friend May Wong joined me at the pastry-making class. We made the pastry choux, then after baking our pastries, we filled them with tasty flavors. Our teacher at LaCuisine did a great job teaching us the art of making French pastries.



Dinner at Tour d'Argent, one of the oldest restaurants in Paris which has been serving guests since 1582 was a delicious celebration. Duck is their specialty, and the wine list is one of the largest in the world with 400 pages. My friends, May Wong from London along with her pup George, Dr. Laura Jimerson, and QB's Lisa Stamos joined me for this memorable meal.



Visiting the beautiful La Cornue showroom in Paris was inspiring with the artistry of this exquisite brand of hand-crafted custom luxury ranges and hoods. Many thanks to Director General Rodolphe de Leusse for this opportunity.



Before taping the Recipe.TV show, we all met up at Notre Dame de Paris. Joining me are (from left) Edward Delling-Williams (Paris Bistro Cooking), Recipe.TV Executive Producer Lisa-Renee Ramirez, and Michel Picaud, president of the Friends of Notre Dame de Paris.



"Chopped" Champion Chef Jackie Rothong is also the Middleby Residential NYC Chef and Brand Ambassador. She created fabulous appetizers for the NYC Notre Dame fundraiser.

"Breathe in Paris. It nourishes the soul," said Victor Hugo. Filming in front of Notre Dame de Paris with Michel Picaud and sharing the story of my father on Recipe.TV was a sacred moment. I wore the colorful silk scarf that my father had purchased for me during his final trip to Paris. Although the fire was destructive, Notre Dame de Paris still stands strong, and with the fundraising efforts of Friends of Notre-Dame, this majestic cathedral will be restored. Many thanks to La Cornue for hosting a fundraiser in the Middleby Residential New York City Showroom. And heartfelt thanks to the many friends who supported this event.



My dear friend Alison Bruhn joined the event.



Michel Picaud is the president of the Friends of Notre Dame de Paris, the official charity leading the fundraising for the reconstruction of the Cathedral.



Rita Jammet, Chief Bubble Officer of La Caravelle Champagne, joined Michel Picaud and I at the Notre Dame de Paris Fundraiser in New York City in May 2022.