

Cafe Borgia

Karen Jesso

5020 South Lake Shore Drive

#3217 North

Chicago, IL 60615

Phone: 312-288-1993 Fax: 312-2881-995

Dear Professor Rainsford,

You are doing a great service to potential restaurant owners. After completing my M.A. at University of Chicago (Behavioral Sciences), I enrolled in their MBA program. I was surrounded, smothered, and rejected by classmates who dreamed of becoming corporate robots. Fifty thousand dollars later I realized that I had gotten my most important “schooling” while working my way through school as a dishwasher, busgirl, waitress, or bartender.

I originally met my husband back in 1978 at my little carry-out pizzeria (ironically, the same building that our Cafe is in today). He was six years younger than I. One Saturday it got to be so busy that I couldn’t cook all of the pizzas. I said, “Mike! We have to stop deliveries tonight. Tell the customers that they have to come in and pick their pizzas up. You have to help me cook.”

It normally takes six months to really train a pizza cook, especially back then when we didn’t have very modern equipment. He was like an octopus—making pizzas like I couldn’t believe.

When I moved 20 miles away to the University of Chicago campus, I sold my business, but purchased the building that housed the pizzeria and had a small rental apartment unit in back. The building paid for itself, with the small profit I made from the sale of the business.

I told Mike, “I am going to school so I will have to take a job as a waitress somewhere. I know that you are having trouble finishing high school. BUT—please DO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL AND GO TO CHEF SCHOOL—YOU ARE A NATURAL IN THE KITCHEN.”

Two years later, Mike manipulated the operator to give him my unlisted phone number. He phoned and informed, “I cannot thank you enough for your taking an interest in my future. Please come with me tonight to McCormick Place. I have competed in the NRA chef competition and finished third in the nation. I’m going to be interviewed on national T.V.”

Since then the Cafe has been on television many times. It has also been featured in *Bon Appetit* magazine, *Chicago* magazine, *Inside Chicago* magazine, *Chicago Tribune*, etc.

We opened the Cafe with a \$35,000 line of credit—that’s the only major time that the University of Chicago MBA came in handy. We tripped over rats in Chicago’s restaurant row neighborhood to get equipment. We bought mismatched plates from the flea markets—which ironically got major media approval and recognition.

Mike is responsible for the menu and kitchen, and I manage the dining room hiring and training. However, I put my time in the kitchen just like Mike has hours as host in the dining room. We are both able to empathize with the position of the other’s territory.

We prefer to hire people with zero training—it is often easier to teach new habits than to break bad habits. We have a crew of 15 people—eight members of our crew have been with us for over seven out of 10 years.