

# Palate of the soul

BY SCOTT HARRUP

It was called the Old Miner's Inn, a name reflective of its location on the edge of the Ozarks. But Chef Maximiliani Giovanni had established the restaurant's reputation for French cuisine. A loyal clientele from nearby Joplin, Mo., and into Oklahoma rewarded his efforts.

So even though his heart went out to the tired-looking 20-something standing at the back door of the kitchen, he wasn't going to let sympathy trump professionalism.

"Tell me something," he said with an accent that had never truly abandoned Italy. "Are you going to get a haircut?"

"I'll cut my hair," the young man said.

The chef looked Chadwick Isom up and down, silently appraising his potential.

"Are you right-handed or left-handed?"

"I'm right-handed," Isom replied.

"OK," Giovanni said, and pushed the door open with a congenial shrug. "You can come in."

Giovanni soon discovered he had a talented and loyal student. Isom discovered a father figure. Fifteen years later, Isom, 38, talks warmly of his mentor.

"My dad died in prison," he says. "Chef Giovanni not only taught me a trade, he also taught me how to act, to be an honorable person, to do what I said I would do."

Giovanni invested his own hard-earned cash to make sure Isom got through culinary school. The young whiz in the kitchen made the hour-plus commute to Springfield, Mo., to take group

classes while continuing to pull long shifts under the watchful eye of the kindly Old World master.

Then everything fell apart.

Isom's dysfunctional past caught up with him. During his father's imprisonment, his mother had remarried several times. The family home in Kansas had been a haven for alcoholism and drug abuse. Despite the opportunities Giovanni offered, Isom's own alcoholism eventually won out.

"I drank myself out of having any friends," he remembers. "I was unemployable and went to San Antonio to a drug and alcohol rehab."

In 2000 Isom not only detoxed his body but also began to nurture his spirit.

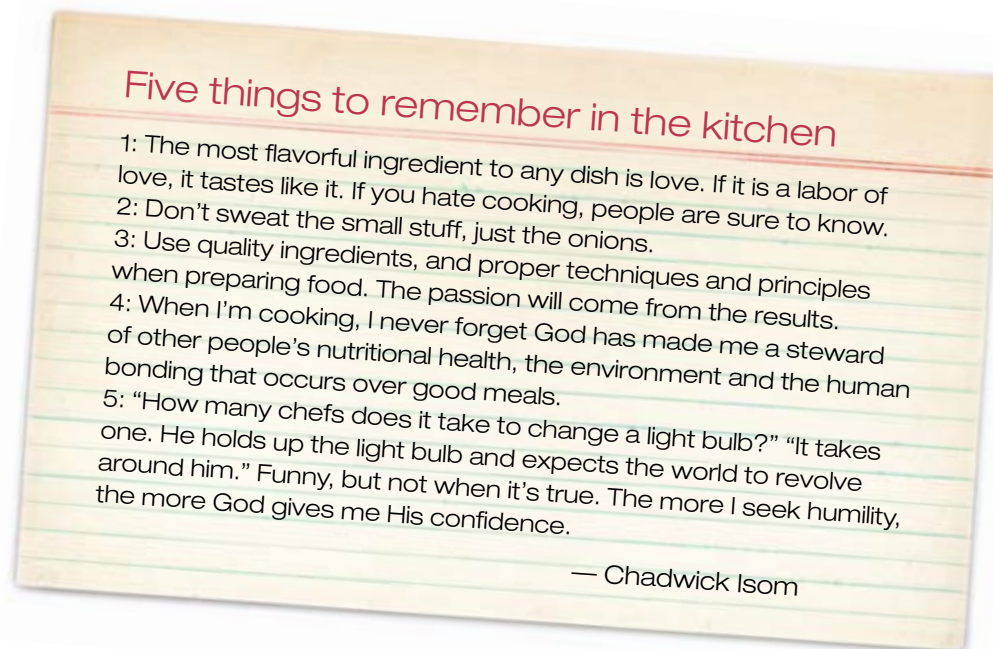


Chadwick Isom

"The spiritual element at the rehab center was kind of generic," he admits. "But it got me started."

The rest of his journey to faith in Christ came through an unusual opportunity.

By 2004, Isom was staying



## Five things to remember in the kitchen

- 1: The most flavorful ingredient to any dish is love. If it is a labor of love, it tastes like it. If you hate cooking, people are sure to know.
- 2: Don't sweat the small stuff, just the onions.
- 3: Use quality ingredients, and proper techniques and principles when preparing food. The passion will come from the results.
- 4: When I'm cooking, I never forget God has made me a steward of other people's nutritional health, the environment and the human bonding that occurs over good meals.
- 5: "How many chefs does it take to change a light bulb?" "It takes one. He holds up the light bulb and expects the world to revolve around him." Funny, but not when it's true. The more I seek humility, the more God gives me His confidence.

— Chadwick Isom

sober and chasing success.

He was the executive sous chef, or second-in-command, at Hemingway's, a popular restaurant in Springfield.

"When I first sobered up, I thought it was my chance to be a big-time chef, make a lot of money, and have a fast car and hot girlfriend," he admits.

Those dreams were put on hold when Isom responded to an appeal for community service. Springfield Victory Mission had reached out to the homeless, addicted and needy in the region since 1976. The mission started Victory Trade School in 2003 and invited local chefs to donate their time to train students in their art. Isom got on board, part-time at first.

As Isom saw students suffering with the same life issues that nearly destroyed him, he was reminded of his own spiritual need. Somewhere among the simple devotionals and chapel services Victory Mission integrated with the school's

culinary training, Isom made Jesus Christ his Savior. In 2006 he resigned from Hemingway's and joined Victory Trade School full time.

"I had chased success," he says, "but as I looked for God, I found Jesus and discovered that none of that stuff brought me happiness. What I needed to do was to be of service to people. It's in the act of helping people and being a teacher and a mentor that I figured out what I'm supposed to be doing. I don't make that much money, but I'm so much richer today."

Isom ingrains in his students that same servant's attitude. During the one-year course, students work their way through gradually promoted positions at The Cook's Kettle, the school's restaurant. Isom starts a student in the dish room for eight weeks. And at each step, Isom believes, God has lessons for his students that may have nothing to do with cooking.

“The men are like I was when I first got sober,” he says. “They don’t realize why they’re here. They think they’re here to learn the restaurant business, but usually God’s got something else in store for them.”

Students find their teamwork ability and their sense of compassion tested when Isom accepts large catering contracts from local charities. Last year, Springfield’s Ronald McDonald House invited Isom to head up its Cup of Cheer fundraiser. The annual event follows an English high tea format, with hot tea and dessert.

“We made 8,000 desserts in 12 varieties in a week,” Isom says.

Leading up to that week, Isom contacted pastry chefs in the city and asked them to help him train

students for eight weeks. The event was a huge success, and Victory Trade School will again partner with Ronald McDonald House this fall.

Days are long and intense as



Victory Trade School students (left to right) Dan Hays, Jim Thurman and Brad Towe display their creations at a professional culinary competition.

Isom trains this year’s VTS class. He knows he needs more than his culinary skills to be at his best.

“To be happy and productive and successful, I need a good Christian base,” he says. “I’ve got to get up in the morning and read my Bible. I’ve got to have something to lean on during the stressful times.”

Isom may have traded some surface perks for his current ministry. But he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I found my calling here,” he says. “This is where I belong.” **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

## When was the first publication of red letters for the words of Jesus Christ?

In 1899, Louis Klopsch, editor of *The Christian Herald*, read Luke 22:20 and was struck by the words “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” Because of the symbolism of the blood, Dr. Klopsch wondered if the words of the Lord might effectively be printed in red: “Why not a red-letter Bible with the red words to be those of our Lord?” He sought counsel from his pastor, T. DeWitt Talmage, of Brooklyn Temple. Talmage encouraged him, and the first red-letter New Testaments were printed in 1901.

Red was applied to all the words of Jesus, including those quoted by others in the Bible, but not in the Old Testament theophanies (or appearances of Christ before He came to earth in flesh).

The first printing quickly sold out, and red-letter Bibles have been immensely popular ever since.

— Ken Horn

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L I V I N G I T

## When should we pray? All the time!

*In case of fire, break glass.*

*In the event of an emergency landing over water, your seat cushion can be used as a flotation device.*

We see or hear emergency instructions like these every day. However, many of us scarcely give them a second thought. They’re only for catastrophes we hope we never face. Sadly, some Christians view prayer a little like those instructions — neglecting to give it much attention until the next crisis.

In contrast, God wants us to make prayer an ongoing priority that touches every aspect of life — from basic needs to the deepest spiritual pursuits. We’re called to a lifestyle of prayer in which we seek His face through the worst of times and praise His name during the best of times. Simply put, God invites us to focus on Him no matter the circumstances.

“Pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NIV). This command can seem a little intimidating at first. Often we struggle to stay focused in prayer for more than a few minutes. How can we possibly keep praying nonstop?

Note that this verse falls between two other commands to “be joyful always” and to “give thanks in all circumstances.” The reality is that none of these three comes easily. Sometimes joy seems far away. Other times it’s hard to give thanks. Similarly, there are times when prayer can genuinely be difficult. So when we see verse 17 in context, we realize that it is defining a concept — an attitude — that ought to characterize the people of God. This “prayer mind-set” must stay in focus even when we aren’t actually bowing our heads and voicing a literal prayer.

Difficult circumstances of life will challenge our faith. Likewise, the best of times can bring complacency and self-reliance. But God has given us a simple, precious antidote. May we be faithful to accept His ever-present invitation and keep our hearts set on Him in prayer.

*Excerpted from Prayer Basics: Understanding the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of Prayer, a downloadable teaching resource by John T. Maempa and James Meredith provided by the National Prayer Center at [www.prayer.ag.org](http://www.prayer.ag.org).*

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