

Without passion man is a mere latent force and possibility, like the flint which awaits the shock of the iron before it can give forth its spark."

— Henri Frederic Amiel

For Beethoven John (BJ) Cervantes, cooking is not only a job, it is a passion. The same passion that allowed him to be what he is today, a chef. Although he discovered his love for food while cooking for his family in the Philippines as a young man, it took several years before he was able to realize that his passion for cooking can translate into a career.

Due to hardship within the family, BJ had to forgo education and seek employment abroad when he was only 19 years of age. He ended up as a contractual worker for an oil barge in the Middle East region, based in Saudi Arabia. There he first worked as a galley man, cleaning the cabins and general areas of the barge. With his hard work and diligent nature, he was noticed by the head cook and took him in as an assistant. This became his first exposure to the inner workings of a professional kitchen. Here he learned different cuisines that catered to the multinational crew and guests of the barge. Aside from assisting the cooks, he was also tasked to purchase food supplies whenever the ship or barge docks in port and help maintain inventory. All of these experiences made him realize that he can pursue a career that he has a passion for. So when he completed his contract and the financial situation of his family improved, he returned to the Philippines to study. Still a young man, he was faced with many decisions whether to pursue this new career or another field that were at the time more financially rewarding. More importantly, he had to consider the situation of his mother who was disabled and recovering from an illness. He tried to study in the medical field but later found that he was not invested into this as much as his passion for cooking. So when the opportunity came, he decided to enroll for Culinary Arts at Global Academy in Manila.

While in Global Academy, Beethoven met new friends and mentors who have as much passion to food as he does. He learned to work and explore culinary in groups, where he and his classmates would go to each other's houses to practice and prepare for classes. He also experienced the fast paced, pressure packed kitchen like a hell's kitchen while interning for one of the school restaurants. He also participated in big catering events for influential politicians, boxing champions, and professional basketball players, as well as preparing special dinners for a governor and his guests. Global Academy gave him access to participate in cooking shows and culinary competitions. One of his proud achievements was to represent the school in the 1st Culinary Cup of the Philippines and was awarded a Silver medal. In addition to Culinary Arts, he also received certification in Japanese and Spanish cuisines.

Armed with the knowledge and professional training in culinary school, BJ moved to California late in 2010 to marry his childhood sweetheart. He found that so many ingredients are readily available here as well as so many different cuisines served in many restaurants and often blending to make new ones. His first work experience was working as a line cook for the historic Hotel Laguna in Laguna Beach. Despite being new to the country, he felt right at home with his colleagues in the hotel's kitchen. In this fast paced environment, he learned to quickly adapt to each situation. The long drive to Laguna Beach made the experience worthwhile but not so financially viable. Like many kitchen workers that had to deal with inconsistent work hours, he worked at other restaurants to make ends meet. This continued until he came upon an opportunity to work as a regular cook at Gate Gourmet, a place that offered regular work hours and something closer to home. It was also another opportunity to learn a different kind of catering, catering for the airline industry. As a regular cook, he was assigned to different stations and was noticed by the lead cook of one airline, specializing in Chinese cuisine. He was recruited by the lead cook to be trained in a cuisine he has no prior experience with. This was very exciting and challenging for BJ and was very rewarding experience despite the long hours and hard work. It was his very first time cooking with a professional "wok". With this new skill, he was promoted as the first specialty cook in kitchen and eventually became the lead for this station. As new accounts came to the company, BJ was then tasked to lead a new station and add to his specialty, Indian and Mediterranean cuisine. During this tenure, he was hailed as Employee of the Month for October 2013 and then later went on to become the Employee of the Year for 2013. He was also promoted to as the lead cook, adding to his task by assisting the executive and sous chefs in kitchen operations. This helped him gain more knowledge in leadership and dealing with administrative and management side of the kitchen. When the opportunity to be a sous chef became available, he took this challenge and is now currently the Operational Sous Chef at Gate Gourmet Los Angeles.