

A Fish Finds Water

by Les Lovoy

Most people never realize or pursue their true calling in life. However, from time to time, we meet someone who, at a very young age, was lucky enough to find what comes natural for them, and spends the rest of their time living the dream. In other words, they are like a fish that has found water.

Such is the case with Chef Tim Creehan. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, his family eventually moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "I was about 13 or 14 and looking for a job," he explains. "I got a job at a restaurant and immediately fell in love with food. It was a combination of the food itself, the textures, the tastes, the preparation—everything. So, it wasn't long before I moved from the dining room to the kitchen and I've been there ever since."

Realizing that preparing food was his life's calling, Creehan visited one of the finest restaurants in the area and asked how did one become an accomplished chef. Fortunately for Creehan, he spoke with internationally known Executive Chef Philippe Parola, who immediately took Creehan under his wing.

"Tim is a true natural talent," Parola says. "His love and compassion for food and people make him the success he is today."

Honing his innate talent and learning important lessons under Parola's mentoring, Creehan never did attend a cooking school, but he did become a member of the American Culinary Federation, where he continues to play an active role. In fact he is currently a Certified Executive

Chef of the American Culinary Federation. According to Creehan, earning that recognition is no piece of cake.

“Among other stringent requirements, someone must manage their own kitchen for at least seven years,” Creehan explains. So, it’s not easy, and you do learn much about the art of cooking.”

In addition to reinforcing the virtues of practical application vs. formal education, Chef Parola also taught his student an important life lesson about motivation. “He told me that when I look for a job in preparing food, never inquire about the compensation. Money is not why we do what we do. Learning new things is what it’s all about. And today, I feel that more than ever. If I’m not being challenged, than I’m just wasting my time.

Creehan’s lust for life and his chosen field has taken him far, both literally and figuratively. In addition to serving as the executive chef in his native Louisiana’s finest restaurants, Creehan was invited to participate in the American Harvest Promotion at the Hong Kong Hilton for a two-week guest chef appearance.

His quest to be the best has also landed him several major accolades and awards. Among them are:

- 2002 One of Florida’s Emerging Culinary Talents—*Bon Appétit* magazine
- 2002 Best Chef—*Emerald Coast* magazine
- 2002 Top 250 Restaurant—*Florida Trend* magazine
- 2001 Top 200 Restaurant—*Florida Trend* magazine

- 2000 Best of Emerald Coast—Best Appetizer
- 1999 Shining Star Chef—*Cooking Light* magazine
- 1997 DiRoNa Award—Marina Café
- 1992 Emerald Coast Chef's Challenge, Best of Show Award
- 1989 Florida Governor's Cup Seafood Challenge, Second Place
- 1987 Baton Rouge Culinary Classic, Gold and Silver Medals
- 1987 Acadiana Culinary Classic, Gold and Silver Awards in four categories
- 1987 Seafood Challenge of Louisiana, Second Place
- 1987 Seafood Challenge of Baton Rouge, First Place

Now settled in Destin, Florida, Creehan owns Beach Walk Café. There he enjoys mentoring the next generation of chefs. "I have a kitchen staff of very motivated and talented young cooks," he says. "I take them and give them a chance at a great career. And, they don't just come and go. In fact, one has been with me for almost nine years. It's great to be able to help young people, just as Chef Parola helped me."

Tim's commitment to excellence has earned him the respect and admiration of food critics, his peers, and his students. "Beach Walk Café is popular not only because it faces the water, but also because it has grand style and delicious Gulf Coast cooking with Italian, French and Asian accents," says Robert Tolf for *Appétit* magazine. "Executive chef and owner Tim Creehan, who turns out delicious dishes like pepper-crusting tuna with sautéed spinach and a soy ginger sauce, is one of Florida's emerging culinary talents."

Realizing his life's calling in his teens. Being mentored by an internationally known chef. Earning the highest accolades in his field. Owning his restaurant. Mentoring the next generation of chefs and students. Isn't that enough for one lifetime?

Not even close. In 1997, Creehan created and patented his non-stick grilling sauce, “Chef’s Grill Plus®.” The product line has now grown to five flavors and several other branded gourmet products. “Chef’s Grill Plus®” is currently enjoying regional growth in retail and food service, and is being sold and marketed through QVC, the popular TV network.

This venture is merely an extension of Creehan’s philosophy of life. “We don’t keep anything from our customers and students, he proudly notes. “Our motto is, ‘The answer is ‘yes,’ now what’s the question?’ To me it has always been a compliment if someone enjoys what I prepare enough to ask for a recipe. I’m happy to share it.”

His love for sharing has allowed him to enter a new phase of his career—live teaching demonstrations and appearing on TV. “I really enjoy the live shows,” he enthusiastically says. “At first it was a little intimidating and scary, but it has grown to be one of my favorite things. I can include comedy, current events, and drama in teaching people about cooking. And, it is extremely gratifying now that more and more people are cooking at home. This could literally be a full-time job for me.”

Creehan’s reputation for professionalism and love of cooking has even reached some of the biggest celebrities in show business. Cybil Sheppard, Timothy Hutton, Debra Winger and Catherine Crosby have invited Creehan to serve as their personal chef. In February 2000, Creehan was asked to serve as chef de cuisine for Amy Grant and Vince Gill’s wedding reception.

In October 2002, Tim was asked by *Country Weekly* magazine to create a special dish for country music artist Tammy Cochran, which was a great success.

“It is a lot of fun to be invited to work with celebrities,” Creehan notes. “Surely, some want the full star treatment, but most are very down to earth people. Yes, we’ve gotten some very strange requests, but a lot of them are tired of people trying to outdo themselves and impress. They just want very simple comfort food. And, we are very happy to prepare it for them.”

In addition to preparing delicious meals for entertainment stars, Tim is always happy to participate in cooking events and fundraisers. “It’s never about the money, he says. “We are always happy to help out. A large part of our marketing plan is participating in events, which promote our state, our area and our cuisine. I’m delighted to be asked.”

“I truly love what I do, he says with obvious pride. “I enjoy every aspect of it. I enjoy the opportunity for new challenges. I enjoy educating. I enjoy making people happy. I enjoy taking a raw product, and with my own two hands, turning it into something, which gives people joy. I really can’t imagine doing anything else. I’m one of the most fortunate persons on the earth.”

A fish finds water indeed.