



PRESSURE COOKER

The heat was on, and so were the Food Network cameras

BY JANET WALDMAN

COULD YOU MAKE YOUR FAVORITE DISH ON DEADLINE under the eyes of some of the world's best chefs while being filmed with 11 other competitors just waiting to eat you alive?

Jason Goldstein '00 did. The psychology major, now a New York City chiropractor, was a finalist on Season 14 of the "Food Network Stars" reality TV show. "I crack all day and chop at night," says the author of a food blog he named "Chop Happy."

He knows his comfort food concoctions are delicious—family and friends tell him so. But when two of his gastronomic heroes—grill master Bobby Flay and Giada De Laurentiis, the queen of Italian cooking—complimented his meatloaf Parmesan burgers, his heart sizzled.

Goldstein met the celebrity chefs during the first episode, which aired this past summer. The chefs served as mentors for Goldstein and the other contestants who vied for culinary fame. "Both of them really cared about us and put us at ease," he says.

This was not Goldstein's first cooking demo on national TV. About three years ago, he made bacon and roasted garlic-infused burgers for a "Good Morning America" segment with Robin Roberts, a GMA co-anchor and patient at his Oasis Chiropractic and Wellness Center. He's been in practice for 11 years.

"Food Network Stars" was filmed at Universal Orlando's Volcano Bay theme park in Florida. Each finalist prepared his or her signature dish in that episode, but with a wrinkle. It had to be a theme park-friendly, fast-food version. Goldstein shape-shifted his meatloaf parm into grillable patties.

The meatloaf recipe is among hundreds on his blog, many with how-to videos filmed by his husband, Tom Chuong. The blog gets 10,000 to 15,000 visitors a month. The effervescent Goldstein loves to dance in his cozy kitchen in the Chelsea section of Manhattan while cooking, and he adds a "dash of gratitude" to every dish, along with the salt. His philosophy: Make cooking easy and the food satisfying after a long day.

He acknowledges that his meatloaf recipe may have been inspired by the meatball pies he consumed from Tonino's Pizzeria in Hamden during his Quinnipiac years, which he describes as some of the best times of his life.

"I make my meatloaf with a twist—first I blend ricotta cheese and an herb mixture of basil, garlic, oregano, Parmesan cheese and a little red pepper. I call it Italian glue. I add that to the meat. When the loaf bakes, the cheese melts and makes it juicy and tender."

The recipe calls for half of the meat mixture to be placed on a baking sheet. Then the cook makes a well and tucks lots of mozzarella cheese inside, topping it with the remaining meat and slathering the whole loaf with tomato sauce before baking. More cheese is sprinkled on top for the final 10 minutes. It's incredibly rich and filling, a bit like lasagna without noodles.

In the final part of the food challenge, Goldstein was tasked with persuading a female park guest to try his dish over that of another contestant who made rabbit empanada. Ultimately, she chose to taste the other guy's creation. Flay and De Laurentiis remarked that while they appreciated Goldstein's passion for food, he should have described his dish in more detail.

Goldstein was eliminated, but not devastated. He grabbed his spatula and moved on to "Star Salvation," where ousted contestants compete to earn their way back to "Food Network Stars." When host and chef Alex Guarnaschelli requested "breakfast for dinner" in 35 minutes, he recalls thinking, "I knew I had to do something bold." He made a bagel from scratch, then whipped up soft scrambled eggs. Bacon cooked in the oven for 10 minutes at 400 degrees and cheese completed the sandwich.



Guarnaschelli was impressed, and he advanced to the next round—creating a weeknight meal using only one vessel. He was given a sheet pan on which he roasted salmon with Dijon lemon sauce, bread crumbs, tomato and asparagus. "Heat the pan while cutting and prepping—when you put the salmon down, you'll get a crispier skin," he advises.

Guarnaschelli proclaimed the dish good, but too salty. And just like that, Goldstein was out again. He shed a tear as he taped his goodbye speech, but his positive personality shone through.

"There is always something to be grateful for, something to learn. Four years ago I didn't have a food blog, and suddenly I was one of the top chefs in America competing on a TV show. Life is amazing."

Jason Goldstein '00 mixes his meatloaf Parmesan burgers on the set of "Food Network Stars." He was a finalist on the popular show.