



FROM **BAD**
COMPANY

TO
Good
Company



paul cullen
As told to restaurant columnist
Bob Yesbek



FROM BAD COMPANY TO GOOD COMPANY
Paul Cullen

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Publisher, Paul Cullen, Tune Your Palate
Story Editor and Rewrite, Bob Yesbek
Book and Cover Design, Elizabeth Ferguson
Assistant, Jose Palma

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN: 978-0-9914361-0-1

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Dedicated to my grandma Elsie Tagliaferro
and my mom Nancy Tagliaferro Cullen.
Thanks for passing down your passion
for food, wine and music.



Acknowledgments

First and foremost my lovely wife Bonnie, for her unmatched support and belief in me and what I do.

I'm so lucky to have the support of all my friends, foodies and winos here on the Delmarva Peninsula. What a fantastic place for food, wine and music.

Special thanks to my family girls Jordan, Marlena and Jessica. And my longtime friends John Hadaway, Mick Weick and my more recent friends Michael Lobb, Mark M Farland, along with Bob Yesbek and Elizabeth Ferguson who played a huge part in making this book a reality.

When the Food Channel was in its infancy there was a chef not too many people knew about. He inspired me to learn to cook the dishes that grandma and mom used to create. Thank you Mario Batali!



Grant Gurskey photo, © Coastal Style Magazine

FOREWORD

When Paul Cullen approached me about putting his story into words, my first reaction was less than enthusiastic. “So he played in a band for a while and sold a few bottles of wine,” I thought. “Where’s the story?”

Let me back up for a minute. Paul and I met through email. I was familiar with this guy who was entertaining quite successfully in fine-dining establishments around Rehoboth Beach. He liked my restaurant reviews and columns, and knew that I had played music professionally and had spent years in the sound recording business. We shared common ground through food and music, and yes, I had played for almost 25 years - but unless a Holiday Inn lounge happened to seat 20,000 people who (inexplicably) came to hear “Jeremiah was a Bullfrog” or “Green Onions,” that’s where the similarity between our performing careers ended.

Truth be told, I wasn’t even that big a fan of Bad Company. But my career as a recording engineer and studio owner brought me into contact with bands of similar stature, and I knew how much behind-the-scenes work it took to make that sort of thing happen. That, added to the fact that I really liked Paul’s wines and his casual style of cooking, ended up pulling me into his world of homemade pasta, crispy pancetta and nicely crafted acoustic renditions of rock standards. In short, we got along well.

The story that eventually emerged from my time with Paul’s hastily written notes and thoughts surprised us both. He asked me to try and get his “funkiness” across to the reader, but I found myself sitting back and just taking in what he had lived through emotionally and financially, rather than pursuing my task of shaping it into a book.

Toward the end of these pages when Paul tells you that he is happy and at peace, that’s the Paul I am fortunate to know. In spite of some of the darker periods that he freely shared with me (and now, you), he is one of the most upbeat, friendly and patient guys I think I have ever met. (I guarantee he is smiling as he reads the word “patient!”)

He approaches life with enthusiasm, sincerity and a sense of humor, and I did everything I could to portray that in the words that follow. I hope that I fulfilled his request that I get his “funkiness” across to you. What I hope you’ll also get out of this is an idea of how lucky I am to call Paul Cullen my friend.

Bob Yesbek
Rehoboth Beach, Delaware

Bonus Material

As a bonus for purchasing “From Bad Company to Good Company” you receive private access to a dedicated companion webpage that features wine pairings for each recipe in the book. This bonus webpage includes exclusive photos, cooking & performance videos, and new music including Paul’s Jazzy Latin renditions of Bad Company songs. Be the first to know about Paul’s latest adventures!

Go to www.paulcullen.net, click on Book Bonus and enter password BC2GC



Chapter 1: The Story

How did I end up here at the age of 54 – from rock star status to living in the sleepy but sexy resort of Rehoboth Beach. My new life revolves around cool music, jazzy wines and divine cuisine; whether I’m eating, sipping, listening, cooking, pouring or playing for my lovely wife, Bonnie, and our friends and clients.

I’m so fortunate to be intertwined with my passions every day. It’s that attitude that has made my life and the people around it so darn much fun. Ok, is it more fun than playing in front of 20,000 people every night with all the perks that go with it (money, respect and women come to mind)? Not really! But I now lead a safer and more balanced lifestyle. No more indiscriminate sex or drugs!

Now it’s eat, drink and *be* merry, not *do* Mary! I spend much of my time in my popular cooking classes, teaching foodies how to cook and drink Italian. I spice things up even more by playing Mediterranean style versions of Bad Company songs on my guitar. Nowadays it’s all about the journey; not the destination. I am certainly not finished, and in fact I’m just getting started!

Paul Cullen



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In The Beginning

So many of my earliest memories have to do with food. I'd be sitting at Grandma Tagliaferro's kitchen table and someone would stop by for a visit. Her first reaction was always, "What am I going to cook!?" In an instant she was raiding the cupboards; pans warming on the stove as Grampa Basil splashed cheap Chianti into water glasses. It wasn't long before everybody was sipping, eating and laughing.

Holidays were always about food. Grandma would prepare a turkey feast, complete with savory stuffing, mashed potatoes and all the fixin's. But that was just the beginning. She also made sauce with meatballs, pork sausage and at least 100 ricotta ravioli - just in case. And each little pillow of pasta was formed by me and my mom. Oh, and don't forget the obligatory antipasto! Of course it wasn't enough to just feed the family: As the bartender at Daley's, a local gin mill, Grandma Tagliaferro brought food into the bar as a happy hour treat. Her dishes became so popular that they installed a kitchen just for her.

My Mom Nancy was an amazing cook and she loved music. So my memories of food always include an audio track; mostly Sergio Mendes, José Feliciano and The Beatles. Maybe that's why my guitar repertoire favors a jazzy, Latin feel. Sundays were all about music and mom's cooking. As her sauce bubbled on the stove, she'd play record after record, with it all culminating in a huge breakfast. Scramble ... McCartney ... pasta ... Sergio ... liver sausage ... José - I can play it back in my head as clearly as if it happened yesterday.

I am the oldest of 20 grandchildren on my Italian side, so at the tender age of 10 I was the first in the kitchen. As you might expect, there's more to the story: Yes, I was the first, but I was also assigned the tedious job of forming endless ravioli and gnocchi while mom and grandma sat, smoked, drank ... and watched me work. I loved to cook, but as a young boy, sports were never far from my mind. I played soccer, basketball and tennis and even made an all-star team or two! I was proud to be one of the best athletes in my class.



In the immortal words of Quincy Jones, everything must change. I was 13 when Grandma Tag passed away, and I was devastated. It was also the first time this 13-year-old had seen a body in a casket! There's another memory I never thought I'd cherish, but I grew up a little on that day, and I still remember it clearly so many years later. Like me, mom was the oldest, so we both mourned the loss of so many things, including those magical afternoons with the ravioli and the gnocchi. It would be a long time before mom finally re-started the tradition. I guess we both grew up a little back then.

Shortly thereafter we moved out to the country. That's when I discovered the difference between veggies from the store and those picked from our garden. Mom and I would grab a salt shaker and eat tomatoes, cucumbers and radishes standing right out there in the yard. It was a rare dinner that didn't start with a cool and crispy salad, simply dressed with quality olive oil and red wine vinegar. That's another memory I can play back (and taste) at will.

Throughout the summer and fall we harvested veggies; snapping the ends off of green beans and bagging them for the freezer. All that work came in handy, especially during the blizzard of '77 when we were snowed in for 15 days. Fortunately there was a lot more than beans in that big chest freezer. Every year we would get a side of beef, celebrate with some wine, butcher the meat and wrap the various cuts in white paper. It seemed like a good idea until one year mom and dad ... um ... "celebrated" a bit too much and forgot to mark what was in which package. We had 60 anonymous paper-wrapped chunks of beef in the freezer that all looked the same. Leave it to mom to turn it into an adventure: She christened it "mystery meat," and whenever she took one out to thaw, she'd create an incredible meal with whatever it turned out to be.

My childhood was amazing, though we did move around a lot. I think I went to 10 schools before 7th grade, including one in California when I was 8. That's where my brother Scott was born. From 7th through 12th grade we lived in a town called Langford, New York, population 200, with four corners that had 2 bars, a gas station and a firehouse. It was just outside of a town called North Collins, where I attended North Collins Central High about 30 miles south of Buffalo.

My Grampa Cullen owned a cabin in Langford since before I was born. We spent every summer enjoying the beautiful lake, family and fishing. Gramps invested a lot of time teaching me to play golf, and in fact we had a little par 3 hole where we practiced. The good news is that I've been swinging a club for 43 years. The not-so-good news is that you'd think by now I would've figured out how to do it. With apologies to my intrepid Gramps, I never really got the hang of it, and it pisses me off! I love to play, and I do it whenever I can, but woe be to the unlucky player without a helmet who's anywhere near me when I'm wielding my driver!



Time at the lake was a refreshing change from the city action in Buffalo. Whether I was ice skating 100 yards from the house on the moonlit pond or camping next to a waterfall on a warm summer night, my appreciation for the outdoors is still with me. I was fortunate to grow up in the small-town way of life. So with all that going on, North Collins High was a blast, with only 98 people in my graduating class. I'll admit that it was a little tough fitting in at first, but as soon as I scored 3 goals in a soccer game I was in! I was fortunate to have amazing teachers and coaches who really cared. To this day they say that the Class of '78 was the coolest class (though I suspect "they" were members of that same class). Larry Ebersole, Dave Gier and I (collectively known as "The Guys") were inseparable. We grew up together through well over 100 concerts and lots of drugs. But we never lost sight of who we were, and we all managed to graduate.

Ahhh, the concerts! Back then, music was all about following the bands. I never thought about learning to play. I saw Bad Company in '76 at Niagara Falls Convention Center, but I was there because Kansas opened for them. Kansas had just released *Masque*, and I was a huge fan. Ironically, as far as I was concerned, Kansas blew Bad Company off the stage. If somebody had told me I was going to play for them 14 years later, I would have said, "Are you high?!" Well, I probably was. Hell, I didn't even play an instrument!

I did play sports, however, and I did it well. I lettered in soccer, basketball and tennis for 3 years and in my junior year made the county all-star team in soccer. In bigger schools, the jocks and the heads were separate (for so many reasons!). But our school was so small that we were both. The bigger schools didn't appreciate it when we beat them, especially the highbrow, rich bastards with their short hair and Polo shirts from East Aurora, a suburb of Buffalo. It was the ultimate insult to have your ass kicked by some long-haired, pot-smoking middle-class dudes! And we were pleased to treat them to that experience. Another advantage of attending a small school was that I got the attention in academics while still excelling in sports. Dedicated teamwork was essential to our success, given our talent level as compared to bigger schools. This was a valuable life lesson, and years later it would most certainly translate to playing in a band. More about that later.

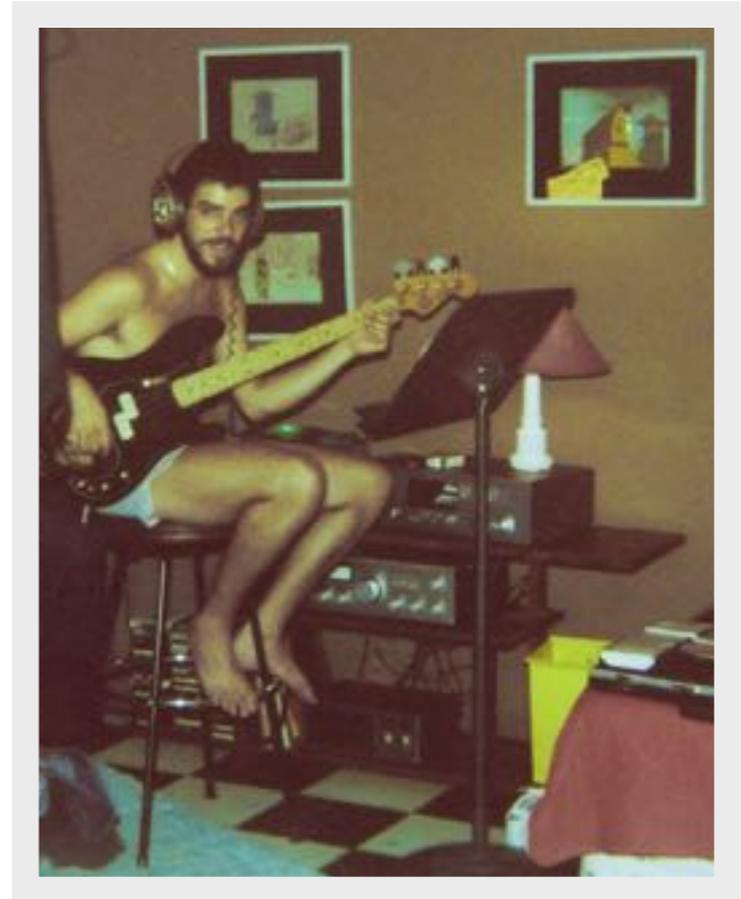


The day after graduation we moved to Ft. Myers, Florida. My parents had a great opportunity there in the dry cleaning business and they asked me if I would help them with the new venture. Though I did have a few prospects for sports scholarships, that would have to wait while I helped my parents. It seemed like the least I could do, and although I didn't like the drudgery of the work, it was fun to pull together as a family to build the business into a money maker. I was the pants presser, delivery boy, curtain hanger and counter person.

In retrospect, helping them with the business turned out to be one of the most important decisions

I've made. I used the time to figure out what I wanted to do with my life - all I knew for sure was that I was not going to be a dry cleaner dude. From mom's Sergio Mendez all the way to The Guys' Kansas, music had always been part my life, so I went to where the passion was and started to learn guitar. One night at a party, I met none other

than jazz guitarist Stacey Boyd. He became a friend and mentor, and it was he who convinced me to switch to bass. We've been friends ever since. In fact, my life was never the same after he turned me on to Jaco Pastorius, the legendary bassist for the legendary Weather Report. I went out and bought a bass, practicing 6-8 hours a day using time management habits I learned from Stacey. Within 6 months I had a paying gig with him and singer Dawn Angel. Barely a few months later I was gigging full-time with the popular country group Foxfire, banging out everything from Charlie Daniels to Yes.



I was jazzed! I was bringing down three-hundred a week playing 5-6 nights with some really good players - and the women were digging me. I thought I had found my dream job until it suddenly got even better: I landed a gig with my friend Michael Daisy's progressive rock band, Centaur. The group was already one of my favorites, and now here I was, playing Rush, Yes, Genesis and all the music I grew up with. The next 9 years were fun and eventful. I played in 12 bands from Florida to Alaska, performing everything from progressive rock to soul with an all-black Motown band. There was no Facebook or Twitter back in those days, but I was a networking fool before it was cool. I did have an agent, Ted Skorman, who hooked me up whenever I needed a gig or to change bands.

One of my favorite bands through that time was The Kids, a group of talented players from the Tupelo, Mississippi area. That's where I hooked up with Mick Weick, who would end up becoming a close

friend. Mick now works for Tim McGraw, but back then he was the sound man we recruited on a tour in Florida. A few weeks after he joined the band we got the call that we were headed to Anchorage, Alaska. Now that was exciting! We worked our way back to the Tupelo area to prepare for the long trek west. Our first stop was Gillette, Wyoming (where men are men and sheep are nervous). We played for a couple of weeks in what I think was a Ramada Inn. Then we moved on to Bozeman, MT and then to Seattle and Portland. We were all around 22-23 years old and, in my dad's words, full of piss and vinegar. (I was never quite sure what that actually meant, but it sounded very dude-like, so I went with it.) We all loved to party, but Mick and I were the experts! I was a little shy back then and he certainly got me out of my shell. He was a crazy bastard with a heart of gold. We are still close, though I almost ruined our friendship because of something stupid I did. We'll leave that one on the shelf.

Alaska! Oh my, what a great place. They flew us up from Seattle along with all of our gear. We were given two 3-bedroom apartments and a three month, six-night-a-week gig at Gussy LaMore's. We were not



only *like* kids in a candy store; at 22-23 years old we *were* kids in a candy store - with our choice of the best drugs and the most seductive women. Most of their partners worked in northern Alaska and were gone for up to 6 weeks straight. Combine that with 22 hours of late-fall darkness and you have the perfect recipe for partying. It was intense, but we also kept our eye on the ball, and the band did rock! Founding member Terry Barnes, along with Mick McIntire on keys and Brian Curtis on guitar and vocals were an amazing combination. Each

sang his own style from The Fixx to Journey, covering almost anything along with a great store of originals. We played. We partied. We were in Alaska, so we skied. Mick and I would play, go to bed around 3, get up at 5, drive a couple of hours, ski all day, and be back on stage that night. You can do that at 23. We had a blast working and playing together and I will never, ever forget it.

No matter whom I was playing with or where we were playing, rest & relaxation always brought me back to Ft. Myers to see my parents. Often I would take up with some local band, and during one break I was asked by longtime friend and musician Michael Daisy to join Boys of Summer. Michael is from Delaware where I now live. We became the pet band for the local radio station, 97 Rock. We opened every concert they sponsored; sharing the stage with the likes of Molly Hatchet and REO Speedwagon. The station had our song Little Black Book on rotation, and we regularly appeared live on the air.

All this press also brought us in touch with local rock stars. Cliff Williams and Brian Johnson from AC/DC, and Brian Howe from Bad Company would come out to see the band and sit in on a regular basis. I ended up becoming good friends with all of them, and when they had their rock star friends in town I got to join them when they went out and about. One of those nights we went to see Tim "The Toolman" Allen in the local comedy club and ended up driving Tim back to Cliff's house where we partied well into the morning. My stomach hurt so badly the next day from laughing (I'm sure that it wasn't *all* from laughing), but the next morning I was up and ready to play golf with Brian Johnson's wife, Brenda. She always called me when they needed a fourth, and I really appreciated that.

Cliff invited us to record our original music in his beautiful studio, so over the next two years we played and recorded all the time. The support from our rock star friends was significant not only for our musical endeavors, but in the partying department as well. South Florida in the '80s was crazy to say the least. Miami Vice wasn't that far from the truth! Of course we all had mutual friends who somehow managed to hang with us (I wonder why...).

The club circuit can get tiresome after a while, especially if you're playing with musicians who aren't on the same level musically. While I was working up the nerve to ask Cliff how I could get to the next

level, he and Brian from Bad Company were already talking to their producer and the other members about my becoming their next bassist. In November of '89 they all came out to our gig at Jimmy Connors' place at Sonesta Resort to check me out. I never had a clue.

It goes without saying (OK, I've said it already, but still...) that the popularity of the band resulted in a lot of women hanging out with us. And that included the female staff from the local Hooters. I ended up dating one of them for a while, and without going into any more detail than is necessary, I didn't protect myself and in the fall of '88 she got pregnant. I married her because I felt I needed to. The shining star that rose from all this appeared on July 20th of '89 when my beautiful daughter, Jordan Nicole Cullen, was born. The apple of my eye, the love of my life! I couldn't imagine loving anybody more. I stopped drinking and partying for a year or so and spent every waking moment with her. I'd finish playing at 2 a.m. and come straight home so I could do the late feeding. Just us, hanging out on the couch. What a great feeling, and I truly believe it also re-energized my parents. My dad quit drinking (he was a full-blown alcoholic, mind you) and my mom took care of Jordan a lot because of my work schedule. She adapted perfectly to the dual roles of grandmother and mom. Good things travel in clusters, I guess, because soon after Jordan was born I was asked to join Bad Company.



The Call I'll Never Forget

I got up around 7 a.m. just like any other day. I had my coffee and made breakfast. I did a lot of cooking, so I topped off my shopping list and went to the grocery store. Our friend Doreen stopped by and offered to baby sit while I did the shopping. Parents out there know that things go a lot quicker when you shop alone, so I gratefully accepted her offer.

When I returned, she met me at the door and said that the singer from Bad Company, Brian Howe, had called and wanted me to call him back. I pretty much tossed it off, saying I'd call him after I brought in the rest of the groceries. "No," she said firmly. "Call him now. It's very important." I really didn't think it was a big deal because he used to sit in with us all the time - so why the panic? Doreen's resolve was profound, so as half the food sat outside in the car, I dialed. After a little small talk, Brian said, "We are looking for a bassist for Bad Company. How would you like to audition?" Doreen stared at me as I stood there in silence. I was in shock. I mustered up every last little bit of cool-dudeness I could possibly pull together and said, in a calm voice, "Sure, that would be great." Of course, the anti-cool-dude inside of me was running around the room screaming like a little girl. But that was for me (and now you) to know. I am pleased to say that Brian was spared that horrifying spectacle. Sadly, I can't say the same for Doreen.

He went on to say he'd be in contact with the details, and asked if I had a passport. "Uh, no," I stammered. "Well, dude, you better jump on that, because the audition is in London in 2 weeks." Calmly, and in a very masculine manner, I hung up the phone just in time for Doreen to tackle me with excitement. We were jumping around, yelling and freaking out, and I swear she was more excited than I was. I was still in shock. And for those of you who keep track of these things, I truly can't recall what happened to the rest of the groceries.

The next 2 weeks became a whirlwind, starting with the ordeal of getting an expedited passport. It arrived the day before I left for London. As if that were not stressful enough, I also had to learn - and get good at - 10 Bad Company songs. I already knew a few, but the biggest challenge was learning to play the 5-string bass for some of their new stuff. It was even more of a challenge because I did not own a 5-string bass. But, when the going gets tough ... blah, blah, blah ... I took my 4-string bass and tuned it down. It would at least get me through the learning process. The other challenge was dealing with my wife at the time. She was a very jealous person and needed to be the center of attention. I had no doubt that she was happy for me [read: *her*] because she could now brag to everyone that she was married to a Bad Company dude. If you don't mind, that's another one we'll put on the shelf and leave there, at least for a while.

I practiced for hours every day. I was most certainly not going to blow an opportunity that could be my only shot at the big-time. The two weeks (it felt like 2 years) were finally over. My flight was Ft. Myers to Miami, then Virgin Airlines to Gatwick Airport, south of London. The flight left Miami around 4 p.m. and arrived in England around 7:30 a.m. Of course there was no chance of my sleeping, and unfortunately that also went for the people seated around me on the airplane. I made several friends, and had to tell them my story - in painful detail, I'm afraid. Fortunately, they all still liked me after we landed, wishing me well with big, reassuring hugs.



London

I will remind you that back then there were no cell phones, no Internet and certainly no Google Maps (am I really that old?!). I was armed only with scribbled directions (how analog) to the St. Giles Hotel in the Tottenham Court Road area. I breezed through baggage claim and customs and hopped on the train to Victoria station in London. The beautiful countryside calmed me down and it took about 30 minutes to roll into the city. Once at the station I had been instructed to take one of the iconic black taxis to the hotel, which was about 10 minutes away in an old YMCA close to Soho, a very hip part of the



city. My first real surprise (if I was, in fact, still capable of being surprised) was how small the rooms were, 8x8 at best, with a single bed. The bathroom was just 2 steps away. Not a bad arrangement, convenience-wise.

Around 10:30 a.m. I was settled in. I laid back, put my hands behind my head,

and took a deep, cleansing breath as the phone jangled me to attention. It was Phil Carson, Bad Company's manager, telling me that a car would be there in an hour to take me to the audition. Holy shit, I had been up for 20 hours straight! As I look back, however, I think it worked to my advantage. I simply had no strength left for nervousness or self-doubt. They picked me up in a short limo, and 20 minutes later dropped me off at the rehearsal studio in a rundown area in North London called Caledonia. Fine. Whatever. I was very relaxed.



The Audition

Ezzie Hire Studio wasn't very pretty, but they had 3 huge 30X40 rehearsal rooms. On that day, Roger Taylor from Queen was in one, and Uriah Heep was in the other. I was definitely in good company. We went in and did a quick meet & greet. The guys were all very cool and checked out my gear. I had a Peavey amp and they had rented a Music Man 5-string. The instrument was beautiful, but it was the first time I had played it. I kept that to myself, and as the niceties wound down, somebody said, "Let's play a few and get a pint." Music to my ears.

Drummer Simon Kirke counted us into Can't Get Enough of Your Love. We sounded great, and it was probably the one I knew best. We rolled right into Feel Like Making Love, kicked off by 2nd guitarist Dave "Bucket" Colwell who was also auditioning. We really killed that one, with background vocals and all. We each just kinda picked our part and went with it. At the end we had a cool jam; I think it was to see if I could improvise. Of course I could, and I think they were impressed. Whew! Then it was off to the pub, which just happened to be attached to the building. How convenient, as rock musicians have been known to get thirsty from time to time. My first day with Bad Company was also my first sip of room temperature English beer. I was surprised to find it quite yummy. We each slammed 2 pints while chatting about my background and the trip. On the way back, Simon pulled me aside and told me how good the groove was on those songs and asked me if I wanted to join the band for the Holy Water Tour. Keeping my cool-dude persona in mind, I calmly replied, "Yes."

"Wow," I thought. "I'm the bass player for Bad Company. That certainly does not suck!"

We jammed for a while longer, put away a few more pints and finished up around 3:00. I finally broke away long enough to find a phone. I called my mom first and she was so proud of me. I think I also called some people I didn't know (including a few from the airplane), but everyone was nice, so all was well. I must have spent \$200. Brian finally dragged me away from the phone and asked if I wanted to join him and producer Terry Thomas for dinner at their favorite Indian restaurant. I was starving but had never eaten Indian food. I have to admit that I was a little suspect. We jumped into a cab and off we went to a restaurant in a residential area of London. It was very clean and chic. Terry ordered Lobster Bhuna for me and a bunch of things to munch on, like papadam with 3 sauces for dipping, along with warm and savory samosas. My suspicions were unfounded, and everything was quite good. Of course, part of that could be the fact that the food was of high quality and I was starving to death. When my Bhuna was set down in front of me I thought I had died and gone to heaven. Oh my, I loved the dark tomato-based sauce with green pepper, onion with Indian spices. I quietly listened to their chatter while I gobbled up everything on my plate. Then they ordered Sambuca with 3 tiny coffee beans. I had sipped Sambuca, of course, but this is the first time I did it with class! They poured me into a cab and I was whisked

back to the hotel. By 7:00 I had passed out from exhaustion (well, exhaustion and the 6 warm pints and the 2 Sambucas with the coffee beans in the bottom).

I'll never forget waking up around 4 a.m. to the funky sound of the police sirens. I thought I was in a dream, and then it all came back to me: I'm in London and I'm now the bassist for Bad Company. Wow! In the movie version of this, Matt Damon (or whoever plays me) will be wearing a huge smile and his breath will be reminiscent of curry.

Fully awake with excitement, I took a shower, got dressed and did a walkabout. It was a crisp spring morning with birds chirping in harmony with the sounds of the city. I just walked and walked, trying to absorb everything that had happened. It was like trying to remember a dream. As the sun began to peek around the tall buildings, I found a coffee shop. I sat in the window and enjoyed a cup of freshly brewed coffee and an English muffin (in my present mood, there was simply no other type of muffin that would have been acceptable). FYI, this is not the Thomas' variety with the nooks & crannies; it's sort of a cup-shaped shortbread. I was learning a lot on this trip.

Day two of the rehearsal was more of the same. Play, sip, play, sip some more, etc. The highlight of that afternoon was meeting Roger Taylor, the drummer from Queen. He was a really nice guy. After we were all pretty much played and sipped out, Bucket (the guitarist who wasn't told he had the job yet) asked me to meet him and some friends at around 7 for what would turn out to be a pub crawl. Understandably, they were a little suspicious of the American, given that some U.S. musicians went overboard with their rock star attitude (Axl Rose and the L.A. hair bands come to mind). But a bit of conversation and a few pints later they welcomed me with open arms. I was now one of them, happy and feeling lucky to be there.

We eventually landed at The Limelight where Roger Daltrey was playing a benefit concert. The Limelight was in an old bank with a balcony around the stage and private party rooms off the balcony. We bounced back and forth between watching the concert and partying in a private room. At one point I had to use the bathroom; I opened the door and found myself face-to-face with Boy George and his brother - two very nice people. They asked me if I wanted to party with them and of course I said yes. That night was one to remember, and

remembering would certainly be a challenge. Those English dudes sure can drink! I think I earned some respect just by keeping up with them. And the next week was more of the same: play, sip, play, sip, eat, play, sip, play, eat. If this was stardom, then I was just fine with it.



MTV Video Shoot

Shortly after I arrived back in the states, I received a FedEx package containing a plane ticket to Los Angeles where the video for the first single, Holy Water, was to be filmed. Four days later I was in baggage claim at LAX. On my way to hailing a cab, I noticed some guy dressed like a limo driver holding a sign that shouted, CULLEN. I walked right by him until it dawned that that CULLEN person might actually be this Cullen. Sure enough it was! On the drive to The Hyatt on Sunset (aka, “The Riot” because of its rock ‘n’ roll history - it has since been re-named “Andaz”), I opened up the sunroof on this perfect 70-degree day, poured myself a scotch, sat back in the cushy seat and thought, “I’ve made the big-time.” It was a very private and special moment that I’ll never forget.

We were scheduled to shoot at 6 a.m. the next day at a location outside of L.A. where the TV version of M.A.S.H. was filmed. But I didn’t have to wait that long for the fun to begin. That night we were invited to The China Club where all the stars partied. Bonnie Raitt’s band was the house group, and celebrities like Bruce Willis and Dennis Quaid hung out and jammed on harmonica. I still remember sitting at a table between bassists Chris Squire (Yes) and John Entwistle (The Who). Everyone was so friendly and congratulatory on my new gig with Bad Company.

Needless to say, 6 a.m. came around very early. The limo scooped us up and we arrived at the site around 7 where we hung out in a trailer stocked with everything we needed. The video we were shooting was for the (then) fledgling MTV, back when they used to play cool music videos. The final product might look free and easy and glamorous, but it was a long 24 hours of shooting. And it was totally worth it. Leave

it to my mom to count the 54 clips where I appear throughout the video. I guess the producer liked what this new bass player did for the camera. I remember the funniest part of the day was when the girls came up to do their shoot. We were all wondering where they had found them because they looked ... well, pretty rough, like they had been up all night. It’s funny what a little makeup can do along with out-of-focus shots to make you look sexy! Vaguely wondering how that might apply to me and the band, I headed home the next day.



Back Home, Then Back To England

For the week I was home I spent most of the time with my daughter and some friends who generously took me out to celebrate. You’ve probably noticed that I don’t speak a lot about my wife at the time (remember, we put that on the shelf several pages ago). Things were not good between us before Bad Company, and things progressively

got worse until we divorced in ‘96. ‘Nuff said. Back on the shelf to stay (well, maybe).



Soon I was on a flight back to London to re-rehearse for the tour. This time we worked at a countryside farmhouse rehearsal space

called Stanbridges Farm Studio. It’s about 50 miles directly south of London on the A23 not far from Brighton on the coast. I was picked up at the airport by Bob, the owner, and was the first to check in. He and his lovely wife made me a traditional breakfast that included bacon (looked more like ham), fried eggs, sautéed tomatoes, mush-

rooms and beans. It was delicious, and I wish I had some in front of me right now. The house was built in the 1600s, and they hire it out to such mega-groups as AC/DC, Phil Collins and Duran Duran, to name a few. They give up half their house and the cottage, with the barn acting as the rehearsal studio and bar. It was near a sleepy little town with only one pub where I experienced my first Cricket match on a Sunday afternoon. How much better could it be; bloody mary in hand, hanging with Bucket and a few of his better-looking friends. There was nothing at all bad about rehearsing 4 hours a day and then lounging by the pool or going to the pub or heading to London. When we were in London, we hung out at a “gentlemen’s club” and restaurant called Stringfellows. It was a London version of the Playboy club, full of very rich guys, celebrities and stunningly beautiful cocktail waitresses and bartenders. One in particular, whom we’ll call Sarah, fancied me a bit. In fact, The Beatles’ song, Norwegian Wood, accurately depicts our evening together. We connected on so many levels and I got to thinking that if I had not been married that we would have stayed in contact for years to come.

Eating dinner with Peter, the owner of Stringfellows, was a sure sign that you were somebody. And being somebody included being whisked past the 100+ people standing in the queue in order to enter the club. Again, way more fun than you are supposed to have - unless you play bass in Bad Company, of course.



Back Home, Then Off To Burlington, Vermont

I returned home for about a week and then was off again for pre-production in Burlington, Vermont where our first official gig was to take place. We stayed, played and drank in Burlington for 10 days. The schedule was wonderfully predictable: Rehearse the show for a couple hours a day, then off to eat and drink. This little college town in the northern part of the state turned out to be one of my favorite stops on the tour; fantastic food and a fun nightlife - especially since pretty much everyone knew we were there and they loved to hang with us. In fact it’s where 2nd guitarist Bucket and I became good friends. We

were both in our early 30s and we loved to play and party! We were killing it at the rehearsals so when we hit the stage for the first time in front of 5500 fans, we rocked them. I remember in the dressing room before we walked out on stage that everyone was a bit nervous. That comforted me a bit. But once the first song was over, we all just took a breath and it got progressively better. I was on cloud nine. And remember that all this happened within a short 60 days of *the call*. Unbelievable!

The tour was officially underway. The next show was in Saratoga, NY where Damn Yankees joined us as the opening act. They were the U.S. version of a supergroup with Tommy Shaw (Styx), Jack Blades (Night Ranger), Ted Nugent (wildlife hunter and part-time guitarist) and Michael Cartellone on drums. Each one had his own personality, and I’m not really sure how they put up with Uncle Teddy. What a piece of work!

One of our next stops was Darien Lake Amphitheater between Buffalo and Rochester. It was great to have some of my family and friends come out for the show, but it was nothing like when we played The Aud (Buffalo Memorial Auditorium). We’ll come back to that later.

The first couple of months out on the road were a tremendous learning experience and a blast. But after a while it became obvious that there were problems between Simon Kirke, the original, and Howe, not an original. Howe was becoming a real ass of a person. I really didn’t pick up on it when we were hanging around Ft. Myers, but boy did it come out on the road! He hated the fact that I was tight with Simon, because he apparently thought I should support his side of everything. That could never happen, simply because he was such a dick and disrespectful to everyone. I believe insecurity was his biggest enemy. Of course I quickly became the target of his wrath. I couldn’t do anything without his telling Robbie the road manager how terrible a job I was doing. It got so bad that there was actually a time when I was ready to quit the band and go home. It all finally came to a head in a dressing room in Minnesota after a show. He was babbling about something and turned to me to say something smart. I slammed him in the chest and told him to back off. I proceeded to punch him in the chest while telling him what a dick he had been to everyone. I knew full well I was saying what everyone else wanted to tell him. And even

though he would never admit it, at that moment I gained his respect - at least for a while.

That being said, I was also sure I was fired. But fortunately our next show was in North Dakota, where it would have been a challenge to find a bass player to replace me - especially on short notice. I was relieved when I was told by management that I needed to apologize if I wanted to stay in the band, so the next day I had a one-on-one with him. In a roundabout way I managed to say I was sorry without really saying I was sorry. For a while afterwards, things were fine between us and I just did my gig and had way too much fun - including playing the show of my life.



The Show

We took a break around the holidays and came back strong in early '91. Most of the shows with Damn Yankees were at 5000-8000 seat venues because both bands had just released albums with as yet very little radio play. After 3 months on the road together, both bands had multiple songs in heavy rotation on the radio, so by the time we reached Buffalo in February we had graduated to 12,000/20,000 seats. That, added to promotions with radio stations like 97 Rock in Buffalo, added up to the show of a lifetime: The Aud, in my home town of Buffalo, New York, where I used to watch the Sabres play hockey and where I saw my first concert in '73 when Peter Frampton opened for J. Geils.

So, needless to say, I had February 26th circled in my itinerary book and couldn't wait for my return to Buffalo. It would be the first time I played bass in my home town. I was able to get 50+ tickets for my family, which included my mom's sisters, Judy and Sandy, sitting on the side of the stage where I was playing.

The day finally arrived. We came in from Boston and checked into the Hyatt downtown. It was surreal to be home, but this time as a rock star. I had a huge amount of support from my road family, including Tommy Shaw who told me at breakfast to enjoy every moment. He

reminisced about the awesome experience he had playing his first show with Styx in Alabama. His story just added to my blissful anticipation.

After breakfast I walked straight down Main St. on a brisk Buffalo winter morning. The 10 block walk, with my feet crunching the packed snow and my breath fogging the air reminded me of my childhood days. When I arrived at the back door of the Aud I paused for just a second, took a deep breath and stepped into my dream. The crew that was setting up high-fived me and gave me words of encouragement. I strolled onto the stage during setup and saw the jersey of Gil Perreault of the Sabres hanging from the rafters. I got a chill from head to toe.

Before the show, I was interviewed live on 97 Rock by Mark Stout: Hometown boy makes it to the big time! The Buffalo News also stuck with that theme. The time was approaching, so I went back to the hotel to chill for a bit. I pictured friends and family streaming in with their tickets. I can still feel the excitement at this moment.

I went back to our normal routine of relaxing until it was time to take a shower and meet in the bar for a beer. Then onto the bus to pull up as Damn Yankees was halfway through their show. I continued to get encouragement from the guys, except of course from that dick Howe who told the tour manager that if I was having too much fun he was going to hit me with his microphone stand. In retrospect it was actually pretty funny, but I didn't think so at the time.

The moments ticked away to nothing as Bucket poured us a shot of Jack to celebrate (and calm me down). Suddenly we were on our way to the stage. The huge room was bathed in darkness as a heavily orchestrated version of Bad Company played on the sound system. If it were ever possible for me to jump out of my skin, this was going to be the time. Jimmy, my tech, slung my polished black Music Man bass around my neck. There was a moment of quiet, and then Simon counted us into Rock and Roll Fantasy. How fitting. We were off and running!

It took me a song or two to relax and settle in. Every time I glanced into the wings, the entire section of my family would jump up and start waving and screaming. It got to a point where I couldn't look at



them. I know that seems sort of strange, but I did have a job to do. Minutes seemed like seconds until Simon came out from behind his kit to sing an acoustic solo version of Shooting Star. The first thing he said was, "This song I dedicate to hometown boy Paul Cullen's family and friends, you must be so proud of him!" The place erupted in applause! He began to sing, and I believe all 16,000 fans knew the words. There was that chill again. I can play it back in my memory like a DVD - in Living Color and surround sound to boot.

After a few of the newer songs, Simon counted us into Good Lovin' Gone Bad. This was one of my favorites because I would run from the side of the stage to the top of the speakers - 25 feet in the air - to get everyone to clap, and then run back to the other side to do it all again. It was the only Bad Company song that was high energy enough to lead Simon into his long drum solo and then straight into Can't Get Enough of Your Love to end the show. We made it back to the dressing room amid overwhelming cheers, and could literally feel the stomping of the crowd demanding an encore. And of course it could be nothing other than the epic anthem, Bad Company. It was a 15 minute spectacular that transported you through every emotion, building into a frenzied conclusion of light, sound and applause. It was just too much. I wasn't even in the dressing room before the feelings of the day took

over and I just cried like a baby. Everybody was congratulating me, including Tommy Shaw and Jack Blades who watched the entire show from the wings. They told me that I was at least 3 feet off the ground the whole time. After a shower I had my very own meet & greet with 150 of my family and friends, including my brother Scott. It meant so much to me that everyone was so proud of what I had accomplished in such a short period of time. And it wasn't quite over....

We were limo'd back to the hotel and then to Sinbad's Night Club near the airport. I'm a little foggy but I do remember a few things: First, I was on cloud nine and very relaxed. Second, I remember Bucket watching over me and making sure I got safely back to the Hyatt around 5:00 a.m. Third, I clearly recall waking up with a cute naked redhead. Talk about a perfect ending!

That leg of our tour was supposed to end in April. However, the two singles from Bad Company and Damn Yankees (If You Needed Somebody and Can You Take Me High Enough) were killing it on the charts, so we were scheduled to go out for the summer shed (amphitheater) tour. Much to my surprise and delight, the original guitarist Mick Ralphs was rejoining the band. Turned out he didn't like the direction that the band was taking under the control of Howe and producer Terry Thomas. I think he got pissed because he had put the band together in 1972 and it had always been his baby.

It was back in England where I met Mick for the first time. He gave me a big hug and thanked me for carrying on the Bad Company tradition and groovin' like Boz had done on the bass. He had heard good things from Simon about my work ethic, not to mention the fact that I thought Howe was out of place trying to control things. Mick asked me to dinner (Indian, of course) and said a friend would be joining us. As we were uncorking a bottle of Chateaufort du Pape, in walks David Gilmore of Pink Floyd! Turns out David and Mick were best friends. I didn't say much; just listened and smiled. Chalk this one up to another memory that I will happily take off the shelf and play with from time to time.

Once the tour started again that summer, Mick, Bucket and I were inseparable. Mick was 20 years our senior, but kept up with us every step of the way while also quietly watching over us. One of the most memorable moments on that leg of the tour was when my brother

Scott, an officer in the Navy, brought a bunch of his buddies to our show at the Scope Arena in Norfolk, Virginia. The place was packed, and Scott and his sailor boys were seated right in front of me. In spite of the bright lights, I could see my brother say to the guy next to him, "That's my fu**ing brother!" The guy nodded like, "Yeah, right." Then he glanced up at me and I nodded and gave him a thumbs-up. He freaked! We tore up the Virginia Beach clubs that night, and the next morning those poor Navy dudes looked like they'd been backed over by an F-18 Hornet.

The tour was really rockin', but the growing rift between the originals and Howe was escalating out of control. Howe knew he was on an island and Mick and Simon were on the shore. Of course, he was pissed that I had taken the side of the original members - as if there were ever any question. It was a no-brainer! The original guys were genuine chaps who just wanted to make good music. Fortunately, Howe didn't bother me too much since I was the least of his problems. At one point in the tour he was actually going to be fired and Steve Walsh, the singer from Kansas, was going to fill in.

People ask me if it was difficult to travel from town to town every day. Well, let's take a closer look: I played in front of thousands of screaming fans pretty much every night. I rode on a million-dollar tour



bus that was more like a hotel suite than a vehicle. When we flew, we flew first-class. When we did stay in hotels, we stayed at Ritz Carltons and Four Seasons. With all that excess, for some reason I still clearly remember my first \$32 room-service burger; truth be told I only did that once. At the hotels we enjoyed the sideways glances from the Japanese businessmen we encountered in the elevators. There we were in long hair and cut-up jeans, probably making as much money as they were.

One of the things that made the traveling even more pleasant was that I didn't have to sleep with my ex. A big bonus, indeed. Speaking of hotels and sleeping, after the shows there would always be younger girls in the lobby waiting to get autographs and photos. They were in the lobby because they were too young to meet us in the bars. Of course, it was inevitable that some of them wanted to sleep with the rock stars - it was the thing to do back then. Unlike a few of my tourmates who shall remain nameless, I drew the line when it came to jailbait. Some of these guys wouldn't drink or do drugs, but they'd happily pick out an underage teen for the night. I was no angel, but frankly I'd rather do a bump and have a Jack Daniel's!

Of course I spent countless nights with girls who were old enough to do whatever we did without me being hauled off to jail by Boss Hog and his cronies. And of course that brings up the not-always-avoidable consequence of such merriment: Kids. When people ask me how many kids I have, my pat answer is, "One - that I know of!" Everybody laughs, but it's true. If I were a betting man I'd put big money on there being at least one unknown Cullen son or daughter out there. After all, before I was married in '89, the number of women I slept with was well into the high 3 digits. In spite of how that might sound, I wasn't very aggressive at all; but I was in Bad Company, so you didn't really have to be all that aggressive.

In October of 2012 I almost won that bet. One night at 10 p.m. I received an email that said, "I hope you are sitting down because I might be your son." WOW! (This is why I don't open my email that late.) I tossed and turned all night, riddled with mixed emotions about the prospect of having a son. Further discussion with the young man revealed that I had indeed slept with his mom - and her friend (at the same time) - after a show. She suspected that Andrew could be mine. Some of my mixed emotions were positive, as Bonnie and I became

more and more excited as we got to know him through Facebook and texts. But reality is reality, and I did the only thing I could do at this point: I took a DNA test. It was a sad day for all of us when Bonnie and I realized that I was not the father of this very nice guy who had been searching for his dad for 26 years.

All in all, I played about 300 shows with Bad Company. It was a whirlwind of first-class flying, that magnificent bus, top-notch hotel rooms (including that \$32 burger) and girls, girls and more girls. We played big cities like Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City, but we had the most fun in smaller towns like Burlington, Vermont and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. In Johnson City, Tennessee, one of my tourmates and I slept with 2 sisters who, shall we say, liked each other. One of them eloquently explained that in the mountains where she grew up, she could munch on her sister and her brother, but that it would have been sick to actually sleep with him. I'll never forget that. See why we liked the small towns? There's nothin' like up-close and personal.

Somehow we made it to New Orleans for the final show of the tour - which, by the way, included dinner at Paul Prudhomme's chef's table where we sampled

everything on the menu while sipping the best French wines. I was so excited because there was talk that I would be staying with the band as the permanent bassist. That translated into a huge pay raise and additional perks like tour and T-shirt money. I would also get to help write and play on the next CD. Indeed, a plan was already in place: A good friend of the band, Robert Hart, was going to replace Howe. In fact

the last time I was in London he showed up at rehearsal before Howe arrived from the U.S. and sang a spine-tingling version of Rock Steady.



So there it was on the table: Howe was fired, and Bucket, Robert and I were in. Talk about a dream come true! But y'know, sometimes dreams don't come true.

I got a call on the day before I was scheduled to return to London to rehearse for the album. I was told that Howe wasn't going away that easily. I was aware of that, but I never thought for a minute they would let him back into the band. Well, the pressure from Atco Records, on top of the fact that Howe was suing for a million, made them cave. They took him back! And this was not good for me. Not good at all. I won't bore you with all the things that happened between us, but I will say we were definitely not friends.

Mick wanted me to play bass on the CD and do the tour, but Howe was already sabotaging my stay with Bad Company. Worse yet, they didn't use any of my bass tracks for the CD! He and Thomas said they were really bad. Maybe they were, but I was so upset with everything that I really don't remember. It's no rock 'n' roll secret that recording is all about the vibe, and believe me it was not a good one. I returned to Ft. Myers around the holidays, but I didn't hear from anyone until after the new year when the CD was slated to be released and the tour would start. What really sucked was that Howe and I lived in the same town and would be in the same club. I did everything to avoid him, but it was inevitable: We would pass each other and he would say, "I'm going to get you fired!"



Another Call I'll Never Forget

As I suspected, I finally got the call from manager Phil Carson that Brian had pushed so hard to have me kicked out of the band that Mick and Simon backed down and I was gone.

Things went downhill pretty fast. I tried hard to get a gig. I was good at networking and had a made number of contacts. But to no avail. Nobody needed a bass player. I did get a couple of calls, but nothing sounded right for me at the time. And the longer I was out of circulation, the harder it was to get a gig. Of course, hindsight is 20/20,

and I now realize I should have gone to Nashville, NYC or L.A. to hang out with my music peeps until a gig turned up. But I was stuck in Ft. Myers, out of sight and out of mind without any money because I was banking on the huge payday when I was made a full-timer. I would have gone from 6 figures to 7 figures in one year. That, combined with my ex spending like crazy, resulted in a near-zero bank balance.

I was still reeling from being let go, and definitely foggy from self-medicating, so I just hung around town for a while. While on tour I had become friends with Derek St. Holmes who was the singer for Ted Nugent in the '70s. Derek sang Stranglehold, Hey Baby, and Snakeskin Cowboy, just to name a few. He wanted me to move to Atlanta to form a band with Steve Fister (the guitarist for Lita Ford) and drummer Steve Pace from a heavy band from Europe called Krokus. So we packed everything up and moved to Atlanta. I thought it would be a good change and mercifully it got me out of Ft. Myers. Things went well at the start but I still couldn't pull myself out of my funk.

As I look back, a lot of that was due to my marriage steadily getting worse. I will admit that at one point I thought briefly about ending it all. It just seemed my world had come crashing down. Unless you've been there, I don't think anyone can know the feeling of all the money, respect and joy of playing in front of thousands, suddenly becoming no money, no respect and playing in front of 20 drunks in a dive near ATL airport.

Plain and simple, I was a mess. I think my dad heard that in my voice on one of our rather rare conversations, and he and my mom came up with a plan to get me back home to Buffalo. So after 8 months of dying at the airport, my wife, 3 kids (Jordan and 2 stepsons), a fish, a bird, a U-Haul and I were off to Buffalo to move in with my parents in a 2 bedroom condo! My parents, God bless 'em, were angels during the whole ordeal until we found a place 6 months later. I'm here to tell you it was effin' crazy. Let's put that one on the shelf with the rest of the really bad stuff.

On the music side I did hook up with phenomenal guitarist Michael Hund (my Aunt Judy's neighbor) and played in several bands with him. He and I connected musically and made friends right away. But I still couldn't stop comparing that to where I was just a couple of years before. Yes, perhaps if we hadn't partied so hard I might have



had the strength of mind to pull myself out of my tailspin. But there's that damn hindsight again, and what's done is done. I did try a couple of jobs during the day, including driving a wheelchair van and later a dump truck, thanks to my father who hooked me up with a job where he worked. To put it mildly, that really sucked; up at 4 a.m., to work by 5 a.m. and getting off around 6 or 7 p.m. Everybody works themselves ragged to get everything done before winter, and, like everyone else, I got laid off in the fall. I went back to playing with Michael and even opened a little music store called The Guitar Company.

I was beginning to feel a little better about myself as a direct result of my wife and I finally calling it quits after 9 years. That was the beginning of my rebound, although it took a while to figure it all out. The other good thing was that I reconnected with my best friend John Hadaway when he was managing a bar where I played in Ft. Myers. We had been best friends, but lost touch in the '90s. It was great to hang with him again. We definitely had too much fun when we were together. It was great to have someone I could talk to about what I was going through. In fact, he and I took over a bar in a crazy "Deliverance" sort of town south of Buffalo called Gerry, NY. Definitely some inbreeding going on there!

We had a lot of fun but didn't make much money. It didn't last very long anyway after John got a great job offer in Orlando where his dad was to be a mortgage broker (more on that later). So I was lost again, bunking with my parents. My father talked me into driving an 18-wheeler with the new trucking school where he was working, so 5 days a week for a month, in the Buffalo winter, we would drive to the school at 5:30 a.m. It was crazy. I passed my state test and he had me set up with a company called Werner. Just when I thought my life couldn't get any worse, it did. There I was, traveling the country with a crazy trainer from West Virginia. For 3 months I somehow endured the worst conditions until I had a week break to say goodbye to my daughter who was moving back to Ft. Myers. On that 60-hour bus trip back to Buffalo, I did some soul-searching and decided if I could find a working band and a day job I wouldn't go back on the road. Within 2 days I had a gig with The Barking Spiders and a delivery job for Best Tile. I moved in with a good friend, Mike Burns, and was finally starting to see some light, although it wasn't very bright. It was during that time that I picked up the guitar to put together a solo acoustic act, which I had seen done successfully by local musician Tom Sartori.

After 6 months of practice I landed a couple of steady gigs, one on Tuesdays at Route 66 and the other on Wednesdays at Fat Bob's BBQ. Admittedly, I was not very good, but I somehow pulled it off. Shortly afterward I left the craziness of The Barking Spiders, as Gary the leader ended up being a bonehead. What is it about singers!? Geez. But all was well. I was finally feeling decent and loving my single life-style.



Yet Another Call

One snowy night my old drummer buddy Michael Daisy somehow found my phone number. After some small talk he convinced me to come to Delaware because they needed a bassist. As good as Buffalo was for me, I was sick of shoveling snow and brushing my car off after every stop. To say nothing of the lack of respect I got from my home town. This is something that I've experienced a lot since Bad Company. I figure some of it was jealousy; "How did he make the big time, he's

not even that good" sort of talk. Pretty funny, really; many musicians start early, play all their life and never make it. I didn't pick up an instrument until I was 20 and 9 years later I was jumping onto speaker stacks in front of 12,000 people. Luck? Maybe. But I worked my ass off to put myself in a position to get lucky! In fact to this day I don't get the respect from our local big-time musicians (or as big-time as things get in coastal Delaware). That's cool. And the upshot? It drove me to take my career into my own hands.

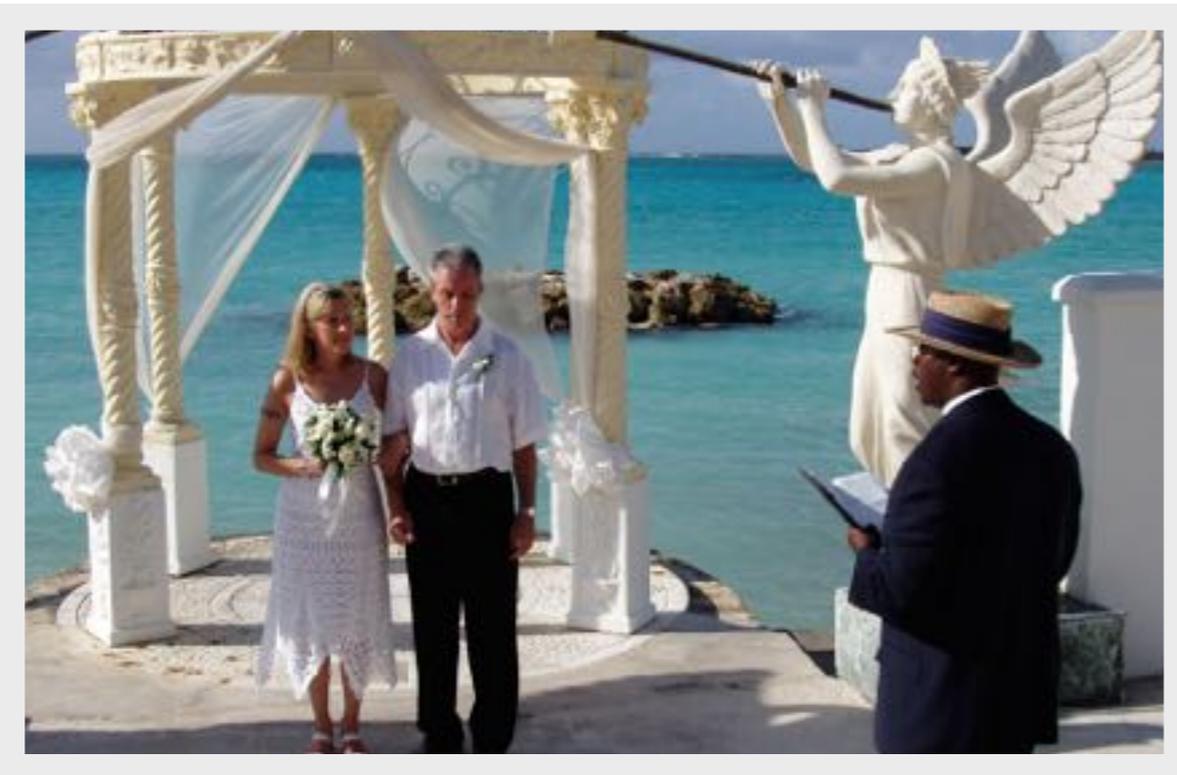
So to Delaware I went on July 4th weekend, Michael Daisy's birthday. With my mom's help I rented a car and drove the 8 hours from Buffalo to Lewes. I met Michael at Irish Eyes' outdoor bar around happy hour. The place is right on the water and very picturesque. So far so good, and it was a birthday party-fest for the next 6 days. I fell in love with Lewes. The people were down-to-earth and didn't judge me on my former status or lack thereof. I'll never forget a drive south on Rt. 1 to Ocean City, Md., with water on both sides of me on a beautiful summer afternoon. As I crossed the Indian River Inlet Bridge, there it was: A long and amazing expanse of beach. Wow, I was definitely moving here! The music scene was good and I would have no problem fitting in.

So on the last night of my trip I was parked at the Irish Eyes bar checking out Michael's music when in walks a beautiful blonde with tattoos and braces. She was a friend of the band and sat next to me at the band's table. I was like ... damn! We hit it off right away and I think I impressed her when I sat in with the group and rocked the bass. We ended up dancing to Smooth by Santana and bumped knees. In her words (now), "It was electric." We got along great. She even went outside with me when I smoked and pretended to smoke too. Pretty cool.

As I left for Buffalo early the next morning, I couldn't stop thinking about Bonnie and moving to Delaware. There's no easy way to make that drive, and after what seemed like an eternity I walked in, turned my computer on and was delighted to see I had an email from her. After that it was full-on for 10 days, 4-5 emails a day and 1,200 minutes on the phone. I knew I was going to move to Delaware, I just didn't know how quickly. I packed my stuff (which wasn't much since I gave the ex everything in the divorce), bought a minivan from my cousin Joey and drove south. I took the plunge and moved right in with Bon-

nie and we've been together ever since. I finally found my soulmate, and as we moved forward together I finally stopped comparing everything to Bad Company. This was a huge step for me. In the music dept., however, I wasn't quite there yet. I played bass on a couple of different projects, but really wasn't having much fun. I did get a job building decks, painting and hanging drywall with Michael. It was nice to have some steady income for a change.

Living with Bonnie was, and still is, such a nice feeling. It's a drama-free zone and her daughter Marlena is amazing. Luckily she got the same good vibe from me. I found I could make everyone happy through their tummies. I'll never forget the look on Marlena's face when I made goulash, my most basic dish. She told her mom I could



never leave. I think Bonnie and I both knew we had found love and could have gotten married right away. But we waited a couple of years and finally, on March 27th 2004, we tied the knot in a beachfront gazebo at Sandals in the Bahamas. My best friend John and his wife Kim stood up for us as the native priest said the magic words: "On this day we bring Paul and Veronica together in Holy Matrimony." There wasn't a dry eye anywhere in the crowd of bathing suit/flip-flop-clad observers.

I kept in contact with my buddy John in Florida, and that October Bonnie and I drove down to Orlando to attend his wedding. It was our first trip together, and it ended up being a blast that continued for an additional few days in Myrtle Beach. Everything was coming together. I saw how well John was doing in the mortgage business and asked him if I could do the same. Without hesitation he replied with a resounding, "Yes!" So off I went yet again on another adventure. I could do mortgages from my house in Delaware, but had to go to Orlando to train for a couple of weeks. With a bit of effort and some help from John I passed the test and became a certified mortgage broker. The money was good (if the loan closed) and it was awesome working with and for John. I did well for a couple of years, though I really didn't care much for the business or the stress that went along with it. So I wasn't very sad when the housing bubble burst and the job vaporized. In fact, the timing was good because I couldn't stop thinking about resurrecting the music career on my own terms. I had picked up the guitar again and was beginning to write original songs. I even went to Hit Music Studios in North Carolina to play bass on Michael Daisey's son Derek's CD. I hit it off with the owners and 6 months later went down to record my first solo CD, Dreamdance. What a fantastic experience playing and recording for 4 months. I would drive down for a week every month; it was my baby, and each and every song was written from my heart and my experiences. Producer Jimm Mosher played a major part in the sound while also playing percussion. He took my shell of a song and made it into something interesting. With the release of Dreamdance I was back playing, and this time it was solo acoustic. I started aligning myself with upscale eateries, wine bars and more importantly, wineries. Since 2007 I've recorded and released 2 more CDs; Paradise and Eleven Sundays. The CD that accompanies this book is my fourth.



I was fortunate to be able to fill the need for a Mediterranean-style guitarist here in coastal Delaware. With my Latin take on rock music from Bad Company, The Stones, Chris Isaak, etc., I create the right vibe for wine events. And that helped bring about my connection with Michael David Winery in Lodi, CA. While dining at Flemings Steakhouse in Tampa, my friend John and I ordered the winery's 7 Deadly Zins. It was so good we had another! I noticed the funky poem on the back label and it inspired me to write a song which I took the liberty of sending to them. It turns out that David Phillips is quite the music fan and we quickly became friends. I set up tastings when he was in the area and played while he poured and talked about his wine and the history of the vineyard. That was the start of my Unplugged and Uncorked events, which later included Napa wineries St. Supéry, B.R. Cohn and Italian importers PortoVino (for whom I would eventually work). I gave the events a cool vibe and could customize music on the spot.



My passion for food returned in the late '90s when I used to watch the then-cool Food Network. There was this guy, Mario Batali, making traditional Italian cuisine just like my Grandma Tag used to make. His show, Molto Mario, was so inspiring. I loved the way he cooked around Italy and explained the rich history and cuisine of the specific regions. Three of his foodie/wino friends chatted, tasted the dishes and asked educated questions. To this day, Batali is my idol, and I hope one day to be a mini version of him.

I've always been the cook of the house. My meals included straightforward stuff like spaghetti and meatballs, goulash, roasted chicken, pork and sauerkraut, etc. They were basic, but really good. We began to invite people over for dinner so I could work on my "Cullen-ary" skills, and to this day, that's one of my favorite things to do. I love having some of our area's best chefs and foodies over for dinner. Bonnie and I have a simple but cozy home with a bar that overlooks the kitchen and is perfect for entertaining. It's a great way to get to know people

and put a smile on their faces. While we sip and talk, I make pasta from scratch, drop it into boiling water and marry-in the sauce. I've never had any formal training; I just get in there and make it happen. That's the great thing about the times we live in; recipes and historical tidbits are no more than just a click away.

My passion for wine developed while Bonnie and I experimented with varietals from all over the world. I'd play with recipes that seemed to work with the wines, and to this day we still love dinner and wine for two by the fireplace, with Chill music on Pandora. It's our personal time to catch up after a busy day. Our knowledge of wines expanded as we attended tastings and classes at Lewes' local but very chic wine shop, Teller Wines. Kevin and Catherine Hester pride themselves on finding the best and most interesting wines under \$15. The founding owners, Steve Kogler and Lesley Cowen, were amazing in this regard, and are still good friends. The fun part is, in order to learn, you have to drink - which was no problem for us. Suddenly I had another passion that fit in perfectly with my music and food. So just like everything else, I jumped in headfirst, and entirely by chance found myself in the wine business.

It started one night while we were sitting at the bar at Nage Bistro, a local but upscale Cheers where everybody knows your name. We were enjoying our vino while politely eavesdropping on the couple next to us (we couldn't help it - the place is small!). Paul and Trish Galiato

had just built a house in Rehoboth Beach. They were from Buffalo and we quickly discovered that we had a lot in common, especially wine. One thing led to another, and by the end of the night I had a job selling wine for Paul's company, PortoVino. He and his partner Ernest Ifkowitz from Florence, Italy had started an Italian wine importing business and were looking for someone to represent their line. Their tagline is "Groovy Italian Wines" and it immediately struck a chord with my style. So after a call from Italy the next day, I had the dream job. Ernest seemed very excited to have me on board. My music and my passion for Italian culture seemed to be the perfect way to promote their wines at events and tastings.

Ernest was an Italian wine aficionado from the Princeton, New Jersey area, but he had spent so much time in Italy that he spoke Italian better than some Italians. In fact, he taught English to them! One of the perks of my new job was that we had to go to Italy to meet the wine producers. Oh darn! I was told by many that the trip would be a life-changing experience, and they were right. For 10 days we traveled the country, hitting 2-3 wineries a day. It was enlightening to meet the people who were actually making the wines. Sometimes we stayed at the vineyards; drinking, eating and getting to know one other. Le



Vigne di Alice, in the northern part of the Veneto, was a great example of that hospitality. Cinzia and Francesca were amazing people who made this crazy-good Prosecco. They have a 10-room B&B in a 16th century building right in the middle of the vineyards. They love music and took a special liking to the songs I wrote while we stayed there.

Cinzia liked Bad Company, but she loved The Beatles! On one particularly memorable night they took us to a 3-star Michelin restaurant

where I enjoyed an amazing lamb dinner. It was truly one of the best dining experiences of my life. Of course, at the end the chef brings out his old acoustic guitar for me to play. I don't think it had been played in years, and the rusty strings were an inch off the fretboard (that's music-speak for "OMG, how am I going to play this damn thing!"). On top of that we had been drinking all day so everything was against my making the ideal first impression. But I jumped in as I tend to do, did a quick tuning and sang one of my songs. I got a standing ovation (obviously they had been drinking as much as I had). I topped it off with Norwegian Wood, especially for Cinzia. She knew the words better than I did. It was a fantastic night, and is yet another memory that will live forever.

One of the most emotional moments was when we got lost on the way to Genoa from Emilia-Romagna. Just 4 months earlier my mom had passed away suddenly, and Bonnie had secreted some of her ashes into a makeup case. Mom was 100% Italian and lived the lifestyle to the fullest, but she had never been to Italy. Bonnie and I were trying to find a spot to spread her ashes, but nothing hit us until we became lost in Colli di Luni (hills of the moon). We came across a stone grotto with a statue of the Blessed Mother (who my mom idolized more than God). It was surrounded by flowers and flickering candles. Bonnie and I said at the same time, "That's it!" Ernest stopped the car and we walked back to place her ashes at the feet of the statue. Life seemed to stand still. It was so peaceful with winds whispering through the pines. Of course we bawled like babies for a good part of the drive to Genoa. That moment will join so many others that are etched into my brain forever.

After a long week of traveling, eating, drinking and learning, Bonnie and I ended up in Rome before our trip back to the United States. We relaxed and enjoyed the wonderful city, in spite of the full day of rain. But it didn't matter. We cuddled under our umbrella and walked between the raindrops around the historic city. Cinzia suggested we visit Enoteca Ferrara, a hip wine bar that offered 40 wines by the glass and happy-hour treats of homemade focaccia, cured meats and pickled veggies. We liked it so much that we went back the next night. Armando our bartender was the perfect host, and we tipped him \$20. On the second night he brought out the Barolo and the Brunello for us to sip. I enjoyed working for Ernest and Paul even

though I'm not the salesman type. But it was an opportunity I couldn't resist.

Back here in Millsboro, Delaware, friends of ours bought an old bank building from 1916 with the intention of converting it into a fine-dining Italian ristorante. One night over dinner at our house they told us about the project and asked me to be involved. I was thinking wine specialist and guitar player, but they were thinking organize the build-out from scratch and serve as GM. Well, I'm always up for a challenge, and I had dreamed of having my own Italian restaurant, so (yet again) I jumped in headfirst. Luca Ristorante turned out to be gorgeous with phenomenal food. You would have thought you were in Rome, not central Sussex County. In a nutshell, I left soon after the opening because the owners turned out to be not nearly as nice as we thought they were. I had helped to assemble a great staff, many of whom were friends, and none of whom the owners treated fairly - in fact they were downright rude to them. Everyone jumped ship, and inevitably, the place closed. I'm happy to say that the chef, Joe Churchman and his wife Megan have since opened their own place in downtown Rehoboth Beach. Their cozy and delicious Bramble and Brine is an amazing restaurant and we wish them the best.

During the early stages of Luca I could see that things were destined for failure, so I started thinking of what to do after it crashed and burned. My best friend John Hadaway and I were always brainstorming about opening a business together since we both had been in the wine business. John worked for a distributor, and I still had my PortoVino connection. During our research I stumbled across the Cameron Hughes story. Cameron Hughes had his own label, but not a vineyard. He bought great juice ready to be bottled or already in bottles (called shiners). We had been under the impression that we needed a vineyard to have a label, but apparently that wasn't the case. So the search was on to find a winery with whom we could partner to market our own label. Through my connections we had around 50 samples sent here to Delaware and I arranged three tastings with my restaurant, retail and wine contacts. The bottles were marked only with numbers, and each taster had a scorecard. Everyone tasted. Everyone wrote. Everyone had fun. The process helped me to learn a lot about the area's wine connoisseurs. Interestingly, there was a corked (bad) bottle that several of these people rated highly. Go figure!

When the results were tallied, Drytown Cellars in Amador County, CA topped every scorecard. Frankly, we already knew we liked that one the best, but having confirmation from our peers made our choice even better. Winery manager Jon Campbell and I worked closely on what wines to use and how they would be blended. We started off with Zin, Syrah and Cab for the red blend. I love those grapes by themselves, but the blend was amazing. There were few people, even sommeliers, who weren't wowed by the structure, spice and complexity of the wine. The white ended up being a unique combination of Sav Blanc and 18% unoaked Chardonnay. The grapes are polar opposites, but in this case the Chard gave the Sav Blanc a bit more bottom than



it normally has. Of course I love adding bottom; I'm a bassist, after all!

All the while I was designing the labels for the government to approve. We selected Sonata as the name, and all the labels featured a silhouette of me playing guitar. We simply changed the color for each type of wine. We did end up adding a Rosé constructed from a delicious and dry blend of Petite Syrah and Fiano. It got tagged as the porch pounder! Within one year of our first idea, we had 1 pallet (56 cases) each of the white and the red delivered to our Delaware distributor. Not bad for someone who had never done that before.

Starting in the state where I lived, worked and played was an obvious choice. Everything went smoothly at first, and I was juggling music gigs and events by night and selling my wine by day. It's funny when you are thinking about doing something like this; you expect the support of some and not from others. In some cases, though, it worked out just the opposite. Some of my restaurateur and retail "friends" refused to carry my wines, while others were calling for my products.

Our next step was to expand to Maryland, with North Carolina on the horizon. That's where my upper management connection at Harris Teeter grocery stores lived and worked. We met Matt Adams on a cruise that we had won from our local Harris Teeter store and he was able to place my Italian wine in the Washington, DC store he managed before he moved back to North Carolina. John and I hoped that we would eventually be placed in all 200 Harris Teeter stores. It would have boosted the popularity of the brand while sustaining a nice cash flow to fuel our expansion. I even decided to stop playing gigs entirely in order to focus on the wine biz. I made connections all over the country and was featured in several magazines, online blogs and websites. There I was: Bad Company to wine company. Things started to get hectic, and I wasn't home very much. We added Florida to the growing list of states that carried Sonata, and I embarked on one seemingly endless promotion that started in North Carolina, went down to Florida, back again to North Carolina, then to Chicago by air for an event with Jess Altieri (Wine Channel TV) to promote Lollapalooza, and then a private event at Billy Dec's place, Rokit Bar & Grill. Then back home for a bit. Then off again to California starting in San Francisco and ending in Palm Springs for a Desert Grill event. With 2 days of relaxing in Palm Springs, I had one last stop in St. Louis to open up for Foreigner at a corporate event in front of 2,500 people at the Orpheum Theater. And they were all drinking my wine!

Those were the highlights. The lowlights? I was never home and was rapidly running out of money. I found out the hard way that the distributors are the key to success in this business. They make 3 times the money you do without having to do any of the work. If they don't back you or you don't have the money to grease some palms, you are screwed. I should have listened to David (Michael David Winery) when he told me that the way to make a million in the wine business is to start with three.

If I could rewind, I would have stayed the course locally and built out from the center. I'm not sorry I attempted this project, though, because I made great connections with people all over the world who are still intertwined with this new chapter of my life.

So now I'm definitely in good company, and I've got the best of all worlds. My cooking classes have been well received by individuals and corporations. I cook, pour and play for any number of guests. I've built a following for my jazzy mood music, and it has landed me cool gigs all over the region. I even get to play wedding ceremonies on the beach! As an added bonus, I'm a co-owner of Eating Rehoboth walking food tours where I get to lead foodies on a culinary outing as they taste and sip their way through our resort towns.

We have a couple of quotes around here, and I've used one of them on these pages already. The first is, "This doesn't suck," and the second is, "Who has more fun than we do?" My answers? No, this certainly doesn't, and, nobody does.





Chapter 2: Recipes

These are some of my favorite recipes that came either from my mom Nancy, Grandma Tag or that I created myself. Each one is Italian and inspired by my upbringing and the people who influenced my life.

Don't worry if you are off a bit on the measurements. But be sure to taste as you go, and season to your liking. My challenge was getting the recipes out of my head and onto paper. Just like music, I cook by feel and creative inspiration. My friend Reas says, "I'm really not sure what our purpose is in life, but one thing we can do is to make sure we pass on to our family and friends what we were passionately taught by our family and friends." Grandma Tag left this life in 1973, but through this book I feel that I've done my part to keep her traditions and recipes alive.

Enjoy!



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Cucumber Salad



1 cucumber, sliced thin
2 radishes, sliced thin
½ red onion, sliced thin
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
salt and pepper

Add all ingredients to a bowl and mix.



Mom Nancy's Hot Pepper Salad



2 cups fresh Heirloom tomatoes,
chopped into bite-size pieces
mix of hot peppers (jalapeño, serrano, poblano etc.), cut into
bite-size pieces
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
salt and pepper
basil leaves, torn
2 cloves garlic, sliced thin

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Refrigerate for a couple hours. It gets even better and spicier in the days to come. Great to bring to picnics and parties!



Cappuccio in Insalata



Salad:

½ head cabbage, sliced
½ pound pancetta, diced and cooked until crispy

Vinaigrette:

1 shallot, diced
½ cup red wine vinegar
1 ½ cups olive oil
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Combine vinaigrette ingredients and add to cabbage. Top with pancetta and enjoy!



Orange Salad for the Holidays



4 oranges, sliced and then cut into half moons
1 fennel bulb, sliced thin (save fronds for garnish)
Kalamata olives, pitted
extra-virgin olive oil
cracked black pepper

In a serving bowl, mix oranges, fennel and olives. Hit with olive oil and then cracked pepper. Get your hands in and mix the salad. It is now ready to serve. Garnish with fennel fronds.



Roasted Fennel and Speck Insalata



1 fennel bulb
¼ pound speck or smoked pancetta
extra-virgin olive oil
garlic, sliced thin
1 shallot, chopped
2 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon stoneground mustard
salt and pepper
spring mix or arugula
2 organic eggs
Pecorino Romano cheese

Cut fennel and speck into bite-size pieces and toss with olive oil and sliced garlic. Put on a cookie sheet and roast in a 350° oven for approximately 20 minutes. In the meantime, make the vinaigrette. Chop shallot finely and add to a bowl with vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper while whisking in a quarter cup of olive oil. Pour over the spring mix and set aside. In olive oil, fry eggs to your liking. To assemble, layer dressed spring mix, then fennel and speck. Place fried egg on top and microplane Pecorino Romano over all. Serve to your sweetie with a smile.



Antipasto Salad With White Wine Balsamic Vinaigrette



Salad:

- 1 head of romaine lettuce, chopped
- 1 fennel bulb, sliced thin
- 4 radishes, sliced thin
- 1 cucumber, sliced thin
- 1 red onion, halved and sliced thin
- 1 cup canned garbanzo beans, rinsed
- 1 cup assorted brine-cured olives
- ½ pound cherry tomatoes, halved
- ⅓ pound sopressata (salami), sliced thin
- ⅓ pound sharp provolone, sliced thin

Dressing:

- ¼ cup white balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon stoneground mustard
- dash of salt and pepper

Mix all ingredients and pour over salad a little at a time making sure not to overdress. Vinegar and olive oil is a 2 to 1 mixture.



Roasted Artichoke (Mom's Late-Night Snack)



2 artichokes, whole
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 cloves garlic, chopped
sea salt
lemon juice
pepper

Preheat oven to 425°. Cut 1-2 inches off the tops of the artichokes along with the stem of each creating a flat base. Use your fingers to spread the leaves open a little. Drizzle about one-third of the olive oil into the artichoke and stuff three quarters of chopped garlic in the center of each. Sprinkle salt and squeeze lemon over the top. Wrap tightly in heavy-duty aluminum foil and put into the oven. Bake for 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the size of the artichoke. Remove the artichoke from the oven and unwrap from the foil.

Dip: In a small dipping bowl combine remaining olive oil and chopped garlic. Microwave for 10 seconds to infuse oil. Add salt and pepper and stir. Dip is ready!

To eat: Start with the outer leaves that have meat on them and dredge through the salty oil, scraping the meaty edges of the leaves with your teeth. (There is less meat on the outer leaves.) Keep pulling off leaves to eat until you reach the heart. Use a spoon to scrape the hair off, exposing the meaty bottom. Cut up the bottom and dip in the oil. Yummy!



Tuscan Bean Crostini



one baguette, sliced ¼ inch thick
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
salt and pepper

Topping:

1 can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
fresh rosemary
squeeze of lemon
3 cloves garlic, roasted
salt and pepper

Slice baguette and brush both sides with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Bake in a 350° oven until golden, turning once. Put all topping ingredients in a food processor or muddle in a bowl. Ingredient measurements can vary. Always taste to see what you need. Spread topping on baked baguette slices and enjoy.



Roasted Butternut Squash Soup



- 1 large butternut squash, roasted
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to rub on squash
- salt and pepper
- 1 white or yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves roasted garlic, chopped
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ cup white wine
- 4 cups chicken broth (have more on hand)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- spices to taste
- ¼ pound pancetta, diced
- 1 cup leeks, diced

Cut butternut squash in half. Rub with olive oil, salt and pepper. Place cut-side down on a cookie sheet and put in a 350° oven for about 45 minutes or until soft. In a soup pot, heat olive oil and add onion. Cook until soft and then add garlic and nutmeg. Sauté until fragrant. Add wine and pour in the chicken broth. Bring to a boil and then simmer. Scrape the inside of the butternut squash into the pot and stir until combined nicely. Carefully pureé the entire mixture in a blender in multiple batches or use a handheld immersion blender. Add cream and your favorite spices while blending. If it is too thick add chicken stock and leave on low heat. In a sauté pan render pancetta until crispy and then add the leeks. Ladle soup into bowls and top with bacon and leeks and serve.

Pasta Fagioli



- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup speck or pancetta, chopped
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 cup escarole or spinach, chopped
- 1 large carrot, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
- 1 quart vegetable or chicken broth
- 2 (14 ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed
- 1 cup small pasta, ditalini
- ⅓ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- salt and pepper
- Parmesan cheese
- red pepper flakes

Heat the oil in a large, heavy pot. Sauté speck until crispy, then add onion, escarole, carrot and celery. Sauté vegetables until soft. Add the garlic and cook another minute. Add tomato paste and let everything get happy. Pour in the broth and beans and cook for 2 hours. When you are getting closer to serving, boil water and add ditalini. Cook until the pasta is al dente. Remove pasta directly from water with a slotted spoon and add to soup. Let it get all sexy (15 minutes). Serve in bowls topped with a drizzle of olive oil, shaved Parmesan cheese and a sprinkling of chopped parsley and red pepper flakes.



Grandma Tag's Fast Sauce



extra-virgin olive oil
1 clove garlic, chopped
chili flakes
1 can whole San Marzano tomatoes
1 pound of pasta, such as bucatini
fresh oregano
Pecorino cheese

Bring a pot of water to boil. Heat a large sauté pan on medium-high and coat bottom with olive oil. Add chopped garlic and sauté for 5 minutes. While garlic infuses the oil, add a pinch of chili flakes, to your taste, of course. Over the pan, squeeze/crush whole tomatoes with your hand and then pour-in the remaining juice. Give it a good stir and simmer. Drop one-half of the box of bucatini into boiling water and cook until al dente. Sneak some fresh oregano into the sauce. Take the pasta directly from the water to the pan and mix well. To serve, put into a pasta bowl and hit with a good Pecorino cheese.



Italian Goulash



¼ pound speck, diced into ¼ inch pieces
extra-virgin olive oil
1 pound fingerling potatoes (white, purple, red),
diced into ½ inch pieces
salt and pepper
1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
½ pound asparagus, tough ends trimmed and cut
into 1-inch segments
2 fried eggs
flat leaf parsley
sprinkle of Romano cheese
Italian bread

Heat a 12-inch sauté pan over medium heat. Fry the speck in a bit of olive oil, turning it frequently so that it browns and crisps on all sides, about 10 minutes. Remove speck with a slotted spoon but leave the heat on and the renderings in the pan. Add the potatoes and don't move them for a couple minutes. Use this time to season them well with salt and pepper. Once they have gotten a little brown underneath, begin flipping and turning them, then let them cook again for a few minutes. When the potatoes are three-quarters crisped and browned, about 15 minutes, add the onion. Cook for an additional 5 minutes. Add the asparagus. Cover the pan and cook for 5 to 8 minutes, or until crisp. Remove the lid. Return the speck to the pan for another minute to reheat. Taste for seasoning and adjust if needed. Fry the eggs in olive oil, sunny-side up and place them over the hash and hit with parsley and cheese. Serve immediately with some lightly toasted, crusty Italian bread.



Pasta Carbonara



- ½ pound pancetta, cubed
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon shallot, minced
- freshly ground black pepper
- 1 pound fresh bucatini, cooked al dente
- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano, freshly grated
- 2 large egg yolks (for plating)
- 1 tablespoon fresh Italian parsley, finely chopped

In a large sauté pan, over medium heat, cook the pancetta until browned, about 6 minutes. Remove from the pan and set aside. Add the garlic and shallots and season with black pepper. Add the pancetta and pasta back to the pan and sauté for 1 minute. Whisk 4 eggs with one-third cup of cheese. Remove the pan from the heat and add the egg mixture, mixing quickly until the pasta thickens. Mound into two serving bowls and add yolk on top. Sprinkle with additional cheese and parsley.



Lamb Bolognese With Peas Over Pappardelle



4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 pound ground lamb
kosher salt
2 medium carrots, roughly chopped
1 stalk celery, roughly chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 small red onion, roughly chopped
2 cups dry red wine
1 (12 ounce) can San Marzano tomatoes, chopped
3 sprigs fresh oregano
2 cups fresh peas
1 pound pappardelle pasta
1/3 cup Romano cheese, shaved
1 cup fresh mint leaves, picked and torn

Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the lamb with a liberal pinch of salt and cook until brown, about 4 minutes. Meanwhile, combine the carrots, celery, garlic and onions in a food processor and pulse to finely chop. With a slotted spoon, remove the browned lamb from the pan and set aside. Add the vegetables to the pan with a large pinch of salt and sweat until translucent and aromatic, 3 to 4 minutes. Deglaze the pan with the red wine, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to get all the goodies into the sauce. Bring to a simmer and cook until reduced by about half. Add the tomatoes and oregano and simmer for 10 minutes. Put the lamb back into the pan and add peas. Let simmer 20 to 30 minutes longer. While the sauce is simmering, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. When you have 10 minutes left for the sauce, drop the pasta into the boiling water and give it a stir so it doesn't stick. When the pasta is cooked al dente, remove and add pasta to the sauce to coat the noodles. If needed, add a ladle of pasta water. Add Romano, mint, 2 tablespoons of olive oil and continue to mix. Remove from the heat and serve immediately with shaved Romano on top.

Angel Hair Pasta With Clam Sauce



½ pound pancetta
2 (6.5 ounce) cans chopped clams
3 cloves garlic, minced
extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup Pinot Grigio
angel hair nests
1 tablespoon lemon zest
fresh parsley
Parmesan cheese

Bring a pot of water to boil. This dish takes almost as long as it takes to cook the pasta. In a sauté pan, add pancetta and cook. When it turns a little brown on the edges pour the clams and juice directly into the pan. Cook until liquid is evaporated. Add garlic and a little olive oil and sauté for a few minutes and then the add wine. In the meantime, drop angel hair nests in water and cook as directed. Take the pasta right from the water and add to the pan. Mix while adding lemon zest, chopped parsley and a little bit more olive oil. If it is too dry, add a little pasta water. Plate and hit with Parmesan cheese and additional parsley, if you like.



Mom Nancy's Chicken Cacciatori



- 1 pound rigatoni
- extra-virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper
- 3 boneless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 1 red onion, diced
- 6 baby bella mushrooms, diced
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 3 ounces tomato paste
- 1 (28 ounce) can San Marzano crushed tomatoes
- 10 whole Kalamata olives, pitted
- 3 ounces chicken stock
- fresh Italian parsley
- chunk of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Start by putting water on for the pasta. When water is boiling add pasta to water with generous amounts of salt and cook to al dente. In a large sauté pan on medium-high heat add 2 tablespoons of olive oil. In the meantime, salt and pepper the chicken pieces and add to hot pan. Brown on all sides (15 minutes) then add peppers, onions, mushrooms and garlic. Sauté for 10 minutes and then add tomato paste. Stir and add crushed tomatoes. Mix well and let simmer for a few minutes. Add olives. Use chicken stock to thin sauce if needed. Add fresh parsley to sauce before taking pasta directly from pot to pan and simmer for 10 minutes. Serve with a hit of parsley and copious amounts of freshly grated cheese di Parma!



Motley Mushroom Ragout



- 1 pound mixed, fresh wild mushrooms (such as black trumpets, fairy rings, and ceps)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter or olive oil
- 2 shallots, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and minced
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mushroom stock
- 1 teaspoon of demi glace (optional)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cream
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

Trim mushrooms, reserving stems for another use. Slice large caps into fairly even pieces. Leave smaller caps intact. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add shallots and garlic and cook until tender, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes. Add mushroom caps and cook until they release their liquid. Add mushroom stock and cook for about 5 more minutes. Stir-in demi-glace (if using) and cream and cook for another 5 minutes. Add thyme and parsley, then season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve with gnocchetti or as an accompaniment to roasted meat.



Pork Butt Ragout



1/3 pound pancetta, diced
2 pounds boneless pork butt or country ribs,
cut into 1/4-inch pieces
4 tablespoons olive oil
1 large carrot, diced
1 stalk celery with leaves, diced
1/2 onion, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 cup Sangiovese wine
1 (28 ounce) can diced tomatoes
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 pound pasta such as rigatoni
Parmesan cheese
fresh Italian parsley

In a dutch oven on medium-high heat, add pancetta and render until crispy. Next, add a little olive oil and then pork and brown on all sides, 4 to 6 minutes. Remove the meat from the pan and add carrots, celery, onions and garlic. Sauté vegetables until softened, 5 minutes or so. Then add wine and scrape the bits off the bottom of the pan. Wait a few minutes, then add tomatoes, bay leaves and give it some love. Add meat back to the pan, along with the thyme. Cover and simmer for a couple of hours, the longer the better. If it is too thick, add some beef or chicken stock. Cook pasta of choice al dente and take right from pasta pot to the dutch oven. Simmer for a few more minutes and plate it with a nice hit of Parmesan cheese and parsley. If you have not already, pour yourself and your partner a glass of Old World Sangiovese. My choice is Conti di San Bonifacio Montereio.



Filthy Risotto



4 cups chicken broth
4 ounces speck or pancetta, chopped
2 Italian sausages
2 boneless pork chops, cut into ½-inch pieces
1 shallot, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
4 ounces baby bella mushrooms, coarsely chopped
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground
2 cups arborio rice or medium-grain white rice, uncooked
½ cup dry white wine
1 tablespoon thyme, chopped
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup Parmesan cheese, freshly ground
Italian parsley, chopped

In a medium saucepan, bring the broth to a simmer. Cover and keep warm over low heat. In a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat, sauté the speck, sausages and pork until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Remove the meat from the pan and set aside. Add shallot, garlic and mushrooms and cook until tender for about 8 minutes, scraping the browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Add salt and pepper. Add the rice and stir to coat. Add the wine and simmer until the wine has almost completely evaporated, about 1 minute. Add one-half cup of simmering broth and stir until almost completely absorbed, about 2 minutes. Continue cooking the rice, adding the broth one-half cup at a time. Stir constantly and allow each addition of broth to absorb before adding the next. Cook until the rice is tender but still firm to the bite and the mixture is creamy, about 25 to 30 minutes. Add thyme and then add the meat back into the pan for 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in three quarters of the Parmesan cheese. Transfer the risotto to a serving bowl. Sprinkle with the parsley and remaining Parmesan cheese and serve immediately.



Garlic Shrimp and Polenta Cakes



1 cup polenta
1 pound shrimp (10-16 count shelled and deveined)
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 shallot, minced
4 cloves of garlic, minced
2 tablespoons white wine
4 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup panko breadcrumbs
4 cloves garlic, minced
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
2 teaspoons lemon zest
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Make polenta as directed. Pour into ramekins and refrigerate earlier in the day or the day before. In a gallon plastic bag add shrimp, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, shallot, garlic, wine and 2 tablespoons of fresh chopped parsley. Refrigerate for at least an hour. Heat oven to 350°. Rub olive oil in an oval baking dish. Add shrimp to the dish in one layer. In a bowl, mix breadcrumbs, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, lemon zest, 2 tablespoons of fresh chopped parsley, salt and pepper. Then layer over the top of the shrimp and put in the oven for 15 minutes or until the shrimp goes from opaque to white. Do not overcook. In a sauté pan on medium high, add 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Remove polenta from ramekins and place the disks in the pan and cook 4 minutes on each side until slightly browned. (You can use the grill or a grill pan also.) Place polenta on a plate and lay the shrimp carefully on top.



Chicken Saltimbocca



- 10 chicken tenderloins
- salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup fennel, diced
- 1 cup carrots, diced
- 1 cup red onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- handful fresh sage, chopped
- 1/3 pound prosciutto, chopped
- 1 tablespoon corn starch
- 1 cup chicken stock

In a large sauté pan add 3 tablespoons of olive oil on medium-high heat. Season chicken with salt and pepper and place in pan and brown, 7 to 8 minutes on each side. Remove chicken and add fennel, carrots, onion and garlic. Sauté on medium heat about 15 minutes or until softened. Add sage and prosciutto. Continue to sauté for 5 minutes. Whisk corn starch into 1 cup of chicken broth and stir in slowly.

I serve a nice pappardelle pasta with it. Boil water and follow directions on the box.



Chicken Milanese With Red Wine Vinaigrette



- 3 (5 ounces) chicken cutlets ($\frac{1}{3}$ -inch thickness)
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon stone ground mustard
- salt and pepper
- 12 ounces spring mix or arugula
- $\frac{1}{2}$ red onion, sliced thin
- grape tomatoes
- panko breadcrumbs
- chunk of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Place chicken and buttermilk in a plastic bag and put in the refrigerator for 2 hours. Make vinaigrette by whisking together oil, vinegar and mustard in a small bowl. Add salt and pepper to taste. In a larger bowl, mix together salad greens, onions and tomatoes. Pour vinaigrette over the top. Set aside. Heat a frying pan on medium-high heat and add olive oil. On a flat plate put a mixture of panko and grated cheese. Dredge chicken in panko, coating both sides evenly. When oil is hot, place chicken in pan and cook for 4 to 5 minutes on each side or until cooked and browned. Place chicken on a plate. Add salad to plate either stacking on top or serving alongside. Shave some cheese all around. Serve with Italian bread and a glass of Vernaccia.



Grilled Prosciutto-Wrapped Scallops With Creamy Polenta



Scallops:

6 dry pack U6 scallops
¼ pound prosciutto, sliced thin
seafood seasoning such as Emerils or Old Bay
salt and pepper
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
handful of parsley, freshly chopped

Polenta:

3 cups chicken stock
1 cup polenta
½ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano

Bring stock up to a rolling boil and slowly whisk-in polenta, stirring all the while. Turn down heat to low. If it gets too thick add more stock and stir. Then wrap the scallops with prosciutto, using a toothpick to hold in place. Season with seafood seasoning, salt and pepper. In a sauté pan add olive oil on high heat. Cook scallops 3 to 4 minutes on each side or until done (when they become clear to white in color). In the meantime, add cheese and parsley to the polenta and stir. Plate by spooning the polenta on the bottom and gently placing the scallops on top.



Salsiccia al Barbera



6 Italian sausages
one bottle Barbera wine
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 red onion, halved and sliced
8 baby bella mushrooms, sliced
2 cloves fresh garlic
fresh sage, chopped
polenta, prepared as per directions on package
chicken stock
½ cup Parmesan cheese

Cut sausage into chunks and put into a container. Cover with Barbera wine and marinate for at least 3 hours, or for best flavor, overnight. In a large pan on medium-high heat, add olive oil, sliced red onion, mushrooms and garlic. Remove sausage from the marinade and place in the pan. Cook until brown. Sprinkle with chopped sage and serve on top of cooked polenta.



One-Pan Frittata



extra-virgin olive oil
fresh rosemary, minced
½ pound new potatoes, sliced thin
1 ½ pound pancetta, sliced and cubed
Italian sausage
one bunch asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 clove garlic, chopped
6 chopped green onions (separate white bulb from green stalks)
6 eggs
¼ cup half-and-half
4 ounces Fontina cheese, grated
4 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated

In a bowl mix 1 tablespoon each of oil, and rosemary with potatoes and set aside. Heat an 8-inch sauté pan on medium-high heat and add 1 tablespoon of oil, pancetta, sausage and asparagus. Sauté 12-15 minutes until asparagus softens and pancetta and sausage brown. Add garlic and green onions (white bulbs) for 5 more minutes. Put in a bowl and set aside. In the same pan, add potatoes and cook until soft and brown, 20 minutes. Heat the oven to 325°. In the meantime, whip the eggs and the half-and-half together by hand or with a mixer. When the potatoes are done, pour egg mixture over the top. Distribute pancetta, sausage and asparagus evenly and sprinkle half of the cheese and green onions (green stalks) on top. Put in the oven for 20 minutes. Then add the remaining cheese and cook for 10 more minutes. Cut into 4 slices, plate and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

