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How The Personal Chef To TRH Prince And Princess Of Wales Built Her Royal Career



Carolyn Robb (Photo Courtesy of The Royal Touch)

In my line of work, I'm introduced to hundreds of fascinating creatives, artists and performers each year who are thriving in creative careers they adore. I love learning about the trajectory of their lives, and how they often took a tiny kernel of an idea or a creative impulse from childhood and helped it grow and flourish. I love too sharing their keen insights about how others can honor their visions of career bliss to achieve tremendous success (because so many skeptics out there tell us we can't).

Towards that end, I was thrilled to catch up with Carolyn Robb, Personal Chef to TRH Prince and Princess of Wales, Prince William and Prince Harry for 10 years. Carolyn's new cookbook *The Royal Touch: Simply Stunning Home Cooking From A Royal Chef* shares special, easy-to-prepare recipes and intriguing anecdotes from her time with members of Britain's Royal Family.

I asked Carolyn to share her personal story about how she was able to turn her love of food and cooking into a successful royal career.

Kathy Caprino: Carolyn, how did you become a chef? Were cooking/baking/designing recipes and food a passion of yours as a child?

Carolyn Robb: As soon as I could grasp a wooden spoon in my little hand, I was at my mother's side in the kitchen at every opportunity. She was a brilliant cook, and a busy one, as a mother of five. My father had

amazingly green fingers and we had wonderful array of fresh produce in the garden. Nothing ever went to waste; my mother always had some sort of jam, marmalade, conserve, jelly, pickle, chutney, cordial or fruit curd underway. I was given free reign of the kitchen when I was a child so I had ample opportunity to experiment. The results were often far from perfect, and my mother was wonderfully honest in her appraisal of my efforts! For this, I will always be grateful.

After leaving school I spent time at University studying languages as my father wanted us all to have a university education. I then travelled to Switzerland to experience a Swiss hotel kitchen — after which I came to the U.K. and did my Diploma in Cordon Bleu cookery which set me up for an unexpectedly fascinating career as a chef.

Caprino: Did your family and other authority figures encourage this path for you?

Robb: My parents were wonderful and encouraged all of us to follow our dreams. From a young age I had the idea in my head of “cooking for the Queen one day.” I still can’t quite believe I did just that! The high school I attended was very academic and the idea of becoming a chef was laughable. It was considered to be a job for those who “couldn’t do much else.” How wrong they were! Being a royal chef has been totally fantastic — in comparison with the rather grey lives of my classmates who became lawyers and accountants. It was a huge gift to be given the confidence to go my own way; I am indebted to my amazing family for their incredible support.

Caprino: What was your professional trajectory, and how did you rise to the top chef position in the U.K.?

Robb: Whilst I was at cookery school I was invited to Kensington Palace for an interview with TRH The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester for the position of their chef. I got the job and spent a very happy two years cooking for them. Following on from this I was ecstatic to be offered a position as a chef to TRH The Prince and Princess of Wales, and at 23 I joined their household, where I remained for 11 years.

Caprino: Did you have any special mentors or sponsors who helped you along the way?

Robb: Prince Charles is one of the most incredible mentors anyone could have! His passion for organics was hugely inspiring and I learnt so much from him. I will always appreciate the in-depth understanding and knowledge that HRH passed on to me. It has had a huge influence on the way that I cook and work. I have also worked alongside some of the “great masters of the kitchen,” to name a few; Raymond Blanc, The Roux brothers, Roger Verge in Provence and Gualtiero Marchesi in Italy.

Caprino: What important lessons and insights did you learn, as chef to the Royal Family?

Robb: As the chef to a family who are as busy and hard-working as our Royal Family, and who are constantly on the move, it was vital to be organized, flexible and be prepared for all eventualities. I loved that aspect of the work, as by nature I am quite organized. I quickly learnt that it is the attention to detail in all that we do that sets us apart.

It is important to love the work that you do because even jobs that might be perceived as “glamorous” (such as a royal chef) are very hard work and require significant dedication; kitchens are seldom glamorous.

Caprino: What lights you up about the work you do, specifically?

Robb: Coming from my heart I would say that I just love feeding good food to people. Taking a few simple ingredients and transforming them into something delicious that brings a smile to someone’s face is magical.

However, thinking about the work that I do in terms of business; I love the versatility of the food industry. I have created a brand, “The Royal Touch” with business partner William Schwartz, who is based in Los Angeles. It was launched at a wonderful event at the British Embassy. The brand showcases the infectious British spirit that is loved by so many, with added touches of whimsicality and of course royalty. I enjoy the process of creating, licensing and promoting beautiful lifestyle and kitchen products which reflect my diverse experience both in and out of the kitchen.

With the ever increasing popularity of Britain’s Royal family and the associated global media coverage, as well as so many premium British brands enjoying global success (Burberry, Bentley etc.), it seems that the timing is good for the emergence of The Royal Touch. We are exploring creating a very British boutique retail outlet with a wonderful I and are working on designing some very special product ranges; kitchen and dining-ware and hand crafted specialty food products. Whilst there are many “celebrity chefs,” my hope is that my “royal credentials” will set me apart and that I can bring something very special to the market place.

Caprino: What are your compelling visions for your career in the future?

Robb: I will work hard to continue to grow “The Royal Touch” brand. I would also like to do more work on opening the eyes of children to what “real food” is, through simple cooking classes. They are easily inspired, and I love that their new found knowledge regularly influences and improves the whole family’s eating habits.

Caprino: What advice can you share for the millions of budding creatives, artists and artisans in the world who long to build exciting, rewarding and impactful careers leveraging their passions and creativity?

Robb: Follow your dreams and be led by your creative instincts, but above all never be afraid of hard work and never lose your hunger for new knowledge and new experiences. For me, attending cookery school was the beginning of a very long and intriguing culinary journey that I am still travelling — and one where the more I learn the more I want to learn and the more I learn, the more I realize how much there still is to learn!

I always encourage people who are passionate about their craft to share their knowledge; in sharing my knowledge with others, I always also learn something new and am left feeling invigorated and inspired.

Caprino: Any last words?

Robb: We all lead very busy lives. Being a single, working mum to my two beautiful little girls, I understand how it feels to never quite have enough hours in the day to get everything done. However, we always sit down together for home-cooked meal at the end of the day; often it is very simple and the girls have helped to prepare it, but this is such precious time together and I would urge every family to do the same. I still vividly remember sitting down with my parents every evening to one of my mother’s delicious home cooked meals.

We also find time every day for some exercise. Even during the cold, dark, English winter months we still need to spend time outside in the fresh air, even if this is only means a few minutes on the swings on the way home from school or a quick dog walk. I believe that good food and regular exercise keep us going in our frenetic, “technology-led” 21st century lives.

For more information, visit www.theroyaltouch.com.