

Jeff Around Town – March 4, 2025

Jeff: Miranda McQuillan, it's fair to say that you love cheese, yes?

Miranda: I do, for a very long time now.

Jeff: You're a certified cheese professional through the American Cheese Society, one of only 1,300 in the U.S. You've studied in France, and we're in the area where Gruyere is made.

Miranda: That is right, that is right. You know, I've always been a cheese lover. When you're little, you know, you go to events and there's a cheese platter and you're excited. But around here, it kind of looked a little different than the cheeses that I've had the luxury to work with over my career. But my cheese love started when I lived in France in college. I lived in Besançon, which is a sister city to UNL. So, they send people to Besançon yearly. It's probably, there's probably hundreds, I know there's hundreds of us, and some alumni stuff that goes on. But I lived there in 1997, and I was there for about seven months. And that is where Gruyere de Comte, Gruyere, Raquette, Bachelorette Mondeur, all these wonderful Alpine cheeses are made. And when I came home, I graduated college and I had a buddy who, he, they opened a Wild Oats here. So, before there was a Whole Foods.

Jeff: Oh, I remember Wild Oats, yeah.

Miranda: I was the first cheese monger in Omaha running like a full cheese counter.

Jeff: Really? This is where Natural Grocers is on 78th and Dodge.

Miranda: Exactly, exactly. And they, he said, you're the only one I know that speaks French or even knows anything about it. You want to run a cheese counter? And I said, oh my God, I do. I was doing marketing in a tedious environment and I was like, get me out of here. And so yeah, when they opened, I started there and I learned from a, there was a gal named Dawn Russo. She was from New York, you know, and she would say Le Fougerou.

Jeff: Le Fougerou, what is Le Fougerou?

Miranda: It's a cheese. And you and I would say Le Fougerou.

Jeff: Le Fougerou.

Miranda: Yeah, so when I was young, I was like, and I had just gotten back from France, you know, so I thought I was real, which I was, I was real Frenchy, but she knew so much about cheese. She was just a dynamo. And I was lucky to have the tutelage and the training from people that I did. So, then I ended up through that, I lived in Chicago and Las Vegas doing marketing for that same store.

Jeff: Okay.

Miranda: And I'll tell you at that time, nobody knew anything about cheese. So I ended up doing a lot of cheese there too. And then I came home and there was a, you know, cheese counters at the bakers in town. So worked for them for 10 years and that's where I got my certification, traveled, fell in love with cheese. You know, it's wonderful.

Jeff: So, you could be anywhere though in the world doing this with your credentials.

Miranda: Absolutely.

Jeff: And yet you are here in Omaha and you are, you consider yourself a creative because creativity comes out in all kinds of forms and it comes out in cheese. You're also an artist, but talk a little bit about why Omaha is like a great place for a creative who does, who happens to create in cheese.

Miranda: Absolutely. You know, I always said that we were a big, small town for a long time and we're kind of transitioning to a bit of a small, big city and it's growing and changing and there's so much food life here. The foodie scene is wonderful. And I'm from here, born and raised my whole life other than when I lived in the three places I mentioned. And so, you bring that stuff back, all the things you've learned, things happening in other places. And so, I was lucky to walk on and do the things I did in cheese for Kroger and build my little business because of that people took interest in me and my way of selling cheese. So, Omaha has become a wonderful tapestry to partner with people. And what we do is we create perfectly paired bites. So, I pair with music. There's a little organization called Sound Bites that we have an event coming up with.

Jeff: Yep. Yep.

Miranda: We just did recently an event with Alliance Francaise. So, some specific groups like that. We did speakeasy series at the Joslyn Castle for five years, pairing whiskeys and perfectly paired cocktails, aperitifs, you know, martinis, anything you can imagine.

Jeff: So, when you're doing that, does something happen like they come to you and they say, hey, we have this event. And does that sort of force you to create, to work in a new way that you hadn't considered before?

Miranda: Yeah. Well, yeah, everything. Like how does the crescendo of music taste or feel in your mouth? What I love about, we always talk about multi-sensory experiences. So, like when you, the rise and fall of something or like the wine, when you're tasting terroir, you know, when you know where it's from. It's bringing those components in to that experience as well, you know. And my partner is a creative as well, my cheese partner. And she brings a lot to the table in that way too. She's a mathematician, you know, and is well an artist.

Jeff: Interesting mashup.

Miranda: I know, you bring those things, you know. You bring all the things that you love and you find what inspires you. And I always say that cheese is just one of our mediums. It's just something that we work in.

Jeff: Love it, Miranda.

Miranda: It brings us joy.

Jeff: Miranda, thanks so much. It's all about joy and creativity.

Miranda: It is. And eating cheese.

Jeff: And eating cheese.

Miranda: Check this out.

Jeff: How can folks find you?

Miranda: We are on Facebook. You can reach out to us that way. We're on Instagram. And then, you know.

Jeff: And again, it's called?

Miranda: Miranda's Cheese Love.

Jeff: Okay.

Miranda: And we'd love to become cheese friends. That's what we always say.

Jeff: Cheese friends.

Miranda: At the end of every event. Now we're all cheese friends.

Jeff: We're cheese friends.

Miranda: So, reach out and let us know what you're thinking.

Jeff: Thanks. Thanks, Miranda. I appreciate it. That's another Jeff Around Town.