



Chefs share many common traits. One of their similarities is often who they learned their love of cooking from. In many cases, it's their mothers or grandmothers. Connie Kim, owner and chef at Kalbee Restaurant in Pembroke, VA is no exception.

However, there was a slightly different twist in her education. Kim is Korean and when she reached the age when a female child would have traditionally been taught the art of cooking, her country was beginning to see a shift in cultural norms.

Previously, only male children received a higher education and the female children were taught the domestic arts, "to take care of the men," according to Kim. Kim's family, however, could afford to keep her in school. She achieved an education in drama.

Kim was never physically shown how to cook by her mother or grandmother. What she took from them was an extensive memory of tastes. Through eating their dishes, she learned intimately how the taste of fresh, high quality ingredients, combined with the complimentary herbs and spices brought happiness and health to those who dined. It was through this extensive taste repertoire that Kim began to develop her extensive and highly impressive catalog of traditional Korean dishes.

Kim explained how many of herbs used in other cultures foods are used for medicinal purposes in Korea and not as food items. Korean cuisine makes extensive use of garlic, ginger, sesame, onions and many types of peppers. Enhancing and adapting, Kim, conversely, does use many herbs such as mint, chives, cilantro and parsley. Many of these she grows herself in her gardens.

“Good food will make a laughing heart,” states Connie Kim, owner and chef at Kalbee restaurant

Kim makes her own soy sauce, with no preservatives added such as in the commercial types. "It takes a minimum of one year to make soy sauce and longer is even better," emphasized Kim. Bean paste is produced as a result of the soy making process. Nothing is wasted. She also makes her own vinegars with the emphasis again on letting time enhance quality. "Young vinegar is lighter and the older is darker and more flavorful," according to Kim.

It was explained how in Korea, there are not salt or pepper shakers on the table as when the food leaves the kitchen, it is fully seasoned. Additionally, chopsticks are used because everything that may need to be cut leaves the kitchen already cut into eating sizes.

Kim stressed that she could buy less expensive ingredients to make a greater profit but that she would know the difference this would make and she would be unhappy with the result. "I won't drop my standards," stressed Kim. She also stressed how her customers would be unhappy. Kim stated, "Good food will make a laughing heart." It is quite clear that Kim wants her guests at Kalbee to be happy.

Editor's Note: Kalbee Restaurant is a small, family owned local establishment. It is recommended that you call ahead (540-626-6011) to confirm that the diningroom is open before you arrive for dinner or lunch due to catering and other demands. A small American menu is available. See the ad on page nine.)

A tasting

