

Thriving

31 Stories on the Impact
of Adventist Education

Aimee Saesim Leukert

Contents

Preface	9
Introduction	11
1. Cynthia Chea Péan	15
<i>Chef, Nutritional Consultant</i>	
2. Jeffrey Kuhlman	19
<i>Physician</i>	
3. Nehemiah Mabry	22
<i>Engineer, Educator, Entrepreneur</i>	
4. Danielle Nelson Garay	26
<i>Clinical Child Psychologist</i>	
5. Steve Moses	30
<i>Diver, Business Owner</i>	
6. Paul Herrmann	33
<i>Pathologist</i>	
7. Louise Phanstiel	37
<i>Financial Consultant, Philanthropist</i>	
8. Adbni Palafox	41
<i>Nurse Practitioner</i>	
9. Mitchell Powers	44
<i>Hospital Chaplain</i>	
10. Alvin Chea	48
<i>Musician, Recording Artist</i>	
11. Lawrence Geraty	52
<i>Educational Administrator, Professor, Archaeologist</i>	
12. Lawrence Brown	56
<i>General Surgeon</i>	
13. Amanda Liebelt Rosaasen	60
<i>Family Practice Physician</i>	

14. Marlene Rodriguez	63
<i>Pastor</i>	
15. Daniel Kido	67
<i>Neuroradiologist</i>	
16. Richard Ongwela	70
<i>Educator</i>	
17. Scott Reiner	73
<i>Health-Care Administrator, Philanthropist</i>	
18. Jordan Vallieres	77
<i>Nurse Practitioner</i>	
19. Donna Baerg Entze	80
<i>Educational Administrator, Teacher</i>	
20. Jessica Trubey	84
<i>Veterinarian</i>	
21. Ed Evans	87
<i>Brokerage Agent, Realtor</i>	
22. Grace Emori-Elder	90
<i>Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer</i>	
23. William Chunestudy	94
<i>Educational Administrator, Choral Director</i>	
24. Carolina Meza Perez	98
<i>Clinical Psychologist</i>	
25. Everett Roper	101
<i>Product Manager</i>	
26. Veruschka Valenzuela Zarate	105
<i>Quilter, Entrepreneur</i>	
27. Ryan Smith	110
<i>Educational Administrator</i>	
28. James Appel	114
<i>Missionary Doctor</i>	
29. Ryan Moor	117
<i>Screen Printer, Entrepreneur</i>	
30. Kem Roper	121
<i>Writing Center Director</i>	
31. Kerry Heinrich	125
<i>Health-Care Administrator</i>	

Cynthia Chea Péan

Chef, Nutritional Consultant

San Francisco Junior Academy
Monterey Bay Academy • Oakwood University

Cynthia Chea Péan received a phone call one afternoon from a gentleman who asked if she could take a job as a private chef in Savannah, Georgia. Cynthia was living in Atlanta at the time, which was four hours away, so she told the caller she'd think about it. She discussed it with her husband, Bernard, who suggested getting a short-term rental in Savannah to make the long drives less frequent and more manageable. The next day, the caller reached out to her again—this time more insistently. So, without details in place, Cynthia decided to accept the job. The caller informed her that his client's kitchen was being remodeled, and she would have to make everything at home, pack it all in a cooler, and set it up for the client and his family.

Cynthia woke up at three o'clock that first morning, cooked a number of different dishes, carefully placed all the food into several large insulated boxes, and hit the road. When she reached the client's beautiful mansion, she quickly got to work. As she laid out her prepared food, she heard someone entering the kitchen. When she turned around, just a few feet away was one of the biggest names in Hollywood! His face lit up with a wide, familiar grin, and he gave her a big hug, welcoming her warmly into his home. The actor chatted briefly with her before taking his leave to head out to the set. He and his family were stationed in Savannah for a film production in

Thriving

which he was involved, and he had requested her culinary services based on another job she'd done in Los Angeles for another well-known celebrity. "They had just recently fired their head chef, and after having some of my meals, asked me to stay on as their head chef," Cynthia recalled. She stayed on in that position for four years, working closely with the actor to prepare the meals that he required for the roles he was taking on. "For one particular movie, he needed to lose weight and look very lean. We discussed micro- and macro-biotics, balancing out his protein needs as well as taking into account his overall nutritional intake." She noted that most of the celebrities she's worked with are incredibly disciplined and shun red meats and shellfish. "Which is good," she laughed, "since I don't cook those."

After getting her undergraduate degree in psychology at Oakwood University and then her master's in international relations at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, Cynthia worked in various fields, including small-business development and public relations in the entertainment industry. She crisscrossed the country, spending time in New York City and Washington, DC, before heading back to the West Coast, where she began working on album shoots and styling music videos with producers and musicians in Los Angeles.

But then, during the economic downturn of 2008, the nonprofit organization that Cynthia had been running collapsed. As she looked for another source of income, her own church, the Breath of Life Worship Center, approached her about helping out with its dining ministries. Cynthia was responsible for providing food—on a limited budget, of course—for all the church's events, which included dinners, evangelistic meetings, and community programs. She quickly discovered how much she loved not only seeing people happy and well fed but also promoting their health and overall well-being through food.

Intrigued by the idea of making a career out of cooking, she decided to go on Craigslist to look for a job as a private chef. There, an ad caught her eye. A wealthy older couple had grandchildren who had recently come into their custody; they urgently needed a chef who could provide three meals a day for them. Cynthia drove to their home,

Cynthia Chea Péan

nestled in a ritzy part of Los Angeles, and auditioned. “I didn’t really have a game plan,” she said. “I just cooked from my heart.” They loved her food and hired her on the spot. Only later did she learn that she’d beaten out two other celebrity chefs to get the job! And so began a two-year journey with this family: Cynthia cooked for them five days a week, providing a four-course meal every evening.

“For the first time in my life, I felt a passion about what I was doing. And I thought, ‘This has to be from God.’” Cynthia pursued formal training through a plant-based culinary school. She noted with delight, “My instructors often referred to *The China Study*, to *The Blue Zones*; it was amazing to see how the Adventist health message is revered in culinary circles.”

And from there, the job offers trickled in. Cynthia has since cooked for many well-known athletes and celebrities and has impressed them all with her down-to-earth but unique fusion approach to food.

“What I do now and the path which I took to get here—that is truly all from Adventist education,” she stated emphatically. From a culinary perspective, Cynthia reflected on the incredibly diverse environment she grew up in at San Francisco Junior Academy (SFJA). Many of the students were first-generation Americans; their parents had immigrated from another country. “And it showed in the lunches we brought from home,” Cynthia chuckled. “Chicken adobo, garlic noodles—the cafeteria was truly a daily celebration of culture.” Those surroundings influenced her palate and informed her cooking, but beyond that, it solidified her own identity. “We grew up in the heart of the city, during a time where there was so much racial tension and political unrest. But because every single day we were exposed to different ways of communicating, eating, thinking, being, we were all comfortable with our differences. Everybody was different; everybody was odd; everybody brought funny-smelling food to school, and that made it OK.”

But beyond ethnic differences, the teachers at SFJA rallied all students, regardless of their backgrounds and cultures, around the pursuit of excellence. “There was no excuse to not be excellent,”

Thriving

Cynthia reflected, shaking her head. “Mediocrity was not a part of the conversation.” The teachers instilled a sense of pride in the students and an awareness of hard work and perseverance being necessary tools for success. “When you didn’t do things a certain way, there were consequences. You didn’t get the job or you didn’t get to the level you aspired to. We were pushed to do things right and to be excellent.” So when Cynthia walks into the homes of billionaires or the kitchens of some of the highest-paid athletes in the country, she isn’t intimidated. “All of my education has culminated in these moments when I am prepared. I know how to step up; I know how to be excellent.” Cynthia paused for a moment. “What is that verse again? About standing before kings? That’s the preparation I was given at SFJA. I can stand before kings and, by the grace of God, do just fine.”