

## ***Through Those Doors***

*For Stratford Chefs School: Class of 2025  
by David Stones*

Through those doors  
you entered

most of you raw,  
a few of you al dente,  
apron strings attached  
but not yet bound,  
flavours undefined and resting  
on expectant tongues,  
knives encased  
and eager for a honing.

Randi, Mike, Eli, Neil,  
Conor and Melissa  
Alex, Erin, Leah, Mark,  
Christopher and Theresa

reviewed the novice recruits  
with the scrutiny  
of a shopping list,  
the scrupulous dissection  
of a new recipe:

are the ingredients here  
for success,

can we tenderize and brine  
these pieces into  
a pureed whole,

produce from these sow's ears  
the nuance and balance  
of a tenderloin,

the emulsified perfection  
of a finished chef?

And so the work began,  
the *mise en place*

so *parfaitement en place*,  
the knives unsheathed,  
the burners turned to flame,

some of you requiring  
a little simmer or a dredge,  
others a severe deglaze or blanche,  
a reduction here to bring  
your talents out,  
a chiffonade there  
to lace an ego into ribbons,  
a poke, a poach, a dice,  
a braise, a whip, a sift,  
a roux, a steep, a melt, a fold,  
and sometimes a skewer  
for those of you caught drifting  
off in class, or the disgrace  
of public spatchcock for those  
showing up half-stewed.

But what a masterpiece  
of culinary art has been produced,  
the nine of you now,  
the perfectly seasoned  
harmonic melange  
of experience and skill.

Jenny, Gustavo, Seth  
and Amelia,  
the sweet, the salty  
and enticingly bitter,  
Jessica, Elizabeth, Andrew,  
Evan and Sophia,  
the richness of sour  
and that umami panacea.

You stand at the threshold  
now of a world  
anxious for your flavour.

You've learned how  
to make butter sing,  
how souffles rise like prayers

(and often on them),

how things get charred  
and sometimes blister,  
the true meaning  
of the word “congeal,”  
and not just as it  
applies to food.

You’ve learned technique but  
it is the nuance of your culinary  
soul that will be your signature,  
your blessing personalized  
and sealed within each dish  
you bring to table.

So go forth now  
you culinary queens and kings,  
you cultural cross-overs,  
you grandiose gourmets  
with your knives shining,

go forth now  
and show us all how  
food connects,  
how your talents  
might bless our tables,  
placate our palates and  
make those aromatic choirs  
sing upon the tongue.

Yes, through those doors  
you entered,  
but a different person leaves.  
And in that leaving  
there is a sadness, too.

Perhaps that hang-dog  
balladeer, Leonard Cohen,  
says it best,

“They’re stackin’ up the chairs now,  
they’re wipin’ down the bar,

I never got to tell you  
how beautiful you are.”

So let us not today  
be guilty of that same  
and grievous sin  
of radiance unacknowledged.

Through those doors you entered  
nervous buds about to bloom  
and through those doors  
you'll soon depart  
a seasoned and most wondrous dish  
for our nation to consume.

Yes, they're stackin' up the chairs now,  
they're wipin' down the bar,  
and we're all here to tell you  
how beautiful you are.

*Congratulations Class of 2025,  
from Stratford's Poet Laureate, David Stones.*