

Chef Overcomes Challenge to Open Restaurant

(September 2015)

Chef Laura Martinez is just 31-years-old, but she's already living her dream. Laura successfully opened her own restaurant back in January 2015. The tiny yet full-service eatery is called *La Diosa* and it's located in Chicago. The words "la diosa" mean "the goddess" in Spanish. This all seems typical enough: a talented chef opening a place of business. However, there's one fact that makes Laura's story a little bit different than any other top chef story. You see, Laura is blind. She lost her sight because of cancer when she was a baby.

Not being able to see hasn't stopped Laura. When she was younger, she went to college to earn a degree in psychology. While there, she was disappointed in the cafeteria food. Laura was used to her mom's delicious homemade meals. She thought college food was weird and she didn't want to have to eat it. That's when she became very sensitive to flavors and smells. The unappetizing cafeteria food is one reason she decided to go to culinary school. Laura began searching for information about other blind chefs but she couldn't find any evidence of other blind chefs in the United States. She knew things were about to get interesting and she was up for the challenge. It ended up being a long process. Laura needed to hire an attorney to help get her into culinary school and during an internship, her supervisor was not very supportive of her.

Laura's hard work and determination eventually paid off though. The late chef Charlie Trotter, who happened to be one of Chicago's most famous chefs, watched Laura work. He also tasted her food and immediately offered her a job. She worked for Chef Trotter until his restaurant closed in 2012. After that, she

didn't have many job possibilities on the horizon, so Laura decided it was time to try and open her own restaurant. Her business advisor wasn't sure that a blind chef having her own restaurant was going to work. Eventually, he decided to help Laura develop a business plan. Of course, Laura already had picked a name for her restaurant and she had a menu all planned out.

So what exactly is served up at *La Diosa*? Laura describes her menu as offering Mexican comfort food with a French twist. Some of the tasty dishes include quiche, omelets, quesadillas, empanadas, and tartizzas. Tartizzas are Laura's own creation. She describes them as a cross between a tart and a pizza. They have a delicate and flaky crust. Laura's husband, Maury, works in the restaurant as well. He rolls out the dough for the tartizzas and gets all the ingredients ready, including Laura's special sauce.

People who see Laura in action are fascinated. Even famed restaurant critics are impressed. Restaurant kitchens are very busy, hectic, and downright chaotic places. Even sighted people have a difficult time navigating through them. So the fact that Laura is visually impaired and cooking and running things behind the scenes is kind of amazing.

If you're ever in the Chicago area, or if you're already lucky enough to live nearby, Laura would surely welcome you for a visit to her *La Diosa* restaurant. She hopes, though, that you'll be able to look beyond her visual impairment and instead focus on the delicious food. With a tasty, carefully crafted menu like Laura's, that certainly won't be hard to do!

Teacher Resources – Vocabulary

Words for Quick Discussion: These words may need to be discussed with students as they are encountered, to help with comprehension of the passage. It is best to do this with a quick discussion while reading the text, in student-friendly language.

culinary (*adj*) of cooking

eatery (*n*) a restaurant

empanada (*n*) any of various pastry turnovers of Spain and Latin America, filled with seasoned chopped meat and vegetables or with chopped fruit, then sealed and deep-fried

internship (*n*) the period of service as an intern

quiche (*n*) an unsweetened custard baked in a pastry shell with various ingredients, as bacon, cheese, or spinach, and served hot

quesadilla (*n*) a Mexican dish consisting of a flour tortilla filled with cheese, squash blossoms, or a spicy mixture, then folded and deep-fried

Words for Further Study: These words not only help with comprehension of the passage, they also appear more frequently in a wide spectrum of reading, especially in academic text. Therefore, further study of the meaning of these words may be beneficial. The words on this list can be incorporated into subsequent lessons.

chaotic (*adj*) in a state of chaos; in a completely confused or disordered condition

supervisor (*n*) a person who supervises; superintendent; manager; director

unappetizing (*adj*) not inviting or attractive; unwholesome

This text passage is archived under People.

Text Easability Scores

If you would like to measure the text easability scores of this passage, please follow the directions below.

1. Visit the Coh-Matrix Text Easability Assessor website at <http://tea.cohmetrix.com/>. If you do not already have a login and password, create one. It is free and easy to sign up for access to the website.
2. Once you have created an account and sign in, you will be taken to a page with an empty, white text box. Copy and paste the text from this passage into the empty, white text box. Make sure you are only copying and pasting the body of the passage. Do not include the title, date, or any of the resources present in the passage.
3. When you have pasted the passage into the text box, click on the red button beneath the text box that says "Analyze." There will be a short delay and after a few seconds, you will see a bar graph appear to the right of the screen.
4. The bar graph will give you the percentages for several text characteristics including: narrativity, syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion, and deep cohesion.
5. Below the bar graph, the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level is also included for your benefit.
6. Lastly, a paragraph is provided that explains the meaning of the measurements of the text characteristics for your particular passage.
7. Once you have completed measuring your passage, you can click on the "Clear" button below the text box and measure another passage, if you so wish.