

## **Transcript of Interview with Tom Dickinson by Dana Bell**

**Interviewee:** Tom Dickinson

**Interviewer:** Dana Lee Bell

**Date:** 03/11/2021

**Location (Interviewee):** Fairfield, California

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**Transcriber:** Dana Lee Bell

**Abstract:** “Chef” Tom Dickinson is the Culinary Instructor for Fairfield High School in Northern California. A native of Oregon, Tom shares his journey in overcoming his personal challenges as a student with Autism who was often dismissed by his educators, to becoming a beloved teacher himself. He is currently organizing the development of a comprehensive culinary program that teaches students essential life and job skills. Tom reflects of the effects Covid-19 has had on his life, community, and students. He reflects on the challenges of online learning and shares the creative ways he has tried to connect with students using technology during the pandemic.

**Dana Bell 0:02**

This is Dana Bell, and today I'm speaking with Chef Tom Dickinson. Today is March 11th, 2021. This interview is taking place at Fairfield High School in Fairfield, California. Could you please tell me your name?

**Tom Dickinson 0:17**

Tom Dickinson.

**Dana Bell 0:18**

And do you consent to being recorded today?

**Tom Dickinson 0:21**

Absolutely.

**Dana Bell 0:22**

Thank you. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

**Tom Dickinson 0:25**

Yes, I'm originally from Oregon. I grew up in the town of Tillamook, it's known for the cheese factory, I went to high school there. I lived there from since I was five years old to the year 2000, I moved over to the Willamette Valley, my parents moved over there so I relocated and I worked over there. I went to the college over there and graduated with an Associate Applied Science in Culinary Arts from Linn Benton Community College, and moved to California in 2007, and I've been here ever since, and I worked ten years for Paradise Valley Estates, and I eventually went and

got my teaching credential. I'd been volunteering here with the special ed kids here at Fairfield High, and Armijo High as well, Dr. Cushman liked what he saw. He asked me, "Can I hire you to be our Culinary instructor?" "Absolutely," and I went to get my credential. And I've been here ever since, and I love it.

**Dana Bell 1:29**

Awesome. Can you tell me a little bit about your hobbies and things that you like to do?

**Tom Dickinson 1:35**

I like to create content online. I've been getting to do a lot of videos, I have a YouTube channel. I like to collect knives, like kitchen knives, Japanese-style knives, I love to do that. I love to write. I love to go to movies, I haven't been able to do that since COVID, but avid movie lover, love to spend time with my wife and the usual stuff.

**Dana Bell 1:57**

Awesome. So that leads me to the next question. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

**Tom Dickinson 2:04**

Yes, my dad is a retired mechanic. He lives in Lebanon, Oregon; he and my mom do, and my dad actually has spent his retirement, he re-builds custom engines for Studebakers, he has a business, he does that. My mom helps him with that business, they live there. I have an older sister, she also lives in Lebanon, Oregon, she helps take care of my parents. And my parents actually adopted my three younger brothers and my younger sister. So I've lived with a lot of kids in our family. I have 10 nephews, I have one... Three nieces and one grand-niece, my nephew Tyler, who's also a chef, has a 14-month-old daughter and she is a precious little gem.

**Dana Bell 3:05**

Can you tell me a little bit about how COVID-19 has affected you and your family?

**Tom Dickinson 3:11**

It's caused us to have a very... Difference of opinion. My sister and I are very, very adamant about wear your mask, get vaccinated. My father actually won't get the vaccine, he's kinda set his ways, I respect that, my mom will. The whole COVID situation has caused a lot of arguments, has caused some division, which it always does. Not all of us agree on the way the COVID has happened, and it's something that we just kinda sweep under the rug and we don't discuss the politics behind COVID-19.

**Dana Bell 4:01**

How has COVID-19 outbreak affected your community? It could be school, clubs, church, jobs, et cetera, can you speak about how COVID-19 has affected any of the communities you're involved in?

**Tom Dickinson 4:16**

I haven't been to an in-person church service in a year. I went to one, and that was when we were almost in the red tier, then we went back to purple, so I went to one in a year. Although we've been having it online. I have watched friends of mine in the hospitality industry lose their businesses, it's heartbreaking when I hear that people might... We're one, big happy family in the hospitality industry, when I hear about people that I know and businesses that I know of having to shut the

door because of COVID-19, it just breaks my heart. It's sad. I have classmates from culinary school, who've had to shut down their businesses because of COVID-19... Of course, we're doing distance learning here at the school, we haven't been able to talk to students, we haven't had students here. We were supposed to do an event December, we couldn't do it because of COVID. I don't know when we're gonna be able to do another event because of COVID-19, because even though we're advancing in tiers, it's still lingering and there's still new variants and we don't know what's gonna happen. We could be in the red tier today and back in the purple here in two months, I don't know. But it's definitely affected everybody, it's affected my industry. A lot of times I feel like I'm teaching a dead professional, and I'm trying to just keep strong and keep doing it, so when the hospitality industry does get back on its feet, I'll be able to send people out there who can work for these businesses, who know what they're doing.

**Dana Bell 5:51**

Right. You already mentioned this, how people around you are responding to the pandemic...

**Tom Dickinson 5:57**

Yeah.

**Dana Bell 5:57**

Is there anything you wanted to add about that? You talked about your family and their response.

**Tom Dickinson 6:04**

I know people who still believe COVID-19 is a hoax. I've had COVID-19. When I got my vaccination, I had all the symptoms of COVID-19. The very next day. My uncle was in the hospital for 31 days because of COVID-19. Now a lot of people in my family don't like my uncle, they don't talk to him. I haven't seen him since I was 11 years old. I called him up because I heard that he was in the hospital, he almost died. Makes you think about stuff, but there's still people who don't wanna wear masks, there's still people, I know personally, who think it's a hoax, they're not gonna get their vaccine, they don't wanna wear masks, and it's like... I told them, "I'd rather stay six feet apart than be six feet under."

**Dana Bell 6:56**

So have you seen people around you change their opinions day-to-day and their activities or relationships in response to the pandemic?

**Tom Dickinson 7:08**

I have. My mom has definitely changed her response about it. My sister has been, I think been in quarantine twice because of COVID-19, she tested negative, thankfully, but she's had to be in quarantine because of it, and she has changed her opinion on it, and she takes it more seriously, and she... She even told my dad, she said, "I'm gonna go get the vaccine, does that bother you?" He's like, "Oh no, go ahead." So my mom is actually gonna go get vaccinated, which just... That's a thank you moment right there that she wants to be safe, so yeah... But I still know people who think it's a hoax, who think it's not supposed to happen. The biggest thing that people have thought about it, they told me that 'cause I'm a teacher, I'm lazy, that I don't wanna go to work. I just wanna sit around at home and teach in my jammies. I'm here every day, I'm in my kitchen every day. I'm working twice as... We're all working twice as hard as we were before trying to get this done, there's nothing lazy about it. Our first priority is to keep our kids safe, and if keeping them safe means not having them here, then that's it.

**Dana Bell 8:27**

Self-isolation, flattening the curve have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic, so how have you and your family, friends, community responded to this request to self-isolate and flatten the curve?

**Tom Dickinson 8:43**

I self-isolate anyway, I enjoy my quiet time by myself, I wasn't affected that much, I enjoyed my peace and quiet. I work in a very... A profession where I'm surrounded by people and I'm at meetings every single day and I see everybody. Self-isolation is a treasure to me, even before the pandemic, so it didn't take a lot to adjust, but sometimes it does... Not being able to go on a date with my wife to the movies, that part sucks, staying at home and we're each on our phones watching Netflix, that part kinda sucks, but we like to go on dates, we like to go see movies when they come out, it's just one of our things we love to do, and we haven't been able to do it, but that's the only downfall. But that's it.

**Dana Bell 9:38**

So can you explain a little bit about what your job is? What do you do here?

**Tom Dickinson 9:41**

I am the culinary arts instructor, I'm the Executive Chef and the culinary arts instructor for the Fairfield High School and the Fairfield Student Adult School Culinary Arts programs. We have two programs here in our district. We have one for the adult school, we have one here for Fairfield High. Here at Fairfield High I teach Culinary I and Culinary II. For the Adult School I teach... I've taught Culinary I and Culinary II, Culinary Fundamentals and International Cuisine. And most of the time I teach here in the morning, and then I have students come in at night, and I have night classes here to just... Because we wanted to provide... The original principal of the adult school James Woods, we talked about workforce development and creating a workforce place, work training for people who need it, and that's mostly what we're doing. That's what we're doing with the high school kids because I'm a firm believer not everybody's gonna go to college, not everybody wants to, and that's fine. So that's what we're doing here. We're providing this skilled trade, just like auto shop is, just like sports medicine is, just like digital video production is. And we're very proud of that.

**Dana Bell 11:00**

So when a student leaves your classroom, they could potentially find a job in the culinary arts?

**Tom Dickinson 11:07**

Yes, they could. Every hour they spend in my class is job training. I have connections with people for wanting jobs, we have industry partners for the Culinary Arts Program. Our industry partners are Paradise Valley Estates here in town, Bernal Cutlery is our industry partner. Also one of our industry partners is Christian Culinary Academy, in Cannon Beach, Oregon. I'm actually gonna be sending a student up there for their conference, he's actually gonna be interviewing to actually apply to go to the school there. So it's really a great opportunity for them, and it's a small school, and they do a lot of really cool stuff, and Chef Ira has been a good friend of mine for about 11 years, he and his wife run the school, and just really, really... It's a really great place. Very small, with a very intense program, so anything that I can do to get these guys ready for a program like that, I definitely will do.

**Dana Bell** 12:07

What made you decide to do this for a living?

**Tom Dickinson** 12:10

To be a chef?

**Dana Bell** 12:11

Yeah, and to work as a teacher.

**Tom Dickinson** 12:14

Well, to be a chef... I've always liked to cook. I've been cooking since I was seven years old. And one of the thing that happened is, it was 2002, I went to my dad's college graduation, he was 59 years old, he was just getting another job so he could train and work until he could retire, and so his social security kicked in, he already had his retirement from him working 28-29 years with the City of Tillamook, and I was sitting out in the audience and I watched my dad walk across the podium with his cap and gown on, and he went and got his degree. And that school is a one-year certificate refrigeration, heating, ventilation, air conditioning. And...When we were at the graduation reception, he had all of his kids around, he said, "If I can do this at 59, what's stopping you guys? What's your excuse?" He challenged every single one of his kids to go to school, to go to college, graduate. I took him up on his challenge, and 2002, I started my first class at Lindback Community College. In 2002, I was sitting in the audience watching him walk across the stage to get his diploma, 2005, he was sitting in the audience watching me walk across the stage to get mine, which was great. And it was probably the roughest, most intense, hardest thing I've ever accomplished in my life. And then I worked in the industry after that. At one time I had a side hustle, doing some private catering. When I came down here, I just decided I'd seen what was going on and I'd seen how people who are disabled were being treated as far as life skills. It's like something needs to be done about that. So I actually emailed... I messaged the school district on their Facebook page, I wasn't employed, and they didn't know who I was. And I messaged them and I said, "Hey, I'd love to volunteer and come into your school and work with your special ed kids and teach them how to cook, host cooking classes." I called Rodriguez, they said no. So then, "Okay, I won't hear anything." Then I got a call from Anna Vieira at Armijo High School, said, "So Tom, saw your message on Facebook. We'd love to have you as a guest." I said, "Really?" She's like, "Yeah, that'd be great." So I volunteered with the schools for about four years, and then finally what happened is, is eventually Fairfield High got a hold of me and they wanted me to come over here and work with them, and I volunteered, and I worked with the special ed kids and the principals would come in and they'd see what we were doing, they'd see all this stuff that we were cooking, and they got to know me pretty well, they got to know what I was doing, and I totally had their support. And then there came a time there was a situation where I was talking with Doctor Cushman, I told him how I would do something and then he said, "Can I hire you?" And I was like, "Yeah, absolutely." He said, "You'd leave your job in the private sector to come work with me as a... Work over here as a teacher?" Said, "Absolutely, let's do it. Let's get it done." Because I had seen firsthand how my profession was changing. I had seen how people were taking shortcuts, they were using ready-made stuff, stuff that was already done, trying to make it easier, they weren't taking that pride and that quality and preparing really good food. And I wanted to change that. I wanted to make a positive difference in my profession, and I wanted to train some kids and train them old school, like we... "Chef, I need beef broth. There's the bones, there's the vegetables, go make some. It's gonna take you about eight hours, but get it done." "We don't have any mayonnaise or ranch dressing chef."

"There's the herbs, there's the vinegar, there's the hot sauce, there's the Mayo, there's the milk, go make some." One of the rules I have in our program is we don't buy mayonnaise, we don't buy salad dressing, we make it ourselves, that's the standard that we have, that's the old school techniques and fundamentals that I want these kids to know. It's not all about heating the microwave on high for five minutes. Chef Mike doesn't work here, he doesn't like his button pushed. Everyone knows what I mean.

**Dana Bell 17:23**

Can you tell me a little bit? Can you speak on why the disabled community is so important to you?

**Tom Dickinson 17:33**

Because I'm one of them. When I was 11 years old, I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, high functioning autism. I have dealt with this, I've had meltdowns, I have dealt with this my entire life. I've been bullied by teachers because of it. I had a teacher who got so tired of having to deal with me, she took me down to the school health room, threw me inside there, which was the equivalent of a jail cell, and she shut the door and left me down there all day long because she didn't wanna deal with me. She thought it would teach me a lesson. I still have never forgotten that day to this day. And one of the things that I have always made sure, and I have a lot of kids who are functional academics and vocational academics in my class. And they ask me, "Chef, do you mind having all these kids in your class?" I say, "No, I do not." I said, "Nobody gets singled out in my class and nobody gets turned away." I have a zero-exclusion policy in the Culinary Arts Program. If anybody wants a shot, they can get one. They're not all gonna get the same work obviously, but they are all gonna get the same opportunity.

**Dana Bell 19:15**

What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and on the economy, broadly speaking?

**Tom Dickinson 19:26**

My biggest concern is the hospitality industry. That, all the Mom and Pop places are gonna die off, 'cause they don't have the resources to stay afloat. And my biggest fear about employment was, I'm one of those classes that's considered non-essential, along with a lot of the other elective teachers, and they could have very easily, because of COVID, say, "Well, we have to make budget cuts, 'cause things aren't happening, we're having to cut your program." that's the biggest fear I always have.

**Dana Bell 20:04**

Is it still a fear of yours, right now?

**Tom Dickinson 20:06**

They just spent two and a half million dollars to build me a new facility, I'm not really afraid about it anymore.

**Dana Bell 20:13**

I wanted to ask you about that. Can you tell me a little bit more about... So you take this program, you're starting it, you're building this program, and now there are big things happening for your program. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**Tom Dickinson 20:29**

When I came in in 2017, the biggest thing [0:20:34.2] \_\_\_\_ is that we needed to rebuild this program. The teacher who was teaching culinary previously, she's still here, she teaches Home Economics now, she taught culinary like she teach Home-Ec class. She's never worked in the restaurant industry, so you know what, I don't hold that against her at all, she tried her best. She's never worked the line, she's never been in a situation, on the line, where you got 50 diners coming into your dining room, they're all sitting down at the same time, they're all ordering at the same time, and there's only two line cooks on the line. I have. I've been with it, I've conquered it, I know what to look for. It's been about rebuilding. A lot of the times, people look at the culinary class as their easy A, where people go to pad their GPAs because they just sit around, they don't have to do anything, they get to eat, and they're just gonna get an easy grade. I'm still trying to cancel the culture of that and changing it around. My guys know that my class is work now, that this is not a cooking class, this is a job training course. If you wanna learn how to cook at home, take Foods and Home Economics. You wanna learn that a cook on the professional level, 'cause that's my style, come to my class. Like today, I just talked to a teacher, she asked me, "How are you gonna get chilli, fajitas and fried bread all done at the same time in only one class period? I said, "Because that's what we do in a pro kitchen. We don't stop moving, and it's fun to try to see how many things can we get done at the same time. That's what we do." When I work with my kids, I do like two or three dishes at the same time, 'cause that's how you work on the line. My style of cooking is professional level, it is not learning to cook at home, actually when a kid tell me, "Well, this is how I do it at home." I hate hearing that. I tell them, "Good then do it at home. Here, you're gonna do it my way 'cause you do it the chef's way," and that's what we do.

**Dana Bell 22:43**

So next year, what are some things that they're talking about... There are things that you've been preparing for all year for next year, what are some...

**Tom Dickinson 22:51**

We are getting a two and a half million-dollar restaurant installed into our school.

**Dana Bell 22:55**

A restaurant in this school?

**Tom Dickinson 22:57**

Yes.

**Dana Bell 22:58**

Can teachers go and eat there?

**Tom Dickinson 23:00**

Teachers can go and eat there, it will be open to staff. The name of the restaurant was originally gonna be The Falcon's Nest Cafe, but because we have a six-burner flat top, because we have a humongous grill now, because we have a full-sized commercial pizza oven for our line, this restaurant is called The Falcon Grill.

**Dana Bell 23:20**

Okay.

**Tom Dickinson 23:21**

And it is a restaurant that's going to be open to staff at first, because of COVID, we're gonna have to go back and start from the beginning and train the kids up, get them ready to work the line, and the way it's gonna be structured is, the Culinary one students are gonna be doing more of the entry level stuff, they're gonna be the prep cooks, they're gonna be the baker assistants, they're gonna work in the dish room, they're gonna wait tables at the restaurant, they're gonna do a rotation on wait staff. Culinary two is gonna take the supervisor roles, they're gonna work the line, for all the wait staff that are Culinary one that in the dining room, we're gonna have a dining room manager who's a Culinary two student. For all the guys on the dish crew, washing dishes, we're gonna have a Culinary 2 student as a dish room foreman. We're gonna have a pantry chef, we're gonna have a saucier, we're gonna have a grill chef, we're gonna have somebody on pizza station, we're gonna a Culinary 2 student on butcher station, they're gonna do all the butchering, they're gonna cook all the food in the smoker, they're gonna take care of all that stuff. We're gonna have a pastry chef who is gonna do all the bread products for the restaurant, and this restaurant, all the sandwich buns, all the bread for the sandwiches, all the cakes, all the rolls, everything is gonna be done from scratch, in-house, because that is the standard we wanna hold to.

**Dana Bell 24:42**

So let me ask you this, why do kids need to learn to cook? Why is this important?

**Tom Dickinson 24:50**

Life skills. You can't live on Top Ramen the rest of your life, you can't live on ramen noodles, you can't live on processed food... It leads the diabetes, hypertension, obesity. The biggest problem, I deal with diabetes every day, I'm type two diabetic, I don't want kids deal with that. Chefs have terrible diets, we cook all this great food in a restaurant, we go home, we'll eat ramen noodles and a frozen pizza. Girls are like, "Oh yeah, I'm gonna marry a chef, they're gonna cook me great gourmet meals at home." and I just laugh. It's like, "No, they're not." They working 12 hours in a hot, airless kitchen and... But it's life skills. Even if they decide not to do this as a career, it's job skills that's showing up on time, working your job, looking at your best and making sure you have a clean uniform on, making sure you're putting your best product out, always. It's the one thing I've been doing during COVID, trying with the kids working online, I told them, "The restaurants here are putting out perfection, so people will come back, even though they're doing a take-out delivery and still wanna buy their food from this, they can survive." I told them, "You guys have to put your best product out, no matter what the situation." So some people think I'm a little harsh, some will think, "Oh, you're not accepting my work late?" No. You put your best product out you put it up on time, no matter what, always. So that's the thing.

**Dana Bell 26:21**

That makes sense. So I wanted to ask you, how have you adjusted your entire classroom during the pandemic, 'cause you're cooking, right?

**Tom Dickinson 26:32**

Mm-hmm.

**Dana Bell 26:32**

And you're trying to teach these kids to cook, but they're at home or on distance learning, so... How are you adjusting to that?



**Tom Dickinson 26:39**

I don't know how I did it, but... [laughter] I can thank Food Network for that, I really can, and I'm not a big fan of Food Network, I like a couple of their shows, but...

**Dana Bell 26:52**

Can you describe your set up for me?

**Tom Dickinson 26:54**

Well, I have... When Covid first hit, I got a couple of tripods, I had my district iPad, my laptop and my iPhone, and I used those to adjust them around my stove to show the kids what I was cooking, and I brought that same set up here, but I kind of expanded on it a little bit at a time. So I started out with a couple of cameras, then I bought another laptop, I got it on another tablet, I got it on sale, I got a couple of clamps on discount and Amazon, I kinda mounted them up, I mounted them up on the rails. Got a couple of these things where I could mount up some lights, and just all of a sudden it just kind of blew out of proportion, I ended up having two tablets, one iPad, my iPhone, and my laptop, and I had them all set up, and I learned, "Hey, as long as you have different devices, you can put all these devices on your same Google Meets chat at the same time." So that's what I do. I have a camera over the stove, I have a monitor facing me where I can see if the kids need to ask me a question, I turn the captions on on that monitor, I have my iPad facing me, so they're facing right down, I have a tablet close up to my cutting board, I call it my plating camera, where the kids can see me plate up the food, they can see me doing the precision knife cut, so they know how to do it. And one of the things I do, I give them cooking labs to do at home, and they have to send me a video showing me how they're doing stuff. One of the things I also do, is say, "Hey guys, I'll give you guys a list if you wanna cook along with me on cook days on camera, show everybody... 'cause I invite all the teachers to come and join class, I'll count it as your lab grade." So I've seen them cook on camera, they're watching me cook on camera, and sometimes it's fun and trying to keep it positive positive, but it feels like I'm doing a cooking show every week. So that's kind of the attitude I have, that's kind of the fun we have, but one thing I do is I also have cook day assignments, they're these big forms, they have to pay attention because I had a lot of assignments not getting turned in, so I have these assignment forms, they even have to list the knives I use. I call all the answers out saying they have to pay attention and type everything for what I'm doing. Someone's like, "Well can't we just send this as a video?" I said, "There is no video. Pay attention. See what I'm doing?" "Well, what if I get hungry?" "Wait." [laughter] So, I showed him the video and actually, we do the video, I do the whole cook day and we get everything done and they have to pay attention and they have to fill it out, and if I done early, we've done early, we go for questions and see what... Just see how they did, and then they turn in their assignment, I give them about a week to get it done, and some of them get it done, and some of them don't.

**Dana Bell 0:03**

Can you tell me what you cooked today?

**Tom Dickinson 30:06**

We cooked, this week, the kids, we've been talking about regional American cuisine, and we're talking about the cuisine of Tex Mex cuisine and American Southwest cuisine, so very Mexican, Spanish, Indigenous influences in the food, so we did Texas-style chili, we did fajitas... We did a native frybread, and we just try to do that to like two or three dishes, and last week we did Pacific Northwest, we did Smoke Roasted Salmon, we did Tempura Sushi, and we just had [0:30:41.8] \_\_\_\_ that we did a Blackberry Gastrique with the salmon, just that [0:30:46.1] \_\_\_\_ vinegar

reduction with blackberries and sugar and ginger and garlic and reduced it down and put it on top of the salmon, it was delicious. Really, really good. So we tried to do some dishes from each region, just so the kids know that these are the flavors that are indigenous to these regions of the country.

**Dana Bell 31:07**

What is your favorite part about distance learning?

**Tom Dickinson 31:11**

Getting to get on camera and do the cook days with the kids, I have fun. Some people don't like the fact that I have so much fun doing it, but I do. It's fun. I mean, this year I got a Teacher of the Year nomination for it. I didn't even know I got a Teacher of the Year nomination, I saw they were doing nominees, I was like, "Yeah, I won't get one." Then Mr. Mac was like, "Yeah, Chef, I like your Teacher of the Year nomination." I was like, "What?" Like yeah, so I looked on there, I was like, "Oh, okay, cool. Doing something right. Great. Good." That's been my favorite part, just getting to do the cook days, cooking every week. My favorite part is it's actually helped me sharpen my skills in the kitchen, which is awesome.

**Dana Bell 32:02**

So, can you tell me what your least favorite part is about distance learning?

**Tom Dickinson 32:13**

The lack of kids turning in work... Every teacher is dealing with that right now. I went on, I was doing grading last night, I have 79 kids in my program who are failing. 53% of my students aren't passing my program.

**Dana Bell 32:36**

What percentage of those students would you say... You can't even get a hold of, like have they been coming to class?

**Tom Dickinson 32:44**

I have kids who've never shown up all year. They have never showed up all year. It's kind of the culture of elective courses that people think that the courses in my class are optional, they're not. People need elective courses to graduate. The biggest thing... People come to my class, I think it's a skate course. And then they come to me, like, "Chef, how can I raise my grade?" And I was like, "You should have done the work. I can't help you. You made a choice." Now that choice has a consequence. If I make bad choices, my choices have consequences. I've made plenty of bad choices in my life, and I've suffered the consequences for it, and I've learned from it. I had one kid who got on me because I wouldn't fix his grades so he could play baseball, it's like, "You should have done the work, if you're that dedicated to baseball, you should have known, you need to do the work in order to play." I came out as kinda mean, but do the work.

**Dana Bell 33:49**

We're coming back to in-person learning after spring break, right. So how do you feel about that?

**Tom Dickinson 33:56**

I think it's great. I just hope they take it slow. I know that we're gonna be doing virtual in the morning, we're gonna be doing asynchronous with the kids coming back in the afternoon, they're coming to get help, I don't know what the guidelines are gonna be, for me having kids in the kitchen

and cooking food because of the CDC. I heard they would, probably won't be able to come, but the kids will be able to come back into the classroom and get help with their assignments, which is great. I'm happy to do that. It would be great to see them back, but I just hope you take it slow, and we don't end up running before we walk.

**Dana Bell** 34:33

So has this experience transformed how you think about friends, family and community, and in what ways?

**Tom Dickinson** 34:45

It's... I think the most heartbreaking thing is the way people have looked at teachers, we've been kind of villainized, were the enemy. Back in March, they were so thankful for us to be here and to do what we did, and now because COVID got real and we're trying to be safe in our work environment, we're trying to keep the kids safe, and it's like... And especially one video I heard online that somebody said that 10% of teachers dying, so the kids can be back in school was an acceptable loss, and it just showed me how society is looking at what we do, not everybody in society, but a lot of people. It was heartbreaking, and a lot of teachers are quitting over it and they're going into new professions. Personally, in my own opinion, their opinions of what I do is a case of mind over matter, I don't mind 'cause their opinions don't matter. It's not gonna stop me from doing what I came here to do, and that is, do you change my profession and equip these guys who wanna go into this industry with the right fundamentals and skills, it's not gonna stop me from doing that.

**Dana Bell** 36:20

So I wanna ask you, can you imagine how your life will be in a year?

**Tom Dickinson** 36:27

No, I can't. I'm just trying to imagine how life is gonna be tomorrow.

[chuckle]

**Dana Bell** 36:36

So what do you hope life will be like next year?

**Tom Dickinson** 36:39

I'm hoping that things will be better, we get some kids in here, that it's somewhat back to normal. I don't think it's gonna be all the way back to normal. I think there's still gonna be... Like I said the whole COVID thing is very fluid. They're trying to get people vaccinated, but every time you try to get somebody vaccinated there's a brand new case. Trying to get on top of it because we did get behind on it. I don't know, I don't know how life's gonna be in a year. I hope it's better. I know that I'm gonna be in a brand new building, playing in a brand new restaurant and getting to serve some great food to some great people who deserve it.

**Dana Bell** 37:25

So is there anything that we haven't talked about today that you feel like is important to share?

**Tom Dickinson** 37:43

Just that what we do isn't easy, it's been hard this year and harder than it's ever been before, it takes a lot of toll, it takes a lot of stress, it takes a toll on people's mental and physical health, but that just

don't give up, do what you gotta do but make sure you take care of you so you can take care of everybody else that's it.

**Dana Bell** 38:12

Thank you so much I think this is gonna be a really important addition to the archives and so I just appreciate you sharing today.

**Tom Dickinson** 38:22

Cool.