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Mighty Mwashekele

Chef

Living his Dream in the Culinary World

People who live their passion do what they love. They have found that one thing they love most and made it a career. They don't mind the sacrifices and long hours, because they live and breathe what they do. They pursue that magic despite bad days, early mornings, tough clients, and all other things that would stop others in their tracks.

Meet 28-year old Mighty Mwashekele. A young male chef who is living his passion. This is his story.

City Dweller

Mighty was born at Ondangwa in Oshikoto, but grew up in Windhoek, where he attended school at Namibia English Primary and A Shipena

Secondary. Describing himself as 'just another city boy', Mighty fondly reminisces about his childhood days on the streets of Okuryangava, where he often had to join his brother in selling ice lollies and fatcakes on street corners.

"My childhood wasn't that carefree at all. As siblings, we had to do our part in generating extra income for the family and in helping our parents to make ends meet. At first, I didn't like doing it, but as I grew older, I realised that my parents were actually just teaching us to be responsible and to appreciate the importance of hard work. Nothing in life comes for free after all. You have to work for your success", he says.



Childhood Dream

Mighty's childhood ambition was always that of becoming a chef. So determined was he in pursuing his dream, that he took a deliberate decision in Grade 4, opting for Home Economics as a subject, much to the chagrin of some teachers and school friends. "People thought it a taboo for a boy to take Home Economics, because it was regarded a subject for girls. My classmates teased and mocked me for my selection. But I ignored them, because I knew already then, that my calling was just for the kitchen", he recalls.

After matriculating in 2006, Mighty enrolled at the Wolwedans Desert Academy, located in the Namibrand Nature Reserve in the //Kharas region, where he completed his Level 1 and Level 2 certification. His decision to leave for the deep south was made easier by the fact that a

close friend, John Siloiso, was also stationed there.

"I grew up with John, who today is an established chef himself. He actually entered the culinary industry when I was still at school and kept on inspiring me throughout, to make work of my own dream to become a chef. He was my rolemodel and we remain very close friends to this day", Mighty notes.

World of Work

Mighty returned to the capital to complete his Level 3 certification at a sister institution of the Wolwedans Desert Academy, the Namibia Institute of Culinary Education. Commonly known by its acronym, NICE, the restaurant located in Mozart Street is not only a popular eatery, it also has a dedicated training arm, which specialises in the training of chefs. "I was very fortunate at the time, because my Level 3 training at NICE was sponsored

under a partnership programme of the Namibia Training Authority", he explains.

Nearly all chef graduates start their careers as apprentices to a higher-level chef and work their way up, regardless of education. Upon completing his Level 3 training, NICE took Mighty on board as a trainee chef. It was also at the heavily frequented restaurant, where Mighty was thrown into the deep end.

"It was very tough. But, being familiar with the environment, I was able to cope with the demands. It's all about attitude, I would say. And that attitude tells you that everyone in this industry starts at the bottom rung of the ladder and work their way up", Mighty shares.

Career Success

It takes more to make a great chef than just passion and training. The perfect recipe for success also

includes some intangible personality traits such as stamina, organisation, flexibility, time management and creativity. Attention to detail is important as well, for following recipes and keeping track of cooking supplies, stock levels, and managerial duties are often expected of a restaurant chef.

Today, Mighty is employed by NICE as its Chef de Partie, or station or line chef, always ready as a swing cook to fill in as needed on other stations in the kitchen. “Producing great meals on a commercial scale is a collaborative effort, so every successful chef needs to be a team player. Working late hours is very common as well. As a professional chef you need stamina to keep going for long periods under high pressure. Cooking in a professional setting is different from cooking at home. You’ll work odd hours with long stretches of high demand, and you need stamina to stay focused and productive during that time”, Mighty notes.

Lifelong Learner

Mighty appreciates that all good chefs need to keep up-to-date with what’s happening in their field in learning more about specific cuisines to an expert level. Testing new equipment, trying new ingredients, eating at new restaurants—these learning experiences are part of the joy of being a chef that happens outside the kitchen, but can enrich and improve your performance in it. Chefs are never afraid to go back to the classroom to brush up on old skills, or master new ones.

“Good chefs keep their skill sets relevant and current. I still need to learn new cooking styles and techniques in new and different places. I need to stay abreast of where the culinary world is heading to. I need to

come up with fresh ideas. There is still so much to learn.”, Mighty emphasises. “Hopefully, and in the right time I’ll get there. In fact, one of my dreams is to prepare and serve a local Namibian dish at an international restaurant. What’s wrong with serving kapana or omahangu at a restaurant in New York or Frankfurt. In my book, nothing. It’s all about the preparation and the presentation. We shouldn’t be scared to promote our own”, he adds.

Trailblazer

Someone once said that a dream job requires three things: It must be a good fit for your abilities, match your goals, and make you happy. Being a chef ticks all the boxes for Mighty. “For me, being a chef comes from deep within. I wake up every morning to do this. I enjoy it and I am good at it. Yes, the kitchen can get crazy sometimes, but I am living my passion. I wouldn’t want to be somewhere else, rather than the kitchen. I was born to do this”, he explains.

Mighty also appreciates that he has become a rolemodel for young people. “I ended up here because of the encouragement of my friend and fellow chef, John Soloiso.

Therefore, I also encourage others who are demonstrating the talent and passion for this work, to take it up. Sustained growth in the local tourism and hospitality sector has created a demand for highly skilled

chefs who appreciate that customers want fresh, delicious and attractively presented food. The chefs in highest demand are the ones skilled in a great many areas of preparation. Soon, I will be one of those chefs”, he shares.

Mighty Mwashekele - An ambitious young man with a bright future in the culinary arts. His story teaches us that the happiest employees are the ones who have found careers that match their skills, talents and ambitions. He is truly living his

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