

## **Burnt Toast**

### **Finalist**

By Thomas Caven

Everyone has failed in pursuing their dream, even if it was just a minor setback or a hiccup and not a total failure. No matter the reason for the failure, whether it was because you were overconfident, underprepared, or just an old-fashioned whoopsie, being able to overcome the failure is the path to success. I still remember what I thought to be my first big failure

This was what I knew I wanted to do. Maybe not exactly, but my foot was in the door. I was sixteen and had gotten my first job in a kitchen. I was only making salads and plating desserts, but you have to start somewhere.

The restaurant was named “Obrigado”, which means “thank you” in Portuguese, but I don’t think anyone in Louisa would have known that. The restaurant was completely out of place. It was a retrofitted store room turned into a kitchen. Jade and Debbie had taken a big risk in spending all that money to open the restaurant where they did.

They were also taking a chance in hiring me. I had taken the culinary arts classes in school, but I had no real experience to speak of. Making something to eat for my little brother really did not count. He was almost three and he would have eaten anything.

It was my first friday night. Anyone who knows anything about restaurants, they know that this was primetime. I honestly thought it would have been an easy night. How many people in the backwoods town are going to come out to eat calamari and brazinni at a restaurant in the middle of nowhere? A lot of people, that’s how many.

I was completely overwhelmed. I had salads stacked everywhere. Most of them were ready and waiting on other appetizers, but some of them were big salads that were waiting on the entrées. I thought I had everything in order despite all the chaos going on around me.

“Bread!”, yelled Lydia from around the corner. There wasn't any time for pleasantries, let alone full sentences. I had to warm up the bread for the servers along with everything else that I was responsible for. That meant I had to leave my station to get the bread from the back.

“Sunny south and a caesar!”, Jade yelled as soon as I entered the pantry. Once again, there was no complete sentence. I got the bread and quickly put it straight in the oven.

“Dessert ticket”, Debbie said as she put the paper on my station. It was a big table and they were all getting something different. I pushed out the desserts fairly quickly while getting Jade the salads she had asked for. I finally had a moment to breathe.

“Where’s that bread?”, screamed Lydia. Not only did she sound pissed, she had used a complete sentence. I rushed to the oven and opened it up. Thick black smoke smacked me in the face and choked my lungs. That bread was toast.

My first big night and I had screwed up. The rest of the shift had gone relatively smooth, but the smell of the burnt bread lingered in my nostrils as a constant reminder that I had messed up. Nothing else had gotten burnt that night, except for my pride.

Later that night during clean up, Lydia pulled me to the side and gave me a pep talk, but it didn’t make me feel any better. Jade and Debbie didn’t say anything to me about it before they went into the back office. You always know you did something really bad when no one chastizes you for an obvious mistake. I just knew they were going to decide that they had made a mistake in hiring me. How good of a cook could I have been if I was burning premade bread?

Jade made her way out of the office on her way home. This was it. I knew I was about to get fired.

“Go home and get some sleep. We have a band coming to play tomorrow night. It should be even busier than it was tonight,” was all she said to me on the way out. She didn’t fire me. I was going to come back the next day, and there was going to be a live band. I loved music. I had hoped I would get a chance to hear them play. I didn’t.

I ended up working there for the next two years until I graduated from high school. I had burned more than just that first loaf of bread. Every time I had failed, I had learned. Every time I learned, I got better. Eventually I wasn't burning anything. It all depends on how you bounce back. After all, there is no point in giving up over some burnt toast.