

Summer 2007

A passion for cooking

Connie Fairbanks, who just published her first cookbook, "Scratch That," recalls her days at ESU and the lessons that led her to a successful business career - and why she left it to pursue acting, and then her current role as cookbook author and home chef

My mother says I have been reading cookbooks, trying some new dishes, or practicing the piano since I was five years old. Somewhere in my very humble beginnings, I read in Jim Beard's Barbeque Cookbook to put an ice cube in the middle of a hamburger to keep it moist and juicy. Of course I tried it and it worked and still works.

The seeds of a career are planted early. So are the lessons learned. I will always credit ESU for the business acumen that led me to the various careers I have had. There were very few women in business classes in those days and I learned to excel. My professors noticed and their mantra was to do the work and do it well. It was there I learned to apply myself. I learned to think. Since I carried a full schedule and worked 32 hours a week, I had to be organized. But, in reviewing the seeds of my diverse career, I will also credit ESU for teaching me to lead a balanced life. I was fascinated by Business Math and have used what I learned in business math practically every day of my life but I was also encouraged to pursue music, home economics, and art.



Each of the studies I pursued taught me something valuable that I would use for the rest of my life. Thanks to the professors at ESU, I was given confidence to reach and stretch, and the desire to follow my avocation as well as my vocation.

I started college as a piano major. With every good intention of succeeding I practiced no fewer than five hours a day in Beach Hall practice rooms. I would play the same Bach pieces over and over until I got the music right. Talk about learning to persevere! You cannot cram when you are a music major. You have to put in the work every single day. Now, there's a lesson in life for you. However, I learned early on that music was not to be my life. And, that was another lesson, to know when to give up on something that's not working.

The lessons learned in college were among the most valuable to my corporate career. I learned to apply myself and do well at the most seemingly mundane tasks. For example, who would have thought there was a lesson to be learned from taking notes. But consider this. When I was at ESU it was a different time. There were no laptops, no cell phones, no e-mails. Listening in class and taking notes turned out to be one of the most valuable lessons in life. When you are in a corporate conference room, there is nothing more important than listening, memorizing important facts and, writing them down.

I credit ESU with the business classes that were later to provide entry into the corporate world of international sales and marketing for medical companies. They included Business Statistics, Business Communications, Business Policy, Business Math, Managerial Accounting and Sales. In those courses, you learned to think, stay focused, summarize the important information quickly, learn how to write in business language and, last but not least, close the sale. Complementing the rigorous disciplines was our professors' encouragement to be curious about current events and knowledgeable about the world outside of ESU.

The balanced life I learned to enjoy at ESU stays with me. To this day, my love of music and art sustains me. And the seeds of my avocation, cooking, was definitely fanned and developed through the home economics classes. I know I'll never be an artist or a musician but I support the arts, and still play a mean piano.

Even pursuing my acting career began at ESU. I used to always wonder what happened in those theatre buildings next to Beach Hall. When I left the corporate world, I rekindled my love of music, drama and languages to pursue a life as an actor. I have been on stage in Chicago's thriving theatre scene and appeared in TV commercials. The idea of writing a cookbook began several years ago while waiting backstage during the second act of *All the Way Home*. I had finished my scenes in the first act, and was

waiting for the curtain call. I started outlining what I wanted the cookbook to be, and then I started thinking about a market for the cookbook. What was missing in the vast area of cookbooks?

*My cookbook, *Scratch That Seasonal Menus and Perfect Pairings* is really the kaleidoscope of my life beginning with days on my family's Kansas farm to everything I had learned at ESU from business management, to financial planning, and organization skills. Even the influence of France that can be seen in many of the menus and recipes in the book began in my first visit in 1975 during an ESU class trip from the Home Economics Department.*

When I look back, what I recall most at ESU is the life force I was privy to and the qualities I was encouraged to develop; to have curiosity, to develop friendships, hold life-long interests, revel in the miracle of learning something new every day and treasure the importance of knowing our lives are integral to everything else happening in our world and an ever-faster moving society.

When I was a student at ESU, it was a very different time but what we learn and take from life from our college experience has not really changed. Thank you ESU and your distinguished professors for providing my building blocks for life.