

Jonathan Bagley
A Profile by Tony Seton

It might be fair to say that Jonathan Bagley invented himself in a garage. He had started life in “suburban bliss,” but when he was five, his mother, “who had been rebellious all of her life, left my dad, moved to New York with me, got an apartment, hung out with sort of B-list New York punk rock stars and started to create the life that she wanted.” She started off in publishing and then went became the director of development for a rabbinical school.

In his late teens, Jonathan moved from the intense bustle of Greenwich Village – “I was looking for the smallest school in the least populated place I could find” – and that was the College of the Atlantic in pastoral Bar Harbor, Maine. He had a vague interest in marine biology but discovered that such a course of study required considerably more academic rigor than he was will to contribute to the process. “You have to really drill down and pick one species of sulfur-eating underwater vent bacteria to study if you want to make any sort of headway, and I was much more of a generalist.”



He got involved in student politics, thinking that he would more enjoy trying to run the school than actually studying. At one point, “I was going to be a teacher, until I met the kids. I found I really didn’t have the patience for small children. They seemed too cute and interesting from a distance, but God love you if you have to actually hold them responsible for something.”

So he dropped out and started cooking; something he had always been really good at. During his time in school, he been “working as a sandwich-maker, *barista*, in a very touristy part of the world a lot of cruise ships and newly-weds and nearly-deads. And there was a built-in college student population for all of the cafes and sandwich shops and things like that.”

Jonathan parlayed his experience into a job as a dishwasher at a real restaurant – Bunchberries; it’s a flower that lives in coastal Maine – and worked his way up. “One day the breakfast cook came in still drunk from the night before. She hadn’t even gone to bed, just sort of changed her clothes and came to work, and my boss fired her on the spot and then asked me, ‘Hey, you’ve been paying attention, right?’”

Jonathan replied, “Well, yeah, kinda.” And bang-zoom, “I started cooking, and not getting drunk and staying out all night. We did 150 people for breakfast in a place that sat 25.”

As happens at seasonal tourist spots, everyone is so burned out that relationships founder and when it all starts over again, the workers look for another job. “I found myself really able to speak eloquently about myself and what I’m able to, or thought I

was able to accomplish, so I got a lot of opportunities that I probably shouldn't have."

After a couple of year working for other people, Jonathan bought out a little baking company in a rented garage space - "It was an oven and a table and a mixer." He baked breads, muffins, scones, and such for the local B & B market which thrived in the tourist season. He was successful for most of ten years, then not. It was time to for a big change.

So he and Heather, whom he met in college, "basically gave up the house to foreclosure, gave up the business assets to the bank, packed up the family station wagon and moved to California."

They came to Monterey, where Jonathan's mother lives. He got a job in a coffee shop. "It was incredibly depressing to give up the life that you had built for nearly 20 years. We were as settled as we thought we were going to be and, oops."

He saw a listing on CraigsList for a cook and send in a resume which prompted a call an hour later, asking when he was available to meet. "Let me put my shoes on," replied Jonathan who'd just gotten home from work. "They were a hotel start-up looking for a chef/food and beverage manager; basically a do-it-all-for-no-money kind of guy. And I was like, 'Pick me! Pick me!'"

And they did. Jonathan was at the Hotel Abrego for two years, until the owner broke with the management company that had hired Jonathan. The experience was valuable, however, and opened the way for him at the Cypress Inn to become the food and beverage manager.

And also the chef. He works probably 65 hours a week. "I have a little bit of a hero complex. I try to do too much. I try to be too many things. I've built up this incredible tolerance to fatigue, and I really believe in what we're doing." Apparently. The volume has gone up 20% each of two years he's been there.

"I found my home. I really have. It's just interesting and it's a challenge and it's fun and it drives me crazy a lot of the time. Then I go home and reset and come back."

Jonathan and his family live in Pacific Grove.