



# PLAYERS

by Dick Odom

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*Hinted about this player in a couple of previous issues.* So much for the teasers, it's time to introduce a guy who's shown more excitement about **Skillet& Glass** than yours truly. There's good reason as you will see. An amateur cook, and in the distant past, professional bartender **Chris Morabito** will be a **PLAYER** in many capacities including: competitive cook (and coffee roaster); demonstrative cook (and mixologist); introducer of wines and bourbons; contributor to the **PLAYERS** issue; web contributor to other featured articles on the **Skillet& Glass** website; judge; and my guess, because of his personality, well-spokenness (I do butcher the English language), and sense of humor...**emcee** of some of our events.

Chris has been cooking for 34 years. What inspired his interest? Working in an upscale restaurant in Anderson, SC while attending Clemson; and, his grandparents--grandfather was Italian and my grandmother, who was one of the best cooks he's ever known, was Russian and put together the most

amazing Italian dishes and also Slavic comfort foods. His grandparents owned a deli in NYC and his family still uses many of his Grandmother's hand written recipes (passed own from generations- both Italian and Russian). Here's your partner **Nano D!!**

Favorite cooking techniques?...slow smoking with wood, searing and grilling, comfort foods such as stews, chili, chicken and dumplings, paella (at our first event, Chris will cook dessert in a paella pan). Mainly he sticks to tried and true recipes, but will often go off with his own versions and iterations. He roasts his own coffee beans together with his father they've learned to use a sophisticated home roaster- with a Microsoft surface pro tablet hooked up taking temp vitals, drum and fan speeds. We'll get some serious coffee roasting introductions from Chris and **Jerry Simonetti** down the road.

What inspired his interest in his favorite spirits?...years earlier he preferred fine scotches, and maybe 10 years ago a couple of great friends introduced him to a few allocation bourbons and he's started to build a nice collection of high end bourbons. Trips to Italy, Spain, and France have re-engaged interest in both their wines combined with

cooking Italian and Spanish, and learning to hone in on a few of his favorites from each area--such as Amarone and Brunello of Italy, Gigondas and Cotes Du Rhone from France, and Syrah, Zinfandel, Riojas, Cabs from anywhere.

He's trying to taste every great bourbon both easy to find and rare. He has a few friends that he's been blessed to meet that have shared the most rare bourbons not available to most collectors (he's gonna find a lot of comrades in ***Skillet & Glass*** who do just that). And he's adding one or two great wine groupings per region each year to his experience.

Besides having cooking as a passion, Chris loves shooting (especially shotgun) and teaching kids to shoot sporting clays. He's an avid hunter (deer, wild turkey) and also a gun and knife (especially high-end kitchen knife) enthusiast. His son Anthony and he shoot together in competitions in both shotgun and tactical 3-Gun tournaments. He plans to create a program that teaches people who are physically disabled how to shoot sporting clays. His daughter Emily is in fashion design school in Manhattan (Parson's School of Design) and her amazing senior thesis project is focused around designing her own

active wear line of adaptive clothing for the physically disabled.

He spent 8 years coaching his son in sporting clays from elementary age to Senior in high school and Anthony is now shooting in college level shotgun sports as a Freshman for Clemson. He says also, though now it might be hard to tell, he has completed many marathons (Charlotte, NYC, Marine Corp) and half ironman endurance competitions over the years. His favorite finishes were in Central park completing the NYC Marathon. He felt like he'd won a gold medal when finishing the Wilmington Beach to Battleship half ironman.

Chris' day job is as a mechanical engineer experienced in Construction/Design Engineering technology and specifically the last 15 years were spent in 3 Dimensional measurement, metrology, 3D reality capture laser scanning, and software applications in virtual design and construction. Whew! I'm glad this is a cooking, wine and spirits guild...I don't understand what any of that means!

Finally, Chris shares this experience. He had to rescue a nearly cooked pig off a huge smoker that he

took his eyes away from for about 10 minutes. He was having a huge party in Greenville and just refueled the large smoker with new wood and made the mistake of going into the house and forgetting that he didn't close the wood box. He ran outside and saw flames pumping out of every hole in the smoker, quickly grabbed a rake and pretty much dragged the pig off the grate onto the ground and threw towels on the pig. It was a miracle that most of it was ok, and he was able to feed 100 plus of his friends that evening!

I'm willing to bet that many of you thought that I was running out of talent in this very diverse group. Let's just say...***baby you ain't seen nothin' yet!***

Family and friends. Those are what this next **PLAYER** is to me. Amateur cook extraordinaire (notice that I reserve this term for me and my blood relatives), none other than **Bill Odom. CUZ!!** That's just 'cuz he's my first cousin.

Professional or amateur, none of our group including **Mr. Morabito**, has any more passion for cooking, wines, and spirits than does "Cousin Bill". He favors some unique cooking techniques and was the first to cook for me on a Himalayan salt block. The first thing

he placed on my plate from that spit was a tongue dripping morsel of Wagyu beef. Eventually gave me a laser thermometer to use with a salt block given to me by our mutual friend **Danny Deas**, another, you guessed it, member of the guild.

First, a little history. Billy and I knew and saw one another fairly regularly when we were younger, 'til about our ages 9 and 10. Then his mom and dad (my uncle) divorced and he moved to Macon, GA where his mom met a nice man in the Air Force who would become Billy's stepfather. On transfer, this nice Air Forcian moved his new family to California and Billy and I didn't see one another until he graduated from high school and he moved back to South Carolina. It just so happened that his dad lived in Rock Hill...before I ever moved to this great town. We got together a few times when I was in school at Clemson. That's when Billy was introduced to Danny—I digress, for better or worse—a story for another time. Not many years thereafter, I moved to Rock Hill and neither of us knew much of cooking, and I won't tell you what kinds of wines and whiskies we were drinking back then...but suffice it to say they were low budget with both of us living in apartments.

Nuff said about the background. Cousin Bill retired from his career job (Headquarters, Sales and Marketing Procurement Director, Altria Group, Inc. in Richmond, VA) earlier than most of us--**Bill Bigham** the exception. And, though he didn't go to culinary school like **Bill B** ("Blue"), he continued his passion for cooking. What's his favorite techniques for cooking?...using his "Big Kahuna" Wok, nailing a Black and Blue steak on an infrared grill, and more recently, experimenting with the Sous Vide method of cooking. We'll find several more sous vide experimenters in this group in addition to **Kelly B**, Billy and me.

Since being diagnosed with Celiac Disease about 10 years ago, and restricted to a Gluten Free diet, his cooking aspirations have been severely limited. While most beers are now off limits, fortunately, wine and distilled spirits can still be greatly enjoyed. I envision Billy being a judge (he's been wined-and-dined all over the world), or competitor, in a gluten free competition.

The challenge of collecting and savoring limited production, allocated and rare distilled spirits keeps him interested in pursuing his libation hobbies. "So

many wines and spirits, so little time.” Asked to name a few things that he’s most proud of in his cooking, wine, or spirits endeavors, he says “Preparing international, mostly Asian, based dishes and acquiring ‘hard to get’ Kentucky Bourbon and Extra Anejo Tequila”. Most of us are looking forward to hearing more about the wines and spirits collections of the pros and ams alike. I sure am.

Cuz has always enjoyed cooking, customizing published recipes, creating new personalized dishes, experimenting with different techniques, searching for the best ingredients – he says “cooking has endless possibilities”.

Of his achievements that he is most proud, outside of the realm of cooking and spirits, he says “aside from my beautiful family, I have soloed in an airplane, captained a sailboat, driven/ridden around a number of US IndyCar Racetracks and Ferrari’s Maranello test track – **life has been exciting!**” Methinks Cuz and **Ken “Cotter”** are going to get along just fine...**fast and furious!**

**Oo! Oo!**, before closing this one out, Cousin Bill’s given name is **Wilmer!**...I’ll take some heat for



that...family forgives of course...right Billy? Uh, right?

Enough for this writing...**MORE TO COME!** Still just warming up. I hope to eventually introduce you to all of our members in similar fashion. In the meantime **FELLOWS**, keep on cookin'.

***“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.” Mary Lou Cook***