

## **Dining With A Celebrity**

### **Sue Lee #1Fan and Rocky Jones pro-golfer/celebrity**

I pushed the tiller over and brought my little sailboat about, heading back toward the marina at Navy Pier. I always seems to be late back to the marina from sailing—the wind and waves are just too enticing to leave—but today was no day to be late. It was my special day to meet my favorite celebrity, golfer Rocky Jones from right up in Evanston. I had been following his career for about a year, after seeing him at a pro/am charity golf event two years ago. So far this year, he's won two majors and placed in the top five in three others. Suffice it to say, he's having a good year.

I really enjoy sailing: there are few things more relaxing than leaning back on the windward side of the boat, hand on the tiller, as it knifes through the water. After a hard week of practice and fretting over the right phrasing of some concerto, it is nice to take a boat out on Lake Michigan and get away. I usually have music going through my head; for some reason, it is easier to put everything straight when you're alone and out on the water. If I'm not thinking about music, I'm thinking about golf, my new passion. Ironically, I usually have sailing on my mind when I'm on land, and something else on my mind when I'm on the water.

On my special day, I had Paganini's First Violin Concerto going through my head as I sailed a beam reach up Chicago's skyline. I was going to use it for an upcoming audition for a space in an orchestra. When I reached the end of the second movement, a quick look told me that I could just about make it back to the marina in time to get home and change. I wanted to have the time available to do it right, and make my evening with Rocky perfect. I could see the sun sinking behind the city's tall buildings in what would be a beautiful sunset and hoped it was a good omen.

I bolted from the cab and up the stairs to my apartment, almost too nervous to handle my keys. I probably only had an hour to get ready. The restaurant where we'd meet was Joe's Seafood House in North Riverside Park, a decent drive with traffic from my Bucktown apartment. I still hadn't made the most important decision: which outfit to wear. I had narrowed the field to three possibilities during the previous week. The first was my "standard" evening dress—a black cocktail dress I wear to all of the parties and other events after concerts. The second was "traditional", a silk Korean garment my mother got me in Seoul for a cousin's wedding. The third choice was "fashionable", a new outfit that I had gotten this week, perhaps for this night. It consisted of a Zac Posen black, pencil skirt with a white blouse—simple, elegant, and sophisticated. With time pressing and because I knew the dinner would be filmed, I chose the Zac Posen. I went to my closet and began sifting through the dozens of pairs of shoes that covered the floor to find just the right ones. I pulled on the black peep-toe pumps, Jimmy Choo's, just as the limousine driver rang the bell!

On the ride over, my excitement climbed as I thought about getting to meet Rocky. I had started following his career from that charity event mainly because I thought he was cute and I liked golf. As I learned more about him, I thought he sounded like a good person,

besides being a good golfer. He seemed to be well-rounded, smart, and interesting. It probably helped that I was developing a real passion for golf myself. Although I've been in the U.S. for twenty years, since I was eight, I never did figure out football, baseball, or basketball. Consequently, I've never been interested in those sports' athletes.

I've watched Rocky play some amazing holes of golf on television and live once, and I admire his ability. I talked about him so much that my friends encouraged me to fill out the form on [www.diningwithacelebrity.com](http://www.diningwithacelebrity.com). I did and, luckily was chosen to have an evening with him as his #1 fan. Now, I was going to live the fantasy of meeting him.

The car pulled up to the entrance of the restaurant. Joe's Seafood is probably one of those establishments that I wouldn't normally get to see, at least not at this stage of my life. Joe is a well-respected chef, trained in Europe and California. His restaurant has a great wine cellar and has become a popular Chicago tradition in a short time. They have been on television, too. It's a far cry from the neighborhood bistros I and my friends usually frequent in Bucktown.

As the driver opened the door, and I stepped onto the sidewalk, I saw Rocky right in front of me! He was dressed in a three-button, medium gray, Armani suit with a white shirt, unbuttoned at the top without a tie. He quickly moved forward with his hand out saying, "You must be my number one fan, Sue Lee." We shook hands, and all I could manage was a meek, "Hello" and "Nice to meet you."

"I guess we should go inside, so we can be seated," he said as he motioned me toward the open door. Once inside the maitre 'd led us to a private room in the back of the restaurant. Inside the camera crew was setting up around our table, so we were served our first glass of wine at a small bar. They started us off with a glass from a Southern Illinois vintner, Kurt Lennin of Foster City Farms. It was a wonderful chardonnay, perfect to prepare my pallet for the feast ahead, if I wasn't too nervous to eat.

Rocky broke the ice by complimenting the way I looked. I returned the favor. He asked if I got to go to many formal events since I was a violinist. I told him that I did, but usually in a more conservative dress. "I chose this one because I knew we were being filmed and wanted to look more fashionable," I said. I struck a pose and told him that I wasn't far enough along in my career as a soloist to wear anything too racy or chic, like Nadia Salerno-Sonnenberg. He said he could sympathize, since the PGA tour had some similar unwritten rules: established personalities can get away with more. I told him that he would be able to dress in anything he liked pretty soon. He laughed and thanked me for the compliment.

"I just hope my mother doesn't see this on TV. She won't think this outfit is formal enough . . . or demure enough," I said as I looked at the neckline of the blouse. "She's pretty traditional," I added. He nodded and smiled. "I think the shoes make the outfit anyway," he said. This time I got to laugh and let him know that my one guilty, secret pleasure is shoes. "I have enough to cover my entire closet floor with several layers—very decadent." He said he only owned four pairs of shoes, other than golf shoes.

By this time, we were ready for our second glass of wine, which came from Napa Valley. The camera crew had set up, so we were ready to begin the dinner. We both sat down, and the restaurant staff brought in our appetizer, a half dozen raw cherrystone clams with lemon and a mild Cajun sauce. I dove in right away. The clams were exquisite.

He asked, “So how can I help with your golf swing?” I was flabbergasted. I knew he had probably guessed that I was a golfing enthusiast since I was a fan of his, but I did not want to put him on the spot to help me. *Everyone* probably asks him for tips.

“Oh, I don’t want to bore you with tales of me hacking away on the course. Besides, I’m sure everyone asks you about how to improve her swing, so I’m a little hesitant to follow suit,” I replied. “Nonsense,” he replied, “I figured that you might want to hear what a pro had to say about golf. Why else would you sign up for this event? Besides, I really *like* golf” I told him that there might be more to him than golf, but we talked about where I was with my game anyway. He listened attentively, giving me some suggestions and pointers along the way. He said that he had figured I would be good at the short game with its requirements for precision, since I was a violinist. I told him that music was easier to read than greens, and that you get pretty strong arms from holding a violin for hours on end, although I still come up a little short on my drives. He joked that he had a standing reservation at the Sydney Marovitz golf course up in Lincoln Park, and we could go work on my game after dinner.

When the salad came—a wonderful medley of Italian tomatoes, avocados, Sicilian black olives, anchovies, balsamic vinegar and olive oil, sprinkled with lemon juice—I asked him questions about his play and the PGA tour. He was very forthcoming and gave a very good inside view of the professional game. I could really see his passion for being a professional in all of the details he described of working his way up from junior tournaments to the majors.

The next course was wheat pizza bread topped with grated Romano cheese, artichoke hearts, black Grecian olives, wheat germ, and extra virgin olive oil. As we worked on it, he began asking questions about me. We talked about my background: growing up in Korea and then moving to the States when I was eight, the culture shock. I also told him about the central focus of my life, playing the violin, from childhood through Northwestern and my masters to all of the tours and professional concerts in which I’ve taken part. He listened very attentively, asking questions and taking in all of the details.

Rocky told me that he was very grateful to be able to have some time with an interesting person outside of golf. Most of his time—80% he said—is taken up with golf, so he doesn’t get much of an opportunity to hear about anything other than golf. Sometimes that frustrates him. He said that there were always interesting people around and things to do where he grew up in Evanston because of Northwestern and the proximity to Chicago. He thought it was nice to be able to re-experience some that, even if vicariously through me.

The conversation slowed down when the main course arrived, mainly because it was so delicious and we just couldn’t divert our attention from it. The meal was a 16” sea bass

from the Atlantic Ocean, flown in overnight and prepared in an oven with Grecian spices and wine from Kurt's winery in southern Illinois. There was also more wine to drink, a great white from the same vineyard. Together, it was all perfect.

We resumed our conversation as they took away the plates and told us about the dessert. The conversation turned serious as we discussed the principal charity that he supported—research into asthma. His younger brother had a severe case, and Rocky had learned a lot about the problem and how urban pollution caused or exacerbated a good many cases. “Someone once told me that all of those beautiful sunsets I see while sailing are the result of dust and pollution in the air,” I told him. I also talked about a doctor at Rush Medical School whom I had met at after a benefit concert. She was doing research into asthma and how it affects poor children in the city. She was part of a program to get famous celebrities to do spots to educate children on asthma and how to get help for it. I remembered her work because her first name was Giselle, and we had played excerpts from the ballet *Giselle* that night. Rocky had heard of her and the program; actually he had helped raise money for it.

The cannoli and scoops of Freddie's Homemade Chocolate ice cream they served us were great, the *coup d' grace* for the evening. As the staff brought us their house specialty blend of Costa Rican and Columbian coffee beans, we discussed the meal. We both agreed that it would be hard to top: it was as near to perfect as one could wish. We also decided that we both wanted to try ceviche next. I promised to research the best place in Chicago for ceviche and keep an open date for when Rocky had some time to do another evening. The coffee had a bite to it but was also sobering, a good thing after all of the wine.

We got up to leave the table. Rocky had some business in the morning and a flight in the afternoon to get to a tournament. He apologized for having to leave then, but I understood the demands of a career like golf. He gave me a hug and kissed my cheek before saying good-bye and getting into his car. I floated to my car and collapsed into the seat. It was a great evening, and I wasn't ready for it to end. I pulled out my phone and turned it on. I saw five messages in the voice mail box, no doubt from my friends wanting to know how my evening with Rocky had gone. Instead of calling them, I sent a broadcast text message to meet me at our usual spot. I was going to spend a little time bragging about every aspect of this truly memorable evening!