

BROUGHT TO YOU
BY LIFE & TIMES**PLUSH** people

ONE of the best ways to assess whether or not cookbook authors are authentic is to observe how they relate to food. The following is what happens when Elodie Bellegarde and Denise Hung are served a slice of Chocolate Truffle Torte at a cafe in Kuala Lumpur.

Both women spend a few moments studying the rich dessert, turning the plate around and discussing if the item could have been better placed. Then Elodie cuts into it.

"Ooo, it looks clean. There are no bubbles. But I would have made the base thicker," she says. She takes a bite, closes her eyes and adds: "This is so good."

Denise does the same and when Elodie finishes, she puts her hand on her stomach and declares: "That was too much. We'll have to work-out tomorrow."

They launch into a detailed discussion about what they've eaten. Could they have made the same thing? What ingredients could they have used to enhance a particular element of the cake? Eventually, they agree that depending on the mood they are in, both would add raspberry sauce on the side.

INTRICATE RELATIONSHIP

It is this intricate relationship between a person's mood and the food they create, that Elodie (a native of France) and Denise (a Malaysian) explore in their

A FOOD FOR EVERY MOOD

How you feel, it seems, can determine the kind of food you prepare, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

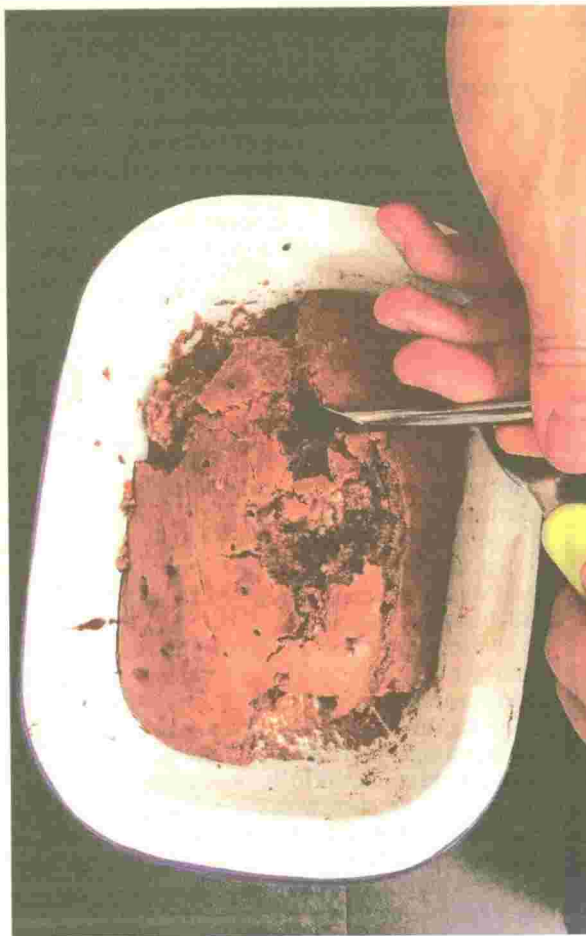
Kitchen Stories

is now available at Kinokuniya, KL

AUTHORS: Elodie Bellegarde & Denise Hung

PHOTOGRAPHY: Elodie Bellegarde

PUBLISHER: Page One



Birthday cake that Elliot baked for his mother.



Bellegarde (left) and Denise share the same philosophy on food.

book, *Kitchen Stories*.

Now based in Singapore, the authors invite the reader to understand how this works and have divided the chapters in the book according to various moods. These include positive ones like bliss and love to negative ones like sadness and selfishness.

Elodie, who has a Masters in Culinary Arts, says she's happiest when she's in the kitchen. She baked her first cake when she was 5 and still measures out the ingredients using the same method — by the number of pots rather than grams.

She yearns for her son to become her kitchen buddy and narrates a story about how Elliot Bellegarde-Matthew, 4, decided to throw his mother a spontaneous birthday party three weeks ago.

"We had to blow balloons and dress up. He baked a cake for me. He decided on everything. On the measurements, everything," says the proud 33-year-old daughter of a welder and child-minder.

While Elodie will not allow her son to go near the kitchen hob, he is allowed to help prepare the ingredients, from breaking the eggs to sieving the flour. Sure, it'll be messy, she says, but children need to be messy. It doesn't matter whether or not the cake turns out great.

"I'm his mother," she adds. "So, whatever he makes will be delicious."

Undeniably, Elliot, who can be distracted in mere seconds, becomes focused when he's in the kitchen. Pointing to a photo of that happy memory of her "second birthday in a year", Elodie says: "Look at how serious he is. He doesn't

wear glasses. But when he was cooking, he looks so serious."

CULINARY JOURNEY

Meanwhile, Denise, 26, did not start out wanting to be a pastry cook, freelance food writer and self-taught photographer. Her first option was to study psychology. A year into her course in Leeds, United Kingdom, Denise was convinced she had to change her career. "I just couldn't take all the statistics and how mundane it was," she confides.

While her family, who lives in Johor Baru, was surprised, her mother supported her decision to leave Leeds. As such, Denise packed 30 kg of clothes and moved to Orlando to join Le Cordon Bleu Orlando, USA.

Staying in a motel for six months, this gutsy girl explains a misconception about America. "People think this is Florida, everything should be OK," she says. "It is if you have a car. There's hardly any public transport and things are difficult."

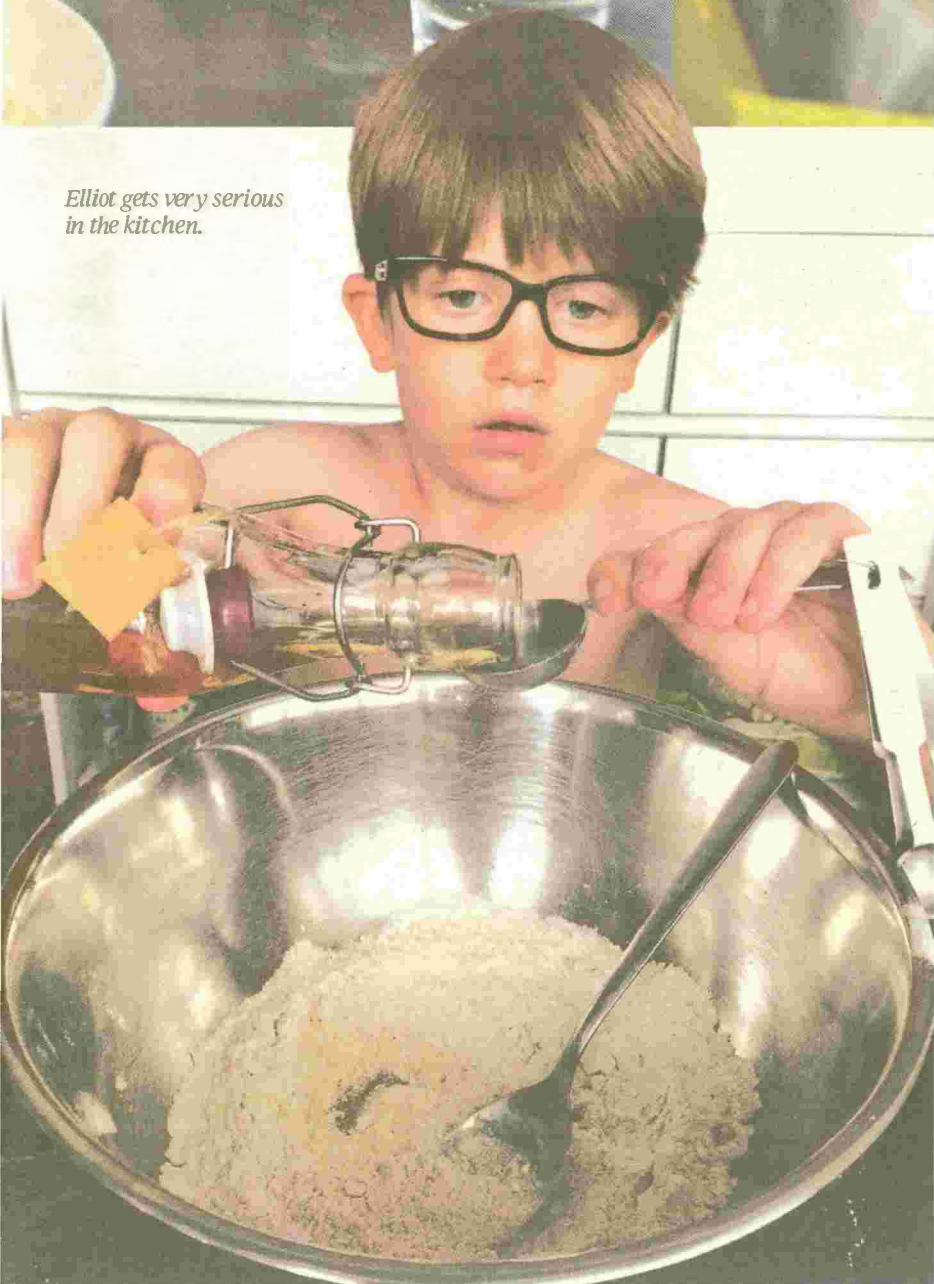
To get to the one Walmart nearby to buy groceries and necessities, she had to cross a highway with four lanes on either side. People would honk at her, wondering if she was crazy. Thrifty, she would save the food she made at culinary school and freeze it to eat later. Although she chose classes that began at 6pm and ended at 2am, Denise says it was the best one and a half years of her life.

Culinary school was just the journey. The real challenge, she says, began after she received her Associates Degree in Patisserie in 2013.

"Everyone thinks you're going to cook



Elliot gets very serious in the kitchen.



people **PLUSH** BROUGHT TO YOU BY LIFE & TIMES

KITCHEN STORIES

Elodie Bellegarde & Denise Hung



PAGE ONE

Bellegarde and Hung connected on Instagram and became fast friends before publishing their book.

“Look at how serious he is. He doesn’t wear glasses. But when he was cooking, he looks so serious.”

Elodie Bellegarde

and be happy. Food is just a tiny part of the industry,” she says. Waving her hand, she adds: “Look around you. Look at the kitchen. There’s one girl in there and all the others are men. It’s such a male-dominated industry and girls are never the ones giving out instructions; they’re always the ones taking it.”

It’s down to physical size, Denise conjectures.

“It’s sometimes the case of bigger person, bigger voice and I’m tiny. I’ve had plates thrown at me and people say vulgar things even though I’m right,” she says.

FAST CONNECTIONS, SLOW COOKING

How did two women, so very different in their lifestyles and experiences meet and eventually publish a book together?

Instagram. As a food stylist and photographer, Elodie often uploaded her photos onto the social networking platform. She reached out to Denise when she came across her work and they became fast friends. Since they shared the same philosophy about food, it was just a matter of time before the book would

be published.

This philosophy can be crystallised into a belief that “preparing food is a creative process and a plate is much like a blank canvas. The dish becomes an expression of how we feel and who we are as cooks while the photography and styling help illustrate each particular mood and emotion”.

Of all the emotions, perhaps the one that reflects poignant tales for both women is Emotional. In Elodie’s case, she chooses the Hazelnut And Pear Cake.

“One of my best friends was going through a rough patch,” explains Elodie. I asked her what would make her feel better and she said a simple cake. It was not a fancy one, but a rustic cake. So, I made this Hazelnut And Pear Cake. It reminds me of autumn. The idea of decay and ending.”

For Denise, her recipe of choice under this emotion is Beef Ragu With Caramelised Onions. “This is slow cooking,” says Denise. The mood here is meditative and she made this dish at a time when she was deciding whether to pursue a career in the food industry or go back to journalism. With a huge smile, she says: “Well, we know what the decision was.”

Focusing on their unique French-Malaysian collaboration, the women conclude that the food we eat doesn’t necessarily have to be fussy and difficult to make. Nor does good food have to be expensive.

Elodie concludes: “It just needs to be simple, wholesome food. It should be accessible and down-to-earth.”