

Father, daughter from Ephrata team up in cooking school



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Blaine Shahan

Kaitlin Goodwin and her father, Tom Smith, of Ephrata, pose in the culinary classroom at YTI Career Institute -- Lancaster before their graduation on Aug. 26, 2014.

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By JEFF HAWKES | Staff Writer

Something unusual happened when 20-year-old Kaitlin Goodwin went to culinary school. Her dad enrolled, too.

It actually worked out.

Classmates for 21 months, Ephrata residents Kaitlin and her father, Tom Smith, 42, graduated Tuesday from YTI Career Institute still on speaking terms.

In fact, Kaitlin said, "The bond is a lot stronger now."

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The oldest of three siblings, Kaitlin said she was always close to her dad, even through high school. They liked going to scary movies and rooting for the Philadelphia Flyers together.

Kaitlin also enjoyed her father's company in the kitchen while he cooked chicken tandoori, burritos and other mouth-watering dishes.

"There's not much I don't make given I have the proper ingredients," said Smith, a corrections officer in Lebanon before deciding on a career change.

"The chicken marsala turned purple," Kaitlin said.

"Wrong wine," Smith explained.

Mutual support

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As an Ephrata High School junior considering psychology as a major, Kaitlin told her dad she was taking him to college with her. It was a joke, of course, until it wasn't.

Kaitlin enjoyed a cooking class her senior year and decided on culinary school, an idea that captured Smith's imagination. He thought he should, in fact, go to school with her.

"We kind of both looked at each other and said, 'Let's do this,'" Smith recalled.

Because YTI's Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts, 3050 Hempland Road, instructs students as a cluster, father and daughter had every class together. They were in school four days a week, five hours a day, followed by homework.

Kaitlin assisted her dad with math and computer programs, and Smith helped his daughter gain confidence in the kitchen.

"She burned a lot of stuff," he said.

Friendly competition

Having dropped out at ninth grade and earned a graduate-equivalency degree years later, Smith applied himself at YTI as if he had something to prove. Kaitlin accepted the challenge of keeping up with him.

"I would get mad when he would get a better grade than me," Kaitlin said. "I hated it."

"I would always be ...," started Smith, with his daughter completing his sentence. "A hair above me," Kaitlin said, "and it was so annoying."

"It was funny if I got Student of the Term or something," Smith said.

"Shut-up, dad," Kaitlin said.

"Exactly," Smith rejoined.

"Hey, I got it (Student of the Term), too."

"You finally got it," Smith agreed.

"Finally?" said Kaitlin, in a slow burn.

Overcoming challenges

A crisis arose one morning when Smith failed to get up for class. Kaitlin thought she knew her father well, but she didn't know he had long-standing, but untreated social anxiety disorder.

"It comes and goes," Smith said. "It's been a difficult battle."

For almost a week Smith did not go to class, and he contemplated quitting. But with the encouragement of Kaitlin, and his wife, Angela, and the help of YTI student services, Smith got treatment and went back to school.

Months later, Smith required surgery to relieve neck pain. It was only a speed bump on his road to graduation.

Kaitlin said her dad's perseverance motivated her to finish strong, graduating with a 3.8 grade point average.

"What did you finish with?" she asked her father.

"At least a 3.9," he said.

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"That's OK," she said.

"It might have been a 4.0," Smith added. "I didn't see my last grade."

"Whatever, dad."



Jeff Hawkes writes about social policy and the well-being of Lancaster County and its people for Lancaster Newspapers. He can be reached at jhawkes@lnpnews.com or (717) 481-6141.

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