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A Chef's Life

Book retraces journey from Poland to U.S.

By Anita Houk

Posted September 19, 2012 at 3 a.m.

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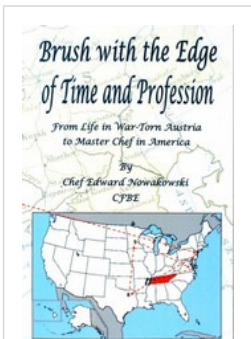


PHOTO BY APRIL SHEPPARD

April Sheppard/Special to The Commercial Appeal Polish immigrant Chef Edward Nowakowski says his mother inspired him to write this memoir (GrantHousePublishers, Jonesboro, Ark.), chronicling her life in Europe and his, there and in the United States.

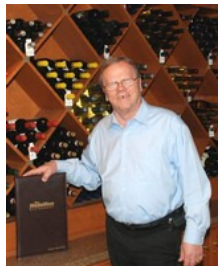


PHOTO BY ANITA HOUK

Asked about standout memories from childhood, Edward Nowakowski doesn't hesitate:

"I was 10 when Stalin passed away."

Born to a labor camp worker in Austria, educated in Poland and France, trained in European culinary kitchens and, since 1977, a chef in the United States, Nowakowski still points to March 5, 1953, as most memorable.

"I went to the market to get the milk and it was announced over speakers that (Joseph) Stalin (premier of the Soviet Union) had passed away, and we had to all salute there in the street for one minute."

Nowakowski's journey has taken him from infancy in makeshift quarters above a barn to a culinary career of distinction. Yet, at 69, the master chef is eager to add one more title after his name:

Author.

And what would one expect from a chef in book form?

"It's not a cookbook," he says emphatically. "It's a memoir."

Nowakowski is preparing to introduce his "Brush with the Edge of Time and Profession" (277 pages, GrantHouse Publishers, Jonesboro, Ark.). The autumn release date and signing reception are to be announced.

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Anita Houk/Special to The Commercial Appeal Edward Nowakowski, executive chef and director of food and beverage services at the Kemmons Wilson Conference Center Group at the University of Memphis, has written a memoir being released this fall, "Brush with Edge of Time and Profession."



PHOTO BY NOWAKOWSKI FAMILY PHOTO

But he knows where the reception will be — the Kemmons Wilson Conference Center at the University of Memphis. He is executive chef and director of food and beverage at the center, from which many of his activities branch.

"I'm too busy to get old," he says.

He lectures on business and management to classes at the Kemmons Wilson Hospitality School. He conducts demos in cooking and butchering at Southwest Tennessee Community College.

"In classes, I try to stress that cooking is an art. Each class has many young chefs, each cooking things a little differently," Nowakowski says. "Even me, during the cooking, I am creating, maybe adding something."

He includes student chefs in his elaborate fundraising receptions and banquets for nonprofit groups. He has been involved with the Greater Memphis Chapter of the American Culinary Federation. And he instructs in his specialty, carving blocks of ice, salt or tallow into tabletop sculptures.

"Now for the restaurant business, you got to have a consistent product, a recipe and a consistent outcome. But in my personal life, I like to

change things around, experiment with something different."

His own life has been one of great changes, which his mother, Stanislawa "Stasia" Nowakowski, didn't let him forget.

"My mother inspired me to write the memoir," he says. "The first three chapters are her life, in her own words."

He was in America by then. She was in Tarnow, Poland.

"Sometimes we communicated only by letters, but also I spent many evenings talking to her. I had to order a special visa for her to go to the post office, to the phone, to take my call. Later, when she could get her own phone, it was easier."

A favorite story of theirs is of food and Baby Edus (who would become "Edward" in America).

"When I was born," the chef explains, "my mom was a young girl. She had been taken to a German labor camp and was working on a farm, a Polish girl living above the barn with a Russian woman, who would be my godmother. She, also, was captured by the Germans."

Here, he refers to the memoir, to the chapters in his mother's words.

Stasia Nowakowski: "My boy was about three months old. I didn't have enough milk to breast feed, and the bauer (farmer) was skimpy with rations. Most nights my little boy did not let us sleep because he was hungry.

"Then one night as my baby was crying again, (godmother) Zofia said, 'Stasia, let me try something.' She went to the stable and milked one of the cows straight into the baby bottle. She returned and gave it to my baby boy. A miracle happened! The baby

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Wind: S 6mph

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54°



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9	10	11	
TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	MORE

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Various locations

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Orpheum Theater

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was sucking the bottle of fresh warm milk and went back to sleep again without crying! After that night, the bottle of cow's milk became the nightly custom."

Even today, the chef admits, milk is still a favorite.

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