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IN ANOTHER LIFE
Giving ship prankster
a roasting showed
I could stand the heat

Chef Kevin Dundon may have learnt his trade in Zurich, but dealing with a jealous colleague during a spell on the ocean wave and a party-filled stint running a Miami eatery gave him lessons in life

In 1987, as I was waiting for my visa to come through to go to Switzerland where I had a cooking scholarship lined up, I worked on cruise ships. Initially, I went on the Royal Caribbean line, working seven days a week. There must have been about 800 staff on it and there were huge cartels: Irish mafia, Italian mafia, Filipino mafia... they watched your back.

The waiting staff were competitive: they were all about having to maintain a five-star rating for their guests. If they didn't maintain that rating, the number of guests they got to look after on the next cruise would be reduced, which dropped their salary. I worked in the kitchen and had waiters paying me to mind their cutlery and plates in the fridges, because there was just enough china for the cruise and nothing extra, and it was important for them to have their tables fully set.

It was an interesting learning curve. You were oblivious to working seven days

a week: your "day off" just meant you didn't have to work a breakfast shift. There was seniority within the kitchen. I worked in the fish section, and a fish person would normally go on to the roast section and then on to the top section in the kitchen doing fine sauces. I got promoted from fish to sauce, over the head of the roast guy. He wasn't pleased — and I soon discovered that being on a cruise ship was more of a life-learning experience than a culinary one.

We used to have theme nights. One particular night the theme was Italian, with lasagne as a starter option. I was doing a double batch because I knew we would be doing the same again the following week. I put them in the oven.

A cruise ship rocks, so there are clips on the front of the oven doors to stop your food from flying out. The roast guy

came along and opened one of my oven's clips. Four big trays of lasagne fell on the floor and there he was, laughing in the corner. The chef came over and gave me a bollocking. I apologised but, because I'd made extra, I was able to tell him, "We're not short tonight, so we're OK for service." So at least that was something.

The next night was American night. One of the main features on the menu was prime rib of beef. I knocked off a switch on two of the roast guy's ovens. Everything looked as though it was cooking, except there was no heat in the ovens.

He never gave me trouble me again. You had to do that, because if you didn't, you may as well have gone home.

After Royal Caribbean, I worked for Windstar Cruises. I came off one ship in Miami, Florida, and didn't want to go home while I was awaiting my visa, so a friend who owned a cafe in an apartment complex in North Beach asked me if I would be interested in managing it for her until my visa came through. I thought that would be quite cool — a chill-out for six months.

The cafe opened at 7am, so while I had to be in at that time to make sure the staff were there, I then hung out by the pool

We partied every night. I'd drink coffee to stay awake until it was time to open the cafe, then I'd sleep by the pool



Miami heat Dundon took a 'working' break in the Florida city, below, before beginning his training in earnest



for the day and partied every night. I was fortunate that, when I had applied for my USIT student card, they made a mistake with my date of birth, and had it down that I was 23. You had to be 21 to drink in America and I was actually only 20, so I was laughing.

We used to go to the Coconut Grove neighbourhood every night. The whole city was openly full of drugs, but I didn't touch them. I would drink Cuban coffee to stay awake until it was time to open the cafe, then I would sleep by the pool.

There were six members of staff. I was always there, though not necessarily working hard, but we were keeping the show on the road and keeping the customers happy. I had a car, but it wasn't good enough to take my driving test in, so one of the cafe clients lent me his. I did my driving test in a Porsche 928, in Miami, at the age of 20.

Then the visa came through and I went to do the scholarship. The contrast was stark: I went from Miami, partying all the time, to ultra-conservative Zurich. Switzerland was a great experience, but I really came of age in Miami.

Kevin Dundon's limited-edition King's Bay Maple Ale is available from SuperValu and Centra stores from March 1

GET STRUNG OUT ON MUSIC

The Irish Association of Youth Orchestras' 22nd annual festival takes place at the National Concert Hall in Dublin on Saturday. The event will feature 400 young musicians from across Ireland, including Salvina Trichini from Saint Ultans primary school's Super Senior Strings, right, with performances at 3pm and 8pm. Audiences will hear a variety of classical and contemporary works including A Celtic Suite, Lord of the Dance, Bizet's Farandole, Dvorak's Slavonic Dance and Mussorgsky's Night on Bare Mountain. Tickets from €7.50. nchi.ie



TAPE ACTION

Can artificial intelligence (AI) really do our jobs better than us? Humans Need Not Apply, a new exhibition opening at Dublin's Science Gallery on Friday, peers into the future and sees an automated world where the machines have taken over. The exhibition includes working examples of AI and art and design works, such as the underground communication device, above, that explore the possibilities of a post-work world where intelligent machines surpass us on nearly every level. dublin.sciencegallery.com



SEE A FREUD IN THE FLESH

The Irish Museum of Modern Art has secured a five-year loan of 50 works by Lucian Freud, considered one of the greatest realist painters of the 20th century. Under the title the Freud Project, IMMA will present a series of Freud-related exhibitions, with a new programme of events and openings each year. This year's exhibition, which runs until October, includes etchings that offer an insight into the great man's artistic process. Tickets are €8, or free to IMMA members. imma.ie



FIND A FIRST EDITION

Next Sunday's Tipperariana Book Fair is the largest one-day antiquarian and second-hand book fair in Ireland. Dozens of dealers from across the country will bring their collections to the Fethard Ballroom in Fethard, Co Tipperary, where visitors can scour their shelves for rare gems. You can also bring along books for an expert appraisal. Entry costs €2 and there will be live music and competitions on the day. tipperariana.com