

risen

faith * hope * love

for KING & COUNTRY's
Joel Smallbone
His New Movie,
Marriage &
Musical Roots

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with the
Food Network
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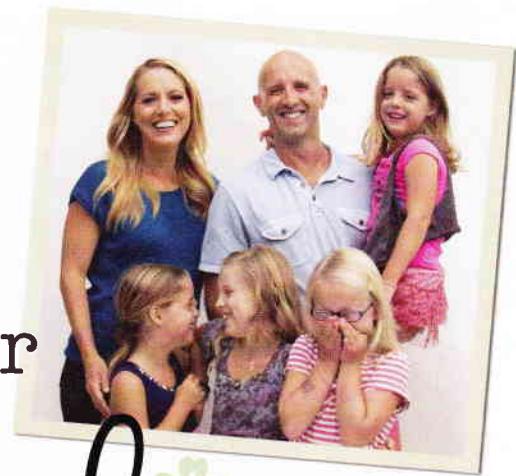
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Food Network Star

Melissa d'Arabian

Stirs up Success in the Kitchen and at Home

Writer: Kelli Gillespie
Photographer: Rob Springer

Life is busy for any television host. But mix in cookbook author, speaker, and full-time mother of four daughters and the word busy takes on a new meaning. Known for her victory as *Food Network Star's* fifth season winner, Melissa d'Arabian's days are jam packed. This MBA graduate used her former corporate finance and strategy professional career to launch her into the food and TV world. Her affordable and stylish home cooking continues to propel her popularity. *Risen* sat down with d'Arabian as she shares her insights about cooking, her faith and just how important that family dinner time together really is.

interviewed exclusively for risen magazine in coronado, california

Risen Magazine: Raised by a single mom, you grew up knowing how to stretch a dollar and work a kitchen. What from your childhood has been passed on and now used in the way you run your household today?

Melissa d'Arabian: Being raised by a single mom we never had extra money to spare and I think that is just something that stayed in my blood. I believe in purposeful spending. I still clip coupons to this day, and I think a lot of that I can trace back to my mom. I remember one day when I was little, my mom fed us dinner and she was really proud of the fact that it had cost her thirty-five cents. She had gotten some chicken wings on sale [the whole chicken wing, not the little appetizer size] and I think that pride in having fed her family for so little money, carried on in me. I always feel good about not overspending and I feel we should be good stewards of our resources.

RM: Your career background has been diverse from finance, to entertainment, to working in Europe, which I understand is where you met your husband. How did this happen?

MDA: My career has been a huge blessing and gift. I was on a really classic business track. I went to business school, I worked in consulting, then I worked in finance –and that's when I met my husband. When we got married, we had four kids right away so then I had the gift of becoming a stay-at-home mom to a pretty big family. I didn't meet my husband until I was well into my thirties, so I had my kids later on, I was [had kids at] 36, 37 and then twins at 38. So to become a stay-at-home mom to four babies in diapers was a huge switch. And it was when the twins were about a year old that my husband said, "You know, maybe you need a project." And so that's when I started speaking to "moms" groups and "parent" groups about money saving techniques and strategies at home. Then it snowballed from there into *Next Food Network Star* and *Food Network*. It's a trajectory that only makes sense to me now in hindsight.

RM: You won season five of *The Next Food Network Star* [after season 7,

the show was rebranded to *Food Network Star*]. Why did you want to be part of a reality television competition and what were your expectations or reservations?

MDA: *Food Network Star* is an interesting animal because it's reality TV and I think the approach that a lot of people have going into a show like that is that it all is about the reality show. And I really saw it as a job interview. I saw it as a piece in the bigger puzzle that is our family, and my mission statement and what I want to do on this earth before I leave it. That kind of took the pressure off in a sense, because I figured I'm there to do what I think I'm meant to do and where the chips fall, I can make my peace with that. There is a real comfort in knowing that if I suit up, and show up, and put in the work, that's enough for me. *Food Network Star* for me was fantastic. It was great schooling, it was interesting, it was challenging, it was demanding; all the things that reminded me of going to business school. I like to work hard. Sure, is it great that I won? Absolutely! But the experience would not have been less great, had I not.

RM: When you mentioned your family mission statement, I'm curious. How do you define that or what do you think is your calling?

MDA: Every year for New Year's Eve instead of going out, my husband and I would stay at home and talk about what we wanted to accomplish in the upcoming year – personally, professionally, as a couple, and as a family. It sort of started when our kids were young and babysitters were so expensive. We would just jot down; *What are we about as a couple? What are we about as a family? What am I about as a human being?* That became a tradition for us where we revamped and revisited our life mission.

My personal life mission has not changed since long before I was on TV – and it has very little to do with TV and food – but my career in TV and food certainly fits into my personal life mission. I think that we are called to do something bigger than television here on this earth. When I judge *Food Network Star* or other culinary competitions, there are people



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that will say, "I just know that this is what I am meant to do. I am meant to be on TV." And I don't know, I don't think God's plan is for me to be on TV. I think His plan is so much bigger than that. Sure, could we use TV as a means to an end? Absolutely. But the truth is, I don't need TV to [fulfill] my personal life mission. I think our circumstances are sort of props to get us there. When we start confusing our means with our ends, that's when I think we get into shady territory, at least for me.

RM: Faith is an important part of your life. When did you become a Christian and what does that mean to you and the way you raise your family?

MDA: For me, my faith is everything. As a purely logistical note, I don't know how people get through the day without faith. I just don't know how they do it. And I wouldn't want to.

I grew up with a general sense of faith. I went to a Christian junior high, I went to Christian camp, I went to church, but I think Christianity and my faith were more of academic exercises through my teenage years. When I was twenty, my mom died by suicide. My parents got divorced when I was just a couple months old so that left me without any parents. So that put me into a little bit of a faith crisis. I had this general sense of faith, but I had a very hard time reconciling what my mom's suicide meant. That was a decade long crisis and it took those ten years for me to reconcile that faith and how my mom's death fit into that. My faith shifted from this automatic, academic, acceptance of Christianity, to really questioning and probing where I stood on everything and what my personal relationship [with Christ] was. I came out of that with a much more mature sense of

faith; one that was more purposeful and one where I participated in more actively. My mom died 24 years ago and that completely changed my faith.

I think as an adult my faith changed yet again once I had kids. The love of a parent to a child is the closest thing to unconditional love, and I think it's the closest thing to what God's love is for us. So that morphed my faith a bit and how I viewed God as a fellow parent. It's how I get through the day as a working mom. It's not just a part of me; it's everything. I have Bible study on Thursdays and my publicist knows that if I have to fly somewhere it's after 11 a.m., because from 8:15-10:30 a.m., that's what I'm doing. Obviously sometimes it happens and I just can't be here if I'm gone all week or something, but it's beyond a priority. It's how I structure my life and my day. It's not that I have to; it's just that I treasure it that much.

RM: When your mother committed suicide, you were a junior in college. Unfortunately, I feel like we are hearing of more and more stories of families affected by suicide, or lacking hope. What advice or tools could you share with someone on that front?

MDA: There are sort of two parts stemming from suicide crisis. The first is, "Why me? Where is God when it hurts?" That isn't what sent me into a decade-long tailspin. While that's awful, that wasn't the stuff that kept my mind spinning. It was the nature of suicide, how people talk about suicide in whispers and I think we should be having louder conversations. I think that as long as I am on this earth, I cannot allow somebody to be in that vortex of despair and not do my best to breakthrough and let them know that people care.

To the person that is worried about a family member or friend, I think there is a big myth out there that, "If I bring up that I'm worried about them, or that I think they may be considering suicide," then they think, "I don't want to put the idea in their heads." I think people need to find ways to reach out and to let somebody know that they are concerned, and to be that hand that breaks through that whirlwind of despair.

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I would choose the people.

And then I think as a society, specific to my experience in suicide, when we are talking about preventing suicide – and suicide is preventable – there is this whole spectrum of prevention options depending on the life cycle of where someone is. For example, are they a survivor and need help coping afterward, like I was? There are a lot of risk factors for suicide like alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, mental illness, bipolarism; there are a lot of indicators and I think that as a society, if we can remove the stigma from people seeking help for depression, we will help suicide. If we can remove the stigma of any of those risk factors, it perhaps is just as important as removing the stigma from suicide itself.

RM: Incorporating faith within family, parents sometimes feel like they are better at developing studying skills or sports. When it comes to instilling the importance of children having their own genuine relationship with the Lord, how do you make sure your kids know God is more than church on Sundays?

MDA: I think as a mom, the spiritual to-do list can kind of change. One of the things I've newly added to my repertoire of spiritual activities is praying very specifically, and individually, for my children with specific Bible verses. I started this last year from a "Mom's in Prayer" group where we will talk about healing one week, and then we will pick one of our children to pray over about healing and pray together and have that power of praying moms.

Everything from, "Oh Mom, Anita from your Bible study is here," [at the front door] to the fact that they see my books lying around, or doing VBS [Vacation Bible School] and seeing their friends participate [reinforces the message]. Also, this year was the first time we did Family Camp. There are ways to infuse that this is not just a Sunday thing, and the fact that there is this seamless transition between what is "normal" life and what is "Christian" life. We live in a small town so it's very blended here, and we are blessed in that sense. I feel like I blended my Christianity into my regular life which has been a very key component to how I mother. I think it's true, kids do what you do, not what you say.

RM: Spending time with your kids is important and that's evident with the creation of your current show, *The Picky Eaters Project*, which is a web series on FoodNetwork.com that encourages kids to have a more adventuresome palate. What have you seen with your kids getting to be more involved in

what you've been doing in the kitchen?

MDA: *The Picky Eaters Project* really came from me wanting to create a project to do with my kids. It didn't come from, "Oh I think this will make great TV." I thought that this is the program I want to create, but I want to communicate it with other people because I think there will be some interesting lessons learned. That's when I went to Food Network, and I said, "I'm doing this. Do you guys want to come in and film it?" And they got on board right away. It wasn't an exercise where I thought, "I really want to do some sort of show with my kids. Hmmm... what could I do?" It wasn't that. It really came out of this organic desire to make some changes in our family household and then we invited in Food Network, and they said, "Yes." And then all the cameras came in!

My kids are 8, 7, 6 [twins], so they are not tiny anymore, but even now they refer to days as either being "school" days, or "family" days. I don't know that we even use the word, *weekend*. We've just set the tone that weekends are family days. That doesn't mean that we may not have to work on a weekend, but we're not the family where my husband sets up a match for tennis at one o'clock on a Saturday. He would make it for an early Tuesday morning before work, or go after work or on a lunch hour. We are very family focused and for us, that works. For us, that is where I get my strength and my refreshment, by spending time with my family and having us all together.

RM: And it's important to you that your family eats dinner together because it's more than a healthy meal, it's a time for that family connection. What encouragement would you give to a mom that wants this, but just feels like it's not achievable?

MDA: As moms, I think we are really hard on ourselves as a group. I think there is this tendency to think, "If I can't do it perfectly, then I'm not going to do it at all." And I'm here to say, "Do it imperfectly." If it seems overwhelming to get a cookbook and cook a dinner every single night, then take baby steps. Order your pizza. But maybe you sit down and have your pizza at the dinner table together instead of in front of the television. Get into the habit of the dinner table first, without worrying so much about what you are serving. I know it sounds like the opposite of what a food person would say. I believe that if I have to choose between the people around the table or the food that's on it, I would choose the people.

It's amazing how once you get in the habit of having family sit around the dinner table, then you'll find a way to toss something into the slow cooker, as I have mine going right now since we're interviewing and I won't have that much time to make dinner. It will be a simple dinner, nothing fancy. But that's okay; I'm still going to have dinner with my family. Once you get into the habit of sitting for dinner, then you find the three minutes for the slow cooker. Or maybe on a Sunday, you find an hour of time and think, "I'm make a roast pork, or roast chicken and freeze half of it. Or I'll make lasagna." Then next thing you know you have some leftovers in your freezer you can pull out one night. Here's the thing, and I've found this to be true for sort of any endeavor, I think if you take a baby step, that little bit of traction that you create will turn into something much bigger, almost all on its own. My experience is that if I take one tiny step toward what I think God wants me to do – as a mom, career person, whatever – I feel like He reaches out and pulls me three steps. So every step I put, I get three more for free. Take the one step. Sitting down at the dinner table will turn into cooking dinner regularly for your family. This is my experience over and over and over again. ∞



Classic Apple Tart

Apple tart is my family's favorite dessert. I love it because it makes the house smell amazing and the tart looks so polished and beautiful (taking a few extra minutes to fan out the apples makes it look like it came from a bakery!). This is a French-style apple tart, not an apple pie, meaning a wedge of the tart is thinner and neater than a slice of all-American apple pie. Try it topped with ice cream for that delicious à la mode taste. Rolling the dough for the tart makes for a finer-textured crust, but on many occasions I have simply pressed the crust into place with great results.

Makes one 9- or 9½ -inch tart

Preparation time: 20 minutes (plus 15 minutes to chill the dough and 5 minutes to cool)

Cooking time: 1 hour

1 stick unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch cubes, plus 1 tablespoon, melted	2 tablespoons sugar
1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for rolling	3 Granny Smith apples
¼ teaspoon kosher salt	1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
	1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. Set the cubed butter on a plate and place it in the freezer for 15 minutes. Fill a cup with ice and water and set aside. Place all of the flour, ⅛ teaspoon of the salt, and 1 tablespoon of the sugar in the bowl of a food processor and pulse to combine. Take the butter out of the freezer and add it to the flour. Pulse the mixture until it looks like wet sand, about 10 seconds. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons of the ice water and pulse until the dough comes together into a ball.
2. Lightly flour your work surface and place the dough on top. Then lightly flour the top of the dough and roll to about a 10- to 11-inch circle, sprinkling more flour under and on top of the dough as necessary. Gently drape the dough over the rolling pin and transfer it to a 9- or 9½-inch fluted tart pan (ideally one with a removable bottom). Fit the dough into the bottom and up the sides of the pan as evenly as possible and press off excess dough from the fluted rim. Set the tart pan on a baking sheet and place in the refrigerator for 15 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Peel, core, and quarter the apples and then thinly slice them lengthwise. Place the apples in a large bowl and toss with the lemon juice, the cinnamon, and the remaining 1 tablespoon sugar and ⅛ teaspoon salt. Remove the baking sheet with the tart shell from the refrigerator. Arrange the apples in concentric circles so they overlap slightly. Brush the edges of the crust with the melted butter and then bake until the edges are golden and the apples have cooked down, about 1 hour. Cool for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.