

## **Introduction:**

**Marion:** You're running, owning, and operating two restaurants now. Is that a lot of work, a juggling act?

**Shawn:** It is, because I also run a chip truck called County Burger in the summer and I run the cafeteria for Chapman's Ice Cream – the employees – as well.

**Marion:** My God!

**Marion:** Shawn Adler is half Jewish and half Ojibway. The Pow Wow Café, his latest venture, features food of his mother's aboriginal roots, and it's already a hit. I'm Marion Kane, Food Sleuth®, and welcome to "Sittin' in the Kitchen®". The Pow Wow Café serves Indian Tacos: crunchy fried bannock with all kinds of tasty toppings. Its energetic owner Shawn Adler graduated with honours from the Stratford Chef School and has a degree in Indigenous studies. His other restaurant, The Flying Chestnut Kitchen, is in the village of Eugenia, Ontario. Now he's returning to his Ojibway roots to bring Indian Tacos to the masses. We spoke at the Pow Wow Café just a few streets from my home in Toronto's lively Kensington Market.

## **Interview:**

**Marion:** I'm with Shawn Adler, a Jindian (laughs). What does that mean Shawn?

**Shawn:** Good morning Marion. A "Jindian" is what the kids called me in public school. I'm half Jewish and half Native. I'm half Ojibway (or Anishinaabe) and half Jewish. Apparently, when my father came home with my mother – he still lived with his parents – and my bubbie threw all my father's things out on the lawn because he was getting together with a non-Jew.

**Marion:** Oh, really? It was an unhappy match re: the parents at the beginning?

**Shawn:** Yeah. At the beginning it was and then they warmed up to the idea. They were introduced to my mother and found out she wasn't a horrible person and she decided to convert so they were happy. I'm just as happy making frybread as I am eating gefilte fish.

**Marion:** You're from two oppressed peoples.

**Shawn:** It's true. It's amazing that I'm such a happy person.

**Marion:** You are! You're very positive. We're in your new restaurant, the Pow Wow Café, and you're currently frying some bannock in front of me. Could you describe the

menu?

**Shawn:** Here at the Pow Wow Café our menu is based on tacos which are called traditionally Indian Tacos. It's a pow wow staple. Across North America, any pow wow you go to, you'll get a version of an Indian Taco.

**Marion:** Is it called a taco at a pow wow?

**Shawn:** Yes. It's called an Indian Taco.

**Marion:** Really? I've never experienced that. Could you describe your version?

**Shawn:** Our version is frybread, it's made from white wheat flour. It's crispy. It looks like an apple fritter but it's savoury.

**Marion:** Could we try a piece? You've just fried three or four and they smell delicious. I'm going to eat one into the mic. Ah! My God. That is truly delicious. Is it bannock?

**Shawn:** I call it frybread myself.

**Marion:** Isn't bannock frybread? I can't eat and talk ... I've got a mouthful.

**Shawn:** Aboriginal people call "frybread" – frybread, scone and bannock. I believe they're used interchangeably. Because I fry this version, I call it frybread.

**Marion:** You're right to fry it.

**Shawn:** It adds the necessary crunch. A lot of youth know it growing up as... you make the dough, you wrap it around a stick and you bake it over the fire...

**Marion:** That's the authentic way, I imagine.

**Shawn:** I imagine that would be the authentic way.

**Marion:** It has kind of a bleak history, because the Native people were given rations by the white man and what were they? Lard? Flour?

**Shawn:** Lard and flour were the main ones because they were both inexpensive. They could sustain you, so out of those rations developed bannock or frybread. This is the way I was taught, and I've tinkered with the recipe to get a nice crispy exterior, but soft and fluffy interior.

**Marion:** Now we've tried the finished version and I can't stop eating it. You have a large bowl with the ingredients to make it. What are they?

**Shawn:** We're going to start with water and eggs and then we'll mix in all the dry ingredients.

**Marion:** Does it have lard?

**Shawn:** At the Pow Wow Café I don't use lard, because we have a vegetarian version on the menu, so I actually use canola oil.

**Marion:** And salt?

**Shawn:** A good Jindian uses only kosher salt.

**Marion:** (laughs). A Good Jindian uses only kosher salt! This is brown sugar?

**Shawn:** Yep. Brown sugar gives the bannock a nice golden colour. White sugar works as well – honey, maple syrup, they all work very well. We actually do a dessert taco here with maple syrup on the frybread, icing sugar and whipped cream.

**Marion:** I can't stop eating the bannock. It's so addictive. How do you make an Indian Taco with the bannock and the other ingredients? I'm eating some more.

**Shawn:** I'm going to make two Indian Tacos. I'm going to make the traditional Indian Taco which is one you'd see at pow wows across North America, and I'm going to make a version that we do at the Pow Wow Café which was on special this weekend. The traditional one will have a beef chili on top of frybread topped with cheddar cheese, lettuce, tomato, sour cream, jalapeño, cilantro. And then for a little flair, some julienned beets and flowers.

**Marion:** Flowers as in petals?

**Shawn:** There's nasturtium, calendula, johnny jump-ups. Each time of year the edible flowers change but it's a nice touch.

**Marion:** Is that a chef-y touch?

**Shawn:** I'd say it's a chef-y touch.

**Marion:** He's putting the chili on top. Is it any special kind of chili?

**Shawn:** This is a beef chili that's based on my mother's chili recipe. It's simple. Onions, garlic, tomatoes, chili powder, and I use garbanzo beans, chick peas, and red kidney beans. It's nice simple delicious chili. The other version is a chicken curry with coconut milk, so that's Indian Indian Taco.

**Marion:** Curry Indian and pow wow Indian.

**Shawn:** I say feather and dot.

**Marion:** (laughs). Feather and dot, that's probably not politically correct. Next, we have...

**Shawn:** Cheddar cheese on top of the traditional. Fresh lettuce, tomatoes, some fresh jalapeño, cumin sour cream, fresh cilantro.

**Marion:** And crowned with flower petals. Beautiful.

**Shawn:** Thanks very much.

**Marion:** It's a colourful presentation and very visual. I've eaten one, and I know it tastes good. I've eaten breakfast before I came. I shouldn't have.

**Shawn:** I'll dive into these.

**Marion:** (laughs) You haven't eaten breakfast?

**Shawn:** I have not. Not yet.

**Marion:** What other aboriginal foods do you want to add to the menu here?

**Shawn:** As time goes on, and I get my feet under me a little bit, we've already started to bring in some nice fish, so we're doing a whitefish and wild rice taco. I was doing some pan-fried pickerel with wild rice and topped with some wild mushrooms. Throughout the winter, we'll hopefully bring in some game. As the winter cools off it's nice to have duck and venison, and things like that.

**Marion:** I went to a wild meat dinner years and years ago, in Peterborough and we ate everything. Bear, turtle, squirrel, beaver. Have you eaten all these meats?

**Shawn:** I've had a chance to try quite a few. I had polar bear, actually. I worked on David Wolfman's cooking show and he was lucky enough to go North and cook in a community and they gifted him some polar bear, which he brought back and I was able to cook for the set, for the crew.

**Marion:** What did polar bear taste like?

**Shawn:** It's very rich, very red meat. I knew it was polar bear because there was still a little bit of fur on the meat, and it was white so....

**Marion:** Did you feel bad about eating it?

**Shawn:** No, I don't feel bad about eating any meat. It's a renewable resource.

**Marion:** You've been pretty busy since you opened about a month ago. Who is your clientele?

**Shawn:** I would say 50% are the Aboriginal population, Native, First Nation, whatever you want to call us, the Indian. They've really been supportive, and each person that comes in is broadcasting it over all their social media, so it's a real community support and they're excited that they can get food that they grew up with in Toronto.

**Marion:** Do you feel you have something to contribute to the situation with the Anishinaabe people in Canada right now?

**Shawn:** I think it's a great time for aboriginal food to come out in the forefront. Aboriginal issues are front and centre all the time and we're very underrepresented throughout Canada with our food. You can try cuisines of any other culture in Toronto, so it's nice now there's a place where Aboriginal cuisine can be highlighted.

**Marion:** How do you feel about the political issue of the residential schools and what has been done to native people, and the missing Indigenous women, and all these terrible issues that are coming up finally?

**Shawn:** I'm certainly not a politician, I'm a chef, but I have opinions on these things. My mother, my aunt and uncle, my grandmother all went to residential school. My mother

wasn't raised by her mother, she was at residential school, so then what happens is you're losing the traditional parenting skills. My mother is probably the best mother in the world; however, I just wonder what that has done. You're not being brought up by your parents but you're being brought up by an industrial school. Certainly, the government needs to continue making headway into reconciliation and repatriation, just righting the wrongs, basically. As for missing women, that needs to be taken very seriously, out west especially. It's a horrible reality but it needs to be addressed.

**Marion:** Do you feel you're honouring your forefathers with this restaurant?

**Shawn:** I suppose I do. I don't think that I look at it that way. I just think that I'm a chef and this is the food of my people. I think it's a great thing that's happening spawning out of it, but it isn't the mandate of my restaurant. It's simply the food that I grew up with, that I want to cook and should be brought to the forefront of Canadian cuisine. This is true Canadian cuisine.

**Marion:** You said it!

**Shawn:** Thanks Marion.

### **Conclusion:**

**Marion:** That was my conversation with Shawn Adler of the Pow Wow Café. Find him on Twitter @powwowcafé. I'm Marion Kane, Food Sleuth®. You can find more stories like this one at [marionkane.com](http://marionkane.com) and in iTunes. Thank you for listening.