

Blogs.pitch.com

Original Story URL: [http://blogs.pitch.com/fatcity/2008/09/so\\_anthony\\_bourdain\\_walks\\_into.php](http://blogs.pitch.com/fatcity/2008/09/so_anthony_bourdain_walks_into.php)

## So Anthony Bourdain Walks into a Bar...

Wed Sep 17, 2008 at 10:00:09 AM

By OWEN MORRIS



*I spent the better part of four hours last night either listening to Anthony Bourdain talk or listen to people gushingly talk about him and generated enough content for two posts. This is part I, which covers the media event event that was held at the Bristol. Part II covers his speech at the Midland.*

Like him or not, Bourdain is a celebrity chef and since celebrity chefs come through Kansas City about as often as the Vatican elects a new pope, there was an air of excitement amongst the 20 or so members of media gathered at the Bristol. Or maybe the media is always so blatant about getting autographs. I don't know since I admittedly have never been invited to one of these shindigs. (And the way this post is going, I won't be invited back.)

Bourdain showed up a little bit before five p.m. "What's the local beer?" he asked, finally deciding on Boulevard Pale Ale over Boulevard Wheat. After the briefest of introductions by Houlihan's CEO Bob Harnett, Bourdain sat down on a stool, pale ale in hand, and took about 25 minutes of questions.

After a couple of stale press-junket answers, Bourdain finally got fired up when someone wondered about his inclusion on a list of *Forbes* ' wealthiest chefs. The magazine estimated his income to be \$1.5 million. "That was really fucked. I am really unhappy about that. I don't make anywhere near that money. The I.R.S will be extremely confused by seeing this or intrigued,

dangerously so I think, when I accurately report my income for the year as being nowhere near that number. My ex-wife will certainly be intrigued and at the end of the day, I'm just not making that kind of bread. And what's worse, they called and asked. I said I don't want any part of it and I'm certainly not providing you with numbers, and they went ahead and guesstimated. I have a really hard time believing Mario Batalli only brings \$3 million per year. It's in no way been good for me."

He also discussed leaving New York. He said he plans to be in a house in Vietnam for a year and after that, "I will be an Italian citizen. I will because I am married to an Italian. Healthcare is a concern to me and my child's healthcare is a concern to me and it's free in Italy. Education is free in Italy and you can actually buy a really nice house there and I could never afford to be in a place in New York. Honestly, I've been kicking the idea around depending on how things go. Having the grandparents nearby -- my daughter loves them and they're very hands-on. Having grandparents in Italy is a whole different variety. You're talking 24 hour day care there. Constantly engaging the child and feeding them good food."

What I found most interesting was Bourdain's frankness about the crappy compensation of chefs.

"I never made any money as a chef. Never. When *Kitchen Confidential* came out I was living paycheck to paycheck. I never took over a thousand dollars a week home. Ever. In my career. I never had health insurance. I never owned a car. I never owned an apartment. I never went out and bought furniture. I had nothing."

To fill in some back-story to that quote, when *Kitchen Confidential* came out, Bourdain had been executive-chef at Les Halles, an upscale French restaurant, for two years. He'd been working in the business for 28 years and he is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, the most prestigious cooking school in the country. Yet he was still only making around \$50,000 per year ... in the most expensive city in the world.

Being a chef is a rough and tough life and Bourdain doesn't skip the grittiness -- it's his trademark. But the world already has one Bourdain and while he's mad at *Forbes* for putting him on the list of the wealthiest chefs, he shows no qualms leaving the kitchen to become Bourdain the business. He wants to make sure that youngsters don't enter the kitchen just expecting to leave it for television. "These kids are going to get out, even of the good schools, of which there are precious few, and they're looking at 10 or 12 dollars an hour if they're lucky. And they're looking at that for a long time. And their dreams of television stardom, much less longevity in the business, are going to spiral down after spending a year peeling squid in the cellar."



For being a supposedly surly guy, Bourdain smiles an awful lot. Not a fake smile either but a "I can't believe I get to do this" smile. He's obviously having a lot of fun traveling and being Anthony Bourdain the personality. As he tells the crowd, "I have the greatest job in the world!" The job he is referring to is the television host, definitely not the chef.