



**Rachael Ray** was born into cooking. My first vivid memory is watching Mom in a restaurant kitchen. She was flipping something with a spatula. I tried to copy her and ended up grilling my right thumb! I was 3 or 4, says Rachael. Everyone on both sides of my family cooks.

Rachael's maternal grandfather grew and cooked everything that his family of 12 needed for sustenance, and her dad's family was steeped in the food-rich traditions of Louisiana. The Ray family was also in the food business, owners of a family restaurant in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Eventually the family relocated to New York, where her mother went to work as the food supervisor for a chain of upstate restaurants.

Rachael's career started at Macy's Marketplace in New York, first at the candy counter and then as the manager of the fresh foods department. After Macy's, Ray helped to open Agata & Valentina, the prestigious New York gourmet marketplace, where she was the store manager and buyer. Though this New York City food fast track was exciting, Rachael decided she wanted to return to the lifestyle of the Adirondacks.

Once upstate, Rachael managed pubs and restaurants at the famed Sagamore resort on Lake George and was then recruited by Cowan & Lobel, a large gourmet market in Albany, to be its food buyer. Rachael Ray turned the job into dual positions as food buyer and chef. As a way to increase grocery sales during the holidays, Rachael began a series of cooking classes.

The 30 Minute Meals classes became so popular that the local media sent a feature reporter to cover the phenomenon, and the following week, an Albany TV station asked Rachael to do a weekly 30 Minute Meals segment for the evening news. Nominated for two regional Emmys, the show was a ma...

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