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George Negus Tonight :: People :: Transcripts :: Nico Moretti



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episode 3

## NICO MORETTI

**Broadcast 6.30pm on 23/07/2003**

**N**ico Moretti worked in the mining industry as a chemical engineer for more than 10 years...redundancies and downsizing had become an annual event and Nico decided to go for one (redundancy) and change his lifestyle. With the help of a payout he was able to make the transition smoothly. He is also going back to his roots. His Italian father opened the first Italian restaurant in Canada. It is still an institution. Nico grew up in the restaurant and is a self-taught cook. Now he teaches up to 12 people in his home cooking school...loves his work and gets to spend more time with his family.



Nico Moretti

GEORGE NEGUS: Well, from mum to author is a curious enough change of direction, but now a bloke who reinvented himself totally after he copped a hefty kick in the guts. Everything was going swimmingly for Nico Moretti until he was retrenched - that sexy French word for getting the sack. Not an uncommon story these days. When Nico unexpectedly copped the chop, he could easily have taken one of those downward spirals, but he didn't.

JANE CUNNINGHAM: Nico Moretti grew up in his father's Italian restaurant in Canada, but his path ended up in a chemical engineering career.

NICO MORETTI: It was good, you know. When I started 10 years ago, it was fantastic, you know, a big career, corporate sort of lifestyle. I enjoyed the travelling and things, getting to see a lot of WA that I might not normally have seen as well. And I had a new family at the time and, um...no, had a lot of fun.

JANE CUNNINGHAM: But two years ago, Nico's path turned the corner when retrenchment gave the chemical engineer an opportunity to follow his dream and passion for food and cooking.

NICO MORETTI: I knew, ultimately, in my heart, that I was gonna be doing something different.

JANE CUNNINGHAM: By day, this is the hub of family life for Nico and his wife Belinda and their daughters Demi and Michaela. And by night, his home is starring in one of his cooking classes with Nico playing host to 10 up-and-coming dinner-party chefs.

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NICO MORETTI: Well, I grew up in a restaurant, so that's sort of in my blood, I guess, and always loved food and loved being with people and dealing with people. I was always in the back of my mind thinking about, "How can I...?" You know, "How can I pursue that, or at what point can I do that?" And hence, 15 months ago, started the cooking school as an entree into the... back into the food game. I came up with my own little concept of having 10 people in a class and sharing a few recipes and tips and stuff. You know, having been self-taught, it sort of made it a bit accessible for people to come in and know that they could do something within their own kitchens as I'm doing here as well.

30% of the attendees are men. We've had a lot of couples coming along - a night out, five couples coming along. Alternatively, we've had some women come along who say, "Wow, these are really good. We want to send our husbands along." So they book in the husbands. And on one class, we had these husbands arrive quite reluctantly, I guess, to start off with, saying, "Oh, you know, what have our wives got us into here?" And within about 15, 20 minutes, a few wines, beers or whatever, they're saying, "This is great, you know." They're really learning something and having a good time with it. It's all good fun. It's like a dinner party cooking class. There's the occasional class where they give you a clap. And you pull something out of the oven and they'll give you a clap. I love it. It's good. So I know that they like what I'm doing, so that's the encouraging part.

JANE CUNNINGHAM: Has your relationship with your family improved?

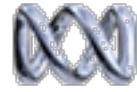
NICO MORETTI: Absolutely, yeah. And what I think, you know, life should really be like, for me anyways, is spending time with my family, seeing them grow up and spending as much time as I can. So that lifestyle choice is the best thing that ever happened to me. It was just a couple of weeks ago that they said, "Dad, you don't wear a tie anymore." But I can drop the kids off at school and, you know, go to their plays and sports events and stuff. And ultimately, it was a lifestyle choice and I can be doing that. And, you know, when I've got my classes on, you know, we start...the night-time classes start at 7:00, so we can have had dinner and watch some TV, do the homework and stuff. And then I'll do my bit down here with my class. And occasionally, they'll come down and, you know, grab something to drink or something to eat, you know, introduce them to the class and they think it's cool.

JANE CUNNINGHAM: What's your biggest buzz about having a class here?

NICO MORETTI: For me, I've always been a bit of a performer anyways. You know, even my corporate life, I...I loved presentations, making presentations, and getting up in front of people and...and, um...you know, presenting, you know, cases or proposals and stuff like that. So I've never been one to sort of shy back from that performance part of it, working for the old company, and now, for me, it's like a show. When seven o'clock comes along and you hear the doorbell go, and it's like, "Yeah, show time, guys." I'm on my stage and I love it.

Well, it's all about chemical reaction and stuff. I think the whole sort of cooking aspects of it is...is really chemical reactions to a point, but ultimately, for me, it's seeing the satisfaction of people and the customer... customer interaction and that's sort of that sales and marketing background that much of my working career has sort of involved as well. Being the master of my own destiny, that's quite energising. And also knowing that I'm doing something that people really, really love and they keep coming back, so you really get that sort of, um... feeling of, er...a fulfilment. Not that I didn't get that before, but you know you're doing it all for yourself and it sort of keeps you driving, keeps you going. I pinch myself every day and say, "Look, this is great. I'm loving it." And, um...and then the family's loving it as well.

GEORGE NEGUS: Nico Moretti and his new life. Beats the hell out of chemical engineering, if you ask me. But what would I know? I've only gone from schoolteaching to journalism.



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