

# A Chef, Author, Philanthropist, and Activist

## Joudie Kalla

**V**ersatile Palestinian-British chef Joudie Kalla has made a name for herself in the culinary world through her passion for cooking and her unwavering loyalty to her Palestinian roots. Born in Syria to Palestinian refugees, she grew up in Qatar and has made London her home since the 1980s.

From a young age, Joudie found solace in the kitchen. She learned the art of cooking from her family, and it came naturally to her, like *al-nafas* (breathing). She obtained a BA in art, architecture, and design from Kingston University (UK) and a master's degree at the Sorbonne in Paris before she enrolled in culinary school in London in 2000. Overcoming traditional beliefs and the lack of female role models, Joudie embarked on a career as a chef.

Throughout her ten-year career working in London restaurants, Joudie faced discrimination and harassment because of her identity as a woman, a Palestinian, and a Muslim. But she persevered with her dream, and in 2010 opened *Baity Kitchen*, her own Palestinian restaurant, and focused on building a community of friends and clients through her cooking. Despite initial successes, Joudie had to close her restaurant after three and a half years due to unforeseen circumstances beyond her control as she faced high expenses. She reemerged successfully through her debut cookbook titled *Palestine on a Plate*, published in 2016, followed by *Baladi: Palestine* in 2018, both of which received rave reviews in the *Independent*, the *Times*, the *New York Times*, and other publications. This was groundbreaking because no cookbook had ever been published with the mention of Palestine on the front cover. Every potential publisher had rejected her book because of the title. But Joudie refused to change it. She waited for a publisher who would allow her to fully represent her history. Joudie's books humanize Palestinians, as she shares stories and

memories of her grandparents, aunts, and parents, using their voices to create their narratives rather than having someone else speak for them, which is so often the case with Palestinians.

While writing her debut cookbook in 2015, Joudie faced agonizing pain, experiencing over 30 physical and neurological symptoms daily for more than a year before getting a diagnosis of Lyme disease. She persevered, however, until she became temporarily unable to move or walk. Her mother stepped in to finish cooking and shooting the book's final chapter while Joudie underwent stem cell treatment in Germany. Joudie continues to share her story and raise awareness of Lyme disease, which has significantly affected her life.

As she navigated this autoimmune disease, her struggle with mental health inspired her to become an ambassador for the mental health charity *Beder*, which aims to prevent suicide among young people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she conducted daily cooking classes to connect people worldwide. Over 30 participants cooked nightly in close to 200 classes, eating together and sharing their experiences online: a lifesaver for her and many others.

During lockdown, Joudie began to paint and soon began to sell her artworks globally. Her favorite subjects are Palestinian women, and her paintings have found homes in the United States, Jordan, Qatar, Dubai, the United Kingdom, Kuwait, Australia, and Europe.

Joudie is an inspiration and has made a significant impact on the culinary world and beyond. She has broken taboos surrounding topics that many Arabs do not discuss due to cultural or family reasons, promoting conversations that can help break historical and generational traumas. Engaged in food consulting, teaching, and writing globally, Joudie champions mental health and freedom of speech. Through her journey of resilience, passion, and determination, she makes a difference as a warrior for women of color and patients suffering from Lyme disease. She talks openly about life, the challenges of being an Arab and especially a Palestinian, and so much more. Her stories are engaging and raw, bringing to the forefront important subjects that are often ignored or hidden away. Currently, Joudie is a food consultant for startup restaurants, an artist, and a chef, with activism as her focal point to highlight injustices being done to her fellow Palestinians.



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