

# THE RESTAURANT

## History

Joey Allaham was born in Damascus, Syria, on November 24, 1974. A fourth-generation butcher, Joey was destined to be a part of his family's multigenerational wholesale meat business. Fittingly, in Arabic, the name "Allaham" translates to "meat."

At a young age Joey began accompanying his grandfather to the slaughterhouse to learn about the business. At eight years old, Joey ate his first pieces of raw meat and started developing a palate for high-quality, delicious flavors. In 1991, as animosity towards the Syrian Jewish community continued to rise, the Allahams immigrated to the United States and settled in Brooklyn, New York. Though Joey had planned to follow a career in law, as his interest in the hospitality industry grew, he shifted his focus and returned to his family business of butchering and selling meat. He founded a wholesale business for various retailers, caterers, and individual clients in Brooklyn, New York.

Joey saw a gap in the market for a kosher steakhouse that could rival its non-kosher competitors and in 1999 began preparations for what would be the opening of his first restaurant, the Prime Grill. A resourceful businessman with no formal training in finance or the restaurant business, Joey found a partner, took out a loan, and only a year later, his dream was realized.

Prime was the obvious name choice, as the restaurant would focus on and serve only the highest-quality cuts of meat. In addition, Joey wanted the name to be simple. The best food that a man can put in his mouth is a simple piece of meat cooked to perfection with salt and pepper,

an axiom that Joey wanted to be represented in the name of the restaurant. Narrowing in on the location was the next task. Joey knew the importance of location and found the perfect storefront, located at 60 East 49th Street, just a stone's throw away from the business sector and featuring a large patio and the prospect of a busy lunch crowd. Arthur Emil, the prominent restaurateur and owner of Windows on the World, owned the lease at the Midtown Manhattan location. Prior to meeting Joey, Emil had two failed concepts in the location, and their introduction could not have come at a better time. With his natural charisma, Joey convinced Emil to open his kosher steakhouse. Emil would go on to be Joey's lifelong mentor and friend until his death in 2011.

Mark Markowitz was selected as the architect and construction began. In terms of design Joey envisioned creating a classic steakhouse that would age well with time—just like his simple but delicious cuts of meat. The color scheme was minimal, but sophisticated, and the place would have a warm inviting feeling.

With a conservative *New York Times* announcement and no advertising budget, the Prime Grill opened its doors with a surprisingly strong first quarter. Word of the restaurant spread on its own, with referrals helping to generate the bulk of the business. However, despite high aspirations and a moderately successful opening, business was not a joy ride at the outset. There were

nights when the restaurant was empty and a year and a half into the business 9/11 hit New York City and the world changed. Despite the difficult times, Joey stuck to the path he carved out for himself. Every day he would train the butchers and oversee all aspects of the business from the front of the house to the back of the house. In the post-9/11 world, customers weren't spending as lavishly on extravagant dining experiences; morale was low. Joey knew that this would not be forever, but he had to give his customers a reason to pick up and move forward; he needed to push the envelope even further.

He went on a desperate search to find a new chef who could create a more invigorating menu. In late September 2001, about eighteen months after the Prime Grill opened for business, Chef David Kolotkin was hired to be the executive chef, and he has since led the kitchen for the past decade. Although not a formal partnership, Chef David and Joey have been a team in every sense, creating and perfecting the menu and overall dining experience.

From there, Joey put together a strong team of like-minded individuals who cared tremendously about food, dining, and taking pride in their craft. The majority of the people who work at the Prime Grill today have been with the company since its first days and continue to share in the mission Joey started thirteen years ago.

While writing this book, we closed up thirteen wonderful years in our founding location and moved northwest to 25 West 56th Street. In our new location, the Prime Grill continues to feature the classic favorites that our customers have always loved. However, we have used this opportunity to introduce a new generation of kosher cuisine including expanded menu options, a true wood-brick oven (a rarity), and more private dining capabilities. The new facility features bi-level seating for more than 360 diners and a special wine-themed private room with a premier collection of rare kosher wines. It was time to

make a move in early 2013, and the new Prime Grill is bigger and better than ever.

We feel fortunate to have hosted so many clients over the years, celebrating familial events, closing business deals, or just getting together with friends. There is nothing more gratifying and we look forward to our customers' support long into the future.



*Joey Allaham, thirteen years old, at his Bar Mitzvah*



*Joey Allaham, in the Prime Grill's former dry aging room*



*Victor Allaham, father of Joey Allaham*



*The Prime Grill's former entrance, 60 East 49th Street*



*The former Bar at the Prime Grill location*



*The former Main Dining Room at the Prime Grill location*



*The Private Room at the former Prime Grill location*





*Sushi Bar Area at the former Prime Grill location*