If ever anyone could claim to be born a teaching chef, Sarah Kvichak (pronounced Ka-vichak) certainly has a valid claim.

For her, things began to fall into place at age 5. That’s when, one day after playing school in the basement, she emerged, hopped up on the kitchen counter and declared that she wanted to be a teacher and a cook.

“Go figure, it actually came true,” Sarah says. “At the time, I had no idea you could combine the two disciplines.”

Then the decision was solidified soon afterwards in kindergarten where her discerning tastes were put to the test with a piece of pizza with frozen cheese, canned applesauce and green beans that were “just all right” and salad with shaved radicchio and carrots that were hard to eat with a spork.

“So I gave up. My teacher said it was time to leave. I was devastated … and still hungry. Could it be that I’d have to endure this for another 12 years? I knew I had to do something about this … and the opportunity came after 23 years.”

Another early food memory was watching as her grandmother cooked traditional Polish food like cabbage rolls and cold dough cookies.

“I was in awe that such simple ingredients could go from the farm, to hand, to heat, to belly and then make me feel so warm.”

Sarah says her dad was the regular cook, so most of her diet came from a box, bag or can, so having her grandmother’s intermittent dishes were a real treat.

Then at age 14 she started working at Boston Market as a counter girl. But the pull of the kitchen was enough for her to bug the manager so much that he eventually put her on one food prep shift a week. “Then I got laid off because I wasn’t old enough to handle a knife.”

At 15, she got sidetracked by an interest in literary and visual arts and ended up with a dual degree in English film studies and mass media communications from Salisbury University in Maryland. When she graduated, she longed to get back in a kitchen, but felt her degree required a good run, so she moved to Brooklyn, N.Y. and applied her still photography skills for two years before enrolling in a culinary nutrition program at Johnson & Wales in Denver, Colo.

But it was back in college, when she started cooking for herself, that Sarah began to realize something that would drive her even faster toward her eventual career: the side effects of eating less processed foods.

“I started to notice I no longer felt so sluggish and my headaches went away,” she says. “That startled me and it actually made me quite livid. All this time, all those years, I could’ve enjoyed life more if I had just eaten less processed foods. Everyone must know about this. It became my mission to inform as many people as possible.”

Today she says what makes her happiest is having a direct impact on others.

“Sometimes the impact is intangible but usually it’s when I see it in the faces of my students – the kitchen staff – and the kids they feed. That’s when I really smile.”