



Julia Child Remembered with Jacques Pépin

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February 14, 2005

Dear Member:

There will always be a warm place in our hearts for Julia Child, who introduced America not only to the recipes, but also to the logic of French cuisine. In the years BC (Before Julia Child), we were a nation of shrimp cocktail, meatloaf and Jell-O eaters. AC (After Julia Child), we were changed forever. Julia was the first to truly expand our culinary horizons, and she did so with an effortless charm and humility that captivated our hearts *and* our taste buds.

The W&FS has been searching for just the right way to honor Julia, who passed away last year at the age of 90. We believe that we have found it under the able leadership of Co-Chairs Susan Postman and Ted Koryn. A dinner in Julia's honor will be hosted by her great friend and cooking companion, Jacques Pépin, at the French Culinary Institute. We will listen to Jacques' remembrances, dine on some of Julia's favorite dishes, drink wines from our own Cellar, and view videos from the '60's of "The French Chef", Julia's inimitable program.

Attached to this letter is the tribute to Julia Child, which was penned for the September 2004 issue of *The Grapevine* by our very own golden-tongued Chairman, Bill Smethurst. Reading his reminiscence should put everyone in the mood to honor the memory of this great lady by attending our dinner on Tuesday, March 15. As Julia herself would have said in her unmistakable voice with high pitched overtones, "Bon Appétit."

Sincerely,

Ivan Thornton
President

Date: Tuesday, March 15, 2005

Time: Tour of the FCI (optional) 6:30; Reception 7:00 PM; Dinner 7:30 PM

Location: **French Culinary Institute**, 462 Broadway (at Grand Street)

Contribution: Members \$145, Guests \$160

Dress: Business Attire (coat and tie)

JULIA CHILD

Just for the fun of it several summers ago, my wife Bix and my sister-in-law Mae decided to produce an authentic 1950's dinner for our unsuspecting children. The recipes came from my mother's old recipe box, undisturbed for over forty years. At first the kids were confused, then bemused, and finally appreciative in the way that tourists relate to a medieval castle or cathedral. Like the feeling for an ancient monument, their response was intellectual and aesthetic. It was not connected to the life they experienced every day.

What happened to bring about this enormous change in our gastronomic sensibilities over the course of a very few years? It has reached the point where kids today have never tasted fried Spam drenched in Karo syrup and surmounted by a slice of canned pineapple and a maraschino cherry. Social historians (far more knowledgeable than I) will undoubtedly point to a number of prime causes. I am sure, however, that an extraordinarily important one was an unheralded cookbook, which appeared in 1961 just as my mother's recipe box faced early retirement. The book titled *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* was written and edited by three middle-aged women, two of them French and one an American – Julia Child. Implausible as it may seem, this cookbook swept through the kitchens of America. It became an immediate bestseller, and the authors, particularly Julia, became celebrities just like Jacqueline Susanne and Ayn Rand. No longer did the home cook strive to produce the perfect tuna fish casserole, the best chicken Kiev or the finest Russian meat loaf. She (it was mostly she in those days) now labored to turn out a fastidious Veal Prince Orloff, a Coquilles St. Jacques or a Bavarian Cream that didn't run.

If the cookbook wouldn't do the job alone (the directions were very clear but complicated), there was always Julia on TV cheering us on. Julia Child's demonstrations were never effortless or lacking in *angst*, but she always (through true grit and intelligence) got to the finish line first. She was the ideal role model for the committed home cook who knew that they could do it if they only put on a full court press (as they say in basketball). And mostly they did succeed, thanks to Julia.

The PBS cooking series, "Julia and Jacques" has always been a favorite in our house. Jacques Pépin is warm, engaging and a brilliant chef, but I always knew when he started that rat-a-tat-tat in slicing onions or peppers with his Sabatier, that I had as much chance of cooking like Jacques as I did of playing golf like Tiger Woods. I never felt that way about Julia. She seemed one of us even if our rational minds knew better.

Julia McWilliams was an unlikely candidate to become the great icon of the American culinary adventure. She grew up in Pasadena the heartland in Southern California of unadventurous, conservative Los Angeles bankers. When she arrived in Northampton, Mass. for college, she probably could have gotten a Welsh rabbit at Wiggin's Tavern, a pizza at Joe's or only the Lord knows what at Rahar's Rathskeller. The food there was so forgettable it wouldn't even rate a listing in the Manhattan telephone directory, much less Zagat's. Prohibition was still on during her years at Smith, and the closest she was likely to get to Chateaux Latour or Petrus was a sip of bathtub gin from a hip flask at a football game in New Haven, Cambridge or Amherst. The war years in Sri Lanka with the OSS undoubtedly excited her sense of adventure. Fortunately for us, while living in Paris after the war with her husband, Paul Child, she attended the Cordon Bleu cooking school to keep busy. The rest, as they say, is history. She has taught us, entertained us and inspired us. Her devotion to the cause of good food and wine is legendary. Julia was one of the founders of the American Institute of Wine & Food; she was an indefatigable supporter of talented young chefs; and she gave generously of her talent and treasure to seemingly innumerable worthy ventures in the gastronomic world. Her kitchen, now transported to the Smithsonian Institution for public view, is an authentic and moving evocation of a seminal voice in the evolution of American cooking in the 20th century.

Above all, Julia embodied those virtues we prize most highly – forthright candor, unflinching good humor, intelligence, sometimes-painful honesty, total integrity, and unflinching determination to see the job through. We can say of Julia Child as John Bunyan said of Mr. Valiant-in-Truth, "So she passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for her on the other side."

Bill Smethurst