

Julia Child

By: Francie McKay



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Introduction

Julia Child was an amazing woman, but I never would have learned about her if it were not for my mother. We watched *Julie and Julia* together and I fell in love. Julia Child inspired me to step out of my comfort zone and try new things. She was something new, and I was curious to learn more about what type of person she was. After researching her over summer break I decided to learn even more. I wanted to know how Julia's work changed the culinary world for women, what influence Julia had on how food is prepared throughout the United States, and finally what the culinary world was like before Julia compared to afterward. Julia Child was incredible, and I will show you why.

Julia Child learned to cook as a middle-aged woman in the 1950's, wrote the first French cookbook for Americans, and broke gender barriers in the culinary world.

Julia Child in France

“No one is born a great cook, one learns by doing.”- Julia Child.

Julia McWilliams was born on August 15, 1912 in Pasadena, California. Julia’s father had a successful career in agricultural land management and real estate, so she was born into wealth and privilege. Private chefs were commonplace



in her childhood home and she was not given an opportunity to experiment in the kitchen. During World War II, Julia worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the CIA, because she was too tall to enlist in the Women's Army Corps. Julia was only an office lady but she enjoyed her work because she had the opportunity to help her country. While on an assignment for the OSS, Julia met her husband, Paul Child. Julia and

Paul were married in September of 1946.

“Find something you’re passionate about, and keep tremendously interested in it.”

- Julia Child

Paul and Julia lived in Washington DC for two years until Paul was offered a position in the American Embassy in Paris and the Childs relocated. Julia and Paul Child moved to France in 1949. Without a job, Julia needed a new hobby. She decided to try cooking since she had always loved to eat. On October 4, 1949, Julia arrived at the Le Cordon Bleu for her first cooking lesson. After a few days, Julia

realized this class was too simple. She spoke to the owner, Madame Elizabeth Brassart, about switching lessons. Madame Brassart would not let Julia take the six week class for experts about which Julia had inquired. Instead, Madame Brassart told her to take the year long program for “professional restaurateurs.”

Julia’s new class was taught by Chef Max Bugnard, who was a culinary professional with years of experience. Julia was the only woman in her class. Luckily, she had spent years in male dominated areas and was not intimidated. Julia Child had only been learning French for a short time so she had trouble keeping up with her teacher’s quick pace, but was determined to learn from some, if not all, of his many lessons. Chef Bugnard had been cooking most of his life and was in his late seventies. Before Bugnard started working at the Cordon Bleu he had refined his skills under the great Chef Escoffier. Auguste Escoffier was a french chef and culinary writer who updated many different french methods.

Even though Julia had only been taking lessons for a short time, her culinary skills improved tremendously and Julia learned that cooking was a “rich layered, and endlessly fascinating subject.”

Once a week in Paris most buildings would lose their electricity, so Chef Bugnard had to think of new ideas for class time. Often he would take his students shopping for food in the Parisian markets. Because of these “shopping sprees,” Julia learned that “shopping in Paris was a life changing experience that truly indulged your senses.” Julia was happy that Madame Brassart had not let her take the six week cooking classes for experts because she “barely would’ve learned a thing!”

Mastering the Art of French Cooking

“People who love to eat are always the best people.” - Julia Child

In the 1950's Julia Child met Simone Beck Fishbacher at a ladies lunch. She was a tall blonde woman who had also taken many classes at the Cordon Bleu and the two became fast friends. Simone, who often went by Simca, introduced Julia to



the *Le Cercle des Gourmettes*. Les Gourmettes was a group of women who met every other Tuesday to cook and eat. Most of the members of the Les Gourmettes were in their sixties or seventies and only came for the luncheon. One of Simca's colleagues and close friend, Louise Bertholle, was also a member of the Les Gourmettes. Louise, Simca, and Julia all

planned to arrive at around nine o'clock am in the kitchen of the electric company where the Les Gourmettes was held, so they could work with the chef before anyone else arrived. During their mornings at the Les Gourmettes, the three friends would prepare wonderful meals, such as stuffed pheasants, poached oysters, and beautifully arranged desserts. Julia later stated that, “it was a marvelous opportunity for me, a foreigner, to be accepted into a totally french atmosphere.”

A couple of Julia's American friends who were staying in France asked Simca, Julia, and Louise if they would teach them how to cook. Simca, who was always the most enthusiastic of the three, happily agreed. Thus, the *School of the Three Happy Eaters* was born. All three of them conducted these lessons and from

time to time would receive the help of Chef Max Bugnard and Claude Thilmont. Chef Thilmont was a pastry chef who had a delicate yet authoritative style and worked at the Cordon Bleu. Before Simca and Louisette met Julia they had been working on a french cookbook for Americans, but they needed an American collaborator. They both instantly knew that she was the woman for the job.

“If you’re in a good profession it’s hard to get bored because you’re never finished, there will always be work you haven’t yet done” - Julia Child.

When Julia realized Simca and Louisette were creating a cookbook and needed her help, she happily accepted. The book had potential, but it needed work. After reading it Julia was determined to create a cookbook that not only told you how to cook meals, but also was informative, descriptive, and showed you why you were doing each step. Once she started writing the book, Julia would sometimes work for hours at a time without any breaks. They had to test every single recipe to make sure it turned out correctly, so the book editing process was slow.

Julia and Paul had been living in Marseille for a few years because of Paul’s job when they once again moved to Germany in October of 1954. Julia’s cookbook was still being created and when Julia moved away it slowed the process down. Julia only stayed a short time in Germany, but while she lived there she stayed in a cramped apartment in Plittersdorf. Paul had been relocated to Germany because he was being renamed as *Exhibits Officer* for all of Germany, which was a huge step up from his previous jobs.

Soon after coming to Germany Julia was back to work on her book, which was now titled *French Cooking for the American Cook*. Simca and Julia had finished the chapters on soups and sauces and were nearing the end of the eggs and fish chapters. They were quite the pair. Simca's knowledge of France and Julia's knowledge of the United States made an unstoppable team. In the next phase of the book the two women planned to split up with Simca working on meats and Julia working on poultry. When Julia first moved away she disliked the distance between her and Simca. Eventually, however, she did not mind it because they could both work on the book without messing each other up.

In January 1955, Julia began working on chicken cookery. Chicken cookery involved almost every fundamental element of French cuisine. A few of France's best sauces and true glories were wrapped up in over two hundred recipes using chicken. Both Simca and Julia were working on the book for over forty hours each week, yet it was still taking forever. Each recipe took an extremely long time to test, write, and research.

Unfortunately, Louise did not offer much help. She had a husband and two young children to take care of and could not find the time to work on the book. The most that she could offer was three hours each week at their cooking school - L'Ecole des trois Gourmandes - and six hours each week on the book. Julia felt that "Louise simply wasn't a good enough cook and could not present herself as an equal author." Julia and Simca decided they would mention Louise's name in the book but she would not be presented as an equal author.

"I think every woman should have a blowtorch" - Julia Child

Judith Bailey was an editor for Knopf in New York. Judith's main job was to work with French translators. In 1959, Judith stumbled upon Julia's book that was titled *French Recipes for the American Cook*. She hated the name, but after reading through and trying some of the recipes she found the book delightful. In May 1960, Judith offered Julia and Simca a chance they could not refuse - a publisher for their book. Julia and Simca's book was published in the fall of 1961 after being renamed *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*.

Later on, Julia's book would lead her to create multiple different television series on cooking and inspired many people to be more adventurous in the kitchen.

Julia Child's Life on Television

“Just speak very loudly and quickly, and state your position with utter conviction, as the French do, and you'll have a marvellous time!” - Julia Child

Julia Child began getting ready for her first TV series, the *French Chef* in 1962. However before the show could air the whole studio burned to the ground. Thankfully, the show was saved when the Boston Gas Company loaned them a demonstration kitchen. On June 18, Julia and her husband arrived at the gas company and prepared for the show. Julia had to bring all of her pots and pans to the kitchen because the gas company did not have any they could lend. The first TV show Julia created was called *A French Omelette*. It was not live, but had been shot without stopping.

Julia created two more episodes before the TV station WGBH suggested that they create a twenty-six episode season of the *French Chef* starting in January. Julia happily agreed and with that the *French Chef* was born. In 1963, Julia Child was “as busy as a bee.” She was creating four episodes of the *French Chef* each week and was writing a weekly news column for the *Boston Globe*. In the fall, Julia planned to take a short break from the television business and visit Simca in Paris. However, she almost canceled the trip because of how much hard work it took to keep the show going. In 1964, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* went into its sixth edition and all of the television work started turning Julia into a budding celebrity. Although the *French Chef* was popular in America, barely anyone in France knew about it.

In 1970, Julia began working on the biggest series of the *French Chef* yet. With a larger budget, all thirty nine shows would be in color. The plan was to shoot



mini documentaries in France about how the food is made, along with a live version of Julia cooking the meals. In May, Julia traveled to France to film the show. The plan was to start in Provence, move to Paris, and end in Normandy.

Around the time Julia started in the TV business, she and Simca decided to create volume two of *Mastering The Art Of French Cooking*. The new book was supposed to be for both amateurs and professionals and include many topics that were not mentioned in *Mastering The Art Of French Cooking volume I*. After a while, Julia decided to leave the book in Simca's hands and completely devote her time and energy to the television shows. Although she was undoubtedly loyal to her publisher and Simca, Julia was "all tuckered out." On October 22, 1970, *Mastering The Art Of French Cooking Volume II* was released, almost nine years after its predecessor. Knopf, their publisher, printed one hundred thousand copies of the new book to begin with while Simca and Julia went on a quick tour around the country promoting their book. Soon afterwards the new *French Chef* episodes started broadcasting. The shows were being broadcasted on PBS stations all around the country.

In January of 1971 a troublesome predicament occurred. Their editor, Judith Jones, was at a dinner party in Manhattan. She was seated next to a doctor from a team researching if asbestos was a carcinogen. Judith remembered Julia had recommended using a slab of asbestos cement in volume two and was immensely

worried. The next day Judith called the asbestos research facility and was informed that they had reasons to believe asbestos may be connected to cancer, but a test by a lead-poisoning expert proved that there was very little danger from asbestos cement. Thankfully, Julia found three new types of tiles to use for the *French Chef*, but could not change the cookbook until it went through a second edition.

Julia Child's Legacy

“This is my invariable advice to people: Learn how to cook - try new recipes, learn from your mistakes, be fearless and above all have fun!” - Julia Child

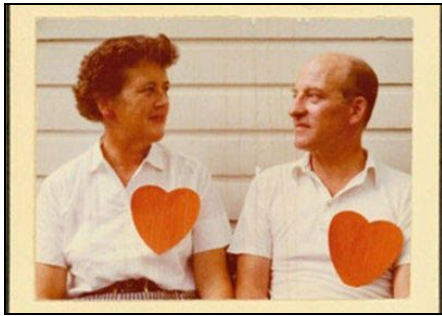
In 2000, Julia was presented with the French legion of honor. This medal is given on behalf of the Head of State to the most deserving citizens in all fields of activity. Soon after in 2003, she received the US Presidential Medal of Freedom, which is awarded to citizens who have made a lasting impact on the United States of America.

Julia never worked in a professional kitchen so she never considered herself a chef. In her eyes she was a culinary teacher and student, but not a chef. Julia was inspiring to many different people because of her unique position and attitude. Julia's position was special because in the 1950s and 60s there were not many cooking shows; especially cooking shows starring women. Julia had a fun and ambitious attitude that inspired many people to be fearless. Julia was unafraid when it came to cooking and she wanted other people to be the same.

Julia sparked a curiosity in America because of how “out there” she was. She was not afraid to be herself, even on television. To Julia, cooking was not just cooking, it was something that could let you escape from the rush of the real world. Julia has influenced the way Americans eat and drink ever since she published her first book. Some of the changes have to do with the way Americans lived. Others have to do with Julia's restless spirit and confident attitude. Maybe she became famous because she helped to show people that they did not have to be afraid of new things. It could have been that she showed people that they were capable of

making food just as complicated and delicious as she did. Whatever the reason, Julia left a lasting impact on the culinary world.

Before Julia, the professional culinary world was made up of a few French men. Julia had never cooked before she went to France, which was just one more



reason for America to love her. Julia redefined the word food in America when she introduced them to French food. She showed everyone that it is ok for women to compete at the highest level and take their culinary skills outside of the home. She

demonstrated that women were just as ready as men to enter the real world and cook on a professional level. After Julia's message got out, many new cooking schools arrived along with more women ready to learn how to cook.

Furthermore, in the 1950s, there were not as many different meal options in the United States. The majority of people in the 1950s would eat at home with their families every meal of the day, every day of the week. This is in contrast to today's society where our busy schedules prevent that. Today, lots of people eat on the go. A lot of present day food is overly processed and can be bad for your health. Although food from the 50s may not taste as good as Goldfish, Cheetos, or other popular junk foods, they were certainly healthier. Julia Child helped the public see that food can be an outlet for creativity and for better living. For those reasons, she truly was a life-changing person.

The measure of achievement is not winning awards. It's doing something that you appreciate, something *you* believe is worthwhile. - Julia Child

Conclusion

Julia Child showed the United States that it is okay to try new things. She was fearless in the kitchen and never let anyone tell her what she could and could not do. She paved the way for women to stand up for their right to cook on an elite level. Julia changed the way people eat and drink tremendously. She said that it was perfectly okay for people to cook the same extravagant dishes that were on her show, and that you can never give up. Before Julia Child people in the United States would eat the same canned food every day, but when she showed them new simple yet stylish recipes her fame boosted. The culinary world would not be the same if it were not for Julia Child.

“A party without cake is just a meeting” - Julia Child

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