

## Julia Child – An American Icon Jim Sikes for 082109

Lots of words have been written by and about Julia Child. With the advent of “Julie and Julia,” there will be a bunch more. So here are a few from me.

In my opinion Julia Child influenced cooking in America more than any other person. And not just cooking but our entire approach to food.

“Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volume One” was a turning point in the American home kitchen. Besides bringing immense details to the techniques of the selection and preparation process, she succeeded in taking the fear out of “jumping in the water” and trying something. That made her approach different. Her instructions were for the home cook.

I purchased my copy of “Volume One” my first semester in graduate school – 1968. It changed my life. Without that book, there would probably be no Jimmy's today. The same is true for many other restaurants.

I didn't do what Julie did. I didn't cook my way through the book and make every recipe. Grad students back then didn't have that sort of budget. Most still don't.

What I did do was read the entire book, make some things for real and prepared the others in my fantasy kitchen. I got “Volume Two” as soon as it was published and did the same thing. But it never got me like “Volume One.” Perhaps it was akin to “first love.”

When I read about how to make a French omelet, I tried the process with exacting detail. It was most likely on a Saturday afternoon. What I remember most is being so overwhelmed by the goodness of the omelet that after eating it, I immediately made another one.

In my early days at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York, I had occasion to meet Julia Child. It was part of the opening of Fauchon at Saks. This was the first time a store of the this stature had ventured into a food boutique. It was nice to be there on the leading edge. It's hard to imagine a department store without home furnishings and lots of cooking things for sale.

Good fortune was with me when I interviewed for the position at Saks. I luckily had the right qualifications – I wanted a part-time job, I was

familiar with basic cooking principles (thank you Julia), and I could read French on a can.

Julia Child was a tall woman. She looked me almost directly in the eye. Yes, I was impressed but probably not sufficiently so. Singing with a touring company gives you nerves of steel.

What I do remember is what I said to her: "You taught me how to make an omelet and so much more. Without you, I wouldn't be here today. I am so grateful." She thanked me and went on her way. After that day, I never saw her again.

Boston Public Television has done so much for us over the years. Nothing has proved to have any more impact than supporting and airing "The French Chef." I remember watching shows of Julia cavorting about in the kitchen. She was cooking and entertaining at the same time. As we now know, she was ahead of her time.

Julia Child taught us some very important principles of cooking and entertaining. Yes, she showed us in detail the technical aspects of "mastering." "Volume One" wasn't set up to make things quickly or suggest short cuts. Nor was it part of a "dummies" series. It was and still is a fine document that is very relevant today.

To me what Julia did was cause us to realize that everything in the kitchen won't always be perfect. It was sort of like the "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" line. She never dropped a chicken on the floor on television like legend has it. If she had done it, she would probably have washed it off and moved along, accompanying the act with bubbling words.

Julia said that we should serve what we prepare with style and verve. If something doesn't rise just right or brown perfectly, don't worry. It will still be good and you should be proud of your work.

Julia Child is so important that her kitchen – the real thing, not a replica – sits in the Smithsonian. It's one of their most popular exhibits.

I haven't seen "Julie and Julia." Aimee saw it last weekend. The report is that you should see it. I know I will. I have read "My Life in France." It's a book you should read too.

From the trailers I have seen, Meryl Streep has the character spot on. Her voice and mannerisms are so right. Stanley Tucci as Paul Child seems perfect. The movie strongly supports their relationship. He provided the impetus for Julia's studying cooking at the Cordon Bleu.

I understand the Parisian scenery is stunning. Paris is truly a beautiful city. The great thing is the trees are just as impressive as the buildings.

Whether you elect to see the movie now or wait for the smaller screen, don't wait to read or re-read one of Julia Child's books. There are lots of them. There are also DVDs of some of the TV shows. The one I have is "Julia Child's Kitchen Wisdom." These are a great way for those who have never seen her, to get a dose of Julia first hand.

Those are my few words about a food legend and a truly great woman. She loved life along with food and wine. She was always experimenting. The great thing is she was not only a teacher but a life-long learner.

Julia's farewell was always, "bon appetit." It means much more than good appetite. Phrases like happy eating and enjoy your food or meal come to mind. I think enjoy is it for Julia. She did enjoy and was always helping us do the same.