

# ANN ARBOR

## CULINARY HISTORIANS

### Voices From the Past



A fellow culinary historian recently purchased a copy of a major work by the renowned 19th century French chef and author Urbain Dubois. He was most anxious to try the new translation program on his computer, from French to English. He inserted the recipe for "Fortress Cake" and below is the machine's (most literal) translation:

1170 Fortress in cookie. (Drawing No. 200) - to Work in a pâté 600 grs of sugar in gunpowder (fragrant to the orange) with 4 whole eggs and 12 yellow; when the device is well frothy to insert him, few little, 400 grs of melted butter and purified; to continue has work him. Some minutes after, to insert him 4 spoonfuls to mouth of rum, a grain of salt and then white 5 or 6 of egg whipped, in time that 300 grs of flour or starch, while sifting them on the device.

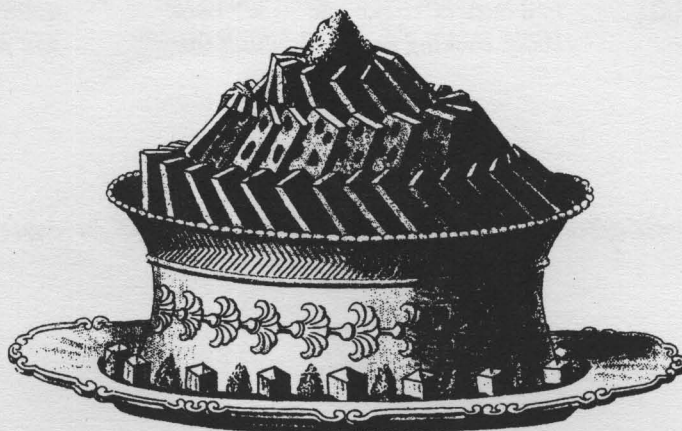
### A Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

To take a cash-box in tin in measurements of height and width that must have the fortress; to butter it internally with the clarified butter and to freeze it with the thin sugar. To put it on a thick and covered ceiling of paper buttered, to fill him more or less to height with the prepared device, to cook this one to soft oven during one hour and quarter. To cook the stant of device to a flat pan, and of 3 centimeters larger than the cash-box in white iron. --- When the cookie is unmolded

and is cooled, to cut it right, then and to decrease the aisseur to 3 quarters of his/her/its height, of way to form on the top a strip in relief. To surround the over while letting to contours of the cookie the thickness of a cent., to empty it slightly and crénel; the superior contours with the help of a small knife: this cookie can be cut very clean. To pierce then, on flanks of cake, of cavities in imitation of murderesses, of which two armies with a cannon imitated in cookie: of these cannons one only sees tips; they must be fixed to their room lastly only.

With a lucid ice to water, fragrant to the zest of orange and slightly shaded, to freeze all surfaces of the cookie, calm on a grid; to decorate it to the small horn, with the white ice, while imitating stones of size of a wall To surround the flat cookie, while letting to partitions the thickness of a cent. and half; to notch partitions in the same order that the top of the cookie and to also conceal them with an ice to the orange. When ice is dry, to slip this bottom on a dish, to put the thick cookie on the center and to decorate the emptiness with cream with an ice and to vanilla (plombière).

Jan Longone



## An Enticement:

*THE KITCHEN*  
BY NICOLAS FREELING  
HARPER AND ROW  
PUBLISHERS, 1970

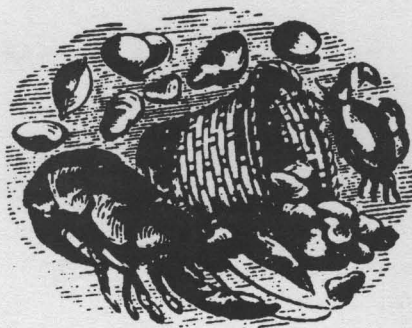


This is not called a review because the book is out of print. Jan Longone had a copy when I called asking about it, and inside are two of her notes in pencil: v. scarce, first edition. It was published in 1970 and you will be wondering why I care to write about it.

Nicolas Freeling has by now written thirty-some mystery novels, but he started out as a professional cook. Much is made of this still on his book jackets, and also of the fact that he wrote the first one while in jail for stealing food. (The manager wanted to get rid of him, he explains somewhere.) You may be aware that your editor is a mystery writer and for years I have admired the work of this man. His themes are serious, his style is elegant, sparse and engaging, his characters live,

and the books are more literary than those of almost any other writer in the genre. From lists of titles in the novels, I know of two non-fiction works about cooking.

It is perhaps not really fair to make you want to read a book that is hard to find. But Jan assures me that the kitchen book is not unavailable (the Ann Arbor library has it in their catalog), though she is still looking for a copy of the cookbook (called simply *Cookbook*) for me. I feel so sure that anyone interested in cooking will enjoy these rememberings that I have decided to spread the word.



About the closest thing to a recipe in this book is some remarks about the making of bouillabaisse, in which he contradicts almost every direction given in a didactic cookbook. It is a book about cooking and chefs, about the

practices of kitchens he has worked in, and about the realities of that experience.

Freeling is an Englishman who was raised in France. He credits his interest in food not to any culinary ambience of childhood but to his father, who learned to cook because his wife was too aristocratic to bother really mastering such a mundane skill, and they had lost their money and had no more *bonne* to do it for them. "He loved deviling things" and he died when Nicolas was twelve "and there was nothing fit to eat for many years."

His first job was in the kitchen of a grand hotel. He was young and willing, spoke several languages, and he applied at the best hotel he knew of and was put to work in the larder. That was a lucky appointment because he would be working in a place that was cool and quiet. The chef in the larder was a kind man whose passions were boxing and bicycling. Freeling thinks that if he had encountered the usual tyrant on his first assignment, he would not have lasted in the kitchen. Fred, the chef of the larder, was also the butcher and the new *commis* learned right away something of skill and style as he watched him wield his knife. Fred, he says, was the first person in his life to teach him anything, which is quite a statement, considering that he had just come out of the army.

*Aluminum saucepans are one of the greatest enemies of good food.*





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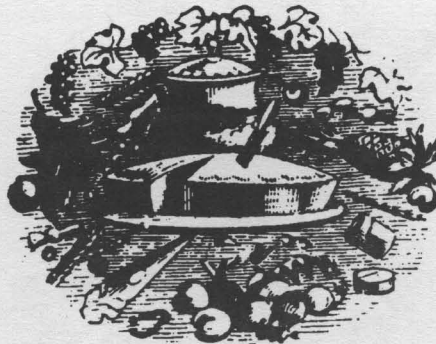
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We are made acquainted with the hierarchy of the kitchen and the good and bad aspects of work in each corner. The larder is high in the rating, the pastry kitchen is "an unreal world" and the pastry cooks have "an overgentle fluffy style" but are spiteful and gossipy, and some of the Swiss ones prosperous money-lenders to the rest of the hotel staff. The sauce cook's corner is the

most "complex, interesting and sophisticated."

He came under a first chef who was kind and taught him well. Throughout the book there are vivid portraits of personnel, which I promise you but will not go into here. With the language and perceptions of a novelist, he gives us cooks who were hysterical, undernourished, nasty, sullen, suspicious, mean, intelligent, sarcastic, negligent, drunkards (anyone caught drinking was instantly sacked—unless he was especially talented), a tenor who sang, and a chef who was "a serious cook but not a serious person."



In these hotel kitchens there was the kind of strict system for avoiding waste that he says was necessary for even the most high-toned hotels, if they were to show a profit. He makes much

of French frugality at this time, the uses of scraps, the stock vegetables recycled as decoration, the breadcrumbs and old potatoes put through the "hurdy-gurdy" with scraps of fish "make fishcakes, nice supper for staff," the chopped parsley, the addition of "more colly" (and anyone who knows what colly is please tell me). In one place, every item in all the larders was counted and inspected *every night*.

At that first hotel, the whole "carte" of the menu of fifty-some items was changed daily. It was all elaborate classic French cooking. In other ways besides the food, tradition reigned. One chef refused to use new oven cloths because they were red and white and he was accustomed to blue and white. There was strict snobbery and rivalry among the chefs: sauce cooks and larder cooks, the aristocracy; grill and soup cooks, low. The lowliest of all was the cook who worked when the others had their days off.

Freeling was fired from his first job for being ill and missing two days' work. Next he went to a Parisian hotel and learned simplicity in cooking, and more economy. There were huge and ancient coal burning stoves, everything extremely clean. He stayed five years but felt he could not advance and left to go to an enormous seaside hotel on the Norman coast.

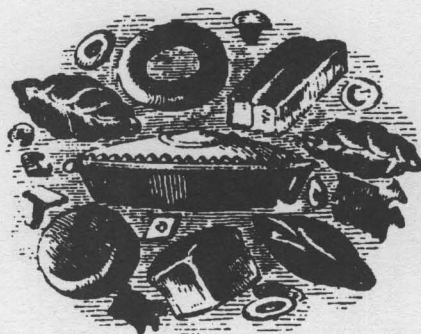
*The most important thing is practice.*



The old hotel almost becomes a character in the book. It had been a popular resort in a former age but was just hanging on when he was there and later closed. It was largely abandoned in the service areas—long marble-floored basement halls and shops closed off and unused, a huge top floor formerly housing an extensive staff and the servants of guests and in his time spottily occupied by the few employees who lived in the hotel and listened to the fierce Atlantic winds whistle under the roof. The chef had rescued the food operations by the imposition of fanatical economy. He was called Dad because he was so unlike a father and was “a good chef but a poor cook,” that is, he did not know how to loosen up from his economical ways and went overboard if he tried to make the food a little richer and ruined the dish. He could deal with any crisis, whether injury, epidemic of flu, or a sudden influx of guests, he was always calm, never raised his voice, never used bad language.

The chefs themselves treated all but the most serious injuries with an assortment of culinary cures. They used a slice of carrot for a cut, onion skin for burns, lemon juice to disinfect, garlic for bronchitis, lemon and thyme for a cold, a poultice of cabbage for boils. And Freeling insists that cooks knew of the healing properties of mold long before the discovery of penicillin.

Those of many backgrounds who worked in the kitchens had arrived at a mixture of languages called “sabir.” Here is part of a scene in the war that always developed between the staff and the guests, often English, who lived full time in the hotel, in this case the old dragon on the tenth floor: She had sent down a list of what she wanted to eat and she communicated with Dad through the lowly liftman: Dad says that he had sent “Ein good porsione Finkle.” “Chef, she says the melon is overripe.” “No overripe. Cantaloupe is



immer so.” Mrs. Finkle gets back for this by refusing the duck. And finally the liftman reports, “She says she try, only because is nothing better. She say. But want now peas.” “Me, too, want now peace,” says Dad, “No, no, piselli, petits pois. . .” and on and on.

His eight years in French hotels were happy ones, but he went back to England and tried to carry on with sound and honest cooking, only to find that the small country inns where he worked insisted on presenting elaborate continental-style bills of fare, instead of concentrating on a few good solid local dishes that could reasonably be produced by a small kitchen staff. He became unpopular with their managers and more and more dissatisfied with his work, gradually developing the idea that he would rather write. His first novel, *Love In Amsterdam*, introduced his Dutch detective Piet Van der Valk, a character so successful that when he was killed off after a dozen or so tales, it was big news. At the time of publication of this book, he had been making a living as a writer of fiction for ten years. He calls the two activities, cooking and writing, “handcrafts” and says that they are surprisingly alike, both disciplined trades, painfully acquired.

If you are attracted to mysteries, by all means begin with *Love In Amsterdam* and go straight through the early books that feature Van der Valk. Be assured—remarks about cooking crop up in all of them.

AW

*Simplicity is an axiom of good cooking. Suitability is another: it means not serving asparagus with chile con carne. Good taste is the third.*





Noël Riley Fitch's

## Appetite for Life

A Review

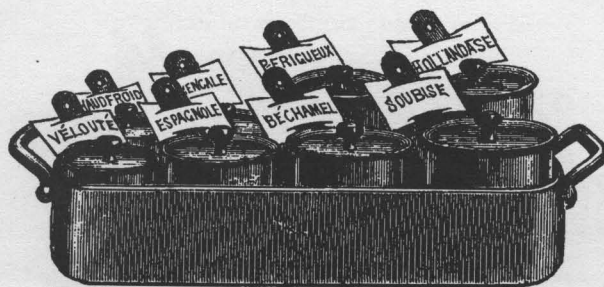


For those who have the time and patience to plod through the interminable minutiae, the irrelevant, mind-boggling details of *Appetite for Life* by Noël Riley Fitch, a picture eventually emerges, albeit disjointed, of our American icon, our National Treasure, Julia Child. No matter how bad the writing, enough of Julia Child comes through to give one the sense of who she is and what she stands for. And what a magnificent person she is. However, a chapter into this tome makes one wonder, "Where was the editor?" The book is filled with extraneous information that one simply doesn't care about; I don't wish to know the names of her playmates at the age of 6 years, or who her neighbors were, or the genealogies of friends. And then later, the name of every guest at every cocktail party!

Julia Child was born in 1912 in an upper-class, affluent family in Pasadena, had a happy childhood, graduated from Smith in 1934, returned to Pasadena for a year living a life of leisure—par-

ties, golf, and more parties—which was not uncommon at that time for a young woman of her class. Most young woman attending a Seven Sisters college had engagement rings by the time they graduated and were expected to follow the prescribed pattern of their culture: marry and have a family.

After a year of Pasadena life, Julia was attracted to New York, and she did a short stint working for a prestigious furniture store there, then returned to Pasadena for another 5 or 6 years. In 1942 she began her first real job at the Office of Strategic Services, initially in Washington, D.C., then in Ceylon (where she met Paul Child) and subsequently in China. It was during this period that she and Paul developed a



close friendship. Paul was urbane, loved women, had lived in Paris, was multilingual, was a photographer and a painter, and had a very sophisticated palate. Julia, on the other hand, had little experience with men or living abroad, and none with food, but she was eager to learn and Paul was just as eager to teach her about food, and he began with Asian food. It was the beginning of a life of learning.

Their love blossomed in China, they were transferred to Washington, D.C., got married, and settled into a house in Georgetown. Two years later, Paul's next assignment took them to Paris, and Julia's very first French meal was in Rouen en route to Paris from Le Havre, and it was an epiphanous event. She later recollected, "The whole experience was an opening up of the soul and spirit for me . . . I was hooked and for life, as it turned out." At age 36 she had found the passion of her life (other than Paul).

Despite the vagaries and the meanderings of Fitch's writing, a clear portrayal of Paul Child, again disjointedly, does evolve. He was an intellectual, a raconteur; he was sensual, disciplined. He was everything to Julia: partner, manager, photographer, scheduler; there was nothing he would not do for her. Theirs was a true partnership in every sense of the word; they were the center of each other's life, yet each with his/her own pursuits. There are many quotations in the book which demonstrate their deep love for each other, but especially in Paul's letters/diary to his brother and in his poems to Julia. Before they were married, he wrote a detailed description and analysis of Julia to his brother that reflects Julia Child in 1998 as it did in 1946. "We did everything together until the end," said Julia. ". . . The main thing about Paul and me is that we were always together so that he could carry on his work and I could carry on mine . . . (we) moved as a unit." Truly it was a marriage of deep love and real partnership.

Paris was a mecca for both of them, but for Julia it was one beautiful discovery after another. She immediately plunged into Berlitz classes, did the daily rounds of the markets where she practiced her French and where she was learning a whole new food vocabulary. While she continued trying recipes from *The Joy of Cooking*, it was only natural that her enthusiasm for French food would lead her to the Cordon Bleu cooking school.

Thus began a career that would be filled with a life-long zest for food. After six months she left the Cordon Bleu to study independently with her teacher/chef. In 1951 when she met Simone (Simca) Beck, she found her soul-mate, someone who shared her feelings about food, specifically, French food. She and Simca forged a close bond that lasted until Simca's death in 1991. Julia felt a real sisterhood with Simca and mourned her death. "I have lost a fond and generous sister."

Julia began getting requests for cooking lessons from American women living in Paris, and it was at this point that Julia, Simca, and Simca's friend Louise Bertholle began a small cooking school (L'Ecole des Trois Gourmandes), using Julia's kitchen. Out of this association came *Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volume I*.

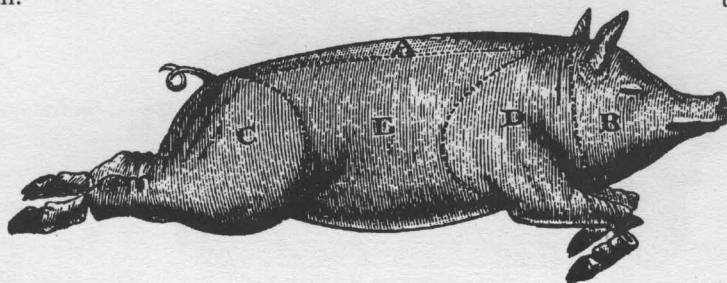
The long saga of the writing of *Volume I*, mainly by Julia and Simca, only peripherally by Louise Bertholle, tells us a great deal about the persistence and determination of Julia Child to write a definitive cookbook that

would be a teaching tool for American cooks to learn the fundamentals of French cooking and to be able to use the techniques to adapt to other recipes, using ingredients available in American supermarkets.

For many reasons it took nearly ten years before *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* was published (in 1961). For Julia, it became her *raison d'être*: testing recipes over and over again to get them *right*; writing the recipes in such a way that American home cooks, who knew little or nothing about French cooking, could understand and easily follow; translating the French techniques, processes, and short-hand direction of classic French cookbooks (which assumed a basic knowledge on the cook's part) with the clarity that would demystify French Cuisine into authen-

incredible detail, its comprehensiveness, and its clarity. You were told what size skillet or pot to use, what could be done ahead of time and how to reheat it, and, in some cases, what to do in case of a disaster. This was a scenario written to encourage, to entice one to try something that might have been considered complicated.

Julia continued her demystification of French cuisine with *The French Chef* on Educational TV from 1963 to 1973. This was the medium in which she became a star, the first major TV personality in the cooking world. She is a natural teacher and this was a platform where she could tangibly make cooking accessible to millions of people with her superb instincts for timing and humor. But most of all she was herself, without guile, without pretensions, the supreme anti-snob, someone who *loved* what she was doing and having fun! What better teacher to introduce and debunk the "mysteries" of French cuisine?



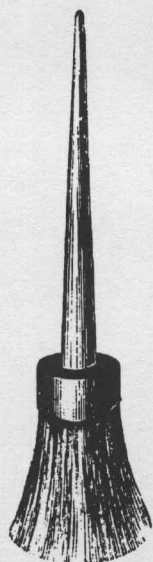
tic French recipes, not merely adaptations.

The book was an immediate and huge success. Craig Claiborne wrote in the *New York Times*, "... Probably the most comprehensive, laudable, and monumental work on (French cuisine) ... and it will probably remain as the definitive work for non professionals." It was really the first of its kind with its

The TV series made Julia a celebrity, and it was the catalyst for the revolution in food in the United States. All things French were chic; Jacqueline Kennedy was a francophile, and the Kennedys had a French chef in the White House; and more and more Americans were vacationing in France. American home cooks now had an alternative to the Tuna and Green Bean Casserole; they were ready for some sophistication in the kitchen. And Julia showed them the way, showed them what good food and good dining was all about while having a good time in the process.

One of the most disconcerting aspects of this book is that while Fitch





is writing the biography of a woman who is passionate about all aspects of food, Fitch herself is woefully ignorant, lacking the perception of a refined palate and thus the vocabulary to write about food in a knowledgeable manner. There is little or no discernible *feeling* about food. I wondered frequently if, indeed, she had ever read

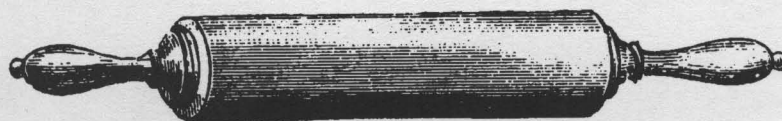
any of Julia's books. She describes a lunch of "*sole meunière* . . . Then a green salad, *crème fraîche* and finally café filtre. . . . Julia savored each dish . . ." *Crème fraîche* a separate dish?

Fitch describes a cooking demonstration that Julia and Simone Beck did in Chicago where they were making their Queen of Sheba chocolate cake. "Julia and Simca carried their eight-inch pan, a blender to whip the egg whites separately . . ." Would Julia Child use a blender to whip egg whites? I think not.

For the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor, it must be noted that the name of our founder, Jan Longone, can be found on page 444 in a discussion of the *Journal of Gastronomy*. " . . . its early issues featured essays by such nationally and internationally recog-

nized scholars and artists as . . . Alan Davidson, M. F. K. Fisher, Jan Longone . . ." Davidson, Fisher, et al., are in good company.

Food in the '90's has now become an integral part of our culture: fine restaurants and specialty food shops abound, and supermarkets are stocked with items such as shiitake mushrooms, morels, pâté, polenta, Italian pasta, wasabi, etc. This level of sophistication, the proliferation of the Dean & DeLucas, Zabars, et al., a TV channel devoted solely to food, the scores of food magazines, cooking schools, and all the other food-related enterprises all surely owe much to Julia and *The French Chef* and *Volume I*. And while our ideas of food have broadened to include Asian cuisines, Ethiopian, Mexican, etc., there has also developed a keener appreciation for American foods. Alice Waters, who began the migration to American cuisine with her

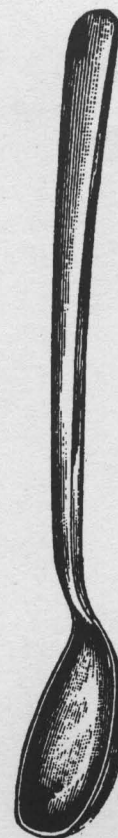


restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley in 1971, says: "Julia made this evolution possible by first introducing Americans to fine food. . . She paved the way for Chez Panisse because she was an unpretentious francophile who taught the generation who became my customers to value good food."

*Appetite for Life* does tell us a lot about Julia Child, but one might only wish that Julia had written this book in the straightforward, articulate, inimitably witty manner that we know from her TV performances and quotations. *That* would have been a great story.



Margot Michael, member, had a catering business in Ann Arbor and now runs a Bed & Breakfast.



April 19 — Beyond Budweiser: Beer from Babylonia to Arbor Brewing Company

Speaker: Jeff Renner

May 17 — Eating Out Around the World:

France, England, Cambodia, Vietnam, Russia and U.S.A.

Speakers: Ned and Joann Chalat

July 19 — Picnique with the Impressionists

Location: Carroll and John Thomson's home

Unitarian Church, 1917 Washtenaw Ave, Ann Arbor, Michigan Time 7:00 - 9:00 pm (unless otherwise noted)



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*First Class*