

## Chapter

# 1



*You live but once, you might  
as well be amusing.*

—Gabrielle ("Coco") Chanel, French couturier

"It's an honor to have you on board, Mrs. Childs," announced the handsome flight attendant neatly clad in midnight-blue slacks, white shirt, and logoed tie. Bending over our seats, he whispered conspiratorially with a Texas drawl as broad as the state itself, "I'm such a *huge* fan. I have all your cookbooks."

Julia smiled demurely, tilted her head in acknowledgment, and said, "Thank you," without mentioning the erroneous addition of an *s* to her name. In the thirteen years that I had been working with her, the faulty pronunciation happened with curious regularity, and some years before, I'd remarked how odd I thought it that so many people put an *s* at the end of her name.

"Not really," she responded. "Before I was known at all there was a popular New York eatery called Childs. People knew of it and it helped them remember my name."

On that March day in 1993, three decades of public fascination with Child, the French Chef, had eclipsed whatever fame Childs the eatery had once enjoyed. That eclipse began the moment in 1963 when, from the display kitchen of the Boston Gas Company, she trilled her first WGBH-TV “Bon appétit.” Cooking enthusiasts became dedicated fans, and even viewers who would never make friends with their stoves tuned in religiously to catch the antics of this Lucille Ball-like character with a rolling pin. I watched all—was it 134?—episodes of *The French Chef* for the cooking, but I reveled in her humor. Spontaneous humor—such as the time she pulled a bouquet garni out of a bubbling stock and said of the used bundle of herbs, “It looks like a dead mouse,” and the time she announced, to cover for a bell that inadvertently rang during taping, “That must be the plumber!” Unable to resist, she licked a rich chocolate batter from her spatula and told us with a smile, “That’s not part of the recipe.” I laughed out loud when the long, slim baguette of French bread she planned to slice for onion soup slumped lazily in the middle when she held it up, so she declared it pathetically lacking in character and flung it dismissively over her shoulder.

She peppered her instructions for proper, classic techniques with frequent, amusing soupçons of sound: *blump, blump, blump* as she quickly sliced through mushrooms, *whomp* when she smashed her knife down on a clove of garlic, and a throaty, crackling sound when she broke off the claw of a lobster. In a distinctive voice that became one of the most recognized—and most imitated—voices in the country, she told us to be prepared to “shoot the wad” on buying the best ingredients and “go whole hog” in fearlessly cooking them. The combination of her off-the-cuff, madcap quirkiness and her deeply serious commitment to things culinary made watching her addictive. She catapulted to fame. When, in 1966, *Time* magazine featured her as its cover story, dubbing her “Our Lady of the Ladle,”

they wrote that her shows “have made her a cult from coast to coast and put her on a first-name basis with her fans.”

Her name, sans the *s*, was unlikely to be forgotten.

“Want something to read?” Julia asked, reaching into her carry-on and pulling out an impressive stack of current magazines.

I held up the spy novel she had loaned me. “No, thanks. I’m just at the good part.” Julia and I shared a passion for thrillers, mostly the ones that involved espionage. I could trace mine back to the Hardy Boys mysteries that I discovered when I was eight. Julia honed hers during World War II, when she worked with the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA. She had just loaned me *The Spy Wore Red*, and although she insisted that during the war she had only typed and filed, I knew the government had cleared her for high-security work, and my overactive imagination kept plugging her into the role of undercover agent depicted by the heroine of the nonfiction book. Julia admitted that she had wanted to be a spy, but the “Oh So Secret,” as she called the OSS, rejected her. “They said I was too tall,” she would sigh. But of course, that’s the sort of thing a spy would say.

I felt something brush by my foot. “Here comes the deluge,” I said in a singsong voice.

“So much useless stuff,” Julia said as she discarded several scented inserts, subscription forms, and coupon offers onto the floor. She didn’t make neat piles; she unselfconsciously tossed the “useless stuff” around our feet. We were seated behind the bulkhead; there were no seats with pockets in front of us, so the floor was the only available receptacle for the mounting trash. I’d seen her do it often when in flight and, being infinitely more self-conscious, I always felt a compulsion to stand up and make a general announcement that we would pick them up before we left the plane. But Julia had no such compulsion. Delightfully uninhibited and completely comfortable with herself, she didn’t worry about what other people might think.

“Do you know how many people actually pay attention to all that?” she asked pointing to the pile.

“No, I haven’t a clue.”

She cited an impressive statistic. “Isn’t that amazing?”

“Amazing,” I agreed, but more amazing to me was the fact that she was interested enough to find out. But then, after so many years with her, I was used to being amazed by her.

She continued to thumb through the magazines, paused intermittently to read articles that interested her, tore out several pages to read later, and tossed the pillaged remains into a heap on the floor. The litter at our feet was growing in scary dimension.

“Would you like me to take those?” the flight attendant asked, eyeing the mess and slipping a navy-blue apron over his head.

“Not now,” Julia replied.

He looked at the pile at my feet and gave me a questioning look.

“It’s *her* mess,” I said with a shrug.

When he walked away, Julia gave me a quick, playful poke in the arm, and I responded as though she had broken it. I wasn’t traveling with Julia Child the star—I was in the company of Julia McWilliams, the slightly naughty schoolgirl who took to elbowing and horsing around. Biographies, television programs, and articles about Julia often allude to the fact that in her youth she was a mischievous cut-up, a prankster, a party girl who loved to stir things up. But that fun-loving, mischief-causing character with a wicked glint in her eye was always very much there, elbowing and stirring up a little trouble whenever she felt like it.

We began our approach to Dallas, and the flight attendant returned to our seats. “We’ll be getting ready to land soon, Mrs. Childs.” And then, with a hesitant look at the clutter around our feet, “Shall I take these away now?”

“That would be very nice. Thank you.”

“Is there anything else I can do for you?”

Julia gently patted both her knees with open palms and said, “We’re supposed to have an airport cart pick us up. Where will that be?” Overall, Julia was blessed with remarkably good health, but stiffness in her knees often caused her extreme pain. “An old skiing injury and all that basketball in school,” she’d say. Although bad knees are just in the cards for some people, all that jumping on her long, slender legs may well have compromised the joints. I’d realized just how long those legs were some years before, when a fan sent her an enormous box of Vidalia onions that contained the instructions “Store well ventilated in a cool place.” When I asked her how she suggested we should store them, she handed me a pair of her pantyhose, saying, “These should do it. We’ll hang them in the basement.” The entire box of sweet Georgia onions fit into the one pair of her stockings.

When standing and walking seriously began to tax her knees, she reminded everyone around her to heed her call to arms: “Save the knees!” The Ritz-Carlton Hotel, our lodging in Houston, had rallied to the cause and arranged for an airport cart to pick us up.

“It will be at the gate at the end of the walkway. I’ll make sure it is,” the attendant informed us as he walked away with his armload of trash.

“There it is,” I said, leading Julia toward the cart where a beaming woman driver was holding a sign that read, “Julia Child.” We loaded our carry-on bags, our computers, and ourselves on board. When the cart began to back up, sounding its tooter to alert travelers that we were on the move, I said, “This is great. I’ve always wanted to ride on one of these.”

Julia responded without missing a beat. “I’ve always wanted to *drive* one.”

Her bright blue eyes smiled at me with a look I had grown to know and love in the more than a dozen years, and thousands of miles, I had been with her. It was the twinkling, teasing, conspiratorial smile

that implied a connection, an understanding, a secret; it was a smile that she often gave me across a crowded dinner table when someone said something that we both knew more about but weren't going to tell. The one she flashed with a wink of her eye to me during long demonstrations that said, *Hold on, we'll be finished soon, and enjoying a cocktail and dinner.* That moment in Houston, the smile was saying, *Of course I drive. It's my cart.*

There never was any question that Julia drove the cart. I was just lucky to go along for the ride!

That ride began in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1980. I was thirty-six years old and married with two toddler sons, had graduated from culinary school, and was running two cooking schools of my own. The husband and the children were intentional; teaching cooking was a delightful fluke.

In 1969, I married Philip Barr and we moved to Washington, D.C., where he attended dental school and I found a job teaching hard-of-hearing children. I quickly became fast friends with a fellow teacher who was supporting her husband through law school.

"We can't just sit at home nights while our husbands study," she stated emphatically while turning the pages of the latest brochure of community classes. "Here's something interesting," she said, handing me the catalogue so I could read about the cooking classes a local woman gave in her home.

I signed up for the classes not because I had a particular interest in food but because it was something to do with a friend. But from the moment I placed a nugget of herb-infused butter on top of a boneless chicken breast, rolled it, and fried it into an elegant, stuffed Kiev, I was hooked. When I tasted the crisp explosion of unfamiliar flavor that a quick dip in hot olive oil made of a small, unimpressive bouquet of parsley, I wanted to know more about this food thing. I bought my first Julia Child cookbook, *The French Chef*,

and watched her shows with a pad and pencil. Philip began to photograph our meals. When I watched Julia make something she called “Glamour Pouding,” I took copious notes, invited friends to dinner, and wowed them with the “handsome molded dessert” that Julia promised me I would have if I did what she did on TV.

I became a community cooking class junkie, and one of my teachers suggested that I might want to assist. She put me in touch with Madame Teresa Colonna, a colorful Polish-French woman in her sixties who ran a cooking school from her home in Bethesda, Maryland. She had immigrated to the United States as a young woman with a certificate from the Cordon Bleu and training as a French milliner. When ladies’ custom-designed hats became passé and cooking classes all the rage, she taught full time. For two years, I spent two nights a week at culinary boot camp—setting up the preparation for hands-on classes, fetching ingredients, adjusting students’ grips on knives, and washing the dishes that remained. I couldn’t have been happier. By the time Philip graduated from dental school in 1973, I knew I wanted to be Madame Colonna.

We returned to Providence, and I immediately enrolled in Madeleine Kamman’s Modern Gourmet cooking school in Newton Center, Massachusetts, where I systematically worked my way through the classic techniques of French cooking. In 1975, I passed my Modern Gourmet exams, received my diploma, and opened my own schools.

I had been teaching classic French cuisine for five years when, in the spring of 1980, a friend, Tina Frost, telephoned me.

“I’m calling for my husband, Fred. He’s heading up the committee for Providence’s Planned Parenthood fund-raiser in October, and we’d like you to help out.”

I’d done volunteer work for Planned Parenthood before. I knew there was a need. “Sure. What can I do?”

“Julia Child has agreed to come to Providence and give two cooking demonstrations. We need help organizing them.”

Ta-da! I was not just going to meet the most important culinary figure in the country—I was going to work with her. It was akin to tossing a football around with Joe Montana or jamming on guitars with Eric Clapton. Tina was giving me dates and venues, and I was mentally kneading images of me standing next to Julia, passing her utensils and ingredients with the efficiency of an OR nurse. She would say, “Bismarck,” and I would know exactly which pastry tip to pass her. “Brioche pan” and the fluted, tin mold would be in her hand.

I was lost in truffle heaven, but Tina’s next words brought me back to earth. “Julia’s bringing her own assistants, but she said we needed someone local with cooking experience who could take care of the food and the set. Do you think you can do that?”

Okay, I would be an orderly, not head nurse, but I would be there. “Absolutely! It’s what I do,” I said, stepping up to the plate with exaggerated confidence. True enough, it was what I did. I just didn’t do it for *Julia Child*.

I made myself focus on the job and not the star. We needed food shoppers, dishwashers, and prep cooks. Since the demonstration site was to be the Rhode Island School of Design’s auditorium, which in no way resembled a place where one could cook, we needed a cooktop, ovens, a refrigerator, small appliances, makeshift sinks, pots, pans, whisks, spoons, measuring utensils, food.

Julia mailed us detailed lists itemizing everything she would need, along with some specific instructions: the demonstration counter was to be thirty-nine inches high, four inches above the norm; the electric stand mixer should be a heavy-duty K5A—the “real McCoy”—and the rolling pin should be a proper ball-bearing one, at least sixteen inches long, and “not some toy.” As did most Julia devotees, I’d formed my impression of her by watching her television shows. I’d seen the messes, the dropped potato pancake, the loaf of bread flung over her shoulder. She was someone who effortlessly winged it and didn’t sweat the small

stuff. Those lists said that there was a finely honed structure behind her madcap exterior.

Julia even told us precisely what she would like served for lunch on the set: smoked salmon with a “nice salad” one day and a “*real* Rhode Island red clam chowder” on the next. A popular local caterer volunteered to do the salmon buffet, and I asked my mother to make the chowder. It wasn’t nepotism; her recipe was my great-grandma Feely’s, and it was the best Rhode Island red clam chowder I’d ever tasted.

The day before the first demonstration, the Julia entourage arrived by train. The plan was for me to meet them at the auditorium, where Julia would check the set before going to the hotel. Sylvia Walker Quinn, one of my team of helpers, called me that morning.

“I told the committee we’d pick Julia up at the train station,” she said.

“You’re kidding!” I’m sure I must have thought a limousine would pick her up. At least it never occurred to me to offer to do it. Such things *always* occurred to Sylvia.

“Why would I kid you? I’ll pick you up first.”

The train was early, so when Sylvia and I arrived, Julia was already outside with her husband, Paul, Liz Bishop, Ruth Lockwood, and several pieces of mismatched luggage, some emblazoned with enormous, yellow masking tape X’s for identification and others hand-lettered with a bold black P surrounded with the letter C. A few oversized tote bags, bloated with an assortment of aprons, food, and cooking utensils, were leaning against the suitcases. This small culinary cortege looked more like an AARP group back from a weekend tour than a television star and her roadies. At a lofty six foot two, Julia towered over the group, and I realized why the counters needed to be so high. In later years, she became somewhat stooped, but on that day, the sixty-eight-year-old undisputed queen of cooking straightened up to her full height and greeted us with enthusiastic warmth.

“Hooray! You’re here!” she warbled, taking Paul’s arm with one hand and hoisting a tote bag with the other.

I smiled, or maybe I laughed. It is impossible not to the first time you hear that unmistakable voice in person—especially when it is accentuating the word *hooray*.

“We are,” I said, accepting the bag she handed me. After multiple introductions, we squished ourselves into Sylvia’s small blue station wagon, with Julia, Liz, Ruth, and me vying for space in the backseat.

“Up and back, Ruthie,” Julia said. Ruth, a neatly coiffed, smartly dressed, efficient-looking woman, was Julia’s friend, her original television producer, and clearly someone who had been squished into many backseats, because she’d devised the up-and-back seating arrangement that gave the *derriere* plenty of space. The person nearest the door slides well back in the seat, the next person sits just on the edge, the next back, and so on. Julia was sitting next to but well behind me, yet her long legs stretched out as far as mine. Many people dream of rubbing elbows with celebrities. There I was rubbing knees with Julia Child, who was telling us how happy she was to be in Providence. I guess we all have different reactions to being in the company of famous people. Mine was to ask innocuous questions about the trip and mention the weather. Sylvia’s was to take a hostage. “Would you like to stop at Nancy’s house to freshen up? It’s along the way,” she lied. It was close to the auditorium, but it was a roundabout way to go.

“Why not?” said Julia, demonstrating how delightfully ordinary my extraordinary idol was.

While I made coffee and rooted around in the cupboards for something to serve with it, Sylvia dragged my complete collection of Julia Child cookbooks off the shelf and asked Julia to sign them for me. All the books were food-spattered and dog-eared, and I half expected bits of parsley and pieces of onion peel to trickle out. I thought ruefully of the protective Plexiglas bookstand gathering dust in the closet.

“How nice to see that they are so used,” Julia said, flipping through the smeared pages. Chalk one up for being a messy cook. Years later, after publishing my own cookbooks, I realized just how gratifying it is to see proof that someone actually cooked from them.

As she signed each book, she passed it on to Paul, who wrote his name in a fine bold hand, with a jaunty scroll beneath it.

“Thank you,” I said, giving what I thought was a nice grateful smile and reaching for the book. He held it open in front of him and gazed reproachfully at me—for what, I didn’t know.

“You have to wait for the ink to dry,” he said authoritatively.

“Of course,” I said, meekly sliding my hand away.

When he determined that the ink was dry, his tone became gentler and he directed my attention to the photographs and drawings in *From Julia Child’s Kitchen*, or “JC’s Kitchen,” as I learned it was always called by all those who had anything to do with it.

“I took the photographs over her shoulder so readers would see the food from the cook’s angle,” he explained. It was an innovation in food photography, since most food photos aimed at tantalizing the appetite and not at teaching. Up until that moment, it had escaped my notice that the photographs and artful sketches in Julia’s early books were Paul’s. For all I knew about Julia’s cooking, I knew little about her personal life. I’m not sure I even knew there *was* a Paul, so I certainly didn’t know that Julia’s husband, ten years her senior, had suffered a heart attack in 1974, followed by a small series of strokes from which he had never fully recovered. That day she made no apology or explanation for Paul’s peculiar scolding tone.

He turned to the front of the book and pointed out what he told me was a favorite photograph—Julia silhouetted in shadow in front of the window in their Marseilles apartment. “Julie looks really good in this,” he said, becoming the only person I would ever hear call her Julie. Somehow it instantly revealed the closeness that was



*Paul, Julia, and me in my kitchen.*

theirs and gave me a glimpse of the extremely charming man who had governed Julia's heart for some thirty-four years.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the kitchen, Liz Bishop was perched on a stool—knees crossed, top leg swinging sassily—surveying her surroundings. Liz had been working with Julia since the first television series. They were good friends. She was in her forties, brash and entertaining with a quick, bawdy wit and a sharp tongue that Julia found terribly funny. So did I. Then Liz said something that caught me off guard.

“You studied with Madeleine?” she asked, raising her eyebrows and tilting her head in the direction of my *Modern Gourmet* diploma in the bookcase. This was a touchy subject because I knew that there was bad blood between Julia and Madeleine. The times that Madeleine

even mentioned Julia in class, it was to say, “She is neither French nor a chef.”

“Yes, I did,” I responded, and Liz gave me an inscrutable smile. I gave it my own read: I would be condemned by association and deep-sixed before I got to demonstrate my efficiency or serve my great-grandma Feely’s red chowder. But no one said anything more on the subject. Not then, anyway.

We spent close to an hour in my kitchen, getting to know each other and smiling for Sylvia, who, being Sylvia, had her camera and was snapping photos. Julia talked mostly about the recipes for the demonstrations, describing in detail how she planned to mix this or assemble that. The words *perfectly*, *carefully*, and *impeccably* sifted evenly throughout her descriptions, and I knew she was sending me a message: *We don’t rush through things*. As she spoke, her hands slowly pantomimed cooking motions, and I remember how their expressiveness captured my attention. Julia had very long, graceful fingers, adorned only by a lovely wide gold Tiffany wedding band. When she was imitating a culinary move, she cupped her palms slightly, tightened her knuckles a bit, and splayed her fingers gracefully in a most distinctive gesture. They were artist’s hands, chef’s tools that never ceased to captivate me. And her eyes intrigued me. They were the most delicate shade of pale blue and glistened as though tears were waiting to appear.

“The caramel gave us a lot of trouble in the past,” she said, referring to the spun-caramel dome that would sit over the cake she was to demonstrate. Although I had never made a caramel dome, I knew the process involved swirling hot caramel with a spoon into a webbed pattern on the exterior of a bowl and, when it cooled, lifting it in one piece off the bowl.

“How so?” I asked, wondering what problems she had encountered.

“It kept breaking when we lifted it off the bowl. We tried different bowls, more butter, layers of plastic wrap. In the end, we found the difference was chilling the bowl beforehand.”

It was obvious from her animated discussion that not only had she researched the releasing qualities of caramel with scientific precision, but she had thoroughly enjoyed the research process. It had been thirty-one years since Julia took her first cooking class at the Cordon Bleu, and yet there she was enthusing about learning a technique with the same passion of a first-year culinary student. Her enthusiasm was infectious.

That evening, at the patrons' gala dinner, I met Julia's assistants, Marian Morash and Sara Moulton. My copy of Marian's *The Victory Garden Cookbook*, the landmark, definitive work on vegetables, was as worn and stained as my copies of Julia's books. I had watched her on her own television show, *The Victory Garden*, but I didn't know that she is married to Russ Morash, the director responsible for Julia's successful burst into the television world. Sara, who would go on to become the star of her own shows on the Food Network, is a petite dynamo. I like to call Sara “petite.” Since I am only five feet two inches, it's elevating working with someone who's even shorter. Sara looked like a teenager, but I knew she had to be older than that, because it took a lot longer than nineteen years to accumulate her degree of culinary expertise. Since both Marian and Sara had worked with Julia for a number of years and knew her routine well, I expected they would hardly need me for anything more than managing the dishwashing station.

The next morning, I stood back and waited for directions.

“Where should we begin?” Marian asked me. “You're in charge.” How generous is that? Marian and Sara intended for me to be the onstage assistant to Julia during the shows, and their instant acceptance of me immediately endeared both women to me.



*Liz seated and me getting to know Sara and Marian, while patron Nancy Taylor of Providence looks on.*

Julia's demonstration that afternoon was to be devoted to fast puff pastry, a quicker but no less buttery version of the classically made, multilayered flaky pastry known in French as *pâte feuilletée*. The classic version calls for spreading masses of butter over a large sheet of pastry dough, *pâte brisée*, and then folding the two into a package. The butter and pastry package is then rolled and folded, rerolled, and folded again for a total of six times called "turns," with chilling necessary after each turn. Its success depends in great part on the cook's ability to handle the butter so that it maintains the ideal temperature to spread properly through the layers of dough: too cold and shards of it can pierce the dough, too warm and it can ooze out

### Ramequin du Juste Milieu

for the uncooked insides of a vol-au-vent (for a 4-cup dish)

Purée the uncooked pastry ( $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup usually) in a blender or processor with 1 cup milk. Blend in briefly 2 eggs,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup grated Parmesan or Swiss cheese, salt and pepper to taste. Half an hour or so before you wish to serve, pour into a buttered baking dish and set in the middle level of a preheated 375°F oven and bake until nicely puffed and brown. Serve at once.

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*Julia's recipe for the inevitable bits of uncooked vol-au-vent dough.*

the sides, sticking the dough together and preventing it from separating into flaky layers.

In 1980, we couldn't buy puff pastry in the market, so if we wanted it, we had to make our own. Julia did not invent the faster method, which she called "*pâte feuilletée express*," but she heralded its use to her audiences so that they would not miss the joys of the layered pastry because they found the classic method daunting. With quick puff pastry, instead of a large sheet of butter spread on top of the pastry, diced pieces are added and blended directly into the flour and water in the bowl of a stand mixer. The dough is then ready for the traditional six turns and folds.

Julia would then demonstrate a number of delicious and inventive dishes you could cook up once you had rapidly made the dough. She would demonstrate two types of pithiviers, that wickedly rich, two-crust tart that oozes sumptuousness: one with a sweet almond paste filling and the other with savory ham and cheese. There would be individual patty shells, called bouchées, and a large vol-au-vent shell.

Typically frugal, she also planned to show how to rework any leftover pieces of pastry into cheese appetizers. Then, a *truc* I'd never

seen before, she would remove the inevitable bits of uncooked dough from the inside of the baked vol-au-vent, puree them with milk, eggs, and cheese, and bake the lot into a nicely puffed and browned sort of vertically challenged soufflé. She called this last dish Ramequin du Juste Milieu.

All that pastry with its turns and folds, rests, and shaping meant that we were up to our ears in flour and butter with a lot of work to be done before the show, and we all seemed to be in constant motion. Jody Adams, now the award-winning chef of Rialto in the Boston area, was then a young assistant at my cooking school and one member of my team. When I asked her recently what she remembered about those days on the set, she said, “Running. I remember all that running around.” This was in no small part because the only water source was the ladies’ room, a good distance away from the stage. Julia worked right alongside us, pausing only briefly to take in the aproned army around her and say, “Isn’t cooking together fun?”

When Julia took the stage at two o’clock that afternoon, an excited, chattering audience warmed all six hundred seats of the auditorium. The house lights went up; Julia marched onto the stage and was greeted by a great thunderous applause. She clasped her hands together over her heart and bowed her head in appreciation. The clapping went on and on, and she raised her hands above her head and applauded the audience. Gosh, she was some showman. The audience loved it and rewarded her with louder clapping and several whoops.

Finally, Julia took her place at the demonstration counter and we assistants stood at the back of the stage waiting for her call to arms. Liz was perched on a stool off to the side. I realized that Liz was a non-cooking member of the team, a kind of majordomo in charge of Julia’s arrangements and appointments. Unless need pressed her into action, she would remain perched. Ruth sat in the front row of the

audience with Paul next to her. He held a small stack of handmade signs lettered with numbers on his lap. He was to keep track of the time and hold up a sign to let Julia know how much time she had left.

Assisting in a demonstration is all about anticipating. Good assistants know the recipes by heart, pay attention to the order of presentation, and keep their eyes on what utensils need replacing on the set. We were well on top of things as Julia was whizzing her way through making pastry.

*"Ninety minutes!"* Paul Child boomed in a loud voice that startled us all. Then the audience went dead quiet. Heads stretched and turned to see who dared cause such a disturbance. It well might have been an awkward, uncomfortable interruption, but Julia seemed neither uncomfortable nor interrupted. She never missed a roll of the pastry.

"Thank you, Paul," she said, smiling at him, before telling the audience that her husband was keeping time. Just as on the day before, when Paul had scolded me, Julia was not in the least bit embarrassed by his unconventional behavior. She was as unselfconscious and unpretentious in front of an audience as she had been in my kitchen. I had no idea of the years of partnership and romance that went into that simple exchange with Paul, but I saw clearly that Julia had a strong, secure sense of who she was, who they were, and she didn't need to explain or camouflage any odd behavior on or off the stage.

The demonstration continued smoothly, with all of us now nodding our thanks in Paul's direction for his periodic time reminders. When Julia got to the sweet almond Pithiviers, she put the filling ingredients—sugar, butter, egg, almonds, dark rum, and vanilla and almond extracts—into the food processor and pulsed them into a paste.

"This has to be well chilled before we put it into the shell to bake," she told the audience as she handed me the bowl. I, in turn, passed it to Brett Frechette, one of the teachers at my cooking school.

She was one of the best, a perfectionist. When I handed her the processor bowl, she looked in and whispered to me, “It’s separated.” I looked down, and sure enough, liquid was seeping out of the paste. It had been mixed too quickly for the flavorings to be absorbed.

“She can’t use it like this,” Brett said. I looked back to Julia to see if I could return the paste to her for fixing, but she was already on to the next recipe. And I didn’t think I should I disturb her by removing the processor from the set.

“The blender,” Brett and I whispered at the same time, looking at the brand-new donated Waring blender sitting on one of the workstations. The workstations were long, folding tables that we had swathed in green checked banquet cloths that draped to the floor. Brett grabbed the blender and scooted under the table near an electrical source. I gathered the ingredients and slipped them down to Brett, who turned them into a perfect, firm almond paste to replace the unusable, oozing one. The only person who seemed aware of the quiet whirring emanating from beneath the table was Liz, who smiled at me knowingly from her perch.

The theme for the next night’s demonstration was filling and wrapping. The first recipe was an elaborate creation of artichoke bottoms stuffed with mushroom duxelles, topped with poached eggs, napped with béarnaise sauce, and served on a platter with large, homemade croutons. Whew! Then there would be a whole three-pound fish, cleaned and scaled but with head on, cloaked in brioche dough and baked—Fish en Cloak. The grand finale—and it was grand—was to be the construction of Mlle. Charlotte Malakoff en Cage, a most elaborate rum-soaked génoise, layered and frosted with a whipped-cream chocolate-hazelnut filling, and haloed with the thoroughly tested, perfectly spun caramel dome. That recipe alone covered five pages, and at the end was Julia’s simple, understated instruction to “shatter the dome and cut the cake as usual.”



*Liz on her stool, me at the ready, and Julia with her cake.*

As lunchtime approached, I found myself wondering if my mother's chowder was really as delicious as I thought. Too late to do anything about it. Volunteers had set up a long table with china, silver, linens, and an empty space for the large pot of soup that my mother was, at that very moment, carrying down the aisle. Rhode Island has three native chowders: a clear broth with clams and potatoes, a creamy white chowder usually called New England clam chowder, and a red one, which, since there are no carrots, celery, or herbs, is not at all like Manhattan clam chowder. Our Rhode Island version is made with salt pork, both quahogs and clams, tomatoes, and potatoes and served with a pitcher of hot milk and pilot crackers.

Julia stepped down from the stage to greet my mother, Billie Higgins Verde, who was beaming. My mother was Irish, and her family's food—primarily corned beef and cabbage and codfish balls

## GREAT-GRANDMA FEELY'S RHODE ISLAND RED CLAM CHOWDER

1¼ quarts hard-shelled clams, combination of quahogs and cherrystones, scrubbed

⅛ pound salt pork, diced

1 large onion, finely chopped

6 large russet potatoes, peeled, cut into ¼-inch cubes

6 to 8 large ripe garden tomatoes, finely chopped, or one 28-ounce can Italian peeled plum tomatoes, drained and finely chopped

Salt and ground black pepper, as needed

For serving:

Pitcher of warm milk

Pilot crackers

1. Bring 2 cups of water to a boil in a deep pot. Add the quahogs, cover and cook for 5 minutes. Stir in cherrystone clams and continue to cook for 5 to 10 minutes or until the shells open. Remove all the clams with a slotted spoon and set aside. Strain the broth twice through a fine-mesh sieve or paper coffee filters. There should be about 1 quart of broth; if not add warm water.

2. Render the salt pork in a large soup pot and when the fat melts, stir in the onions. Cook over medium-low heat until the onions are translucent and soft; do not let brown. Add the potatoes, tomatoes and broth and bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer about 20 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Meanwhile, finely mince the quahogs and coarsely chop the cherrystone clams. When the potatoes are tender, stir all the clams into the chowder just to reheat, about a minute. Season with pepper and taste for salt though none should be needed. Serve the chowder with the pitcher of warm milk and pilot crackers.

*Note: Quahogs or quahaugs give chowder great flavor, but they are tough so be sure to chop them very fine. My grandmother put them through a meat grinder, and my mother pulsed them in a food processor.*

served with homemade baked beans on Sunday mornings—took a lot of ribbing from my Italian father's family. For her to serve her

Irish family's chowder and not lasagna to Julia Child was a real coup—more so when Julia asked for a second bowl.

That evening, the demonstration began as it had the day before, with much applause and cheering. In spite of the elaborate menu, it was, so to speak, Child's play for Julia. She whipped through cloaking the fish, spinning the caramel, raffling off the finished dishes, and auctioning off the stage equipment.

But there was more. As I would come to know, a Julia show is not over when the Julia show is over. There were fans to greet, books and aprons to sign, and photos to be taken. Julia left the stage and sat at a table facing long lines of admirers waiting for autographs and a



*Jody Adams, Marian Morash, Julia, Paul, Sara Moulton, me, Liz Bishop, and my assistants Jocelyn Hamblett and Sylvia Walker Quinn saying soufflé.*

word with her. Some approached her laden with an entire collection of Julia Child cookbooks; others held only the program from the demonstration or an apron they had hastily purchased. They lingered, telling Julia how she'd changed their culinary lives, recounting tales of their own kitchen disasters, sharing family recipes, asking Julia what was her favorite recipe, favorite restaurant, favorite anything. Julia listened attentively, commented graciously, and answered all questions except those about favorites. "That's a media-type question," she'd say with her index finger raised. "I don't answer those."

It was taking a long time after an already long day. When one man babbled on, giving a cup-by-tablespoon description of his great-aunt Ethel's orange cake, I was ready to scream. Julia asked him what kind of baking pan Great-aunt Ethel used. Where did she get the energy?

At last, with all the books signed and the last fan satisfied, Julia gathered the kitchen teams together for a group photo.

"Say cheese," the photographer instructed.

"No. Say *souf-flé*," Julia corrected, overstressing the second syllable.

"Soufflé?" I asked, wondering if Julia had randomly chosen a French word. Could we just as readily say *quiche* or *canard*?

Liz, Marian, Ruth, Sara, Paul, and of course Julia were probably hoping someone would ask because, practically in unison, they looked at me, raised their voices, and said "Souf-flé! See? You have to smile to say it right."

We smiled our "*souf-flé*" together and then sadly said goodbye.

A few months later Liz Bishop telephoned me. I wasn't surprised to hear from her, since we'd made a nice connection when she was in Providence and had promised to stay in touch. She invited me to Boston, to lunch with Julia, and Julia had a question that did surprise me. Marian was working on a second book, was involved with her own television show, and had a growing family that needed more

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31 October 1980

Ms. Nancy Barr  
109 Williams Street  
Providence, RI 02906

Dear Nancy,

How much we all enjoyed being with you and your marvelous group in Providence. We all said that was really the happiest time we've ever had on our demonstrations, just because of your charming, helpful, professional backing. And I think we had lots of fun together. We do look forward to another get together. Unfortunately, Paul and I are leaving for the west coast right after Thanksgiving, and are very much tied up with our ABC work, going back and forth to New York. But maybe something could be worked in before, or if you are going to be at DeGustibus, it would be great fun to see you.

*With fond thoughts from us both -*

*Julia*

*PS: (and our present, and  
am distributing it!*

*Julia's letter to me after the Planned Parenthood event.*

of her time, so she could not commit to all the work Julia needed. Was I available to work with the Julia team? And, just like that, I hopped on Julia's cart. I would be saying "souf-fle" with her for the next twenty-four years.