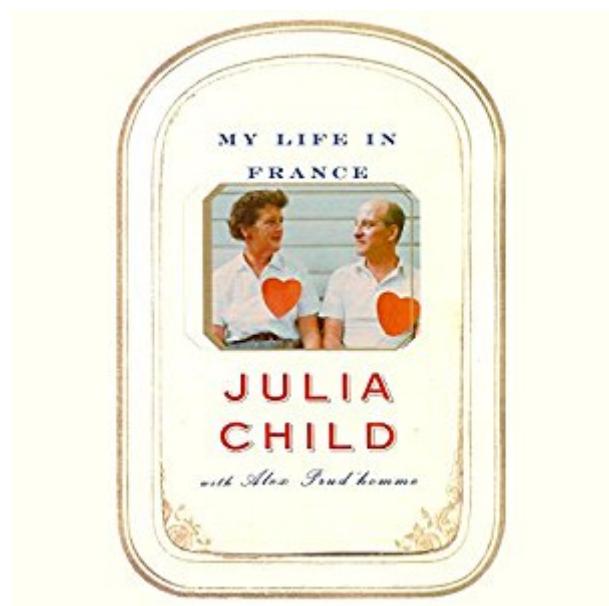


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# My Life In France



## **Synopsis**

Julia Child single handedly awakened America to the pleasures of good cooking with her cookbook Mastering the Art of French Cooking and her television show The French Chef, but as she reveals in this bestselling memoir, she didn't know the first thing about cooking when she landed in France. Indeed, when she first arrived in 1948 with her husband, Paul, she spoke no French and knew nothing about the country itself. But as she dove into French culture, buying food at local markets and taking classes at the Cordon Bleu, her life changed forever. Julia's unforgettable story unfolds with the spirit so key to her success as a cook and teacher and writer, brilliantly capturing one of the most endearing American personalities of the last fifty years. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Most Americans know of Julia Child via the parodies of her cooking show --- a frowsy, big-boned matron with a trill in her voice, hacking up a chicken with more zest than is called for, most likely because she's been chugging the cooking sherry. Well, that was, on occasion, a fair take on Julia Child, the jolly chef who taught her fellow citizens the joy of French cooking on public television. But Julia Child was much more than a 6'2", 158-pound precursor of Martha Stewart. She was a revolutionary. Not intentionally. She just had the great good fortune to find herself living in Paris with no job and nothing more compelling than a tentative interest in cooking. She signed up for classes at Cordon Bleu, got hooked, and soon found herself, with two friends, working on a book we now

take for granted but was then unimaginable --- an authoritative guide to French cooking for Americans. Published 40 years ago, 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volume One' has never gone out of print. It never will. It is the gold standard. Julia Child died in 2004. Of her 11 books, none was a memoir. But she kept scribbles and letters, and at the end of her life, she began to shape this book with her grandnephew. Like almost everything she touched, 'My Life in France' is a triumph --- insightful, poetic, deadly accurate about people, and, above all, tasty. To read it is to breathe French air. Nothing in her early life would have predicted that Julia Child would become formidable in any way. Her father was a conservative Southern California businessman; her mother was "warm and social." After college came World War II and government work in Ceylon. There she met Paul Child, an artist who designed 'war rooms' for the generals. The first meal she cooked for him --- brains simmered in red wine --- was not a success. Still, they married, and, in 1948, moved to France. She was 36. She didn't speak a word of French. Her first meal, in Rouen, started with oysters, served with a pale rye bread and unsalted butter. They were followed by sole meuniere, "perfectly browned in a sputtering butter sauce with a sprinkling of chopped parsley." Mr. and Mrs. Child washed it down with a bottle of Pouilly-Fume. They moved on a green salad and a baguette, fromage blanc and cafe filtre. "Absolute perfection," Julia decided. "The most exciting meal of my life." Fortunately, the Childs were not rich --- two-star restaurants were the best they could afford in Paris. But Julia was reading cookbooks, making friends in the food markets, falling in love with Paris. At Cordon Bleu, her classmates were 11 former American servicemen who were studying courtesy of the GI Bill of Rights. She went right to the head of the class. To read this book is to peer over her shoulder and learn with her. Scrambled eggs, for example. They are not whipped, just gently blended. Smear the pan with butter, add the eggs, salt and pepper, cook over a low flame. After about three minutes, the eggs will start to form a custard. Only then do you stir rapidly with a fork, sliding the pan on and off the burner. Pull the egg curds together --- and, finally, add the butter, to "stop the cooking." Sprinkle with parsley (or not). Serve. Dazzle. The real revelations in this book are not about food, however --- they're about work. There's a lot of it involved in the creation of a book, especially when you're creating something new. "WHY DID WE EVER DECIDE TO DO THIS ANYWAY?" Julia writes to one of her collaborators. But after eight years, the thing is done. And Knopf offers to buy it for \$1,500. The galleys weigh 15 pounds. When printed, it is 732 pages long. In 1961, when 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking' was published, Paul Child was 59 years old. Julia was 49. They had no expectations of a bestseller, much less a franchise. But the New York Times raved --- the recipes are "painstakingly edited and written as if each were a masterpiece, and most of them are" --- and the book sold and sold. In 1962, Julia taped three half-hour shows for WGBH, the public

TV station in Boston. By the following year, she had taped 26 more. But this is not a celebrity memoir. This book is called "My Life in France" for a reason --- it is there that Julia and Paul feel most fully alive. Paul's photographs deliver the country in delicious slivers. The passages at their home in the South of France lift off the page and surround you. You inhale lavender. You feel the breeze. In the distance is the smell of lamb cooking in herbs. There is laughter, and wit, and, most of all, blessed silence. If this is not a description of Heaven, what is? Paul takes ill and dies. Julia soldiers on. She understands --- you have to keep grabbing life. Food and love and very shrewd French friends have taught her well: "Nothing is too much trouble if it turns out the way it should." The book ends this way: "The pleasures of the table, and of life, are infinite --- toujours bon appetit!" As you read these words, you finally get it --- this is not a book about food, this is a book about life. A wise life, a life of beauty, art and invention. You can learn a lot from a life like that. Start with this book

With every word I sensed I was there. I could smell the air, feel the cold and want a blanket. I lusted to be able to taste the foods she talked about. I laughed when she described her first attempts at food preparation. I loved that she was pragmatic and yet extravagant about cooking utensils. Her husband was very encouraging of her endeavors. Together they shared a life and a love, but it was more, they shared a passion for travel and the tastes of other cultures. My mouth salivated as she toured the markets. Her French was horrible by her own admission but her genuine interest in the culture won out with shop owners. It is a delicious read.

This, hands down, is one of the best reads of the year. We took it with us on vacation last month & my wife and I competed over reading rights whenever the kids were otherwise occupied. It's beautifully told and as compelling as a great mystery that you know has a happy ending. It will remind you of your honeymoon in France (even if you went somewhere else) and inspire you to go again. And when you finish, you'll want to find a copy of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and keep going....

As a young person growing up in the Boston area, I watched Julia Child on WGBH. I will never forget her *Salade Nicoise* show where the lettuce ended up on the floor instead of the colander. This is why we loved Julia Child - she was real and fun and didn't take things too seriously. This comes through in *My Life In France* although sometimes it's a little too engrossed in the mundane details. It's an excellent read in her inimitable voice of her discovery and love of food and the trials and

tribulations of writing Mastering the Art of French Cooking. Her curiosity, commitment to detail, perservence, and natural talent for communicating made Master the Art of French Cooking rock the food world when no one thought such a cookbook would sell. I loved reading about Julia's triumph.

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