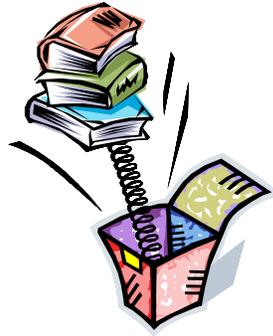




Whittier Public Library's

# Book Club in a Box



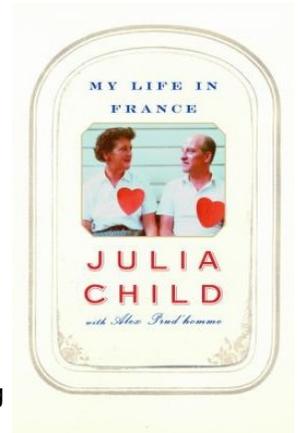
WHITTIER PUBLIC LIBRARY

## MY LIFE IN FRANCE

Sponsored by the Friends of the Whittier Public Library

### About the Book

In her own words, here is the captivating story of Julia Child's years in France, where she fell in love with French food and found 'her true calling.' From the moment the ship docked in Le Havre in the fall of 1948 and Julia watched the well-muscled stevedores unloading the cargo to the first perfectly *soigné* meal that she and her husband, Paul, savored in Rouen en route to Paris, where he was to work for the USIS, Julia had an awakening that changed her life. Soon this tall, outspoken gal from Pasadena, California, who didn't speak a word of French and knew nothing about the country, was steeped in the language, chatting with purveyors in the local markets, and enrolled in the Cordon Bleu. After managing to get her degree despite the machinations of the disagreeable *directrice* of the school, Julia started teaching cooking classes herself, then teamed up with two fellow *gourmets*, Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle, to help them with a book they were trying to write on French cooking for Americans. Throwing herself heart and soul into making it a unique and thorough teaching book, only to suffer several rounds of painful rejection, is part of the behind-the-scenes drama that Julia reveals with her inimitable gusto and disarming honesty. Filled with the beautiful black-and-white photographs that Paul loved to take when he was not battling bureaucrats, as well as family snapshots, this memoir is laced with wonderful stories about the French character, particularly in the world of food, and the way of life that Julia embraced so wholeheartedly. Above all, she reveals the kind of spirit and determination, the sheer love of cooking, and the drive to share that with her fellow Americans that made her the extraordinary success she became.



Contents	
About the Book	1
About the Author	1-2
Discussion Questions	3
Further Reading	3

### About the Author



Popular TV chef and author. Julia Child was born Julia McWilliams, on August 15, 1912, in Pasadena, California. The eldest of three children, Julia was educated at San Francisco's elite Katherine Branson School for Girls, where—at a towering height of 6 feet, 2 inches—she was the tallest student in her class. In 1930, she enrolled at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Upon her graduation, she moved to New York, where she worked in the advertising department of the prestigious home furnishings company W&J Sloane.

In 1941, at the onset of World War II, Julia moved to Washington, D.C., where she volunteered as a research assistant for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a newly formed government intelligence agency. She and her colleagues were sent on assignment to Ceylon (now

*(Continued on page 2)*

(Continued from page 1)

Sri Lanka), an island off the coast of India. In her position, Julia played a key role in the communication of top secret documents between U.S. government officials and their intelligence officers. In 1945, she was sent to China, where she began a relationship with fellow OSS employee Paul Child. Following the end of World War II, the couple returned to America and were married.

In 1948, when Paul was reassigned to the U.S. Information Service at the American Embassy in Paris, the Childs moved to France. While there, Julia developed a penchant for French cuisine and attended the world-famous Cordon Bleu cooking school. Following her six-month training—which included private lessons with master chef Max Bugnard—Julia banded with fellow Cordon Bleu students Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle to form the cooking school L'Ecole de Trois Gourmandes (The School of the Three Gourmands). With a goal of adapting sophisticated French cuisine for mainstream Americans, the trio collaborated on a two-volume cookbook titled *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961). Published in the U.S., the 800-page book was considered a groundbreaking work and has since become a standard guide for the culinary community.

Then living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Julia promoted her book on the Boston public broadcasting station. Displaying her trademark forthright manner and hearty humor, she prepared an omelet on air. The public's response was so enthusiastic that she was invited back to tape her own series on cookery for the network. Premiering on WGBH in 1962, *The French Chef* TV series, like *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, succeeded in changing the way Americans related to food, while also establishing Julia as a local celebrity. Shortly thereafter, *The French Chef* was syndicated to 96 stations throughout America.

For her efforts, Julia received the prestigious George Foster Peabody Award in 1964 followed

by an Emmy Award in 1966.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Julia made regular appearances on the ABC morning show *Good Morning, America*. Her other endeavors included the television programs *Julia Child and Company* (1978), *Julia Child and More Company* (1980), and *Dinner at Julia's* (1983), as well as a slew of best-selling cookbooks that covered every aspect of culinary knowledge.

In 1993, Julia was the first woman inducted into the Culinary Institute Hall of Fame. Her most recent cookbooks were *In Julia's Kitchen with Master Chefs* (1995), *Baking with Julia* (1996), *Julia's Delicious Little Dinners* (1998), and *Julia's Casual Dinners* (1999), which were all accompanied by highly rated television specials.

In November 2000, following a 40-year career that has made her name synonymous with fine food, Julia received France's highest honor: the Legion d'Honneur. And in August 2002, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History unveiled an exhibit featuring the kitchen where she filmed three of her popular cooking shows.

Child died in August 2004 of kidney failure at her assisted-living home in Montecito, two days before her 92nd birthday. After her death Child's last book, the autobiography *My Life in France*, was published with the help of Child's great nephew, Alex Prud'homme. The book, which centered on how Child discovered her true calling, became a best seller.

In August 2008, the National Archives de-classified 750,000 pages of personnel files. The documents revealed that Child was, in fact, a spy during World War II. She served with the Office of Strategic Services, the huge spy network created by President Franklin Roosevelt and forerunner of today's CIA.

## Discussion Questions

Describe how Julia became interested in cooking. What events or foods sparked her interest?

Discuss Julia and Simca's relationship. What lessons did Julia learn from it? What problems did they encounter?

How did Julia feel about France? Describe her relationship to this country.

What do you think are some of the differences Julia felt between France and the United States?

Describe Julia's experience at Cordon Bleu. What were some of the problems that she encountered there? What did she learn at the school?

Why do you think Julia experienced success with her cookbooks and her television show? Provide examples and evidence for your argument from the book.

Have you cooked a recipe from one of Julia's recipe books? If so what did you think of it? How do you feel about her way of writing to get recipes across to the normal cook?

## Further Reading

**If you liked *My Life in France*, you might like:**

*Blood, Bones and Butter* by Gabrielle Hamilton

*Encore Provence* by Peter Mayle

*Julie & Julia* by Julie Powell

*Kitchen Confidential* by Anthony Bourdain

*Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table* by Ruth Reichl