

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1993

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

'Gourmet momma' inspires good cooks

Now that Valentine's Day has passed, and I have confessed the usual card shop version of love to my mate, I can wholeheartedly confess adoration to one of my true loves, Julia Child.

Julia has garnered my love and respect in much the same way that momma has. As a matter of fact, subliminally, I refer to her as my "gourmet momma."

On rainy days, I pop one of Julia's eight cooking videos into my VCR, watch her prepare duck a l'orange, and silently mimic her cartooned voice. When I'm searching for a recipe for an infallible bread, chowder or cream flan, I refer to one of her many books, especially "The Way to Cook," (Knopf, copyright 1989).

Grande dame

There's little doubt that Julia is by far the doyenne, the grande dame, and the epitome of good cooks throughout the world. Martha Stewart professes to entertain. Lynne Rossetto Kasper might know about Italian cuisine, and Heloise can teach me how to clean my stove-top. But Julia deserves credit for instilling basic cooking knowledge to millions of folks like you and me.

If you cook, and if you're reading this, you probably love to cook. Undoubtedly there's a Julia Child cookbook somewhere in your cookbook library. If you have yet to pick up a copy of "The Way to Cook," there is no better time. This book is check full of Julia's favorite master recipes, and contains tips that can turn a ball of sticky dough into some of the best French bread you've ever sunk your teeth into.

Helpful tips

The latest rage sweeping the metro area is root vegetables, and once again, Julia shows you how. One might say that Anne Willan, author of the "The Look and Cook Series," which accompanies recipes with step-by-step color photographs, borrowed Julia's thought that in addition to great recipes, a cookbook should contain precise photographs.

The photographs in "The Way to Cook" are full color directives that show how the food being prepared should look, whether you're braising cabbage or grating beets. And if that's not quite enough, there are also little quips of information like how to remove beet stains from your hands — simply wet them, rub with salt then wash with soap and water. The hands shown in the photographs are definitely Julia's complete with wrinkles and dark blotches that have formed everything from a tenderloin of lamb to a wrinkled leaf of spinach.

Cooking with Julia

Readers call me all the time to ask questions about cooking. Whether it be how to make a velvety sauce for a bunch of broccoli or a question about the color of one of Julia's favorite foods, veal. I usually end up conferring with Julia in one of her books about a technique or recipe.

The first time I ever deboned a leg of lamb was with a glass of Gallo Hearty Burgundy and Julia's book, propped open to page 212.

The first time I ever attempted to bake a true French bread, complete with a cup of water thrown into the bottom of the oven to create steam for an unsurpassed crust was with Julia. I can still remember plugging in the 18-inch black and white TV where the blender now stands in momma's kitchen to follow Julia every step of the way while I boned my first walleye.

I'd even forego reruns of the Ghoul on Saturday afternoons to watch Julia dance through her French chef kitchen on PBS. There's little doubt that I am a Julia Child groupie.

If you love to cook and enjoy cooking well, you need to buy one of Julia Child's cookbooks. Whether it be "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," "The French Chef Cookbook" or any one of her other four cookbooks.

Julia Child deserves a place on your cookbook shelf. Local libraries have copies of her cookbooks for lending, and if you're looking for something a little classic, one of her recipes will certainly warm the cockles of your heart and taste buds.

She's one of the few great chefs today who can take you into her kitchen to tell, and show you everything she knows about the essentials of good cooking.

"The Way to Cook" is also available at all major bookstores, Williams-Sonoma and Kitchen Glamor stores. It's a bit pricey (\$50) hardcover, but if there's someone in your family who loves to cook, this book will be an endless resource. Bon appetit!

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a Voice Mail message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a Touch-Tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.



JOIN THE CARNIVAL

SPICE UP YOUR LIFE



DIANE HANSON



Cheer up, do something different, and fun. Get in the carnival spirit. Mardi Gras is a festive theme for a party. Set the mood with some Dixieland music, put on a pot of jambalaya or gumbo, and invite friends over for a fabulous feast.

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BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

Add some spice to your life, get rid of those winter doldrums — Mardi Gras is the perfect excuse to have a party.

Set the mood with Dixieland music, Zydeco or Harry Connick Jr. Hum along as the songs "Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?" Put a pot of spicy jambalaya or gumbo on the stove to simmer, invite friends over, and you'll be thinking about having fun, instead of how cold and ugly it is outside.

If you're Catholic, Feb. 23, also called "Fat Tuesday," is the last day to indulge in sweets, and other foods that are forsaken during Lent, the period of fasting and penance between Ash Wednesday, Feb. 24, and Easter, which this year falls on April 11.

"The word carnival means farewell to meat," said Carol Haskins, executive chef at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham.

"Most of the Mardi Gras foods are fun foods to eat. There's a traditional cake called a King's Cake. It's a ring-shaped cake made from rich yeast dough with candied fruit peel, topped with a glaze of carnival colors — white, yellow, green and cherries. They put a bean or pecan half inside, and whoever finds it is the Mardi Gras king or queen."

Maureen Kelly of Troy, Catherine Quaine of Farmington Hills, and Geraldine Carroll of Bloomfield Hills are busy getting ready for the second annual Mardi Gras Carnival Feb. 20 at St. Anne's Church in Detroit.

The event, sponsored by the Gabriel Richard Historical Society, is a benefit to raise money for the restoration of the church building and grounds. Established in 1701, St.

Anne's is the oldest Catholic parish in Detroit, and the second oldest in the country.

The carnival will take place in a series of connected, but separate tents, and feature hors d'oeuvres, an open bar and live entertainment including Dixieland favorites from Percy Gabriel's New Orleans Band.

"Mardi Gras is mostly a celebration of good, hearty, substantial foods," said Jeffrey Gabriel, Certified Master Chef and director of the culinary arts program at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

Schoolcraft's Mardi Gras celebration Feb. 19 and 20 will feature the Red Garter Band, harmonica virtuoso Peter "Madison" Ruth and Schoolcraft's School Jazz Vocal Group.

The menu includes Seafood Jambalaya — a blend of rice, ham, red peppers, shrimp, tomatoes and okra seasoned with Tabasco sauce, garlic and cilantro. Jambalayas are also made with chicken, crabmeat, oysters and sausages. The rice absorbs most of the broth the meat or seafood is cooked in.

Gumbo, a hearty soup made with chicken, shrimp, ham and oysters either alone or in combination, is an-

other food that comes to mind when talking about Louisiana cuisine and Mardi Gras. In gumbo the rice is cooked separately. At serving time, a mound of rice is placed in a soup bowl, and the gumbo is poured over it.

Marcio Sikarskie who is teaching "Mardi Gras — New Orleans Style" at Kitchen Glamor stores Feb. 16 to 19, describes Louisiana food as hearty and robust.

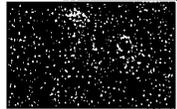
"They use a lot of seafood, chicken and pork in their dishes," she said, "and lots of garlic, pepper, sage, thyme, paprika and bay leaf. The food gets spicier the further south you go because the climate is warmer, and spice was used as a preservative." Vegetables common in Cajun and Creole cooking include tomatoes, onions, celery, green pepper, and okra.

Coffees flavored with orange and lemon peel or cinnamon are traditional. For dessert, serve pralines, which according to legend were named for a French butler, Pralinsin, who had almonds coated with sugar for his master as a precaution against indigestion.

See recipes, and listing of Mardi Gras events inside.

Celebrate Mardi Gras French style

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

A most interesting history of the celebration of Mardi Gras is woven by Erol LaBorde in "Mardi Gras," published by Playalune Press. In the beginning, LaBorde elaborates, "Mardi Gras was sanctioned by the Christians and was named by the French." He goes on to describe primitive man's celebration, and that of the Greek peasants 50 years ago.

Christian religions consider the late winter rites an acceptable fasting before the Lenten season's abstinence. Whatever the details, Mardi Gras conjures up the idea of fun and celebration.

LaBorde does not detail how the celebration became associated with the word carnival, only that it did. The root word, however, gives us some clue. In 18th century Venice, he says, the celebration lasted on and off for six months, and a majority of the population adopted the habit of masking.

It appears that compared to their Latin neighbors, the French got a late start in celebrating carnival but "they quickly made up for lost time," LaBorde writes.

Some early French customs were quite uncivilized. As time went on, they adopted many culturally civil traditions still practiced today. "They made masquerading at balls popular and

they introduced the bouef gras, a huge bull, either real or manmade that came to symbolize the celebration," LaBorde narrates. "Fat Tuesday," a direct translation from the French became the French name for carnival day and is now known in every language as Mardi Gras.

By the late 19th century, the celebration of Mardi Gras waned in France. Ironically, this is the time it began to flourish in New Orleans and it is there that the feast is most celebrated today.

History lesson over, let's get down to celebrating and masking with Cajun and Creole cooking. The heart of Cajun food is southern French country cooking. Cajuns use the bounty of local crawfish, as well as chicken and pork, which is often smoked.

File powder, parsley, bay leaves, cayenne, black pepper and hot peppers are the principal seasonings. All preparations are accompanied by rice. Rice balances hotness from the seasonings and allows solid wine harmonies. Unlike Cajun, Creole food originated in New Orleans and is a mixture of French, Spanish, Italian, American Indian and African traditions.

Louisiana's renowned chef Paul Prudhomme contends that "Today, in homes, there is still a distinction between Cajun and Creole cooking in restaurants, little distinction remains." That's why Prudhomme refers to the two together as Louisiana cooking.

With Louisiana-style crabmeat, crawfish, shrimp or oysters, champagne or sparkling wine works well against well-seasoned preparations as long as they're not too hot.



DIANE HANSON

Wine selections: Accompany Louisiana seafood dishes with 1990 Paul Thomas Sancerre, Chavignol "Les Comtesse" (\$16) and duck or andouille gumbo with Maison Louis Jadot Vosne Romanee Les Suchots Red Burgundy (\$50).