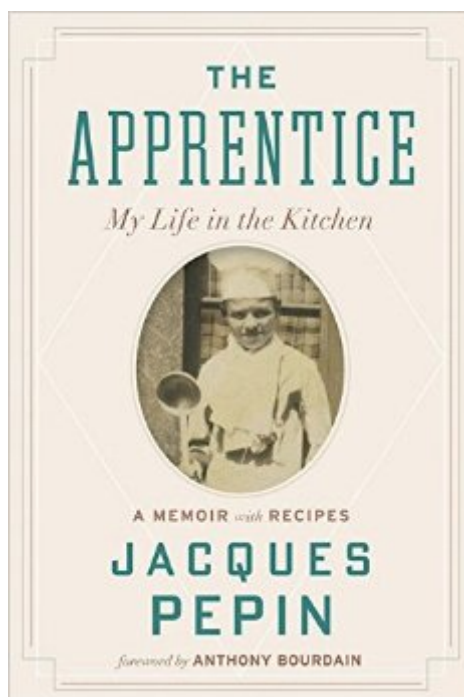


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The Apprentice: My Life In The Kitchen



Synopsis

In this captivating memoir, the man whom Julia Child has called “the best chef in America” tells the story of his rise from a frightened apprentice in an exacting Old World kitchen to an Emmy Award-winning superstar who taught millions of Americans how to cook and shaped the nation’s tastes in the bargain. We see young Jacques as a homesick six-year-old boy in war-ravaged France, working on a farm in exchange for food, dodging bombs, and bearing witness as German soldiers capture his father, a fighter in the Resistance. Soon Jacques is caught up in the hurly-burly action of his mother’s café, where he proves a natural. He endures a literal trial by fire and works his way up the ladder in the feudal system of France’s most famous restaurant, finally becoming Charles de Gaulle’s personal chef, watching the world being refashioned from the other side of the kitchen door. When he comes to America, Jacques immediately falls in with a small group of as-yet-unknown food lovers, including Craig Claiborne, James Beard, and Julia Child, whose adventures redefine American food. Through it all, Jacques proves himself to be a master of the American art of reinvention: earning a graduate degree from Columbia University, turning down a job as John F. Kennedy’s chef to work at Howard Johnson’s, and, after a near-fatal car accident, switching careers once again to become a charismatic leader in the revolution that changed the way Americans approached food. Included as well are forty all-time favorite recipes created during the course of a career spanning nearly half a century, from his mother’s utterly simple cheese soufflé to his wife’s pork ribs and red beans. *The Apprentice* is the poignant and sometimes funny tale of a boy’s coming of age. Beyond that, it is the story of America’s culinary awakening and the transformation of food from an afterthought to a national preoccupation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have always had the greatest respect for Jacques Pépin based on the high reputation of his culinary books, collaborations with Julia Child, and great good humor and skills displayed on various television appearances, but I have always wondered how he reached a position of high respect within his profession without a connection to a major restaurant for at least as long as I have known of him (the last 15 years). This book answers my question and a whole lot more, confirming my impression of Jacques as a major figure in culinary America and a great gentleman as well. Without giving away too much of the book's story, I must point out that Jacques was, by some great good fortune, the chef to France's President Charles DeGaulle at a very young age. In fact, he appeared on the TV show 'To Tell The Truth' and the panelists did not pick him as DeGaulle's chef because he was so very young. Upon coming to the United States, he quickly attained a position as a line chef under Pierre Franey at the great Le Pavillion, following Franey to a position in the test and development kitchens at Howard Johnson's. For those of you post baby boomers, I can assure you from first hand experience that at one time, Howard Johnson's was often considered a very desirable place to eat out. Jacques would probably now be the owner / executive chef at a major restaurant but for a very serious automobile accident which broke most major bones and which left Jacques with only a slim chance to even be able to walk. Miraculously, he mended well to the point where he returned to an almost normal life, but without the ability to sustain the 12 to 14 hours on his feet at a typical chef's station. This led to his career as a teacher, followed by cookbook writing and TV cooking series a la Julia on PBS.

Not being a devotee of the Food Channel, I discovered Jacques Pépin by accident. Channel surfing one day, I stumbled upon Jacques' transforming a big slab of meat into a beautiful roast, trimmed and tied. The sureness with which he handled his knives, his knowledge of the animal's anatomy, and the warm confidence with which he shared his knowledge -- "of course you can do this at home!" -- hooked me immediately. "The Apprentice" tells the story of how he acquired this deep knowledge, and does it with style and charm. The story opens in war-time France, where Jacques and his brothers were sent to farms in the remote countryside during the summers for their safety... and in the hopes of avoiding food shortages prevalent in urban areas. From his earliest days,

Jacques shadowed the women in his life as they cooked for their families, from the farmers' wives to his mother, an accomplished cook in her own right. After the war, his mother parlayed her cooking skills and entrepreneurial spirit into a succession of increasingly successful restaurants, with Jacques and his three brothers helping out before and after school. From an early age, Jacques knew he wanted to be a chef. He left school at 13 and began an apprenticeship at a nearby hotel. For the next few years he moved from job to job, city to city, working 16 hours a day to lay down the foundation of skills -- stocks! aspics! forcemeats! -- that are the hallmark of the classically trained french chef. His career as a chef hit a peak a few years later, when in his early 20's he found himself cooking for french Presidents, including a memorable stint for De Gaulle. He then came to America, and embarked on what must have been a very unorthodox career.

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