

**JULIA CHILD IN AMERICA**

**Melanie Rehak, Dan Barber, David Kamp, Molly O'Neill, and Laura Shapiro**

**Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers**

**7:00 P.M., October 10, 2007**

**JEAN STROUSE:** Welcome to the New York Public Library, and to what promises to be a terrific opening for the fall season's Conversations from the Cullman Center. I'm Jean Strouse, the Director of the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, which is up on the second floor here, and I apologize if you had a hard time getting in today. As you probably heard, they're shooting *Sex and the City: The Movie*, today, tomorrow, and Friday, and the enterprise has completely, if entertainingly, made a mess of this place. They're doing it actually right outside the—the shooting's going on on the stairs going from the second to the third floor, which is right outside the Center, so you can see all the actresses sitting there getting their makeup put on and I—this afternoon, Carrie Bradshaw in her wedding dress got married or almost got married. **(laughter)** I hope I don't get sued by the film company. I was spoiling it. Shall I spoil it or shall I say no more? Okay, I won't say anymore, except that—oh, never mind. **(laughter)** Yeah, right. It's quite a dress.

You'll find this card which lists our, the other programs we have coming up in the next couple months—it's on the table at the exit as you leave. Next Tuesday the novelist Joyce Carol Oates will be interviewing Edmund White, who was a fellow at the Cullman Center and wrote a novel while he was here called *Hotel du Dream*—that's Tuesday the sixteenth. Later on in the fall we'll be hosting conversations about the writer Leonard Michaels, about two slaves who escaped from the South during the Civil War and about a new best-selling novel called *Redemption Falls* by the Irish writer Joseph O'Connor, who will talk with his fellow former Cullman Center Fellow—I was worried about tripping on that—another best-selling Irish novelist Colum McCann. So you can find dates and times for all of those on this program, called Murder in the Stacks, which, I don't know, will. Special thanks to Betsy Bradley, the Cullman Center's Manager of Public Programs, for setting up and managing all of these events, including tonight's.

Which brings us to “Julia Child in America.” Melanie Rehak, the moderator for the evening, wrote her own best-selling book, *Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her*, while she was a fellow at the Cullman Center. The book won the Edgar and Agatha Awards and was named one of the Best Books of the Year by the *Chicago Tribune* for 2005. Melanie's currently working on a book that will be called *Meet the Farmer: Food, Family, and Balancing the World, One Meal at a Time*. As you might guess from the title, it will be about local farming and will follow various kinds of food from growing in the earth to arriving on the plate. What's not evident in the title is that the story will be a first-person account, part of it based on Melanie's work in the kitchen of Applewood, a

great small restaurant in Park Slope. If she weren't here tonight, she'd be cooking fish at Applewood, and if you haven't eaten there I really recommend it.

Melanie will introduce the panelists, and I'll turn the mic over to her in just a second, but I want to add that books by the four panelists will be on sale just outside the doors also as you leave. The authors have agreed to sign copies, so please let them get out, back to the hallway after they speak and buy the books and ask them your follow-up questions there. Thank you.

**(applause)**

**MELANIE REHAK:** Hi. Thanks for coming. I'm going to do a quick introduction of our four panelists so we can hear what they have to say. David Kamp, to my right, is the author of *The United States of Arugula: How We Became a Gourmet Nation*, which is a great book for anyone who wants to know why you can buy sushi at your corner market and what a salt tasting is, which I found kind of interesting, and which was also named one of the *New York Times* Hundred Most Notable Books for 2006. He's a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair* and at *GQ*, where he recently wrote, not about Sylvester Stallone, which was what I thought, but about Sly Stone of the Family Stone. **(laughter)** That was a very critical conversation we just had backstage. **(laughter)** And his new humor book, which is called *The Food Snob's Dictionary: An Essential Lexicon of Gastronomical Knowledge*, coauthored by Marion Rosenfeld, just came out yesterday, so you want to rush right out and buy it. And according to that book, which I think is very appropriate

for this evening, it “will give ordinary folk the wherewithal to take down the food snobs,” which Julia Child would surely have appreciated.

To his right is Laura Shapiro, whose most recent book is *Julia Child*, published in the Penguin Lives series, which is an acclaimed brief biography of tonight’s reason for being here. She is a former senior writer for *Newsweek*, where she covered food, books, and the arts, and has also written for the *New York Times*, *Gourmet*, and *Gastronomica*, and she is the recipient of a James Beard Journalism Award. In addition to her new biography of Julia Child, she’s also the author of two other food-related books, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*, and *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*. Like her Julia biography, both of those books are about a lot more than just food and cooking in America. They cover social and historical contexts of our great national culinary journey and I’m sure she’ll help us learn more about that tonight as it pertains to Julia.

To her right is Molly O’Neill, who is most recently the editor of *American Food Writing: An Anthology with Classic Recipes*, published by the Library of America, a really kind of incredible book that includes everything from George Washington Carver’s recipe for “Puree of Peanuts Number Two, extra fine,” which he allows—I couldn’t resist telling you all this—a generous layer between slices of bread makes an excellent sandwich to Julia Child’s essay about how her TV show *The French Chef* began, which begins that she ended up on television by accident, so maybe we’ll be able to talk about that a little bit tonight, too. Molly is also a former food columnist for the *New York Times* and the

author of several cookbooks, including the award-winning *New York Cookbook* and one of my favorites, *The Well-Seasoned Appetite*, as well as a memoir.

And finally, to her right is Dan Barber, who is the chef and co-owner of Blue Hill Restaurant here in New York, which just received its first Michelin star, and Blue Hill at Stone Barns, which is actually up in Westchester County. He also serves as Creative Director of the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, which is committed to sustainable community-based agriculture and to educating all of us about what that means, with a lot of great programs for children and for adults. The farm raises free-range animals, one of which is in the back of Dan's car outside right now, which I'm probably not supposed to tell you, but . . . and also produce year-round, and they have a twenty-two-thousand-square-foot greenhouse which they use during the winter and you can eat all of that stuff at both of the restaurants, both upstate and here. And, in addition to all of this, Dan is also a recipient of the James Beard Award for Best Chef in New York City.

So, that's who these people are, and sadly, I have no introduction for this fine creature, but our fifth and final guest, maybe is the perfect introduction for her. So we thought we would start the evening off with a little taste of what Laura refers to in her book on Julia as Julia's "joyful fanaticism," a phrase that really stuck with me. So we'll start the first clip.

**JULIA CHILD:** Look at this magnificent head. It's from a giant cod. And here is a hank frame. We're going to do fish soup and bouillabaisse today on *The French Chef*. (**theme**

**music) (laughter)** Welcome to *The French Chef*. I'm Julia Child. Today we're going to do fish soup and bouillabaisse. Bouillabaisse is probably one of the most famous of all French soups. It originated on the Mediterranean coast of France, in Marseille, and all it is, really, is a plain fisherman's stew made out of the day's catch, or the unsalable leftovers. Unfortunately, when you get a famous recipe like this, the *gourmets* get hold of it, and they fancy it up so much and say do this, do that, or that's not the real thing that us ordinary people feel that it's impossible to do and terribly expensive. But you can make a bouillabaisse out of any kind of fresh, lean fish that you want. And it's wonderful to eat and everybody enjoys making it and particularly eating it and there's nothing very difficult about it. Now, the first thing that you do when you want to make a fish soup or a bouillabaisse is to make a great fish stock.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Well, that was rather abrupt. Every time I see that, I feel like we should have invited a sociolinguist onto the panel just to talk about how Julia says the word "gourmets" because I feel like so much untapped material here. But since we haven't, we'll turn to these fine people and, maybe, Laura, you want to start us off on Julia and who she was and why *this* woman became so popular right away in American culture.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** This bouillabaisse clip is actually a great way to introduce Julia, because bouillabaisse was kind of a fetish of hers, starting back when she was living in Paris and had gone to the Cordon Bleu and she had met Simca and Louise Bertholle, her colleagues there, and they were working on this big French cookbook for Americans

that would become *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. And while she was working on the book and, being Julia, her way of working on the book was to take *every* recipe, every traditional recipe, every recipe of Simca's, every recipe from Escoffier or any other book and tear it apart and deconstruct it and redo it from every possible angle and try to make it come out right every single time and be the perfect example of that, so she was an incredibly hands-on, plus academic, cook.

In that time she was also a Foreign Service wife, her husband Paul was working for the State Department in Paris, so they had this social life and they were always meeting and spending time with the French people in Paris, who paid no—it's hard to believe now—they paid no attention to Julia, and they didn't think that she was an interesting or important person because she was (a) American, and (b) interested in cooking, "well, isn't that nice," and it was sort of a pat on the head—it was a pat on the head. **(laughter)** So, and this infuriated her. They were condescending to this nice little housewife who was working on recipes. She could, you know, run them six times around the room, with what she knew about bouillabaisse, but they would insist that to make a bouillabaisse—and this was one of her examples all the time when she raged about this in letters—you had to be a grizzled old Frenchman, a fisherman in some coastal town, and you had to have exactly this fish, and you had to, you know, pull this sprig of something out of the ground exactly for that—she thought this was ridiculous.

So her idea, and she says this when she writes about bouillabaisse always, is, "it's fresh fish. It's this, it's saffron, whatever, it's anise, those are the flavors. It's going to be

French. *You* can do it. You don't have to *be* French, you don't have to have gone to cooking school to do it. It's yours, you can do it." So that's what she's doing here.

**MELANIE REHAK:** And Dan, maybe you can tell us—

**DAVID KAMP:** I'm not Dan, though.

**MELANIE REHAK:** I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Oh my God. Julia would be so—although actually, Julia would probably.

**DAVID KAMP:** "Just make the most of what you *find*, girl!" (In Julia's voice)

**MELANIE REHAK:** David, maybe you can put this into a little bit of a context for us. You write a lot in your book about what was going on when Julia came along and—

**DAVID KAMP:** Well, it was it was the postwar era, and it was actually a very Francophilic era, I kind of view it wistfully because now we hear about the French as "cheese-eating surrender monkeys," and they're, you know, reflexively derided and we are supposed to hate them, but it was actually mutual, and the French reciprocated in the postwar era, and this was kind of a natural outgrowth of that, about Americans becoming more aspirational, and there really hasn't been an era like it before or since, in terms of mutual admiration and respect between the French and the Americans, and then to—what she did was she took on the seemingly undemystifiable thing that was French cookery



and said—you know, the populism in that clip, that anyone can do it. And in fact, this would set hearts aflutter now, but when she talks about bouillabaisse she says, I believe in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, “you can use some canned clam juice if you don’t have such and such available to you.”

But that was part of it, too, was that she really was trying to take away any intimidation factor whatsoever and that was brilliant of her, but it was also brilliant timing, because she hit this moment when ordinary literal G.I. Joes, you know, were going to France, traveling, because airfare was cheap, and were willing to take on this idea of cooking without being intimidated, and she took away that intimidation factor.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Well, Dan, now I know I have that right.

**DAN BARBER:** I’m certainly not intimidated.

**MELANIE REHAK:** As arguably a gourmet, can you speak to—

**DAN BARBER:** A gourmand at heart.

**MELANIE REHAK:** A gourmand, exactly. Could you speak to that issue of, you know, how Julia wanted to make food approachable and—

**DAN BARBER:** Yeah, I'm not sure I have quite the historical perspective that David does.

**MELANIE REHAK:** But you have the chef's perspective.

**DAVID KAMP:** I'm going to lord it over you.

**DAN BARBER:** Yeah, she opened doors. My generation doesn't have a direct connection to her in the sense of watching that and being inspired directly, but I can see just from that clip how it's influenced chefs like me today in trying—in our approach to food both in the kitchen and in front of the live audience to make what we do accessible and friendly and approachable and that's a gift that I think she—she handed down to us in a way that opened up the kitchen beyond creating the perfect plate of food and beyond being *imprisoned* by the kitchen, and she gave rise to the Wolfgang Pucks of the world and today you see her influence everywhere. So it was really refreshing to see that.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Just wait, there's more.

**DAN BARBER:** Right.

**MELANIE REHAK:** And Molly, maybe you could talk a little bit about what she did for home chefs. I mean, and just how that show went into American airspace. And I mean, some of the fan mail she got, it's as though she had released—as Dan said—

released people from their chains and you sort of have this image of, you know, American women in front of the TV set, you know, just waiting to learn more from her.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** Right. Right. Nora Ephron did a *wonderful* take on what happened in the years after, you know, as soon as Julia began airing and suddenly the shift went from “discussing the ballet to discussing the poulet,” **(laughter)** and, you know, it happened and everyone was making the same recipes and they were fairly derivative of *The French Chef*.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Like what, could you give us some examples?

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** Yeah, I mean, suddenly everyone thought they could make a baguette, **(laughter)** and Julia's recipe was like, twelve pages long it was hilarious. I remember one time as a tribute to Julia, I wanted to run it in the *New York Times*, but there weren't that many ad pages, the magazine would have weighed five pounds—it was insane. The other thing that's really interesting to me. I mean, there were a couple of things that were very interesting to me. I always forget what a klutz she was. And I worked with Julia. I lived across the street from her in Cambridge. I learned—she was *incredibly* generous to me when I was coming up. And she was a real battleship in the kitchen. And—but I forget that on camera, too, *that* was one of her *great* things. I mean, she's just such a real person. With her cleaver—you know, getting her cleaver out, putting that down. And then those big hands—I mean, her hands were like these teamster, these stevedore hands, **(laughter)** and then, you know, that chirpy warbling voice, and

then, you know, her whole thing about speaking for the proletariat, and speaking for the common person, and none of those *gourmets* for us.

To me the irony is that she created, she took fine food from the professional class and brought it into the middle-class household and made it part of daily vernacular, but she also created a generation of Dan Barbers, (**laughter**) and so we're seeing it move—that fine cooking is moving back to the professional kitchens. And I see, you know, the kind of science cooking as a way of doing that. Let's keep it here. Let's make the divide. We always have to create that distinction, that distinction, that distinction, and I think that Julia—I love to think sometimes, well, what would she well, what would she say about this? Sometimes I channel her.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Sometimes we all channel her.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** Yes, it's true, this business of making these recipes available to ordinary people and loosening up the kitchen and so forth, and that all happened, but she had a great little streak of—I don't want to call it elitism—

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** Oh, I will!

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** When Craig Claiborne did that—had that famous story—it was on the front page of the *New York Times* in the early seventies. He had won a four-thousand-dollar dinner anywhere in the world. He and Pierre Franey went to Paris and this

restaurant and they ran a story about this dinner and in the early seventies spending four thousand dollars for it. You could send your kid to college for that in those days. And the letters poured in. People were outraged. The *Times* ran letters for weeks on this thing. Julia—there's a letter from her to Craig Claiborne writing to him and saying, "They are crazy. What are they complaining about? These are people who have mink coats and big cars. That's what they're spending their money on. Why shouldn't you spend your money on this food?" Whether or not she really believed that, I don't know. She had a funny thing about Craig Claiborne, she was real nice to him and she also criticized him, you know, with the other, on the other side. But—

**MELANIE REHAK:** Well, do you think—I mean, that brings up an interesting point was that she was accused more than once, I'm sure, of being a food snob. And was that—maybe could you speak to this, David. Is this true, or—

**DAVID KAMP:** Actually, I don't think she was, necessarily. I thought she was really more the anti-elitist. In fact, she is, on paper, as elite as you get. Born in a well—born to a well-to-do Pasadena family, educated at Smith, and she and her husband were in the OSS, which was a haven of rich preppies and all that, and—but the thing that got across about her. But to this day, that's sort of the biggest fear that a lot of ordinary people have in crossing over into embracing better food and, you know, farm to table and all that stuff. "Oh, it seems so elitist. It seems so intimidating," and she somehow despite this so-called on-paper elitist background had this streak of populism that was the complete

opposite of what her background was. And so she *wasn't* a food snob and in fact the way she delivered the word *gourmet*, I mean, you know, she torpedoed that word.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Right. Well, what about the idea—I mean, she was a huge supporter of the food industry, and Safeway even sponsored *The French Chef* for a long time, and I mean, that seems so the opposite and, Dan, maybe you have some thoughts about this, of what we think of as, you know, good food or fine food now, I mean, her whole idea, as David mentioned, was that, you know, you could make it with canned clam juice, and it was fine, and it seems like now, you know, we're all coming back to the idea that you know, if you can't buy it at Greenmarket, you do it in a pinch but you don't really want to use it. I mean, how do those things . . .

**DAN BARBER:** Well, she strikes me as very political. I mean, she knew who her constituency was and she was going after that. I'd like to think that she didn't *actually* believe in the kinds of things that, you know, supported big agriculture, although there are quite a few examples, and I'm sure you could probably reference them much more readily than I can where she spoke in favor of those corporate interests, and whether they were sponsoring her or not, from what I understand.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** She was very much for large corporate food interests and very intimidated toward the end of her life about a number of things that were the truth told today would cast her in a *less* favorable light. There were a few political things that as a diehard liberal Democrat she stumbled on. And there were—*huge* things in the food

industry. I mean, a couple things that I remember, when PETA started going crazy about the milk industry—remember Primo Veal and that whole thing. I went, I went to a veal farm with her, and it was a nightmare. It was a nightmare. I mean it was like being in a Holocaust. It was horrible. And she said, **(in Julia voice)** “I see nothing wrong with this place. What are they talking about?” I mean, it was horrible. And when I, you know—

**MELANIE REHAK:** All right, Laura and Dan, you guys are up next for the Julia impression. Okay, just so you know. Two down, two to go.

**MOLLY O’NEILL:** The tide began to shift in America away from very meat-heavy dishes to kind of lighter dishes and the use of vegetables became more pronounced and the use of carbohydrates became more pronounced. Every Sunday morning, this is back in the days of the answering machine. Every Sunday morning when I was writing at the *New York Times* the answering machine would go off. Julia woke up very early and was accustomed to talking to me early, so 6:15—bing! **(in Julia voice)** “Molly! Have those vegetarians gotten to you? I see no *meat* in your column! **(laughter)** We need to be careful, dear.” **(laughter)**

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** That was really it. It was not for her constituency. Her constituency was your constituency, and they were appalled by some of the things that Julia got around to saying. She would get these letters: “Julia! How could you? You’re promoting genetic engineering. You’re in favor of MSG!”

**DAVID KAMP:** And irradiated food. She was pro-irradiated food.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** She believed the things that the food industry said and she had a history of believing them. Again, when she was in Paris, when she had questions about the food for the book she would write these letters to the Rice Council and the dairy industry.

**DAN BARBER:** I'd like to read their answers. The irony in that of course is that the kinds of things she was talking about, classic French food, is rooted in great agriculture. Organic agriculture, of course, before the word was invented. But great fundamentals and heritage wisdom.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** She thought that was the *least* important thing in the world.

**DAVID KAMP:** I kind of give her a little bit of a pass on that just because of the era and generation she was. It's sort of like I don't begrudge a ninety-year-old for saying all rock music is noise. You know, it's the same thing. She had a very specific battle that she chose and won handily with America, which was just, "Hey, don't be intimidated by cooking. Don't be intimidated by good food, or by French food," which then can be a gateway to other kinds of sophisticated or aspirational or adventurous cooking and eating. So that was her battle, she took it on, won it handily, really convinced the whole of America, pretty much, that that was worthwhile. She was, you know, by our standards, *wrong* about ingredients—you can do it all at the supermarket. No, you can't, if you



really care. Like I said, that was sort of, it would be sort of like beating up on a ninety-year-old for not liking the Rolling Stones.

**DAN BARBER:** But don't you think that her attacks on Alice Waters, for example, was a direct appeal to the masses, who view Alice Waters, and I don't mean to single her out, but those who are precious about—or Dan Barbers, if I had been around at that point—**(laughter)** who approach this with too much of a sensibility and a preciousness that wouldn't appeal to the kinds of people that she was trying to turn on to food. Am I wrong on that?

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** I think it was not about the masses or her audience at all. It was that she thought Alice was *out of her mind*. The *idea* that you had to be committed to picking every peach from the tree, and that a peach counts as a dessert. It just—it was not her thing. **(laughter)** **(in Julia voice)** “I can see it for lazy people. She doesn't even cook it!”  
**(laughter)**

**MELANIE REHAK:** Do you think, Dan, that she could survive today with this show—

**DAN BARBER:** Well, there are a lot of chefs that I know of today who embrace that and view Alice with that same kind of pretentiousness that I just mentioned and feel like, you know, *that's* something that's a little bit backward and unrealistic, especially for *our* climate in the Northeast, but also just for the general home cook, so there is something that I think that is embracing about what Julia represented for a lot of chefs, ironically,

because—also of our haute imperative, as well. So it can get quite confusing when you examine it.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** I think the objection was something different. I think the objection was one of style. I think that for—what Julia doesn't like about Alice is that Alice lives out of her *head* and Julia lives out of her *heart* and her hands. And she *wanted* joy, she wanted a robust feeling, she didn't want things parsed and tiny and Tiffany-d. She wanted things to be accessible, and I think that *that's* what it was really about, and that the battle line happened to be about products is incredibly unfortunate, but I don't think that that's what motivated her in that battle.

**DAVID KAMP:** I would agree with Molly, too. That I think that with Julia it really was about just enthusiasm, an infectious enthusiasm, whereas with Alice Waters, it is about a noble ideal and I think that Julia to this day I think her approach as a politician was much better because, you know, she won all of us over, whereas Alice Waters, honestly, she comes out on the stage at some event, some people hunch over, they feel guilt-tripped just by the very sight of her. **(laughter)** The beret and everything . . . and I think honestly we need more people who have Alice Waters's ideals, but more of a Julia approach to popularizing them, you know, if we could somehow morph them in some tube thing.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Well, along those lines we have another clip.

**JULIA CHILD:** And one thing that's nice about this, too, is that you can add other things too it, such as these cooked diced onions, and we had them the other night with onions and cooked diced green peppers—

**MELANIE REHAK:** The context is she's making a potato pancake.

**JULIA CHILD:** And another thing you could do would be diced ham or chicken livers or diced mushrooms. I'm going to try, I'm going to try and *flip* this over, which is a rather daring thing to do, but I've got to get a little bit of a crust on the bottom of it. And another thing you can do with this is to have a fireproof dish and get the bottom nice and crusty, and then pour some very heavy cream, and sprinkle a little cheese on top of it and then bake that in the oven for about—in a 375 oven for about thirty minutes. That makes a perfectly delicious dish. And we'll see if that is flippable. Well, I'm going to try it anyway. When you flip anything, you really you just have to have the courage of your convictions, **(laughter)** particularly if it's sort of a loose mass like this. **(laughter)** Well, that didn't go very well. You see, when I flipped it, I didn't have the courage to do it the way I should have. **(laughter)** You can always pick it up if you're alone in the kitchen. Who is going to see? **(laughter)**

**MELANIE REHAK:** All right. It almost bears no comment, but—so I'm not sure if everyone could hear over the raucous laughter from the room, but that was the very famous clip in which she says, “you are alone in the kitchen—if you are alone in the kitchen, who is going to see?” something I have often brought to mind when I've had a

big disaster during a dinner party. But why is that, I mean, this is maybe *the* most remembered Julia moment of all of her shows and maybe we could talk a little bit about that and a little bit about why this woman who—who, as you said, was such a klutz, and did things wrong constantly on her show was still such an idol and became such a sort of cooking guru for so many people.

**DAN BARBER:** I was trying to imagine Rachael Ray doing that—

**(laughter)**

**MELANIE REHAK:** And maybe, since you bring it up, maybe we could sort of merge all these conversations together and talk about how different that is from what we see now on Food TV and what we expect from celebrity chefs and Food Network shows and, you know, so.

**DAVID KAMP:** Well, the Food Network vetting process now would never allow a six foot two inch woman with a warbly voice and breathing in the wrong places. I always liken her to like her contemporary Howard Cosell **(laughter)** in the sports world, Brooklyn Jewish lawyer, talks like this, whatever, and you know, again, no ABC executive now would allow that man to make it even into the reception, let alone the on-camera screen test and so it's just there's something to be said for oddball charisma, which is what both those people had, and it was so infectious. I think it was part of her

populist appeal, too, was just that she *wasn't* a Donna Reed–type perfect kitchen character, which is what that era prescribed, you know.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** The amazing thing about this clip, and this moment, which is the famous moment from Julia's whole television career all those years, this is the thing everyone remembers and they remember it wrong. People will say—they've come to *me* and said and they'll say to anybody—"I saw her drop a chicken on the floor and put it back, I saw her drop a turkey, I saw her drop three ducks on the floor, (**laughter**) a huge fish, and she put it right back and she said, 'you're alone in the kitchen, who is going to see?'" So they get the quote right but the food has grown, it's just blossomed in their memory, so, I in working on my book, I just—I wrestled with that. "What is it? What are we trying to remember? What do we have to remember that makes us expand that incident to include these gigantic things of food and Julia bringing it back?" And I feel as though the incident has to be as big as Julia, as big as our *memory* of Julia. That she's such an outsized figure in our television memory, in our culinary memory, that somehow that little incident had to be the same size. But it is remarkable. People—Some of you probably remember seeing her drop a chicken but I promise you it didn't happen.

**DAVID KAMP:** And also, the Dan Ackroyd parody, I think it was like '78, by which time she had not filmed an original show in something like, five, six years, right? So I mean—that it was still that relevant, and that gettable to a young, TV comedy-watching, stoner audience, probably, and that they would still get a Julia Child joke, because she was that big.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Well, Dan, what do you think? I mean, you're, you know, the only person here who has to function. I mean, I don't know if you ever cook in front of an audience, but I mean do you feel that now there's really a culture—

**DAN BARBER:** In front of the twenty-year-old testosterone-driven young chefs that I cook around all day.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Right, right, but do you feel there's a pressure to—

**DAN BARBER:** —a national audience.

**MELANIE REHAK:** —to perform, you know, to execute your knife skills, and your everything, you know, your flips, perfectly?

**DAN BARBER:** Do I feel the pressure to—I mean, you wouldn't find me attempting to do something like that in my kitchen, that's the only problem. Yeah. My audience, I say that with some kind of truth. I mean, I feel tremendous pressure around my young coterie of cooks because I—because they do look to me as if I know how to cook, flip the perfect potato pancake, and so the humanizing around this group doesn't happen too often, and so I tend to take on a testosterone-driven manliness myself, **(laughter)** to be honest, and those kind of clips are more instructive than you think.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Do you think something has been lost? I mean—

**DAN BARBER:** Well, when I watch the Food Network, yes, I think a lot's been lost, obviously when you see that, and the network seems to me to be more about fetishizing, fetishizing food, more than it is about what everyone has described today, which is the love of good food, and the love of the company that surrounds it, and the kinds of things that Julia represented and that we ought to return to, but it seems as if the Food Network is going in the other direction, and food shows, so, you know, it's a little perplexing to see this next to a—next to a Rachael Ray show.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Molly, did you want to say something or were you just having a laugh?

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** It would have been so funny to see them cooking together.

**(laughter)**

**DAVID KAMP:** Well, one thing, Julia would have cooked with Rachael Ray. In one of the last print interviews she gave, she sang Emeril Lagasse's praises and she was not, she was not, you know, scandalized by the fact that he was so flagrantly commercial, because that again was her populism kicking in. And my sense is that Rachael Ray would not have offended her. She would have found a way to defend Rachael Ray.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** She probably would have. The thing about Julia's mistakes is that she herself hated them. They were the things that everybody loved the best and in fact they were incredibly useful for an audience to see. You saw her, you saw her mending that potato thing, so she recognized. She knew that that was like a teachable moment, and it was good to have it. She *hated* it, they made her cringe. That was going to be on reruns for the rest of her life. And she was—she was a huge perfectionist. She thought of herself as a *total* professional. She had studied with chefs. She wanted to do it right. She thought that good teaching was showing them how to do it right. It *killed* her to see things like that just out there over and over, and the very quality that we *love* in that show and about Julia, the klutziness, that things go wrong and stuff, drove her nuts, and it's why in the course of her career, the shows got glossier and glossier and more rehearsed, she did less cooking, they got sillier and less interesting until there was just—you could just see a huge change from the beginning to the end of her career because of that. But she liked them better. She thought that they were better, the smoother they are and the more professional.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Just to go back to something you said about your testosterone-drive masculinity, the other thing that strikes me, Rachael Ray aside, is that of course Julia was a woman and I feel like a lot of the chefs that we really hold in high esteem right now are not, are men. You know, yourself included, but anyone from, you know, Mario Batali to Emeril Lagasse or whoever and do you think—is there room?

**DAN BARBER:** When you say, *we* hold them in regard, I mean, I don't.



**(laughter)**

**MELANIE REHAK:** I mean we the non-chefs. You know, if you think of the names who are big enough to exist on a kind of national level, Food Network people, kind of household chef names, you know, a thing which didn't really exist prior to pretty recently with the exception of Julia and maybe someone like Alice Waters, who I guess we've all agreed is of another time/space continuum. I mean, why are there no women now? Why—do you have a—

**DAN BARBER:** Well, did you want to chime in on that as a woman?

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** I prefer to do it as a woman than as a man. I mean—

**(laughter)**

**MELANIE REHAK:** Sorry, I didn't mean to put you on the spot.

**DAN BARBER:** No, really, this is why I don't moderate these things.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** We're really—I think a couple things are going on here. We're dramatically overlooking Martha.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Ah, good point.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** I'm sorry, but you can put fifty-five Mario Batalis in a can and you do not have Martha, by any way of judging except taste. **(laughter)** Right? And you know, so much of what the Food Network is doing is totally derivative. No one's come up with anything new since this woman. No one is taking any risks. They're not allowed to. The production values are so extraordinarily high. The cost of doing—I mean, when I was doing stuff for Channel—for public television, I believe that the budget was \$300,000 for thirty minutes and we were using BBC footage. I mean it's an *insane* amount of money that goes into doing it and it has to be committee-controlled. And you know, yes, there is a gender—there is a *significant* gender problem and Laura and have had real, some great lunches on this topic, prepared by men. **(laughter)** But I think that the issue is something different. It's about there's—one thing happens, it changes the world, and then the world imitates that thing until the next great thing happens. And in this—the next great thing hasn't happened yet. We're all riding her coattails. At least that's what I think.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Do you agree with that as a man?

**DAN BARBER:** That's a broad statement. I just want to go back to your point about why are there no, you know, that question, why are there not more women to which we supposedly emulate in the kitchen, it kind of goes back to why aren't there more female chefs running top kitchens?

**MELANIE REHAK:** I guess that's really—you know, I certainly don't mean to discount Martha Stewart, but somebody of a sort of a restaurant empire cookbook kind of category.

**DAN BARBER:** The women chefs that I admire are not cooking the kind of food that gets the four stars and the multiple restaurants and the backing to do restaurants in the environments that get those kind of reviews and then get that kind of backing, it's kind of contagious. So, there are a lot of fantastic women chefs out there and in fact in my kitchens at Blue Hill New York and Blue Hill at Stone Barns, I *prefer* hiring women. We get quite a few through, and a lot choose not to work the hours and the intensity. But there's—I'd say I have thirty to forty percent women, which is triple the number of most kitchens, because I look for them, it's a kind of reverse sexism, whatever, because I do feel like that when somebody can take the hours and the pressure, when a *woman* can take the hours and the pressure, again it's a very broad-stroke comment to make, but I feel like the passion, the reason for them being there, is much more about the food and about where the food's coming from, and about the sensibility and the whole gestalt is—the whole package is much more real than when usually this testosterone-younger-male-driven chef is there for the résumé and for the prestige of working with me, supposedly, or with Blue Hill, so, anyway, I'm really doing it out of self-interest because I really think they produce. Women on my cooking lines produce better food.

**DAVID KAMP:** Well, this is a little far afield from Julia Child, but on the West Coast, actually, a lot of visionary chefs have been women, like Deborah Madison at Greens, the vegetarian restaurant, Judy Rogers at Zuni Café, Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken, and Nancy Silverton, for whom you worked, right? So I mean, there are quite a few out there, but somehow they're all on the West Coast, not all but a lot of them. Sorry, I was going to set Laura up, I was going to set you up with something. **(laughter)** Which is that to tie it back to Julia. Julia didn't really like women chefs, did she? She was a man's woman.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** She liked women chefs, but her idea of greatness was generally focused on men. We did not invent this male-centered food world that we now live in. Julia was hoping and praying for it. It was her idea that unless you got men at center stage in the food world, it was never going to be a great culinary preoccupation and the subject of all conversations and so forth, the way it was in France. And that's what she was aiming for, so . . . Plus, she just liked men. **(laughter)** She really did. She was a big flirt and she just had this *thing* for men. It sounds so outlandish now. Nobody does anymore.

**(laughter)**

**MELANIE REHAK:** That's for a different panel, Laura.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** Anyway, that was. She would light up when the men came in the room. When letters came in from a male fan, she and Paul would read them, and she'd write these nice personal notes back. "So great to hear from a man. **(laughter)** I always think it makes such a difference to have a *man* in the kitchen." So she was just like that and she would have appreciated this. At the same time, if you were a good cook it didn't matter what sex you were, she was for you. And she promoted a lot of women chefs. And she worked to get them into the Culinary Institute of America, she was definitely *for* women being in the profession, so it wasn't that she was against them. She just loved men.

**MELANIE REHAK:** All right, well, on that note, we're going to show one more clip which is Julia and some tools, so it's very appropriate, so—

**JULIA CHILD:** And then, no matter what way you're going to cook it, it should have a butter massage. **(laughter)** If you had rendered chicken fat, you could give it a rendered chicken fat massage. I really think the actual massage is very beneficial to it, because it gets right into that skin and that gives it a lovely flavor and it helps it brown nicely. Then you can roast this as it is now, you can poach it, or you can roast it the old-fashioned way in the oven, or you can roast it on the spit, and we're going to roast it on the spit because that is not only the most ancient but also the most *modern* way to roast a chicken. And here's the spit, **(laughter)** I think it's useful to know how to put the chicken on a spit. So you make sure it's good and tight on this end, and you always start on from the neck end, and I'll show you why later, and that's those prongs, if the prongs don't fit in very well,

you can always bend them, **(laughter)** but you want to get the prongs into the chicken. And then you get the other end on, and that's supposed to go right square into those bones there, because it's just got to hold that on, and screw that up tight. I always believe in having plenty of tools in the kitchen, **(laughter)** a pair of pliers and really pull that on, because if you don't get the chicken well enough on to the spit, it shrinks a little bit sometimes as it cooks and it also can come off the spit too easily, and then you have a terrible problem of a hot chicken and a hot spit and juice dripping and it's just a mess, so just remember, get it securely on. And the reason that you have it on—

**MELANIE REHAK:** I think the thing where she brings out the pliers may be my personal favorite. You just wait for her to have some kind of fancy cooking gadget, but no, she's gone into the toolbox. So I think this is a great clip because it shows really how practical Julia was, on top of everything else, and how much she cared about teaching—she's so involved in all the—right before this section, you see her tie up the whole chicken with about five yards of string, and she makes it all look incredibly easy and the chicken is perfect afterwards, and, you know, I watched it and thought, you know, “she's got to be kidding, I could never do this,” and yet, she still made me feel like if I just practiced enough, I could probably do it. So, let's talk about her as a teacher, because this was something that I think was very important to her that, you know, maybe we've also lost a little bit now, and I think was a huge part of, you know, why we're still here talking about her now, so who wants to . . . Molly?

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** Well, let's see. She was a fantastic teacher. But there was a need for a teacher at that time. I mean, it's not only that she was—she was just a natural teacher. In fact, I'm thinking, I'm kind of casting back, and I'm thinking of her kitchen in Cambridge, which didn't have one piece of fancy equipment in it. And she really—she really thought that fancy stoves and all that, she thought it was a bunch of hooey and that you should just have things that worked, and she had a piece of pegboard with everything outlined because it drove her nuts if people didn't put things back in the right—you know, *here's* where the nutcracker goes, and *here's* where the zester goes, and *here's* where the whisk goes, and it—but it was very simple and not fancy. Her stuff had old chipped enamel handles on it and stuff like that, and as I'm thinking about being in that room and of her as a teacher, she was not this brilliant technician.

Laura's probably going to get incredibly mad at me right now, but Julia was *not* a very good cook. She really wasn't, and I ate her food a lot of times, she was not a brilliant cook, she wasn't even a particularly talented cook, what she was was a woman who had great joy, and she knew how to talk about it, and she knew how to talk you through it, so if she would see me doing something that could be better, as I was watching this I remembered, Julia was the one who said to me, it kind of ties all this together. We were doing some chickens one time, and they were from Safeway, they were horrible. And I was cooking in restaurants and used good food products and I was looking at these things and just despairing, because we were doing a fund-raising dinner for Radcliffe, and I thought, “Oh, God, it's just going to be a nightmare.” And she said, **(in Julia's voice)** “Oh, no, dear, we're just going to get a lot of butter, and we're going to shove it under the

skin.” So in addition to the massage, we were shoving butter between the skin and the flesh, all over the bird, not just the breastbone, but she was a very patient teacher. She’d kind of show me one thing and then about five birds later, she came by and said, “oh, yeah, you’re much better than I am, you have much better hands than I do, and you’re going to like that butter idea.”

And to me that’s what was great about her. She wasn’t great technically, she wasn’t a terrific cook, but she knew the right place to be and she knew how to *meet* a cook, you know, how to tell you, “this is what you need to do now. This is how to use your hands today,” and because of that and because we needed as a nation to be reminded how to cook, she was kind of a perfect, forgive me, but kindergarten teacher. This is not heavy lifting, this is really elementary stuff. Sorry.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** I think.

**MELANIE REHAK:** All right, Laura.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** I think. I remember that bit where she trusses the chicken. Yeah, it’s elementary if you’re a chef. It’s a degree from MIT if you’re a regular person. That was big-time teaching, that was big-time teaching. And Julia *was* our great cooking teacher, because she was our great cooking *student*. She had learned to cook, because she couldn’t when she started. She was not a natural cook. Nothing came easily or well to her, and that’s maybe what you see happening. She couldn’t cook when she started, she



had to learn, and she learned at the Cordon Bleu, where it was very cut and dried and very rigorous and very technical. *That* made her a cook, and that's what she believed in, that's what she trusted, were those techniques and learning that way.

And she did it because she wanted her husband Paul to be happy, really. So it was love and going to school and learning this thing. And that was like the size and shape of her career. And she always loved learning and that's what made her a good teacher year after year. I was once in that kitchen with her when she had this little TV on and Wolfgang Puck was doing one of these *things*, I thought to myself, "Wolfgang Puck, who cares about him? I'm not going to pay attention to that." When it was over, two minutes over, Julia said, "Wasn't that amazing," and I said, "yeah," and she said, "You know, you can always learn something," and I felt like such an idiot, I had ignored it, but she had picked something up, because she always could learn something, she always paid attention.

**DAVID KAMP:** One of the leitmotifs of when I was interviewing people in the food world, especially talking about the food pioneers in America, James Beard, Craig Claiborne, and Julia, and even Alice Waters, a lot of people who knew them would say, "But you know what, he or she didn't have kitchen jobs." It was like the big secret, didn't have kitchen jobs. Doesn't diminish their legacy, any of those four people I mentioned because they each obviously got across in some major way despite being far less technically accomplished than Wiley Dufresne or someone like that.

**DAN BARBER:** Well, the biggest debt to chefs just from hearing all of this and thinking about it in the context of a chef's perspective is you look at the three—I'll take this, I think I can say this, the three biggest chef names today, the Wolfgang Puck on the West Coast, the Mario Batali all over the place, maybe Emeril, those three—all of them owe the greatest debt to her, not because of their cooking abilities. In fact, one could question their cooking abilities, as David just said, and their chops in the kitchen, but their love of and passion for food is directly, is so straight linked to her, that it seems inarguable to suggest that they couldn't be in the place they are today without her opening those doors. It reminds me of that just watching these clips.

**MELANIE REHAK:** All right, well I think that's a great place to end. We're going to take a few questions, ten minutes of questions or less, five minutes of questions? And Betsy has a microphone and if you just address it to whoever you're addressing it to that would be great.

**QUESTION:** Hi. You spoke early on about Julia Child's regard for Safeway and for big food and her bewilderment at someone like Alice Waters and her regard for ingredients. Did she also have any connection with the source of the food, did she, for example, ever shoot a segment of her show on location on a farm, or was that completely lost on her?

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** Yes, later in her career she did more of that and that was the part of her television career where she was sort of standing around saying things while other people did the stuff of the show. She knew that—she knew it was important. She

understood the difference between a good ingredient and a bad ingredient, but that *thing* that Alice has that kind of drives you to the ground to pull the radish out by the root, she didn't have that. She did it on TV a little bit, but she didn't have it.

**DAN BARBER:** To defend Alice, she could have done more in that area, and could have done a lot to awaken people to the kinds of things that Alice talks about probably, as David said, in a way that was more appealing than Alice herself.

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** Yeah, but she absolutely refused to.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** But one thing we're overlooking is that there was a degradation in the quality of the products that happened gradually over a lifetime. And, you know, Alice went to France and suddenly, it was like Helen Keller at the well, this is what chicken's supposed to taste like. And when a thing degrades over a period of decades, she'd already picked her battle, as we've said her, so to circle back I'm not sure is even a hundred percent possible.

**QUESTION:** Hi. You spoke a little bit about Julia Child's legacy in terms of being a television chef, but I was wondering whether or not any of the panelists could talk a little bit about her legacy in terms of being a cookbook author and what she did for American writers in terms of making the cookbook something different than what it was before.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** Those of us who are deadline offenders are very, very grateful to Julia because *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* took—

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** Seven years at least, seven years of writing, nine in all.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** Right, a sixteen-year project altogether, and so you know, that's kind of a wonderful thing, when you're slogging through trying to deliver something on time, and you suddenly realize, "Oh my God, I've overlooked this whole thing." My fantasy is always, "This is the Julia moment. This is what will make it great."

**MOLLY O'NEILL:** And I mean, also, I think, yes, Julia gave us a lot, but so did Judith, her editor. Between the two of them they changed the form of cookbooks and it was a very important moment. If you look at recipes before Julia and then after Julia, the form changed. It became much more conversant, but it's still a very elegant form, and it's arranged intuitively. The changes are really subtle but they're incredibly effective, and we still are doing—I mean, it hasn't changed again since then. I'm not sure that that's Julia. I'm not sure Julia would have done that without her editor. I think that's a great example of a collaboration.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Okay, I think we have time maybe for one more and that's it.

**QUESTION:** I was just wondering if Julia made any attempt to franchise herself other than the cookbooks, was there Julia Child products, pots, dishes, or anything as we are so inundated with today.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** That was one of the main things that she committed to not doing very early on. As soon as the show started and she started to get famous, the invitations started pouring in. Promote this, use that, sell yourself here, make money there. She said “no” and she said “no” for the rest of her life.

**DAVID KAMP:** I think she viewed James Beard as a cautionary tale on that, because they were close, but he sold himself out to anyone he could, because in those days there was no lucrative niche for a food person to live in, so any offer that came his way, he took and she saw that and found it terribly sad, because she liked him, so she said never.

**DAN BARBER:** Julia Vegas?

**(laughter)**

**DAVID KAMP:** There is Julia’s Kitchen at COPIA, which is that food and wine institute in Napa Valley, and has her name and it’s probably the only thing—commercial enterprise that has her name on it, but it’s purportedly for a noble cause.

**MELANIE REHAK:** We have time for one more, one lucky questioner.

**QUESTION:** Hi. I think a lot of the paradoxes and contradictions that I've been hearing from the panel have their root in the circumstance that Julia Child was never a chef, never, never, never a chef and the title of her show from the beginning was *The French Chef*.

**LAURA SHAPIRO:** You're right, and that could be another, you know, series of ten books on that very issue but she liked that title and she wanted that title for the show because it was short, sharp, and professional. Some of the other suggestions were, you know, "Fun with Cooking," and she shot those down. She wanted something with dignity and that gave some stature to the thing. So you're right, she was a home cook, first, last, and always, and she taught home cooking, but I always think she had the mind of a chef. In another time and place and generation she *would* have worked in a restaurant, she loved that, you know, that those, just—just rising to that height. She admired it tremendously. She thought that chefs walked on water, she thought they were just the most wonderful, learned people, she had studied with great ones, and so she had kind of the mind and the aspiration of a chef, but it was all focused on reaching people in their own kitchens.

**MELANIE REHAK:** Well, thank you to our panelists, and there will be book signing back that way.

**(Applause)**