Julia and I always joked that we had started cooking at the same time, and it is true. In 1949, when I was thirteen and a half years old, I began my apprenticeship at Le Grand Hôtel de l’Europe in Bourg-en-Bresse, not too far from my family’s restaurant in Lyon. That same year Julia started at the Cordon Bleu in Paris. She was, of course, already a married woman with much more sophistication and knowledge of food than I had. Yet, my apprenticeship, under the guidance of Chef Paul Jauget, and her instruction under Max Bognard at the Cordon Bleu, were much the same in regard to the training, the view of food, the discipline, and our roles. I suppose this was revealed in the ways that the two of us agreed and disagreed about food during our long relationship.

Julia called me Jack. It was her way of democratizing me, making me more accessible to the audience, Americanizing me—and teasing me! She did it in a playful, gentle way. She was fiercely and vehemently Democratic, a hard-core Democrat. Even though she accepted the prestigious Medal of Freedom from George W. Bush, she was an adamant critic of his policy and secretly regretted not receiving it from Clinton, whom she loved as a politician and as a man. She also received the Légion of Honor from the French government, long overdue, and we had a sumptuous celebratory party at Le Meridien Hotel in Boston. She played down the accolade but in truth was proud and pleased to receive the highest civilian distinctions bestowed by the French and American governments.

I met Julia in 1960 at the home of Helen McCully in New York. Helen, food editor at that time of *House Beautiful* (and earlier of *McCall’s*), would become my surrogate mother in this country. A well-known figure in the culinary world, she was a very close friend of James Beard, with whom she communicated every day, spending a good hour gossiping about the food world. I had met Helen through Craig Claiborne, the food critic at the *New York Times*. Craig had been introduced to me at the Pavillon, where he was writing an article on Pierre Franey, the restaurant’s executive chef. Amazingly, I was friends with this “holy Trinity”—James, Julia, and Craig—within less than six months of my arrival in this country at age twenty-three. The food world was smaller and more intimate than it is today.

In the spring of 1960, Helen told me, “I’d like to show you the manuscript of a book I received from a big California woman who is coming to my house next week.” Then she showed me the manuscript of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. I have to admit I was slightly jealous. I was looking at the book that, in my head at least, I had already decided I would write some day, and here it was, already completed by an American woman that I would meet a few weeks later.

Like most people, I was overwhelmed when I first met Julia. Her voice, her size, and her presence could absorb you, but I felt comfortable with her. I don’t remember what we talked about in that first meeting, but I do recall that she spoke French far better than I spoke English at the time. Her husband, Paul, whom I met at the same time, impressed me with his knowledge and sophistication about all things French, including literature, philosophy, and, especially, wines. This meeting would be the start of our friendship.

Yet, for quite a number of years, we were merely friendly acquaintances who met from time to time at food-related events. She was direct, tough, gentle, competitive, generous, opinionated, optimistic, funny, serious, informative, demanding, frustrating, eloquent, and vibrant and—more than anything—full of life, always fun, and living to the fullest until her last breath.
events, usually in New York. I do remember, however, that when my book La Technique was completed in 1975, I sent her the manuscript and she wrote a quote for the book—very unusual for Julia, who seldom did book quotes—saying that it was a great book that didn’t exist in France or America and would be very useful for both professional chefs and anybody seriously interested in cooking. It was a great quote, from the heart.

By then, and starting in 1963, she had taped The French Chef at WGBH in Boston and a great number of other series, one right after the other, and she told me she was ready to retire. “You know, there is no one who can show cooking techniques as you do,” she said. “Since I am not going to do any more shows, you should go and see Kotlowitz, the programmer at WNED in New York, and do a show with them.” Julia, of course, went on to make many more television series, and I didn’t start taping shows for PBS until 1982.

Each time she and I met and talked and cooked together, we became closer and closer. In 1978, when La Méthode, the sequel to La Technique, was published and I went on the road to publicize it, I ended up in Boston, where my wife, Gloria, and I were invited for dinner at Julia and Paul’s home in Cambridge. I had dined with them before, but this was the first time for Gloria. By then I had been married for nearly ten years, and Gloria had met Julia socially only a few times, at Helen’s or elsewhere. Neither of us had ever dined at Julia’s home, and Gloria was excited.

I remember that although we didn’t have much money at that time, Gloria had bought a mink coat that was pretty but not, perhaps, of the best quality. She was very proud and excited about her coat, and since we were going to Julia’s in midwinter, she decided to wear it there. (Of course, this was before the concerns about whether it was politically correct to wear fur.) We bought a big plant for Julia and found our way to Irving Street, never an easy feat, in the middle of Cambridge. We entered the house through the back door, where we were greeted by Julia, who grabbed both of us in her famous bear hug and kissed us openly and enthusiastically. She led us into the kitchen, grabbed Gloria’s coat, and hung it firmly on a big nail behind the door. Gloria was absolutely certain the nail would go right through her precious coat. (Fortunately, it didn’t!)

We proceeded into the kitchen to discover that there were still crumbs and food remnants from the previous meal on the oilcloth covering the kitchen table. There was Paul, waiting for us, and we sat down in the kitchen and drank a bottle of champagne while Julia and I started opening and eating oysters. Paul charmed Gloria and then proceeded to show her the furniture he had made, the decorative windows he had installed in the front door, as well as his paintings. Meanwhile, Julia and I decided on the menu. She had a large loin of pork that I transformed into chops, which we garnished with sautéed baby potatoes and French haricots verts with shallots. We had started the meal with raw oysters and buttered black bread, and cheese followed the main course. I forget what we had for dessert, but I know that we had a Pommard from Burgundy from Paul’s well-stocked wine cellar. In Julia’s words, this was la cuisine soignée, a simple and lovingly prepared meal.

This was the first meal for the four of us together in that famous kitchen. We sat around the central table with the oilcloth cover, and we shared the warmth of friendship without snobbery. We had true food, and as we ate, we discussed what we were eating, what we could have eaten, and what we would be eating in the next few days. It was the beginning of a deeper friendship that would culminate in the PBS-TV series and the book Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home, which we did together in 1999.

Julia and I argued a lot. She was opinionated, I am opinionated, and we clashed often in our discussions on the concept of the shows, the dishes we would demonstrate, and what we wanted to teach. Our confrontations were fierce but honest and straightforward. One always knew exactly what Julia thought. Yet, all of our arguments, however hot and animated, finished around the table with us sharing wine and food. During each of those lively and sometimes blunt exchanges, I learned something. I wanted to pack too much into the shows, and she made me realize that television was entertainment and that if you want to impart a message and teach people, you have to do it in a way that is light, amusing, and as much fun as possible.

Too much was probably made of our differences: Julia, for some reason, didn’t like kosher salt, while I like the feel of it and use it most of the time in my kitchen. I love the taste of black pepper, to which she objected because of its color in certain sauces—it was a question of aesthetics, and she would use white pepper in light-colored sauces. These were, however, minute differences. Our philosophies usually coincided.

We agreed on the need for high-quality ingredients in any recipe and any meal. We agreed about the straightforward simplicity of a good recipe built on classic technique. We agreed on the balance of dishes in a meal. We especially agreed on the importance of sharing food with loved ones and friends.

Julia was the ultimate teacher. With many of the dishes we prepared, she would ask, “What are we teaching here? What are the people going to get out of this?” Even though there was bantering back and forth, we worked well
together. There was a sharing of ideas, as well as a sharing of wine, and many funny moments on the shows. Moreover, there was teaching going on, whether people watching realized it or not.

Julia taught me how to remain open to new ideas and new young chefs. She was the best supporting mentor to a whole flock of young chefs, and she never hesitated to admit when she didn’t know about a new product or a new dish “à la mode.” It was her candor and her honesty that people found really compelling.

Her appetite for life was inexhaustible. She was always curious, inquiring, and her joie de vivre, her excitement for life, may have been her greatest asset. The last time I spoke with her, only a couple of weeks before her death, she didn’t want to talk about her health. She wanted to know what I was doing, what was going on, what was new, asking questions about common friends—Barbara Fenzl, cookbook author and owner of Les Gourmettes Cooking School in Phoenix; Roger Fessaguet, former executive chef at La Caravelle in New York; Rebecca Alssid, director of lifelong learning at Boston University. Julia was someone who never dwelt on her own problems but projected herself forward, asking you about a project you were doing and being genuinely interested in your response.

Julia was very secure with herself. She knew what she wanted, and she knew the type of cuisine that she liked and the way it should be done. She was never tempted by fads; that being said, it wasn’t that she didn’t look at new things and sometimes hail them as great ideas, but often the fads—like putting incongruous ingredients together just for the sake of being different—didn’t impress her. At the onset of nouvelle cuisine, when she saw the intricate arrangements of food in a symmetrical way on oversized plates, she would say, “So many people have touched this food that I don’t feel like eating it.” The food was too static, too stagnant; it didn’t have the natural look that food should have. I remember her talking about grilled vegetables, which she hated at a time when everyone else was crazy about anything grilled. She would say, “These vegetables are burned, black, and raw at the same time, so they are inedible.”

She didn’t mince her words. At an International Association of Culinary Professionals conference in Dallas, a group of us went together late at night to check out a new restaurant. There was cookbook author Barbara Kafka, public relations
executive Susie Davidson, Barbara Fenzl, Julia, me, and a few others. The director of the restaurant, whom I knew, and one of the waiters stopped by our table to greet us. They were very happy to see all of us, and the director wanted to give us a sample of his food. Julia took the menu and asked the waiter if there was a veal chop on the menu. When he said yes, she then asked if the veal was organic, and you could see on the waiter’s face that he didn’t know what to answer. Finally, he opted for the truth and told her, “No, I don’t believe that it is,” to which Julia applauded and said, “Good, I can’t stand that organic veal; it’s red, tough, and tasteless!”

Another time, Julia and I were eating at Circo in New York and discussing some project we were working on. We ordered lamb chops and some fresh string beans—beautiful little haricots verts—and I knew as soon as the plate arrived, without even tasting them, that those beans were not going to be cooked enough for Julia. The kitchen staff was watching us through the window in the door leading to the dining room, and Julia, while talking with me about the project, started chewing on her beans almost absentmindedly. Before long, she spit them out in her hand and put them on the side of the plate—or on the floor—while she continued to talk without stopping. She wasn’t aware that she was being closely observed while she ate.

Julia was expert at playing to the camera, and even though she sometimes said something that sounded as though she had just thought of it at the last moment, she had often planned it in advance. She also enjoyed a good off-color story or joke. Once I was making a lobster soufflé in the style of the Plaza Athénée at my house for a show of hers, and she asked me, “How do you remove the lobster meat from the claws?” So I demonstrated how I would do this with a knife, cracking the claws, etc. She then grabbed the tail of the lobster, pulled the meat from the shell and, without blinking an eye, turned to me and announced, “Jacques, I have a nice piece of tail for you.” The whole crew began laughing, so we had to cut and reshoot the segment. But she knew exactly what she was saying; it was
funny and a bit risqué, and when they reshot she said the same thing again directly to the camera.

Another time, I was with her on Good Morning America. We were going to make two classic French sandwiches: she was to make a croque-monsieur, and I was to demonstrate a croque-madame, the difference, of course, being that I used chicken and cheese and seasoned the sandwich with tarragon, while she used ham, the standard ingredient for a croque-monsieur. Before we went on air, she was talking to one of the assistant producers of the show, trying to make him say croque-monsieur, and in her loudest voice, she said, “No, it’s not cock-monsieur, it’s croque-monsieur!” This was Julia, at her most outrageous, and we all laughed.

She certainly wasn’t one to kowtow to sponsors, either. For the twenty-two series episodes that we did at her house in Cambridge, Kendall-Jackson, the wine company, was one of our sponsors. I knew the company president, Jess Jackson, a great gentleman, and his wife, Barbara Banke, and they had asked to take Julia and me out to dinner. Beforehand, they stopped by to watch us tape one of the shows from Julia’s front parlor, which had become a production or monitor room. I must admit that we drank a good deal of wine while taping that series—reds and whites from all over. At the end of each show, we usually tasted the food we had prepared and toasted the camera, and since Jess Jackson was there that day, I had decided to serve one his best wines. On air, I asked Julia if she wanted a merlot, my preference, or a cabernet sauvignon with her lamb. Looking directly into the camera, she replied, “Beer.” I was stunned; we had no beer, I thought, but Julia bent over and produced two bottles of beer from under the counter, and I made the dough as she requested, with half Crisco and half butter.

One of her pet peeves was the quality of beef and lamb. She insisted that butchers had no prime anymore and didn’t know how to age meat, so it always ended up being too tough for her. One day, during the taping, we cooked a beautiful leg of lamb in the French style with a coating of breadcrumbs, herbs, shallots, and garlic on top, and when I sliced it at the end, Julia said she wanted to taste it. She thought the flavor was good, but she concluded that it was tough because the meat hadn’t been aged enough. A few days later, we decided to do a series of salads. Since we didn’t have a script for these shows, there was a great deal of give and take. We had an idea of what we would do thematically, but we did not have specific recipes. We could do as we pleased, which was great for us, of course, but made it somewhat tense for the cameramen and producer, who didn’t know exactly where we would be going and what we would do. So, on this day we began with Julia making the famous Caesar salad that she learned from Caesar Cardini in Tijuana, Mexico, where he had invented the salad at his restaurant. She explained the history of the Caesar salad, and then we went on to prepare a salade niçoise, which she loved. We still had time afterwards, so I suggested we prepare a salad of mixed greens with some cooked meat around it, in the modern style. Julia agreed that this was a “great idea.” Then, I suggested that we use meat from the leg of lamb that we had cooked a few days before, and when she agreed, I proceeded to make the salad and arrange slices of the lamb around it. The result was beautiful and very appetizing, and again, she said she wanted “a taste.” Not surprisingly, after tasting the lamb, she announced, “Well, it is still tough!” Everyone laughed, and we ended the show on that note.

In the late spring of 2003, I drove down from San Francisco to Santa Barbara to see Julia with Susie Heller, a friend and independent producer who has worked on several of Julia’s and my PBS series. Sam Godfrey, the extraordinary baker from Napa, whose dream was to meet Julia, was following in his car with his friend, Michael. The French Laundry and Per Se executive chef and owner Thomas Keller, resplendent in his shiny Porsche, joined us on the road for the trip. We stayed two days in Santa Barbara and had lunch with Julia at her favorite hangout, the Harbor Restaurant, and dinner with her at Lucky’s, along with Stephanie Hersh, her ever-faithful assistant, and Pat and Herb Pratt, her good friends. While we were there, we appeared at a fundraiser for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art; “A Conversation with Julia and Jacques” would be our last public event together. Susie Heller was the moderator, and Julia was in great
shape: quick-witted, funny, eloquent, and mordant. People laughed and applauded, and it was evident how much they loved her. Sam had made a stunning, superb birthday cake for Julia for this occasion. It seems that we celebrated every birthday she had from ages eighty to ninety in one place or another to raise money for one cause or another; she was generous with her time and giving.

Sam’s chocolate cake was made in the form of an enormous bouquet of roses. Julia didn’t know that Sam had made a cake for her, and she was unaware that Thomas was coming. They stayed hidden in the theater crowd, with Sam declining to bring the cake to Julia in person. It was Thomas who presented it, walking down the center aisle with it and approaching the stage, to everybody’s cheers and applause. Julia was surprised and greatly touched, and she announced that “right here and now” everyone was invited to a party after the program to taste the cake. Fortunately, Sam had made enough extra cake for everyone to have a taste—cooks and bakers are the most generous people in the world. Then Julia, in order to raise more money for the museum, decided to auction off the cake that Sam had made for her. It went for two thousand dollars, and we had great fun. Julia was at her best.

I remember Julia all over the United States: in New York at the homes of Helen McCully and James Beard, at breakfast at the Café Pierre, at lunch at the French Culinary Institute with its founder and CEO Dorothy Cann Hamilton, and at dinner at Le Cirque, whose owner, Sirio Maccioni, she loved. I see her in San Francisco at Roland Passot’s La Folie, at Gary Danko, and with Mark Franz at Farallon. She would always go into the kitchen and shake hands with everyone, including the dishwashers, and pose for photos with them—she was just being Julia. I can see her in Napa at Copia and drinking champagne with Susie Heller at the Carneros estate; I see her in Los Angeles at Jean-ter Mano’s L’Ermitage, at Wolfgang Puck’s Spago, and at Michel Richard’s Citrus; and in Washington, D.C. at Jean-Louis Palladin’s restaurant for an extraordinary meal we had after another Conversation with Julia and “Jack” at the Warner Theater. We ate together at the Buckhead Diner in Atlanta, at the Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas with Dean Fearing, with Barbara Fenzl in Phoenix; we ate in Baltimore and in Providence; but I see her, especially, in Boston, at her house for breakfast with Martin Yan, at lunch with Susie and Geof Drummond, Julia’s series producer, and at dinner with my wife and our friend Gloria Zimmerman. I can still see and feel her when I am at Boston University, where we taught together for years. I see her sitting in the kitchen, a queen holding court, at Rebecca Alssid’s house for all those incredible parties, and at Radius, Biba, and Jody Adams’s Rialto, but particularly in Chinatown. Julia loved Chinese food, and one of our favorite Chinese restaurants was Ocean Wealth, where just the three of us—Rebecca, Julia, and me—weate many times.

Julia looms very tall and large on my horizon. She was direct, tough, gentle, competitive, generous, opinionated, optimistic, funny, serious, informative, demanding, frustrating, eloquent, and vibrant and—more than anything—full of life, always fun, and living to the fullest until her last breath. She will remain in my memory, and often when I prepare a certain dish in front of the camera, there is a little voice inside asking me, “What would Julia have thought of this?” I smile and thank her for all that she brought to my life.