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Q & A with **Joan Styrna**;
Chef, Teacher, & Author of;

Good Food Simply Prepared

A Collection of Recipes from 3 Generations of the Styrna Family

Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC

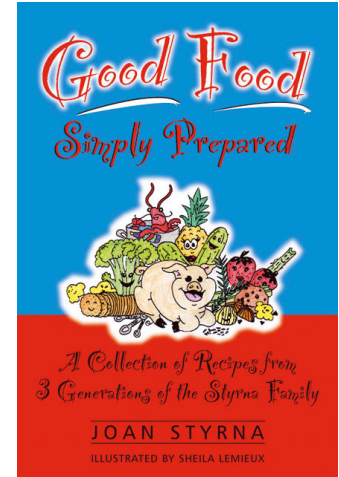
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What makes Good Food, Simply Prepared "more than just cookbook"?

It's not just about food, it's about family and how food traditions are passed down through the generations. This is becoming an important part of our modern cooking today. Each chapter tells a story about the home values and family traditions that changed as my family members became assimilated into American culture. You can see how recipes from the past influenced the present as they do in many families. The hot beet soup my "Baba", my grandmother from Poland, made became a lighter chilled soup served during our summers in Maine. There are also some great "cook's tips" and "critic's comments" from friends who enjoy good food to supplement the stories. The book is unique because it tells a story while giving some wonderful simple recipes for tasty meals.



What inspired you to write Good Food, Simply Prepared?

I found that over the years friends were constantly asking me to make the recipes and menus that came from my heritage when we got together for shared meals. As we enjoyed some of the dishes from my families' past, the conversation would inevitably turn to the stories behind the great food we were enjoying and my family recipes and food traditions. I think that happens in many families where generations have passed on food traditions and don't we all like to reminisce about what our grandmother used to make! Those evenings inspired me to write this book with the hope that my stories will bring enjoyment to others, and keep our heritage alive.

What are the ethnic origins of your family and how are they reflected in these recipes?

My family is primarily Polish and Lithuanian. The diet of these nationalities mainly came from their gardens and livestock. It was wholesome food. It's so interesting that the culinary world is coming back to those same concepts and practices of getting and using fresh products from the farm—even foraging for mushrooms like my father did. (cont.)

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What are the ethnic origins of your family and how are they reflected in these recipes? (cont.)

The old cooking methods are coming back too. My grandparents used a woodstove and now some home cooks are getting back to basics like that. I use the woodstove my grandparents used to make pizza! My parents and their parents lived vigorous lives into their eighties and nineties. My parents live with me now and sometimes I have a hard time keeping up with them, but the fond memories of gathering around the table are always there.

You're a gourmet chef. Should other people using your cookbook have lots of experience in the kitchen?

Absolutely not! I have been teaching middle and high school students how to cook for twenty-six years. They are certainly beginners and I wrote my book in a style that is suitable for amateur cooks. And now even more advanced modern cooks know that simple and fresh is best.

You left your job as a chef and chose to work with high school kids, teaching a class called Culinary Classics and Gourmet Foods. Tell us about why you made that change?

I went to college to become an educator. When I turned thirty, I made a career change to pursue my cooking passion. Preparing teenagers for a career in cooking has been very rewarding, especially when graduates invite my class and me to have lunch, with a tour, at their restaurants. It's so important to teach our next generations the importance of great food and enjoying food with friends and family. It's something we need to preserve, and it's what the whole Slow Food movement is about. My grandparents knew that even before the phrase came to be! But I love to cook and I love to teach; this is my perfect job.

Did you need to change your old family recipes much to adapt them to modern times?

Not really, the ingredients are very basic. Sometimes I may add or substitute an ingredient, but I'm mostly faithful to the family recipes and there is a trend that's becoming an integral part of modern cooking now, to go back to the simple and fresh. These recipes are timeless and fit right into that philosophy.

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