

JULIAN ARMSTRONG FOOD WRITER

Julian Armstrong was born in Toronto and obtained a degree in Modern History from the University of Toronto in 1954. Her mother, Polly, who taught her three children to cook, wrote food columns from the 1930s until the end of the 1950s for both *Saturday Night* and *The Globe and Mail* under the pen name Janet March. Julian has memories of her mother seated at the kitchen table, surrounded by her notes and culinary experiments, and working at her typewriter.

Julian travelled to Europe as a young adult. She discovered her love for journalism when she was hired for a temporary job at the *Toronto Star* in 1955. By 1956, she had settled in Montreal to work for the *British United Press* and *the Gazette*. She met Hilda Meehan Kearns, who acted as her mentor, teaching her about the journalistic profession and its code of ethics. She would be among the last journalists to learn her craft through an apprenticeship; journalism schools were on the rise and would soon replace this way of learning.

Shortly after her marriage to Robert O'Brien, a Montreal lawyer, Julian took a cooking course with the nuns of the Congrégation Notre-Dame on Stanley Street. Julian was particularly grateful to Sister Berthe Sansregret for her mentorship and to Sister Monique Chevrier who guided her as she explored traditional Québécois cuisine.

Upon the completion of her cooking course, Harry Larkin, the *Gazette's* editor-in-chief, proposed that Julian become the head of the paper's new food section while continuing her women's columns. She accepted, and as her mother had done before her, began to blend married life with food writing from her own kitchen. She wrote about dishes made by local chefs and nutritionists from the start of her career, as she felt that Montreal's Anglophone community had already been amply exposed to American cuisine.

Julian's love of cuisine grew through meetings and courses with numerous high-profile chefs of the time: Henri Bernard, Pol Martin, La Varenne, Raymond Calvel – who used to visit from France quite often to make bread with Montreal's famed baker, James MacGuire – and Julia Child, who she met at conferences in New York through her newspaper work.

She moved to the *Montreal Star* in 1962. The *Star's* then editor-in-chief, Donna Logan, persuaded Julian to write a weekly column about fresh products, a project she would later pursue in the *Gazette*, under the title *Best Buys*. By then, Julian had become an authority on seasonal produce and Quebec's regional cuisine.

After her return to *The Gazette* in 1979, Julian covered all the events highlighting Québec's local food and cuisine proposed in those years by the MAPAQ (Quebec's Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-food) and by Suzanne Paré-Leclerc's group of regional chefs.



Julian and Jehane Benoit in Amsterdam,
invited by the *Holland Cheese Association*, May 1969 (Julian Armstrong Collection)

It was after a French-immersion experience in Jonqui re in 1986 that Julian began to write the cookbook, *A Taste of Quebec* (1990), which highlights Quebec's regional cuisines. Her second book, *Made in Quebec: A Culinary Journey*, was published in 2014 and featured profiles of food producers as well as recipes for the specialties of a hundred of Quebec's best regional chefs.

She was a co-founder of two important groups in food journalism and regional cuisine: the Association of Food Journalists (which included members from both Canada and the U.S.; it ceased its activities in 2020 due to the diminishing coverage of food in newspapers), and Cuisine Canada, a national culinary alliance which later became Taste Canada.

Julian feels privileged to have been made to feel so welcome by people from across Quebec, and to have received so much support and assistance from them to help her research the province's regional cuisines. She also acknowledges the love and support she always received from her husband, who passed away in 1992, and from her three children.

“Quebec is a source of endless food discoveries. I have always felt fortunate, as a journalist, to have the key to finding out the whole story.”

Stuffed Pork Tenderloin

This recipe is from Julian's mother, Polly; it's an excellent dish to serve to guests. It can be prepared up to 24 hours in advance, by simply covering it and refrigerating until cooking. Polly served it with a sauce made with apples. Julian prefers a mushroom sauce which can also be prepared ahead of time. Saut  a   lb (250g) of sliced mushrooms in a bit of oil; sprinkle with flour; once the flour is absorbed and cooked a bit, add 1   c (325

ml) of consommé or chicken bouillon; cook until well mixed and heated through. Julian suggests mashed or scalloped potatoes and green vegetables as sides.

Serves 8

- 2 pork tenderloins, about 2 pounds (1 kg) total
- 2 tablespoons (25 mL) olive or canola oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) raisins
- Generous pinch each dried thyme, savory and sage
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Salt
- 2 cups (500 mL) diced fresh bread
- 4 slices bacon

Trim tenderloins of surplus fat and butterfly (cut open along the length on the thinner side so you have two flat pieces of meat). Using a large, heavy frying pan, heat oil over low-medium heat and sauté onions until softened, about five minutes. Add raisins, thyme, savory, sage, pepper and salt to taste. Add bread and toss to blend seasonings. Lay out four pieces of string, about 12 inches (30 cm) long, at about 2-inch (5-cm) intervals. Set the larger of the two pork tenderloins on the string. Mound the stuffing along the length of the meat. Spread the second tenderloin on top, tucking in any surplus stuffing. Lay bacon strips side by side the length of the meat. Tie the strings firmly over the bacon. Lay meat on rack in roasting pan. (At this point, you can cover meat with aluminum foil or wax paper and refrigerate pan up to 24 hours; bring to room temperature before roasting.) Insert meat thermometer and roast uncovered at 350 F (180 C) for 55 to 60 minutes, or until bacon is crisp and meat thermometer registers 160 to 170 F (70 to 75 C). Cover loosely with a lid or aluminum foil and let stand for five minutes. Carefully remove string, slice in half-inch (1-mm) slices and serve at once.

- Approximate nutritional content per serving: Calories 255. Protein 31.1 g. Fat 10.1 g. Carbohydrates 8.9 g. Dietary fibre 0.6 g.

Source: Rose-Hélène Coulombe, mémorialiste-auteure et Michel Jutras, mémorialiste-auteur

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