



IT
AIN'T
ALL ABOUT THE
COOKIN'

HARD WORK AND A POSITIVE
ATTITUDE PUT PAULA DEEN ON THE
HAPPY ROAD OF UNIMAGINED SUCCESS



DELECTABLE
DELIGHTS

WITH HOLLY HERRICK

IT AIN'T ALL ABOUT THE COOKIN'



Paula Deen photo by Lori Balse.
Provided by Paula Deen & Friends, Simon & Schuster.

Hard Work and a Positive Attitude Put Paula Deen on the Happy Road of Unimagined Success

One of Paula Deen's favorite expressions (and she's got some dandies) is "no stinking thinking." By that she means, think positive and believe in yourself, your talents and your ability to succeed. This motto, along with her infectious grin and hearty laugh, convincingly masks the extremely difficult hurdles that the Food Networks' star matron and cookbook author has overcome in her 59 years.

A native of rural Georgia, Deen's family-rich early years were sweet, though money was in short supply. She married her high-school sweetheart and had two children (boys Jamie and Bobby). Then the troubles began. Her husband proved to be controlling and a poor provider. Both of her parents experienced tragic early deaths, and the crippling grip of agoraphobia entered Deen's life not long after. After being housebound for 20 years, she finally found the courage to put everything behind her and get busy doing what she does best – cook.

Deen started a business called The Bag Lady with \$200 her husband begrudgingly forked over. She prepared bag lunches her sons sold door to door. This eventually morphed into a successful restaurant she named The Lady and Sons in Savannah, Ga., and the rest is history. She tells her story in her latest book, *Paula Deen: It Ain't All About the Cookin'*. I asked Paula about the book, her life, and what she loves about the Lowcountry.

Q: Paula, your agoraphobia was so severe at times you were afraid to leave your house. How did you summon the courage to get over that and move on with your life? How does one do that?

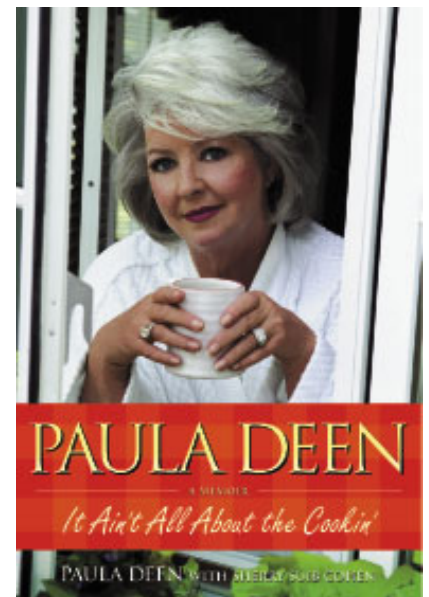
Deen: I was just sick and tired of being sick and tired. I didn't have but one way to go. I was looking at the cheese line and that did not appeal to me. I said, "I'm better than this ... I'm much better than this." I took responsibility for myself for the first time in my life. It was truly a miracle. I was watching one of those doctor shows the other morning and there was a woman suffering from agoraphobia and had been for 15 years. I wanted to shake her and say, you know, don't do this because whatever is going to happen is going to happen. It doesn't matter if you're home or not.

Q: Why was it important to you to share that part of your story and other less-than-perfect, painful aspects of your life in your new memoir?

Deen: If I can tell one person, just one person, it's worth telling. I hid mine. I didn't know it had a name. I thought I was the only person in the world who had it. Then, one day I was watching Phil Donahue doing a show on agoraphobia, and I found out it had a name and that it can be conquered. It was a weight lifted off my shoulders. I thought I had a defect. I didn't want people to know that because I had always been a pretty together girl.

Q: You credit your Grandmother Paul with teaching you how to cook. What do you think were the most important lessons she taught you and how do you employ them today?

Deen: My grandmother got great pleasure from cooking. She was in the restaurant business, so she had to cook for her restaurant. But after my granddaddy died and she lived alone, she still cooked that big meal every day for herself. She loved it. To this day, I associate the kitchen as therapeutic, nurturing. I cooked dinner last night, and I left the kitchen for a little while and damned if I didn't burn everything – I have so much going on right now. I sat down and apologized to my family and Michael [Deen's second husband of three years] said, "Oh, honey, don't worry, we're just thrilled to see you cooking" [laughs].



Paula Deen tells her story in her latest book.

image provided by simon & schuster



Mother, Corrie Hiers; Father, Earl Hiers; Paula Deen; and younger brother, Earl "Bubba" Hiers.

image courtesy of paula deen enterprises

Q: How do you describe your cooking?

Deen: Farmhouse, Southern, plantation-style, home cooking – all those things.

Q: You've lived in Savannah for more than 20 years. Does it feel like home now?

Deen: Oh, I couldn't go back [to her childhood home of Albany, Ga.]. I could never leave Savannah. This is the birthplace of my grandson. I love it. This is home. This town has been so good to me, so supportive. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, and I could never, never be landlocked again.

Q: In your opinion, what makes cooking in the Lowcountry special or different? What are some of your favorite regional products to work with?

Deen: I love the fact that we have so much abundance here. You can just get in your boat and drop a crab pot, pull up some shrimp and crab, and dinner is all but ready. It is just amazing to me. Peaches have always been a big part of my life, and I do love butter! It is so good.

Q: Do you visit the Charleston area often? When you come, what do you like to do?

Deen: I just adore Charleston. In fact, my ancestors landed in Charleston, and I think there are some Pauls [Deen's maternal ancestors] still there. It seems like my great uncle told me that the Civil War was announced in the Paul home over there in Charleston. I feel such a connection to that town. My brother Bubba and I actually came up there to look at property for a restaurant in Charleston, but we chickened out. We realized we didn't have the staff and the backbone to do it at the time. And now, there is just too much on my plate to make it happen.

Q: Paula, you've traveled some difficult roads in your past. You spent years of your life living on very little money, and that's just for starters. Now you're a national celebrity with legions of fans and plenty of money. Do you ever pinch yourself to wake up and make sure you're not dreaming?

Deen: Listen, I do honey [laughs hard]. I'm black-and-blue from pinching myself. I told myself for years that you can do anything. I don't think I was buying into that. I wanted my children to believe it. Now it's happened to me and I just don't believe it. It's fabulous to live in a country where that can happen – where you can come from absolutely nothing and have such success.

Q: Do you have any tips for the rest of us?

Deen: You have to make a lot of sacrifices, work hard and be passionate. We're in an era right now where everybody wants things instantly – lottery tickets, scratch-offs, whatever.

They want that instant wealth, that instant win. Honey, your chances are better to be bitten by a rattlesnake in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean [rolling laughter here]. The best way is the old-fashioned way – roll up your sleeves and get to work.



Paula Deen with her two sons, Bobby (left) and Jamie, on the set of food network.

image courtesy of the Food Network

Paula Deen: It Ain't All About the Cookin' includes a recipe at the end of each chapter. Here's one of Paula's favorites, with a forward written by her:

This is one of the most traditional funeral food offerings in the house. Mrs. Henrietta Dull was born on a plantation in the mid-1860s, and she conducted cooking schools throughout the South, eventually becoming the editor of the Home Economics page in the Atlanta Journal. She was my grandmomma's favorite chef and her tomato aspic was legendary. You couldn't hardly die in style without this aspic served on someone's very best china at the gathering after the funeral. This is Mrs. Dull's recipe, handed down from Grandmomma Paul, as she wrote it.



photography by brennan wesley

Photography by **Brennan Wesley**

Recipe reprinted with the permission of Simon & Schuster.

mrs. dull's tomato aspic funeral food dish

1 quart can tomatoes
A half to whole bunch of celery
One 5¾-ounce bottle of stuffed olives, drained
3 tablespoons of vinegar
1 tablespoon of grated onion
1 tablespoon of salt
1/8 tablespoon of cayenne pepper
1 box Knox gelatin
½ cup cold water

Mash the tomatoes into a pulp, removing any stem pieces; cut celery thin, slice olives thin and add all seasonings. Put the gelatin in the cold water for 10 minutes, then heat over boiling water until melted; add the tomato mixture, turn into a large mold or individual molds to jell in the refrigerator. Rinse the mold with cold water before putting in the mixture so it will unmold easily.

Serve the whole aspic on pretty lettuce leaves, or if you've jelled the aspic in individual jelly glasses, you can unmold each glass and cut the aspic in inch-thick slices – then put on lettuce with a side of mayonnaise.

Remember, this aspic is not cooked at all. You can garnish with asparagus or other fresh vegetables on the side of the plate.



tomato aspic mold prior to slicing.

photography by brennan wesley

Home at the Range with Holly

I love the idea of garnishing Paula's aspic with a bit of horseradish cream sauce. It almost recalls a virgin Bloody Mary taste adventure combined with the olives, tomatoes and celery in the aspic. So, hopefully with Paula's good graces, I put a recipe together to serve on the side or as a generous dollop for a pungent kick on top. Also, those of you who prefer your aspic on the firmer side may want to add an additional Knox gelatin packet to the recipe.

horseradish cream sauce

makes one-half cup

¼ cup whipping cream
1 generous tablespoon prepared horseradish
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

In a cold, medium-sized bowl, whisk together all of the ingredients until thickened and frothy – “stiff” enough to hold gentle peaks. Serve immediately as a garnish or topping.

