



Introduction

Life can certainly take some interesting twists and turns. This time last year, I was planning our family Christmas and looking forward to a couple of weeks by the beach afterwards. I had filled in an online application form for a cooking competition called *MasterChef*, and then forgotten all about it.

In January, I received a phone call to say I had been granted an audition for the show. In February I competed in the top 50 and made it to the finals. In March, I moved into a mansion with nineteen strangers, not knowing that I wouldn't return home for more than four months – and that when I eventually returned, it would be to a profoundly changed life.

Since *MasterChef*, I have been asked hundreds of times what started me cooking, and why I love it so much. As a child, I was taught the basics by Mum and have fond memories of learning to cook pikelets at her side when I was very little. I wasn't given my head too often in the kitchen, though, as I tended to be extremely messy.

When I left home and had my own family, and my own kitchen to mess up, I really started to get into cooking – experimenting, trying to recreate things I had tasted and enjoyed elsewhere, swapping recipes and ideas with my friends. And I learned a fundamental truth about human beings, a truth understood by generations of cooks before me: if you make nice food for people, they love you.

And so I began to realise that being able to cook well meant more than just being able to eat well. I noticed just how pivotal the food was at any gathering, how any celebration or get-together revolved around the dishes served. I began to really observe the kinship that occurs naturally over a shared meal.

I also learned that when I cook with time, and patience, and love, the food tastes so much better than when it is rushed. This lesson came home to me in a very real way during my time in the *MasterChef* kitchen. When I was panicky or fearful, my food reflected my state of mind. I realised that I had to find that serene place within, the calm that cooking brings me, even in the midst of all that chaos. I had to draw on that and bring it to the table. It was only when I understood this that I was able to bring my best effort forward to be judged.

Winning the competition, and in particular being granted the opportunity to write a cookbook, is in every sense a dream come true. It is an opportunity for me not only to record the recipes that my own family loves to eat, but to draw on the diversity and creativity of the people who surround me. Generations ago, extended families tended to live closer together and could count on one another for babysitting, meals, help about the house and garden, whatever was needed. These days we are often far-flung from our families. Although technology has given us connections to people half a world away, we still need to be connected in a real and touchable way to people nearby. This is where friends and community step in and fill what is often a gap in people's lives.

There are so many books available that explore the cutting edge of the food industry: new ingredients, new techniques, new methods of presentation. They are wonderful to read and experiment with. I have many of this type of cookbook and have learned a lot from them – but this book does not explore the new. Rather it is a simple cookbook with simple recipes, a wander through the world of the old and familiar with my family and my friends. It's a revisitation of food and ingredients that have brought comfort in the past. It is a peek into the food memories of others, an opportunity to compare and to remember for ourselves the things that brought us pleasure. Throughout *Our Family Table* you will find stories that all relate, in one way or another, to food. To how food is prepared, or shared, or what it has meant in the lives of the contributors.

The joy that we all found in recalling these stories was a gift in itself. We laughed and cried as long-forgotten tales were dusted off and brought out. Perhaps in remembering the things that made us happy as children we may resurrect some old recipes or rituals for our own children – or even create new ones.

During the writing of *Our Family Table*, we laid to rest my beautiful grandmother, Edna White, and also my far-too-young mother-in-law, Kathleen Goodwin. These losses brought home to me how important it is to talk while we have the chance, to record memories and collate photos and collect old letters and recipes and stories while we still can. So much of what we know is stored only in our minds and is easily lost.

My heartfelt thanks go out to all of the contributors. Reliving the many wonderful moments of our past – the camping, the Christmas feasts, the laughter – has made me so grateful to my mum, Marlene, and dad, Tony. Along with my amazing sister, Debbie, her partner, Kieron, and their gorgeous children, I know we will all continue to celebrate life in a way that always made Nan proud and will continue to do so.

Mick's family was a free-flowing stream of stories about his mum, Kathleen, and his grandma Imelda. Thanks to Mick's siblings, Paul, Liz, Rebecca, Anthony and Ben, and their wonderful partners, Lyn, Steve and Andrea, and all their beautiful children. Mick's uncles, aunts and cousins have also been very forthcoming with their recollections and advice – particularly the Henebery males on the subject of camp cooking and barbecuing. Thanks to Brian, the Photo Finder and Tong Master, as well as Vince, Saul, Andrew, Carmel and Sarah, and Rosemary, the Keeper of the Archive. For all of Mick's family, remembering the past has been joyful but also difficult, in this year of losing Kathleen, beautiful mum, grandmother and beloved sister. I am grateful for their sharing and hope that the book serves in some small way to keep the many good memories alive.

The diversity of culture among our friends is a source of inspiration to all of us as cooks. From Helene's Sri Lankan feast to Megan's Dutch treats and Kylie's Italian delicacies, I love the feeling of bringing not only friends but cultures together around the table. I am grateful to Mary, Natasha, Steph, Daniel, Adam, Vickie, Wayne and

Elizabeth; Louise and her mum, Jan, and their mate, Thelma; and friends of my parents, Cheryl and Gabrielle – all dear friends with an abundance of their own stories, memories and recipes.

Inspiration even flowed from the workplace, with contributions from Rose, Anthony, Leon, Josh, Kyle and Marcus from the team at Loyal I.T. Solutions.

As promised, the last chapter in this book has been left blank. I sincerely hope that you will begin your own collection of stories, recipes, pictures, words and memories. As important as the material itself, is the gathering of it – the sharing. My hope for this book is that you the reader will use the recipes to create delicious food for the people you love. I hope it draws you into the kitchen, and that you enjoy what you cook. But more importantly, I hope it encourages you to start a dialogue with the people in your own life about food and celebrations and the role they have played in your personal history. I hope it sets you on a journey of your own.

Most importantly of all, I hope that it inspires the creation of new memories. I hope it encourages the celebration of community through the sharing of a meal with others. I hope that, just like in generations past, the gift of a meal can bring peace or relief or happiness to someone in need.

It's a big ask for a little book, but these days I have every reason to believe in dreams coming true.

Julie Goodwin, 2010



Mum and Uncle Barry on a camping holiday, with their catch