Foreword

My first meeting with Diana changed both of our lives. I was a young literary editor transplanted from California with a longing for what I assumed was authentic Mexican food, which didn't seem to exist in New York beyond one pricey restaurant. I was eager to meet this British woman anointed by Craig Claiborne, the legendary *New York Times* food journalist, as the one who would, as Julia Child had recently done for French cooking, bring serious Mexican food to the American home kitchen. Diana did not disappoint; she was animated, witty, full of fascinating stories, and wonderfully mischievous. We spent hours and hours talking that afternoon, with Diana taking little breaks to bring me a taste of this or that, all completely new to me and thrilling. Chinese food was the passion of refined palates of the day—1969—and Diana explained in detail how Mexican food was every bit as complex and sophisticated and regionally based. Although I'd never published a cookbook before, by the end of the afternoon I knew that I wanted to publish this landmark of a book she wanted to write, and we began planning it that very day. For both of us, it would be the beginning of many, many cookbooks to come.

We knew we needed a lot of color photographs of this food most Americans had never seen before—as well as the chiles, the utensils, the techniques, everything. That became our first roadblock—no money for that, we were told—so we resorted to feeding the powers that were. Once everyone arrived at Diana's apartment on New York's Upper West Side overlooking the Hudson River, the production manager announced, before taking even a sip of his margarita, that he knew exactly what we were up to, and it wouldn't work—there simply wasn't money in the budget for the kind of volume we had in mind. So let's just enjoy ourselves, he said, and get to know a little more about real Mexican cooking. It was a memorable lunch, not only because of the astonishing food, but because by the time dessert was served, the production manager was holding up Diana's many color slides to the window and saying, "Well, we have to have THAT one . . . and THAT one."

Since no one in New York publishing circles had any idea what we were talking about, we resolved to simply advance the cause at the dining table, and Diana cooked many an extraordinary lunch and dinner for the Book of the Month Club editors,

First demonstration in 1972 for The Cuisines of Mexico at Bloomingdale's in New York City.

the salespeople, various executives, and publicity folk. The high point came at the American Booksellers Association convention in Washington, DC, the year the book *The Cuisines of Mexico* was published. We hosted a dinner for one hundred hand-chosen booksellers from all over the country, with Diana cooking it all over several days in advance, and several of us driving down from New York with her many *cazuelas* and other pots and vessels for a properly authentic presentation. It was all stunning. No one who attended that dinner could stop talking about it afterward, and the book became instantly famous.

As it happened, Diana was in the avant-garde of a movement that brought a serious understanding of authentic cuisines to American cooks. The authors of these books were what one *New York Times* food columnist calls “talented amateurs”—Paula Wolfert on Moroccan food and Marcella Hazan on Italian cooking followed shortly. It was as though the world broke open for American cooks, and we all plunged right in up to our elbows.

Exciting as all this was for me, some of my favorite times spent with Diana centered on teatime, which for her always involves proper British tea, fine Indian Darjeeling, brewed perfectly, some-

thing freshly baked, and possibly some of her famous preserves. If we were working long hours on the manuscript, Diana might suggest a little something—wasn't I feeling peckish?—and it would often be one of her old favorite British dishes, perfectly rendered. There would also be lively dinner parties, and the fare was as likely to be French as it was Italian or Mexican.

I learned early on that Diana had the finest palate I'd ever encountered, and that's still true today. She can taste kosher salt in a dish, or canola oil, or cassia, the cinnamon imposter—all excoriated in her "My Bêtes Noires" section on page 18. Once when my entire family was visiting her in Mexico, she asked if we'd like a salad for dinner—we would, of course—and returned from her garden with some ravishing greens and in a matter of moments threw together an astoundingly good salad that my children still remember decades later. Her own vinegar, naturally, some lovely oil, and exactly the right amount of salt and pepper, all tossed without an extra drop of dressing.

She also quite likes to break all the rules. Once we were roasting a very substantial free-range chicken from the farmers' market. At the time it should have been perfectly done, I pulled it from the oven and started testing: legs moved properly in their sockets, temperature was perfect, no pink juices were running, but Diana said it wasn't done. "How do you know?" I demanded. "I just know," she said. "I think it's at least another half hour." We pulled it out again at the half hour, and she pronounced it done. "How do you know NOW?" I asked. "I just know . . .," and it was just as she said; it was perfectly cooked, and delicious. It's both frustrating and reassuring to know that Diana is nearly always right in her pronouncements—she knows these things in her bones, and she always knows chapter and verse of ingredients and techniques.

On that same visit, I was testing a recipe in someone's book proposal for chicken breasts cooked in

fresh orange juice in the oven with a little garlic, and Diana immediately said, "This person doesn't know how to cook." I had to agree when we tasted the finished dish. But then Diana had an inspiration, and to my horror, tossed the warm chicken/orange/garlic cooking juices into a green salad we were about to serve—divine!

Another time we were up in the Catskills at the country house we owned with some dear friends. At the end of the weekend of scavenging for some wild foods and cooking, of course, we locked up the house for the next week and went off to check out a fascinating house we'd found in a nineteenth-century enclave nearby. Our friend Norma slipped and fell right onto her head, which suffered a long gash. We raced to the hospital, where she was patched up and told to stay in bed, NO getting up, though they really wanted to check her into the hospital. Back at the house, the rest of us sat around downstairs and had a stiff drink while wondering what to do next. Diana went straight to the fridge, where there was nothing to eat, we thought. But in about half an hour, Diana had done a loaves-and-fishes trick with a tiny end of roast pork, half a head of lettuce, and some onions and garlic, plus a little vinegar and chile. The aroma was sensational, and we were just beginning to think about whether we should bring a little plate of it up to the patient, when the nightgowned figure of Norma teetered down the stairs, her head still well wrapped like a mummy's, saying she just had to see what was smelling so delicious two flights up. She later swore she had recovered because she'd had that memorable meal, despite disobeying doctor's orders.

It was all of these things that made me beg Diana to write her personal cookbook, one that would show more of her tastes, tell us more about her life, and show us what an amazing magpie of a cook she is—one of the very few famous cooks who is constantly reading and appreciating other cooks' work. So many times I've had a phone call or an e-mail

from her, excited about a recipe she's just made from a Paula Wolfert book, or a Carol Field Italian book, or one of Claudia Roden's books—those incomparable “talented amateurs.” I wanted all these things and more in *Nothing Fancy*, but really, my secret goal was to share the recipe for Diana's magnificent sticky gingerbread—an addictive dessert if ever there was one.

Diana was quite sure that no one would be interested in her personal cookbook, and it wasn't an easy sell. She'd protest that her food was nothing fancy, nothing anyone would care about, but that was exactly the point, that it's real food of a high order, the kind of food you never get tired of eating. The simpler the dish, though, the more you have to really pay attention to every detail of the recipe, and Diana has a special gift for pointing out the places where disaster might lurk without losing the basic simplicity of the recipe. It's her frank, spirited, even lusty attitude toward cooking that I find so beguiling, and it's most clearly seen in this informal, very personal cookbook.

For this updated edition, there are some superb new recipes, including a brilliant ceviche and a very rare recipe from Ukraine that I haven't been able to find anywhere else published in English. It's a bit like stuffed cabbage rolls, but the “filling” is Ukrainian eggy bread dough, and plump little bits of it are wrapped in fresh beet leaves from the summer garden, then baked in cream. Diana also lets her hair down a bit in this edition, listing her personal *bêtes noires* and speaking directly to the cook in the no-holds-barred candid style her friends know so well.

Diana wasn't dubbed the “scourge of gastronomy” for nothing, of course, and she is famously adamant that things must be done properly. Except when she isn't; she's very open to impromptu substitutions when the perfect ingredient is nowhere

to be found, and she's always up for trying a new way of putting ingredients together—though not if it's an authentic traditional recipe (she has too much respect for native cooks and their culture for that). Her sensibilities are every bit as finely tuned as her palate, and her personal outrage meter is likely to spiral up dangerously when she doesn't like what she sees or hears. For those who can take the heat, there's always something to learn—and almost no one else can or will tell you these things. Often it's done with her trademark sense of humor, an element of her personality people often miss.

At an age when most of her very few contemporaries are sticking close to home and enjoying everyday pleasures, Diana is full steam ahead—constantly traveling, starting new projects, and only just now beginning to think about her legacy. It's a magnificent one. She has almost singlehandedly documented and saved many of the dishes of the authentic regional cuisines of Mexico with the eyes of a botanist and an anthropologist as well as those of a fine cook. She's also screamed long enough and loud enough about ecology in the kitchen that chefs all across the world are finally paying attention and taking responsibility. If a little less kosher salt is sold next year, it will be because of Diana. If consumers stand up and insist on not only organic ingredients but tasty food as well, many of them will have heard her call.

At a recent food festival in Austin, Texas, Diana was introduced, as she invariably is, as the Julia Child of Mexico. After her lively presentation, a fan begged to differ. “No, Diana,” he said, “you're the Mick Jagger of Mexico.” And so, in her incredibly stylish leather pants, she is.

FRANCES MCCULLOUGH

DIANA KENNEDY'S PRINCIPAL EDITOR, 1972–