

Morsels from my Mum

When her mother died, Jules Clancy collected her recipes, some good, some for memory's sake, in a book, **Sarina Talip** writes

One of Sydney food blogger Jules Clancy's earliest memories growing up on a sheep farm 15km outside Gunning was watching the parable of the stone soup on children's television show Humphrey B. Bear.

In it, a hungry and weary traveller arrives at a town, asking the villagers for food. When they refuse, saying they don't even have any for themselves, he makes stone soup in the town square, gathering a crowd, who bring him ingredients like turnips and onions to "add" to the stone soup. The result is a delicious soup that feeds all the villagers.

As a four-year-old, Clancy may have been too young to fully understand the tale, but she will never forget what her mother June Clancy did when she wanted to make her own stone soup.

"I didn't get any of the morals, but I went down to the creek and got a stone and my mum helped me make this soup and chop up veggies," she says.

"We put the stone in the soup but she provided all the extra ingredients that made it actually taste like something."

Clancy cherishes the memory as it reminds her of the way her mother encouraged her daughter's imagination in cooking, an activity that was more passion than chore even though her mother had five children to cook for.

"It gave her a sense of nurturing her family, and her mother, my grandmother, is actually one of the worst cooks I've ever come across. I used to hate going to Nana's place for Sunday lunch," she says laughing.

"So I think mum had taken over the cooking at an early age because she was like, this is pretty bad, surely this isn't how it's meant to be."

When Clancy's mother died of breast cancer in August 2007, Clancy wanted a way to keep her memory alive, and going through her things, she found her old recipe book.

"She used to write in all her favourite recipes. Things that she'd like, she'd rewrite into the book with her variations and twists."

With two of her three sisters, Sarah and Naomi ("Kate isn't into cooking, she's into skiing," Clancy says), she began to collect her mother's recipes into a book.

"Sarah and Naomi are both into cooking so there were a few recipes that they had that weren't in mum's book and that I didn't have so we pitched in together."

At the same time, Clancy had been pursuing her other passion, and photographing the recipes.

"The book turned out really well so I decided to self-publish it to get it out there and share it with more people because I figured there are a lot of people who aren't lucky enough to have such a great mum as a cook."

The result, *And the Love is Free: Mum – a life with recipes*, is filled with simple recipes like "asparagus with poached egg" and "simple roast chook", written in a conversational way, with Clancy easily sharing memories of her mother's unfussy cooking creations.

Clancy's least favourite recipe is one that will resonate with many mothers. It's called "braised beef: aka yuck" after the universal cry when it was served.

The recipes are reminiscent of the simple style of 1970s Australian cooking, the ingredients for "yuck" only blade steak, water, red wine and half a packet of French onion soup.

Packet soup is the secret ingredient in another of the recipes, where a packet of dried chicken noodle soup is mixed with minced beef, onion and capsicum to make "Oriental meatballs".

And Clancy's family was clearly not into curry. Clancy says the recipe for "Junesy's curry" might have come from her Nanna "who wasn't really into her food. I'm sure there aren't many people in India putting Vegemite in their curry, but it makes for an Aussie feel," she writes. The curry has onion, tomato sauce,



June Clancy, Jules Clancy's mother, whose memory has been kept alive in her recipes.

Worcestershire sauce, two cups of chicken stock, one teaspoon of Vegemite, cornflour, sultanas, cooked cold lamb (leftovers from a roast) and only half a teaspoon of curry powder (hardly surprising, Clancy says, given her mother had "one of the most sensitive palates to chilli that I've ever encountered – she thought Dijon mustard was incredibly hot"), and served with bread and butter.

Clancy says, "Simplicity was important to her because she had five children so she was quite busy and there just wasn't a lot of time to spend in the kitchen."

"And also back then, the availability of exotic ingredients in the country, it just really wasn't possible [to create fancy meals], so you just had to keep things simple."

Her mother instilled in her good cooking practices. "She wouldn't ever have described it as a philosophy, but I think her style of cooking was very homey – it was about using good ingredients and things that were fresh."

"Like, we'd use our own lamb, dad would kill a sheep. And she had a herb garden and a veggie garden and she used to also grow strawberries."

"So it was about using what was available, rather than using processed food and things that come out of a can."

"But she was also adventurous, she wasn't afraid to try new things, and was a bit of a traveller, so I think she passed that sense of exploration on to me as well."

Living on a sheep farm helped that sense of exploration. "We just had space and freedom. We were able to ride our bikes anywhere we wanted and to climb trees and build cubby houses."

Working up big appetites, dinner time was an

important part of life. "We were never allowed to eat in front of the TV, and in the evening there were always jobs, like someone had to set the table, and mum would get us to help in the kitchen."

"There'd always be dessert after the meal but of course you have to eat your veggies, and it was just really family time and time to talk about what had been going on in everyone's day."

"But mum often encouraged us to help her cook and often one of us would make the dessert."

There is one dessert in particular in the book that holds special memories for Clancy – lamingtons, which she and her mother would make together for Clancy to take back with her to boarding school.

"Making the lamingtons we'd sit in the kitchen at the bench together and she'd put the chocolate icing on and I'd be rolling in the coconut and we'd have a bit of a chat and catch up."

How does she feel making one of her mother's recipe's now knowing she's gone?

"Really comforted, and supported and nurtured and I feel connected with her still."

Perhaps the most poignant note in the book is alongside a recipe for jam, where Clancy says, "I'm down to my last jar of Mum's blackberry jam and have been saving it for special occasions only. It really is the most perfect jam even though it's about three years old."

■ *And the Love is Free: Mum – a life with recipes*, by Jules Clancy. Available through her website www.thestonesoup.com \$29.95.



June's fig jam

Fig jam was a relatively recent addition to Mum's repertoire. The first few times she made it with green figs which was delicious but I'm thinking black figs would be even better.

3kg figs
2kg sugar
½ cup white vinegar

Top and tail figs and chop into chunks. Add sugar and leave to stand overnight. Add vinegar, bring to the boil and cook briskly for two to three hours or until jam sets when tested (see below). Divide hot jam between clean glass bottles that have been sterilised in the dishwasher and seal immediately. Store in a cool dark place.

Busy-day pudding

Serves 6

We had a cleaning lady at one stage. We were all scared of her because once, when we were really little, she made my sister clean up after herself when she had been sick. But there was a good thing

about our cleaning lady and that was that she gave Mum this steamed pudding recipe. Lighter and less dense than a Christmas pudding, it was a favourite winter treat served with custard, ice cream, cream or all three. I'm pretty sure Mum usually just used sultanas but sometimes she'd mix in chopped dates or currants.

2 tbsp golden syrup
2 tbsp butter
¾ cup milk
½ tsp bicarb soda
1 ½ cups self-raising flour
pinch salt
½ cup or more of any dried fruit

In an aluminium pudding steamer, melt together golden syrup and butter. Add milk in which soda has been dissolved. Add sifted flour, salt and fruit. Beat until light and well mixed. Cover and place in saucepan of boiling water, with the water only coming halfway up the steamer and simmer for one to one-and-a-quarter hours, adding extra boiling water to saucepan if necessary.

Burnt custard

I am a massive custard fan. It's lovely on its own or poured over pudding.

4 cups whole milk
2 eggs
2 tbsp sugar
2 tbsp cornflour
2 tbsp golden syrup

Boil milk. Beat eggs, sugar, cornflour and golden syrup. Add milk, return to stove and cook, stirring frequently over a medium heat until thickened but not boiling.

■ Recipes from *And the Love is Free*, by Jules Clancy.

