



The Joy of Cooking

Irma Rombauer

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The Joy of Cooking is one of the United States' most-published cookbooks, and has been in print continuously since 1936 and with more than 18 million copies sold. It was privately published in 1931 by Irma S. Rombauer, a homemaker in St. Louis, Missouri, who was struggling emotionally and financially after her husband's suicide the previous year. Rombauer had 3,000 copies printed by A.C. Clayton, a company which had printed labels for fancy St. Louis shoe companies and for Listerine, but never a book. In 1936, the book was picked up by a commercial printing house, the Bobbs-Merrill Company. Joy is the backbone of many home cooks' libraries and is commonly found in commercial kitchens as well. In 1931, Rombauer, a recent widow needing a way to support her family, self-published "The Joy of Cooking: A Compilation of Reliable Recipes with a Casual Culinary Chat." The book was illustrated by Rombauer's daughter, Marion Rombauer Becker, who directed the art department at John Burroughs School. Working on weekends during the winter of 1930-31, Marion designed the cover, which depicted St. Martha of Bethany, the patron saint of cooking, slaying a dragon. She also produced silhouette cutouts to illustrate chapter headings. Much slimmer and more conversational than later editions, the original Depression-era edition included sections on canning, pickling, and instructions on how to use meats such as squirrel, opossum and raccoon.

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