

Soups & Bread

COOKBOOK



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Soup & Bread

COOKBOOK

Building Community One Pot at a Time

MARTHA BAYNE

DESIGN BY SHEILA SACHS | ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL DOLAN

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On a raw evening in Chicago, in the middle of March, the back room of one little bar is a happy mess of connections—social networking embodied, no wifi required.

In that room, in the glow of strings of twinkly lights and under the silent gaze of several stuffed and mounted fish, you'd find a find a gardener, a mom, and an actor, a writer and a farmer, a country singer, a social worker, and 75 others eating, talking, and standing in line. A harried bartender is spilling drinks and crumbs are flying as a graphic designer runs a knife through a baguette. A Michelin-starred chef shares cooking tips with a vegan barista. A DJ spins deep cuts of obscure R&B and at least two kids—maybe more, hard to tell—are running around in a ginger-ale-fueled frenzy.

The gardener runs the program at the school where the kids grow peppers. She's working on a new project with the writer, who's chatting up an editor, and introducing her to the kids' mom, who brought her friend the musician. He's an avid home baker, a loaf of fresh sourdough under his arm, and the actor tries to distract him long enough to snag a bite. Across the room, the social worker—who's friends with the gardener—is chatting with the DJ, whom she knows from back in the day, but she's interrupted by the chef, who is wondering if the DJ does parties.

Faded cotton tablecloths and candles in colored globes dress up tables of varying sizes, and over on a small rolling bar, dollar bills—ones, fives, the occasional twenty—pile up in a busted Crock-Pot, vintage 1974. At the rear of the room a hand-painted wooden sign hangs above an empty stage. For now the action is in front of the stage, where two long tables provide the catalyst for all this good cheer.

Behind the tables stand half a dozen apron-clad cooks, wielding ladles and fielding questions. Before them diners file past, clutching paper bowls and jockeying for space.

What's on the table? On the table is soup.

Now, soup is an all-purpose dish. It's nutritious, inexpensive, and infinitely variable.



It can be an earthy meal in a chipped pottery bowl or an elegant palate cleanser, frothed into a porcelain cup. It can showcase the explosive flavor of fresh spring peas and provide refuge for tired celery and stale bread. It soothes the sick, it nourishes the poor—and it can trick children into eating their veggies. But perhaps more than any other food, soup can also be a powerful tool: drawing people together and helping them reach out to others.

You're probably familiar with the “stone soup” fable—the tale of hungry townspeople who feed themselves when each contributes a measly carrot or potato to the pot. I think I first heard it in preschool, when it served as the foundation of a lesson in cooperation and sharing. As an adult I've come across it in multiple cookbooks, where the moral of the story skews more toward the way cooking can create dishes that are greater than the sum of their parts. The true power of soup, I believe, falls somewhere in the middle—in its ability to serve as both potent metaphor and cheap, tasty dinner.

I began to learn this firsthand a few years ago, after I had left my job as an alt-weekly editor on the food beat, moved to Wisconsin, and tried to write a book about an experiment in sustainable agriculture and its effects on a tiny island community. That didn't work out so well, and by the winter of 2009 I was back in Chicago and tending bar at the Hideout, a ramshackle, Depression-era tavern on a dusty industrial street.

The Hideout is one of the city's coziest and most eclectic music clubs, showcasing everything from country punk to experimental jazz on the little stage in the back. But early Wednesday evenings, when I was on duty, there wasn't anything to do but polish the pint glasses. Garbage trucks and snowplows lumbered down Wabansia Street round the clock, en route to a city garage, but what little happy-hour business I saw came mainly from shoppers at the nearby Home Depot. But that winter the recession hit the city hard, and even thirsty home remodelers were scarce. It was cold. I was lonely. And then one night it occurred to me to serve soup.

I asked around and some friends said sure—they'd come out on Wednesdays if

there was food. So I thrifted a bunch of mismatched bowls and started a blog and a Facebook page to get the word out. Thanks to my work as a food writer, I knew a lot of cooks, professional and not, and I hit them up to contribute. “Bring a couple gallons of soup some Wednesday,” I said. “Any kind of soup at all. We’ll have day-old bread and hot soup and it’ll be fun, and we’ll take a collection for a good cause. It’s called, ‘Soup & Bread.’”

On the first night I wasn’t sure what to expect. It was the Wednesday after New Year’s, it was snowing, and a gas main had broken down at the corner. A friend had surprised me with a load of secondhand slow cookers at Christmas, and when I showed up to plug them in the entire block was lousy with fire engines and hazmat trucks. But despite this confusing scene a handful of determined diners navigated the roadblock and found their way to the bar. They shook off the snow and perched on stools to slurp soups donated by one of the other bartenders, by a friend’s pastry chef sister, and by a nearby café. The food was free, but we put out a bucket for donations, and we collected more than \$100 for the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

It wasn’t a disaster. In fact, it was kind of a hit. Even the gas company guys came by for a bowl.



Since then, for three winters running, the Hideout has hosted a weekly Soup & Bread feast, courtesy of professional and amateur cooks—musicians and artists, restaurateurs and farmers, writers, parents, food geeks, and friends—all of whom donate homemade soup

to serve along with donated bread to crowds of 100 or more. Diners are free to contribute a dollar or 20—whatever they can afford—and the take is passed along to local food pantries, a different one each week. It’s an easy, low-key way to get people out of the house and socializing in the dead of darkest winter, and as word has spread we’ve raised more than \$13,000 (so far) for a critical cause. According to a recent report from the nonprofit Feeding America, an estimated 37 million people nationwide now rely on food from food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens—a 46 percent increase in over just four years.

When people ask, I usually describe Soup & Bread as an “everybody wins” type of project. Diners get food, cooks get glory, the bar gets business, and the food pantries



get funds. “Soup & Bread is permaculture,” Los Angeles-based writer and “urban homesteader” Erik Knutzen told me once. Because what is permaculture other than the creation of a self-sustaining, mutually beneficial system?

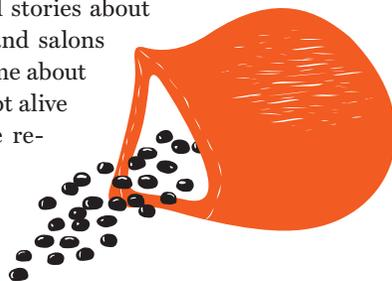
At Soup & Bread we’re not going to school you in the virtues of local, seasonal cooking, but there are many farmers and sustainable food advocates in the mix. We’re not out to celebrate celebrity, but some of Chicago’s hottest chefs have hopped on board. It reflects the current craze for off-the-grid eating, expressed by everything from underground dinners and food trucks to charitable DIY events like Brooklyn’s annual “Pie in the Park” fundraiser. It’s a gentle way of raising popular awareness about poverty, hunger, and nutrition. And, of course, it’s fun.

It was so much fun, in fact, that along with my friend Sheila Sachs I took it on the road to Brooklyn in 2010. That hazy, joyous night at the Bell House raised \$900 and had me scrubbing Crock-Pots over a slop sink surrounded by strippers wearing not too much besides tattoos and sequined pasties. We hit the road again a year later, journeying to Seattle to the Fun House, a great little punk bar in the shadow of the Space Needle.

At the end of Soup & Bread’s first year I asked Sheila—the graphic designer with the bread knife—to help me compile recipes from Soup & Bread cooks into a cookbook. We were inspired by the community cookbooks our moms had had when we were kids—those mimeographed fundraisers for the parish or middle school loaded with recipes for crab dip and green bean casserole—only our community was, you know, a bar.

The book was spiral-bound with a letterpress cover and illustrations by our friend Paul Dolan. It was also, if I may say so, super cute. For a year or so we set up shop at craft fairs all over Chicago and sold copies on consignment around town. Out of town, we enlisted our moms as regional sales reps. Now it’s clean out of stock.

As we got out in the world and talked to people about Soup & Bread, people started seeking us out to talk soup. We heard stories about regional soup traditions, about soup swaps and salons and family soup Sundays. My friend Ben told me about a soup circle he and his friends started and kept alive for several years. And my college housemate reminded me, to my amnesiac amazement, that for a while senior year we tried to instigate a Friday soup dinner as an alternative to



the pizza and beer that dominated campus weekends.

Soup, in short, is everywhere.

Why does something so simple resonate with so many people? I think in part because it sits so snugly at the intersection of a lot of cultural trends. Map a Venn diagram of the recession, the boom in home cooking, and increased awareness of the lifelong benefits of good nutrition, and in the middle you'll find a bowl of soup.

That's where this book comes in—a revised and expanded edition of the first self-published cookbook of recipes from Soup & Bread nights paired with stories about soup and other soup projects. (As with the first Soup & Bread Cookbook, a portion of the proceeds from sales of this book will be donated to the Greater Chicago Food Depository.)

As a food writer I've always been more interested in the stories behind the stuff on your plate than in mastering new levels of adjectival gymnastics to describe the taste of tuna. So as a writer-turned-soup-wrangler, I set out to talk to people about their soup stories, and to collect evidence that now, perhaps more than ever, soup is bringing people together to serve a common good.

The concept's been around forever—or since the Middle Ages, at least—when European monasteries offered free soup and bread to hungry petitioners at the gate. More recently, of course, the soup line is a defining image of the Great Depression, when soup kitchens nationwide provided hot meals to millions of struggling Americans. But not every soup project is steeped in history. Here in Chicago, the power of soup has been harnessed to fund grants for artists and to spread the gospel of local, sustainable, seasonal eating.

Soup can be a political statement: the radical volunteers of Food Not Bombs (the subject of Chapter Seven) have been providing free vegetarian soup to the hungry as a protest against war and social injustice since 1980.

Or it can be performance art: In 2003 Bill Drummond, who once burned £1 million



cash as front man for the prankish pop band the KLF, launched an erratic performance piece called the “Soup Line,” in which he traveled to the homes of complete strangers across Britain and Ireland and cooked them a pot of soup. (There’s more about that in Chapter Five.)

Soup can be a way to strengthen social ties. According to sociologist Juliet Schor, soup swaps (Chapter Two) are a micro-manifestation of how the recession has inspired communities to come together. “Soup may seem like a small thing,” she told National Public Radio in 2010. “But it may turn out that your sharing network is very important to you if you lose your job, if your housing is in jeopardy. You’re going to have these folks to rely on.”

Soup can be a way of fostering a connection to home and family (Chapter One), or just a means of honing your culinary skills to feed your friends (Chapter Eight).

“It’s simple and it’s mutually comprehensible to anyone,” one of the members of InCUBATE, a Chicago arts collective, told me, talking about their Sunday Soup fundraising project (also Chapter Five). “The nice thing is there’s a simple core that people can layer their own concerns, issues, ways of working on top of. And just because the thing at the middle is simple, it doesn’t mean everything else can’t be more complicated or contextually specific.”

I don’t think he realized at the time that he could have been talking about soup itself.

All these soup-based efforts have in common the desire to extend hospitality to all comers. To forge community in the moment, over the table, or across years. And they are, I’ve come to see, as forgiving and flexible as soup itself. They feed crowds, raise money, stimulate creativity, and—like the Campbell’s ad says, help you “get to a happier place.”

Lisa Lee is the executive director of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, whose Re-Thinking soup project is the subject of Chapter Six. In our wide-ranging conversation about community, history, and social justice, and about the responsibility of cultural institutions to “foster radical democracy,” we talked about the strange power of soup to stir all these ideas into one easy-to-digest pot.

“It’s not easy to have a soup kitchen in a bar,” she said. “Like, really? It is hard. But it’s also super joyful, right?”

She’s right. It is. And it sure beats polishing pint glasses.

There’s a whole lot more about Soup & Bread on our website at soupandbread.net.

ABOUT THE RECIPES IN THIS BOOK

Soup & Bread depends on the creative energies of an always awesome and forever growing crew of volunteer cooks, and so does this book. Every recipe found within (with the exception of one, just to prove the rule) was prepared for and served at a Soup & Bread dinner in Chicago, Brooklyn, or Seattle. Taken as a whole it's a document of what we ate, with whom—a true community cookbook that reflects the way people talk about cooking and eating.

Of course, it's intended to be a useful guide to cooking as well. To that end I've tried to present directions as clearly as possible, pestering contributors to pin down the size of that “can of beans,” and find out just how long “cook all day” means. I hope I've preserved the cooks' idiosyncratic voices. Any errors or misjudgments made in that effort are my own.

Structurally, this book is a little loose compared to traditional cooking primers. Recipes are organized not by ingredients, but by associations—and pork, chicken, squash, and split peas may often wantonly rub up against each other in the same chapter, or the same recipe. To make things easy, all the recipes are listed in the back by type: poultry, seafood, the various meats, and vegan and vegetarian-friendly soups. For the latter, you may need to just trade the chicken stock for vegetable.

And, it's true: While the title of the book promises soup and bread, bread is comparatively underrepresented. To help you find the bread recipes awash in all this soup, they've been indexed as well, and are italicized in the table of contents.

Most of the recipes are pretty simple, but even the fancier ones are accessible to an ambitious home cook, and few require any special gear beyond a large stockpot and a ladle. But a couple of handy gadgets do pop up here and there—most notably blenders. Throughout, if a recipe directs you to “blend” or “puree” you've got two options: Carefully decant your soup into a stand blender, in batches, or use a hand-held immersion blender (a “stick blender”) to puree in the pot.

Other useful tools include cheesecloth and a chinois, the fine-mesh conical sieve that's a staple of restaurant kitchens and a boon if you want to smooth a pureed soup to a velvety polish; and a mandoline, which can make slicing veggies a breeze.

Finally, though every effort has been made to ensure that recipes are original to their creators, recipes are not subject to copyright protection (though the language used to describe them is). Per the guidelines of the International Association of Culinary Professionals, we've given credit for creative adaptations as due. Beyond that I can only hope that any established cook who stumbles upon a vaguely familiar recipe in this book will appreciate the homage.

CHAPTER ONE

Soup
from
Home





In the down-at-heel dining room of a former convent on Chicago's far north side, dinner was served. Senegalese Afropop blasted from the CD player, and an ebullient toddler bounced underfoot as a dozen men, women, and teenage girls hustled in and out of the kitchen, setting the table with limeade and salad and a huge pan of chilaquiles.

The convent is home to the Heartland Alliance's Marjorie Kovler Center, a human-rights organization providing support to survivors of torture as they build new lives in Chicago. Every other Friday the center hosts what's known, without fuss, as "cooking night"—at which a different cook prepares a meal from his or her homeland. In attendance this particular night were diners from Togo and Haiti, Eritrea and Pakistan—and between the music and the teenagers and the polyglot of language it was hard to get a word in edgewise. But when I mentioned that I was working on a cookbook about the ways people conjure community through soup—people around the world, I added, with the bravado of the generalist—one woman, a volunteer, piped up.

"There's no soup in Côte d'Ivoire."

What did I know? Why would a hot West African country have any use for soup? But it turned out, I discovered later, that soup truly is universal. From pho to gazpacho to gumbo, soup is everywhere. Even in Côte d'Ivoire, where, it's true, most meals are built around cassava and plantains, a host might trot out a chilled avocado soup for a special occasion. "The truth is," says Janet Clarkson, in her compact and thoroughly enjoyable *Soup: A Global History*, "the idea of soup is not even vaguely unfamiliar to anyone, anywhere, on this entire planet."

Soup, Clarkson argues, is the foundation of civilization. Cultures worldwide learned to cook by boiling grains in water. Over time they added vegetables and, on occasion, meat. And from the porridges and potages of the early days evolved split pea soup and congee, mushroom barley and groundnut stew. Now even Antarctica can lay claim to a signature soup—a tasty "hooch" of pemmican, oatmeal, and water, seasoned perhaps

with seal blubber, cherished by explorers and ceremonially eaten on Midsummer's Day.

While Antarctic explorers may not miss their hooch once they're off the ice, soup can conjure powerful associations. The Kovler Center's cooking night is a means of fostering a sense of security and community among traumatized, displaced people through the universal ritual of creating and sharing a meal. I wound up there because some of the center's clients had brought soup to Soup & Bread earlier in the year. One of them, Chantal Powell, a chic young woman with a head of luxurious braids, brought Haitian Independence Soup, a treat from her native Haiti.

Also known as "soupe giraumont" or, in Creole, "soup joumou," the rich, mildly spicy puree of pumpkin or squash and beef was, under French colonial rule, a delicacy for the rich; enslaved Africans had to stretch their soup with bread and scraps of inferior meat. Now soupe giraumont is eaten every New Year's Day across Haiti—and in Haitian communities around the world—to celebrate the day that country won its independence and became the world's first free black republic. (See page 5 for Chantal's rendition.)

In other contexts, soup can connect families to their roots. Mariana Glusman's grandmother fled the pogroms in Ukraine as a teenager and wound up with one sister in Argentina. The rest of her family was set to follow, but the Iron Curtain crashed down and it was 50 years before the sisters saw their siblings again. Though the family eventually moved from Argentina to Mexico City, where Mariana was born, to the United States, the recipe for grandma's borscht was passed along. "It's cool," says Mariana, a pediatrician in Chicago. "Soup is the one thing that remains of a culture that's lost to my family. It's a legacy of something long gone." Mariana's parents still serve borscht on special occasions, but thanks to Mariana's peripatetic background, it's not beets but chicken tortilla soup that's her go-to comfort food.

Lawyer Peter Tyksinski, raised in suburban Chicago, has similar cross-cultural soup cravings. He's lived in Tokyo for almost six years and has learned to enjoy miso soup every morning for breakfast. But on the weekends he prepares the split pea and bean soups he craves from home. "I can trace my first memories of soup to my mom's rendition of green split pea with a giant ham hock," he says. "Prying the meat out from under the tough ribbon of skin and eating it was a perverse joy. As wonderful as Japanese soups can be, there is something much more fulfilling about making my own."

My friend Irma Nuñez also lived in Japan for many years. She recalls longingly the pleasures of her favorite ramen shops, on a bustling ring road near her first Tokyo apartment. "It was so amazingly good and comforting," she says, that even after she moved across town she would regularly trek back to Nogata for ramen. Nowadays, she treks to the Asian malls in Chicago's far suburbs for a fix of the real thing. And she does

so in spite of an intolerance for gluten. “I could live without pizza and cheeseburgers,” she says. “But I don’t think I can say the same for ramen.”

Like Irma’s ramen shops—whose offerings changed depending what side of the street you were on—soups around the world reflect the peculiarities of their region and their cooks. Just ask an insider about the difference between Filipino lugao and Thai khao tom (page 10) and—or any number of similar rice porridges found across Asia. Or Russian and Polish borscht (page 16). Or, heck, Manhattan and New England clam chowder (page 20).

These idiosyncrasies are part of why soup can be a touchstone of home. A few years ago my friend Shana, a Jewish girl from Saint Louis, married Simo, a Muslim from Marrakech. While they were courting Simo told Shana of his mother’s cooking—lavishing praise on her harrira, the lamb stew eaten during Ramadan to break the fast. When Shana went to Morocco to meet the family, harrira was the first thing her future mother-in-law cooked for her.

“It was clear after I tasted it,” says Shana, “that I was going to have to learn to cook it myself.”

Harrira (page 6) is traditionally eaten at sundown across Morocco during Ramadan—or after a long night of partying at a wedding. Everyone makes it differently, Simo says. “But it’s always a collective event. Harrira is about generosity. You always make sure to make extra, so that there’s some for people who are hungry.”

When Simo and Shana’s son was born, Simo’s mother, LaZahra, came to Chicago to help care for the baby. Shana does the grocery shopping and LaZahra does most of the cooking, schooling her daughter-in-law in the finer points of Moroccan cuisine.

Now, says Simo, “when I see my mom making harrira, I feel like family is here, and I am so happy.”

Following are 14 recipes for soups that can deliver a potent sense of place, whether that place is halfway around the world or just down the interstate. They’re paired with a recipe for “free-range” sourdough bread, a bread technique as old as cooking itself.