Healthful Cooking Made Easy

There’s an app for that

LONG BEFORE COOKING became a competitive sport, Deborah Chud’s grandmother was a top chef in her own right—a restaurant owner and caterer who created sophisticated sauces and exquisite, multilayered wedding cakes.

“She was the sort of chef who in those days used wine in cooking,” says Chud (MED’84) of her paternal grandmother, Leah Friedson, who lived in Florida. “When my mother met her in 1949, Leah was making stuffed breast of veal with dry white wine. She braised her brisket in dry red wine, rather than the syrupy sweet red stuff that most people served at Passover and Rosh Hashanah.”


Those foodie genes have apparently passed to Chud, a cook, food blogger, and cookbook author who is using technology in ways Leah Friedson could never have conceived of.

With the help of six BU students, Chud has launched Trufflhead, a healthy cooking app for iPhones and iPads with nearly 300 recipes, as well as techniques and tips, all aimed at inexperienced and intermediate cooks.

The companion website, which is at www.trufflhead.com, includes a featured recipe from the app, a “tour” of ingredients and equipment, a section for questions and answers, and blogs written by Chud, as well as other foodies, dieticians, and nutritionists.

The idea, says Chud, is to show college students and young professionals not just how to follow healthy recipes, but how to become a healthy cook. It’s personal for Chud, who has a 25-year-old son.

Toward that end, the app has lots of the basics. In 170 slideshows, Chud demonstrates how to strain, mince, seed, chop, slice, trim, and cube, among other techniques. An ingredients library explains how to choose and store all manner of produce, from acorn squash to zucchini. The app also includes a table of measurements, a list of recommended equipment, tips on food safety, and information on buying organic foods, using sweeteners, and calculating your carbon footprint.

But basic doesn’t mean bland. Many recipes reflect Chud’s love of ethnic foods, such as cauliflower soup with Moroccan spices, ceviche with avocado, Cuban shrimp, curried mango chicken thighs, five-spice chicken stir-fry, and Korean-style hot pepper meat bundles.

“I cook more ethnic foods than I used to,” says Chud. “Indian cooking is very compatible with my healthy food orientation, because it’s not as fat-dependent as European cuisines are.”

STUDENT HELP

While Chud has been at home in the kitchen since she was 10, cooking didn’t become a professional interest until much later.

She studied English at Harvard and went on to earn an MD at BU’s School of Medicine in 1984. She was married as an intern, became pregnant while doing a residency in psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, and left the field for good in 1988.

Over the next 20 years, Chud cooked and began doing work for ZonePerfect Nutrition, founded by the creator of the Zone diet (“a moderate protein, moderate carbohydrate, low-fat diet,” she says). She published a cookbook, The Gourmet Prescription, and created a website, A Doctor’s Kitchen (www.adoctorskitchen.com), with a new recipe every week and videos and strategies on how to reduce fat and calories.

By 2009, she was thinking about writing another cookbook and creating a companion website aimed at inexperienced cooks. Her publicist suggested the app. Even though she’d never used one, she says, “I knew he was right.”

She and Gabe Stein (CAS’11), the BU student she’d hired as webmaster for A Doctor’s Kitchen, began brainstorming. She hired a developer, and, over time, five more BU students to help launch the app and www.trufflhead.com. Brian Sirman (CAS’02, MET’08, GRS’13) typed up the recipes so they were in the proper format for the web developers, compiled master lists of ingredients, equipment, and tags, tested the functions, and did a lot of proofreading.

Like Stein, Sirman often turns to the app in the kitchen. “I’ve cooked several of the recipes,” he says. “My favorites so far are the different variations of sleepover oats, which I make for breakfast at least two or three times every week.”

That’s the kind of review Chud likes to hear. Her mission, she acknowledges, is grandiose. “I would love to teach my son’s generation to cook healthfully,” she says. “And I believe I can.”

Cynthia K. Buccini

WEB EXTRA

Deborah Chud’s recipe for tilapia agrodolce is at bu.edu/bostonia.