

AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY

A series that profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time



Margaret Fulton

1924-

Cookery Writer

This program is an episode of **Australian Biography** Series 6 produced under the National Interest Program of Film Australia. This well-established series profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time. Many have had a major impact on the nation's cultural, political and social life. All are remarkable and inspiring people who have reached a stage in their lives where they can look back and reflect. Through revealing in-depth interviews, they share their stories—of beginnings and challenges, landmarks and turning points. In so doing, they provide us with an invaluable archival record and a unique perspective on the roads we, as a country, have travelled.

Australian Biography: Margaret Fulton

Directors/Producers Robin Hughes, Linda Kruger

Executive Producers Sharon Connolly, Megan McMurchy

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Study guide prepared by Darren Smith © Film Australia

Also in Series 6: Eva Burrows, Bruce Dawe, Elizabeth Durack
Jimmy Little, B.A. Santamaria

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For more information about Film Australia's programs, contact:
Film Australia Sales, PO Box 46 Lindfield NSW 2070

Tel 02 9413 8634 Fax 02 9416 9401 Email sales@filmaust.com.au

www.filmaust.com.au

SYNOPSIS

Margaret Fulton was the first and greatest of the Australian celebrity cookery writers. As the world opened up again after World War Two and a wider range of foodstuffs began to arrive in the shops, it was Margaret Fulton, through her magazine columns and later her cook-books, who showed the nation how to cook in new and exciting ways. It was largely through her inspiration and example that younger Australians realised the pleasurable and creative possibilities of fine dining. Our national cuisine was transformed.

For Margaret Fulton, the great pleasure of cookery writing was to bring good food into ordinary homes. She was never interested in writing for an elite. Instead she concentrated on 'bringing magic' into everyday living through better everyday eating.

A passionate traveller, she is credited with being one of the first people to bring international cuisine to the Australian table. Both in her career and personal life, Fulton has sought out the 'good life', and from this delicious interview it seems that she has finally found it.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at middle to senior secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include Personal Development, Legal Studies, Home Economics, Careers Education, Design and Technology, Visual Arts, English, Business Studies and Studies in Society and Environment.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Vocational Paths

The interview gives a glimpse of a person's journey towards an unorthodox profession. Margaret Fulton is not just a cook, but a writer and presenter of food, making her story a fascinating example for thinking about career paths.

Her journey was neither fully planned nor smooth. Rather, it was a mix of formal training and experience in non-culinary work. After leaving school, she trained in Sydney as a home economist and soon after worked in advertising. In many ways, Fulton's direction formed out of blending together her skills in these two areas.

One of the first details she reveals of herself is that, according to Chinese horoscope, she was destined to be around food. Whether or not we accept this prediction, it is certainly true that she held a strong belief in what she wanted. Her affinity for food and cooking flowed across her personal and professional life.

There are many things that influence people's decisions about their career or vocational directions. Similarly, there are many things that influence the journey there. Formal training is an important factor, but not the only one. Aside from her confidence, there were at least two other major influences for Fulton: personal and professional relationships, and being open-minded about new or unplanned opportunities.

Discussion questions

- How were personal and professional relationships important in Fulton's vocational journey? Give an example.
- What other factors influence the direction of a person's career?
- Fulton's career is quite unique in many ways. How is it different from other careers? How does the career goal influence the strategy for getting there?

- Do you think intelligence is a guarantee of achieving career aspirations? What does Fulton say about this?
- What do you think was the key to Fulton's success?

Success

Margaret Fulton may not provide a recipe for success, but she certainly offers some of the ingredients. She also shows us the many forms success can take. The interview explores some very different ideas about what success actually is and how it is measured.

People are successful in all kinds of pursuits and fields. The most notable success stories are ones in the 'public eye'—actors, sports people, musicians, politicians, business leaders and other high-profile people. Fame and public recognition are common standards with which success is often measured. However, this usually turns upon what the public at the time value and how much exposure the person has. So, while fame says a lot about a person's social status or the society we live in, it is not a true indicator of success.

We may also think about success in terms of money or financial gain. Money was undeniably important to Fulton, but it was neither a measure of her success nor an end in itself.

Fulton discusses a time when she had little money, commenting: 'what you can do with a buoyant disposition and imagination and intelligence...hard work and milking the goats...it was a marvellous time...' She later indicates a preference for 'magic' over money.

Feeling successful and satisfied is important for us all. Just as we can have very different desires and wishes, so too the picture of success and measure of success will differ from person to person.

Discussion questions

- A moment of recognition for Fulton was when the Prime Minister chose her Manor to host a high-level meeting of foreign dignitaries. How did this affect her?
- What does she have to say about money as a measure of success? Do you think money has anything to do with success?
- How else does society measure success? Do you think it should be measured in other ways? How do you measure your own achievements?
- Do you believe in failure?
- What are some of the ingredients of success?

CONSUMING PASSIONS

Food

'I discovered this wonderful world,' says Fulton, describing her first exposure to cooking.

Food is more than just sustenance or nourishment—it is indeed a world of wonder. Across all human cultures, food has a mythology of its own. Historically, food has been used to express important cultural ideas, and continues to do so.

Food can be consumed not only with our mouths, but also with our eyes. How many times has the look of some food convinced you to eat it? Artists, poets and writers have all been inspired by the visual allure of food. One of the most popular subjects of painting in history is a bowl of fruit. A 16th century painter, Arcimboldo (1537–93), painted pictures using images of all kinds of foods.

Appetite and desire are often represented through food—for example, a golden apple in the Adam and Eve story. Food is also used to express passion, warmth or love between people. In movies such as **Chocolat** and **Babette's Feast**, food brings passion and warmth to people who were otherwise estranged.

Discussion questions

- What other abstract or emotive ideas does food express? Think about religion, art, movies, books or advertisements.
- How does food take on a special meaning during religious or cultural festivals?
- Given that we can only see and/or hear advertisements, how is food sold using the visual and aural?
- Why do you think food is so 'magical' across cultures?

Cuisine

Fulton's greatest contribution has been introducing new cuisine into Australian homes. Since her childhood days stirring custard, through to television, her main concern has been cooking, and writing and presenting on cooking. It is a culinary journey she shared with many Australians.

Cuisine concerns the style and method of cooking. It covers everything from preparation techniques, such as chopping or baking, to presentation. It is also about knowing what is possible to achieve with food. There are many different styles of cooking, from the culturally different, the more affordable and practical, and to the more indulgent and artistic.

Over the past 50 years, Australian cuisine has undergone radical changes. Fulton was very influential in this, introducing new cuisine from all over the world, particularly Europe and East Asia. Other cooks, such as Bernard King and Stephanie Alexander, have had a similar impact on the food we eat.

Another major influence on Australia's cuisine was immigration. Migrants from the world over have made a huge difference to what we eat. Australia now has a strong reputation for its diverse tastes in food.

This trend has its impact right down to people's kitchens. Writers such as Fulton have made cooking easier, especially non-traditional cuisine. Stephanie Alexander, for example, has written a number of books for young adults, giving them an understanding of what to do with fresh food. This includes a program for school students.

Cooking shows, recipe books and food writing continue to build Australia's gastronomical culture.

Discussion questions

- What reasons does Margaret Fulton give for the popular appeal of her show and books in Australia?
- Can you think of other writers or presenters of cuisine? What do you think is the basis of their public appeal?
- What do you think makes a cooking show successful?
- How have migrants had an influence on Australian cuisine? Can you think of any other things that contribute to Australia's international status for cuisine?
- What would make cooking attractive to younger people? Why is cooking an important skill?

MEDIA STUDIES

Advertising

An important career move for Fulton was her decision to work in advertising. She took the advice of her brother-in-law to 'go where to money is'. Advertising is a less obvious, but significant part of writing and presenting in the media. The interview raises interesting questions concerning the relationship between advertising and the media.

As Fulton points out, advertising lies behind most forms of media, whether print or broadcast. It provides the revenue for media groups to operate and disseminate information at little or no cost to the consumer of information. Advertising can take the form of television or radio commercials, print advertisements, product samples and classifieds.

The media is a very valuable method for people and companies to promote their products. It is a network of communication that can reach both a mass audience or a more select or 'targeted' one. It is also a source of news, current affairs and entertainment. For most of us, it is a point of contact with a world beyond our eyes, a place for discussion and our main source of information about political and social concerns.

As advertising has grown, its place in the media has sparked a great deal of criticism. Some suggest that the lines between what is advertising and what is information are becoming blurred. The 'Cash for Comment' scandal of 2000 went to the heart of this criticism, causing greater public scrutiny over media and advertisers.

Advertising is seen as a potential threat to the independence and objectivity required of the media. Indeed, there are laws in place to ensure advertising revenue does not influence non-advertising content. For example, an advertiser may not pay a journalist to write a positive account of their product.

These questions involve balancing the need to fund commercial media with the need to maintain its integrity.

Discussion questions

- What different kinds of information do we find in the media?
- How do you tell the difference between an advertisement and a piece of information?
- Are reviews for films, venues, books, etc forms of advertising? Why or why not?
- What was the "Cash for Comment" inquiry about? Check out the website at the end of this study guide.
- Why is the media's independence from advertising important?

Marketing

The chief concern of marketing is the way a good or service is offered to potential customers. It involves asking: what is the best way of promoting this product for optimal sales? An advertisement is just one part of a whole process of planning, researching and development.

Understanding potential buyers (or 'the market') is a significant part of this process, and often involves market research. This includes finding out:

- why people might need or want the product or service

- how they would use it
- how they make purchasing decisions generally
- what they are influenced by and what other products they tend to purchase.

The research can influence everything from the design of the product or service offer right through to the music selected in advertising. Potential customers are not always the general public at large, but narrower or 'targeted' sets of people.

Having worked in advertising, Margaret Fulton developed a strong understanding of marketing techniques. Interestingly though, when writing her first book, the editor encouraged her to write for herself rather than any perceived market. The book was a great success.

Discussion questions

- What else does marketing involve?
- How does an audience shape the final look of a marketing pitch? Give examples from advertisements.
- To what extent are labels important to marketing? Give some examples of how labels are used and what they add to a product.
- What does 'imprimatur' mean? Why might using Margaret Fulton's name for something written by other people have been controversial?
- Are labels reliable means of measuring a product's worth?

ACTIVITIES

1. Cooking Show Working in groups, develop and write a proposal for a cooking show and/or book. You should pick a general theme for the presentation, and consider what audience you would target, what style of food to cook, how you would present it and a catchy name.

2. Essay 'Advertising has changed the face of Australian media, whether news or entertainment, in a profound way.' Discuss with reference to new ways in which advertising is used in the media.

3. Review Write a newspaper review for a food-related product. It could be a restaurant you ate at, a recipe or a food product. In particular, think about the way you convey your sense of taste through words.

4. Career Paths Select one of the following vocations listed below. What steps are involved in getting there? Where can you find information? What other qualities do you think are necessary? Map out your answers using a diagram.

- actor
- hairdresser
- lawyer
- veterinarian
- hotel manager

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Margaret Fulton

Margaret Fulton, **I Sang For My Supper: Memories of a Food Writer**. Lansdowne, Sydney, 1999

Sample Cookbooks

Margaret Fulton, **The Complete Margaret Fulton Cookbook**. Paul Hamlyn, Sydney, 1968 (her first cookbook)

Margaret Fulton, **Encyclopedia of Food and Cookery**. Octopus Books, Sydney, 1983

Margaret Fulton, **Margaret Fulton's Health & Energy Cookbook**. Golden Press, Sydney, 1986

Margaret Fulton, **A Passionate Cook**. Lansdowne, Sydney, 1998

Consuming Passions

Website containing paintings by Arcimboldo
www.arcimboldo-award.com/Arcimboldo_uk.html

Other Cooking Writers/Presenters

Jamie Oliver
www.jamieoliver.net/

The Two Fat Ladies
www.bbc.co.uk/food/twofatladies/

Stephanie Alexander
www.stephaniealexander.com.au/

Food Movies

Chocolat-Official Site
www.miramax2000.com/chocolat/

Babette's Feast
www.foreignfilms.com/films/1088.asp

Media Studies

Information on the "Cash for Comment" Inquiry—
 Sydney Morning Herald
<http://old.smh.com.au/news/specials/local/laws/>

Adbusters—not-for-profit media literacy
www.adbusters.org