

**Paula Hiers Deen**, (born **Paula Ann Hiers** on January 19, 1947), is an American cook, restaurateur, writer, and Emmy Award-winning TV personality.

Deen owns The Lady & Sons restaurant in Savannah, Georgia, where she resides, and runs it with her sons, Jamie and Bobby. She has also published four cookbooks. She is known for her "down-home" personality. On her shows, books and appearances, she still uses the surname Deen, from her first marriage.

Born in Albany, Georgia, she married her first husband after graduating from high school in 1965. As documented in the Food Network special *Chefography* and Paula Deen's Official Website, her parents both died when she was 23 and her husband decided to move closer to his family, which was a good distance from anything Paula had ever known. As a result of her parents death she developed a fear of death which led to chronic agoraphobia. She was a proficient Southern cook, a talent she used to help her deal with her condition. In 1986, she felt well enough to take a job as a bank teller. She was robbed at gunpoint the next year, and that incident led her to deal with her agoraphobia head-on. After the family moved to Savannah in 1989, she divorced her husband and parlayed her cooking experience into a catering service.<sup>[1]</sup> She made sandwiches and other meals, which her sons delivered. She also adopted two sheepdogs, Nikki and Matty, to which she credits her day to day happiness.

*The Bag Lady*, as the business was named, was wildly successful and soon outgrew her kitchen. On January 8, 1996, she opened her own restaurant, *The Lady and Sons*, in downtown Savannah on West Congress Street. Within a few years, the restaurant moved to a larger building in Savannah's historic district. *USA Today* named *The Lady and Sons* the "International Meal of the Year" in 1999. The most popular meal at Deen's restaurant is her buffet, which can include sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, fried chicken, cheesy meatloaf, greens, beans, and creamed corn, plus many other items. Every meal comes with a garlic cheese biscuit and one of Deen's famous hoecakes. Because Deen is busy with her television show and other activities, the restaurant is run by her sons, when they are in town.

In 1997, Deen self-published *The Lady & Sons Savannah Country Cooking* and *The Lady & Sons Savannah Country Cooking 2*, cookbooks filled with traditional Southern recipes such as the Goopy Butter Cake, also known as the Chess Cake (a variation of a Chess Pie recipe). The cookbooks were very successful as well, and she has since published an additional two books. She has appeared on QVC many times and went on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2002, and twice in 2007.

Deen's relationship with Food Network began in 1999, when a friend introduced her to Gordon Elliott. He took her through the city for a series of *Doorknock Dinners* episodes. She also appeared on *Ready, Set, Cook!* Deen got to shoot a pilot named *Afternoon Tea* in early 2001. Food Network liked it but didn't have a place for her yet. An American trend toward comfort food, led to Food Network's giving Deen her own show, *Paula's Home Cooking*, which premiered in November 2002. In an early episode, while making hot wings, Deen became the first host to be bleeped on Food Network.

She remarried on March 6, 2004, to Michael Groover, a tugboat pilot in the Port of Savannah. Michael has two children, Michelle and Anthony, from a previous marriage. The wedding and preparation were documented by Food Network and aired in late 2004.

Deen has one grandchild, Jack, who was born August 21, 2006.

Deen made her film debut in *Elizabethtown*, starring Orlando Bloom and Kirsten Dunst. In the movie, she plays the aunt of Bloom's character, and her cooking is showcased heavily. The film premiered on October 8, 2005. A special, *Paula Goes Hollywood*, premiered on Food Network in conjunction with the film's premiere.

Following the example of other *Food Network* chefs, Deen launched a lifestyle magazine called *Cooking with Paula Deen* in late 2005.

*Paula's Home Cooking* was originally taped in Millbrook, New York (according to her magazine's debut issue), at the home of Gordon Elliott, the show's executive producer. Deen mentioned in an interview aired on the March 13, 2006, edition of *The Daily Buzz* that the next batch of episodes of her show will be taped at her home in Savannah, Georgia. According to the first of those episodes, actual production at her new Savannah home began in November 2005.

A televised biography of Deen was aired on an episode of the Food Network's *Chefography* program in March 2006.

Deen's latest show, entitled *Paula's Party*, was first broadcast on the Food Network in the fall of 2006. In April 2007, Simon & Schuster published Deen's memoir *It Ain't All About the Cookin'*.

In June 2007, Deen won a Daytime Emmy Award for best Lifestyle Host. *Paula's Home Cooking* was also a winner.