

# Jean Paré

By Theresa Britton

Jean Paré is an Alberta Champion. With her cookbook business “Company’s Coming”, she is one of the most successful cookbook authors and she continues to inspire people around the world. Her legacy shows us the importance of believing in ourselves and keeping going, even in the face of setbacks. Jean faced difficulties in her life, but she persevered and triumphed. From being a farm girl to gaining worldwide recognition, Jean Pare influences us to pursue our dreams, no matter what they are.

Jean Shirley Elford was born December 7th, 1927, in the rural town of Irma, Alberta. Growing up, Jean helped her parents, Ruby and Edward Elford, with their general store, the Irma Trading Company. Jean’s mother, Ruby, cooked meals using traditional family recipes. Jean found inspiration in this cooking, which led to her obsession with collecting cookbooks. She read cookbooks as if they were novels. Her earliest attempts at cooking were praised by her father, who encouraged Jean to cook even more.

Later on, Jean met her first husband, Clarence Lovig, and they married in 1946. According to the “*Canadian Encyclopedia*”, the engaged couple moved to Vermillion, a small town near Irma, in 1959. They ran a store known as the Vermillion Auction Mart, and had their 4 children, Lyall, Brian, Grant and Gail.

In 1963, Jean assisted with catering at the Vermilion School of Agriculture’s 50th Anniversary celebration. This was Jean’s first catering job, and incredibly she prepared 1000 meals for the event. Many of these meals included potato salads, ham and ice cream served in Dixie disposable cups. Due to Jean’s successful first catered event, she decided to pursue this as her profession.

In the late 1960’s, Jean and Clarence decided to part their separate ways. Jean and her children relocated to Edmonton but moved back to Vermilion afterwards. Her kids missed the small town, so they decided to stay there. Jean then purchased a café known as the Rio Café.

While working at the cafe, she met an electrician and regular customer, Larry Paré, who later became her husband in 1968.

Jean Paré sold the cafe shortly after buying it. She continued her catering business, which then lasted for 24 years. Nevertheless, Jean was constantly being asked for her recipes. People loved what she made, and inquired as to why she didn't write a cookbook. If the recipes were so good, why not share it in a much easier way? So, she teamed up with her son, Grant Lovig, and created her brand, “Company’s Coming”, in 1980.

A year after starting her business, Jean wrote her very first cookbook, “150 Delicious Squares”, which was a book full of some of her most famous dessert recipes. These recipes were from her 24 years’ worth of experience from catering. She designed these books cleverly, using spiral comb binding for the spine of the book, so it could be opened and laid down easily. Since cooking can be a handful, she designed and wrote the books in a way so any reader could easily navigate through the instructions, regardless of their skill level. Additionally, the recipes were made using everyday ingredients, so it was not overcomplicated.

She sold her cookbooks primarily in drug stores and gas stations. Her first book, amazingly, sold 1.5 million copies. So, Jean continued to write books for “Company’s Coming”. She wrote roughly 200 in total, and many were hits. In all, she has sold more than 30 million copies of her books. Continuing to sell these books in gas stations and grocery stores, she secured her books as a kitchen cookbook staple.

Jean Paré was a culinary genius and was well-known across Canada. Instead of making recipes that were sculpted to perfection, Jean’s goal was to just help people cook. She simply wanted to teach people how to cook by using easy recipes and simple ingredients. This led to her success as an entrepreneur.

Later, Jean longed to be closer with her children and their publishing company in Edmonton. As a result, she moved there in 2005. Four years later, Jean decided to donate her massive collection of cookbooks, which was 6 700 books in total, to the University of Guelph. This University had a considerable number of cookbooks already, so Jean’s donation doubled the amount of their collection. In 2011, Jean decided to retire with three decades worth of writing

cookbooks. Jean passed away in 2022, on December 24th. She died in Edmonton and was 95 years old. Still to this day, we remember Jean's incredible legacy. Her cookbooks are still sold around the world, and you might even have one of hers in your very own kitchen.

Over her career, she won multiple awards, such as Queen Elizabeth II's Golden and Diamond Jubilee Medals. Jean was inducted into the Order of Canada in 2004 and later in the Alberta Business Hall of Fame and the Taste of Canada Hall of Fame.

When I started learning about Jean, I realized that there was so much she accomplished on her own. Jean was not born into a rich or famous family. She was just like me, a regular girl. She built her legacy with her bare hands and shared her recipes with Albertans and Canadians to enjoy. She truly is a culinary genius! Jean did not have a perfect life, either. She still had to go through some difficult times and setbacks.

Jean Paré was truly an incredible woman. She inspires authors, cooks, and entrepreneurs alike to pursue their dreams, no matter what. Jean's legacy in culinary arts will be remembered for many years to come.

As an author, Jean inspires me because I dream of being an author when I grow up. I hope to share my ideas with others, like she shared her recipes. Her cookbooks allowed people from all skill levels to get in the kitchen and prepare delicious meals. She taught people to cook. With my writing, I hope to inspire others like Jean did. I want to use my writing to make changes in the world and make Earth a better place. She taught people to cook, and I hope to teach people that we can change the world and be just as great as Jean Paré.

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