



# **The Cassoulet Saved Our Marriage: True Tales of Food, Family, and How We Learn to Eat**

*Caroline Grant (Editor) , Lisa Catherine Harper (Editor)*

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Food is more than what we eat. It reflects how we live in the world and connect with others. From junk food to soul food, from busy weeknight meals to holiday feasts, from the vegetarian table to the kosher pantry, these essays bring you into the kitchens (and shopping carts) of real American families. Without mantras or manifestos, twenty-nine writers serve up sweet memories, salty irreverence, and delicious original recipes. They candidly reveal what food means in their families--and help you discover what it can mean in yours.

With essays from:

- Keith Blanchard
- Max Brooks
- Melissa Clark
- Elizabeth Crane
- Aleksandra Crapanzano
- Gregory Dicum
- Elrena Evans
- Jeff Gordinier
- Caroline M. Grant
- Phyllis Grant
- Libby Gruner
- Lisa Catherine Harper
- Deborah Copaken Kogan and Paul Kogan
- Jen Larsen
- Edward Lewine
- Chris Malcomb
- Lisa McNamara
- Dani Klein Modisett
- Catherine Newman
- Thomas Peele
- Deesha Philyaw
- Neal Pollack
- Barbara Rushkoff
- Bethany Saltman
- K. G. Schneider
- Sarah Shey
- Stacie Stukin
- Karen Valby

**The Cassoulet Saved Our Marriage: True Tales of Food, Family, and How We Learn to Eat Details**

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# From Reader Review The Cassoulet Saved Our Marriage: True Tales of Food, Family, and How We Learn to Eat for online ebook

**MyGoodBookshelf says**

“This is what food means in our families. What does it mean in yours?” 4.5 Stars

**\*\*I received a review copy of this book via Netgalley.\*\***

I am a person who loves food- every aspect of it. Choosing a recipe, the sometimes laborious preparation and of course best of all, the eating! Whilst it is a given that within my family, like most other families, we have our own special recipes and food ‘traditions,’ I must confess that I’ve never really considered before just how important food can actually be to different people across the globe; what a meal or recipe may symbolise for them and the meaning that certain dishes or recipes can have within different cultures.

For me, this collection of food essays was truly an eye-opening book, and if you will excuse the horrible pun, I devoured every fascinating word of it. I was initially a bit concerned that it might be a bit ‘over my head’ in parts, given that it seems to be aimed towards the American market and uses purely American collaborators, as well as it being adapted from an American blog that I haven’t actually read before (I will now!), but I needn’t have worried one iota. At times funny, sometimes poignant but always thought-provoking, each of these hunger-inducing essays has one thing in common: they provide an enlightening insight into other cultures, families and traditions via the medium of food and they also go to prove that food isn’t just about what we eat- it can mean so much more than that.

Each of these 29 essays was very well structured, revolving around different themes. Some for example, concentrate on the heritage and traditions of food and memories evoked by family recipes, or what a particular dish symbolises for them. Others look at the foods themselves, such as the ethics of being a meat-eater or the foods that we encourage our children to explore and as to the pitfalls of trying to get them to try certain dishes. I was really fascinated by the insights into Jewish culture and also a chapter that looked at literature in conjunction with food. There was a nod to ‘The Lion the Witch and The Wardrobe’ and how when the authors own children tried Turkish Delight at la Edward Pevensie, they found themselves disappointed by it, which is certainly reminiscent of my own experiences as a child!

The beauty in this book is that there is bound to be at least one essay that resonates with the reader and the descriptions of food are truly unctuous, so I would caution you not to read it if you are remotely hungry! The recipes at the end of each essay were also an inspired touch; I will certainly be recreating some of them in my own kitchen.

I would recommend this delightful collection of stories to readers interested in gastronomy essays as well as those who enjoy candidly written memoirs.

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**Tamsen says**

I often eat alone, which takes a lot of the joy out of cooking. Spending an hour on cooking a dinner you'll be forced to eat as leftovers for the next week isn't exactly exciting. So I find ways to cook small meals - nothing complicated - no cassoulets here.

There is a woman in my office that I ask every day - what are you making for dinner tonight? It's usually nothing I could eat anyways (I'm a vegetarian) but I always reply how good it sounds. It sounds so good to have a spouse cook you a meal, or to cook a meal for your spouse, to have someone else to eat at the table, someone to share your day, to hear the clatter of another fork and have someone by your side as you clean up the meal together.

Maybe I'm playing up the fantasy a bit, but if there's one thing I miss from a relationship, it's dinner.

This book is surprisingly dense for 256 pages. Maybe because after each story, I would mark my place and head to the fridge. Another mournful gaze and back to the book.

Yet for all my cooking alone, I would say this is an important book to me - almost as important as those books about animal cruelty that have led to my vegetarianism. Cooking real meals is important. Food not only nourishes our bodies but our souls - I forget that sometimes when I'm in the grocery store, choosing popcorn for dinner. Cooking can be an expression of love. I should have a dinner party soon to fill my house with the clatter of plates, the sound of laughter, and to share the love.

3.5 stars - I could have done without the 'my kid doesn't eat' whatever sections.

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### **Matt says**

Both of the editors have worked on projects involving motherhood, so I suppose they couldn't help adding a few "my child won't eat anything that isn't white" hysteria pieces in the latter 3rd Learning to Eat section of the book. Other than those, most of the pieces are enjoyable explorations of our emotional ties to preparing food and sharing food...indeed expressing our love for others through how and what we prepare for our dearest and even strangers. A lovely book, and a cassoulet is an intriguing metaphor for a marriage, as you'll read in the title essay, which happens to be a written correspondence between a husband and wife. Well written, thoughtful, recommended.

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### **Cheryl says**

Have to read Karen's piece

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### **Alyce says**

I should have known better. While reading "Best Food Writing 2013", I discovered Aleksandra Crapanzano's touching and lovely Lobster Lessons, which was originally published in this book. So of course I had to read The Cassoulet..." Let's just say that it's no secret why none of the other stories in this book made it into BFW.

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## **Cinnamongurl says**

I read it quickly, so it's obviously readable. But perhaps I read it so fast in the hopes that the next essay would be better. Some essays were great, others pedestrian. But overall, the book just made me sad about how fucked up about food North Americans are, generally. "Healthy food" was discussed in essay after essay, especially on getting children to eat it or on bragging about your own children eating it, but the only type of food deemed healthy in essay after essay was vegetables. The essays that were really concerned with the function of food in making connections between people, especially families, tended to at least imply that the foods were good for us emotionally but bad physically.

I'm glad I read the book, but it didn't meet my expectations. I was hoping for essays that transcend our obsession with the healthy (low-fat, sugar-free, non-animal)/unhealthy (everything else) binary.

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## **Caroline says**

Nothing like reading the finished, bound edition. Of course I am utterly biased, but these essays never fail to move me. They are funny, relevant, heartbreaking, honest, surprising, and true. Plus, each one comes with a delicious recipe.

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## **Niya says**

Better than some collections on food writing, worse than others. The stories are heartfelt, but a bit inconsistent. The themes around family eating, feeding children, learning how to share memories and pass them on, how to express care and affection, or anxiety and a lack of confidence through food are interesting, but not always compelling. In addition, as with most cookbooks, some of the recipes are absolutely worth keeping - others not so much. It would've been nice to see a broader conversation - given that north america is so much a country of immigrants. While there is a token nod to the american south, there isn't much in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity when it comes to authors included, nor is there a diversity when it comes to socioeconomic backgrounds that would have also made for a more interesting read than parents alternately celebrating and fretting over farmers markets they have access to.

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## **Oona says**

I wanted to love this book, and while the short chapters were ideal for my current reading reality, I was underwhelmed.

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## **Jessica says**

I'm sure the fact that I didn't care for this book is my own fault (due to boredom or frame of mind) but I didn't get very far into it. It reminded me a lot of "Man with a Pan," which I also didn't love. I'm just sick of anthologies of stories that give you a three-page glimpse into someone's life and then end with a recipe that I

will never make. I kind of want more of these peoples' writing, but at the same time, I'm good. How many different ways can you talk about a parent of [Italian/Jewish/Polish/etc.] descent who made the most amazing dish without ever using a recipe?

Don't get me wrong. I adore food. Cooking it, eating it, you name it. But for every story that made me pause to think about social issues or, at least, got me drooling, there were five more that left me yawning.

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### **Lisa says**

The title sounded so promising but this was very uneven. Many of the essays were amateurish at best--a smattering of parent rants about food aversions, eating disorders, and so-so recipes added to the mix. I don't even want to discuss the cover . . .

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### **Kristen Northrup says**

I wasn't sure until I finished this how I would rate it. Some essays were great and others were painful. Never painful by way of bad writing, per se. But a couple were really pompous and a few were just too raw for me. Some people associate food and family with miserable traumatic things and it's really none of my business, even if they're voluntarily sharing it. The title is sort of a spoiler, by the way. The full version is along the lines of *The Cassoulet Saved Our Marriage That One Time But It Won't Help Now*. Again, not everything is perky. But also not everything is by a freelance writer in New York City and that is refreshing. The ones where food represented cultural heritage were the most enjoyable. Edward Lewine's overwrought PTA mothers were the most entertaining. I finished Jeff Gordinier's piece thinking it was one of my favorites without registering (until the about the authors section at the back) that I'd already read and enjoyed one of his books. The downside to getting this from the library is that there are several accompanying recipes that I really want to try.

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### **Darren says**

This is a collection of essays brought together to portray how we learn (or relearn) to eat and the role and importance that food plays to our life and our relationships.

Contributions range from journalists and writers to academics and those at the sharp end in a commercial kitchen, providing a diverse range of opinions and insights (from a predominantly U.S. perspective) in a reasonably-short, bite-sized form, split into three main sections (food, family and learning to eat).

Reviewing such anthologies is always a difficult task as it is so dependent on the prejudices and interests of the reviewer, perhaps even more so than a recipe book would be as that can be measured by factual metrics. How can you really judge somebody's opinion (unless it is really wacky) or life experiences? Short of calling them delusional or a liar that is! The title is, itself, taken from one of the essays that looks how a cassoulet (a rich, slow-cooked casserole from the south of France) held together and reinforced a couple's crumbling marriage. This reviewer hadn't heard that term before, so straight away a new bit of knowledge was received and hopefully retained. Whilst reading many of these witty, intriguing and sometimes sensitive essays a lot more information will surely be retained amongst the other emotions that can be triggered.

Fortunately the price of the book is low, the content is diverse and the format conducive to being a light read on a holiday or whilst commuting as well as, perhaps, a basis for academic research in its own right. If you are open to something slightly different this could be a good little read for you. If you are unsure, search it out in a bookshop, browse through it and if after a few minutes it is "glued" to your hand, then you know you've got yourself a winner. It is also something you may find yourself reading again and again over time!

The Cassoulet Saved Our Marriage: True Tales of Food, Family, and How We Learn to Eat, written by Caroline M. Grant & Lisa Catherine Harper and published by Shambhala Publications/Roost Books. ISBN 9781611800142, 255 pages. Typical price: USD16.95. YYYY.

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## Julie Bestry says

I don't cook, but I do eat, and I enjoy reading about food from a cultural and social perspective. I liked the idea of this collection, but I hated the eponymous essay, which was depressing and made me feel like I'd gone to a party and wandered into someone's marriage counseling session instead of the kitchen.

This book is a mixed bag. Some of the essays were compelling; others were entertaining. A few were even heartbreaking. But I was expecting more heart and less whining. More culture-clash and less suburban mommy(and daddy)hood-meets-haute cuisine clash.

And gracious, inclusion in this book *almost* seems to have required that the foodies in question be white, upper middle class, big-city-dwelling and ethnically homogenous. New York City and San Francisco, with a dash of LA and a soupçon of Austin, Texas for flavor, so how does a collection subtitled *Food, Family and How We Eat* not have anything written by Chinese-Americans or Mexican-Americans? No Indian food or Cuban cuisine? I'm Jewish, so I guess I appreciate that my heritage had some coverage, and Deesha Philyaw's "A Case for Soul Food" was evocative. But the book felt precious, and essay after essay on parental anxiety over children's eating habits failed to evoke much interest on my part. One third of the book was supposed to cover "Learning to Eat" but the essays in that section all seemed to be about parents learning how to chill out and not give in to their innate fears or those of their age and social cohorts. Meh.

Still, "Lobster Lessons" was a standout, and I really enjoyed "May It Never Be the Last Brisket." I know I will remember the feeling of reading Iowan Sarah Shey's "An American Omelet in Brooklyn" for a long while. Indeed, the essays in the first part of the book, Food, were almost all excellent -- tasty hors d'oeuvres. The ones in the second part, Family, were mixed, like a dinner with great vegetables and an amazing salad dressing, but with overcooked meat or dry chicken. And the aforementioned third section on Learning to Eat yielded a dessert that was more lime Jello or digestive biscuits and less peanut butter cheesecake or creme brûlée.

I guess that's the beauty of collected essays. Nibble what you like and leave the rest.

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**Lisa says**

As editor, I am, of course, biased. That said, having read and re-read the stories in this collection, they continue to make me laugh, cry, and think again about why I care about food and feeding my family.

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