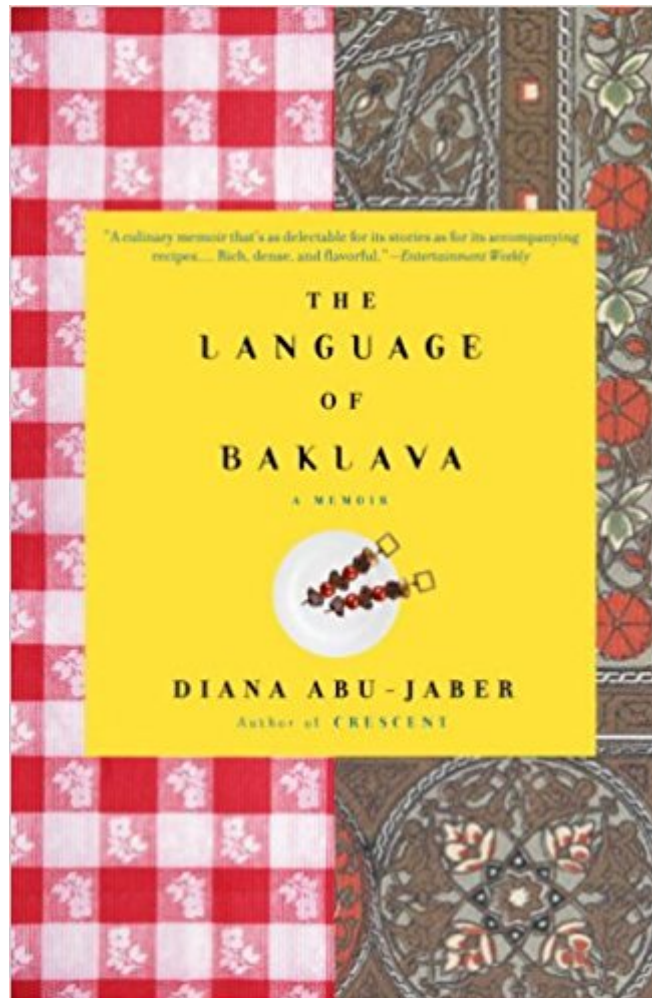




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The Language Of Baklava: A Memoir



Synopsis

Diana Abu-Jaber's vibrant, humorous memoir weaves together delicious food memories that illuminate the two cultures of her childhood—American and Jordanian. Here are stories of being raised by a food-obsessed Jordanian father and tales of Lake Ontario shish kabob cookouts and goat stew feasts under Bedouin tents in the desert. These sensuously evoked repasts, complete with recipes, paint a loving and complex portrait of Diana's impractical, displaced immigrant father who, like many an immigrant before him, cooked to remember the place he came from and to pass that connection on to his children. *The Language of Baklava* irresistibly invites us to sit down at the table with Diana's family, sharing unforgettable meals that turn out to be as much about "grace, difference, faith, love" as they are about food.

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Customer Reviews

Abu-Jaber's father, who periodically uprooted his American family to transplant them back in Jordan, was always cooking. Wherever the family was, certain ingredients—sumac, cumin, lamb, pine nuts—reminded him of the wonderful Bedouin meals of his boyhood. He might be eating "the shadow of a memory," but at least he raised his daughter with an understanding of the importance of food: how you cook and eat, and how you feed your neighbors defines who you are. So Abu-Jaber (*Arabian Jazz*; Crescent) tells the charming stories of her upbringing in upstate New York—with occasional interludes in Jordan—wrapped around some recipes for

beloved Arabic dishes. She includes classics like baklava and shish kebab, but it's the homier concoctions like bread salad, or the exotically named Magical Muhammara (a delectable-sounding spread) that really impress. While Abu-Jaber's emphasis is on Arabic food, her memoir touches on universal topics. For example, she tells of a girlhood dinner at a Chinese restaurant with her very American grandmother. Thanks to some comic misunderstandings, the waiter switched her grandmother's tame order for a more authentic feast. Listening to the grandmother rant about her food-obsessed son-in-law, and watching Abu-Jaber savoring her meal, the waiter nodded knowingly at Abu-Jaber. "So you come from cooking," he said, summing her up perfectly. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School — A coming-of-age memoir about seeking identity through the foods of childhood. The daughter of a Jordanian father and an American mother, Abu-Jaber was raised in upstate New York but spent long periods of time in Jordan. Her Middle Eastern grandmother's knafeh and her American grandmother's roast beef helped her bridge both worlds. The author peppers her story with recipes for the foods that have formed her, and with recollections about her eccentric family. Her father carried her over his shoulder as he cooked onions for the meals that helped him remember his origins. Her American grandmother, always at odds with her son-in-law, cooked a huge ham when they first met, not realizing (or perhaps knowing all too well) that Muslims don't eat pork. Not all of the memories associated with food are pleasant. Abu-Jaber experienced her first dose of prejudice when her father, unaware of suburban traditions, grilled shish-kabob in the front yard. On the bus to school the next day, a friend informed her, "In this country nobody eats in the front yard." If your family doesn't know how to behave, my parents will have to find out about getting you out of the neighborhood. Perhaps her most memorable meal was in a Bedouin camp. The tribal women tried to entice her to stay with them rather than return to the U.S. as they scooped *mansaf*, a goat dish, into their mouths. Teens don't need to share Abu-Jaber's love of food to enjoy this story of family, love, and finding one's identity. Pat Bangs, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a seminal piece of work. Abu-Jaber writes with insight, honesty, humor and compassion about the ups and downs of growing up bi-cultural. She'll have you laughing on one page and tearing up on the next. Your mouth will water too, while Abu-Jaber describes the experience of

cuisine from childhood to adulthood and includes the recipes for a number of traditional Jordanian dishes. This book is a gateway to understanding the Arab-American experience and the immigrant experience one generation removed. Whether your usual fare is novel or nonfiction, you'll enjoy this remarkable and important book. It's perfect for reading aloud, alone, or with a book club. Whatever you do, don't miss the chance to savor this read. "The Language of Baklava" has become a family favorite at our bi-cultural house.

Reading the Language of Baklava, transported me to many similar childhood and young adult memories. I am a first generation Lebanese-American. My parents immigrated to the US when I was a baby. I was 7 years old when my dad's work sent us abroad. While living abroad we frequently went to visit family in Lebanon, Egypt, and France. I have very vivid memories of our many visits- the feasts, smells, noises, animated conversations in 3 languages without interruption. Upon returning to the states as a young teenager, I felt lost. Life was so different... This made it hard for me to adjust to being back "home". I am happy to be American-Lebanese- I value and hold close to my heart the collection of memories during our time abroad and once back in the US. I also loved the description of meals, and the inclusion of recipes I've grown up with!

The Language Of Baklava is an ode to the author's multicultural heritage, family, and above all, the power of food as the framework of hospitality, healing, and the glue that holds things together. Peopled with lively characters who move in vivid vignettes of life in America and Jordan, the author's journey from resistance to her larger than life Jordanian father's expectations and strictures to embracing their warmth and good intentions, is a mesmerizing read. The chapter entitled The Language Of Baklava

If you love food and imagine in scent and flavor, you may appreciate this memoir. If you want to visit a new place intimately and also look inside an individual to explore a truly vivid and complex family relationship, this book is rich in images and ideas.

Most all of us are immigrants to this country - and somewhere in our family histories are similar stories of challenges, longings and new lives grown into. I love how the author punctuates and celebrates this journey with recipes that touch the spirit as well as tantalize the taste buds !

Anyone who grew up with a protective father can identify with Diana's experience. As an immigrant I

can also identify with having to straddle the Atlantic, one foot in America, one foot in Europe. I love the flow of Diana's memoir and her sumptuous language. The addition of the recipes is very clever.

Very enjoyable, easy to read book, intermittently powerful, but mostly an enjoyable read, I felt like I was listening to an engaging story over coffee. I gave it 4 stars instead of 5 because I thought that the last part of the book seemed like an afterthought, wasn't as good as the first 75-80%, almost like I thought it was done but then more pages.

This is an exceptional book. One of the few I've read in Kindle and then bought in print simply so I could give it to friends and family. Very funny, insightful, an excellent observation on living and the blending of two cultures. Highly recommended! (Good grub also).

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