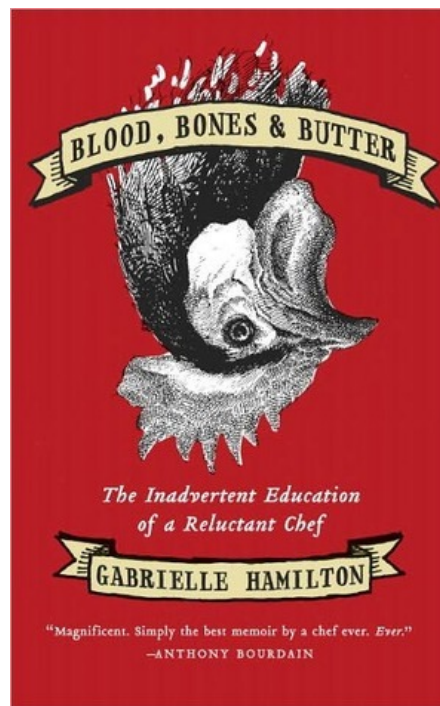




Blood, Bones, and Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef

Gabrielle Hamilton

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Before Gabrielle Hamilton opened her acclaimed New York restaurant Prune, she spent twenty hard-living years trying to find purpose and meaning in her life. Blood, Bones & Butter follows an unconventional journey through the many kitchens Hamilton has inhabited through the years: the rural kitchen of her childhood, where her adored mother stood over the six-burner with an oily wooden spoon in hand; the kitchens of France, Greece, and Turkey, where she was often fed by complete strangers and learned the essence of hospitality; Hamilton's own kitchen at Prune, with its many unexpected challenges; and the kitchen of her Italian mother-in-law, who serves as the link between Hamilton's idyllic past and her own future family—the result of a prickly marriage that nonetheless yields lasting dividends. By turns epic and intimate, Gabrielle Hamilton's story is told with uncommon honesty, grit, humor, and passion.

Blood, Bones, and Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef Details

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From Reader Review Blood, Bones, and Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef for online ebook

Brittany says

The alternate title for this book:

I Have an Italian Husband (But I Totally Didn't Mean To) and Other Reasons Why I'm Totally a Legitimate Chef.

At first, Hamilton tries to take the Feminist-Answer-to-Anthony-Bourdain angle: I never wanted to be a chef! I was a bad girl druggie! I was in the kitchen being vulgar and sexual with all the male cooks in my kitchen but I was also educated!

Unfortunately, Bourdain actually has wit, something that Hamilton is sorely lacking--some of her stories are interesting, but they constantly give the impression that she wants us to think of her as extremely ~deep and meaningful~.

She must have found out this doesn't work, because she switches tactics halfway through the book and becomes that one friend you knew in school if you lived in a small town: she's the one telling you she's related to Princess Di, that she visits London every spring just in time for the roses and the horse races, and oh-my-god if you've never had a REAL mint julep you haven't liiiived darling.

Her locale of choice is Italy. Partially because of her Accidental Italian Husband (but we don't talk very much and we're not romantic, she assures us), but mostly because it's the perfect backdrop for her to brag about her Totally Rustic and Real Italian Family and how she never buys produce from anyone but the old man on the side of the road because stores are too clueless and farmer's markets are for hipsters...but, she fails to realize that she's a foodie hipster herself, denouncing everything but the Rustic and Authentic and Undiscovered, as if food is some sort of secret only for those who pass some sort of culinary test of wills that apparently involves beheading chickens somehow.

Yeah, we know, Gabrielle, your mother was French, your husband's Italian, and you're in the boys club of chefs even though GODDAMN IT'S SO HARD TO DO WHILE WRANGLING TWO KIDS.

Maybe if you want to feel legitimized as a chef and not a "female" chef, you should take your own advice and focus on what you do rather than your oh-so-unique-womanly-struggles or the fact that you use your family to give yourself permission to cook...it'd probably be a less eye-rolling read, anyway.

Happyreader says

Blood, Bones, and Bitter would have been a better title. Her constant subterranean rage exhausted me. Great, she can cook and found a workaholic outlet to hide from all of her unexamined issues. She's well into her forties and still angry with her mother for God knows what. The big complaint is that her parents divorced and abandoned her for a summer. Yet she was abandoned at her dad's home and it's her mom, the source of her love of food and cooking, whom she doesn't speak with for 20 years. Her dad, except for paying her college bills, essentially vanishes from the story. And the story itself is all over the place with sentences so long that you forget what she's ranting about. For someone who claims to be overly structured, her writing can be as messy as her Italian in-laws' villa kitchen. Besides her two sons, the one person she claims to love most dearly, her sister Melissa, is the one whom she betrays the most, the big reveal that was left to the tabloids rather than this self-billed honest memoir. Beware the toxic lesbian sister who claims devotion and

sleeps with your husband.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

This is not a chef's tale in the fashion we've come to expect from foodie books in recent years. It's more of an autobiography that happens to include a lot of cooking and eating. Put even more precisely, it's an exercise in self-analysis through writing, in which the reader is allowed to tag along.

The book's subtitle is a perfect seven-word description of Gabrielle "Prune" Hamilton's road to chefdom. Her training in the food service industry was as inadvertent as any career path could possibly be. She never had a plan. The simple need to survive took her from teenage criminal with a strong work ethic to minor celebrity with a thriving New York City restaurant.

The dissolution of her family led Gabby to take her first job in the food industry at the age of 13. For the next 20 years, she washed dishes, waited tables, freelanced in the catering world, and even served as a cook for a children's summer camp. She was at loose ends in her life when she was offered a chance at a tiny abandoned restaurant space, and all of her years of experience came together in the successful creation of Prune.

Hamilton knows how to spin a narrative, particularly when she has a juicy anecdote that lends itself to embellishment and hyperbole. And yet, for all her ability to tell a story, there's an obfuscatory quality to her writing that smacks of coyness, whether intentional or not. She throws out a lot of references she doesn't explain, and jumps around in the chronology much as one might do in a private journal of self-discovery rather than a book meant for public consumption.

In the last 100 or so pages, the book slowly devolves into a near-microscopic examination of her marriage to Michele, an "Italian Italian." This was where the book fell apart for me. She seemed to have abandoned her original intentions for the book, and she ends it without resolution or indication of where her life now stands.

Those who have read the book will forgive me for saying I was left feeling like her entire life was just one big "bone"-dogle. Her success as a restaurateur excluded, her years were spent letting life live her rather than living her life.

I really enjoyed doing this as a buddy read with my friend Judy, even if she *did* leave me in the dust. Her questions and comments made me read more carefully, and we had some good laughs along the way.

Diane says

On my copy of this book, there was a gushing quote from Anthony Bourdain: "Magnificent. Simply the best memoir by a chef ever. *Ever.*"

I respectfully disagree. I thought Gabrielle Hamilton's memoir was uneven and a bit messy. Some parts were well-written and engaging, and other parts were so tedious that I couldn't wait to be done with the book. Sometimes Gabrielle explains herself well, other times she is maddeningly vague and obtuse. She comes across as both empathetic and also arrogant. Some stories made her sound so cocky and bitter that it was hard to sympathize when her marriage went south.

This memoir covers Gabrielle's childhood; her lessons in cooking from her French mother; her early

experiences of working in the food service industry; her time in graduate school; her adventure of opening up Prune, her restaurant in New York's East Village; her love affairs and her marriage to an Italian man.

There are some juicy stories here, there are beautiful descriptions of food, there are some thoughtful passages on finding meaning in life and work and relationships. There were also times when I was so frustrated with the author that I considered abandoning the book.

Now that I am finished, I am glad I read this memoir, but it was not a wholly enjoyable experience. Sort of like a good meal with an obnoxious dinner companion. (I'd still like to visit her restaurant, though.)

Jackie says

I was unprepared for how this memoir spooled out. I was not familiar with Hamilton, or Prune, her restaurant in New York City, and was expecting a dainty kitchen memoir, even a tough one. But the book turned out to be the story of a marriage, and more, the story of a woman exploring her own identity and soul. This soul is deeply wrapped up in the kitchen, and that is how the kitchen enters the story: it's a background character that defines the shape of everything around it. As a passionate cook who grew up in the restaurant business, as well as a former professional baker, I thoroughly identified with Hamilton's kitchen soul-connection and there were numerous passages that made the hairs on the back of my neck tingle with delighted recognition.

Nor was I expecting Hamilton's tough-girl persona. Cracking yet another food-related book, I was ready to read about another 'refined woman chef' in the mold of Alice Waters. But Hamilton immediately sets into how she grew up shabby-chic but poor, with artistic parentage, half of which was a French mother who was an expert practical and stereotypically Gallic taste. Gabrielle and her numerous siblings were half-raised as wolves compared to the average sterile, American suburban child. This makes her someone of whom we both disapprove (rifling during family parties through the coats and handbags of the guests to steal money) and silently egg on (cursing creatively in the restaurant kitchen).

Her mother's mastery of the kitchen seeps into Hamilton from infancy and I do think this describes the experience of most serious cooks - we were exposed to passionate cooking from childhood, usually in the form of some tradition or culture. The restaurant, then the kitchen itself, is the place where Hamilton grows up, becomes an adult, finds her lovers, meets her husband, and lastly, discovers, deepens and diversifies her own passions not just for food, but for literature, writing and connection with others. The core of the book becomes the relationship she develops in Italy with the Italian family - especially the mother - of her "Italian, Italian husband." This connection with her mother-in-law, though they do not speak the same language, becomes the driving creative force of her marriage, which though in itself relatively empty, also the way she is able to re-mother herself after long-estrangement from her own mother, and the way she begins to more deeply understand her own vocation, avocation and her maturing personality.

Ultimately, the best thing about this book for me was its core emphasis on the centrality of commensality. Instead of a quaint kitchen memoir, another romanticized travelogue with recipes for wannabe American expats relaxing in their Tuscan villas, or even a 'ya think ya know life in a kitchen, tough guy?' self-congratulation, this was a celebration of feeding people, eating together, loving and being loved, the way Jesus fed the masses with loaves and fishes. Such things are not just about the kitchen; they make up the core of what it means to be human in the company of others.

Cassy says

Whenever I read an autobiography, I find myself asking these two basic questions:

1. Can they write?

2. Is their life interesting enough to warrant a book? Because, I'll be honest, mine is not.

To the first question, Hamilton can write. She earned an MFA (for whatever you think that's worth). I enjoyed both the crispiness of the details, as well their selection and amount. She was also good at analyzing herself, her life's trajectory, and the food industry.

Regarding the second question, I had mixed feelings. The primary focus of the book is her varied culinary career. She begins in the kitchen of her French mother and with her jobs waitressing, moves on to the drudgery of catering companies, describes the creation of her own restaurant and its inspirations, and ends cooking with/for in-laws at their Italian villa. The former sections were okay for me. It was the last two stages that I found most interesting – likely because my husband and I enjoy going to chic restaurants and pretending to be gourmands. As the waiter explains in painstaking detail that the duck is prepared in the [insert French method] way and the mushrooms are from [insert exotic locale], we nod and nod as though we understand. It was beneficial to have the perspective of an actual connoisseur. (And Leo, the gig is up.)

There was also a good deal about her personal life during which my interest fluctuated more dramatically. I was a straight-laced kid so the tales of her rebellious youth could be titillating. But I did feel that the childhood section was drawn out. Thereafter, I thought she held back. She had a large family growing up, yet only spoke of a few members as an adult. What happened? She has (or had?) an unconventional relationship with her husband. She offhandedly mentioned that they didn't move in together after their courthouse wedding and were still living apart when she gave birth to their first child. I wanted more of that!

I agree it was right for the food to be the focus. And I can imagine her publisher enforcing this emphatically. Yet I would have appreciated, at least, better allocation of the personal word count: less childhood and more explanation of monumental adult relationships.

Ultimately, the best way to gauge one's reaction to this book is probably to ask a third question.

3. Do you want to eat at Hamilton's restaurant, Prune?

The next time I am in New York, yeah, I'd like to go. Although given the success of her book, it might be a royal pain to get a dinner reservation.

Lauren says

I loved this book. Loved it. At first I thought this was going to be another memoir about "how I fell in love with cooking during my already privileged life". But this one is different. Gabrielle is real. She has had an extraordinarily non-traditional and rough upbringing and is unflinchingly honest about it. So her story is interesting but what I loved most wasn't her unique story but that she is a really, really good writer. Beautiful, I would say. So once I got on board and realized that, I slowed down. I savored this book as I would any delicious meal.

K says

Some Obvious Things I Should Already Know that I Learned from Reading Blood, Bones & Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef:

1. I almost never enjoy food writing as much as I think I will. I certainly don't enjoy it enough to compensate for basic flaws in a book.
 2. TMI memoirs are car accidents but vague, guarded memoirs are boring and confusing which is arguably worse. (I still don't get why Gabrielle was so mad at her mother, how she made the transition from untrained catering assistant to successful chef/restaurant owner, what the heck was up with her marriage, etc.)
 3. Just because you write good sentences doesn't mean you should write a memoir.
 4. You can come from a working class background, priding yourself on your work ethic and humble origins, and still be a huge snob. Your blood sugar can run dangerously low and you'll still turn your nose up at a restaurant that doesn't meet your standards, making everyone around you crazy in the process (for God's sake, just order some french fries or something and the heck with it!).
 5. Don't get your hopes up about a book on goodreads that has a high average rating initially when it's billed as an up and coming book (this book once had an average rating of 4.13 or so). Wait until more people have read it and then check the rating (in this case, closer to 3.6 which is far more indicative).
-

V. Briceland says

Toward the end of Hamilton's interminable chef memoir, she admits to having a certain sense of Gallic superiority to the rest of the world. Hoo boy, is that an understatement. While Hamilton's recollections of her unconventional childhood and rise to celebrity as the owner of Prune offer up a credible pastiche of MFA-style literary writing, the author's personality is so off-putting that I found the book nearly unreadable.

When Hamilton is talking about cooking, or about the restaurant industry and its quirks, she's very nearly engaging--that is, if one can overlook her arty tendency to switch between first-person-past and second-person-present-tense narrative on the turn of a very thinly-sliced wafer of pancetta.

Hamilton's narrative style rests on the piling-on of rich layers of detail, however, yet throughout long passages of the book I found myself distrusting the accuracy of those details. I raised an eyebrow, for example, when she described driving down from Ann Arbor, Michigan, across 8 Mile Road into downtown Detroit--a nice shout-out to one of Detroit's more infamous landmarks, but a geographically-dubious route into the city. And it's outright disingenuous of her to spout foodie nonsense about how her childhood once-a-week dessert was a single square of really good imported chocolate or a lightly-sweetened slice of buttered bread, when she's mentioned, only a few pages before, gorging on Tastykakes. If one can't trust the details, what, exactly, can one relate to in a memoir like this?

Certainly not the thorn-skinned author, herself. A similar tone of superiority mars a good deal of the narrative. Hamilton dislikes children and their preference for French fries and macaroni and cheese over that single square of really good chocolate, or any of the more exotic fares she serves in Prune; she's dismissive

of their parents and indeed, of anyone who will eat less-than-gourmet fare instead of skipping a meal altogether. She spends a large portion of the book secretly mocking and sniggering at her graduate school comrades only to turn around and justify the behavior by accusing them of condescending to her. And the meandering last third of her book turns on the cold fury she experiences, and the subsequent two-week silent treatment she gives to her (long-suffering) husband when he mentions that he'd like to buy a new iPhone.

There really is some minutiae that probably should be left out of a memoir, apparently.

Nina says

I think it went something like this:

Agent to Gabrielle: "Hey, you've had a famous restaurant for a while now and you've never been on the Food Network, Iron Chef, etc., why not hop on the bandwagon and write a memoir?"

G. to Agent: "Gee, I've been keeping journals all my life, why not, sure, I'm gonna do it".

This book pissed me off almost as much as "Eat, Pray, Love". Self-referential (a word she uses a lot), snobby, totally devoid of any spark of humor. This woman doesn't like paragraphs. She just goes on and on and on, and really comes off like a self-absorbed, albeit talented, very full of herself type of woman. Oh, and she's polyamorous, if you can count a green card marriage to a doctor, who she then goes and has two kids with even though they start out living separately. She visits her mother after twenty years only because of the death of her brother, and apparently hates her, even though to me she seems a lot like her mother.

I don't know why she titled the book ... "reluctant chef"--it's all she ever did, really, except for getting a masters at U. of Michigan ("the Harvard of the midwest) where she trashes all her fellow students, mainly because she's not up to speed with the terminology of literature.

Aargggh! The only part of the book that remotely touched me was the end, where she realizes her Italian mother in law is aging and may not be around for the annual month in Italy.

Never does she mention putting love into her food. To her it seems like a battle to get the orders out, and her terrific work ethic, and that she is better than anyone else.

I have no doubt this will be a best-sold on the NY Times, and maybe it's just me, but I found Ms. Hamilton to be an utterly unappealing, uninteresting and even soulless person. I'm not saying don't read it, but be warned, this lady is really impressed with herself.

Kate says

I suppose "Blood, Bones, and Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef" (which is at least 2 lies) was shorter than

"It's not my fault that everything disappoints me: One narcissist's completely predictable culinary path and résumé of failures with a heaping dose of spin"

or

"Blood, Bones, and Butter: A few mouthwatering meals described in delicious detail served with an amazing amount of whine"

Petra X says

This is the second book today I've found that I have read and rated and has disappeared from my shelves. This is freaky. There is a thread on it, I've written to support and got nothing back. Obviously I am not deleting all these books. This is so fucking weird and upsetting. I just don't know what to do.

The other book is Voluntary Madness: My Year Lost and Found in the Loony Bin

Kathryn says

Gabrielle Hamilton certainly has led an enviable life. Blood, Bones & Butter is an adventure, and, truthfully, I was disappointed when it ended. But I found that while Hamilton is skilled at invoking the senses, she is less adept at reconciling various parts of her story. The resulting gaps within the narrative make it a disjointed and frustrating read and impair what is otherwise a very good book.

Feeling “disaffected” after 20 years in the kitchen, she leaves to pursue an MFA degree. After returning to Manhattan, she opens Prune without any prior experience as a restaurant chef or manager. Up to that point, we hear only about a mishmash of catering jobs and a couple of summers as a children’s camp cook. Considering that unorthodox employment record (and her ambiguous feelings toward the industry), the decision to take on her own restaurant is puzzling. Filling in her storytelling would enable readers to make sense of it. Somewhere in there, she could have talked more about her transformation from hustling cocktail waitress to accomplished professional chef. Who (besides her mother) or what has influenced her, and how did she master her craft? What does she feel is most rewarding about a culinary career, and why, specifically, does she become disenchanted with hers? How does she feel she can succeed in the competitive New York restaurant scene?

Similar omissions appear in the telling of her personal life. Although I can understand her anger and sense of abandonment at her family’s breakup, I cannot comprehend why those feelings are directed entirely at her mother. I sense that she doesn’t either, because she never addresses it. Hamilton seems unwilling or unable to self-analyze. Equally as confusing is her sudden change from gay to heterosexual woman. No explanation given. She is either as baffled by it herself or simply disinclined to connect the dots for her readers.

Overall, it is an enjoyable book, but somehow unsatisfying. The holes are too large. Yes, Hamilton can choose how much to reveal in her memoir. Like another poster suggested, however, she could better support those parts she does reveal.

Rocinante says

I often rate books but seldom actually comment on them. I also rarely give a book one star so I feel I must justify it a little.

So the subtitle is the Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef. That's a little misleading. I didn't really notice any reluctance. Every job she ever had was in food service. And, in her only non-food experiment, the

MFA, she ended up deciding she'd rather be in food service. With the exception of a few early stories about her mother, she really didn't explain any of her food education either. She kept saying how hard the job was, and how she had put in her time, but after the stories about her mother, she just listed the restaurants she worked in but didn't respect, the caterers she she worked for and didn't respect, the MFA, more caterers she didn't respect, and a random, lucky incident that led to her own restaurant. Where was the education? It did seem inadvertent, however, which I guess is a good thing.

Also, and maybe this is what really disappointed me, her book took me from really wanting to try her restaurant to never wanting to try her restaurant. During the course of the book, among other things, she -

1. Lied to get her jobs
2. Stole large amounts from her employers and spent the money on coke
3. Didn't have the decency to treat a girlfriend of many years with respect on the way to an unfortunate break-up
4. Married a man she admitted she didn't love and didn't really try to - who married as a form of performance art - and then lamented the fact that she didn't have a picture perfect relationship with him and couldn't co-opt his family.
5. Spent an hour driving around brooklyn in a low blood sugar induced rage, yelling at her spouse in front of her small children rather than eat a mediocre meal

By the end of the book, the author struck me as short tempered, self-absorbed, and willing to hurt others on a whim. While I'm sure her restaurant is very good, the portrait she has drawn of herself does not seem trustworthy, she has left a lot of wreckage in her wake and there is nothing at the end to make me feel better. No bit of self-examination that gives me hope that she's changing.

She is certainly a strong person and I praise her for her success. And its her life, so she certainly she shouldn't change if she's happy the way she is. But I can't help but have a suspicion, during some lean year, her willingness to bend the rules and hurt people will eventually migrate into her kitchen. And I don't want to be eating at her restaurant when it happens.

RandomAnthony says

Gabrielle Hamilton's *Blood, Bones, and Butter* is as good a book I've read about the intersection between eating, cooking, and what we do with the hours in-between. Even though I'm a huge Anthony Bourdain fan but his work sometimes make me feel like I'm reading through a filter that stylizes the profession into a restaurant version of a movie like *Goodfellas*. I'm not a foodie. I microwave cheese on tortillas. *Blood, Bones, and Butter* doesn't engage in culinary industry mythmaking; the book is about how cooking and Hamilton's soul intertwine and how the messy knot of humanity that emerges from the resulting tangle interacts with the rest of the world. *Blood, Bones, and Butter* is the story of a strong woman who could beat your ass and make you dinner. Both would make you cry.

S. says

The author is aware that her frigid French ballerina mother is fully responsible for her (prepare yourselves 'cause I'm gunna say it) Freudian obsession with fresh and authentic cooking and she illustrates this without making us wallow with her in endless therapy sessions. I loved revisiting NY's East Village circa 1988--rat carcasses and all-- with her as a tour guide almost as much as her fairytale trips to Italy with its villas,

oregano scented air and 80-year-old matrons making pasta and vegetables in female dominated kitchens.

Her descriptions of U of M's writing program are very funny and accurately depict participants in writing MFA programs everywhere. (Oh, that self-indulged sing-songy "I'm invoking the MUSES, everyone!" reading voice. God help me, it makes me homicidal.) The food porn is tantalizing, and she skates flirtatiously around the subject of her sexual orientation so frequently that the reader doesn't really care too much either way by the end of the book--which might have been her goal all along. The Kindle edition was superb for its ability to let me insta-Google the obscure ingredients she mentions. This made me want to cook amazing new things and actually clean up afterwards, which I've never enjoyed so much. The author's description of her own crazy work ethic is sexy enough to inspire me to WANT to scrub the grout behind the fridge. Powerful writing indeed.

Susan says

I kept reading mainly because of the gushing praise of Mario Batali and Anthony Bourdain highlighting the cover of this book. Either they didn't actually read the book, or their frame of reference is sadly narrow. Or maybe the publisher sent a lot of wine.

I had to ask my culinary school graduate friend if all chefs are whiny and crude. A lot, but not all, I am told. Argh, what an annoying story. Made worse, no doubt, by the author's MFA in writing. Apparently this necessitates throwing in the occasional colorful phrase, carefully chosen obscure word, or paragraph of painstaking and flowery detail to make sure you remember that she is a trained writer (and you, most likely, are not).

She had a rough childhood. Her parents were of little use in raising her, so she went feral, took drugs, stole, etc. Somehow managed, with the help of an attorney hired to keep her out of jail by her brother--who somehow managed to become wildly successful--to get back on track. Doesn't want to be a cook, but just keeps at it, even while working on her master's in writing. Blah, blah, blah.

Married a guy so he could stay in the country. Had two kids and stayed together several years even though they had no real relationship or intimacy. We assume she divorced him finally, since she says it is coming and the description on the jacket says she lives with her two sons. Whine, whine, whine, he never opens up. I missed the part where she put any effort into it.

The consistent thread through the whole memoir is how she wants a different life, but she never seems to really try to make a change. It is almost claustrophobic to read it. You want to give her a push. She succeeds, but can't ever express any joy or even satisfaction for more than a moment. It is just depressing.

I am glad I did not buy this book, but only borrowed it from the Library. If I had paid for it, I would be writing to Batali and insisting he pay me back.

Mary says

I read an article of hers in the latest Bon Appetite magazine and immediately purchased this book. I absolutely loved it and noticed myself parceling it out so that it would last longer. Even though the final part of the book felt like it got off kilter and started to ramble, there were just so many great things I loved, that I had to give it five stars.

Some of the winning pages included:

‘Camping’ in the back yard with her brothers and sister ”...that voluptuous blanket of summer night humidity, the smell of wood smoke, the heavy dew of the tall grass around us, the necessary and anchoring voices, giggles, farts, and squeals of disgust of my older siblings....”

The three pages describing butchering a single chicken with a dull hatchet while her father looks on

disgusted.

And the part that sealed the deal for me was/is her take on being hospitable:

“...without wasting a moment on that awkward and tedious conversation that will unhappily precede so many hundreds and hundreds of future restaurant meals in all of our lives – whether to share or not to share and whether or not there are food phobias and dietary restrictions among us – simply ordered food for the table ...and so set the standard for me for all time of excellent hospitality: Just take care of everything. I forever want to arrive somewhere hungry and thirsty and tired and be taken care of as Iannis took care of us.”

I really enjoyed so many of her stories and memories and related to several. Many of you may not enjoy this book like I did, but a lot of you in the food service industry, just may!

Richard says

Once a sauce breaks it's almost impossible to bring it back together again. Chefs have their tricks, but even with tricks there's no guarantee, and no guarantee the sauce will hold. Most likely it won't. The unfortunate separation in Blood, Bones & Butter occurs at the half-way mark. Of course, I write this at the risk of being way too clever, and maybe it is, but I'm saddened that Chef Gabrielle Hamilton wasn't able to hold her memoir together.

She had me, totally had me for the first 158 pages of this 291 page book. (Pages are for the review copy.) In those pages a wild child thrives in an eccentric, and artistic/bohemian family, struggles through her parents' failed marriage, sets out on her own and makes just about every mistake a rebel could make, and then begins to find herself in the sensual and spiritual world of kitchen work. Chef Gabrielle has a life-long spiritual affinity with food and service, and tells wonderful, sometimes harrowing stories as she starves her way through Europe, slogs her way through the horrors of tourist trap kitchens, and industrial catering, slugs her way through a creative writing program, and finally finds herself the naive but enthusiastic owner of her own restaurant. I was pretty sure I'd fallen in love with her. Then, at page 159, and upon meeting her husband to be, her education, inadvertent as it may have been, as a chef, reluctant as she may have been, ends.

The second half of the memoir is the story of the first half of a marriage doomed to failure. It's odd, but the story doesn't resolve except in some weird slump of resignation - somehow, maybe she mentions the fact, or alludes to it, I knew the marriage was going to end, but we don't get there, and we're left hanging half way through. The story the Chef decides to tell has its moments, and the best of them are around food and her husband's family, but the stories become repetitive, as do the ever widening cracks in the marriage, and the 130-some pages become an endless series of poor-me's. It's a story of a slow suffocation, not pleasant, beyond a chef's education, and the necessary personal pronouns of memoir get really, really tiresome. Chef Gabrielle even spends the bulk of a chapter telling us what she should have said at a conference at the CIA on women in the restaurant profession. A chapter of second thoughts. That's where she really started to loose me and though I hoped for some writerly/culinary magic that would bring the sauce back together, ultimately I wanted the book to end, and I didn't care how.

What a shame. The education of a chef was interesting, soulful, and moving; the education of a wife and mother wasn't.

Margaret says

This was an exhausting, schizophrenic read for me and I have very contradictory and conflicting feelings about it. In some ways it was both frustrating and off-putting, and yet I really couldn't put it down until I'd finished it. On the one hand it's probably the best food memoir I've read since Anthony Bourdain's Kitchen Confidential – and for some of the same reasons - but at the same time I got far more information about the author's spectacularly dysfunctional personal life than I really wanted to have from this kind of a book. The structure is a nightmare, leaping backwards and forwards in time with no warning and darting disconcertingly sideways whenever Hamilton sees something shiny but superfluous in her memory box, and there are run-on sentences that would make Henry James weep with frustration (not that I'm in any position to throw stones in that regard); but Hamilton's use of language is extraordinary, vital and juicy and evocative, and the rushing, headlong pace gives her prose a breathlessly immediate, you-are-there impact that's irresistibly effective, especially at moments of discovery or epiphany for the author, while the general disarray of the narrative is somehow compellingly reflective of how her mind works in a way that's entirely legitimate for personal memoir. Hamilton herself emerges as a thorny, difficult personality, tough-minded, profane, narcissistic, and selfish, but she's so completely forthright about what a f***ed up excuse for a human being she is (no time is wasted on excuses or blame or explanations - "this is what it is," she seems to be saying, "deal with *that*!") that you can't help liking her for having the balls to take such complete responsibility for herself and her actions, and yet she remains essentially a not very appealing person. I admired her and was engaged by her, without warming to her. I would love to have a meal in her restaurant. I would not love to be in a room with her. Make of this what you will – it may be a big mess, but it's a big mess that makes for a terrific read and I have no reservations about giving it a big four stars.
