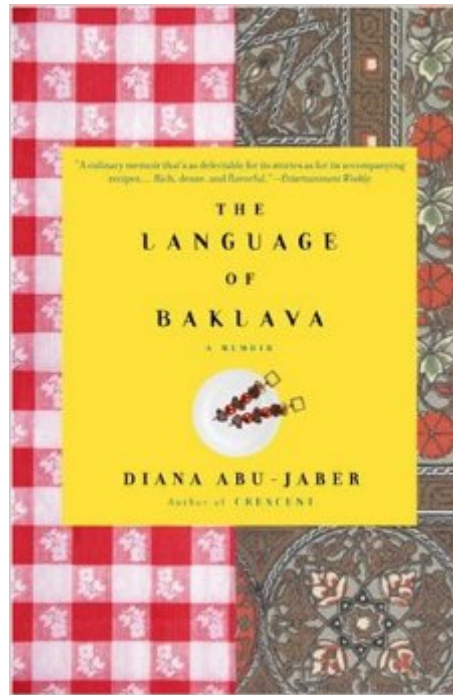


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The Language Of Baklava



Synopsis

Diana Abu-Jaber's vibrant, humorous memoir weaves together stories of being raised by a food-obsessed Jordanian father with tales of Lake Ontario shish kabob cookouts and goat stew feasts under Bedouin tents in the desert. These sensuously evoked repasts, complete with recipes, in turn illuminate the two cultures of Diana's childhood—American and Jordanian—while helping to paint a loving and complex portrait of her 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* irresistably 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. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Normally, I wouldn't want to give autobiographical information when writing about someone else's work. However, it's necessary for me to give some of my own background in order to explain my responses to Ms. Abu Jaber's memoir/cookbook. I grew up in Oregon with an American (Scots-Irish/Norwegian) mother and an Arab (Palestinian-Israeli) father. So, while I

wouldn't claim that my life has mirrored Diana Abu Jaber's background, I would say there are a lot of similarities. Much of this book rings true. The overprotective father. Family grudges and gossip. Relatives crisscrossing the ocean. The audience for the "The Bold and the Beautiful" (an American soap opera) that you find in the Middle East. Immigrant parents who want all their children to become doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Taboos against dating. The expectations to marry someone who is also Arab, even if your own mother isn't. You get the idea. One chapter that sticks out to me is "Immigrants' Kids". One part of it describes the nostalgia that a dish of stuffed cabbages (a popular Arab dish) can bring. Reading it almost made me shed a tear because it reminded me that it's been a long time since I've had stuffed cabbages. Like Diana, I also had a father who wished to move the family back to the Middle East. Like her, I also fought with my dad over this happening. I admire her for writing about such a conflict because it can still be painful for me to recall such old disagreements. If there is a line that I felt summed up the book's theme it is when a friend of Diana's asks: "How come my father never cooked me any eggs?" Of course Diana's father has cooked her eggs and plenty more. In my opinion, this is a book about family love.

The author's memoir, *The Language of Baklava*, is as rich and full-bodied as the pungent recipes that are peppered throughout the book, both sweet and spicy, a peek into bi-cultural life that is amusing and heartwarming. Abu-Jaber infuses her memoir with the joy of family and the love of food, meals shared with many because "you never know who's just come over from the old country". The old country being, in this case, Jordan. Her two novels, *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent*, are filled with the kind of colorful personalities, both Jordanian and American, who have filled Abu-Jaber's life, the author drawing inspiration from a unique assortment of extended family and friends. In this flavorful book, she tells her own story, growing up a child of two cultures. Moving from America to Jordan and back, the young Diana absorbs everything around her, the people, events and aromatic dishes prepared by her father. She speaks to a personal experience of cultural ambiguity as a schoolgirl in America, with a father who has his own ideas about the behavior of adolescent daughters. Throughout, the author gathers the reader in, introducing her extended family in all their glory and eccentricity. The Abu-Jaber's are as generous and expansive as they are unconventional, drawing outsiders into their circle, unable to resist the tempting aromas that waft from the home. In one scene, the children are allowed to stay up all night on New Year's Eve. As the parents gather to talk of old times, the children enjoy their own adventures, let loose upon the midnight landscape, their imaginations wild with abandon until, one by one, they fall into sleep, exhausted by possibilities. Food, family and celebration go hand in hand, the rich tastes that bring

back memories of Jordan, the flavors of home.

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