



Gluten-Free Girl: How I Found the Food That Loves Me Back & How You Can Too

Shauna James Ahern

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A delightful memoir of learning to eat superbly while remaining gluten free.

--*Newsweek* magazine ""Give yourself a treat! *Gluten-Free Girl* offers delectable tips on dining and living with zest-gluten-free. This is a story for anyone who is interested in changing his or her life from the inside out!""

--Alice Bast, executive director National Foundation for Celiac Awareness

""Shauna's food, the ignition of healthy with delicious, explodes with flavor--proof positive that people who choose to eat gluten-free can do it with passion, perfection, and power.""

--John La Puma, MD, *New York Times* bestselling co-author of *The RealAge Diet* and *Cooking the RealAge Way*

""A breakthrough first book by a gifted writer not at all what I expected from a story about living with celiac disease. Foodies everywhere will love this book. Celiacs will make it their bible.""

--Linda Carucci, author of *Cooking School Secrets for Real World Cooks* and IACP Cooking Teacher of the Year, 2002

An entire generation was raised to believe that cooking meant opening a box, ripping off the plastic wrap, adding water, or popping it in the microwave. *Gluten-Free Girl*, with its gluten-free healthful approach, seeks to bring a love of eating back to our diets. Living gluten-free means having to give up traditional bread, beer, pasta, as well as the foods where gluten likes to hide--such as store-bought ice cream, chocolate bars, even nuts that might have been dusted with flour. However, *Gluten-Free Girl* shows readers how to say yes to the foods they *can* eat. Written by award-winning blogger Shauna James, who became interested in food once she was diagnosed with celiac disease and went gluten-free, *Gluten-Free Girl* is filled with funny accounts of the author's own life including wholesome, delicious recipes, this book will guide readers to the simple pleasures of real, healthful food. Includes dozens of recipes like salmon with blackberry sauce, sorghum bread, and lemon olive oil cookies as well as resources for those living gluten-free.

Gluten-Free Girl: How I Found the Food That Loves Me Back & How You Can Too Details

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Kate says

This highly-touted book got off to a great start but by the end had dissolved into sentimental pap. Ahern makes some excellent points and recommendations for people who need to eat gluten-free and, after diagnosis, suddenly find that they must dramatically adjust their eating habits. But she's a hardcore foodie, and, as such, impractical and obsessive about preparing/thinking about/eating/living with/shopping for food. My mom, who must live gluten-free (I read her copy of this book), doesn't have the time or desire to spend hours upon hours in her kitchen making everything from scratch -- she eats to live and doesn't live to eat. Ahern lives to eat, and this book is for people who do the same. It is most certainly not a practical guide for living a gluten-free lifestyle.

Also, Ahern gets horribly mushy at the end detailing her romance with "The Chef" -- they ride off into the gluten-free sunset together. I'm sure many readers find this tale inspirational but I found it tiresome. I know Ahern believes that all things in life, from her celiac diagnosis to her romantic endeavors, are connected in one big gluten-free journey, but... Again, this is not the practical info I was looking for, nor was it useful to my mom as she struggles to live gluten-free.

So ultimately, *Gluten-Free Girl* is a very mixed bag. If you're a foodie, you may love this book. If not, I'd look elsewhere for gluten-free recipes, solutions and philosophies.

Sher says

the author is extremely knowledgeable, and she has a wonderful way with words, although there are times she seems a little condescending. she knows her way around the land of celiacs. of course, it is a lot easier to handle radically changing your entire diet when you're single and fall in love with a chef who essentially converts his restaurant into a gluten-free haven.

seriously. not. bitter. but if you are a parent dealing with kids who must become gluten-free, this is probably not the most helpful book. kids will not care a lot about truffle oil.

Kim says

I actually would give this book 3.5 stars (why oh why won't goodreads do that????). I know the author did not intend this to be a "how to live gluten-free" book, but given the popularity of her blog and the chosen subtitle (which I know from reading her blog that she had no say over), a reader would expect to have more information provided. That said, she did provide some good information (especially the grains chapter), but I would have liked more information about the different flours and why some gluten free baking recipes use things like apple cider vinegar when their standard gluten version does not (ie. what such ingredients do for the recipe). Information like that would empower someone to do the experimentation in the kitchen that she is such a vocal advocate for. She can also get a bit repetitive about the importance of making foods from scratch and enjoying your meals.

But I do enjoy her writing style, and contrary to some other reviewers, I enjoyed the chapter on her relationship with "the Chef."

Kathleen F says

I've known about this book since before it was first published, and could only bring myself to read it now. As a person who's living with Celiac Disease, I really wanted to love this book. But I haven't been able to meet my diagnosis with the everlasting "yes" that Shauna James Ahern has. For me, it's more like the everlasting "oy."

Having admitted this, it can be difficult to read such unceasing positivity. I think it's WONDERFUL that she's transformed her life and her way of eating because of her disease, and that it may be the reason she ultimately met her soulmate. But for some of us the journey with celiac is a bit more difficult--we have partners and families who can't cope as well with the gluten-free lifestyle, other food sensitivities beyond gluten to deal with, less easy access to the ingredients she sings about. Not to mention a bit less desire to spend so much time in the kitchen--perhaps my life will change, but at this stage I can't imagine myself spending my Sundays making stock from scratch.

I think if this book had come out when I was first diagnosed, I might have had a different reaction to it. But as another reviewer mentioned, each "chapter" is a bit repetitive--she keeps rehashing things, especially the particulars of celiac, when she should have been able to move on after the first chapter.

What I *will* take from the book is her description of alternative grains like amaranth and teff, which might be helpful. However, this is information you can also find in her blog.

On the plus side, this is a quick read. :)

Lena says

I'm not quite sure how to describe Shauna Ahern's book about living with celiac, a disease in which the body responds to the gluten found in wheat and other common grains with an intestine-damaging immune response. The book part memoir, in that Ahern tells her personal story of life before and after her diagnosis. It is also part how-to guide, as she discusses the basics of the gluten-free diet, where gluten can hide, and how to do things like talk to restaurant servers about what you can and cannot eat. There is also a recipe component, in which she offers a number of her own gluten-free concoctions. And then there is the philosophical food musings, in which she rails on American processed packaged food culture and sings the praises of organic, locally grown whole foods.

As I read this book, I found some of these aspects very interesting and useful, while others grew repetitive and cause me to do a fair amount of skimming. Unlike Ahern, I do not have full-blown celiac, but it runs in my family and I am producing antibodies to gluten. Since the odds of my developing it are higher than average, I have been told to eliminate gluten from my diet. As a passionate lover of bread and pasta, I greeted this recommendation with woeful dismay. Given how widespread gluten is in American food, following the celiac diet is astonishingly difficult: if those French fries were cooked in the same oil as onion

rings, for example, they will be contaminated with gluten. Even rice-based Asian cuisines aren't safe because there is wheat in most soy sauce.

Ahern is entirely undaunted by these kinds of restrictions, however, and has used her diagnosis as an excuse to wholeheartedly embrace the previously unexplored world of all the gluten-free foods that she can eat. She is a tireless cheerleader for the explosion of taste and flavor that comes from cooking your own meals with fresh, quality ingredients, and her passionate enthusiasm for food makes it very clear that living with celiac need not mean living a life of deprivation. It is this enthusiasm that was for me the most valuable part of the book; I became genuinely excited about doing more of my own cooking and exploring the uncharted waters of things sorghum flour and popped amaranth.

Ahern's own transition to a gluten-free life was made easier by the fact that she already loved to cook, so I don't know that this book will be very useful to someone without the ability or inclination to spend as much time as she does in the kitchen. It's the only book I've read on the subject so far, so I hope there are others that offer less time consuming strategies to those who are not already committed gourmet chefs. For those who are struggling with the sense of loss that comes from being told you can never again eat a slice of crusty bread fresh from the bakery, however, Ahern's enthusiasm for everything else you still can eat is a surprisingly effective antidote.

Jenny says

Words cannot even begin to express how I feel about Gluten Free Girl. As a reader of her companion blog, I have fallen in love with the smooth words and beautiful descriptions that Shauna describes on the pages of both her blog and book.

This book is not a HOW TO on being Gluten free, as a portion of the title suggests. (That part should have been left off the title.) Instead, Shauna takes us on a journey of how she fell in love with food, was diagnosed with Celiac Disease, and how she learned to live with it.

I really like Shauna's approach for dealing with her disease. She takes food by storm instead of sulking about what she cannot eat. In the process she learned much more about loving food than she ever expected. I swooned when she detailed her relationship with the chef. (I know how it feels to find the love of your life.)

This book also re-emphasized the importance of buying fresh, quality ingredients. Please give this book a chance, especially if you are looking to heighten your senses and learn to enjoy food even more than you already do.

Rachel says

As someone who is constantly trying to learn more about food and new ways to make recipes and who has a chronic illness with dietary repercussions, I was really interested in reading this book. What a disappointment.

I don't quite understand was she so obsessed with rehashing the foods of her childhood. It seemed like at least a third of the book was spent bad mouthing the food she grew up with (which seemed typical of many American family diets in the 1970s) without drawing any real parallels to her disease. I am glad she figured out what is wrong with her and is now eating so well, but her condescension was overwhelming and a real turn-off to me as a reader. By the end I was honestly hoping that her parents will not be able to read the book, her railing against the white bread and American cheese of her childhood was so frequent and harsh (not to mention excessive).

The book was also quite repetitive, revisiting the same foods, ideas, concepts and anecdotes more often than was necessary to make her point. A lot of the book was lifted directly from her blog without much in the way of editing, which might help explain the disjointed feeling of parts of the book.

I think that a better format for this book would have been either a straight memoir with recipes (if no other reason than that she could really just delve into the childhood stuff for a couple of chapters and then move on for the rest of the book) or a collection of food essays and recipes rather than trying to tell us how we can find "the food that loves us back", which I don't think the book quite accomplished.

If helping others (rather than simply telling her story) was the main goal of the book (and I think the subtitle certainly gives that impression, despite the author's apparent reluctance to follow through on that aspect) I think readers would have been better served by learning more about her recipe development methods or by including some constructive advice to people who don't have the access to high quality ingredients that she has, money to spend on truffle oil or the time to bake bread 3-4 times a week.

Andra Watkins says

I wanted to love this book. I love food, even though I am sensitive to gluten. I adore eating. I even like Shauna's blog.

This book comes off snooty and condescending. For some people, embracing life fully is not about making food, tasting food, communing through food. For others, like the author, living life IS about that, and that is fine. There are multiple ways to deal with a gluten intolerance or celiac, with hers being just one of them. In both her monotonous litanies about the poisonous food she consumed in her formative years and in recounting her journey to finding happiness, she only makes HER way okay. She refuses to acknowledge that, for some people, packaged gluten-free meals may be the only way to trust food again. Others will stink at cooking, no matter how much they try. She never makes it okay for a celiac or gluten-free person to find a way to happiness that does not revolve around food. She knocks others for failing to see the world her way, and, in doing so, becomes the very person she professes to despise.

As a book, this would've been much better sold without the 'how to' component, which, from reading the reviews, created unrealistic expectations for more readers than just me. I know that was not her choice, something I say to underscore that her instincts on that score should've carried more weight. I am in the process of trying to find a way to live without gluten, and this book really didn't help me.

else fine says

People keep trying to loan me this book. I wish they would stop. I also have celiac disease, and lean towards sounding like a newly converted missionary at times, and like many other people with the disease, I spend a lot of time stewing over the terrible foods I ate in my benighted ignorance, and the horrible ramifications my diet had for my health. Seriously - I lived on those cans of fried mock duck chunks you find at Asian markets (wheat gluten fried in wheat sauce), noodles, and beer. It's no wonder my body gave up on the stuff, probably out of fear and despair. But Ahern out-stews me, easily. You'd think she'd suffered more than anyone ever, and she blames her mom for most of it. I felt really bad for her poor mom, probably just doing her best, feeding her what in retrospect was a bad array of wheaty foods, but no different from what most people eat. It's seriously uncomfortable to read.

Blame slinging and navel gazing aside, the food writing is too twee for my taste, all misty rapture and preciousness. If you enjoy Thomas Kincade paintings or Christian television, this is the food writing for you.

Danna says

Another niece of mine has been diagnosed with gluten intolerance and was lamenting the fact that she couldn't enjoy her usual favorites at Thanksgiving. I'm her giver in this year's family x-mas gift exchange, so I had the brilliant idea of finding a lovely gluten-free baking book. Instead, I found this little gem! The first chapter really resonated with me, and reminds everyone that what we eat has a direct effect on our physical, mental, and emotional health (seems like a no-brainer, but in our "take a pill" world, it's easy to forget that critical link).

Yes, Ahern often sounds like a snob. Yes, this is mostly a collection of her blog entries (often verbatim) rather than what some would consider a proper book. Yes, she goes on and on about other personal events. Certainly this is a memoir rather than a medical guide to living with gluten intolerance. However, for my teenage niece who suddenly learned that the typical American diet she's been raised on is poisonous to her, my hope is that she'll find comfort and inspiration from this personal narrative.

Lady Susan says

This was a 2.5. I guess I should preface this review by saying that I really like Shauna's website: Gluten-free Girl. It was one of the first food blogs I was introduced to. Ironically, I now find it an invaluable resource since I have been diagnosed as celiac.

That being said.....I find her writing to be too much at times. Too flowery, too descriptive, to wordy. Also...at times I thought the book a bit....pretentious? I mean, she went on and on about all these exotic and expensive ingredients that are available to her Locally! Oh and she has five Local! butchers that live Right! Around! the Corner! I mean, Shauna, not everyone lives in Seattle with practically everything available to them and in the right season. She talks about trying vegetables other than the ones of her childhood--Carrots, broccoli, etc. That is great....if you have access to vegetables other than carrots, broccoli, etc. with which to experiment. The grocery store where I live doesn't carry fava beans.

Also, I found the writing to be a bit disjointed--jumping around chronologically, etc. So yeah...it was o.k.

Marnie says

Shauna wrote this book after she found out she had celiac disease & had to give up gluten. While it was nice to read about how she learned to eat better & treat her body right, she's kind of a food snob & most of her ideas aren't very realistic for most people, like no one I know would spend \$25 on a bottle of cooking oil or \$150 on a kitchen knife, & most of her recipes look like they're really high in fat. I was also surprised to see other allergens like eggs in her recipes, I thought people with gluten intolerance usually had other allergies too, like I do. She does do a really good job of describing the food & inspired me to try some of the more exotic grains. I mostly enjoyed this book, but Shauna's writing style can be hard to read sometimes, she uses too many big words & doesn't seem very down to earth.

Rebecca says

I'm currently wrestling with Celiac and oddly enough there is this relatively mainstream memoir about the disease. I really just breezed through it, the writing is pretty abysmal. Also, I can't eat dairy currently and she talks about cheese so often I wanted to smack her. Seems to me that the book is just a bunch of repetitive blog posts strung together and published in hardcover. But there are certain aspects of this story that I can relate to so strongly that I kind of want to give this book to everyone I know so that they'll get a picture of what it's like to live with Celiac.

Angie says

I've seen this book many times since my daughter's Celiac diagnosis nearly three years ago. I've read reviews of people singing its praises. Maybe it's because I don't have Celiac myself, but I found the book disappointing. It was interesting and while she is an excellent author, I found the book to be very repetitious and it's different sections long-winded. I enjoyed the history of some of the gluten-free grains and appreciated the suggestions she gave; but many of the recipes are just not practical when trying to feed a nine-year old girl, let alone her even pickier siblings! We aren't a family of gourmet palates by any stretch of the imagination; and to really "get" the book, apparently you need to be.

Sarah says

I have a visceral dislike of the author's website, so I expected to hate the book with the same name. Shauna's long digressions about food make a lot more sense in a book than they do on a food blog (and a book can't make blatant cash grabs or say nasty things on twitter). I suspect that the benefit of an editor and a medium better suited towards longer stories helped. It was a book about the evolution of Shauna's relationship with food throughout her life, beginning with Lucky Charms and casseroles and ending with gluten-free farmer's market fare.

I was surprised at how much I had in common with Shauna: we both were diagnosed with celiac as adults, grew up eating mostly processed food, taught high school English, and were involved in car accidents (although mine happened after my diagnosis).

With these commonalities in mind, I reject a lot of what she has to say. Her discussion of the "wan, thin girl with no discernible personality" is extremely off-putting and snobby. She decided she had "nothing to say" to her. As someone else pointed out, maybe food isn't that young woman's life passion. Maybe it's fighting poverty or astronomy or anthropology. Frankly, all of the moaning over food that went on in this book was downright creepy. I also rolled my Brooklyn born and raised eyes over the assertion that most New Yorkers don't really cook. Maybe the Upper West Side yuppies she knew didn't, but NYC has a population of over 8 million people and I doubt she's met most of us.

Additionally, it is extremely irresponsible for her to say that gluten-free diets are useful for treating autism. The studies are at best inconclusive (although the stronger ones show that there is no link between a gluten-free diet and the reported improvement of autism symptoms in children). Autism is not a disease and autistics are not looking for a cure.
