



## Julia's Kitchen

*Brenda A. Ferber*

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## **Julia's Kitchen** Brenda A. Ferber

Cara Segal is a born worrier. She figures her worrying works like a whisper in God's ear – if Cara's concerned about car crashes, kidnappings, or murders, she lets God know, and he always spares her. But Cara never thought to worry about a fire. And one night while she's sleeping at a friend's house, her house catches fire, and her mother and younger sister are both killed.

Throughout shiva, the initial Jewish mourning period, Cara can't help wondering about God's role in the tragedy. And what is her father's role in her life now? He walks around like a ghost and refuses to talk about the fire. Cara longs for her family and her home, where sweet smells filled the house as Cara's mom filled orders for her catering business, Julia's Kitchen. Then one day a call comes in for a cookie order, and Cara gets a wild idea. Maybe by bringing back Julia's Kitchen, she can find a way to reconnect with everything she's lost.

Complete with a glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish terms and a recipe for chocolate chip cookies, this debut novel is a joyous tribute to the resiliency of the human spirit.

*Julia's Kitchen* is a 2007 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

## **Julia's Kitchen Details**

Date : Published March 21st 2006 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR)

ISBN : 9780374399320

Author : Brenda A. Ferber

Format : Hardcover 160 pages

Genre : Childrens, Realistic Fiction, Fiction, Religion, Judaism

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## From Reader Review Julia's Kitchen for online ebook

### **Megan says**

i loved this book so much and i also no the author and she is so nice!

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### **N\_sally says**

Keep a box of kleenex next to you as you read this book. Cara is an eleven year old girl who loses her mother and sister in a house fire in the first pages of the story. Cara was staying overnight with a friend when the fire occurred. Her father survived the fire, but won't ever talk about what happened. The story takes the reader through the initial days of shock and denial and then the next few months as Cara tries to deal with her grief. Her father is so overcome with his own grief that he is unable to be there for her. When Cara secretly takes over her mother's former business of making cookie baskets for special occasions, her journey towards healing begins.

I'm sure this author has experienced loss in her life. Her descriptions of Cara's experience as she works through her grief and struggles with questions about God feel so authentic. The way the people around Cara try to be supportive in some helpful and not so helpful ways is also very insightful. I would use this book with children in 5th grade and above. The story would provide a window into the experience of grief.

My only criticism of this book is the illustration on the cover. In my opinion it misrepresents the story. The girl on the front reminds me of a happy comic book character. A story that feels so authentic deserves a more sensitive cover.

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### **Susan Dunn says**

I'm not sure how I missed this one when it first came out in 2006, but I'm glad that I finally found it. Cara is spending the night at her best friend's house when her own home catches on fire. Her mother and younger sister are killed. The house is destroyed, so Cara and her dad move into an apartment for the time being. Obviously Cara is distraught, and it's made worse by the fact that her father can't talk about that night. She needs to know exactly what happened, but what would help her begin to heal is the one thing that her father is trying to repress. After a month or two, her friends begin to tire of Cara's grieving. She must find a way to get through to her father and take steps to make herself feel better too - and she eventually does both by resuming her mother's cookie baking company, Julia's Kitchen.

A great story of grief and healing. I would pair this with "Mick Harte was Here". After I read that book I swore never to ride a bike without my helmet, and after reading Julia's Kitchen, I've started to unplug our small appliances every night!

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## **Angela says**

### Task G Alternative Assignment

Genre: Contemporary Fiction – Bibliotherapy/Multicultural - Jewish

Grades: Ages 9-12

Awards: William Allen White 2008-2009 Master List: Grades 3-5, Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award

The morning after staying the night with her best friend Marlee, eleven-year-old Cara Segal learns that there has been a fire at her family's home, and her mother Julia and her sister Janie have died in the fire. Her father is the only survivor. Sydney is overwhelmed with grief, and she contemplates God's role in her life. Her father is devastated and unable to tell her about the fire or give her much comfort. Sydney is primarily comforted by her grandparents and Marlee. The family goes through Shiva, a seven day Jewish mourning ritual. She learns that the family cat was also a victim of the fire. During Shiva, Cara swears off desserts because they remind her too much of her mother and her mother's business, Julia's Kitchen. After mourning, Cara learns through a newspaper clipping that the fire started in the kitchen toaster, but the story doesn't answer all of her questions. She still wonders what really happened. Her father works long hours, and Cara feels orphaned and lonely in their new apartment. She misses the Jewish traditions that her mother kept alive. One day she receives a call for Julia's Kitchen, but instead of ignoring it she impersonates her mother. The customer heard of Julia's Kitchen and wanted a basket of her famous cookies to celebrate the birth of her new granddaughter Julia. Cara takes the name Julia as a sign. Cara and Marlee use her mother's recipes that survived the fire for the cookies, and the baking process helps Cara heal. Her father is shocked one day after work to discover that Cara is making cookie baskets and has adopted a stray cat. Marlee is sent home and Cara and her dad have a heart to heart. Her dad is finally able to tell her about the morning of the fire.

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## **Carrie says**

Cara was waking up from a sleepover at her best friend Marlee's house when the phone rings and her world is torn apart. In the early morning hours, a fire tore through her family home and her mother, Julia, and 8 year-old sister, Janie, did not survive the blaze. The aftermath of the fire leaves her father utterly bereft and unable to care for Cara's emotional needs. When their phone starts ringing for "Julia's Kitchen", the small baked goods business her late mother had recently started, Cara secretly impersonates her mother and begins to bake their family recipes and fill orders again. Doing this makes her feel closer to her mother and allows her to begin to move on. A touching story; I'll admit it, I cried.

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## **Celestina Warbeck says**

Big fire, death, baking, and secrets. The story of a girl whose mother and sister died in a fire.

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## **Jean Haberman says**

God was a talisman for 11-year-old Cara. Everytime she worried about something, God took care of it and it didn't happen. She forgot to worry about her mother and sister dying in a fire and the unthinkable happened! Did God abandon her? Where was He?

Cara and her father weren't able to communicate. Each of them was dealing with grief in their own way. Cara's best friend and her family helped Cara cope with the loss of her mother and her sister, however, Cara needed her dad. Cara found a way to hold her mother close to her by secretly continuing to bake cookies under her mother's business "Julia's Kitchen." Cara came to understand that God was still there during her loss.

The characters were Jewish and the author included a glossary of Jewish terms. It was a little unbelievable that Cara and her best friend could bake all the cookies and deliver them after school hours. When Cara's father was finally able to tell Cara the events of the fire, I had nightmares.

The cover of this book makes it look like a fun, fluffy read. Boy, was I wrong!

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### **Jodi says**

I don't think I realized this was about Jewish grieving when I picked up this book at ALA. When Cara loses her mother and sister in a fire, she thinks that God has abandoned her but as she moves through the grieving process, she discovers that God gives us the power to get through tough times. The most realistic scenes were Cara and her best friend who eventually fight over Cara's grief. Ultimately it snaps her back into the real world and she secretly starts operating her mother's home-based baking outfit. It's a heavy subject and Ferber handles it well, but at the same time, I thought Cara got over it all a little too quickly. She was 11 but two months isn't a very long time when you lose nearly everything. I did enjoy it and it was nice to read a book that talks about Jewish rituals. I even learned a few things.

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### **Kim says**

An unforgettable book about a young girl learning how to cope with tragedy.

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### **Sam Sinkler says**

\*Spoilers\*

I love this book. I read it in elementary school, and it has been my favorite book ever since. I always tried to find it in my local and school libraries, but none of them ever had it. The book tells a crazy emotional story. In the beginning you learn about the family and the oldest daughter and her mother's love for cooking and the father and the younger sister love to bond over sports. After you learn to love this family and get more insight on who they are, a napkin gets left by a hot toaster and the house burns down. The family was stuck in the house, and the mom, older sister, and dad got out, but the younger sister and the family cat were left behind. The mother ran into the house to get them out, but never came back. The rest of the book goes on to talk about the new bond between father and daughter and that's why I really enjoyed it. This is definitely a book I recommend to people of all ages and it's a very touching true story.

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### **Yi says**

I opened this book, and was pretty floored within the first few pages to realize that I was reading a book about a girl who's just lost both her mother and her sister in a horrible house fire. She "questions God, and his existence," according to the cover flap, which made me really hope that the book would rise above a discussion of faith.

At worst, it'd be a treacly read about redemption and belief. Brenda Ferber, though, handles the topic well, keeping it to a very real set of circumstances and keeping the book way out of the realm of religious discussions. Instead, she frames the question of faith in the day-to-day happenings of a girl who's trying to find a way to get through life after something horrible happens.

This is a good, fast, read. And while we all hope that nothing like this ever happens to us, we do walk away from the book thinking that we understand grief a lot more.

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### **Annica Azad says**

What's crazy about this book is that I remember reading it when I was probably 10 or 11, but it has stuck by me for the past few years. I think the best things definitely come out of tragedies sometimes, whether you want for it to happen or not. And I think this way, because as terrible as the situation may seem at the time, how you deal with the situation really allows you to become a better person and look at every day, as a new day, when you can make everything work the way you want it to work for you. Cara, the main character in this book definitely shows this through her experiences. It's a feel good book and I think if you're someone that is going through hard times in your life as of now, you should definitely take some time to read this book, even though it is indeed, a children's book.

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### **Virginia Aronson says**

This brilliant book begins with a fire on the first page and does not let you turn away. Sensitive, bold, and deep, the story examines big themes including God, grief, loss, tragedy, courage, friendship, and identity. And baking! The story is hopeful despite the trials of the young protagonist. A moving, very real look at how a young girl deals with a grave and sudden loss. Pick this one up, no matter what your age. You won't be able to put it down.

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### **Sara says**

Julia's Kitchen by Brenda A. Ferber is about a girl named Cara who has been going through a lot of depression and grief by losing the two most important people of her life, her mom and her sister in a fire. Although, Cara wasn't there when the fire took place, she was staying at her best friend's house, Marlee. All that Cara had left was her dad, but the thing was that her dad didn't speak a word to her. He was too busy mourning about the loss of his wife and daughter. He was really hurt as well, but all Cara wanted was love from her dad because there was no one else left for her. One day Cara answered the phone and someone was asking for Julia's Kitchen, her mom's baking business. Cara decides she would take the order and deliver it.

As she was making the order she felt close to her mom. It cheered her up a lot. She felt like her mom wants her to do this. Cara's dad decided to start all over again. Julia's Kitchen was open again. I would recommend this book to someone who likes sad stories that involve loss and depression. The character's emotion were shown strongly throughout the book. I really enjoyed it and I could connect with the character easily.

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### **Arielle Levitan says**

I cried for about the first 100 pages and almost missed a flight because I was so engrossed. This might be meant for kids but it covers a very difficult subject and does it so well.

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