



Comfort Me with Apples: More Adventures at the Table

Ruth Reichl (Editor)

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In this delightful sequel to her bestseller *Tender at the Bone*, Ruth Reichl returns with more tales of love, life, and marvelous meals. *Comfort Me with Apples* picks up Reichl's story in 1978, when she puts down her chef's toque and embarks on a career as a restaurant critic. Her pursuit of good food and good company leads her to New York and China, France and Los Angeles, and her stories of cooking and dining with world-famous chefs range from the madcap to the sublime. Throughout it all, Reichl makes each and every course a hilarious and instructive occasion for novices and experts alike. She shares some of her favorite recipes, while also sharing the intimacies of her personal life in a style so honest and warm that readers will feel they are enjoying a conversation over a meal with a friend.

Comfort Me with Apples: More Adventures at the Table Details

Date : Published April 9th 2002 by Random House Trade (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9780375758737

Author : Ruth Reichl (Editor)

Format : Paperback 302 pages

Genre : Food and Drink, Food, Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Food Writing, Cooking, Foodie



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From Reader Review *Comfort Me with Apples: More Adventures at the Table* for online ebook

Deborah says

I wish I hadn't read this book: I ended up not liking Ruth Reichl at all. I loved *Tender at the Bone*, so when I saw this book at Costco I bought it on impulse. I enjoyed maybe the first 1/3 or 1/2--after all, I lived on Channing Way in Berkeley in the 70s also--and the book was an easy read, but she just seemed to make bad and then worse decisions in her personal life, and then justify each one, and eventually I realized I was reading it just to finish the dang thing. I might try some of the recipes, but not Fried Capers and Calves' Brains with Sherry Butter Sauce.

Amy says

[cheats on her husband time and time again and then just floats in limbo in two relationships at once. (hide spoiler)]

Hilary Hanselman says

This book covers the beginning of Reichl's career as a food critic, but more than that it covers some of her affairs and the disintegration of her marriage. It was a bit cringey, and not enough about food for my taste, but still very readable.

Mary Timbes says

Comfort Me With Apples is a good, racy read--full of delicious stories from real life and a few actual recipes. Ruth Reichl, renowned food writer, has lived a full and adventurous life, not all of it soothing. This is the second memoir. I confess I didn't read the first but am somewhat familiar with Reichl as a food celebrity and was curious what she might reveal about her life. The book captured my interest and led me through some of the highs and lows of her life. I think it helps to have an interest in food and cooking to read a book like this--she is prone to describe the meals, bite by bite, and she also expects you to want to know how to cook what she has described. Her life is bound by meals and she sees yours that way too. I for one love to cook and eat, and am somewhat jealous of her successes, but *Comfort Me With Apple* tells some of the difficult parts and well and elevates the reader by its honesty and candor.

Billie Criswell says

This book picks up right where *Tender At The Bone* left off, which was a great comfort to me. I love nonfiction , but I am always left wondering what happened, and this satisfied my hunger for more "book." And there is no surprise why--Ruth Reichl is a great writer and I wanted more. In fact, after reading this

book, I still want MORE!

I have found in my reading that second books by nonfiction authors tend to be more honest, morose, and therefore sad than the first books. This was no exception, but it was in a good way. It felt natural and true to her voice from the first book... in a strange way, it added to the humanity Ruth creates for herself.

The food was another story--the story of food grew and she learned to navigate the world of being critic, which I found very fascinating. I look up to her food life so much, and I felt like I was learning and growing alongside her in this book.

It's just captivating--the way she writes and the life she has lived--even in the most painful moments. And there were times in my reading where I found my jaw agape, or my eyes tearing up. There is real emotion and life in her voice and her writing and that is just so rare. Needless to say, I have already downloaded the next book..... *sigh*

I love Ruth Reichl.

Madhulika Liddle says

A constant theme through restaurant critic Ruth Reichl's memoirs *Comfort Me With Apples* is of food and cooking being therapeutic: it helps her go through difficult times, both professional and personal. Chocolate cake for when she can't figure whether to stay with the husband she is still so deeply attached to, or move in with her lover. Crab cakes for when she can't decide if she should take up a new job or not. Mushroom soup to help her and her mother get over the death of Reichl's father.

Set in the late 1970s (beginning in 1978) and extending over part of the following decade, *Comfort Me With Apples* forms Reichl's memories of those years. The reviews, the interesting restaurants she not only ate at but in some cases got to help set up. The chefs, the experimentation, the excitement about new techniques, new ingredients, 'new' cuisines.

For me, the food aspect of this book was what made me give it the two stars. Had it not been for the food, I'd have left it at one star. Because when I'm reading a book by a food critic, by someone for whom food is such an important part of life—I want to read about *food*. I am not even slightly interested in whom she slept with, why she and her husband—whom she was so very devoted to, she can't stop dwelling on it—cheated on each other repeatedly, or how sex with Michael felt. *Puh-leez*. Sadly, these very intimate reminiscences of Reichl's are what form the bulk of the book; the food interrupts these only now and then, and then only briefly, before Reichl plunges into more personal stuff all over again.

On the plus side, there are interesting little glimpses into the food scene in the 70s and 80s, and how very different it is from today (a food critic who has no idea what balsamic vinegar is? Or Szechuan peppercorns? Unimaginable today). Similarly, a lot of the food Reichl describes—and the recipes—are often markedly different from modern cooking: there's very little of the contrasting textures and flavours, the freshness provided by salads and vegetables and herbs that we expect in Western food today. Instead, there's an emphasis on creamy, buttery, cheesy stuff that I personally didn't find especially appealing (there's a recipe for a Swiss pumpkin, invented by Reichl herself, which really put me off).

The next time I want to read a book by an American food writer, I shall probably turn to Michael Pollan or

Jeffrey Steingarten: I prefer their idea of what a good food book needs in addition to the food *per se*. The history of food, the politics of food, the sociology, as Reichl mentions at one point in her book. Not the intimate details of the writer's love life.

misha says

I read this book on one part of a flight, and ended up in tears on the plane. Oh, she is such a beautiful writer, and just the type of writer that I love. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. I kept reading sections to my foodie husband, and it was just a delight to, on top of that, read about berkeley and boonville and truckee... living in oakland, my husband cooked at the boonville hotel, and my parents live in tahoe.

Her love stories are so beautifully honest, and reminded me of one of my favorite authors, Marion Winick. Her stories of trying to get pregnant, and her attempts to adopt - left me in tears. Now, do I loan this book out, or keep it close in my bookshelf...

Eve says

“When I got on the plane, I didn’t really know why I was [going to Barcelona]. But I [did] now. I needed to find out that sometimes even your best is not good enough. And that in those times you have to give it everything you’ve got. And then move on.”

In reading Reichl's culinary memoirs, I don't know how I skipped over this one! This volume chronicles a momentous decade in her life that ultimately shaped her into the outstanding food writer and editor she is today. Reading her previous books made a fan out of me, but Comfort Me with Apples really cemented my admiration for this amazing woman. In it, Reichl faces some pretty heavy challenges such as difficulties in her marriage, jumping into a career as a food critic, death of a loved one, and the desire to find a soulmate and start a family. She didn't always know what to do when a challenge presented itself, and there were quite a few things I'm sure she wished she could do over, but the way she unapologetically relayed her shortcomings made her just that more endearing and relatable.

She certainly came through on her food writing, and in this memoir she travels around the world! My favorite chapters were those based on her travels in China and Thailand. Also noteworthy were chapters on a few now famous chefs who were just flowering when Ruth crossed paths with them, such as Wolfgang Puck. She was gracious enough to include a plethora of recipes from these chefs, and quite a few of her own! Three I'm excited to try include her “Like Water for Chocolate” chocolate cake (that's my title for it based on how she came about the recipe), Dottie's spinach (pictured above with my dog, Dottie) and her mushroom soup, which I'll never think of the same way after reading her introduction to it:

“That fall, in New York, I made mushroom soup almost every night for my mother. And for myself. It’s the most soothing soup I know, with no sharp edges to jar the palate, no sneaky unexpected spices. It is the perfect prescription for those in need of solace.”

How precious is that? What better way to describe a simple soup? A highly recommended read. If you’re new to Reichl, make sure to read [Tender at the Bone](#) before this one, and then follow this book with [Garlic and Sapphires](#). You won’t regret it.

Kim says

A beautifully written, inspiring book, full of amazing descriptions of food (though some foods, like boiled brain, don’t sound all that appetizing) along with recipes that are woven into this story. This book is an autobiographical account of the author’s early life as a restaurant critic. I found it compelling, but perhaps mainly because I had already read her second volume of life in NYC. This book I read chronologically out of order, but had already fell in love with the author, so her descriptions of affairs, pregnancies, joys, and burdens moved me. I’m not sure I would have been so moved if I hadn’t already been introduced to her in a more purely food-oriented piece. Anyways, I loved this book; I love her! I want to eat at her house for dinner. I’d even give up vegetarianism for one night, because she truly makes eating dinner sound like such a sensual, life-altering experience.

Carolyn says

I really enjoy her writing style. Even when I have absolutely no interest in eating the food she is describing, she makes it sound so wonderful, so I can enjoy it vicariously through her. Reading her book is like sitting down with a friend for drinks - great conversation, some laughs, some funny moments, and even a pearl of wisdom or two. A nice way to spend some time. A couple of the recipes looked like I might try them (like Danny Kaye’s lemon pasta, yum!)

Margaret says

I didn’t like this quite as much as *Tender at the Bone* or *Garlic and Sapphires*. There wasn’t as much food description, and I wasn’t as interested in the details of Reichl’s personal life here as I was in her childhood (in *TatB*) or her restaurant reviewing and sociological observations (in *GaS*). Still, there’s much food goodness, and I like how she conveys her sense of comfort in food and eating.

Sundry says

I liked the real foodie parts of this book, but it pretty quickly devolved into the sort of memoir where I felt somewhat aghast for Ruth’s friends, family, former and current spouses, and lovers. Yikes!

TMI!

It would have comforted me if she had stuck an apple in her mouth rather than telling me quite so much about her infidelities.

[SPOILERS....]

I don't know why this is so...she just seemed so stupidly self-destructive at some points and yet constantly fell forward into better and better jobs. I really was not happy to find out at the end of the book that she was going to achieve her goal of having a child

Kenji Alt says

Entertaining, but shoddily written and kinda trashy. Ruth Reichl's like the paperback romance novel writer of the professional food writing world. Buy this book (and *Tender at the Bone*) at the airport, finish it on the plane, then leave it in the seat pocket in front of you.

Rebecca Foster says

Reichl traces the rise of American foodie culture in the 1970s–80s (Alice Waters and Wolfgang Puck) through her time as a food critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, also weaving in personal history – from a Berkeley co-op with her first husband to a home in the California hills with her second after affairs and a sticky divorce. Throughout she describes meals in mouth-watering detail, like this Thai dish: “The hot-pink soup was dotted with lacy green leaves of cilantro, like little bursts of breeze behind the heat. ... I took another spoonful of soup and tasted citrus, as if lemons had once gone gliding through and left their ghosts behind.”

Samira says

I just could not get into this book--I have very little patience for people who want sympathy while living obviously self indulgent and absorbed lives.

Chana says

By the time I was a quarter through this book I was freaking out (bet that is a Berkley term). I was telling myself, "Don't judge! Stop judging! Take a deep cleansing breath, another!" It only helped so much. I was definitely judging! By the time Ruth and Doug have their honest conversation I was furious. I had to keep telling myself, "This is Ruth's life not yours, Doug is not your husband so you don't have to kill him." I mean I was judging Ruth too, but man (another Berkleyism I'm sure) Doug took the cake (well actually Michael got the cake but never mind that). I liked Michael and was glad when they finally got married. She had better not reveal in the next book what a creep he actually was. That was what happened with Doug, he was such a great guy in the first book, and then the second book, whammo, Doug is a creep.

She eats a lot of, in my opinion, gross food in this book. Things like jellyfish, baby eels, frogs, brains, and something the Chinese told her was an armadillo, hahaha, they have no armadillos in China. Probably dog I'd guess. Her China story is interesting though, I admired her chutzpah. After she marries Michael they adopt a baby in unusual circumstances. Birth mother comes back and claims the baby. I think I know Ruth and Michael's pain. They lost a child as did I. Mine died and theirs was taken away, but the result was the same, bereavement. I stopped judging Ruth finally.

The story ends on a very upbeat note, very happy. She writes very well and her story is interesting, even if I did get upset for awhile there.

Laura says

Ruth Reichl, food critic and former editor of *Gourmet* magazine, is a fluid and engaging writer. Her stories about the early days of California Cuisine were interesting, as were the anecdotes involving people like Wolfgang Puck, Alice Waters, and the Aidells sausage guy before they became household names. But too much of the book is about her personal life, which at this phase involved living in a commune in Berkeley and pursuing several extra-marital affairs. Even if all her descriptions of meals had been for food I actually like, visions of unwashed, unshaven, unmarried people *in flagrante* would have killed my appetite. For me, the problem with these memoirs, as with some of her recipes, is content, not style.

Becky says

This followup to Reichl's first memoir, *Tender At the Bone*, is as lush as its predecessor, if a little sickening as a comforting marriage splinters, a self is reinvented, and a longed-for child is gained and lost.

Though she's well-known for writing about food, Ruth Reichl is just as adept at writing about the self, particularly when the self is caught in unfamiliar, transitional phases.

In the beginning of *Comfort Me With Apples*, Reichl finds herself embroiled in one extramarital affair after the other. The breakdown of her marriage is sketched for the reader, rather than drawn out in excruciating detail, but that sketch is evocative and, indeed, excruciating anyway. It's very clear to the reader what Reichl is giving up, and how hard it is for her to make the decision to give it up.

Also palpable, though never stated outright, is her bemusement at being swept into the L.A. food world of celebrity chefs and movie stars. Perhaps that feeling comes from having read *Tender At the Bone*.

The part of *Comfort Me With Apples* that will stay with me the longest is the part about Reichl's adopted daughter, Gavi. I can't imagine withstanding a loss like that. Indeed, I had no idea there was any such thing in Reichl's life. She tells the story of her daughter with the awe-inspiring level of self-knowledge that seems to be a characteristic of her memoirs.

Ruth Reichl knows food, but Ruth Reichl also knows herself -- every strength and weakness, every grace and meanness -- and she's not afraid to show us each aspect of her personality.

Angie says

I like reading about Reichl's life in general, I love reading about her take on food in particular, but I hated reading about her marriage falling apart & her affairs.

Meg Powers says

I would be embarrassed to read this in a public place, but it's a mindless read and I have a hard time resisting descriptions of food. This is a good break-up book so far: all the romantic relationships Reichl describes crumble, and her writing is too cheesy for me to feel like she's a real person (see: *Made From Scratch*, the Sandra Lee memoirs), so it's pleasantly cathartic. Plus- recipes!

I shouldn't speak too soon, though. Maybe she'll meet some amazing guy she's still with in an inspirational "I needed to let myself be ready for myself" sort of way, and I'll want to throw the book at the wall.

UPDATE:

Finished. Blegh. When it comes to stories of hardship, I have a hard time relating to people whose escapism manifests itself in trips to Bangkok, Barcelona, Paris, etc. Given the chance, that would be my desired means of escapism, but in the mean time I'm stuck with \$1.99 movies and books like this.

P.S.-

This book convinced me that I never, ever want to eat brains.
