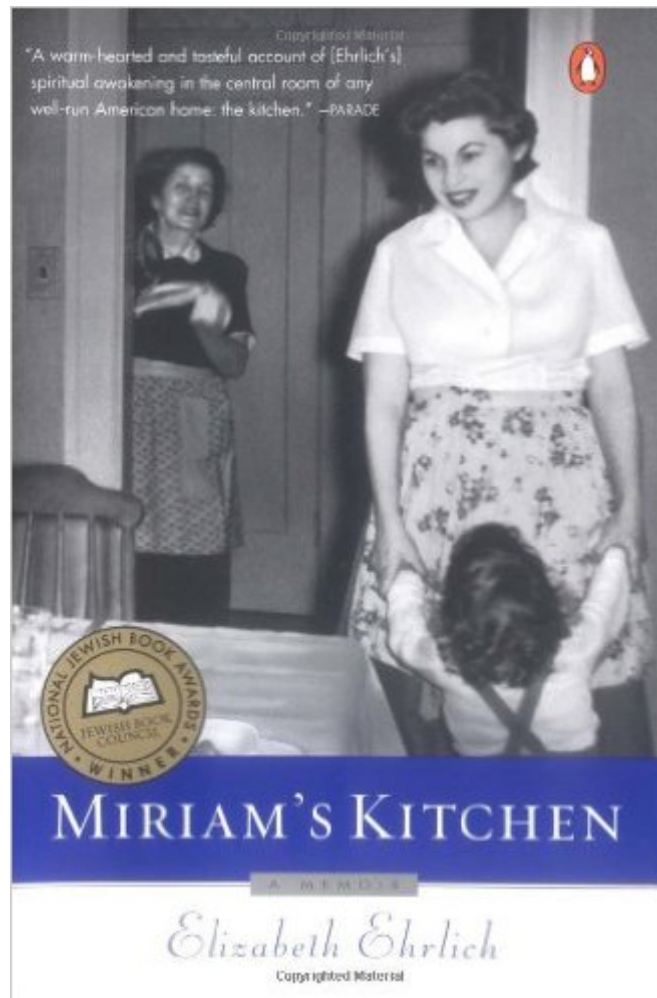


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Miriam's Kitchen: A Memoir



Synopsis

Like many Jewish Americans, Elizabeth Ehrlich was ambivalent about her background. She identified with Jewish cultural attitudes, but not with the institutions; she had fond memories of her Jewish grandmothers, but she found their religious practices irrelevant to her life. It wasn't until she entered the kitchen--and world--of her mother-in-law, Miriam, a Holocaust survivor, that Ehrlich began to understand the importance of preserving the traditions of the past. As Ehrlich looks on, Miriam methodically and lovingly prepares countless kosher meals while relating the often painful stories of her life in Poland and her immigration to America. These stories trigger a kind of religious awakening in Ehrlich, who--as she moves tentatively toward reclaiming the heritage she rejected as a young woman--gains a new appreciation of life's possibilities, choices, and limitations.

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Customer Reviews

I was touched by the special relationship that the author developed with her mother-in-law, Miriam. Through Miriam, we are all so fortunate to hear her life's story, and ultimately, many women's stories from the Old Country. While the author does skip around in thoughts, her essays touch on numerous New York style traditions. I enjoyed reading the index afterwards, and realizing how many different topics she had covered. My synagogue did a book review and it was very favorable. Just one warning: many of the recipes apparently are NOT coming out right! Be sure to read the hilarious disclaimer about the recipes in the front of the book. The recipe I tried (Choc. chip and pineapple cake with meringue) DID come out delicious and was very different! Also be aware that this really is

not a cookbook, per se, so it should be read as a story. Some of the stories ARE holocaust-related and as such, contain sad episodes. This book mostly establishes a mother-in-law's successful attempt to bring Judaism back into the major portion of her daughter-in-law's life. Anyone who has decided to keep kosher after being married will laugh with sympathy at some early attempts to do things right!

If I could give this book a 10-star rating, I would. Elizabeth Ehrlich has written this memoir from her heart, and it shows. The memoir traces the deepening relationship between Ehrlich and her mother-in-law, Miriam, as well as Ehrlich's memories of her fiercely left-wing family in the inner city of Detroit. Both families celebrate their Judaism through food, drink, ritual, prayer and family ties. Ehrlich's views on Judaism shift as she travels the road to middle age, first as a young girl, then as a young adult, next as a new wife and, finally, as the mother of three young children. Along the way she explores such complexities as Miriam's memories of the Holocaust and her native Poland, the challenges of managing a kosher home, and the joys and regrets of interfaith unions. Travel Ehrlich's road with her and you won't regret it-- her book is rich with memories and love. An added bonus: the reproduction of many of Miriam's mouthwatering recipes.

This book is a lot of things. It's a cookbook (although I will take a previous reviewer's warning to heart and be careful about following the recipes); it's a reminiscence of sorts (the memories of Ehrlich's mother-in-law Miriam and others about European/American/immigrant Jewish life in the era of World War II); and finally, it's a book about a certain way of Jewish living. All three of these books are wonderful. The chapters with recipes in them put me in mind of the movie "The Big Night" (that's the one where you saw all that marvelous food being prepared in Stanley Tucci's restaurant in preparation for Louis Prima's visit). These parts of the book are the print equivalent - my mouth watered just reading about the preparation of those dishes. The other parts of the book describe a world that's fast becoming extinct. There is a new wave of religious fervor in Judaism, but it's just not the same as the religion my grandparents observed. That was a meeting of the Old World with the New, and I don't really think that will happen again. I do hope that Ehrlich writes a sequel (or some columns for distribution in newspapers or magazines). I'd like to know how she and her family are continuing to reconcile their version of religion with secular America. I'm sure it will become harder once Miriam and Jacob, her in-laws, pass on. They have been her teachers and guides (Miriam more so than Jacob), and I would like to know if she's truly acquired their commitment as well as their recipes.

Ok, so I'm like a Hawaiian/Chinese guy living in San Francisco who picks this book up and finds it to be the first in a long time that moves him to tears. Sometimes it's like visiting a parallel universe - for a goy to understand why his hand gets slapped from the butter dish at his Jewish friend's houses - and at others, it's a beautifully written account of how a working woman in the 90s (re)discovers her immigrant heritage. I think this book will touch anyone with immigrant roots; all of us can identify with the hard work, sacrifice, and the scents that emanate from our mothers' kitchens. Those scents will always signify - home, and this book captures those scents in an elegant bottle.

Most people who read this book are women. I read this book because my wife was so affected by its content (she cried all the way through), that I just had to read it. I cried too! While the author catalogues her aging mother-in-laws unique recipes, she also reflects on the cycles and rhythms of life held by Jewish traditions. In effect, she is challenging all of us (not only Jews) to look at what valuables, or values, we can, and should, transmit to our children. We are also left with the deeper question of our responsibility, observant or not, to understand and pass along our family and religious traditions. In addition to your children, this book will make you want to connect with your entire family, and get in touch with the family history and traditions that make you who you really are. This book is heartily recommended. It also makes a great gift, especially for a Jewish relative or friend. And the recipes are good too!

I finally read this book after meaning to for a long time--and I'm glad that I did. The premise of this book, a true story, is that a young Jewish daughter-in-law is learning to cook from her husband's mother, Miriam, who is a cook par excellence and a concentration camp survivor. Although the book is peppered with everyday and Jewish holiday recipes, the beauty of the narrative is the growing appreciation that the author, a young career woman, finds for her aging mother-in-law. This book is a rare combination--a book for foodies (of which I am admittedly one) and a book for women who are learning to appreciate the wisdom of an older generation. The book is sometimes funny, sometimes serious, but always tantalizing and perpetually interesting. I highly recommend it.

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