



Yes, Chef

Marcus Samuelsson

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It begins with a simple ritual: Every Saturday afternoon, a boy who loves to cook walks to his grandmother's house and helps her prepare a roast chicken for dinner. The grandmother is Swedish, a retired domestic. The boy is Ethiopian and adopted, and he will grow up to become the world-renowned chef Marcus Samuelsson. This book is his love letter to food and family in all its manifestations.

Marcus Samuelsson was only three years old when he, his mother, and his sister—all battling tuberculosis—walked seventy-five miles to a hospital in the Ethiopian capital city of Addis Adaba. Tragically, his mother succumbed to the disease shortly after she arrived, but Marcus and his sister recovered, and one year later they were welcomed into a loving middle-class white family in Göteborg, Sweden. It was there that Marcus's new grandmother, Helga, sparked in him a lifelong passion for food and cooking with her pan-fried herring, her freshly baked bread, and her signature roast chicken. From a very early age, there was little question what Marcus was going to be when he grew up.

Yes, Chef chronicles Marcus Samuelsson's remarkable journey from Helga's humble kitchen to some of the most demanding and cutthroat restaurants in Switzerland and France, from his grueling stints on cruise ships to his arrival in New York City, where his outsize talent and ambition finally come together at Aquavit, earning him a coveted *New York Times* three-star rating at the age of twenty-four. But Samuelsson's career of "chasing flavors," as he calls it, had only just begun—in the intervening years, there have been White House state dinners, career crises, reality show triumphs and, most important, the opening of the beloved Red Rooster in Harlem. At Red Rooster, Samuelsson has fulfilled his dream of creating a truly diverse, multiracial dining room—a place where presidents and prime ministers rub elbows with jazz musicians, aspiring artists, bus drivers, and nurses. It is a place where an orphan from Ethiopia, raised in Sweden, living in America, can feel at home.

With disarming honesty and intimacy, Samuelsson also opens up about his failures—the price of ambition, in human terms—and recounts his emotional journey, as a grown man, to meet the father he never knew. *Yes, Chef* is a tale of personal discovery, unshakable determination, and the passionate, playful pursuit of flavors—one man's struggle to find a place for himself in the kitchen, and in the world.

Yes, Chef Details

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Author : Marcus Samuelsson

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From Reader Review Yes, Chef for online ebook

Avishek Das says

I wish this was my story; loved the way it blends culture and life via food. The medium is super lucid but not extravagant. the charm of learning to cook from your grandmother is immaculate. above all, the essence of cooking is to learn to taste.. very very good read...

Sheila DeChantal says

Yes Chef delivered everything I hoped it would. Marcus tells his story in an honest and humble tone from beginning to end. My copy of this book is covered in little post it arrows where I marked how he prepared truffles (you add them to the sauce at the very end so as not to cook all the flavor out), and his Spanish breakfast (ripe tomatoes peeled and then crushed on toast adding a grind or two of black pepper), and how to make a lobster lasagna. When curing duck breasts Marcus would soak them in a large pan of salted water with a plate weighing them down for 6 hours.

Mouth watering yet?

And in between pages of mixing seasonings and different flavors is Marcus' story. Growing up and moving out... restaurant experiences that are detailed from where he got it right, and from when he should have been fired and by grace he was not. And then into Marcus' life as the one doing the firing and trying to find kitchen help that understood the demands of a kitchen, one employee even telling him,

"You can ask me to be on time, iron my shirt, shave or not to wear sneakers, but you can't ask them all of me... it's too much."

~Page 309 Yes CHEF

Yes Chef was interesting and a fun book to read that I will refer to again and again. Marcus is a true story of battling against the odds, fighting prejudices and coming out on top. His tips on food throughout the book are things I want to try, things I would have never considered, but when I read Yes CHEF, I felt inspired.

Highly recommended to lovers of memoirs, cooking related books and success stories... I loved this book.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I only really knew Marcus Samuelsson from shows like Top Chef Masters, and vague references to a chef who was combining Swedish and African flavors in his cooking back when I was thinking about working towards being a chef myself. I didn't know much about him, but was interested in hearing his story.

I have to admit to being impressed. Marcus has always been incredibly driven. As a child, it was to be a

soccer player, and when it turned out that he wasn't going to be big enough to cut it, he turned all that energy into cooking. He somehow knew when he needed to push more, to learn more, even from a young age, and his skill and persistence placed him in key restaurants from Sweden to Switzerland to Austria to the United States to France to cruise ships and back to New York, where he has recently opened his newest restaurant, Red Rooster.

Listening to the audiobook enhanced the story quite a bit for me. Sometimes he misreads the words, and it doesn't always flow. Still, what ends up happening is that it feels like he has pulled a chair up to your table to tell about his experiences. By the end, I was completely rooting for his success, as well as for anyone he'd be able to have an impact on. I found a warmth to him, a compassion even, that I wasn't expecting. His love of flavors and how they connect to a community's history inform his cooking, and I think his perspective is important to our culinary world.

I feel like I'm gushing. Chefs do tend to make me that way, but I think unless you've worked in a restaurant, and served 200 tables with a third degree burn, you can't really get it - how much you pour into it; how much it energizes you. For an alternate perspective, Eddie Huang from the Observer offers a much more critical eye. He focuses on the issue of race, but to be fare, Marcus is not born American, and has learned about race relations in the states only through his own experience. I wish Huang had instead looked at what he had to offer. I think he missed Chef Samuelsson's intentions with the Harlem restaurant. He never intended to recreate what Harlem already had, but to tie it into the wider culinary experience, and his own.

Robyn says

Update May 2013: this book has been awarded the James Beard Foundation's Book Award in the Writing and Literature category

This was a seriously good book. Before I received it I didn't know a lot about Marcus Samuelsson. I haven't watched any of the seasons of *Top Chef Masters*, and I missed season 7 of the regular *Top Chef* (which is when he appeared as a judge), so my awareness of him as a chef has been name recognition only. I'm very glad that has changed with reading this memoir.

Immediately upon finishing the first chapter, I started checking the copyright page, "about the author" paragraph, and author's note to see if he had written the book entirely on his own or with a ghostwriter. Less than 5 pages in, I was *that* struck by the writing. After brief Google searches I still can't be sure, but I suspect that the acknowledgment of Veronica Chambers 'helping to tell his story' and 'the fine touch on the words being all hers' tells the reader that she was a big part of the writing. Either way, whoever was involved should be proud.

About six or seven chapters in, I was told that I was reading with a very expressive face. Smiling gently most of the time, occasionally furrowing my brow (I can only assume this was as I read a scene that took place on the playground). That has to be because the story of Samuelsson's life is truly fascinating and strangely accessible, considering how vastly different it is from my own experiences.

In tone *Yes, Chef* reminds me a bit of Jacques Pépin's *The Apprentice: My Life in the Kitchen*, which is a real compliment from me. Both memoirs show the same respectfulness toward family and kitchen staff, the same underlying sense of humor, and the same gratitude, optimism, and hard-working sensibility. One of the things I enjoyed most about Pépin's memoir was his humbleness and focus on the positive things in life, the

ways he'd been fortunate. Samuelsson showed the same traits here.

I have no idea why someone would read a chef's memoir if they weren't interested in food, but for those of us who are: don't worry, there's plenty of gastronomic talk to satisfy most any foodie. I was especially pleased because there is so much discussion of dishes and flavour components of various countries and cultures around the world, which is wonderful. Most chef memoirs seem to focus on French cooking nearly to the exclusion of all else. While I understand that French traditions are the backbone of most restaurant work in the West, and I believe French food has a strong place in the culinary world, I don't believe that place is the **only** place.

I'm also a big fan of holding your head high enough and keeping yourself to a high enough standard to not feel the need of calling out your detractors in print when writing a book about yourself. *Yes, Chef* does not avoid this trap entirely. There are two professional clashes that are discussed, but the persons involved are not insulted and enough positive had been said about them in the previous mentions of them that it comes across not as a spiteful hit, but as a needed explanation of why those professional clashes happened. The incidents in question could not have been left out, so they were written about in the best way possible without attacking, and I appreciate that Samuelsson acknowledged his own responsibilities instead of placing all blame on the other involved parties. The only person truly called out in the entire book is a celebrity chef who conducts himself publicly in a style that I don't personally care for, so I can't be annoyed about seeing him taken down a peg. Even in that case, Samuelsson let the other man's words speak for themselves.

I live with enough privilege to have never thought of food careers as an arena where race would be a particular issue. My experiences growing up in California have been such that the idea of a professional kitchen being almost exclusively white chefs and Latino line cooks seems ridiculous (when I eat shawarma, qorma, adobo, mole, udon, mochi, tajine, phat thai, tandoori chicken, etc., I don't expect those restaurants' kitchens to be full of white faces, and in California those items are more available to me than coq au vin). I had my eyes opened to prejudices that still exist in the cooking world, and I appreciate that Samuelsson discussed it in a way that was clear and honest about the effect on him, but without changing the tone of the book from that of a story about a Chef who is black to a Story About a Black Chef. Race has been a factor in his life and his career, but it is not the entirety of the story, and I'm grateful that it wasn't written as if it were (though the last two chapters did start to get that way).

The quality of the book broke down suddenly and strangely for about 17 pages a few chapters before the end. Anecdotes that weren't relative or interesting were forced in with a shoehorn, then left lying there with no follow-up or reason for being. The writing through this section was choppy and backed me out of what I was reading, as I flipped backward and forward to see if maybe I'd accidentally skipped a page. It was this section that also made me think the book might be better off as a whole without titles to the chapters. Most of the chapters' content related directly to their titles, but others only tangentially or only 2 pages out of 10. The last two chapters were a lot of "wrapping up" language. They mused, felt nostalgic, and seemed to be trying to impart a lesson, when there was still more story to tell. It's unfortunate that this departure from the feel of the rest of the book is what the reader is left with, walks away with, as it's not the supremely enjoyable experience I had from the first 270-some pages. Fortunately it's not bad enough to dispel the good feeling, and I definitely feel good about recommending the book overall. As for me, I'm now off to watch *Top Chef Masters* Season 2, so I can see the man in action!

Received this book as a GoodReads First Reads winner!

Karen says

I first "met" Samuelsson when he competed on Season Two of Top Chef Masters. I enjoyed his quiet confidence, his collegial attitude, and his global palate. His memoir provides a lot of great detail about his journey from his grandmother's kitchen to his hosting a White House dinner and then running a Pan-African restaurant in Harlem (with some Swedish dishes and soul food dishes on the menu, reflecting the culture of his adopted parents and his restaurant's historic neighborhood).

He shows how he's been chasing flavors for decades by cooking in several restaurants in several countries as well as cooking on a cruise ship, which allowed him to investigate the flavors of street food while in ports. He took extensive notes about foods in his journals over the years, and this research has paid off. He also explains the time-intensive process that chefs go through in order to apprentice into the trade. Chefs have to start in lowly stations, taking orders and working 18 hours a day before they can rise through the ranks to the point where they can create dishes to add to the menu. This is a grueling profession, requiring financial and physical sacrifices.

After feeling out of place for so long, I delighted in reading about the friendships he formed in New York with soccer players, many of whom had lived in more than one country like Samuelsson. I would go on and on about this, but I don't want to marginalize him as the Ethiopian/Swedish chef. From watching him cook and reading about his craft as a chef, I think it's more important to describe him as an amazing chef first and a person with an interesting biography second. But I do make concessions that his biography has influenced his cooking. He makes that argument through the details of his memoir.

Because cooking is best taught through a hands-on approach, the apprentice relationship is vital. The book also reveals how competitive, political, and subjective this process can be. I respect Samuelsson for doing his best to introduce better gender parity in the kitchen and for helping working class chefs and chefs of color gain entrance into the kitchens of fine dining restaurants. I also respect him for bringing African foods and soul foods to the palates of fine diners. I celebrate his willingness to take risks by switching up traditional dishes by introducing techniques and/or ingredients from other countries. That's a gutsy move, but I think it reflects the fact that our economy and culture is becoming more and more a global village. And he's the person to put this economic/cultural zeitgeist on a plate.

Faith says

I don't generally read memoirs, but I've seen this author on several cooking shows and he seemed very personable and his food looked really good, so I tried his book and enjoyed it. The audiobook was read by the author and he did a good job. He writes well and seemed to be trying to avoid being too easy on himself.

Marcus and his older sister were adopted by a Swedish couple after the children's mother died of tuberculosis in Ethiopia. Marcus was about 2 at the time so he has no direct memories of his mother, but she was very brave in saving her children by getting them to a hospital. Much later in his life he discovered that his father and many step siblings were still living in Ethiopia.

Food connects Marcus to both his Ethiopian and Swedish roots and along the way he has added influences

(and languages) from Switzerland, Austria, France and Africa. He has led a very focused life, which is what it takes to succeed in the world of high end cuisine, where "yes chef" is the only acceptable response. I first heard of him when he became the head chef of Aquavit in NYC when he was only 24. Later, he had to buy his way out of that relationship and is now the owner of restaurants in Harlem. Along the way, he won Top Chef Masters and executed the first Obama state dinner. Charmingly, he also cooked the identical meal in his apartment for a group of Harlem grammar school students.

Cindy says

[What if Zoe was a pseudonym to partly protect her identity? He thanks "For the leading ladies of my life: Anna, Vanessa, and Linda." This is the only place where the name Vanessa appears, right in the middle of his sisters. Maybe that's her? (hide spoiler)]

SheilaRaeO says

The professional kitchen world is a brutal environment in which to make a living. Those that survive and thrive in that world are a very special breed - a subculture to themselves with their own set of rules all seem to understand without being talked about. This chef's memoir is unlike any other I have read. It is more than just a peek behind the swinging kitchen door of a 3 or 4 star restaurant. It's a look at the racial divide that exists in that world. A divide that exists even at a world-wide level, which I would not have expected somehow. A divide that Chef Marcus Samuelsson is determined to erase. Aside from that very strong message that was emphasized throughout the book, I was most impressed with Chef Samuelsson's drive and determination that was apparent even from an early age. This along with immense creativity and a well developed palate are essential to success as a professional chef. It is a truly remarkable journey Marcus Samuelsson has been on from being an orphan in Ethiopia to cooking the Obama administration's first State Dinner. One that I was completely swept up in while devouring the pages of this book as if I were at The Red Rooster enjoying a meal especially created just for me.

NyiNya says

Marcus Samuelsson is a genius in the kitchen, but his real skill is in maneuvering. "Yes, Chef" is an intriguing little look at ambition, how to climb to the top of your field and make the most of your friends and family. He's a take no prisoners kind of guy, adept at using people and then losing them. When he realizes his girlfriend is more of a hindrance than a help in his goal to reach the pinnacle of chefdom, he dumps her...but continues to sleep with her and accept free vacations from her parents. When he gets another girl pregnant, he realizes this will look bad on his resume and chooses to ignore the situation...until his adopted parents tell him he's not getting a free ride. Upstanding middleclass Swedes, they pony up the child support for Marcus until he's able to do it himself.

When he learns of his beloved grandmother's death, he doesn't miss a beat and keeps on stirring his sauce. Taking time off to grieve...even just 30 minutes or so, might interfere with that promotion he's counting on. Returning home to show his respect for the woman who loved him, mentored him, gave him his passion for cooking was simply out of the question.

When the chef at Aquavit who gives Samuelsson his first break, a real job as a cook, not an apprentice or assistant, and even went so far as to allow the neophyte to contribute new dishes to the menu, Samuelsson shows his gratitude by telling us the guy was into booze and coke and strip clubs. Nice payback. As you might notice, I'm not liking Mr. Samuelsson so much. This kind of single-minded obsession might be admirable in a young scientist who wanted to cure cancer, but in a guy who wants to be the next celebrity chef, not so much.

Despite my not liking him, I enjoyed the book. Marcus' singlemindedness can be fun and, occasionally, touching. It's well written, lets us see inside the kitchens of some renowned restaurants and meet a few genuinely great chefs while tracing this gifted young man's remarkable trajectory. "Yes, Chef" has already been reviewed by someone I (and many others) consider to be the best reviewer on Amazon. He gives it five stars. However I found a couple of points so irksome I simply couldn't cough up that perfect score.

Samuelsson is given to making broad and incorrect statements. He claims Aquavit...the NYC restaurant where he finally achieves his celebrity status...was 'the first' restaurant in the U.S. to take Swedish food beyond meatballs and mashed with lingonberries when it opened in 1988. This isn't true. The late great Scandia in Los Angeles (which closed in 1989) had been doing that for decades. When Mr. Samuelsson apprenticed at Aquavit, it did indeed serve that cliche Swedish meal...which would never have made an appearance at the elegant Scandia on Sunset. He calls the James Beard Institute the most prestigious food institute in the country, one that sets the benchmark for great cuisine. Baloney. Okay, they gave Samuelsson an award and he's grateful, but most people in the restaurant business think the JBI is lame, out of touch and past its sell-by date. Recent scandals among its directors further tarnished its reputation.

Samuelsson praises another chef he works with for his remarkable combination of lobster and avocado, a pairing so natural and good, Samuelsson wonders why it had never been done before. Except it had. At Scandia and at any number of other restaurants in New York, Los Angeles and probably around the country and around the world. I remember eating lobster and avocado club sandwiches in Lahaina in 1977. It's hardly that unimaginable a combo. With five second worth of research, I discovered recipes for lobster and avocado salad going back to the 1960s.

And finally...and worst of all...Samuelsson disses borscht. Where I come from, you don't do that. You can insult our mothers, drain our liquor from an old fruit jar, spit into the wind AND step on superman's cake, it's all cool. But lay off the borscht. Samuelsson says: "Let's face it, borscht can only be so good." He's in Russia, the grand and glorious motherlode of all things borscht, and he doesn't even tell us what kind of borscht he's dismissing. It's like saying "Soup can only be so good." There are dozens and dozens of different kinds of borscht: sweet, sour, sweet & sour, with and without beets, ruby red and perfectly clear, or an impossibly pink concoction gilded with sour cream that glides down the throat in a rapture of cold, creamy deliciousness. Borcht with potatoes? With cabbage and tomatoes, with fat, juicy hunks of beef? With sauerkraut and big garlicky sausage slices? There's even a caraway scented white borscht and one made of pickles. Borscht can only be so good? From a chef?

Throughout his career, Samuelsson jotted down unique or unusual food pairings, juxtaposing the traditional with something totally new or off the wall. "Chasing tastes," he calls it. It's fun to read about those tastes...new flavor combinations and some "what if I mixed a little of this with a little of that" and seeing how many of them now appear on the menu at his Red Rooster Restaurant in Harlem.

Quite a few made it past the idea stage. The Red Rooster menu features items like a traditional southern fried bass and grits -- but gussied up with curry, raisins and almonds. Can't you just imagine how great that combination tastes. His swedish-roast chicken uses a cooking method learned from his adopted Swedish

grandmother, gets a rub of berbere (a heady blend of cumin, coriander and other spices), and is served with a Thai-inspired sweet and vinegary peanut slaw. Bacon and eggs is transmogrified into Caribbean inspired Jerked Bacon and Eggs with pikliz...a searing and indescribably addictive combination of shredded cabbage, carrots, garlic, onions and fiery scotch bonnet peppers in a vinegary dressing. Pikliz is a Haitian staple, a nuclear version of Italian giardiniera and worth the blisters that arise on the inside of your lips after eating.

Enjoy the book and let's hope that all this success has mellowed Mr. Samuelsson. To his credit, he does promise that, when he becomes a chef, he will never subject his staff to the humiliation, insults and sometimes physical punishment that are the norm in other kitchens. We'll have to wait for his sous chef or one of the commis at Red Rooster to do a tell-all to find out. And we'll know if he's still willing to sell his soul by whether or not we spot him "Iron Chef America, Battle Eggwhite."

(Note: Samuelsson came really close to getting that fifth star back for mentioning a blue corn pancake/gravlax combo. I rubbed some lox trimmings with sumac (middle eastern spice with a lemony taste)mixed them up with sour cream, minced green onions, sliced cucumbers, salt and pepper. A couple of blue corn tortillas were heated up until they were soft and fragrant. We covered them with the lox mixture and folded them like crepes. Ding Ding Ding. Jackpot.)

Niklas Pivic says

This was better than I'd expected, although I didn't know much about Samuelsson apart from him being an adopted Swede who's made it in the USA.

In this book, he takes the piss out of himself a lot, which is great; he rarely - if ever - takes the piss out of his profession, even though he once berates the harshness of the system in restaurants, where the hierarchy decides the pecking order. And the peckings are gruesome. Other times, he accepts it and even seems to like it, as I've found a lot of cooks do, masochistically. Maybe they should look up to "high-echelon" chefs like Thomas Keller, who seems to run their kitchens with respect and no stress as top priorities.

Samuelsson writes about being an outsider, not only in Sweden (as a black person, he was subject to racism as Sweden is still a xenophobic country in a variety of ways) but also in the cooking world. Still, time and time, he shows that hard work and dedication pays off. Always.

And he does this without braggadocio or any kind of loud-mouthed pretentiousness, which other chefs - notably Gordon Ramsay, who called Samuelsson and called him a "black bastard" according to this book - display all too well.

All in all, a seemingly honest portrayal that wears thin towards the end, but during the first 75% is very readable.

Elizabeth says

This book is pretty interesting, and the author has had an interesting and exciting life, but it's making me think that he is kind of a pompous ass. I especially have a problem with the way he is portraying his relationship with his daughter. I guess he is being honest, but it's still annoying. He says that when his

daughter asked him if he didn't want her, he told her that he did want her, but then earlier in the book when he finds out his one-night-stand is pregnant, he definitely states that he doesn't want to be a parent and he doesn't intend to give any money to his child. It's his mother that makes him give money, not his own sense of morality. And when he talks about meeting her, he's only worried about how he will cope if she rejects him. And how he had to meet her on his own terms. And he asks how he can explain why he never met or spoke to his child for fourteen years without seeming like a jerk? Um, you can't, and you didn't. Also, when he talks about his feelings when his baby's mama tells him she's pregnant, he says he "did everything" he could to avoid becoming a stereotypical black male, and I'm wondering how he can say that since he participated in getting her pregnant, so there's at least one thing he could have done that would have prevented him from being an absentee father!

Anyway, I'm still not finished.

It is a little hard to understand him, he has a heavy accent and he reads the book himself, in the audio version I am listening to.

So, I finished this book, and it is really interesting, he's had an interesting life. I feel like he glossed over some parts of his life, but it's his book, so he gets to choose what he wants to discuss and what he doesn't. The ending of the book didn't change my perception that he is pretty arrogant and selfish, but the book itself was interesting, and worth reading.

Stephanie says

Disappointing. That is the only way to sum up how I feel about this book. It's a shame since Samuelsson has such an interesting history and story to tell.

I've been following Samuelsson loosely since he left Aquavit. While I didn't watch Top Chef, I followed along interested to see if he would turn out a win. His personal story (African orphan adopted by a Swedish family lands in the US) is very unique in the elite cooking world. I expected to really enjoy hearing his life story and how he came to be one of the most famous chefs in the world.

Instead I was incredibly bored through most of the book, and more than once I thought about just walking away from it. Samuelsson is incredibly repetitive to the point that I was actually saying "I GET IT" aloud while reading. I found Samuelsson almost unlikable in parts of the book...mostly in the part where he doesn't see or talk to his daughter for 14 years.

There are some redeeming parts to the book. The look at the role race plays in the world's elite kitchens was very interesting. I also enjoyed that he didn't hold back when calling Gordon Ramsay out for being a racist jerk (something I have always suspected). I also found the entire process of buying back his name to be insightful, and I wish he would have talked more about the process of severing the chef/owner relationship.

All in all this is my least favorite of all of the chef autobiographies I have read to date. It's unfortunate, because Samuelsson is probably the most interesting in real life.

Marieke says

Where do i begin? I guess first--i wanted to read this because i like food and i spend a lot of time reading about Africa. Then i found out that Samuelsson had actually published a cookbook about African food,

which i couldn't believe i didn't already know about. And then friends recommended this book very highly. i didn't quite know what i was in for, but this, to me, is a very special memoir.

It's not just about food; it's also about family and race. In this memoir, Samuelsson strikes me as incredibly humble and forgiving, non-judgmental, and accepting. His Swedish family also struck me as incredibly special. On a personal note, i have been in the sad situation to have to take classes about foster care/adoption (of other family members). In those classes we spent quite a lot of time discussing race and what is needed when a family adopts a child of a different race. It was remarkable to me to read about a family back in the 1970s doing everything just about perfectly for their children. I was also incredibly touched by the connection Samuelsson made with his birth father and other birth family members as an adult, and that his Swedish mother was included. On a similar note, i really felt sympathetic towards Samuelsson in his difficulties figuring out how to have a relationship with the daughter he accidentally fathered at the age of 20. I admired his Swedish mother and the daughter's mother for laying the groundwork to make a relationship possible, once Samuelsson was ready. I noticed that some reviewers here are critical of Samuelsson for his behavior in this part of the story, but i appreciated his honesty about how he felt about the situation and how well he handled himself once he started taking steps to get to know his daughter. He never once invalidated her feelings.

I could go on and on about that stuff but there is so much more to this book than those family relations...I loved how frank Samuelsson was about race and his way of navigating racism. I love how he has embraced American food and all its ties to African-American history, and therefore African cooking, in all its complexity. He made me feel really hopeful about race relations here in the U.S. as we continue to struggle through the post-segregation era. As a foreigner, he has a very interesting perspective of American history and i loved reading how well in tune he is with it. Also, he never once shied away from the uncomfortable aspects of racial history and race relations here. i do hope he achieves his goal of raising America's consciousness about food, especially food so heavily influenced by African flavors and traditions, because i think it could help us a great deal in moving forward, together.

Diane Yannick says

I can't rate this book as I chose not to finish it--unusual for me. After reading the first third of the book, I was so bored that I couldn't continue or justify the \$13.99 kindle price. I returned it and am relieved not to continue Marcus' journey from one kitchen and locale to the next. I know it's a tough life in the top kitchens and that it's a struggle to get there. I just could not find the compelling narrative.

Obsidian says

I enjoyed this a lot. I think some readers got turned off by Chef Marcus Samuelsson because he makes a lot of personal choices they would not have. But I get it, I had a lot of hard choices to make while I pushed myself forward in my career. I didn't find him heartless, I felt empathy throughout this book.

What's funny is that my parents would get it. A few days after my father died, my mother looked me in the face and said so you're going back to school (I was in my senior year of college). When my father passed away I graduated from grad school, I started my first federal job three weeks later. I didn't get a chance to mourn in probably the appropriate way according to other people, but I know my parents would have

understood.

I loved reading this memoir that's shows Samuelsson from Sweden, to Austria, France, and the United States. We don't get recipes in this book, but you get a personal look at Chef Samuelsson's personal life and his views on food and other chefs. FYI Gordon Ramsey sounds like an ass.

Book Riot Community says

I received this chef memoir in a food-themed Book Riot box, along with an apron, a dishtowel, a charming bookmark, and other goodies. It hadn't been on my radar previously, but I ended up really enjoying this account of a chef who worked his butt off through years of feeling like an outsider, and who established an identity for himself as someone who was skilled at creating and melding flavors that transcended cultural boundaries.

—Steph Auteri

from The Best Books We Read In July 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/08/01/riot-roundup-july-2016/>...

Kristin says

I feel a bit conflicted in reviewing this memoir. As an aspiring foodie (in the unpretentious sense of the word, hopefully), it was interesting to read about an Ethiopian-born, Swedish-adopted chef who first learned to cook in his adopted grandmother's Scandinavian kitchen and refined his skills through both short and extended cooking gigs around the world. In New York City (where he chose to settle), his newest restaurant, Red Rooster, is located in Harlem, and he references some of his favorite food shopping places as Roosevelt Ave./Jackson Heights (cool!) in Queens, Chinatown, and the Harlem Farmers Market. I really like his idea of developing a restaurant in Harlem. What I admire most about him as a chef is his interest in joining together cultures and drawing upon food experiences and ingredients from his life and travels.

Early in the book, Samuelsson writes he has a daughter who is a product of a one-night stand. Although part of his personal life and perhaps not relevant to his path as a chef, this is a memoir, and it was hard to read he had been voluntarily absent during the first 14 years of his daughter's life while pursuing his culinary dreams.

The conflict of the review is that Samuelsson discusses at length the long hours of sacrifices essential to making it as a chef, and as a result, his daughter ended up being one of them. This was intriguing to me considering Samuelsson's story and relationship with his own birth father (I won't write more in order to not spoil!).

In summary, an entertaining read and incredible story but in the one aspect of Samuelsson as a father, a bit hard to swallow (pun intended).

Sarah says

I finished listening to this on audio earlier today and all I can say is wow. Non fiction and memoirs are typically outside my comfort zone, but I was looking for an audiobook and thought something along those lines would be better because there wouldn't be a plot to follow.

Turns out, I didn't want to miss a moment of it and I didn't struggle to pay attention. Samuelsson reads it himself and while chef lingo is something I don't understand it was truly awesome to hear him tell his story.

I've always liked Samuelsson when I saw him as a Chopped judge on food network, but I never knew his name or much about him beyond that. Turns out, he's had a very adventurous life. Born in Ethiopia, adopted by a Swedish family at the age of three, and traveled the world on various apprenticeships or just to taste the different foods the world had to offer.

I have nothing but respect for him and the way he talks about hard work being enough to get noticed. In a kitchen, you don't want to be noticed for anything else (attempting to make small talk with the chef, screwing up at your station, etc.) He's made some difficult choices in his ambition to become a chef, but for most of them, I can hardly blame him. Look where he went. Look at what he's done.

Race plays an important part in his life. Being a black man growing up in Sweden he said he felt forever an outsider. The language in the kitchen they use to refer to the lowest staff literally translates to black. He's experienced some very harsh realities in regards to his race but his perspective on all of it is very admirable, and how he uses his celebrity status to raise up, not just other blacks, but women and Latinos, and other marginalized people in general is a wonderful thing.

But I think my favorite parts of the story, are when he talks about his love for cooking, how it relates back to both his mothers, his grandmother, the meals he's shared with family and friends. How food can unite people, and flavors of different cultures can come together to form an entirely new kind of dish.

I am going to wrap this review up here because otherwise I'll just gush for the next ten paragraphs, (turns out I suck at reviewing memoirs) but I'd highly recommend this to anyone who is a fan of Samuelssons or enjoys food and cooking in general.

Mo Shah says

So the dilemma for me here is twofold.

One, this is an obviously ghostwritten book. The language - especially the sensory details - is so rich and ripe and lucious there is no way that someone who isn't a professional in the field could manage it. So I had to search for it, but in the afterward where he acknowledges folks the first person he thanks the person who helps him tell his story.

The second dilemma is that while I might appreciate Mr. Samuelsson's drive and ambition and talents more after reading it, I'm not particularly sure I like him that much more. Most particularly, the fact that he has little explanation as to why he essentially abandoned his daughter for 14 years really bothers me. To be fair,

he's straightforward and forthright about the fact that he didn't do so. Baffling is that his mother was involved in his daughter's life, so why didn't he remain in contact? It's obviously a decision he'll have to deal with, but it certainly makes me respect him less.

But how should that affect the rating of his book? Given the strength of the writing (which really is so descriptive of food and a joy to read) I have to give it some props.

La Petite Américaine says

Is it bad that I'm waiting with baited breath for Marcus Samuelsson to fly just a little too close to the sun? You can bet I'll be there to kick him when he comes crashing down.

You see, this is not a memoir. It's the story of one man's unwavering ambition, and the book itself is just a cog in the massive Marcus Samuelsson self-promotion machine, a small workhorse that gives a little more publicity to the guy who has four restaurants, catered for the Obamas at the White House, and got himself gigs on the Food Network and Bravo.

But the thing is, I don't even care about the memoir being a self-serving gig to promote his agenda. That's fine. That's business. That's the state of American publishing. What bothers me here is Marcus Samuelsson's heaping sack of steaming crap, bound up, disguised as a story, and packaged nicely by a decently talented ghost writer. The entire thing is a healthy entree of bullshit with a side of crème fraîche.

While I do appreciate the fact that Samuelsson had to endure great hardships because of the color of his skin (and I take particular glee in the fact that he called out Gordon Ramsay for being a negative, loudmouth, asshole racist), I can't stand the fact that I'm supposed to ignore the pain he inflicted on others in pursuit of his dreams of becoming a chef.

Some examples? Samuelsson missed his father's funeral because our fair chef's visa paperwork prevented him from traveling. Well. It happens, and the dead *are* exceedingly understanding about these things. Let's try again. Oh, yes, he broke up with a girl he'd been dating for years to follow his dreams of working in a Swiss restaurant and simply can't fathom *why* she's upset. He's even more perturbed that she takes a job in Switzerland with him, so to cope with his annoyance, he fucks a different girl in Austria and knocks her up; that relationship produced a daughter for whom Samuelsson paid child support but refused to meet until she was fourteen because he was too busy making his career in New York and marrying a model. (Oh, great. Just what the world needs: another little girl with daddy issues. We all know what happens with those.)

(Good thing Samuelsson made up for lost time with his kid by flying her to New York to meet Kanye West at a party. Jesus. Fucking. Christ).

You know, ambition is fine. Ambition is what makes dirtbags like Marcus Samuelsson famous while people like me write pissed off reviews on goodreads. It's the fact that Samuelsson treats the people that are supposed to be important -- his daughter, his father, women, etc. -- like crap, but then praises himself for sending monthly financial support to his family of origin in Ethiopia (that gave him up for adoption when he was a baby), or talks about how much he loves his super-wealthy supermodel wife. Funny how the only

woman he respects is one who's rich and gorgeous, and the only family he takes care of is the one that sounds great in New York Times articles. UGH.

When he wasn't trying to disguise his dickheadedness with faux acts of humanity, it was all food, food, food, food, FOOD, FOOD, FOOD, FOOD and ... yeah, I couldn't take it.

So, Marcus Samuelsson, do your thing. Marry the model, run the chic four-star New York City restaurants. Pop up on every TV show on Bravo and the Food Network. Do your little promo thing with Illy. Rake in even more millions. Just keep flying higher, my friend...that's right, higher, right towards that warm glowing orb, just keep flying ... When you hit the ground with a thud, I'll be here waiting. With a pair of boots on....with steel-pointed toes.

Oh, and Marcus? You forgot to mention your daughter in the acknowledgments section. *shocker*

UGH. One star for the Gordon Ramsay tidbit.

Sucked.
