



Cooking as Fast as I Can: A Chef's Story of Family, Food, and Forgiveness

Cat Cora

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Remarkably candid, compulsively readable, renowned chef Cat Cora's no-holds-barred memoir on Southern life, Greek heritage, same sex marriage, and the meals that have shaped her memories.

Before she became a celebrated chef, Cathy Cora was just a girl from Jackson, Mississippi, where days were slow and every meal was made from scratch. Her passion for the kitchen started in her home, where she spent her days internalizing the dishes that would form the cornerstone of her cooking philosophy incorporating her Greek heritage and Southern upbringing—from crispy fried chicken and honey-drenched biscuits to spanakopita. But outside the kitchen, Cat's life was volatile.

In *Cooking as Fast as I Can*, Cat Cora reveals, for the first time, coming-of-age experiences from early childhood sexual abuse to the realities of life as a lesbian in the deep South. She shares how she found her passion in the kitchen and went on to attend the prestigious Culinary Institute of America and apprentice under Michelin star chefs in France. After her big break as a co-host on the Food Network's *Melting Pot*, Cat broke barriers by becoming the first-ever female Iron Chef.

Cooking as Fast as I Can chronicles the difficulties and triumphs Cora experienced on the path to becoming a chef. She writes movingly about how she found courage and redemption in the dark truths of her past and about how she found solace in the kitchen and work, how her passion for cooking helped her to overcome hardships and ultimately find happiness at home and became a wife and a mother to four boys. Above all, this is an utterly engrossing story about the grit and grace it takes to achieve your dreams.

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From Reader Review Cooking as Fast as I Can: A Chef's Story of Family, Food, and Forgiveness for online ebook

Jill Title says

2.5-2.75? Not bad. It was entertaining and interesting, but it felt a little self aggrandizing at times with a lot of name dropping and what not, and she glossed over a lot of really deep issues making it seem as though she hasn't quite worked them out yet, which is fine of course, we're all works in progress, but it was maybe a little uncomfortable. Real life is so messy, I guess maybe I'm just looking for something a little tidier in my reading? Not totally sure. Something about it just felt awkward.

Savannah Jane says

I chose to read Cat Cora's memoir mainly because I hadn't yet formed an opinion on her which was the perfect basis for eliminating bias upon reading a book. Despite my affinity for The Food Network, I never caught Cora on a show. About as much as I knew about her--her height, her hair color, and her cooking style--I could learn on her Wikipedia page. The more intimate details about her--her childhood, her education, her relationships--were mere questions in my mind before reading her memoir, *Cooking As Fast As I Can*.

This is one of my favorite memoirs because of Cat Cora's Southern charm, no-bullshit badassery, and selflessness. It is the perfect blend of food knowledge, as she includes some of her favorite dishes, childhood connections to cooking, and forays into the culinary world, and personal information, like where she grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, painful memories of sexual abuse, and learning how to navigate her sexuality. I never found myself at a loss for either food or secrets because Cora so effortlessly weaved the two together in an engaging way.

I appreciated Cat Cora's candidness about her life, especially her obvious, plentiful love for her family, her genuine remorse for her mistakes, and irrefutable passion for cooking. This is not one of those memoirs that simply reinforces how talented or successful a chef the author is. More than that, I was left realizing that above being a force in the culinary world, Cat Cora is also a devoted Southern girl, family woman with secrets like all the rest of us. The only difference between her and us is that she shares those secrets instead of harboring her regret.

ShannonCC says

Her story was interesting. The book itself could have used a lot more editing though. She didn't seem to have a focus and would start and stop stories suddenly. The ending in particular felt unfinished. But still, it was interesting to read about her life.

Karen says

There is so much about Cat Cora's memoir that grabbed me. It's sass, its vivid descriptions of her southern childhood and her determination to make it in the hard-driving world of celebrity cooks. You can see her boldness, her grit early on and when she decides to become a chef she brings it right with her. She lived hard and fast and she liked it that way (and it was fun to read) and yet, it got tricky. Alcohol got in her way (and maybe, still does) as does the impact of being sexually abused by a family friend. She deals with it, keeps going, deals some more with it and keeps on going. It is all so admirable especially how she talked to her family about the abuse. I was with her for about 2/3 of the book but then I started to become irked by some of her bravado and the book started to feel more gamy and a bit like an advertisement. Ms Cora did not seem as open as before. My sense was that by the conclusion of the book that things were pretty tough, at home, with drinking perhaps. That is fine and understandable and reading about the hard stuff is what I gravitate to but she seemed inaccessible and her writing felt stilted with platitudes and triteness. I mostly wound up thinking "No yet, too early. It wasn't time to write your story yet." If there is a sequel I will be sure to pick it up and see where she is at and I will hope that it can be as strong and open as the beginning of this book.

Thank you to Edelweiss for allowing me to review this book for an honest opinion.

Liralen says

So...I'm not a foodie in any way, shape, or form. I'd never heard of Cat Cora prior to reading this book and had to look up Iron Chef to figure out exactly what it meant that she'd been an Iron Chef. Still, I like food memoirs and queer memoirs and so on, so on paper (pun totally intended) this works well for me.

There's a reason, though, that I have a shelf called 'fame first, book second': celebrity memoirs (and occasionally fiction) are a whole different ballgame. I've read some legitimately good ones and some legitimately enjoyable ones (not always the same thing), but much of the time they seem more an attempt at further branding than anything. Case in point: the writing here is *fine*, perfectly competent and all (aided, no doubt, by the ghostwriter), but there's no real story; in places it feels like an attempt to stuff every life event into the book, and in other places it reads like a résumé. Would have been a lot more interesting to me if she'd focused really closely on one or two experiences. Some interesting points about knowing that she was a lesbian in the southern US in the early 1980s, though: *I didn't even fantasize about being truly, deeply in love with a girlfriend because I knew I could never have it. It would be like a straight chick hoping to marry a rock star or the Prince of Wales* (28). Lots of places, still, where that hasn't really changed.

The book ends on something of a downer—less because that's the intent, I think, and more simply the story arc beyond *my life so far* is pretty thin. The timing is perhaps unfortunate, though—(view spoiler).

Taryn Pierson says

I've long been intrigued by Cat Cora. She always seemed sassy and fun whenever I saw her on Iron Chef America, super petite but packing tons of energy. When I saw she had written a memoir, I knew hers was a life I wanted to know more about.

And what a life she has led so far. I got winded just reading about it—all the cross-country flights for TV appearances, countless restaurant openings, stints in culinary school and internships abroad. Cora has worked unbelievably hard to become one of the best chefs in the country (or would she say the world?), and it's paid

off handsomely for her, even though the spark that drives her was kindled at least partly from hardship.

Cora hasn't led a perfect life; in fact, I was surprised at how colorful her account is, and how honest she seems to be about her rowdy past. She may have a wife and four children now, but in her twenties and thirties she was clearly of the “work hard, play harder” mindset. She weaves in some great behind-the-scenes stories of when tempers—hers included—flared in the kitchen along with the gas. There's a good balance in the narrative between her personal and professional lives, and as she makes clear, when you're in the kitchen six days a week, the two have a way of blending together.

This memoir would be a great gift for the foodies in your life, or really, anyone who likes finding out what makes other people tick.

With regards to Scribner and NetGalley for the advance copy. On sale September 15.

More book recommendations by me at www.readingwithhippos.com

Ashley says

3.5

Amanda says

Iron Chef, mother, wife, and friend – while Cat Cora may be all of these, she has spent most of her life defying labels. Her gritty and candid memoir hops from Mississippi to California to France, all the while unearthing the things—and food—closest to her heart.

Cora is a true Southern girl, complete with a slight twang and penchant for no-nonsense axioms. After a horrifying incident when she was six years old, Cora grapples with feelings of betrayal, loneliness, and shame until she realizes “that I’m the only one responsible for taking care of myself.” Her mental armor prepares her to undertake several restaurant internships in France, and then to become executive chef at Postino. After gathering tremendous momentum in the culinary world, Cora then becomes the first female Iron Chef.

It would be remiss not to discuss another important facet of Cora’s life—her relationships. Cora, out and proud, had many volatile affairs before settling down with Jennifer and having four children. Cora’s unflinching narrative and honesty only serve to endear us more to her, her family, and her cooking.

If you’ve ever watched the Food Network just to gaze at the glistening racks of lamb or steaming mussels, then this book is for you. Cora’s fearless glimpse into the cryptic world of the kitchens is enthralling without being overly lofty. She strikes a fine balance between grit and glamour that creates a breathless, can’t-put-it-down narrative. [Reviewed for ELLE Magazine]

Brianne Sperber says

Of all the chefs I watched on television growing up, Cat Cora was always a bit of a mystery to me. She didn't prepare meals for her husband as Ina Garten did, nor did she cook alongside her sons like Paula Deen. Compared to her Food Network contemporaries, her life seemed a bit more private and less of an act. Cora's unlikely path to celebrity chef and bittersweet coming of age story is one all too many women can relate to and one I am grateful she shared with us. Her memoir deserves to be placed next to Ruth Reichl's *TENDER AT THE BONE* and Marcus Samuelsson's *YES, CHEF*--it is as tender, rewarding, and inspiring.

A must read for fans of the genre.

Michelle says

Entertaining anecdotes from Cat's early life, culinary life and romantic life. Very frank, and fast-moving.

Rebecca says

(3.5) Despite her various Food Network appearances and restaurants, I had never heard of Cat Cora. I don't generally read ghostwritten celebrity autobiographies, but I really enjoyed this. A sharp, sassy voice comes through as Cora narrates her Mississippi upbringing in a half-Greek adoptive family and the challenges of being gay in the conservative South. The highlights for me were Cora's two *stages* (apprenticeships) in France and her menu development for restaurants from upstate New York to the Bay Area of California. It's less interesting once her restaurants start to become a brand/franchise.

kathryn says

Picked this up at a used book store because we needed a book to read in a bar. I chose this because it was about a celebrity chef from Jackson MS! I had never heard of Cat Cora, the Iron chef, but I appreciated her honest (as far as I could tell) story of her life-particularly growing up in Jackson, struggles with her sexuality and coming out and then fighting in the male dominated kitchen and her love life. parts of the book felt rushed but so does her ridiculous life...

Jennifer Kirkey says

Remarkably candid, compulsively readable, renowned chef Cat Cora's no-holds-barred memoir on Southern life, Greek heritage, same sex marriage, and the meals that have shaped her memories. Before she became a celebrated chef, Cathy Cora was just a girl from Jackson, Mississippi, where days were slow and every meal was made from scratch. Her passion for the kitchen started in her home, where she spent her days internalizing the dishes that would form the cornerstone of her cooking philosophy incorporating her Greek heritage and Southern upbringing—from crispy fried chicken and honey-drenched biscuits to spanakopita. But outside the kitchen, Cat's life was volatile. In *Cooking as Fast as I Can*, Cat Cora reveals, for the first

time, coming-of-age experiences from early childhood sexual abuse to the realities of life as a lesbian in the deep South. She shares how she found her passion in the kitchen and went on to attend the prestigious Culinary Institute of America and apprentice under Michelin star chefs in France. After her big break as a co-host on the Food Network's *Melting Pot*, Cat broke barriers by becoming the first-ever female *Iron Chef*. *Cooking as Fast as I Can* chronicles the difficulties and triumphs Cora experienced on the path to becoming a chef. She writes movingly about how she found courage and redemption in the dark truths of her past and about how she found solace in the kitchen and work, how her passion for cooking helped her to overcome hardships and ultimately find happiness at home and became a wife and a mother to four boys. Above all, this is an utterly engrossing story about the grit and grace it takes to achieve your dreams.

Renee says

Renowned chef Cat Cora's candid memoir on Southern life, Greek heritage, same sex marriage, and the meals that have shaped her memories.

The book takes us from her childhood in Jackson, Mississippi to her current status as a successful chef and television personality.

Although she skirts around the topic, I would have liked to have known more of the specifics of her challenges as a female chef in a male dominated career. An open and honest story of a Chef Cora's life experience and how she got to where she is today.

Ali says

I'm glad I stuck with this book. I originally bought it to preview for my AP Language class but quickly discovered that it was ghostwritten, and that didn't work for my assignment. Anyway, there's a slow part near the beginning that almost made me put it down but I kept going because I want to send it to my sister, and it did indeed get better. What I liked most about this book was Cat Cora's emphasis that success and fame is not linear, that there are ups and downs, that reality TV is so fake and that there are real emotions behind the people we're avidly watching and that what we see is not those things.
