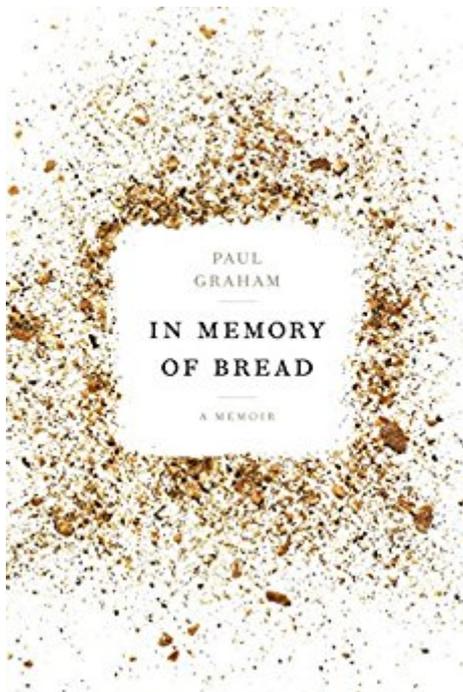


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In Memory Of Bread: A Memoir



Synopsis

The funny, poignant memoir of one man's struggle to come to terms with his celiac diagnosis, forcing him to reexamine his relationship with food. When Paul Graham was suddenly diagnosed with celiac disease at the age of thirty-six, he was forced to say goodbye to traditional pasta, pizza, sandwiches, and more. Gone, too, were some of his favorite hobbies, including brewing beer with a buddy and gorging on his wife's homemade breads. Struggling to understand why he and so many others had become allergic to wheat, barley, rye, oats, and other dietary staples, Graham researched the production of modern wheat and learned that not only has the grain been altered from ancestral varieties but it's also commonly added to thousands of processed foods. In writing that is effortless and engaging, Paul explores why incidence of the disease is on the rise while also grappling with an identity crisis—given that all his favorite pastimes involved wheat in some form. His honest, unflinching, and at times humorous journey towards health and acceptance makes an inspiring read.

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Customer Reviews

“Give us this day our daily bread.” In the Our Father, bread becomes the representative not only of all nourishment on earth, but our surpassing nourishment in the Eucharist. Unless we eat this bread, we will not only go hungry, we will “not have life” (see John 6: 53). For a while, 16th and 17th century missionaries in Asia translated this petition of the Lord’s prayer as “give us this day our daily rice.” That didn’t go over well with Church authorities. It may have communicated the aspect of earthly nourishment accurately enough, but it lost the Eucharistic connection with the Bread of Eternal Life. And so the Church still prays three times every day (Morning Prayer, Mass and Evening Prayer) for “daily bread.” Yet by now all of us know someone for whom bread, whether the limp white sandwich bread of our childhood PBJs or the crusty artisanal loaves in a high-end bakery, is not nourishing at all. Bread, the simplest of culinary delights is for persons with celiac disease, not food but life-sapping poison. Those who are “merely” gluten intolerant may not suffer the same degree of physical damage from eating grain-based foods, but they know there is a price to pay if they indulge in a bagel or a cupcake. Paul Graham knows what that is like, and in his memoir he shares the experience of being cut off not only from bread as food, but from the culture of bread (and of beer!). There is a special poignancy to Graham’s narrative of coming back, literally, from death’s door only to discover that he had to give up two of his favorite hobbies, two crafts that had brought him immense pleasure not only in the eating (or imbibing, as the case may be) but in the fellowship built around the products of grain: home bread making and beer brewing. With Graham’s book those of us whose daily bread can be, in fact, bread learn what it is like to suddenly be deprived of such a common and seemingly harmless food. Graham’s struggle to find food that was (a) like bread and (b) still worth eating highlights an important dimension of culture: the common table. To lose bread is to be cut off from your fellows, as well as from a vital connection with 10,000 years of tradition. When something as basic as bread (and in Graham’s case, even the generally-tolerated oats) is off the table, relationships—and not just menus—have to be renegotiated, rediscovered, relearned. But the first of the relationships affected by Graham’s sudden illness (and its almost equally drastic “cure”) was his relationship with his wife, Bec. From the very first, Bec decided that she and Paul would bear this burden together. Paul’s inability to tolerate ordinary grains (and products made with grain) would not create a division at their common table with the “haves” (Bec) and the “have nots” (Paul). She would scrutinize labels and clear the house of anything unsafe for Paul to eat. She

would experience the same loss, and the same, almost desperate search for bread that was at the same time gluten-free and real, as in real, identifiable bread. She would adopt a gluten-free diet with him. Graham found that relearning his life after celiac disease included finding a tolerable gluten-free beer that he could drink with his softball buddies after a game. It meant neighbors and friends going out of their way to provide gluten-free canapes at cocktail parties, and the disappointment of many imitations of bread (the saddest of all: imitation pizza). The Grahams had long adopted a "locavore" ethos, supporting local farms and limiting their food choices to produce, meats and cheeses that had been raised in the vicinity. Until Paul's diagnosis, this included local wheat with which to bake the fragrant loaves which were now out of the picture. Now it became necessary to purchase items that could not be produced locally: psyllium, xanthan gum, tapioca starch. With so few restaurants in their rural New York town offering gluten-free options at the time, he had to rely more and more on the exotic. As wonderful as those Asian (hold the soy sauce, please) or African or Latino meals were, they were not the food he grew up with: they did not satisfy his human hunger. They were not bread. Accompanying Graham and his wife on their search for satisfying bread, we learn about grain production and the culture that took root when grains were first domesticated. With him, we learn the forms of bread in various parts of the world. I had no idea that buckwheat (not really "wheat") blini are a traditional (and gluten-free) French crepe, or that chickpea flatbread is a (gluten-free) tradition in Nice as well as in India. Did the Grahams finally find a bread that was both safe to eat and a real connection to the memories and cultures that were woven into their lives? Would they ever be able to bake real bread at home again? Did Paul find a decent beer for his ballgames? No spoilers here. In Memory of Bread: A Memoir In Memory of Bread was an engaging read, from first to last, with some laugh-out-loud lines in just about every chapter. It disabuses the reader of any notion of a fashionable gluten-free "lifestyle" while giving us a little clue about just what we are asking for, simply on the level of this good earth, when we pray "give us this day our daily bread."

More about wheat than I thought I needed to know. What I liked about this book is how the author wove his journey through a diagnosis and acceptance of a serious disease in with his quest to discover acceptable ways to bake and prepare food. I found myself envious of his cooking talents as well as his local and variable food sources. I do feel his overindulgence in artisan breads in addition to home beer brewing led to the disease raising its ugly head sooner than later although I know he disagrees with that statement.. I also admire his wife's voluntary decision to walk the gluten

free path with him. Besides being entertaining, his educational story expanded my vocabulary!

I was diagnosed in late 1997 and the overwhelming feeling of life never going to be the same is well stated in this book. Learning to provide the basics of sustenance is well described by Mr Graham. He has anecdotes that were so close to what our family suffered through. I felt his confusion and despair. It does get better and we do adjust and carry on, but in our area there is no real substitute for that raised, glazed maple covered long John, although there are those who are making serious efforts. It is an ongoing learning process and I did enjoy this well written, intelligent "memoir".

This is a really good book. Well written and interesting, it not only tells us about the author's life changes after being diagnosed with celiac disease, but it also introduces the ideas of the importance of food and meals as a social practice. My grandmother always said "Bread is the staff of life." I think maybe she got that from the Bible. Graham's diagnosis of celiac disease meant that he was no longer able to eat bread made with wheat, which left enormous gaps not only in his personal life, but also affected all of those family and friends he interacted with on a regular basis.

I found myself skimming through the pages even though I was interested in his thoughts, but maybe he was a little too verbose. And then I found myself hoping he would share some of his successful recipes, but there were none. I was disappointed.

I have celiac disease and I truly appreciate the time and effort that Mr. Graham has put into researching, educating, and teaching about celiac disease via his book. I am sure that many will be helped by his story. Celiac disease is poorly understood by the general population and the rates of diagnosis are dismally low (although 1 in 100 people have celiac disease in the U.S., only 20% have been diagnosed). I was disappointed to see that has replaced the words celiac disease with "wheat allergy" in their overview of this book, because celiac disease and "wheat allergy" are two totally different medical disorders. Celiac disease is NOT an allergy, it's an autoimmune disease that effects just about every system of the body and can lead to serious problems such as nerve damage, arthritis, infertility, headaches, thyroid dysfunction, anemia, dental enamel defects, etc. People with untreated celiac disease are also have much higher risks of gastrointestinal cancer.

If you have celiac disease, you will enjoy the effort put into this book. I know people who have this disease and I wish the opportunity to purchase some of the things he talked about were easily

available to everyone who need it.

This book gave me a number of useful leads to gluten-free products and helped me to understand the condition. It dragged a bit, but overall was informative and interesting.

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