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A memoir about the joys of food and parenting and the wild mélange of the two

Matthew Amster-Burton was a restaurant critic and food writer long before he and his wife, Laurie, had Iris. Now he's a full-time, stay-at-home Dad and his experience with food has changed . . . a little. He's come to realize that kids don't need puree in a jar or special menus at restaurants, and that raising an adventurous eater is about exposure, invention, and patience. He writes of the highs and lows of teaching your child about food--the high of rediscovering how something tastes for the first time through a child's unedited reaction, and the low of thinking you have a precocious vegetable fiend on your hands only to discover that a child's preferences change from day to day (and may take years to include vegetables again). Sharing in his culinary capers is little Iris, a budding gourmand and a zippy critic herself who makes huge sandwiches, gobbles up hot chilis, and even helps around the kitchen sometimes. Hungry Monkey takes food enthusiasts on a new adventure in eating and offers dozens of delicious recipes that "little fingers" can help to make.

Hungry Monkey: A Food-Loving Father's Quest to Raise an Adventurous Eater Details

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From Reader Review Hungry Monkey: A Food-Loving Father's Quest to Raise an Adventurous Eater for online ebook

Daniel Pool says

More of a put-your-mind-at-ease type book than a researched-technical-feeding-advice type book. Definitely more of a memoir. But still, good, and it DID put my mind at ease regarding some of the tasks ahead (I've been terrified of raising a picky-eater, but Matthew makes it clear that that is likely to happen no matter how hard you try, and it's also totally fine). Recipes look good but I haven't tried my hand at any yet. Back of the book has some recommendations for more technical, researched parenting advice books that I'll probably be picking up.

Wendy says

It's funny! It quotes from obscure children's books! It makes me hungry! I like the part about me.

Meghan says

I've nailed down the reason I never like memoirs based on food blogs, although I think it might have more to do with what I read *into* them: a kind of dishonesty, an attitude of "hey, look at my beautiful life!", an unwillingness to delve deeply into how this lifestyle is maintained - we can't all be freelancers waxing rhapsodic about strawberries. Anyway, this is a memoir by a hip stay-at-home dad in Seattle, about what he cooks for his family, what his daughter likes, and how her tastes change over time (she is four during the book's present-tense moments). It's not that I was unable to relate to his enthusiasm for food and cooking, but that it's written from such a position of privilege and hipster-dom, so that even the asides about eating boxed macaroni and cheese and frozen ravioli did not work as a way to make Amster-Burton and his family likeable to me. As such, most of the humorous one-liners came off a little annoying. I would recommend The Big Rumpus and Dirty Sugar Cookies by Ayun Halliday for a better mixture of humor, parenting, and cooking.

Anne says

I had mixed feelings about this book.

Parts of it were quite funny.

There were some recipes that I'd like to try sometime (I probably won't)

But

It was also just a series of vignettes about how lucjy he is that his daughter was adventurous in food.

A lot of people probably pick up this book hoping to find out how he did it so they can try it too - but what you find out is that his daughter - while she goes through food phases just like all children seems to have the same kinds of idiosyncrasies as most kids.

It made me jealous that I don't live in a city (which is funny because if I got the chance I probably would not take it)

So if you are looking for help you probably will not find it -though you may find out that you are not alone in the struggles of feeding children. In fact the best most heartening part about the book was reading about how the author - a totally foodie who will eat anything - was according to his mother - one of the pickiest eaters ever throughout his childhood. This gives me hope. And so perhaps for that alone - I am glad I picked this one up

Kirsten says

I finished this book today and gave it to my husband so he could read it while on a business trip. I am already regretting that decision because I won't have Hungry Monkey in my hands again for 6 whole days. As soon as I read the last page I wanted to start over again with some little sticky flags in my hand to mark recipes I wanted to try and passages where Amster-Burton says specifically that *kaiten* sushi is ideal baby food. But no, I was all, "This book is hilarious. It's about cooking and kids and Seattle. You're going to love it. Why don't you take it to LA with you?" And now I can't make dumplings or cornmeal pizza crust until Friday. If you know me at all, and you might not, you'll understand why these four reasons alone merited my five-star rating of Hungry Monkey:

- Amster-Burton writes about Seattle and makes me feel like an insider, even though I live in Bellevue;
- he references Bread and Jam For Frances multiple times, which is possibly the best book ever written;
- he got a 5 on my humor rating scale, meaning I was laughing out loud to myself AND making my husband listen as I read funny parts aloud;
- the way he talks about food and feeding his family is equal parts Anthony Bourdain and M.F.K. Fisher, which is no easy feat.

What I was drawn to most in this book is the author's respect for both his daughter and the food they make together. Their relationship as depicted in the book is really quite lovely and illustrates that one does not have to dumb down conversations, expectations, ideas or flavors just because one lives with someone who happens to be a toddler.

And, on a personal note, as I sat in a nearly empty restaurant today and waited for our order that I could SEE on the warming tray for over 15 minutes (including one child's order of mini hamburgers and grapes...yawn) while my own toddler got increasingly flappy and bouncy in her high chair, I thought about our last visit to our favorite sushi place where she happily ate her fill of *tamago* sushi and edamame as soon as we sat down. Then I thought about Hungry Monkey and realized that I'm glad to have its message, its spirit and its recipes to guide me through these next several years of eating, cooking and throwing food on the floor.

Yune says

Really quite charming: the tale of a food writer's daughter's culinary journeys. I got this book because I find the author's podcast (*Spilled Milk*, made with another food writer) to be entertaining and informative and friendly for a hopeless cook such as myself. His voice shines through just as clearly in print.

If you're a beginning cook, *Everyday Food* will ask you to stretch, but not very far. There's a monthly feature called "Have you tried...?" introducing a special ingredient, such as canned chipotles in adobo, pecorino Romano, or radicchio. (If I were the editor, for the April issue I would feature something like "Have you tried...chicken?" or "Have you tried...beer?")

I laughed aloud at several points and even eyed a couple of the recipes (which come at the end of each chapter, after they've been introduced in proper context), but mostly just sat back and appreciated. I kept reading this even when I was knocked flat on the couch by dire allergies and the clock was ticking past midnight on a work night.

I saw a lot of my niece's eating habits in there (and some of my own childhood pickiness) but where I got frustrated with my niece, Amster-Burton somehow makes these traits, well, cute and funny. When Iris announces that she won't be eating vegetables, it's not doomful, just a wry twist away from her earlier openness. His easygoing attitude will, I suspect, ease many a parent's mind about the travails of getting their children to eat something, anything, other than X brand of cereal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And it'll be amusing while it goes about this reassurance: win-win!

Annelise says

This guy was too hip for me. But like so many hipsters, he thinks he's not one and goes out of his way to prove it...before diving right back into the sea of hip where no one else could possibly follow and splashing the water ostentatiously. Sometimes I had to put the book down and breathe deeply until the waves stopped crashing to their indie beat. I think I was supposed to think this was funny. But PS: What's with all the foodie dads who publish recipes that I wouldn't even use for fancy Sunday dinner? What are the moms doing? (Probably trying to balance the poor baby's diet of bacon and sushi with some good old fashioned bananas and peas). At least there weren't any pictures of the baby in a Deathcab onesie licking fudge sauce out of a Molly Moon bowl at 11 PM. (And I think I just proved that I don't know hip from hop.)

Dlmrose says

3.5

Mallory says

I wanted to give this 2.5... darn this whole-star rating system.

Anyway, this book can't decide if it's a cookbook or a memoir... it's a stay-at-home dad's account of how he tried to encourage his daughter to be willing to try new foods (and sometimes succeeded!). I like food and I like kids, so I thought I'd like this book. It's a little Seattle Yippie for my taste (FYI a Yippie is a Yuppie masquerading as a Hippie - don't be fooled) with lots of accounts of going to the Asian Grocery and the Farmer's Market. While some of the anecdotes are cute and the child, Iris, is quite pweshus, this book is just so.... white. I would love to be able to spend the time and money and energy that Burton spends on feeding his family when I have one, but it's very easy for me to read this book and be turned off by the author's privilege. Maybe that's snotty of me, and I feel bad saying it, but it's hard for me to get into a book that is so white west coast. (Apologies to white people on the west coast)

Claire says

As the first book I read post-baby, this had a marvelous way of calming my fears about starting our dragon on solids and keeping me laughing in the scattered few moments I could cobble together to read it. In particular, the first few chapters made me laugh at my own hyperactive worries about raising a healthy water and it had great overarching ideas about good foods to try, but unfortunately I'm a bit of a culinary "all-thumbs" so most of the later recipes, while delectably described, just intimidate and overwhelm me. I did like the "little helpers" ideas a lot too but would have liked more dishes that could involve kids more.

Grateful though for the inspiration to be inventive, to encourage my darling dragon to help out (yet not necessarily expect his participation) and for the much needed guffaws before my sleep deprived brain drifted off. Recommend more as a lighthearted and fun read of parental adventure than as "how to" raise an adventurous eater, but it still is encouraging to know we're not alone in our failed attempts at times.

Kristi Brown says

I recently picked up a copy of a new food memoir titled "Hungry Monkey" by Matthew Amster-Burton...because you got me...I loved the kitchy title, its cover and because it was about food. Oh, and the author is from my home - Seattle. What is there not to like about this book? Well, nothing! After a busy Saturday morning with my a\$\$ firmly planted on my upper deck I devoured this food memoir, enjoying every bite of it!

Yes, I did take some reading breaks! The first break was to try almond milk - steamed milk + almond syrup + lots of foam milk on top! Only my version had three shots of Nespresso espresso. I bring the caffeine, I bring it strong! Head back to the upper deck for more reading! And I got about half way into "Hungry Monkey" realizing my next break needs to be page markers. So I go inside and gather my Eiffel Tower Post-It note collection! I am flagging pages left and right of stories that make me LOL and recipes that I must, must try. Like stew. I have never in my life made a stew...that will change in Fall because I will be making some type of stew that will include bacon, and the good smoked bacon Matthew raves about in his book - Neuske's bacon. Oh, and Trader Joe's Greek style yogurt with fig puree. OMG! How have I missed this product on my bi-weekly TJ's visits? Tj + Figs is a kismet combination that I simply must try. And farmer's markets.

Farmer's markets was break number three. I turned on my laptop and searched for when/where my local West Seattle Farmer's Market is to discover it was the next day! So Sunday morning I woke up extra early, got lots of cash, and headed to the WS farmer's market. And blew through my \$40 in less than 4 minutes too! Here's what I got: A flat of blueberries and raspberries, olive bread, white goat cheese with chives, blueberry butter, 2 delicious gluten free pastries (a biblical experience) (yum) (very yum), and flowers.

And to quote Arnold Schwarzenegger...I'll be back!!! Farmer's Markets ROCK!

Check out Matthew Amster-Burton's blog: <http://www.rootsandgrubs.com>

CLM says

Great fun! I enjoyed hearing about Matthew, Iris and Laurie's adventures from his perspective, and of course I particularly enjoyed the literary allusions and references to those I know (although somehow I did not find any BT mentions - in other ways, Matthew comes close to the perfect spouse). Every time I picked the book up I got hungry again although I am less sophisticated than Iris and would probably not survive for long in this household. I am trying to remember what I ate when I visited Laurie in Seattle but I think we went out to dinner with Lisa Motherwell, then returned to Laurie's for cupcakes. Please, no eel the next time I come!

Lindsey says

Overall this was a fun read and I liked its (mostly) relatable stories about kids and food. What's fun is that you get kid/food stories, but in the "amped up" version (i.e. his kid asking for lobster for dinner and picking out sushi from the conveyor belt). In the end, though, you realize kids are really all the same, meaning they all have their idiosyncrasies. What I didn't like was the author, at least the guy talking in the book (whether that's really the author or not). For as hard as he (seems) to not want to be labeled a "city snob" (he lives in Seattle and walks to the grocery store every day for fresh produce/meat), he is. It would be nice if he could embrace his lifestyle without appearing at times condescending to parents who don't try to teach their kids how to boil live lobsters. He seems a bit out of touch with reality for parents who aren't food critics and freelance writers, and that makes him unlikeable on a parent-to-parent level.

Rachel (TheShadesofOrange) says

4.0 Stars

This is a light-hearted and entertaining memoir about a foodie father attempting to raise an good eater. While this book provides some advice on child feeding techniques, it's more conversational than instructive. I would recommend this enjoyable memoir to laid-back parents who want to raise healthy children without stressing too much over the details.

Deb says

The style of this book is perfect. It's not a cookbook, it's not a memoir, it's just a dad and his kid (Iris)

traversing the rocky road of childhood eating habits. The author just happens to tell you how he makes the easy-peasy recipes for Iris at the end of each chapter. I am definitely stealing the 6-ingredient phad thai recipe!

One of the things I really enjoyed were the references to other food-for-kids books. Amster-Burton balances his food expertise and experiences raising a foodie kid against health & child-rearing experts in the field, debunking or praising the advice they give. Some of this is based out of practicality, some of it's just laughable--I think other children's food writers must not have kids based on the time-consuming & elaborate food preparations they advocate!

Amster-Burton is a local food writer for the Seattle Times and a bunch of hoity-toity foodie magazines. He writes with a relaxed and amiable tone, kind of like you're having a beer with him instead of reading a book.

I highly recommend this for expecting or current parents who want to raise adventurous eaters. Mind, this doesn't mean not-picky--most kids have picky eating habits, as does Amster-Burton's daughter, Iris. Amster-Burton instead focuses on the importance of sharing your foodie passion with your kids, how to feed them without worrying about whether the food is okay for their age-range, and throws a few super tasty recipes into the mix.

Duck Ragu, I'm gonna eatchu!
