



## Food and Loathing: A Life Measured Out in Calories

*Betsy Lerner*

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## Food and Loathing: A Life Measured Out in Calories Betsy Lerner

With warmth, wit, and not a trace of self-pity" (*Entertainment Weekly*), Betsy Lerner details her twenty-year struggle with depression and compulsive eating in *Food and Loathing*, a book that dares to expose the insidious nature of women's secret life with food.

"Alternating between hilarious and heartbreak" (*People*), *Food and Loathing* gives voice to one of the last taboo subjects and greatest stigmas of our time: being overweight. Lerner's revelations on the cult of thinness -- from the dreaded weigh-in at junior high gym class to the effects of inhaling Pepperidge Farm Goldfish at Olympic speeds -- are universally resonant, as is her belief that this is one battle no one should fight alone. Essential reading for anyone who has ever wielded a fork in despair or calculated her self-worth on the morning scale, "Lerner's lament is a triumph" (*Publishers Weekly*).

## Food and Loathing: A Life Measured Out in Calories Details

Date : Published February 23rd 2004 by Simon Schuster (first published 2003)

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Author : Betsy Lerner

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## **From Reader Review Food and Loathing: A Life Measured Out in Calories for online ebook**

### **Meghan says**

I just finished this memoir and should maybe take some time to process it before writing a review, but I'm afraid I'll forget what I want to say. This memoir isn't what I expected. It's more about Betsy's mental illness and being institutionalized. I understand that this is directly related to her eating disorder, but I just felt that the eating disorder took a backseat to everything else. If I had known, I may not have read this book.

That's not to say that this is a bad memoir. It's well-written, and Betsy's depression is palpable. I found it interesting that The Bell Jar was mentioned a few times in the memoir, because I found her writing to be Plath-like. It's rather depressing. Again, that doesn't make it bad. I'm just used to reading food memoirs that are on the lighter side and more a little more comic.

Anyway, I'm so glad Betsy came out on the other side. I cheered when she began to feel alive and wanted to leave the hospital. I was so happy when she and John got together, and hope they still are. This one has a happy ending.

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### **Clarice says**

I chose this book to read right now because I wanted to read a memoir, and it seemed light enough I could read it quickly, which I did. All in a few hours. I liked it, I just didn't LOVE it.

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### **Esther Bradley-detally says**

I read this book twice, and bumped it up a final star. In 2009; i don't know what was going on in my life, but this time, I loved Lerner's droll and spunky voice, and read a long passage to friends in a wiring group. It's good; i am sympatico to her views and now I am going to look for her other book; kudos to Betsy Lerner

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### **Nancy Peacock says**

This book is one of the most readable books I've ever read. I flew through it the way I sometimes fly through a bag of chips or a box of cookies. I am a big fan of Lerner's book on editing for writers, The Forest for the Trees, so I am not surprised that she can write well. What did surprise me was the risk she was willing to take in telling her own story. This is a brave and honest book about self esteem and loss disguising itself in calories.

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### **AJ says**

A lot of slow build up followed by not a heck of a lot of resolution. The first few chapters were almost intolerably boring and I only kept going out of curiosity. It really wasn't worth my time.

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### **Laranuessel says**

This could have been written about me. Except for the lithium. And the hospitals. And the OA. And I live in Colorado. So, yes, it could have been written about me.

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### **Susan Bazzett-Griffith says**

I almost gave this book three stars; the quality of writing was great. Lerner has a lovely way with words and her voice definitely draws a reader in. That said, this book wasn't that interesting or fun to read. In fact, it was all around depressing, and there was much less, in terms of growth, that I was expecting from the author by the end of the book. It seemed that she blames her disordered eating and thinking about food mostly on her mental health disease and her family, which does seem to reflect her experiences, but at the same time, makes a reader wonder how reliable a narrator she actually is, as she doesn't necessarily ever "get better" from this line of thinking. I don't know- I simply didn't enjoy the book enough to give it more than 2 stars. Disappointing, as the author is a talented writer.

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### **Rachel Brown says**

A lightweight memoir about compulsive overeating.

I've read a couple of memoirs about eating disorders and/or body image issues, mostly because I read a lot of memoirs in general. By far the best-written was the anorexia/bulimia memoir *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*, by Marya Hornbacher. I liked the latter so much that I gave it to a friend of mine who is interested in psychology, only to discover much later, to my chagrin, that she had wondered if I was trying to send her some kind of message. That book is intense.

However, with others I have a sick tendency to enjoy the loving food descriptions on the exact same level that I would enjoy those in a cookbook. Compulsive eaters are second only to food writers in their ability to conjure up the complex web of emotions and sensations associated with eating.

Lerner becomes a compulsive overeater at a very young age, spends years under the care of a clueless psychiatrist, and finally ends up in a mental hospital after a suicide attempt. She contemplates jumping off a bridge, but is interrupted by a man who had been beating off in the bushes. This is definitely the best truth-is-stranger-than-fiction moment in the book.

Women in America have huge issues with body image, weight, and food. I am one of only about two or three American women I've ever met who has never been on a diet, and I have known a lot of women with eating disorders and body image obsessions. So a book on eating disorders and body image had better either address those issues in sociopolitical context or else be one heck of a compelling story. Lerner's book didn't quite make it for me on either count. More humor would probably have helped, and more of a focus on the interplay between her dysfunctional brain chemistry (she turns out to be bipolar) and the dysfunctional

circumstances of her life.

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### **jennifer l shockley says**

I don't know if it's supposed to be, but this book is hilarious. It was such a relief when I first read it, probably because I was bulimic at the time, but being able to identify and just 'get' what she was saying, well that was the start of my crumbling facade. I just so get that feeling that you cannot EAT FAST ENOUGH to fill thee emptiness. And then the inevitable sense of guilt.

Her desperation does speak loudly in the book, though. And she was certainly lucky to have parents with wealth, who could afford (and cared) to see her through to health. That and her smarts, coupled with her educational opportunities, prodded her towards a better life.

If I have one reservation, it's that Ms. Lerner seems to have been a little spoiled. She never had to worry about necessities, and spent most of her time hanging out with friends, reading, and smoking pot. Sometimes the story can come off a bit self-indulgent. It seems a lot of memoirs of mental illness (Girl, Interrupted, Prozac Nation, The Center Cannot Hold) are written by upper class, or at least upper middle class white females with high IQs whose parents could afford to spend large sums of money on their betterment. There are some memoirs written by those in other situations (A Piece of Cake for example), but more are needed.

Overall though, I really enjoyed reading Ms. Lerner's book.

Jennifer Shockley

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### **Pat Edwards says**

Disappointing, but not meeting my expectations is my problem, I guess.

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### **Ellie says**

I love Betsy Lerner. I ran out to get this book after reading The Forest for the Trees (Revised and Updated): An Editor's Advice to Writers, just because I wanted to spend more time with Betsy Lerner. And I got my wish-this memoir is not focused on the craft of writing, as Forest is, but on the difficulties of living, of family, of relationships-with self, others, and food. While her struggles remains uniquely hers, I felt comforted in hard-to-define ways in the struggles of my own life. Lerner just can't seem to help giving to others, even as she takes center stage on the page, there feels like room for all of us with her.

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### **Nita says**

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I felt sad at the end of the book when she didn't give us the true secret of getting and staying thin. Then I remembered this was a memoir - a story of her journey - not a self-help book and I became grateful for her honesty. Very well written. A story not only of a woman's battle with her weight, but with her mental health. A picture of the challenges of dealing with mental illness and how it is treated in children and adults. Moving. Worth reading again.

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### **Kirsti says**

I read an excerpt from this memoir, and it stuck with me for a long time. So it was interesting to read the whole thing.

I'm glad that doctors are becoming more skilled at treating depression, mania, and eating disorders. Also, I think people are much more accepting of anger in girls and women these days. So many memoirs are by women who were volcanically angry for years before they were even able to identify their feelings as anger.

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### **Abby says**

For some reason, a random ledge in the laundry room of my apartment building has become a book exchange. Usually, the books are Danielle Steele, sci-fi paperbacks and westerns. And then one day in January, I saw this hot pink Food and Loathing, complete with a mirror on its cover, like that fancy TIME magazine about me!

Anyway it was a half decent read about a tubby poet with low self-esteem, her suicide attempts and fleeting sexual exploits. Oh, and her parents, which is probably what makes it the best. Anyway, worth reading, if you read stuff like this about people and food, which I, obviously, do.

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## **Anne-Marie says**

The cover of the book reads: "Food and Loathing" then there is a picture of a mirror and underneath that, in a smaller font: "A Lament". How clever is that? I am so burned out on "Memoir" after titles.

Why else I love this book in 15 quotes and 1 fun fact:

"My mother and I endlessly debated about her inner life."

"Thank God we are atheist."

"I knew even then that my bid for attention was craven."

"I could fit into the size tens and twelves in my wardrobe, which doubtless resembled the closets of many women who struggle with their weight: filled with increasingly stylish clothes in the smaller sizes and more muumuu like cover-ups at the high end."

" . . . when she wasn't home I sneaked into her studio. I admired the way she arranged tiny rows of blue glass and shells. She had a marvelous way of organizing textures and shapes into patterns. And I envied everything about her little world; even the brushes fanned out in a jar of turpentine looked exquisite."

"She picked up the receiver and dialed information, pressing the numbers with her thumb, a detail I found myself weirdly fixated on."

"Your depression and your compulsive eating are inextricably linked."

"The show made me feel that much more pathetic, indulged, unworthy. My own self-loathing was like a furnace; there was nothing that didn't feed it."

"I hadn't been able to trust since the age of four. I was torn between wanting to be cradled and telling the world to go fuck itself, and those were opposite sides of the same coin."

" . . . away from the messy emotions of a polluted girl floating in a pond of her own making."

"What I want to know is whether we're supposed to change or just accept who we are?"

*"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change. The courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference."* I still didn't know the difference."

"I had officially joined the cacophony of sick mother fuckers."

"Nothing was a more powerful compass of my mood or a better indication of my self-worth than the number on the scale."

"I could only trust someone who distinguished between people, who was discriminating, who could be cruel."

Also mentioned briefly in the book is Brigid Berlin of Andy Warhol fame. It was funny because Lerner was

describing what OA was like and I thought about the John Water's documentary about Brigid Berlin and then Lerner writes about becoming friends with her on the next couple of pages.

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