

Reader Views

Book reviews, for readers, by readers.

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Jasmine in Her Hair: Culture and Cuisine from Pakistan

By Huma Siddiqui

White Jasmine Press (2003)

Reviewed by Juanita Watson for Reader Views (4/06)

“Jasmine in Her Hair” - Just the title alone intrigued me. I couldn’t help but instantly be drawn into this delightful cookbook. Written by Huma Siddiqui, the recipes are rich with her family’s heritage, creating a true cultural experience.

Huma beautifully weaves aspects of her culture with personal memories growing up in Pakistan, all along-side easy to follow recipes. I was able to prepare various dishes and while they were cooking, read about Pakistani culture and Huma’s family; a middle-upper class family living in Pakistan in which food and tradition were integral parts of their lives. As I was cooking, the aroma of spices would fill the room creating a wonderful backdrop for reading the rich passages.

Huma talks about various aspects of Pakistani life including women and education, door to door street sellers, her family’s experience during the two wars with India, religious celebrations, weddings, and then the difficult decision to come to America. Included are spectacular photos that complement the writings and recipes, visually rounding out the beauty of this book.

This cookbook, I feel, is a testament to the love of family, and the warmth of tradition. Huma speaks with honest motherly wisdom as she talks about her life, and the various ways food played a part in it. This book really moved me. Expecting a straight ahead cookbook, I received so much more. I gained a new appreciation of Pakistani culture and cooking through Huma’s stories, and found out about a remarkable and inspiring woman at the same time.

The recipes I tried were all delicious, very easy to prepare, and uncomplicated in design. Plus, I found most ingredients already in my kitchen. Huma divides the recipes into six sections – Appetizers, Meat Dishes, Desserts, Rice & Bread Dishes, and Sauces & Drinks. I will continue to make recipes from this cookbook and revisit Huma and her family for years to come. Great book Huma – Well done!!