

Cleaving: A Story of Marriage, Meat, And Obsession

by Julie Powell



About the Book

Julie Powell thought cooking her way through Julia Child's **Mastering the Art of French Cooking** was the craziest thing she'd ever do --- until she embarked on the voyage recounted in her new memoir, **Cleaving**.

Her marriage challenged by an insane, irresistible love affair, Julie decides to leave town and immerse herself in a new obsession: butchery. She finds her way to Fleischer's, a butcher shop where she buries herself in the details of food. She learns how to break down a side of beef and French a rack of ribs --- tough, physical work that only sometimes distracts her from thoughts of afternoon trysts.

The camaraderie at Fleischer's leads Julie to search out fellow butchers around the world --- from South America to Europe. At the end of her odyssey, she has learned a new art and perhaps even mastered her unruly heart.

Discussion Guide

1. Julie Powell takes us deep inside the intricacies of working in a butcher shop. What did you find particularly fascinating --- or off-putting --- about the details she relates?
2. Did reading **Cleaving** make you more inclined to visit a local butcher shop? Have you ever felt the same draw toward butchers that Julie feels?
3. Conscientious eating has been much in the news recently and is an increasingly prevalent part of our culture. How do the practices at Fleischer's measure up for you in this debate? What do you consider "eating well"?
4. Julie Powell witnesses a pig being slaughtered at a pig farm. What did you make of this scene in **Cleaving**? Would

you be able to watch such a thing? Or partake?

5. In **Cleaving** we learn more about Julie's relationship with her husband, Eric, than was revealed in *Julie and Julia*. Why do you think Julie and Eric stay together, even after the trouble starts?

6. Imagine yourself in Julie's circumstances, faced with the return of a past lover. In what ways would you have reacted similarly --- or differently --- to the situation?

7. What do you make of Julie's decision to sequester herself in the Catskills and apprentice herself to a team of butchers? Have you ever plunged yourself into an obsessive project to make a change in your life? Did it work? Does it ever work?

8. What did you make of the crew at Fleisher's? Do you think it might be true that butchers are a different breed?

9. What was your response to Julie's affair with D? Was it understandable? Reprehensible? Were you sympathetic?

10. At a certain point Julie reveals that Eric is also seeing someone on the side. Did you consider this "only fair"? Did it cast Julie's own indiscretions in a different light?

11. What did you think about Julie's around-the-world journey to visit butchers? Where in the world would you want or be willing to go to experience food?

12. Do you think Julie Powell's travels abroad changed her? How?

13. What do you make of the memoir's title, **Cleaving**?

Author Bio

Julie Powell was on the verge of turning 30, trapped in a series of unfulfilling temp jobs, and living in a dreadful apartment in Queens. That's when she decided to break the monotony by attempting to make all 524 recipes in Julia Child's *MASTERING THE ART OF FRENCH COOKING*. One year later, Powell had achieved her goal, documented her experiences on one of the most popular blogs on the internet, and began the award-winning, bestselling book *JULIE & JULIA: My Year of Cooking Dangerously*, which inspired the 2009 movie starring Meryl Streep and Amy Adams. Powell passed away on October 26, 2022 at the age of 49.

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