



Memoir of the Sunday Brunch

Julia Pandl

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For Julia Pandl, the rite of passage into young-adulthood included mandatory service at her family's restaurant, where she watched as her father, who was also the chef, ruled with the strictness of a drill sergeant.

At age twelve, Julie was initiated into the rite of the Sunday brunch, a weekly madhouse at her father's Milwaukee-based restaurant, where she and her eight older siblings before her did service in a situation of controlled chaos, learning the ropes of the family business and, more important, learning life lessons that would shape them for all the years to come. In her wry memoir, she looks back on those formative years, a time not just of growing up but, ultimately, of becoming a source of strength and support as the world her father knew began to change into a tougher, less welcoming place.

Part coming-of-age story à la *The Tender Bar*, part window into the mysteries of the restaurant business à la *Kitchen Confidential*, Julie Pandl provides tender wisdom about the bonds between fathers and daughters and about the simple pleasures that lie in the daily ritual of breaking bread. This honest and exuberant memoir marks the debut of a writer who discovers that humor exists in even the smallest details of our lives and that the biggest moments we ever experience can happen behind the pancake station at the Sunday brunch.

Memoir of the Sunday Brunch Details

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Author : Julia Pandl

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Jay says

This is a hard one to review. I ended up liking the story from the start, but.... Given that the blurb on the book says it is like "Kitchen Confidential", I was expecting that kind of insight into the restaurant. The title implies that too. But this book did not have that kind of calling -- the restaurant, the diners, the food, the work, the other employees (except her father) really felt like backdrops to a coming of age story. There were a couple of funny buffet anecdotes, but really not what I expected. Points off for blurbs setting incorrect expectations. (Note the blurb also mentions "The Tender Bar", which I believe is much closer to this book, but that's not why I picked it up.) The book is divided into two parts. The first part can be read as a monologue from a one-woman show. The funny bits are spread quite equally throughout, as if measured. This part of the book could easily be performed on stage, and the author's stand-up background shows through. Part 2 is more about the retirement and death of her parents, so no behind the scenes restaurant talk in the second half of the book. The chapters in this part are half funny monologue and half a kind of slam poetry (sentence fragments, repetition). This is truly a story about the author and her parents, madcap in the first part and sentimental in the second. As separate stories, both parts were very good. Together, you get a little whiplashed. I look forward to the author's next book, or stage show for that matter.

Jeanette says

This hit home. And not only on the work ethic, joke style, or Catholicism minutia categories either. But in the spirit of family and commitment twice over. Her father's tong rule at the restaurant! Sibling and parental marriage stories too; I did LOL.

And the second half of the book also. Same honest personal and intimate stories for the good-byes. Such repayment to parents as seldom viewed (by myself anyway) any longer.

The style was hyper and over the top. Which at times caused me to lose the one star of enjoyment.

But hearing about Milwaukee and other venues of Northern IL I've also seen, only coming from the other direction, was 5 star delightful. After that playoff game last weekend, I bet Julia and her siblings are wondering how George is reacting in Packer heaven.

Lisa Hall says

I picked this book up expecting one of those "insider" books - the real inside look of what it was like growing up in a restaurant and how the restaurant business works. What I got was a rather sweet memoir that was more about family, a family that happened to be headed by a restaurant owner. Sure, the author worked in the restaurant on Sundays (why she was not there the rest of the week, I don't know), but the first part of the book was as much about her 8 siblings as anything else. The second half of the book leaps forward to her adult years as both parents enter declining health.

The book was a quick read and I liked it, but it just was not what I was expecting. Seems like the second part of the book tended to be very factual, without much depth in the author's perspective. Seems like if you are going to go into issues like faith, hospice, death, and share it with the world, there should be more emotion and evidence of impact. You almost get the sense this book was more of a diary or a form of therapy.

Diane Yannick says

This lady can write....and tell a great family story. She paced the story in a way that allowed the reader to gradually come to know her parents. The truth was often in the smaller details rather than the big stories. She used a writing technique that I loved---repeating single words or phrases as an occasional refrain. It made me slow down and savor the sensual image she was describing.

Pandl's restaurant was a Milwaukee landmark for many years. George and Terry Pandl had nine children to help out at their tremendously popular Sunday brunch. Their family, as remembered in the 70's and 80's, was quirky, funny, and often irreverent. Never sanitized or overblown, it was a story that rang true to me.

What a fine tribute to her parents. She has created a family heirloom that many generations of Pandls can enjoy---as well as the rest of us. I especially loved the scenes when an underage Julia was driving her father to their restaurant. When his financial situation was grim Julia saw her father "choose humility over bitterness." The contrast between George's tough and tender sides was endearing. By the time his death was nearing, I too felt the loss. "Impending death, just so you know, does not have the ability to kick history to the curb. It can't." In the end, he trusted his children to do what was in his best interest. "Is there a greater act of true love than trust?"

Here is a small descriptive detail from a time when Julia was helping her mother pack for a move: "A cloud of gray smoke mingled with the dust and sunlight over my head." Some of the smells made me stop and imagine: "The room smelled like Ammens powder and sherry."

"Food taught us the basics: how to entertain, how to clean up after ourselves, how to behave."

Lisa B. says

My Thoughts

Part I of this book was hysterical. I mean laugh out loud, slap your leg, tears rolling down your face funny. Ms. Pandl has an ability to take normal, everyday activities and make them very entertaining. As the youngest of nine, she had lots of material to work with.

Part II was a 180 degree turn around. While there was still some humor, this part related to her family as her parents got older. She talks about the effects that diabetes had on her Mom. She writes about her relationship with her Dad as she became an adult herself.

After the extreme humor in Part I, I initially struggled with the more serious nature of Part II. I wasn't sure I liked this change of pace. But by the time I finished the book, I had changed my mind. It's easy to like a humorous story, but the story of aging parents - not so easy. Ms. Pandl handles this with poignancy and grace.

Many thanks to Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill and Netgalley for allowing me to read this ARC in exchange for an unbiased review.

Publish date: November 13, 2012.

Peggy Graves says

I enjoyed this book very much. Milwaukeeans love all things Milwaukee, so the book will have a ready, willing and able readership. Julia Pandl caught the essence of Milwaukee and her family's significant role in it.

At times i felt she was a bit self-indulgent giving me more feeling than fact. The book is more about Julia than Pandls. More about her dad than mom. Julia is the youngest of 9 yet she sounds like the one and only - certainly Daddy's favorite? I am the youngest of four and was the only when I was 9, but I am well-aware of my siblings' role in the family, even tho they've lived most of their lives out- of-town. I would have liked to have heard more about everyone.

Hating to be trite, I can report I laughed (a lot!) I cried (a bit) I was moved. Julia's delivery is so funny. She has some great stories, and George's death is sensitively delivered allowing room for more laughter - just like reality.

A good read.

Arlena says

Author: Julia Pandl

Published By: Algonquin Books Of Chapel Hill

Age Recommended: Adult

Reviewed By: Arlena Dean

Blog For: GMTA

Rating: 5

Review:

"Memoir of the Sunday Brunch" by Julia Pandl was a simple well written memoir that I did enjoy. I found myself laughing at a lots of this funny and heart warming read. This is just a wonderfully written personal memoir of Julia Pandl's family growing up in the Pandl Family Restaurant business. This memoir pays great attention to this eccentric father, George. Julia was the youngest of nine children which left her with her parents ageing just when she is getting more involved more with the family restaurant endeavors. Yes, there

was some dysfunctions going on, but isn't in present in most families? It was good to see how this family was able to come together when certain situations were presented. You will find this wonderful novel sometimes not so happy, then down right hilarious and always full of love that played out with great affection. You will find this a personal memoir that will bring out all of the quirks out in this family.

I did like the way this author did a part 1 and part 2 of this memoir .Not wanting to tell to much more I would definitely suggest that you pick up this excellent read "Memoir of the Sunday Brunch" to see what all this is about in its touching tribute of Julia's wonderful parents.

If you are looking for a good novel that is full of laughter,some crying and maybe just find yourself smiling....you have come to the right novel and I would recommend "Memoir of the Sunday Brunch" to you as a excellent read.

Page Edmunds says

Oh how this book took me by surprise (as I sniffled and wiped away tears while sitting at an airport bar between planes). I fully expected the funny growing-up-in-a-family-restaurant stories, which didn't disappoint. But I was unprepared for the beautiful second half of this book, a story about being an adult daughter and sibling when your parents begin to age and fail. The Pandl family is unforgettable, and their story is told with great humor and affection. Even though theirs is a family where dad is a chef, kids are forced into ugly restaurant work (made only uglier - hilariously - by teenage hangovers), and there are nine siblings, their story is really a universal one: how to life a good life and die a good death, and what it means to be family.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

There are two parts to this review. If you just want to know about the book, read as far as the line across the page. Below the line is a personal, semi-related story.

Rating = 3.5 stars

Wisconsin, 1970s and '80s, Catholic family, nine kids, the dad owns a restaurant and runs it with exacting standards. All of the children are required to pitch in at the restaurant, especially for the lavish Sunday brunches. That's the first half of the book. In the second half, Julia jumps forward to her adult years of caring for her aging, and then dying, parents.

This is a fast-moving, easy-reading memoir. I could have read it in one day, but I was in no hurry, so it took me two days. I'm glad I read it, but it wasn't what I was hoping for. Given the title and the promotional

blurbs, I expected more depth about the restaurant life, and more food talk in general. The back of the book says it's *"a window into the mysteries of the restaurant business."* Don't believe it.

This is not a foodie memoir. Rather, it's a lighthearted paean to Julie Pandl's funny, eccentric, indefatigable father, George. He was a big bundle of paradoxes, but his love was always reliable.

George's attitudes toward money were especially puzzling to his children. Julie provides the best example of this with a story about the family's visit to Chicago for a restaurant convention. George paid for rooms at the posh Drake Hotel, gave Julie \$100.00 of "walkin'-around money," and spent \$1200.00 to feed fifteen people at a nice restaurant. But when someone ate a \$7.00 can of Planter's peanuts from the mini-bar in the hotel room, he went ballistic. He walked down to Walgreen, bought a can of their store-brand peanuts, and put it in the mini-bar where the Planter's had been. Ha! As if the hotel staff wouldn't notice.

Sounds crazy, right? Penny wise and pound foolish? But it makes some sense when you look at how he tried to prevent his children from developing a sense of entitlement. He loved to be generous, but he didn't want them to assume they could squander his money without his permission.

My rating is partly a reflection of my unfulfilled expectations. I'd recommend the book for those who might enjoy a sweet, quirky story of family love and loyalty, with a skosh or two of religious hocus-pocus. Just don't expect much foodie coverage.

Julie Pandl had to start working the Sunday brunch at age twelve, and I could relate to the overwhelming feeling of being very young in a grown-up work situation. At least she had her older siblings to ease the way, whereas I was entirely alone.

I grew up in Kings Beach, California, just a mile or two from the Nevada border. Right before I turned thirteen, I took a job busing tables at the Cal-Neva Lodge. I had to lie about my age, but I was tall, and far too serious for a 12-year-old, so it was an easy sell. No one cared back then. I was a tireless wage slave who never once complained. That was good enough for them. No complaining, but I *did* cry sometimes. I was just too young for the stress of a casino/restaurant environment.

Once, during a particularly trying banquet, one of the kitchen guys caught me in tears. He told me there were some half-smoked joints on the roof that might help me relax on my next break. I was stunned, until I remembered that he thought I was 16 or 17. I said "Thanks," and raced back out the swinging doors to the banquet room. When I look back on my 13-year-old self, I marvel at her ability to keep her own counsel.

And no, I didn't smoke the joints on the roof. I was too chicken. I did go up there and look, though, at the end of my shift. Sure enough, that rooftop was **Doobie Central**. Oh the '70s, the '70s....

Cindy says

I did not like the writing style of the first half of the book. To me it read like a smart alick teenager talking. That got old really fast. The second half, when her mother dies, she writes in a calmer usual style.

I thought it odd that she referred to her Mom & Dad by their first names.

The book is all about her growing up & then about her parents dying. There is nothing of significance about the ins and outs and behind the scenes of the restaurant world.

I thought the book was boring, but finished it anyway, because I just hate not finishing a book.

I would not recommend this book.

Carl Phillips says

I thought this was a really good book, a good balance of humor and love. Pandl's writing just seems to flow, good description to which I could relate. She was not always complimentary of her parents, particularly her father, but her love for him comes through during his final weeks as he was dying of cancer.

Diane says

Julia Pandl is the youngest of nine children born to George and Teresa Pandl. Her dad owned a restaurant in Milwaukee, and every Sunday each child was expected to work the famous Sunday brunch. She recounts this life in Memoir of the Sunday Brunch.

I have to tell you how much I loved this book! You not only get an insider's look at what a tough life the restaurant business is, you also get a wonderful, honest look at life in a big Catholic Midwestern family, and Julia's relationship with her tough, loving father is so beautifully written it will make you want to give your own dad a hug.

George not only loved food, family and the church, he was a voracious reader. He even read during mass, though they were always books with a religious theme, to be fair. He was a huge presence in his family's life, and Julia loved him very much, even though he was always trying to feed food to his family that was leftover from the restaurant- as in leftover from months and years ago.

When she was fourteen, she asked if she could drive them to the restaurant, and George let her drive a little bit further each week, until soon she was driving them all the way. These rides cemented their close, loving relationship.

Working the brunch was not easy. Julia's first job was picking up trash in the parking lot. Next she moved onto peeling shrimp, and soon her job was making the pancakes for the line. As someone who owned a fast food restaurant, this section of the book had a special appeal for me.

As a Catholic, I also enjoyed reading about how the Pandl's faith informed their life. Terry had religious statues, rosaries and funeral cards all over the house. Terry is not a big part of the book until she loses a foot to diabetes. Julia's relationship with her mother seems to deepen as she helps to care for her aging parents.

The end of the book is very moving. Julia and her siblings must deal with her parents' serious illnesses, and these last few chapters are something that will make everyone reflect upon their own parents, as this is

something that most of us will face at some point in our lives.

There is so much to love here in *Memoir of the Sunday Brunch*. Julia Pandl writes from the heart; with all the fun, the joy, the fighting, the hard work, the love, and the sorrow that living in a big family brings. This is one of my favorite book of this year, and it makes me appreciate my family even more.

Book Concierge says

Julia Pandl was the youngest of nine children born to Terry and George Pandl. Her father ran a very popular restaurant in a suburb of Milwaukee WI that was particularly famous for Sunday Brunch. At the age of 12 Julie began working in the restaurant – without salary. Her first job was “pick up the parking lot” – ridding the asphalt of used cigarette butts and discarded candy wrappers. Once she was done with that her sister set her up on a 5-gallon pickle bucket turned upside down, gave her a pile of shrimp larger than she was and said, “Start peeling.”

This is a delightful memoir of a young woman growing up as the baby of the family with a larger-than-life father. She takes us from sullen pre-adolescence to young adulthood, from being the pampered youngest child to assuming the caregiver role for her aging parents. Along the way she treats us to some laugh-out-loud observations on life, love, faith, family, friendship and trust.

The first half of the book is more focused on her experiences as a teen, working in the restaurant, and traveling with her father to and from work. The book takes on a more serious tone in the second half, when first her mother and then her father are stricken with the illnesses that will eventually take their lives, and Julie moves back home to help care for them. It’s poignant without being maudlin.

I’ve seen reviews that characterize this as “a cross between *A Girl Named Zippy* and Ruth Reichl’s *Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table*,” and I have to agree.

Esther Marie says

I enjoyed this book, but was, (and am), confused at the marketing employed by the publisher. The first half of this book deals with growing up in a family that owns a restaurant, (humorous and entertaining for those working in the industry), and the second half covers Pandl’s care of her elderly and dying parents, (also relatable, though to a different demographic). Pandl’s father, George, is the true focus of this novel, but you’d never guess that based on the back of the book or even the summary shared here. I wouldn’t call the novel incohesive, but would question the way that this book is presented to potential readers.

Roneice says

I was not expecting only half of the book to be about the author’s Sunday Brunch experience! I must admit a bit of confusion as I began reading the second half. The stories of siblings working the Brunch, the Fatger’s control of the kitchen, serving positions, keeping a fast pace with the customers,

disappeared. These were replaced, with no warning, with the history of her mother's illness; her Catholic upbringing; and her father's thriftiness, beyond reason, using very outdated food in their own home compared to the freshness of food in the restaurant. The disappearance of the book's topic was such a surprise! Perhaps had it come with a 'Warning' label?
