



Grace's Table

Sally Piper

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Families were like sand dunes, Grace decided. They shifted shape and position with even the gentlest of forces. Even a tiny puff – a shrug – could bring about change, move a handful of thoughts to a new understanding, a new authority. A gale, like today's, and whole dunes – lives and futures – were relocated, reimagined.

Grace had not had twelve people at her table for a while. This wasn't the kind of family who shared regular Sunday meals. But you don't turn 70 every day.

As her friends and family arrive for lunch, memories are rekindled but not all of them are welcome. As the meal is served, it becomes clear that events of the past have left their mark on everyone at the table in vastly different ways. Grace is reminded that age is no guarantee of wisdom and there is much still to learn from the young at heart. As the family finally confront a shocking event in their past, Grace is forced to face her own shortcomings as a parent and wife and left to contemplate the ways in which grief and regret have resonated through her life.

This moving and often funny novel dissects the lives of women over three generations, explores the pull and power of memory and celebrates the triumph of endurance.

Grace's Table Details

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Author : Sally Piper

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From Reader Review Grace's Table for online ebook

Sue says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book which centres around Grace, and so to her family. Family get-togethers can be fraught with underlying tensions from the past, complexities of real or imagined hurts or slights, and the understanding or misunderstanding of communication.

Beautifully written the book opens out over its pages the life of Grace with all its experiences and subsequent results.

A simple but lovely read.

Alison Long says

Reading this superb debut novel I was reminded of Gustav Klimt's 'The Three Ages Of Woman'. A painting that became commercially popular in print form but often only featured a beautiful young Mother and infant. It's only when you search for the original painting that you see behind the vivid, brightly coloured image of youth in the foreground, stands a hunched older woman with sagging posture and head turned away. She is a stark contrast to the main image and therefore easy to edit. Cut. Written off. Forgotten. So true of the plight of older women with so much more to tell and say, if only someone would listen.

Grace has a story to tell. She will take you on a sensory journey through her life as she prepares a celebration lunch for her family. With many of life's undulations to bear, the one constant for Grace is food and with every stir, splash and simmer she will evoke powerful memories of your own too. Grace will resonate with every woman. Those who still have to cook joylessly for their families day in and day out and those who wish they could recapture the days when they did.

WARNING - Do not read on an empty stomach!

Alison Wootten says

Novel set over a lunch time sitting of a 70th birthday celebration. All the ups and downs, good times and sad times, incorporated into this time of remembering. A beautifully written, poignant story of family and friendships. A really lovely read. I much preferred this to her second novel, the geography of friendship.

Helen says

I loved this crisp, astutely observed first novel. The gradual revealing over one day, Grace's 70th birthday, of past griefs and secrets, of grumpy pettiness and darker strife, of current yearnings and timeless needs are all beautifully handled on the whole, with just a rare rather clumsy note towards the end. I recommend this as a good read.

Dale Harcombe says

This book is like stepping back in time in one sense. I found a lot of the things recounted like the knitted tea cosies, the hand written recipes in an exercise book, the overuse of salt that used to occur in cooking of previous generations, the making of mint sauce from scratch, and so on were interesting details. When I read about Grace rolling her husband's cigarettes and placing them in a tin for him it reminded me of seeing my mother do that for my father. So it was a bit like a walk down memory lane.

Events take place on the day of Grace's 70th birthday celebration with family invited to share the meal. They are interwoven with events and incident that shaped family life and the tragedy that is pivotal to the story. The ending throws a little more light on events and the shaping this had on the characters.

I have to admit I'd have not been thrilled at a gift of knives either and loved the careful way Grace answered when asked if she liked them. The attention to detail is one of the things I most liked about this novel. The little descriptions like that of the money spider on the freshly picked mint plant which had been growing in a cement tub, and the description of hands betraying age are so well handled. It reminded me of a poem I had written on a similar theme about hands.

I liked the gentle yet acerbic humour at times and comments, like the way Grace responds with 'Life Shops' when asked whether all the different plates had been picked up at antique shops. I liked Grace and agreed with her about sarcasm being cheap currency. Susan, her daughter, I could willingly have slapped and her son Peter wasn't much better. But you understand them a little more toward the end. It is a very detailed picture of prickly relationships in family and it makes interesting reading. However it left me feeling thankful that I do not have a family like this one.

Phil Kelly says

Grace's Table by Sally Piper is a warm portrait of life in Australia.

The art of good writing is in highlighting the little things that create a big picture and Sally has nailed it here on this one.

If you ever fought with your sibling over the shady window seat on the way back from the beach or washed your hands with Lux Soap in your grandparents concrete laundry tub, this is a book for you.

The book's plot is also true to Australians of the time.

Candy says

This is a well-crafted story which takes places on one day, but reminisces about a lifetime. At first, I read a bit of the book, but it seemed mundane and tedious, and I didn't get very far. I came across it again, started reading, and am very glad I did. This isn't a book of thriller endings and plot twists, but an ordinary woman's life examined.

It's Grace's 70th birthday, and as she prepares dinner for her family and close friends, she weaves a tale of her life: childhood, love, marriage, children, friendship. She uses the everyday and special items in her home

to spark her memory and tell her story. However, it's a story that can be seen from a different perspective by other family members: "Families were like sand dunes, Grace decided. They shifted shape and position with even the gentlest of forces. Even a tiny puff – a shrug – could bring about change, move a handful of thoughts to a new understanding, a new authority. A gale, like today's, and whole dunes – lives and futures – were relocated, reimagined."

Thoroughly enjoyable read.

Sue Shepherd says

I loved the way Grace reminisces about her life's most important events. She's hosting her 70th birthday party at home with all her family and close friends. The way tiny things, cooking, facial expressions, words spoken, would all make her recollect events from her life. The underlying dark secrets that are never spoken about, brought to the table and seen in a different light from different generations. I would recommend this book as a pleasurable read that is at times, quite moving. It moves along at a constant rate that leaves you wanting more.

Kylie says

A gentle and tender novel containing some wry and honest observations about the lives of women, though not without an undercurrent of simmering rage.

If I'd read it fifteen years ago, I'd have loved it.

Nicola says

A skillfully observed and beautifully written story about unresolved family issues, played out against the backdrop of a celebratory meal. An engrossing and entertaining read from a talented author - looking forward to her next book.

Emma says

A thoughtful & rewarding read. Grace's 70th birthday lunch is a repast in several ways. We are reminded of the comforts of true friendship & of the undercurrents of tension that can run through any family. The grandchildren provide a refreshing note of ignorance/innocence (the moment when Jorja asks why she should learn to grow her own cherry tomatoes when she can always come & eat her grandmother's is poignant). Grace's responses to her children and to her grandchildren are very different -- and yet the hope that they will escape the traps of the past is deflated somewhat by her children's interactions with their own children. Ultimately uplifting, there are moments of Grace along the way as well as heartbreaking truths. We are reminded that truth is always relative....

Cass Moriarty says

Grace's Table by Sally Piper tells the story of Grace and her friends and family that surround her table on the occasion of her 70th birthday. Over the course of the meal - the preparation, the eating and the cleaning up - Grace's life is revealed to us through flashbacks and memory. With her children divided over a long ago incident that changed the course of their family's history, the characters' relationships with each other, with themselves, and of course, with food, are served to the reader one dish at a time. What I loved about this book is that the idea or concept we have of some of the characters changes quite a lot as we get deeper into the story and discover more about the motivations behind their actions. Perhaps all is not as straightforward as it seems. We are left feeling that we have a bit more understanding and perhaps tolerance for the people involved.

Alistair says

This novel proved to be a surprise, and a further reminder, Reader, that a book should not be judged by its cover. What I imagined would be an amenable, gentle, nostalgic novel, turned out to be quietly subversive depiction of family life. As Grace says, "so much resentment had percolated undetected in this family for so many yers."

Helen says

This book about family life, both now and in the past, contains many fond memories but also a lot of resentment, even rage. The comparison between marriages then and now is interesting. Also interesting is the difference in attitude toward Grace's boyfriend. This novel is an honest but gentle story about living the life you have, about aging, friendship and families. A great debut novel.

Jennifer says

A lovely modest story. I really engaged with it. I found the 'mundaneness' in the story really touching and helped to firmly root it in real life experiences. I think also the fact that the story seemed to be set in 'my time' helped me to really connect with it. I liked the way Grace found comfort and the strength to go on in the rhythm of her everyday life. I found it really interesting that she really loved her (adult) kids, but at times didn't like them much. We do our best but kids have a pesky habit of making their own way and becoming their own person to a certain degree (unless of course they turn out just like us and that is what we secretly dislike about them!). However there were a few times when I thought Grace was a bit too good to be true, but thankfully that wasn't too often.

Des came across as a brutal man but not an unfeeling one. I wondered how much a product of his time he was because certain things he did reminded me of my father. I found it interesting that the one time when he tried hard to assert his masculinity (his fight with Grace and Des' son Peter), was when his masculinity fell woefully short, and with dreadful consequences. He wasn't 'man enough' to give his son room to assert

himself and he paid a huge price for it.

The bond between Grace and her grandchildren was really touching and reminded me of the way in which the generation gap manifests itself in families. It's like one group is unwillingly leaving their income earning/productive years behind them and the other group is closing in on their income earning/productive years impatiently. It is a bond epitomised by them both not quite being where they want to be.

The book showed very touchingly the everyday mundane inability we all possess to see past our own hurt to someone else's. Often the closer they are to us, the harder it is to see. It made me wonder how families cope with the worst possible thing that might happen to them and still manage to stay together, even if their together sometimes feels and appears like a default setting.

I enjoyed this book very much and managed to read it in three days, working days that is.
