



## Making Piece: a Memoir of Love, Loss and Pie

*Beth M. Howard*

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*"You will find my story is a lot like pie, a strawberry-rhubarb pie. It's bitter. It's messy. It's got some sweetness, too. Sometimes the ingredients get added in the wrong order, but it has substance, it will warm your insides, and even though it isn't perfect, it still turns out okay in the end."*

When journalist Beth M. Howard's young husband dies suddenly, she packs up the RV he left behind and hits the American highways. At every stop along the way—whether filming a documentary or handing out free slices on the streets of Los Angeles—Beth uses pie as a way to find purpose. Howard eventually returns to her Iowa roots and creates the perfect synergy between two of America's greatest icons—pie and the American Gothic House, the little farmhouse immortalized in Grant Wood's famous painting, where she now lives and runs the Pitchfork Pie Stand.

Making Piece powerfully shows how one courageous woman triumphs over tragedy. This beautifully written memoir is, ultimately, about hope. It's about the journey of healing and recovery, of facing fears, finding meaning in life again, and moving forward with purpose and, eventually, joy. It's about the nourishment of the heart and soul that comes from the simple act of giving to others, like baking a homemade pie and sharing it with someone whose pain is even greater than your own. And it tells of the role of fate, second chances and the strength found in community

## Making Piece: a Memoir of Love, Loss and Pie Details

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## **From Reader Review Making Piece: a Memoir of Love, Loss and Pie for online ebook**

### **Peggy L says**

"Making Piece A memoir of love, loss and pie"

Author/journalist/piebaker Beth Howard shares a touching story of love lost, surviving grief after her husband's death, and the risks she took to continue living a life she was at first not certain she wanted to live. By taking a fork in the road, taking risks, and putting her faith in community, friendship and pie she survived and shares her journey in this book. Now living in the American Gothic House in Eldon, Iowa and running the Pitchfork Pie Stand every summer's day, this writer is a joy to read, even when the story is painful. With a network of long time friends, friends she just met and friends about to be, Ms Howard traverses the country talking about, eating, judging and making pies!

From driving "The Beast" the RV she told Marcos, her husband that she would never drive, to being a self-promoted judge of pies at the Iowa State Fair to handing out free pieces of pie at Venice Beach on National Pie Day this book conveys the warmth of fresh apple pie without the calories!

There are recipes if you are inspired to try a bit of pie therapy!

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### **Charlotte says**

<http://charlotteswebofbooks.blogspot....>

Some people will pick up this book and gain strength from Beth's survival after the loss of her husband. Other's will pick up this book and identify with the healing power of food. I picked up this book, that I didn't even know was set partially in Iowa, and got a piece of "home" when I needed it the most. I haven't been "home" since Thanksgiving and my homesickness has reached an all new level. To paraphrase, the author talks about crossing the Missouri river into Council Bluffs and seeing the sign that says "Iowa A Place to Grow" and how it just felt right. I know that feeling so very well. I have had that same feeling every trip "home" for the last two plus years.

I really enjoyed Making Piece. I am sure that I enjoyed it more because of the Iowa connection than I did anything else, (not really a pie girl, unless it is made of chocolate) but I enjoyed watching Beth make it through that critical year. She went from being the "big city girl" back to that "small town Iowa girl" with such ease that it almost makes me long to do the same. I think that Making Piece has a little something for everyone, including recipes at the back of the book.

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### **Sharon says**

I loved this book and hated for it to end. Someday, I hope to go up to the Pitchfork Pie Stand and buy a piece of Ms. Howard's apple pie. If you've ever lost someone close to you, you'll be able to identify with all the feelings expressed in this book. Plus there are a few recipes at the end.

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### **Cara says**

This memoir was written by a native Iowan who lived on the west coast and in Europe before finding her way back to her home state, in need of solace after her husband's death. She settles in the American Gothic House made famous by Grant Wood's painting, just up the hill from my grandmother's house. She's still renting the house as we speak... I've been going to Eldon (population 892) my entire life, and I got a kick out of the way Beth portrayed the town, but the book overall is too much about the author's persistent navel-gazing for my taste. And you don't have to tell me (or anyone else who has spent ANY time in Iowa) that pie can solve all the world's ills.... isn't that obvious?!?!

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### **Darlene says**

One of my favorite genres is the memoir, and this memoir by Beth Howard was one that really spoke to me. Journalist Beth Howard had been married to her husband, Marcus, for 7 1/2 years; and their relationship had always been difficult... they loved each other intensely but their differences seemed to continue to push them apart. Marcus was a German automotive executive and because of his job, they spent a great deal of time apart.... this was one of the points of contention between them. Finally, the two decided that, although they loved each other, the constant turmoil in the marriage had worn them out; and they decided to separate.

An interesting aspect of Beth's and Marcus's relationship is that their problems didn't seem to me, to be about their personal differences, as much as they seemed to be about their inability to communicate. What Beth really wanted was for Marcus to spend more time with her; but instead of telling him her feelings, she pushed him away... asking for a divorce... but secretly hoping he would say no and would fight for their marriage. They were at the end part of the divorce process.... just needing to sign the papers.. when tragedy struck. Marcus died suddenly of a congenital heart problem. Marcus's death left Beth filled with guilt over the words she hadn't been able to say to him and grief stricken. This memoir is Beth's story... not only of her grief .... but also of her healing and her journey back to finding peace and looking forward to her life once again.

I suppose this story isn't a new one. After all, we all deal with loss and grief at times in our lives, and we all need to find a way to work through it and find a way to look forward to the rest of our lives, all the while accepting the loss we have suffered; accepting that we are forever changed somehow. There were a couple of things which made Beth's story unique in my view. First of all, Beth's self-awareness and understanding of her own feelings were very impressive to me. It was obvious that she had done a great deal of very difficult soul searching ; and had to face some very difficult truths about herself. And in this world where few people seem to engage in introspective thinking, I find that a very rare and admirable quality.

The second thing that stood out that I could really identify with was the way that Beth found her way back to peace. It was something that she had always loved to do and on the surface, it wouldn't seem to be an activity that would bring a person peace of mind... it was her love of baking pies! She wrote....

"With each push of the rolling pin and each pie that came browned and bubbling out of the oven, my soul was soothed and my heart mended a little more."

This made perfect sense to me on a very instinctive level. I am a baker also... I have loved to bake my entire life. So when Ms. Howard talked about how it felt to take a few simple ingredients and using just your own

two hands, form those ingredients into a light and flaky crust which you fill with apples (sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar), summer blueberries or even the juiciest peaches; and how that aroma would fill the air and your home. Well, that was something I could not only understand; but something I have found brings calm to my own mind when it has felt cluttered or when my life has felt chaotic. Perhaps it's a form of meditation or maybe you can call it a 'prayer'... whatever you wish to call it.. it really DOES work!

Ms. Howard decided to get into an RV that she and Marcus owned and she began a journey across the country. She baked pies and distributed slices to anyone who wished to have one: and on National Pie Day, she stopped to teach anyone who was interested, how to create their own pies. What she discovered was that the act of creating those scrumptious offerings and sharing them with others soothed her and 'fed' HER soul. I believe that what she found was that caring for others by giving them nourishment was probably one of the most elemental things a person can do. Providing nourishment to others can be very healing.. both emotionally and spiritually.

Ms. Howard finally ended up back in her birthplace in rural Southeastern Iowa... in the town of Eldon. It seemed somehow fitting that she end her period of grieving and healing back in the place where her life began. Upon her arrival, she discovered that there was a house for rent that seemed perfect for her. This was no ordinary house. In fact, it is a well-known tourist attraction... the American Gothic House, which was made famous in the iconic painting by artist, Grant Wood (it's the painting of the couple in front of the farmhouse, holding a pitchfork). Ms. Howard decides this is the perfect place for her to be.. there was a peacefulness in Iowa that she needed and it provided a place for her to plan and look forward to what would come next in her life. She ended up opening a pie stand where she sells pies to tourists visiting the old house.... calling it appropriately the Pitchfork Pie Stand. As of the writing of this memoir, she is still making her home in Iowa.

I found Ms. Howard's memoir to be especially moving and her incredible ability to be honest with herself about her feelings was nothing short of inspirational. I found a bit of myself in her story and reading her eloquent words was an affirmation for me.. about who I am and what motivates me.

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### **Elaine says**

This writer is a very articulate, over-analytical, self-indulgent widow examining the sudden loss of her husband, from whom she was soon to be divorced. Her use of figurative language is amazing, and, at times, very artistic, but page after page of her detailed weeping and wailing grew tiresome. I mean, all right, already, I got it in the first 100 or so pages that her eyes suffered from swelling due to the abundant tears, and she would collapse on the floor or onto a sofa in the fetal position, but this went on from beginning to end even when she shopped at an Aldi store in her home state of Iowa, for heaven sakes. Sorrow is great and real, but did we have to go over and over all the crying events? The thesis that the world needs more pie is trite, ridiculous, and unconvincing. At times, however, she had a wonderful grasp of humor and hyperbole, and that was fun. The fact that her journey through life, in her 50 years or so, has taken her all over this country and Europe as she moved around, and it convinces me that this return to her home state of Iowa, to reside in the famous American Gothic house of the Grant Wood painting, will only result in another impulsive move somewhere else where she will indulge her descriptions of grief. I mean, did we have to have the details of her two night stand during her widowhood when she was attending a pie-baking contest where she was supposed to be a judge? What was the purpose of that? OK, Beth, you've said enough: your husband died suddenly, but this was not the first time the two of you were planning to divorce; you baked pies all your life, now see what else you can write about, but, remember, the best writing is performed with

restraint and less-sentimentality.

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### **Peggy Hess Greenawalt says**

This well written book made me smile, even laugh at times, but also made me sad and reflect on my losses. I loved all the pie baking, and it inspired me to bake a pie or at least eat a piece! :) I did tire of her crying, but I reminded myself that I cried a lot for months after my mother died, and that grief is very personal and different for everyone. I really want to use this with my church book group, so could have used a little less language etc., but overall, I think the book was one that could be enjoyed and discussed, and we could all take away something about the challenges of life and how to overcome them. Thanks Lee for a good read!

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### **Annmarie says**

Poignant + pie + Portland setting in part - the book hit the trifecta for me. I quite enjoyed it, even though I don't usually read memoirs and I don't really bake. I do however love pie and appreciate good writing. The author's German husband dies unexpectedly & relatively young while they are in the process of a divorce - but they still love each other, and it rocks her world. The book is basically a memoir about how she gets over her grief with the help of good friends and a journey in an RV sharing, giving away pie, and meeting other pie bakers across the country. She used to live with her husband in Portland (among other places, she's quite a traveler) and returns there in this book for a period of time - now I must visit the Pacific Pie Company she mentions. :) She comes across as a very appealing person in her writing, I could totally sit down and chat and share a pie with her I think. You can read the first page or two of the book at her site:  
<http://bethmhoward.com/books/pie-memoir/>.

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### **Jennie says**

I love pie. LOVE pie. I can also relate to baking through life's challenges.

That being said, I could not get into this book. I could not relate to the author at all. Opening the book with her complaints about her marriage did not appeal her to me. I was sad that her husband died, but her ways of dealing with the problems of her marriage (asking for a divorce even though it was the last thing she wanted, just to get his attention) were immature. I just couldn't connect with this woman. Call me old-fashioned, but a marriage is about the couple, not the individuals. Seemed like they both got married for the wrong reasons.

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### **Lula says**

While I generally liked this book, it is about pie after all, it felt a little to "made for tv" for me. I am realizing that this is about the third blog-turned-memoir book that I have read and what has bothered me in all of them is the lack of beautiful writing. There are moments that shine, but there are also parts that seem trite or confusing. I think I would have liked it more if I could identify with more of the grief aspects, though I am thankful that I could not. The best thing I can say is that it made me want to bake, share, and eat pie.

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### **Lisa says**

I really loved this book and am so glad my friend Becky recommended it to me. It's a memoir written by a women who loses her husband very suddenly at a young age. To overcome her grief, she turns to her love of pie, and crust by crust, comes through the grieving process happier, healthier, and more hopeful.

My favorite line was: 'you are like a trapeze artist. You have to let go of one swing in order to grab the next one. There is that moment of being airborne in between when you are holding on to nothing, and trusting that the other swing will come toward you. That 'in between' is where you are now, grasping for air.'

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### **Lauren says**

I have two reactions to this book. On the one hand, I love that Beth found solace in her grief through baking, which I also find to be therapeutic. I love that she encourages the human connection that occurs around good food---in this case, pie (oh my, did I crave apple pie as I read this). On the other hand, I don't agree (except on a surface level) that "pie can change the world"---I wish she had encountered God in a very real way on the Great Pie Journey. I am hopeful she still will. He certainly uses the work of our hands---pie included---to bless, and change, the world. Beth, if you are ever in my town, let's meet for pie and conversation!

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### **Catherine Adde says**

When our library's Debbie Henderson recommends a book, I read it! We were both intrigued, as history buffs and bakers, to learn that Ms. Howard lives in a historic house in Iowa, portrayed in that famous painting called American Gothic by Grant Wood.

It is in this house, a tourist attraction, that she bakes pies for her Pitchfork Pie stand, writes her blog: <http://theworldneedsmorepie.com> and has come to terms with the devastating, sudden loss of her husband. While I wanted a 'fun' read this summer, I found her story helpful for anyone who experiences life in the fast lane since she demonstrates that having the 6 figure income in a 'dot-com' career is not necessarily everything, or even healthy. Many will be able to relate to her journey from grief to healing as well. Best of all: award winning pie recipes are included!

Written thoughtfully with funny and sad scenes interspersed, this memoir, the author reminds us, is similar to the pie that she loves to make: it can be sweet, bitter, messy, but in the end, everything turns out alright!

~ by Catherine Addé  
Friend of the Sierra Madre Library  
Former Chair, Board of Trustees

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### **Jake Rideout says**

A little over halfway through, I just want to SHAKE Beth Howard. I was hoping this wouldn't turn out to be another memoir by a spoiled middle-aged lady, but that's exactly what it is. Usually food memoirs are written by people who are a little more grounded and humble, because people who work with food don't typically make a lot of money--they work with their hands, and their building blocks are very basic. For Howard, though, baking is more of a cheap form of therapy. And for the first 2/3 of the book, it's not really working.

Another thing that I hate is that, every time Howard mentions specific things she misses about her deceased husband, sex is either the first, second, or only thing. Then she usually paints him in a negative light immediately after that. I'm no psychologist, but it seems to me like a lot of her grief came from resentment that they were hours from a divorce when he died, but now she wouldn't be able to move on from him. So all the times she repeats how much she misses him, and how she didn't REALLY want a divorce, I feel like it's a little dishonest.

And meanwhile, while she's moping around the country, wailing and gnashing her teeth and relying on some seriously amazing friends to feed her, house her, and continually talk her off the ledge, we find out that THIS WHOLE TIME her brother has been fighting cancer and on the verge of death himself. But she doesn't even MENTION it until 170 pages in, and even then, it's just an anecdote that serves as a way for her to explain another emotional breakthrough that she had.

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### **Kathy says**

I'm 113 pages in and don't think I'll be able to finish this one. Too bad, it had such promise. But besides the author telling you about how much she loved her husband (even though they were on the verge of divorce and then he died), she's all about telling you how she used to work on a hit TV show. How she didn't go to her prom -- because she'd already lost her virginity and wanted to go on a camping trip instead. How she used to bake pies for celebrities in Malibu. All the bragging is very annoying, and the bad pie metaphors sprinkled throughout made me feel she was trying too hard. The writing is serviceable, but nothing graceful or thought provoking. Back to the library it goes.

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