



## How to Bake a Perfect Life

*Barbara O'Neal*

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**How to Bake a Perfect Life** Barbara O'Neal

**In a novel as warm and embracing as a family kitchen, Barbara O'Neal explores the poignant, sometimes complex relationships between mothers and daughters—and the healing magic of homemade bread.**

Professional baker Ramona Gallagher is a master of an art that has sustained her through the most turbulent times, including a baby at fifteen and an endless family feud. But now Ramona's bakery threatens to crumble around her. Literally. She's one water-heater disaster away from losing her grandmother's rambling Victorian and everything she's worked so hard to build.

When Ramona's soldier son-in-law is wounded in Afghanistan, her daughter, Sophia, races overseas to be at his side, leaving Ramona as the only suitable guardian for Sophia's thirteen-year-old stepdaughter, Katie. Heartbroken, Katie feels that she's being dumped again—this time on the doorstep of a woman out of practice with mothering.

Ramona relies upon a special set of tools—patience, persistence, and the reliability of a good recipe—when rebellious Katie arrives. And as she relives her own history of difficult choices, Ramona shares her love of baking with the troubled girl. Slowly, Katie begins to find self-acceptance and a place to call home. And when a man from her past returns to offer a second chance at love, Ramona discovers that even the best recipe tastes better when you add time, care, and a few secret ingredients of your own.

## How to Bake a Perfect Life Details

Date : Published December 21st 2010 by Bantam

ISBN : 9780553386776

Author : Barbara O'Neal

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Romance, Contemporary, Family

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## From Reader Review How to Bake a Perfect Life for online ebook

### Melissa Storm says

I loved this book! Very deep characters and a compelling storyline, both past and present. Even though this book wasn't a romance, Ramona's and Jonah's love story is probably the most touching I've ever read--and that's saying something. Highly recommend for fans of both literary fiction and romance.

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### VillaPark Public Library says

How to Bake a Perfect Life by Barbara O'Neal is the perfect recipe for an enjoyable read. Ramona Gallagher has weathered everything from becoming a single mother at age 15 to enduring an ongoing family feud that affects her current business situation. She operates a successful bread bakery in her inherited Colorado Springs Victorian home but the slow economy and a series of small mishaps threaten her business and home. Her daughter Sofia receives a call that her soldier husband has been badly injured overseas and flies to Germany to be by his side, leaving Ramona to take care of her stepdaughter, Katie. The teenager has had a tough life with a meth addicted mother and a soldier father so she is wary of any new people in her life. Katie's dog Merlin was rescued from the street and he plays a critical role in bringing Ramona & Katie together. Like yeasty bread, the story bubbles with love and drama and is best savored slowly.

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### Margitte says

From the blurb:

*In a novel as warm and embracing as a family kitchen, Barbara O'Neal explores the poignant, sometimes complex relationships between mothers and daughters—and the healing magic of homemade bread.*

The title says it all. Add a little bit of Hallmark romance to it, and everything is said and done. There's romantic fluff, for sure. But surprisingly no martini and stiletto undertones, and that basically, makes this book a really good read.

Okay, a good read if you believe in real people with real lives being challenged by modern issues, such as the Afghanistan war, drug abuse, parental neglect, financial challenges, and family feuds. And if you love baking bread, this is the book for you! In fact, it was the reason why I decided to just sidestep the sugary romantic talk in it and get some new inspiration from the baking side in it instead. Good decision. Old family homes and traditions, ordinary cars, and imperfect people trying to negotiate all the pitfalls coming their way.

It's a wholesome story. You've figured that one out already. But it is realistic, and layered with family ties, compassion, trust and forgiveness. A palate cleanser after all the dark, somber reads. A feel-good experience. There is a lot of talented prose mixed into this dough.

I really appreciated the experience. The company of this family is so special. What was really outstanding about this story was the depth of character of all the people involved. The integrity of the love baked into

complex situations. It was not people seeking perfection in people. They looked far beyond that for the values that are so much more important.

If it wasn't for the chick-lit romance, an unnecessary blandness, splashed like cold water over an otherwise amazing story, I would have gladly rated this book five stars. It was really that good.

For romance readers it is a blast, though.

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### **Elizabeth says**

This is a fabulous book. The title and cover are not fitting in my opinion. They make it seem like a light read when it is anything but... so many things happening on these pages throughout the story, it was just so much more than I was expecting, in a good way...

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### **Ian says**

Ramona finds herself well and truly thrown in the deep end when her daughter, Sophia, travels to Germany to be with her husband who suffered critical and life threatening injuries in the Iraq war. With Sophia in Germany, Ramona finds herself looking after her step-daughter Katie who has come from an impoverished and uncaring home.

Over the months, Katie slowly starts to trust Ramona and feel a measure of stability. But every time she starts to feel like she belongs something happens which reminds her she is an interloper.

*How to Bake a Perfect Life* is the story of a group of women from four different generations. If I had to choose a word to describe the book, I'd say it's about 'resilience'. It's not always easy but it's ultimately positive and uplifting.

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### **Audrey says**

lovely and soulful. you will want to gather your mother and daughter and bake something. spend time doing things you love and eat good food and plant something. really enjoyed this one. my favorite part..."well, what if it isn't a big mistake? what if this is only something that happened, something that's different from the things most of your friends are doing but not bad. maybe it's extraordinary, to help you become an extraordinary person."

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### **Holli says**

I am just amazed at how this author writes! I've read one other book by her and I loved it also.... her character development starts right off the bat and by page 5 you are invested in everyone in her stories. The relationships between her characters, the settings, the recipes..... her phrases and word choices.... just AMAZING!!!! I highly recommend this book as well as *The Lost Recipe of Happiness* by her.

## **Kimberly Kincaid says**

I really, really enjoyed this! O'Neal's description is just stunning, and I felt like I knew every nook of her bakery/house (and loved it). The characters were lovely while still being flawed (even when they did ugly things-- which wasn't often, but this is life-- you knew they weren't ugly people. They were so real!). I loved how masterfully she wrote the layers of each character, and that everyone had a journey in the book. The book did "jump" from character to character (smoothly, in my opinion), and while it wasn't disarming for me, I could see how it might be for someone else because she writes Ramona's section in the first person, present tense (SO hard to do) and Katie's in the third person, past. Then there are Sofia's entries, which are all written in her journal. But I liked how it set each section apart.

The love story was sweet and I really liked the book. I will definitely read anything else O'Neal writes. Worthwhile and poignant-- wonderful.

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## **Sonja says**

I wish it was possible to add stars for those particular books that blow over the top...because this is one of them. Wow. Captures the complicated relationships within families, and the fear, guilt, insecurity, and other swirling emotions of Katie are portrayed extremely well.

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## **Catie says**

\*3.5 stars\*

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## **JuliaOrlando says**

I liked this book very much. I liked the interaction between all of the characters and their individual story lines flowed together very well. This book also made me think about different parenting styles for different generations and how do we avoid the parenting mistakes our parents & grandparents made. There were a few loose ends that the author never tied up, but not enough to take away from my enjoyment of the book.

### **Main Characters**

Ramona - the main character an early 40 year old baker, single mother, 1st person POV.

Sofia - daughter of Ramona and married to a soldier wounded in Afghanistan, 1st person POV

Katie - Sofia's 13 year old step daughter, 3rd person POV

Bread baking is also a large part of this book as the main character Ramona is a baker (boulanger). I enjoyed the way the author incorporated several bread recipes into the book and how she explained the different stages of bread making. (This book has piqued my interest enough that I will be trying my hand at home made bread in the near future).

Issues dealt with in this book are: family relationships (mostly mother/daughter), single parenthood,

substance abuse, growing pains, and wounded military spouses.

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## Linda says

*"Bread I know. Bread I love."*

This statement described Ramona Gallagher's life. She ran her bakery out of a seen-for-better-days Victorian home once owned by her grandmother. Her daughter taking an unexpected trip to Germany, a broken water pipe, a soon-to-be visiting teenager and a dog needing rescue: these were just a few of the things that were affecting her day.

The story was told by three generations of females: Ramona, her daughter, Sofia, and Sofia's stepdaughter, Katie. Normally I don't care for chapters flipping back and forth between three different people but the author made it work. The characters were cracked and chipped; no one was perfect. Well, maybe Sofia, but she had the least amount of contact with the reader. Their story was bittersweet.

Both a contemporary romance and women's fiction, it was loaded with family drama. Ramona came from a big family; most of them lived in the same town. Favoritism and rivalry lit sparks but the author fed you tidbits of poignant moments, too. There was some emotional turmoil and the way to look at things came from three sets of eyes: Ramona's, Sofia's and Katie's.

The clincher that pulled everything together was the art of making bread. Here and there, tucked within the pages, are recipes but not ordinary receipts. Ramona shared some of her successes: her secrets. And why kneading, twisting and pulling at the dough relieved stress, helped with decision-making and gave her happiness. The act of making comfort food was her friend.

On its own, the story might have been too anxious for some readers. (view spoiler) There was a lot going on with plenty of angst and trust issues. But the preparation, 'watching' the bread rise and the 'smells' made you see and taste her world. For Ramona, bread was about nurturing, memories, healing, and pleasure: in one word, life. And, for a few precious moments, I felt I was along side of her in the kitchen.

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## Naomi says

Generally a cute story...sort of your typical chick-lit book. I bumped it up to 3 stars for the recipes alone..My gosh, the recipes look so fantastic. I am loving the fact that authors are starting to do recipes with their books..as someone who loves to cook, it is just something that makes them stand out and go POW! And let me add, I have gotten some pretty terrific recipes from these types of books and authors web sites.

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## Melodie says

The mother-daughter relationship is complex,unique,often dramatic.Ramona is an independent spirit, raising her daughter, building a business. The book gives voice to the family history that has landed Ramona where

she finds herself and winds around to come full circle.

I found this to be a deeply satisfying read. This family of strong women resonated with me. Each generation knows the basic recipe for mother love but each must tweak it to fit their individual needs and situation. And each generation tries to not repeat the perceived mistakes of their own mothers. The mistakes and missteps each made over the years brings them back to a place of understanding and a tolerance for that which they have trouble accepting or understanding.

Bonus points for a four legged character named Merlin and all the recipes and bread baking tips. I intend on trying some of the recipes included in the book.

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### **Deborah Blake says**

I don't have the words to describe how much I loved this book. It is warm, funny, and entertaining while still being poignant and heart-breakingly real. It's like a mug of hot chocolate on a frosty cold day...with a shot of Bailey's in it. And as with all of O'Neal's books, the recipes are a great bonus.

Ramona Gallagher is a professional baker who is one plumbing disaster away from losing everything, including her business and her grandmother's falling-apart Victorian. To complicate things, her very pregnant daughter Sophia is called away to deal with her husband's horrific injuries when he is hurt in action in Afghanistan--right when Sophia's 13 year old step-daughter is about to arrive. Can Ramona save her life's dream, a troubled teen, and mend both an old house and her family at the same time? And maybe even find love while she's at it?

This book is about the love of family, and food, and about creating your own second chances. And the romance that shows up when you least expect it. You're going to want to make room for this one on your To Be Read Soon shelf, I promise you.

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### **Jess says**

Meh.

This book is too long.

That sums up the way I feel about it.

It should have been about seventy-five pages shorter. It would have been better.

O'Neal is a good story-teller. The characters she created in "How to Bake a Perfect Life" deserve to have their stories told. And she laid the groundwork for amazing connections and situations that would pull on your head, heart, and soul.

But they didn't. They lacked a lot of proper development. I blame the set-up of the book in large part. If they had made a set of two books perhaps--this one only focusing on Ramona's two points of view. Another focusing on Katie alongside Sofia.

Also because the book was so long--and the set-up so far-reaching, the descriptives were repetitive and the characters had similarities they shouldn't have. For example, every other page someone is resting their hand on their stomach. It is noted over and over. Everyone from Katie--who is thirteen, tiny, and as a teenager

would not naturally rest her hand on her abdomen, to the pregnant women--the only ones that make sense, to the foreign, elder lover of the main character. Over and over. It's one of the many things you pick up on throughout the book that just rests in your mind.

As does the fact that the main characters parents are names James and Lily. Which should be noticed by American authors who write books after the decade of the Potter generation.

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### **Just - The romance reader says**

The story had everything that a girl like me loves - baking, an awesome dog, a bakery, a bit of drama, some romance and a happy ending. Ramona is such a great character. She's so strong and compassionate, really, truly caring about those in her life. She has some struggles but no matter she's willing to sacrifice for her loved ones. And Katie, poor sweet Katie has seen way too much in her young life, but she's an old soul who has taken those bad experiences and struggles and turned them into life lessons that have put her on the path to being a truly amazing adult.

An added bonus is that there are some of Ramona's bread recipes scattered throughout the book.

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### **Angela Mcclanahan says**

I love her books! This book follows a woman, who is a baker, through her life. I love how it is like I am watching a snapshot of this woman's life. I see the entire gambit of emotions from deep sorrow to true love and everything in between. The characters in the book go through everyday life and all the challenges and surprises that go with it. If you haven't read this author before then you are in for a treat. She always writes about some type of cook or baker and then includes recipes in the story. So you see the character make a bread and then at the end of the chapter is the recipe written by the character.

I like to note in my reviews that there is sexual content in this book. Honestly I think there was a little too much and much more than in her previous books. It may have just been because I am a modest individual but I found the continual reoccurring sexual content a little distracting as if it was being forced into the book.

Otherwise I totally loved this book and am excited to read more books by Barbara O'Neal. I have already recommended this book to a few of my friends.

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### **Kathryn says**

This book was such an enjoyable read and to get some delectable recipes for breads and muffins just added to my delight. My only true criticism was Ramona's relationship with her family and how she allowed them to treat her. I just felt she was strong enough to stand up for herself and not allow them to beat her up so badly. But that's what makes a good book, is the author's development of all the characters.

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### **Candice says**

Some books come into your life at just the right time. This one has been sitting on my shelf, but I'm going through some rough times now and wanted something that would be a comforting read. This was a perfect fit. It's not all sweetness and light. There are some very sad elements to the book - an Iraq war veteran who becomes a drug addict and damages the life of her child, an Afghan war soldier who is horrifically injured in the war. But at its heart this is a nurturing book about mothers and daughters and the power of love. There's also a lot about baking bread, and some knock-your-socks-off recipes as well. No need to wait until you need a hug. This one can be enjoyed at any time. I'm glad it came to me when it did.

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