



Crave: A Memoir of Food and Longing

Christine O'Brien

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Christine O'Brien remembers growing up in NYC's famous Dakota apartment with her powerful father, her beautiful mother, and a food obsession that consumed her.

Hunger comes in many forms. A person can crave a steak in the same way that she can crave a perfect family life. In her memoir, *Crave: A Memoir of Food and Longing*, Christine O'Brien tells the story of her own cravings. It's a story of growing up in a family with a successful, but explosive father, a beautiful, but damaged, mother and three brothers in New York City's famed Dakota apartment building. Christine's father was Ed Scherick, the ABC television executive and film producer who created ABC's *Wide World of Sports* as well as classic films like *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* and *The Heartbreak Kid*. Her mother, Carol, was raised on a farm in Missouri.

With chestnut hair and the all-American good looks that won her the title of Miss Missouri and a finalist place in The Miss America Contest she looked to be the perfect wife and mother. But, Carol had a craving that was almost impossible to fill.

Seriously injured in a farming accident when she was a girl, she craved health even though doctors told her that she was perfectly fine. Setting out on a journey through the quacks of the East Coast, she began seeing a doctor who prescribed "The Program" as a way to health for her and her family. At first she ate nothing but raw liver and drank shakes made with fresh yeast. Then it was blended salads, the forerunner of the smoothie. And that was all she let her family eat.

This well-meant tyranny of the dinner table led Christine to her own cravings for family, for food and for the words to tell the story of her hunger. *Crave* is that story--the chronicle of a writer's painful and ultimately satisfying awakening.

Crave: A Memoir of Food and Longing Details

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SundayAtDusk says

Crave is very much a book of descriptions, descriptions of people, places, seasons. Early on, I began to long for more talk of feelings, instead of all of those descriptions. By the time the memoir got to extensively describing food and family meals, my interest in the story was seriously waning. Food became the focus of the author's family, when obviously feelings were not being discussed. It was like reading a book about an eating disorder that affected everyone. I'm afraid I have no more interest in eating disorder memoirs than I do in foodie memoirs.

While Christine O'Brien does discuss her own "cravings" due to her mother's food "program", nothing was concrete enough to totally pull me back into the story. It was all so fragmented—family, food, fame. Maybe it would have been wiser if the author had focused more on how a father's fame affects a family, than on how a mother's food obsession affects a family. For it's hard not to wonder if her mother's need to rigidly control the food her family ate was rooted in a deep need to do something really important, and to be highly successful in what she was doing; much like how a famous person is often seen as being really important and highly successful.

(Note: I received a free e-ARC of this book from NetGalley and the publisher.)

Andrea says

I received this book as a Netgalley ARC. *Crave* is based on the life of Christine O'Brien as she grows up with a famous, angry father and a mother who strives for control by forcing an extreme diet on her family. It has lasting effects, positive and negative, on the author and her three siblings. I found the author's life to be very exotic and interesting, so much different than the way most people live. The flow of the story is off at times but I think editing will remedy that.

This is overall a good book that I would recommend to memoir fans.

TUDOR^QUEEN says

Thank you to St. Martin's Press who provided an advance reader copy via NetGalley.

Christine Scherick O'Brien is the daughter of late ABC broadcast executive Ed Scherick, who brought TV shows such as "That Girl!", "Batman" and "Peyton Place" to the screen as well as movies like "The Stepford Wives" and "The Taking of Pelham One Two Three". While a young child in the sixties, Christine was living in the iconic New York building The Dakota (John Lennon and Yoko Ono lived there years later), watching her parents hobnob with the likes of Alan Alda, Charles Grodin and Marlo Thomas. The movie "Rosemary's Baby" starring Mia Farrow was being filmed there at the time. One Halloween her Mom took the kids trick or treating in the building and they encountered legendary actress Lauren Bacall, a longtime Dakota resident.

Christine was the oldest child and the only daughter, and she had three younger brothers. She was witness to her father's occasional explosive and surly encounters with Mom Carol. Carol grew up on a farm in Missouri

where she very nearly died after being pulled under a tractor. But she didn't die, and she took up the bassoon (originally her sister Audrey's instrument) to strengthen her lungs. She also went on to become Miss Missouri, become a pianist and musical prodigy, and the glamorous wife of a successful entertainment executive.

The issue of food becomes a major preoccupation for Mom Carol when she turns to an extreme form of diet, not just for herself but the whole family. She shops at health food stores and spends many hours in the kitchen preparing "blended salads" and smoothie type drinks with fruits and vegetables. The whole family is pressured to adapt to "The Program" of this sparse eating regimen. Three day fasts spent in bed are also occasionally employed. While Christine is constantly hungry (especially for meat), she has to admit that her body looks toned and healthy. As Christine grows into an adult, there are moments when she loses the willpower to adhere to "The Program", and feels extremely guilty about it. For a time in college she even forced herself to vomit after eating so-called forbidden foods.

This is a very interesting book about a privileged family in the entertainment industry in which the mother was a forerunner / pioneer for her time in the health foods industry. However, it also is an honest account from daughter Christine's point of view of the major role food presented in her family, and the ramifications...both good and bad...this had on the lives of everyone involved.

Jeff says

A famous father, a health-obsessed mother and the iconic Dakota Apartments in NYC are just the beginning set up for what is a powerful memoir by author Christine O'Brien. Her skilled and delicately written story carries you in a dream-like state through childhood and into the resulting struggles and realizations she experienced as an adult.

O'Brien's story is as much her mother's as it is her own. Lovingly questioned as it is remembered-- searching, here in the written word, as it has been in real life for what she craves.

O'Brien could have easily written a tell-all or focused on the notoriety of her family but those details are here to serve as just the framework; enriching her own personal journey that navigates through an enchanted, perhaps haunted life. She becomes one with the reader allowing an exploration-- almost from the outside looking in -- at a unique and fascinating life.

The dreamy telling becomes colorful and vibrant as O'Brien reaches adulthood, experiences the joys and challenges of motherhood and starts to come into her own-- always questioning as well as embracing the cravings in her life.

This book is not so much a story about craving as in food obsession-- as it is craving life's truth and so much more.

I received an ARC copy from the wonderful publisher, St. Martin's Press, through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Janet says

I received a DIGITAL Advance Reader Copy of this book from #NetGalley in exchange for an honest

review.

From the publisher ---

Christine O'Brien remembers growing up in NYC's famous Dakota apartment with her powerful father, her beautiful mother, and a food obsession that consumed her.

Hunger comes in many forms. A person can crave a steak in the same way that she can crave a perfect family life. In her memoir, "Crave: A Memoir of Food and Longing", Christine O'Brien tells the story of her own cravings. It's a story of growing up in a family with a successful, but explosive father, a beautiful, but damaged, mother and three brothers in New York City's famed Dakota apartment building. Christine's father was Ed Scherick, the ABC television executive and film producer who created ABC's Wide World of Sports as well as classic films like The Taking of Pelham One Two Three and The Heartbreak Kid. Her mother, Carol, was raised on a farm in Missouri.

With chestnut hair and the all-American good looks that won her the title of Miss Missouri and a finalist place in The Miss America Contest she looked to be the perfect wife and mother. But, Carol had a craving that was almost impossible to fill.

Seriously injured in a farming accident when she was a girl, Carol craved health even though doctors told her that she was perfectly fine. Setting out on a journey through the quacks of the East Coast, she began seeing a doctor who prescribed "The Program" as a way to health for her and her family. At first, she ate nothing but raw liver and drank shakes made with fresh yeast. Then it was blended salads, the forerunner of the smoothie. And that was all she let her family eat.

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This was a hard book to read for me as I have a food obsession – I am as addicted to food as any other substance-abuse person is to theirs. I was also anorexic/bulimic for twenty years so I know about weird food obsessions. (not raw liver/yeast shakes, though ... thank God). I also understand how writing can be a release...I think I am now addicted to books and writing about them. I also grew up with an angry father and a mother with serious food issues so I cannot imagine why I relate to this book at all ?

Okay, confessional over. This book is extremely well written and presented and I think that any woman could relate to it on a cellular level. (we are complex beings that like an ice berg, show only 10% above the surface.) Not an easy read but an excellent read: I can see it as a book club pick and the wonderful conversations flowing out. DEFINITELY FIVE STARS.

Lindsay says

Because this was a galley, I don't know if the formatting will change. Sometimes the author jumped around chronologically in a single chapter and it would make more sense to have line breaks or something. I also hope the print version has pictures.

This is a very interesting story about being raised by 2 very different parents and ultimately I was left wanting to know more!

Jane says

What a compelling telling of an interesting life, Christine draws you into her story and her family with ease.

Every time I picked up Crave I found myself eager to find out what happened next-so much so that I finished in one day! Even though Carol was a flawed mother, you can't help but root for her because Christine beautifully captures her complexity. Sick, but healthy. Vulnerable, but strong. It's clear that Carol was bound and determined to make life better for her loved ones, no matter the cost.

Jill Mackenzie says

I was offered this book from my Book Of The Month club. This is one of the better memoirs that I have read in a very long time. This is great book for a book club, so much to discuss in this well written read !

Maureen says

Christine O'Brien's writing is fabulously evocative with descriptions that compel you to turn the page, along with a gripping story that is as timely as it is deeply personal. Impossible to put down, and moving and resonant to the past page. I love this book!

Anne says

This memoir is refreshingly genuine and a wonderful read. Christine O'Brien holds her readers closely in her trust throughout the book. She kept a journal since she was a little girl, and I felt right there with her in age and perspective. Her father was undeniably brilliant and a tour de force in movie and TV production. His career achievements gave me both nostalgic and interesting glimpses into show business icons and classic productions of the era. Ironically, the book is set in real estate out of a movie-set...the Dakota in Manhattan, a turn-of-the-century mansion in an old New York village, and a Beverly Hills mansion. Like many mothers and daughters of the older generation and late baby boomer generation, the author and her mother's experiences were vastly different. But her mother was definitely not my mother's Betty Crocker variety. While Carol Scherick held onto some remnants of practical Midwest and depression-era sensibility, she was always looking for something deeper to satisfy many unmet needs. She was clearly loving to her children, but consumed with protecting her family's health. She was obsessed with keeping her family on a rigid eating regiment that seemed tortuous. It would have been one thing if they were born into this food program; but instead one day their mother was buying Kelloggs' cereal and the next day only wheat germ and the blandest of vegetables. Later her mother moved onto other food remedies and journeys to enlightenment. Sadly during these several years of the food program, the family meals were endured rather than enjoyed. Though the program finally came to an end, there were lasting consequences for everyone in the family in their own personal way. The subtle humor throughout tells the reader the author survived this remarkably intact, and now she has written a remarkable memoir.

Susan says

This was a crazy book about a crazy family. It was all over the place, chronologically, emotionally, historically. But in a crazy way, I really liked it. The author had a strange relationship with her mother but then, don't we all?

Lissa says

Christine grew up in the home of an ABC executive father and a former farm girl/beauty pageant queen mother. Her mother dealt with her bad-tempered husband by becoming obsessed with a "healthy" diet plan that included eating blended salad three times a day (I looked it up and it is a real thing). This memoir could have easily veered into "woe is me" area but she balanced the bad parts of her childhood with memories of parents that obviously cared for the children despite their flaws. At times her flowery descriptions were beautiful at other times, over-written but I do think this is a good addition to the genre of memoirs about unusual upbringings. I received a digital ARC of this book through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Kimberly says

This memoir was atypical, in that it wasn't a bad-mommy or bad-daddy -focused memoir. In fact, in a lot of ways, the author had a privileged childhood. As someone who grew up envying Buffy and Jody on A Family Affair, I was primed to envy Christine and her brothers in their huge, high-ceilinged Dakota apartment, partying with their parents' famous friends. However.

I'm about the same age as Christine, and honestly, whose father wasn't drinking and yelling in the evenings back then? A lot of us had either white-collar Don Draper or blue-collar Archie Bunker for dads. But it's Christine's mother's fixation on dietary perfection that sharpens the memoir, and Christine's search for giving that abusive starvation meaning that keeps you reading.

I kept waiting for Christine to realize she was being abused and it..never...really...happens?

Ultimately, Christine and her brothers all find a way out of the situation; Christine's escape is described, her brothers' is left for you to imagine. But there is never the hoped-for confrontation with her mother or father regarding the abuse or even an explanation of what the years of this horrible diet cost her health and/or body.

When I read a memoir like Crave, like a lot of people who had problem families, I look for a fellow traveler who survived and how they did it. I look for someone who would recognize me as I recognize them. Unfortunately, I think Christine would walk right by most of us while thinking about how nutritionally ahead of time her mother was, and how thankful we should be for her foresight.

Susan Pollock says

I cannot describe how moved I was by this beautifully crafted work. CRAVE is an extremely moving story of an eccentric family. It is exquisitely written and the reader is taken inside of this family's dynamic in the most intimate way. This author is a remarkable talent and the writing is so mesmerizing. She brought this reader into her orbit and kept me there throughout the book. Move over, Mary Karr. This is one of best memoirs I have read in years. I love this book. It could be a best seller, so beautifully written, so original and so moving. What a unique voice this writer has!

Jena Henry says

Who is Christine O'Brien and what does she crave? After reading her memoir, I'm not sure.

But I do know that I enjoyed getting to know Christine and her family and I took pleasure in the well-tuned phrasing of this story. Although the book blurb promised painful revelations, I found instead the measured thoughts of a careful, good girl. I read this book over a few days, and when I had to put it down, I did so reluctantly and when I had time to read again, I looked forward to getting back to Christine's world.

Christine was the oldest child of four, and the only girl. Her parents were remarkable. Her father was a successful entertainment executive and the tv shows and movies he produced are iconic. Her mother was raised in the Midwest on a farm and was also creative, intelligent and successful. Christine and her family lived in the Dakota, also iconic, in New York and then moved to Beverly Hills.

At this point in my description of the family you are probably picturing a crazy, out of control lifestyle beset by drugs and infidelity. Not so. In many ways, Christine's family was typical All-American. Her mother stayed home, sewed Halloween costumes and spent time with the kids. Her father came home for dinner most nights and also seemed connected with his wife and kids. Although the father was high-strung, both parents seemed to love, and show love to their family. They enjoyed peaceful summers at the shore and other pleasant vacations. Christine and her younger brothers were close and enjoyed playing imaginary games together.

So, what was the painful problem? Well, it all began when the juicer bumped across the Formica. Christine's mother suffered from hard to diagnose medical ailments and so she embarked on a quest to treat herself naturally with food. The juicer was the key to The Program. Christine's mother bought crates of fresh lettuce, celery, and tomatoes each week and created fresh juice, and blended salads for every meal, for years. And thus began what the author called "the chain of control and rigidity and guilt."

The author showed herself as a perceptive, quiet and contained girl and woman. As a child, one of her favorite books was *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*. I loved the Peppers, a book series that was published at the turn of the 20th century. I also had other feelings of kinship with the author, as I grew up at about the same time as she did, back when parents were strict and mothers tended to have issues.

Crave lets the author tell her own story after the death of her parents. Her story is not dramatic, thrilling, or traumatic. Rather, it is a descriptive poem about her life and times.

While the book is described as the chronicle of a writer's painful and ultimately satisfying awakening, I did not sense pain, but rather a series of deftly told observations. I am also not sure if she had a successful awakening but the book does end with the author realizing that it is healthy to seek a balanced life.

I enjoy memoirs and slice of life stories, so this book appealed to me and I recommend it.

Thanks to NetGalley and St. Martin's Press for a review copy. This is my honest review.
