

What the Mouth Wants: A Memoir of Food, Love and Belonging

Monica Meneghetti

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What the Mouth Wants expresses with eloquent candor that while there are boundaries and behaviors to challenge, others of flesh and blood are sometimes best left alone.

Through swift, sensual chapters, Monica Meneghetti's *What the Mouth Wants: A Memoir of Food, Love and Belonging* details a life lived on many levels. The author, part of a Canadian Italian immigrant family, is also bisexual. Her memoir focuses on discovering her own complex personal identity while maintaining a unique appreciation for her ethnic background.

A passion for food vibrantly colors Meneghetti's recollections, starting from childhood as she watches her mother chop herbs and garlic and stir simmering pots of minestrone. The family cuisine features gelato, risotto, cheeses, olives, homemade pasta, and steamed black mussels, their tightly clamped shells now open like "books left ajar," allowing "glimpses of private life." Meals were not to be interrupted by phone calls or other distractions, and while dinner talk might flare into angry debate, the food was to be savored with respect.

Meneghetti's mother is another integral part of the story, her presence solidly nurturing, with occasional moods of vulnerability or volatility. Beyond the family table is the world at large, a place of uncertainty but also excitement and exploration. Early on, Monica senses that she's different, with writerly aspirations and intense crushes on both sexes. While as a young woman she sees herself as a "geeky Italian girl" who pursues relationships with men, her desires eventually lead her to bisexual and polyamorous involvements.

Meneghetti's ultimate family unit will include her male and female lovers, the trio living together in an open-minded, open-hearted arrangement. New traditions are established, including new holiday dishes in combination with older recipes. Meneghetti realistically and ruefully notes how she was not able to tell her father about her sexuality, due to his failing health and her concerns that he would see her as an even "queerer version of queer."

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