

Introduction

A Homemade Life by Molly Wizenberg, freelance food writer and creator of the award-winning blog Orangette, is part touching personal memoir, part wonderful recipe collection. Molly recounts a life with food at its heart, where delicious recipes intertwine with the stories of her family, growing up, beginning a blog, even meeting and marrying her husband. Written in a lively, accessible style, *A Homemade Life* is as much at home on the bookshelf as it is in the kitchen.

Discussion Questions

1. In her introduction, Molly describes her love for the intangible things about cooking. She explains, “When we fall in love with a certain dish, I think that’s what we’re often responding to: that something else behind the fork or the spoon, the familiar story that food tells” (p. 2). Are there any dishes that you associate with a particular story, person, time, or place? Describe those dishes and the intangible meaning they have for you.
2. Molly’s father Burg was an important presence in her life. She describes him as “a real character, a very kind person, and even sort of a sap, but he could also be very difficult. He was not some mythic figure sent from on high” (p. 183). What do you think were Burg’s strengths and weaknesses?
3. “When I was little, I thought my mother came from the most perfect family.” (p. 51). Later in the book Molly explains that she was closer to her mother than her father, but she spends more of *A Homemade Life* describing Burg and his outsized personality. Why do you think this is?
4. Based on her description of her parents, what traits do you think Molly inherited from each of them? How do you think those traits affect her life?
5. People often associate food with celebrations and holidays. In the chapter “Italian Grotto Eggs” (p. 135), however, Molly describes a dish she made for Burg as he was dying of cancer. How did the egg dish provide relief for Burg? How did it provide relief for Molly? Do you associate any recipes with a sad or tragic memory?
6. Molly describes meeting her future husband online in the chapter “Baby Steps” (p. 195). Does making a romantic connection online hold any connotations for you? If a friend told you she was going to meet someone who emailed her blog, what would you think?
7. In the chapter “Summer of Change,” Molly admits, “Whenever I don’t know what to do, Paris is where I’ve gone” (p. 162), and she has spent a significant amount of time there. What does Paris mean to Molly? What does it provide her?
8. What does the concept “whatever you love, you are” (p. 153) mean to Molly? How did she use it to better understand her father?
9. Throughout the book, Molly mentions that she has difficulty embracing change, that she likes the concept of routines—almost to the point of being boring. What are the aspects, both positive and negative, of this character trait?

10. Molly defines happiness as “a pan of slow-roasted tomatoes” (p. 189). Can something specific and tangible define happiness? If so, what defines happiness for you?

11. When her father was near death, Molly states, “I know it’s awful to say it, but I was so relieved that morning, when I saw the splotches. I didn’t want to stop him. I was terrified of stopping him. I pulled my hand away from his face. I stood up, ran my fingers down his forearm to smooth the hair, and stepped back. Then I left the room, and I don’t remember what I did” (p. 144). The sentences leading up to the last are descriptively vivid. Why do you think Molly doesn’t remember after that point?

12. In the chapter “The Hardball Stage” (p. 72), Molly shares the story she wrote as a teenager about, as she puts it, “how one wordy teenager found her way into the kitchen.” What does the essay reveal about her relationship to her family? about her relationship to food? Optional exercise: Write a personal food-related story to share with the group.

13. What do you think *A Homemade Life* means to Molly? What does it mean to you?