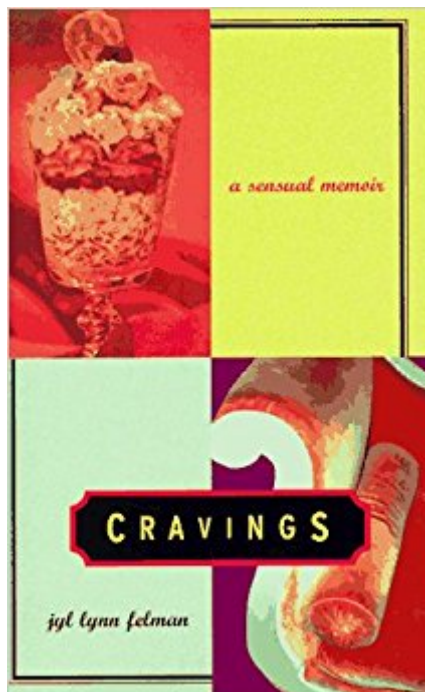


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CRAVINGS CL



Synopsis

In this profound and darkly funny collection of essays, Jyl Lynn Felman explores the bittersweet experience of growing up the youngest of three girls in a Jewish American family in Dayton, Ohio. In a family unable to speak about feelings, the Felman sisters found their own ways to break through the silence and rigidity of their parents' religious beliefs and to vie for their mother's attention and love. As an adult, Felman reckons with her grief over her mother's suffering and eventual death from Parkinson's disease and its destruction of the family. Throughout, she writes of her own cravings in the sensual experience of her childhood—the taste of her mother's cooking, the feel of her touch, and how these memories have driven her adult life. "The loss of a mother is one of the most profound tragedies a daughter will face. Jyl Lynn Felman explores this territory with remarkable bravery. A stunning memoir." |Cravings is beautifully written and painfully honest. After turning the final page, I was hungry for more." —Hope Edelman, author of *Motherless Daughters* "With her sharp-eyed sensibility and spare, distinctive prose, Felman is always revealing." —Adrienne Rich

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Customer Reviews

In the essays contained in *Cravings: A Sensual Memoir*, writer and performance artist Jyl Lynn Felman looks at desire not in the abstract, but in the particular: she considers a child's craving for a mother's attention, a daughter's craving for a specific piece of the family china, a lover's craving for her beloved. Felman contextualizes herself as a Jew, a feminist, a lesbian, and a person who grew up in Ohio. She examines how each of these selves experiences desire differently. *Cravings* is also

a memoir of family life, of sibling rivalries that outlast childhood, and of the grief, regret, and anger that a daughter feels because of her parent's death.

Food (in all its polymorphous varieties, kosher and not), designer clothes, their mother Edith's silverware, but especially, especially, Edith's loving attention--these are the cravings of Felman and her sisters in this rather offputting memoir. The lives of Felman (Hot Chicken Wings, not reviewed) and her older sisters, Judy and Jan, were regulated in every way by a perfectionist mother whose nostrums for life included the importance of playing bridge and setting a perfect table. Her house immaculate, she placed a sign in the bathroom admonishing her daughters, "If you sprinkle when you tinkle, then please be neat and wipe the seat." But Edith was always busy, teaching Hebrew school, going to Hadassah meetings, being the perfect homemaker. Too busy, along with father Marvin, who had his parking lot to maintain, to notice that Judy was shoplifting and becoming anorexic. So busy that 12-year-old Jyl intentionally hyperventilated one day to place herself in the hospital so she could receive Edith's undivided attention. Even after their mother's death from Parkinson's disease, this Edith-craving causes bitter jealousy among her daughters, who vie to inherit her belongings. The memoir opens with this sibling rivalry, and one immediately conceives a dislike for these three immature women. Felman seems locked in a love-hate relationship with her mother, a need to both identify with and separate herself from Edith. But it is the unresolved rage that predominates in this book, which is more an outpouring than an exploration. Trying to lend greater significance to her family's pathology, Felman constantly drags in Jewish history: "Judy was the messianic hope after the Holocaust. . . . It was a lot of pressure." This explains her anorexia? And Felman's habit of writing in sentence fragments ("When she was born. She was the first. Of everything") becomes an added irritant. Felman is so full of sympathy for herself, that readers will have no need to add their own. -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

I read this book in preparation for a class that I took of Jyl's while I was attending Brandeis, where Jyl teaches (last I heard- I graduated 1999). Because I knew Jyl, I heard her voice in my head reading that unusual punctuation. It makes a lot more sense if you know her. A lot of her personality and individuality came across. Jyl has a amazing style and grace that I admire greatly, and is an excellent professor. She made us write on the spot, and read our stuff aloud right in class. There was always something going on, something emotional and tender- just like in the book. I was at once comfortable and extremely uncomfortable- when it got personal. I began to wonder about my relationship with my two sisters. Definitely an experience and well worth the time to understand the

structure of the book.

While Ms. Felman's book is meant as a commemoration of the death of her mother, and thus one feels some sympathy, I felt that her book was self-indulgent. Most particularly because of its usage of indecipherable punctuation, (a usage that implies a disrespect for the reader), but also because of the fact that almost every other paragraph seems to be either a request for pity or a request that one concur that the world is a rotten place. In transactional analysis, such cynicism and victimhood is known as "grievance collecting," and one does begin to feel that one is functioning as Ms. Felman's therapist.

Even though the punctuation is unorthodox, this is the way I think sometimes (in fragments). It wasn't distracting or hard for me to understand. I can also closely identify with the emotions brought forth in this text in terms of growing up in the same era and losing a parent, and believe that most "baby boomers" would feel the same way. This was wonderful summer reading!

Jyl Felman is an excellent writer who captures very moving and powerful experiences in an economical style that held my attention and had me wanting more. Ms. Felman juggles many emotions in this short work. The reader finds herself dealing with mother/daughter relationships, Jewish history, feminism, lesbianism, the Holocaust, and food. I highly recommend this book.

The story is compelling but I can't make it past the first 50 pages because of the way the author punctuates. Her writing style is very distracting. I do not recommend this book.

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