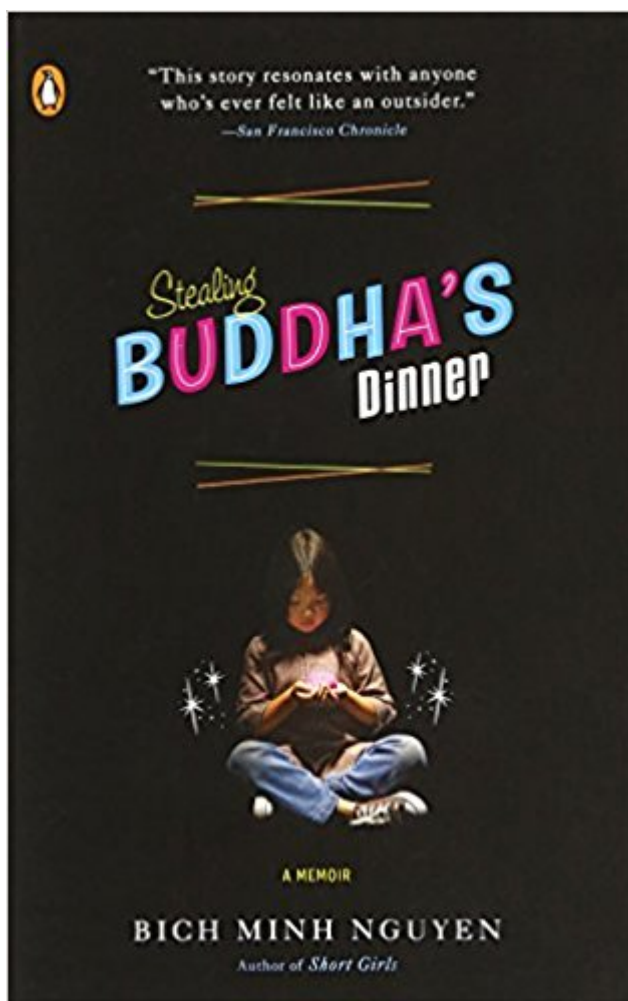


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Stealing Buddha's Dinner: A Memoir



Synopsis

As a Vietnamese girl coming of age in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Nguyen is filled with a rapacious hunger for American identity, and in the pre-PC-era Midwest (where the Jennifers and Tiffanys reign supreme), the desire to belong transmutes into a passion for American food. More exotic- seeming than her Buddhist grandmother's traditional specialties, the campy, preservative-filled "delicacies" of mainstream America capture her imagination. In *Stealing Buddha's Dinner*, the glossy branded allure of Pringles, Kit Kats, and Toll House Cookies becomes an ingenious metaphor for Nguyen's struggle to become a "real" American, a distinction that brings with it the dream of the perfect school lunch, burgers and Jell- O for dinner, and a visit from the Kool-Aid man. Vivid and viscerally powerful, this remarkable memoir about growing up in the 1980s introduces an original new literary voice and an entirely new spin on the classic assimilation story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Nguyen was just eight months old when her father brought her and her sister out of Vietnam in 1975. The family relocated in Michigan, where young Bich (pronounced "bit") wrestled with conflicting desires for her grandmother's native cooking and the American junk food the "real people" around her ate. The fascination with Pringles and Happy Meals is one symptom of the memoir's frequent reliance on the surface details of pop culture to generate verisimilitude instead of digging deeper into the emotional realities of her family drama, which plays out as her father drinks and broods and her stepmother, Rosa, tries to maintain a tight discipline. Readers are inundated with the songs Nguyen heard on the radio and the TV shows she watched— even her childhood

thoughts about Little House on the Prairie” but tantalizing questions about her family remain unresolved, like why her father and stepmother continued to live together after their divorce. The mother left behind in Saigon is a shadowy presence who only comes into view briefly toward the end, another line of inquiry Nguyen chooses not to pursue too deeply. The passages that most intensely describe Nguyen’s childhood desire to assimilate compensate somewhat for such gaps, but the overall impression is muted. (Feb. 5) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

Bich Minh Nguyen’s humorous coming-of-age tale mines themes of loss and identity by cleverly retelling anecdotes in chapters dealing with—or gleefully obsessing over?—particular American foods. Her prose is engaging, and half the fun is reliving with her the pop culture of the 1980s. Rosa’s role as “mom”/tyrant/activist is rich and resonating, but critics were split over the effect of Nguyen’s birth mother, whose fleeting appearance is powerful but unexplained. The novel’s chronology also caused some confusion. Still, this impressive book, Nguyen’s first, won the PEN/Jerard Award and sets the stage for a much-anticipated follow-up from this professor of literature and creative writing at Purdue. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

I’m not quite finished reading this book yet, but it’s been quite a joy discovering historic perspectives in an area I have never been to in this country. Although each Asian culture has different practices with our food, offering a gift, such as a fresh fruit, to the alter and later on receive it back for us to eat is much the same in mine, Japanese. I remember my grandma giving a steaming bowl of rice and a fruit every morning, first thing to do for the day. A nice summer read, even if you may not be familiar with all the culturally iconic junk foods of America.

What I most enjoyed about this book was gaining some insight to becoming a new American and how difficult even the most every day things can become. I also appreciated the last half of the book when the author was an adult and that perspective. I think we can all relate in that we are familiar with our own culture and when we find ourselves on the outside it feels very different. Imagining what it must be like to leave your home land and culture is very thought provoking. This book is the author’s memories and not a story per se, because of that I really enjoyed it. It was an easy read and I would recommend it.

This book is poorly organized and poorly written. The whole time I was reading, I thought, "Was there even an editor involved with this book?". One entire chapter is just a retelling of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books. There are some interesting characters, the picture she draws of my native Michigan is accurate and wry, and you will laugh sometimes. None of these attributes even comes close to over-riding the fact that this would have been and should have been a humorous essay.

Nguyen's food writing is insatiable. Your world just stops as she describes the lowly Pringle or Twinkie (look up her editorial on this), yet this book offers much more in exploring an immigrant's journey of becoming American.

Interesting account of a Vietnamese immigrant child growing up in Michigan in the 70s. Follows the problems of "trying to fit in," worshipping the American way of life, and straddling two very different cultures to become the person who she is.

This book was very odd, in a word. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. It relied heavily on food and pop culture references, at times too heavily, but having grown up in the same time and region as its author I could relate. Otherwise I may not have enjoyed it quite as much. At times, it was very obvious that the author was drawing from her other previously written stories and essays while writing this book (something I guessed with ease, even before learning it to be true). But it kept me totally entertained and drawn in, I didn't want to put the book down...so I definitely recommend it.

This is a quick and easy read, but not exceptionally exciting or moving. It is a straightforward book. The item arrived in a little worse quality than expected, but it was still a good value.

Fine memoir of a young Vietnamese woman growing up in western Michigan. This book was inexpensive but in terrible condition. Cover torn from binding and badly warped.

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