

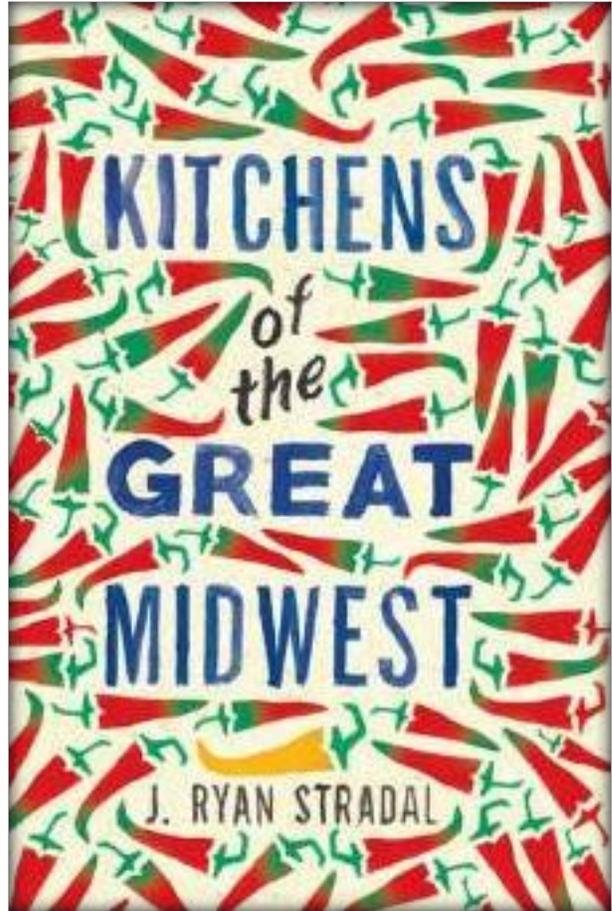
LoveReading Reader reviews of Kitchens of the Great Midwest by J. Ryan Stradal

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Ann Peet

Quirky, bittersweet, and original novel about family, friends and food.

There's a good story here but also an original and interesting style of writing. Eva is the main character and we first meet her as a baby, abandoned by her mother. Next she is a 10 year old with an ability to tolerate very hot, spicy food. She used this to good effect on some school bullies and then to make some money by taking bets on what she will be able to eat. Then there is a first date and a dining club - all the time she is learning about food and cooking. Further episodes in her life follow. Sometimes she is the main character and sometimes plays only a minor part but through these stories we see her become a famous chef.



Eva is a feisty and intelligent character - I would actually have liked to see more of her in the later episodes though these are amusing and interesting - the baking competition one was my favourite. I liked the way characters from previous episodes pop up again and you see a different side to them. There is a great ending where many of the characters - and ingredients - from Eva's past come together.

My only problem with it was that, particularly in the early parts, there is a lot of US slang and references to American popular culture which meant nothing to me. However, this doesn't detract from a quirky and bitter sweet story about

family relationships, friendship, struggles to overcome setbacks and achieve dreams. And fantastic meals!

Humaira Kauser

This book is beautiful. Highly recommend this book to any foodies out there

***This novel is a work of art.** I've never read anything like this and I'm not just saying this. The way Eva Thorvald was portrayed through the eyes of different characters was executed wonderfully. People viewed her differently for different reasons and I loved that. I liked seeing her grow up physically but I also loved how she changed as a person.*

One way to describe this book is that it is mini stories within a bigger story. Essentially the story revolves around Eva but we learn so much about the people who perceive her. You learn so much about them and develop favourites (mine would be Will Prager and Braque).

'Kitchens of the Great Midwest' is perfect to read for the summer!

Liz Bloomer

A thoroughly enjoyable book to read and read in one sitting! The story tells of the external impacts on Eva's life from the moment she was born to when, as an adult, she becomes a successful chef.

A great read that inspires the reader to follow their passion regardless of the obstacles that litter the way. From a sad start in life and through the many experiences that she had, her passion for food and cooking remained with her and ultimately made her. The final chapter brought the stages of her life together in a menu for selected guests. It was almost a book with several storylines bringing you back to the central character, and sometimes I found myself wanting to know more about the other lives the writer was describing! The one upmanship and moral dilemmas about which bars made it to the County Fair bake off had me laughing! Highly recommended and may even try some of the recipes!

Angie Rhodes

Eva Thorvald was, for me, a mixture of Fanny Brice and Holly Golightly. Just perfect. The all American girl, with a slight edge to her. Eva has lived alone with

her father, as her mother 'walked out on her' at an early age - though Eva was told she had died, so she would never feel as if her mother didn't love her.

She is an enigma with more layers than an onion, and can be as fiery as a red hot chilli. She wants to become the greatest chef in the world and, reading her story, you know she can do it.

*A feel good book, a beach book, a curling up on the sofa book, yes, this just about sums this up, and it was written by a man, with a passion for story telling,! Go on, what are you waiting for? **Buy it, read it devour it, you won't be disappointed.***

Phyllippa Smithson

I don't usually like short stories but this is more a series of discrete parts. There are constants between each chapter - Eva, food and drink. Clever, clever stuff.

Stradal very subtly reveals the various stages of the aging Eva from the very first moments of her life. And those first years define what and who she becomes – a dedicated, focused (almost to the point of obsession) very successful chef.

Born to parents Cynthia and Lars, it would be easy to understand why she follows in their shoes into the world as a professional chef, as both were dedicated to the same industry. Only before she was even eating solids, she lost her Mum and then her Dad. Adopted by her Father's brother and his wife, the wider family strive to keep secret her real parents. And her new parents see a Big Mac as a staple diet – a world away from the passion her parents had for food.

Key periods of Eva's subsequent life are revealed not by her being the central character but by those she touches. This can be confusing. As one chapter abruptly ends with no real conclusion, we move to another in a totally different period of time and immediately enter the lives of what seemingly are unrelated characters.

*But it works. It is **great fun to read** and although you don't get the chance to really grow to know any one single character closely, you do learn an awful lot about food, about drink and some great recipes (which very cleverly are intertwined into the text).*

Edel Waugh

The story begins with a young couple meeting, falling in love, marrying , having a baby. Then the story takes two very unexpected twists and we are on a new adventure . The story is based around a girl called Eva who has an unusual palate and enjoys the whole process of cooking and different kinds of food , through this love of good food she meets many people and she becomes famous in food circles for hosting spectacular dinners that have huge waiting lists years in advance. Now that her name is famous in food circles her name reaches ears of those most keen to meet her and see what this chef is really like.

This was a surprising story about love, family, and at the centre food! Delicious recipes are included in the book and there are many mouthwatering descriptions throughout the story that will have you craving something delicious while reading this!

www.edelwaugh.blogspot.com

Jennifer Movice

*This book is the story of Eva who grows , cooks and eats extremely hot peppers and turns into a cool, chef. Whilst each chapter is about a different person and a different recipe it still remains its attachment to Eva. She has a palate so unique that a person like this comes along once every blue moon - and so turns this story into something **hilariously funny and yet touching**.*

This book would be fabulous made into a movie - I heartily recommend it - truly captivating.

Glenda Worth

Chilli's play a major role! Eva, grows them as a child, very hot and spicy. Her mother deserts her and her father struggles to bring her up, this along with the lutefisk is the basis for this story

Eva is a child abandoned by her mother, brought up by a struggling father in a poor neighbourhood, living on her wits. As she grows up her ambitions become clear as her culinary talents come to the fore while various characters come and go in her life.

There are any recipes included and each chapter is named after a food. A quirky novel which shows how family life evolves with friends and strangers linking the different food dishes together.

Chilli's in particular are a favourite of Eva's the hotter the better along with the walleye which plays its own role.

Rachel Anderson

An unusual, bitter sweet novel for those who love food.

The question on the back of the novel is 'Who is Eva Thorvald'? The novel tells the story of her life from when she was born until her mid twenties. Eva, the central character, was born to Lars Thorvald and his wife, Cynthia. Lars, was a chef in a 'trendy' restaurant. He loved his little daughter intensely. He was obsessed with cultivating her palate and senses in terms of food, passing on his love of cooking. His wife, on the other hand, becomes disappointed with her life and craves to be a sommelier away from the responsibilities of being a mother.

Through the course of the novel, Eva meets people who have dominant influences on the path her life will take. Eva takes after her father in terms of his career and obsession with food. She becomes something of a celebrity chef. People are willing to put their names on long waiting lists in order to sample her cuisine. At the start, she is merely a vulnerable baby, at the novel's finish she is as bold and fiery as the chilli that she cooks with.

Food is very important to the novel. What I found was quite good was the recipes within the book. I particularly liked the French onion soup one.

Kitchens of the Great Midwest is both funny, sad, touching and quirky.

A great summer read.

One last thing: I thought it was a lovely touch that the publishers sent a packet of chilli seed for me. I will have a go at planting them in due course.

Sarah Harper

A gorgeously well-crafted study of human nature and the important role food plays in our lives. Astutely observed, funny and poignant, the recipes are just the icing on the cake!

Quirky and original, Kitchens of the Great Midwest grabbed my attention and touched my heart from the outset. This is the story of Eva, a girl with an exceptional palate. With a sommelier and a chef for her parents, Eva is raised from a very early age (although not as early as her father would like!) on good food made from quality ingredients. Understandably, cuisine plays a pivotal role in her life as she develops from orphaned child to world-renowned chef.

Very cleverly, we learn about Eva from the point of view of others. In fact each chapter of the book relates to a period in her life and is told from the perspective of a different character. The stories, and recipes they contain, appear at first to be somewhat disparate, with only Eva holding them together, and her role at that being sometimes very minor, however they are woven together beautifully to make her story complete. Some characters play an integral role in her life while others have only tenuous links with Eva at best however this doesn't matter as they all contribute to what makes Eva the person she grows to be. Food, relationships, love and loss are all intertwined and are drawn together beautifully in the closing chapter. This is a gorgeously well-crafted study of human nature. It's astutely observed, funny and poignant. It highlights the fundamentally important role food plays in our lives and the recipes it includes are just the icing on the cake. Unique and very clever, full of humour and hope, this is a book you're going to want to tell everyone about.

Alison Bisping

I struggled with this book, although, overall I did enjoy it. It took a while to get into it and I think for me, would be better with a second read.

Eva Thorvald, born to Lars and Cynthia. A wanted child, however, Cynthia decides motherhood isn't for her and disappears for most of the story, and Lars dies. Both parents had a big interest in food and/or wine.

The story tells us about Eva growing up with different people lending their voice to tell her story - this is a style I don't particularly enjoy as I find it a little 'bitty'. I found it hard at times to work out the links between people within the story - which there definitely were, and I think it is probably very cleverly written.

However, we learn how Eva has this amazing palette for food pairing, and how she becomes one, if not the, best chef in the USA.

It left me with some unanswered questions - did I miss the answers? Are they not there because we are meant to work them out ourselves?

I'll be interested to read other reviews - and will probably read it again soon!

Lisa Wise

An unusual culinary tale of a young girls journey to womanhood.

I started this book with trepidation, after the first chapter i was hooked! As the

story unfolds it follows Eva Thorvald as she enters her father's world of culinary expertise.

This is not a straight forward story, there is sorrow as well as triumphs throughout. Each chapter depicts the lives of friends, family & mere acquaintances who all touch & impact on Eva's life. Eva remains the central character as people come & go.

Her Mother, Cindy, leaves Eva & her father when Eva is only a few months old, Lars, Eva's father, dies shortly after & Eva is bought up by her uncle & aunt who bring Eva up as their own, never telling her the truth about her parents. When Cindy re-enters the story in the final chapters, she meets her daughter as a grown woman who has become an enigma in the fashionable foodie world, will Cindy tell Eva who she is?

I dare you to read this story & not become entwined within the pages!

<https://wrongsideoffortyuk.wordpress.com>

Claire Simms

Eva Thorvald is one of the top chefs the story follows her career from the early days of growing chillies in the wardrobe to the height of her career.

Kitchens of the Great Midwest is based on Eva Thorvald who has a passion for cooking, which she inherited from her father Las. The story follows Eva from birth and the people she meets through her life until she becomes a famous chef running a pop up restaurant demanding thousands for a table that has years waiting list. This isn't the usual type of book I read but really enjoyed it and would definitely read another by the author.

Kelly Silcox

A story of how your family and people you meet in life can help define who you are.

This book tells the story of Eva Thorvald. Abandoned by her mother, she is left to be raised by her father, a chef who is desperate to pass on his love of food.

However, life always brings about the unexpected and this book tells the life story of Eva and how she becomes a renowned chef. It is a fast paced book which explains how the people she meets along the way inspires her in the dishes she creates.

A must for food lovers everywhere.

Catherine Price

This terrific read is less about the kitchens of America and more about the people who helped and hindered enigmatic chef Eva Thorvald and the food they ate together.

*The preparation and consumption of food is a theme that runs throughout literature. Food is the ultimate commodity, and often encodes status, repression and desire. More recently foodie fiction has become a staple of contemporary fiction, with novels set in pretty teashops and trendy cafes. But *Kitchens of the Great Midwest* is an altogether different kettle of fish (so to speak); it is as much about separation and connection as it is about chillies and caesar salad. Eva is orphaned as a baby, and her austere childhood and bullied youth is movingly evoked, until she finds work with a chef who recognises his protégé has a ‘once-in-a-lifetime palette’. A large cast of friends, colleagues and family members dip in and out of the storyline, whilst Eva’s career soars – although she herself remains tantalizingly in the background, appearing at the end in a blaze of culinary glory. **An original and hugely enjoyable novel of delicious food and lasting relationships.***