



American Pie

By Pascale Le Draoulec
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Introduction

Part culinary quest, part *Thelma and Louise* (with alternating Thelmas), *American Pie* tells the story of a woman's journey to find out what role, if any, pie has in today's world. Can this American symbol survive in our treadmill take-out society? If it's easier to buy the dessert ready made than it is to make it from scratch, who will then pass down the techniques and recipes to our younger generations?

These are the questions that prompt journalist Pascale Le Draoulec to drive across country instead of fly to her new job in New York. Using pie as her guide, she leaves San Francisco with her trusty Volvo and her hypoglycemic friend Kris. Their mission is to drive to small towns looking for pie bakers, pie recipes, and pie lore -- seeking pies with character and characters who love pie.

A first-generation American born to French immigrants, Pascale knew nothing about making pies, only *tartes*. But as she travels across the United States, she learns that pie is not just an American dessert-turned-patriotic-symbol. It is a way to connect -- mothers to daughters, husbands to wives, and even with oneself. She finds that the art of pie making doesn't result in only satisfied stomachs but also in satisfied souls. From the Amish to the Cajuns, from the bear trapper in Montana who makes huckleberry pies to ward off his demons to the 12-year old Darrell who gets "a real sense of accomplishment" from making pies in Nyack, New York, Pascale meets a hopeful set of people who share with her their advice, recipes, and stories.

"To be savored, slice by slice, chapter by chapter" (*San Diego Union-Tribune*), *American Pie* is the tale of an American discovering her country and ultimately herself. It is a journey that we all should take... if only through her book.

Discussion Questions

1. The author quotes Alexis de Tocqueville throughout her book. What meaning did these excerpts have for you?
2. "A *tarte* is always topless, or open-faced. Pies, more often than not, are covered... Generally speaking, a *tarte* crust is sweet, buttery, and has a crumble to it. It could easily stand alone if it had to. Pie crust, on the other hand, is less sweet, and has a crisp, not crumbly, texture. On its own, pie crust is rather uninteresting" (page 40). How does the author's description of the differences between *tartes* and pies translate to the difference between the French and Americans?
3. Pascale and Kris make it a point to drive on Route 66 through Oklahoma. What meaning does this highway have for Pascale? And what comparisons, if any, does the historic road have to pie?
4. Discuss pie as a symbol of America. If America is a melting pot, is pie a fair symbol to represent all our cultures?
5. "Pies reflect your personality. If you make a pie, it should be like you," says D'Ann, the beehive lady who makes pie at Catfish Haven (page 287). What kind of pie would you make?
6. "One of these days, y'all are going to look up and you're going to be looking for fresh pies, and you're going to realize there's nobody cookin' them no more," claims Evelyn at the Ranchman's Café (page 285). Do you agree with Evelyn? Or do you think the popularity of cooking shows today offers hope that more and more people are becoming interested in the art of cooking, extending even to pie-making?
7. Dave, the bear trapper from Montana, bakes pies to stay away from the bottle. Laura, the owner of the Spruce Park Diner, has multiple sclerosis and yet her pain disappears once she picks up a rolling pin. Do you use any hobbies as a distraction from unpleasant things in your life?
8. While the author is on her culinary journey, she is also going back and forth in her mind about her relationship with Ty. Were you surprised by their final decision?
9. "Pie...loosens tongues and inhibitions. Tell someone you're looking for a good slice of pie and their countenance changes: shoulders sigh, brows soften, eyes open wide as a barn door... Pie brings even the crustiest people out of their shells... And all pie lovers, I would soon discover, have a story to tell" (page 15). If you had run into Pascale on one of her trips would you have offered her any suggestions on where to get pie, given her a recipe, or shared a good pie story?