



## Consuming Passions

By Michael Lee West  
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### Plot Summary

"I grew up in the fifties, an era when cellulite existed but had no name. In our household, tucked away in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, the sixties were noted for its grapefruit diets and ice cold cans of Metracal. My people loved food, and every meal was a celebration." So begins Michael Lee West in *Consuming Passions*, her deliciously funny look at family, food, and Southern life. Brimming with lively anecdotes about aunts, uncles, cousins, and all manner of eccentric locals, it is also filled with a classic selection of recipes for the gumbo, barbecue, cakes, and pies that reflect this region's, and the author's, devotion to real "down-home" food.

The reader is transported from West's first attempt at "No-Fail Rice and Pork Casserole" to her "internship" in Miss Johnnie's kitchen, as she launches on her own food explorations, making croutons, bravely frying, ordering exotic spices and taking cookbooks to bed to "read, study, and dissect. I knew my kitchen, perhaps my life, would never be the same. I had a destiny, a food obsessed life."

### Topics for Discussion

1. Although Michael Lee West focuses largely on her development as an "accidental gourmet," the strength of *Consuming Passions* is the relationship between West and the women who helped nurture her "foodie" spirit, especially her mother. Discuss the importance of this mother-daughter relationship and the manner in which food acts as a medium through which West and her mother come to a greater understanding and appreciation of each other.
2. The passing on of a family recipe also means the passing on of tradition, keeping the past alive through the food on our tables. The recipes within this memoir are closely linked to the strong Southern tradition of storytelling. How does food become the avenue through which the past is discussed and kept alive for future generations? Why is this important?
3. West had numerous influences throughout her development as a gourmet -- Miss Johnnie, Aunt Tempe, Aunt Dell, Ary Jean -- what could be called "home training." Discuss some of these influences and how each added to her culinary repertoire. What/who has been your own greatest influence in your love for food?
4. A sense of place is very important to West -- she is a daughter of the South and she finds great pleasure in making Southern cuisine. How is your sense of place reflected in the meals you cook? What dishes give you a sense of home or trigger special memories?