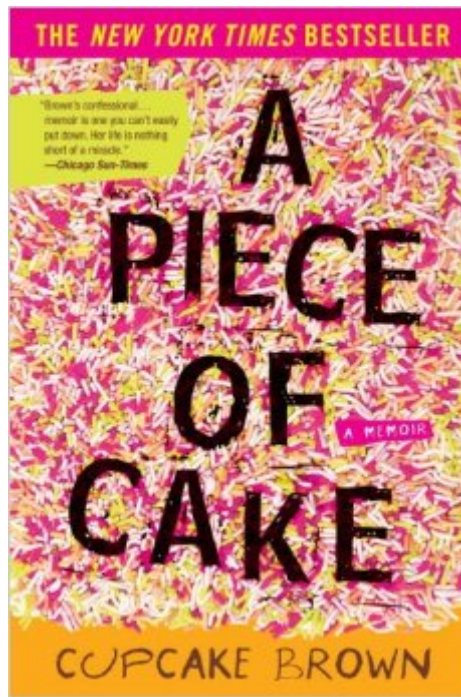


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A Piece Of Cake: A Memoir



Synopsis

There are shelves of memoirs about overcoming the death of a parent, childhood abuse, rape, drug addiction, miscarriage, alcoholism, hustling, gangbanging, near-death injuries, drug dealing, prostitution, or homelessness. Cupcake Brown survived all these things before sheâ™d even turned twenty. And thatâ™s when things got interestingâ |. You have in your hands the strange, heart-wrenching, and exhilarating tale of a woman named Cupcake. It begins as the story of a girl orphaned twice over, once by the death of her mother and then again by a child welfare system that separated her from her stepfather and put her into the hands of an epically sadistic foster parent. But there comes a point in her preteen yearsâ™ maybe itâ™s the night she first tries to run away and is exposed to drugs, alcohol, and sex all at onceâ™ when Cupcakeâ™s story shifts from a tear-jerking tragedy to a dark comic blues opera. As Cupcakeâ™s troubles grow, so do her voice and spirit. Her gut-punch sense of humor and eye for the absurd, along with her outsized will, carry her through a fateful series of events that could easily have left her dead. Young Cupcake learned to survive by turning tricks, downing hard liquor, partying like a rock star, and ingesting every drug she could find while hitchhiking up and down the California coast. She stumbled into gangbanging, drug dealing, hustling, prostitution, theft, and, eventually, the best scam of all: a series of 9-to-5 jobs. But Cupcakeâ™s unlikely tour through the cubicle world was paralleled by a quickening descent into the nightmare of crack cocaine use, till she eventually found herself living behind a Dumpster. Astonishingly, she turned it around. With the help of a cobbled together family of eccentric fellow addicts and âœœangelsâ•â™ a series of friends and strangers who came to her aid at pivotal momentsâ™ she slowly transformed her life from the inside out. A Piece of Cake is unlike any memoir youâ™ll ever read. Moving and almost transgressive in its frankness, it is a relentlessly gripping tale of a resilient spirit who took on the worst of contemporary urban life and survived it with a furious wit and unyielding determination. Cupcake Brown is a dynamic and utterly original storyteller who will guide you on the most satisfying, startlingly funny, and genuinely affecting tour through hell youâ™ll ever take. When it came time for me to talk, I wasnâ™t sure which parts of my past to tell, which to keep secret, and which to pretend never happened. Uncle Jr. had already seen the welts on my back, so he wasnâ™t too surprised when I told them about some of the physical abuse I endured at Dianeâ™s. Everyone else hit the roof, except Daddy. He got really quiet and started balling and unballing his fists. I continued my update. Experience had taught me that adults have trouble accepting the idea of children having sex. I decided that from then on, that part of my life never happened. I picked up the story by telling them about Fly, the Gangstas, and getting shot. I was dying for a cigarette. So it seemed a good time to announce that I smoked

cigarettes and weed. After a moment Sam looked at me, smiled, and handed me one of her Marlboros. I preferred menthols, but beggars can't be choosers. I kicked back, took a long drag, and closed my eyes. Daddy and Jr. were silent. They seemed a bit shocked and unsure about how to respond. Well, Cup, Jr. said, it's a little too late to be trying to raise you now. But those cigarettes will kill you. And weed will only lead you to stronger drugs. He didn't know how right he was. But for me, it was too late to be worrying about stronger drugs—the only worrying I did was whether I could find a connection to get some. So I just smiled, nodded, and took another hit off my cigarette. The eerie quiet returned. —from *A Piece of Cake* Also available as a Random House AudioBook and eBook. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Before this book lifts your spirit and expands your understanding, it will break your heart...on two levels. Brown's personal story of being abused and neglected is a shattering one. If she were the only little girl in America that this had ever happened to, it would still be too much. But when the understanding of another reality sinks in—that there are hundreds of thousands of children out there still being abused as Cupcake Brown was—it's too much to take. And yet, as you read through unimaginable (at times, graphic) depictions of Brown's personal hell, you will find your respect and admiration for her growing, as she finally begins her slow ascent, out of the valley of the shadow of death, and into redemption. Coming out of awful abuse, and a life of prostitution on the street, and drug addiction, she finally seeks—and finds—hope, strength, and focus in her relationship

with God. To use a Bible phrase, she "sets her face like flint" to accomplish worthy goals: she gets clean from drugs, she works hard, goes to school, and finally graduates from law school. Today, she is a highly respected lawyer at a top California law firm and a much-sought after motivational speaker. Re-read the above paragraph, and pause to think about it. This is not an everyday story. Sadly, the thousands upon thousands of little girls and boys who experience similar tragedy and abuse in their lives never rise above the horrific aftermath. How did Cupcake Brown do it? What makes the outcome of her story so different? What can we all learn from this amazing lady? Read the book and find out. Some may criticize her writing style or grammar. Not me. (Or is it "not I"? Dang grammar police got me confused. Er, they HAVE me confused.) At any rate, for me, Brown's style is refreshing. It's like sitting down with someone personally and just listening to their heart. Stories of redemption are my favorite kind. Some people can write and speak eloquently, but have nothing to say. Cupcake Brown's story and message ARE her eloquence. Her gritty determination commands respect, and her faith inspires hope for everyone.

Let's face it. We all know the expression "You only live once." Or, "Anything is possible if you put your mind to it." No matter how many times we may say these types of things to our friends or to ourselves, there are just as many other times where we brush that "go get 'em" attitude aside in favor of the easy way out because we are too lazy, too afraid, too set in our ways to actually do what it takes to succeed. In her relentlessly crushing yet ultimately uplifting debut memoir, Cupcake Brown relays the down-and-dirty details of her disaster-prone life with such vigor and frankness that readers will be shocked to realize that she actually made it far enough to work through her problems without giving in to the weight of them, let alone graduate magna cum laude from college (without a high school diploma, I might add), finish law school, pass the bar exam, and publish a bound-to-be bestselling book, all the while remaining completely sober. It is a wonder that one human being could accomplish so much given the circumstances. When Cupcake was 11 years old, her mother died from an epileptic seizure at the age of 34. Not soon after, Cupcake and her brother Larry were taken from the only father they ever knew and sent to live with their real father, Mr. Burns. Despite the fact that Mr. Burns had never paid child-support or visited his children, he was given legal custody by the state of California. Rather than take care of the kids he never wanted in the first place, he shuffled them off to live in a foster home, run by a violent and viciously manipulative woman who had been accused of "accidentally" killing two of her charges a few years earlier, and whose nephew repeatedly raped Cupcake for his own sick pleasure. Of course, the corrupt "don't see, don't act" child welfare system never stepped in, leaving Cupcake no choice but to run away

and try to make it on her own. At 11. In the coming years, Cupcake would run away from Diane's abusive care a number of times, only to be taken back by the police, a worried neighbor, or a "concerned" social worker. In that time, she became a child prostitute, turning tricks for truck drivers, other foster fathers, and even cops. She smoked pot, drank copious amounts of alcohol and took drugs, from LSD and cocaine to crystal meth. At 13, she was brutally beaten by Diane's daughter and the rest of the foster children living in the house at the time, and consequently lost the baby she was carrying from an unknown father. At 14, she fled to South Central Los Angeles to live with her great-aunt and four male third-cousins, and joined a gang called the Eight-Tray Gangster Crips. Although gang life provided her with the love and support she lacked in the past, it further encouraged her participation in illegal activities (robbing, stealing, dealing), taught her how to use various weapons in drive-by shootings, and deepened her love for and addiction to crack, PCP, and other hard drugs. On her sixteenth birthday, she was shot twice in the back by a rival gang member and was told that she might not ever walk again. But, miraculously, she recovered. Believe it or not, this all takes place in the first third of the book. Over the next 300 or so pages, Cupcake continues to describe her experiences --- flitting in and out of various 9-to-5 jobs (while still on drugs, mind you), a failed marriage, and dilapidated living arrangements (including, at one point, a dumpster). To say that readers will be amazed that she didn't wind up in jail or dead in an alley from an overdose is a gross understatement. It is only in the last 100 pages that she actually deals with the logistics of her recovery. With the same strength and determination she used to run her life into the ground, Cupcake embraced the process of recovery. She started going to a 12-step program for recovering addicts and made friends (including her sponsor and surrogate mother) who would change her life for the better. With the support of her unbelievably compassionate boss (she worked as a legal secretary), her family, and her new-and-improved self, she turned her life around to such an extent that anyone familiar with her past (not to mention the reader) would surely find this stable, successful, and sober woman virtually unrecognizable. To read Cupcake Brown's memoir is to witness the full range of life's possibilities, both positive and negative. In an age where spewing your personal tragedies onto the page and sharing them with billions of scandal-obsessed unknowns has become quite commonplace, it is not surprising that this book will satisfy the likes of Oprah and the primetime media circuit. What makes *A PIECE OF CAKE* so momentous and different, however, is that Brown's is not a story full of privileged complaints, grandiose generalizations, or race or class inspired clichés. It is a true story told by a woman in her own vernacular who needed to prove to herself that she could beat all the odds to accomplish the virtually impossible. Remarkable. ---

Reviewed by Alexis Burling

I felt this book. We have a foster child (and for those who have never taken in or known a foster child, once you do, your eyes will be open forever). I get this story. I admire this woman, and by the way, her life does happen. It is real. I could not put her book down. Thanks Cupcake Brown for sharing your story. It is inspiring.

It's Saturday night and my evening plans are ruined thanks to this book. I just couldn't put it down. Every teenager, every young adult, heck nearly everyone will get something out of this read. Cupcake Brown tells her story of dropping out of school, running away and living on the streets. Her life of drugs, booze, crime, gangs and sex is told in an honest, unglamorous and emotionally raw style. Ms. Brown writes in a street fashion which young readers will relate to but she also sprinkles in the wisdom and comments of the current day Ms. Brown which I found unique and revealing. The story is true -- and at times disturbing, so be warned -- but stay with it as the payoff is unbelievable. This is one of the most inspirational books I've ever read. If you ever thought there was something in your life you just couldn't overcome -- read this book for motivation. Cupcake Brown, a high school drop out, prostitute, gang banger, drug addict and alcoholic, straightens out her very crooked life, goes on to graduate law school and is now a successful lawyer. Her life path was filled with punishing obstacles -- yet she overcame. It's a lesson for the rest of us.

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