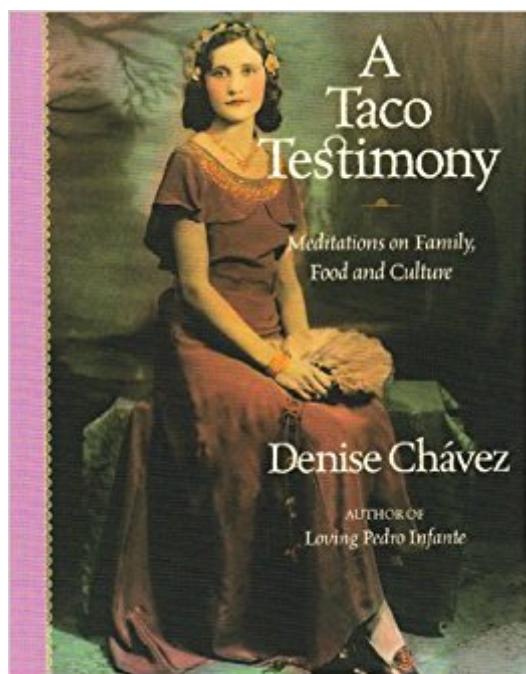


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A Taco Testimony: Meditations On Family, Food And Culture



Synopsis

Acclaimed author/actress Denise Chávez explores the history, lore, and preparation of tacos and other art forms in a warm and exuberant memoir, with recipes. "Tacos are sacred to me," writes Chávez, who's set many a fictional scene in a Southwestern restaurant or around a dinner table. And here are her special recipes, including her mother's Tacos a la Delfina ("I swear these tacos are really good cold!") and Grandma Lupe's Pasta (not macaroni but a savory mincemeat-like taco filling). Here, too, are tips on shopping, cooking, and serving: "Offer up the meal with gratitude and remember: Tacos are one of life's greatest things!" "We live in chile country," she adds. "We are blessed to be here. Food is more than food; it's a culture. And tacos are more than tacos." Chile country is the setting for Chávez's magical, tragicomic fiction. And in *A Taco Testimony* she also tells wonderful stories that connect literature with culture and food with life along the Mexican-American border. "Time and love are the essence of all Mexican cooking," Chávez says including her spicy, juicy writing, and this feast of a book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Denise Chávez has her roots in New Mexico, Texas, and México and learned to love tacos in all of these places. An award-winning fiction writer, playwright, actress, and teacher, Chávez considers herself a "performance writer." In 1995 her first novel, *Face of an Angel*, won the American Book Award as well as many other honors. Her works include the novel *Loving Pedro Infante*, nonfiction, fiction for children, and more than 45 plays. Her writing and her many community

projects have been supported by the Fulbright Commission, the Lannan Foundation, and a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award. Chávez founded the Cultural Center of Mesilla and the Border Book Festival, of which she is executive director. She lives with her husband in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Delightful, lyrical writing that captures time, place, and feelings in a way that very few writers can. A memoir, diary, and philosophical treatise alternating with recipes and food descriptions that will have you drooling. Well worth reading!

A beautiful story of love. Denise writes lovingly about her mother without being treacley (look it up) about it.

Brings a smile to your face.

A fascinating look at a culture I am not familiar with. There is much more written about Italian and French Cooking.

Product arrived quickly and in condition described. I would recommend this seller! The book was an easy read and was very interesting in its analogy of Latino culture.

This book tells the story of the role of tacos in the author's life, but she also creates a coming-of-age memoir as well as a loving portrait of her mother, the champion taco-maker. It includes recipes, poems, moving personal history, and thoughts about Mexican culture in both Mexico and the US, but the word pictures it creates of growing up in the 50s and 60s have parallels throughout the various "cultures" in the US. I have recently read *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros, and *Esmeralda Santiago's* books on growing up in Puerto Rico and the US, and find it valuable to think about all these books at once--since there are parallels in all these women's experiences.

As a resident of the author's city, I was looking forward to reading her much anticipated release. Unfortunately though, I was sorely disappointed. In fact, the reviewer who awarded *A Taco Testimony* two stars was generous. Unlike the 2-star reviewer though, I stuck with it, reading page after dull page, hoping it would improve (but never does), much like a monotonous "Saturday Night Live" skit that doesn't know when to end. Without semblance of structure, she haphazardly places

poems, recipes, and anecdotes at random, repeating herself ad nauseam utilizing the sophomoric "Taco is life" metaphor. Moreover, her inchoate thoughts lack depth and detail. Riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions, full of fluff and devoid of content, her style resembles that of a grade-groveling high school sycophant, trying to con her audience with melodrama and malaise, but inevitably saying nothing of note. In her weak attempt to explain "Culture", for example, she affirms that it is lack of cultural awareness that results in our inability to know and respect others which ultimately causes violence in the world. Here, I agree. Yet her very example epitomizes HER ignorance of culture. With awkward phrasing she states, "A man who lives here but is not from here is trying to sue the city to get the three crosses, the symbol of our town, removed from all public displays." Not only does she promote divisiveness by insinuating that he is an outsider, despite claims throughout her book that we are all one people, she fails to acknowledge that the crosses of Calvary are recognized worldwide as the autograph of Christianity - that the triumvirate could represent centuries of violence perpetrated against non-believers. By failing to recognize the identities of non-adherents of Christianity, she obliterates them from the landscape, engaging in her own brand of cultural imperialism. Thus, the crosses are not merely the symbol of our town, the simplistic notion that the author would like us to believe. Perhaps the author is better suited to writing fiction. I can only hope her tacos are better than her book.

In the very first sentence of her new memoir, "A Taco Testimony: Meditations on Family, Food and Culture" (Rio Nuevo, paperback \$16.95), Denise Chávez warns readers: "This is not a sweet little book about tacos; it remembers the fights that began at the kitchen table, spilled into the dining room, then moved quickly into the living room and continued into the bedroom with the sudden slam of a door that led to the hushed sound of someone crying behind that door." But the title of this moving and engrossing "memoir of food" also gives a clue to the story Chávez is about to tell. Chávez does, indeed, offer testimony about growing up in a family dealing with alcoholism as well as her own battles with depression and drugs. But this is far from being a gloomy book. In the end, Chávez inspires and cajoles the reader into learning how to appreciate family, friends, literature and good food. Of course, the recurring theme of Chávez's memoir is the taco. Reappearing throughout this engaging book are fond memories, recipes, poems and interesting facts related to the taco. For Chávez, it goes beyond delicious nourishment. It symbolizes order and comfort in a household that suffered from the alcoholic abuses of her father, Epifanio, a "brilliant lawyer" who "had no practical living skill" and drank the family into financial jeopardy. In their neat Las Cruces home, Chávez's mother, Delfina, tried mightily to maintain appearances in her

marriage to this handsome and seemingly upright man. But they "lived a family lie." To the outside world, her father was a "successful small-town lawyer" married to an "untroubled beautiful mother from an even smaller town called El Povo, The Dust." Delfina met Epifanio as a widow with a child. He was supposed to be her salvation, her way of making a home that was torn apart by the untimely death of her first husband. Sadly, Epifanio failed in that regard. They eventually divorced, though Epifanio would sometimes stay overnight during important holidays, his birthday being the most important of all. In the same way her mother's tacos helped bring some warmth and stability to their home, Chávez admits that this special food came to her rescue while she attended graduate school. Far from home, she suffered from depression, smoked marijuana constantly, skipped meals and began to unravel. Chávez recounts one night when she forced herself to make tacos, all by herself with her family many miles away, to pull herself out of a downward spiral. She would not sleep until she finished cooking. Chávez succeeded in this curative act and unabashedly asserts: "Tacos can save your life." She has forgiven her father and grown stronger in the process. Now she can look back with great fondness on the good things her family offered: love (though imperfect), a rich culture, education and wonderful, healing food. Chávez is an engaging writer who has a well-honed talent for describing in intimate detail everything from human foibles to mouthwatering Mexican delicacies. She also confronts life in all its beautiful and painful permutations. This is a testimony well-worth reading. And it wouldn't hurt to have a taco or two nearby once your mouth starts to water. [This review first appeared in the El Paso Times.]

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