



## Dear Julia

*Amy Bronwen Zemser*

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Elaine Hamilton has never wanted to be the center of attention. She'd like nothing more than to cook quietly in her kitchen, mastering French cooking with the recipes of the great Julia Child.

So how did she end up with cameras zooming in on her and a crowd cheering her on?

Well, it involves . . .

an eccentric best friend named after a font,

five lively brothers constantly asking, "What's for dinner?"

a rotten fig and a weakness,

a feminist congresswoman mother,

a yoga-practicing father,

a chest full of unsent letters,

and many, many roast ducks.

Delicious. Just delicious.

## Dear Julia Details

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## From Reader Review Dear Julia for online ebook

### Nancy says

I really liked the cover and the premise of a semi awkward protagonist with a love for cooking. But, as we all know, when you have such expectations, they are sure to disappoint.

Instead of falling in love with the protagonist, I was extremely annoyed by Elaine. I fail to believe that she's never had a single friend. It also doesn't impress me that she's mastered French cooking as young as 8-12 years old. In fact, it's unrealistic, and I was more than irritated by the constant French phrases and dishes; at least tell me (paraphrase or translate directly into English) what the damn dishes were! Another unsettling factor was the way Elaine spoke. I completely understood that she was socially awkward, having never made friends after all, but she spoke like someone straight out of an Austen novel. She was prim and proper, and annoying as hell with her, "I beg your pardon," and "Walking is my preferred mode of transportation". Nobody EVER talks like that, except if you're somehow stuck in the 18th-19th century.

The other characters fell flat, too. Lucida Sans was eccentric, wacky, and I normally love the outrageous characters, but Lucida Sans went overboard with her quirks. It started with the fact that she's named after a font, and the fuss people constantly make over it (both the parents say something along the lines of: "Hm, why does that name sound so familiar?"). She's just too crazy for me. She's indignant all the time, and she tries so hard to be famous that it's really exhausting to read. I love her spirit and all, but wished she could have tone it down a whole notch.

While I loved the brothers, especially the twins as sou chefs, all were underdeveloped. I guess it's hard to fully fluff out 5 brothers, but throughout the novel, I could not, for the life of me, pick out which brother was Chris or whatever their names were. They all kind of meshed together, mostly because none had very distinctive qualities - except, I think one was supposed to be a cross-dresser.

The father was so predictable. He would say, "This is delicious, Elaine," every time he tasted a new dish. It made me laugh. But it also creep-ed me out a little, and I wondered whether he really meant it, or was just being fatherly. I have nothing to say about the mother, except that, as a feminist, she didn't play much of a role in the book. Same goes for the Fischburger mothers. The only reason I remember them is because I laugh every time I come across their last name.

And finally, Croton. What a strange, strange name. At first, I thought it might have been croutons, and it would have fit in nicely with the food plot, but after some googling, it's actually a plant. A very colorful plant, but not the most beautiful. He was weirder than Lucida Sans at times, because I was just confused by his actions. He was a very flat "villain" and seemed way too petty at times. I really don't know what Lucida saw in him. At first, I thought it hilarious how they referred to him as a "rotten fig" and a "flower gone to see", but after much repetition of those two statements, it became torture reading it.

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### Frezanda says

Please excuse my rant about this book here. Ok, here I go.

I hate this book because i hate Lucida, the bestfriend( if she can be called that).I know she was weird..Eccentricity I can forgive. What I hate from her is her irresponsibility. Elaine met Lucida the first time when Lucida cause a fire that burn the town fair. It's an accident I know. We could not blame Lucida even though she was the one accidentally caused the catastrophe. What I despised is how easily and convicted she

said "It's not my fault". She's not even feeling a little bit guilty. Somehow there was never mentioned how much the damage due to the fire. Of course, somehow there is no injuries happened but can you imagine the damage? And she just said easily it not her fault like that..

This is the first thing that makes me doubting Lucida as a person.

The second time she said it's not her fault again was even worse. She blamed Elaine for naively giving the tape to Crocton (or whatever, I found his name stupid). Considering her attitude, revenge and idiocy about him, it can be said Lucida's fault is even bigger. This second time feels like a betrayal which make it worse.(And what's the problem with Lucida-Crocton relationship? Is she masochistic? I fell so angry every time she whined " But he is so handsome!")

The third time she said it's not her fault again prompted me to stop reading. She caused a fire again!!! And then there she said that sentence again.."It's not my fault!"

I also found Elaine's family plain annoying. Especially her parents I guess. If you had 6 kids, can you be responsible for them instead of paasing the babysitting jobs to your eldest daughter? I mean if you will not be there why would you have so many kids anyway?

Those are the reason why I hated this book. I think I'll stop my rant here. Thank you for reading.

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## **Hillary says**

I just don't have time anymore for books that aren't obviously bad, but are perhaps just materially unsound. I was born to like the premise, geeky loner girl loves Julia Child and loves to cook despite her feminist mother and hooks up with a loner extrovert and things start to change. Familiar YA ground adapted to a topic I like (Julia Child). And the author is definitely competent when it comes to sentence structure and the YA sense of the vernacular. But I just don't buy the "she mastered Julia Child's Mastering the Art of French Cooking" by the age of eight" business and the author just plain old lost my trust from the start. It would be one thing if the entire story tone was consistent with that sense of the realistic-fantastical (I think I might have just coined this phrase, and I'm not even stoned), but this is good plain old realistic YA (which I'm quite fine with) with all this unbelievable business thinly developed from the start. So I had to put it down. Probably too soon by other people's thresholds, but unlike my fabulous colleague who's mastering the 48-hour reading challenge and will probably come out having read ten books on the other side, my kid only lets me off the hook a few hours a day.

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## **Jennifer Wardrip says**

Reviewed by Sarah Bean the Green Bean Teen Queen for TeensReadToo.com

Elaine Hamilton's greatest desire is to be a chef like Julia Child. She practices her French cooking skills every evening at dinner, and has recipes memorized. She teaches her younger brothers about slicing and peeling. She even writes letters to Julia Child about her cooking, but has been too afraid to send any of them. Most of Elaine's family loves her cooking, but her congresswoman mother has high hopes for her shy daughter and they don't include anything in the kitchen.

Isadora Wilhelminetta Fischburger, who has re-named herself Lucida Sans after the font, wishes to be famous. The problem is Lucida doesn't have any stand out talents. Lucida is known around school as the girl

in the crazy costumes and wigs who is always trying to be famous.

When these two girls meet, the shy Elaine and quirky Lucida quickly become unlikely friends. After hearing about an upcoming contest for a cable access show, Lucida gets the idea that the two should enter with a cooking show, using Elaine's cooking skills and Lucida's ease of being in front of a camera.

With the help of Elaine's brothers, the girls set off to fill their deepest ambitions. But they'll battle egotistical boys, idealistic mothers, cooking contests, and the dreaded omelet along the way. Will they get their own cooking show? Will Elaine's mother ever let her be a chef? And will Lucida ever be famous for anything?

DEAR JULIA is a charming, fast-paced, feel-good, laugh-out-loud read. The cast of characters are eccentric and fun, including a cross-dressing brother, yoga-practicing father, and a stuck on himself too-handsome actor, who Lucida continually refers to as "her weakness." Elaine is a girl you can't help but cheer for as she learns to stand up for herself and have confidence. Lucida provides immense comic relief, yet also adds depth to the story.

Fans of The Food Network will eat this one up. Be sure to add this one to your must-read pile -- just don't read while you're hungry!

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## Marsha says

While this young adult novel celebrated one girl's love affair with French cooking, I decided against giving it high marks. I wasn't sure why at first; I generally adore books that deal with cooking and food and I didn't know why this one had failed to move me like other books such as "Play It Again, Spam", "How to Cook a Tart" and "The Food of Love".

Finally, I realized what the deficit was. Elaine Hamilton, the book's shy chef, loves to cook; she is a long-time worshipper of Julia Child. But you never get the impression that she loves food. I'm talking about a real LOVE in which she savors the food on her tongue, salivates at the smell of good chocolate, drools over whipped cream or rolls her eyes and moans in delight at a really great crême brûlée.

The deeply withdrawn Elaine is simply dedicated to the preparation of great dishes; you get the distinct feeling that eating them is secondary and beside the point. In fact, she is one of the least sensuous people you are likely to meet in a fictional kitchen and I believe sensuousness is essential to making a really good chef, at least a fictional one.

The other characters do almost as little as she does to create a sense of food worship. Her brothers interfere while she's cooking (one of them grouches about not being able to get Mac 'n cheese while she's in the house); her mother is a feminist and disapproves of her daughter's retrograde desire to cook and her father shows no subtle appreciation of her gifts at all, merely eats and says "Delicious" over and over again, giving blanket approval to his daughter's talent as if it were an instruction he read in a parenting manual somewhere.

While there is a climactic cook-off near the end of the book, there is no sense of love of the food except by the food critics and that is somewhat spoiled by their over-critical assessments. What does get played out is how Elaine comes out of her shell due to being befriended by the outgoing, loud, irrepressible Isadora (who changed her name to Lucida Sans because she thinks it's the best font ever). But when a secondary character comes off as more vibrant and interesting than the protagonist, you know the book has taken a wrong turn

somewhere.

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### **Michele says**

cute story... i love the idea of a cooking prodigy, but the main focus of this story was the idea of stepping outside yourself and reaching for your dreams

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### **Maya says**

it didn't wow me but i didn't hate it either. it had some good life lessons. if u like to cook this is the book for you!

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### **Clare says**

In this excellent book, the main character, Elaine, is a shy teen with a dream. She wants more than anything to become a chef, trained at a school in Paris, just like her idol, Julia Child. She befriends a girl named after a font, and together they strive to make their dreams come true! I liked it a lot because it involved yummy French food with cool names, and struggles between mother and daughter!

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### **Cindy Dobrez says**

Sheer fun for cooks (or people who like to eat!) This book reminded me of a Joan Bauer book, for its characters and heart (although Chris the cross-dressing brother or the two moms are not standard fare in Bauer books). Contrivances abound in the plot, but I didn't care, I just rolled with the fun. A bonus was the friendship that develops between two very different girls who support each other (mostly) just when the other really needs it.

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### **CLM says**

Quirky and appealing story about a shy teen who is obsessed with cooking (and whose descriptions of food are mouth watering). By making a friend who is her opposite, Elaine is drawn out of her shell and gains some much needed self worth. Her friend, Lucida, is more annoying because such an imperfect friend - yet don't we all have one of those? A friend who ignored us in high school or college when a boy beckoned a finger, yet whom we later forgave?

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### **Patricia says**

Elaine has one goal in life- to master French cooking like her idol, Julia Child. However, her mother, a

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senator and avid feminist, believes this to be a demeaning woman's role and won't accept it as a viable future. But Elaine's 5 brothers and her father really enjoy the fantastic food she turns out for them day after day, week after week. She often writes letters to Julia Child, asking about fine points of cooking, but she never mails them, just locks them up in a trunk. Life changes dramatically when the wacky and outspoken Lucida Sans comes into her life. Lucida's goal is to become famous- however she can, but she hasn't yet found anything that she excels at to achieve that goal. She also has two mothers- "moms"- she calls them, and she disrupts Elaine's mannerly life. Elaine manages to keep her cooking skills a secret for a long time, but when Lucida discovers that Elaine actually has a talent that could make her famous, she pushes her to audition for a local cable access tv channel. But an egotistical boy ruins the audition tape and Elaine retreats back into her shell, because she doesn't want to become famous- she just wants to cook, go to Smith College, like Julia Child, and then to cooking school in Paris. However, in the end, she is persuaded to enter a national cooking contest, with Lucida as her helper. She again gives up, but Julia Child actually appears and persuades her to cook the last plate- a perfect omelette, which Elaine has never before been able to produce. Turns out that Lucida, after discovering the letters, mailed them all the Julia! Quirky characters, sometimes a bit much, but a great ending, although I did get very impatient with Elaine sometimes...

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### **Book Concierge says**

Charming YA novel about a teen whose life ambition is to cook, and who has been secretly writing letters to her idol, Julia Child since she was 6 years old. But she's never gotten an answer. That's to be expected, since Elaine Hamilton is far too shy to actually mail the letters. Her mother, an elected official, is horrified at the thought her daughter would aspire to "domesticity" vs a profession. But Elaine follows her dream. At age six Elaine begins to rise early to prepare breakfast and pack lunches for herself and her younger siblings. By the time she's in third grade she is preparing dinner from Mastering the Art of French Cooking.

Now she is an awkward high school student with no friends, and a tendency to use extremely formal language when she feels stressed. But at a community fair she comes across a girl who is completely opposite – Isadora Fischburger (now known as Lucida Sans) is convinced she will be known for her talent (if she can just find which talent). She's exuberant and fearless, a real individualist. Their friendship will temper each of their personalities.

I enjoyed this gentle coming-of-age story. I did think the adults, in particular Elaine's mother, were not really sufficiently fleshed out. The relationships between the teens and adults, as a result, didn't ring true, and the conclusion was just a little too neatly tied up in a ribbon. Still, it's nice to read a YA book that does not rely on witches, werewolves, ghosts, goblins, etc.

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### **Ayja says**

GRRRRRREEEEEEAAAAATTTT! It was awesome because I love cooking and baking so this was a perfect book for me. Thanks mom!

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### **The Library Lady says**

How did I hate this book? Let me count the ways:

A heroine whose awkwardness was NOT endearing--she reminded me of that equally awful series by Susan Juby about a girl named Alice.

A sidekick whose wackiness is just plain irritating.

A male villain whose actions seldom make much sense.

Another helpless, wacky father who has no idea what's going on, and a mother who is a feminist sterotype.

Brothers who are given one character trait and that's it--the cross dressing brother(really), the spelling champ, the jock and the twins who do NOTHING to show you they have individual characters.

*And sorry, I don't believe a pair of 6 year olds could function as sous chefs the way they do here. Even if they are supposed to be as solemn and humorless as their big sister.*

Oh, and to really make me want to throw this book across the room, a *deus ex machina* ending featuring a real celebrity who has been dead for several years--note of which is only made in tiny type on the copyright page--who is presented as well and living.

I will give this book one saving grace. Unlike another book featuring a self centered twit obsessed with Julia Child, this book only features one four letter word.

Yes, it's better than "Julie and Julia". I'll give it that.  
But that's not saying much.....

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## **Marieme says**

### Dear Julia

By Amy Bronwen Zemser  
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Elaine Hamilton wanted to become a chef just like her idol, Julia Child, for as long as she could remember. She would cook all of her family meals out of pure enjoyment. She loved being in the kitchen mastering the French cuisine. She even teaches her younger twin brothers a few tips and tricks in the kitchen. From when she was a little girl, Elaine would write letters to Julia Child. However, those letters would never get sent to her. Instead, Elaine would seal them in an envelope and stow them away. She was always too shy to send them, and her mother, being a strong congresswoman, always told Elaine that she could do bigger and better things than stay in the kitchen.

Another girl Elaine's age, Lucida Sans--formerly known as Isadora Wilhelminetta Fischburger--is the orange part of a sea of green. She's different from others and definitely not afraid to be known as "different" or the girl who comes to school in a different crazy costume everyday. Lucida has two mothers, high aspirations to

become famous, but not much talent. She's willing to do whatever it takes to see her name up in lights, whether it's singing, acting, sports, anything.

When Elaine and Lucida meet, the two sixteen year old girls become unlikely friends; one girl is painfully shy while the other is more outgoing than anyone in their school. One day they hear about a contest where they can win their own cable access show. Lucida suggests that she and Elaine should enter the contest and do their own cooking show. That way, they could combine Elaine's extraordinary culinary skills with Lucida's ease in front of cameras and audiences. With the help of Elaine's brothers, she and Lucida work towards this great goal of theirs. Along the way they have to overcome obstacles such as feminist mothers, conceited guys and of course, that ever-so dreaded omelet.

Dear Julia is a pretty enjoyable book if you can deal with a character such as Lucida and a teenager who speaks as if she is a grown etiquette coach. I find it hard to enjoy a book if the character's personalities annoy me. Lucida was a little too eccentric for my liking. She sometimes acted as if she were an overly excited 6 year old girl rather than the sixteen year old she was. Elaine on the other hand spoke in a way that most teens don't, and it was painful to have to read what she said. I would've enjoyed the book more if the characters sounded like most teens today. Nevertheless, Amy Bronwen Zemser did a great job in creating these characters with unique, standout personalities (whether or not I liked these personalities). This book was okay, but not the type of book I would have much to say about.

I would recommend this book to people who enjoy a good story about unlikely friends. Also to people who can deal with books with characters who can sometimes come off as annoying. I think that girls or boys might enjoy this book, but judging by the cover (Yes, I know the saying) boys might not be interested in this novel.

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