

Dianne Jacob, *Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Restaurant Reviews, Articles, Memoir, Fiction and More...* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 2005) 306 pp. \$15.95

Dianne Jacob has drawn on the best of the previously mentioned books, and combined it with her quarter-century of experience as a journalist and writing instructor, to create *Will Write for Food*. The book's subtitle says it all: *The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Restaurant Reviews, Articles, Memoir, Fiction and More...*

Most people, outside of the business, think first of cookbooks and restaurant reviews when they hear the words “food writing,” but Jacob knows that the term includes everything from memoirs to a range of non-fiction genres (from how-to books to history), to fiction. She does not, curiously enough, address the needs of poets who write about food—but, while a number of first-rate practitioners come to mind, poets have an even more difficult financial path to climb than food writers. So, she can be forgiven this tiny lapse, especially since it is just about the only one she makes in her book.

The book is arranged in ten chapters that can be grouped into four basic sections. The first two chapters define food writing and the sort of people who produce it. Chapters three and four describe the process of beginning a career in food writing. Chapters five through nine address the primary types of food writing: restaurant reviews, cookbooks, recipes, memoir and non-fiction—though, clearly, many memoirs belong in her final category: fiction.

Many readers will immediately skip to chapter ten, “How to Get Your Book Published,” but they'd be making a grave mistake. While the chapter explains book proposals and query letters, contracts, the value of literary agents and “the pros and cons of self-publishing,” Jacob's years of experience inform every part of the book. Every chapter, not just the tenth, can save the reader years of wasted efforts—she has

interviewed scores of successful food writers, editors and literary agents about what food writing is, should be, and shouldn't be, is marketable, and isn't marketable, Writing a book is a major commitment of time and energy, and to ignore the insights of all these experts is the grossest folly.

At the end of each chapter, she includes a reading list of books that every aspiring food writer should read. If that were not enough, she concludes the book with a multi-part appendix. It begins with a four-page list of the people she interviewed in researching her book. Then follows a fifteen-page bibliography. She then adds a directory of useful websites, broken into nine categories. Some of these might logically be combined or described differently, but their contents are worthwhile: magazines, newspaper food sections, web sites, food writing and writing classes, associations and non-profits, cooking schools and classes, food studies, online cookbook stores, and government sources. Finally, as anyone who researches any subject in order to write about it, the book has a fully functional index.

Will Write for Food is like that Cream of Wheat box: it charms with its sequentially-layered explorations of its subject—and it's filled with simply-unadorned wholesome goodness. It's the book I wish I had written, and one I will certainly use when teaching classes on food writing, for—as my colleague David Leite wrote, “My only complaint about *Will Write for Food*—and it's a big one—is that it wasn't around when I started my career. If you're serious about becoming a food writer, save yourself years of banging your head against the wall in frustration and run to the checkout with this book now.”

-- Gary Allen, food writer and historian. Written for the Association of Food and Society Quarterly, 2006.