

Bite Me: A fun-filled cookbook for the rest of us

BY MIA STAINSBY, MIA STAINSBY SEPTEMBER 29, 2009



Piquant Pasta Puttanesca.

Photograph by: David Rocco, Bite Me

VANCOUVER — Nothing fills the belly as deliciously as laughter.

That's why when Bite Me, by the "tiny-bit-salty sisters" Julie Albert and Lisa Gnat came across my desk, I found myself smiling and called them up.

They had won me over on Page 2 with the gag photo of themselves: two very little, old and feisty ladies, one of them catching the other's hair in a vacuum cleaner nozzle. I have a weakness for absurdist humour. (Or is "juvenile" a more fitting adjective?) The pages of Bite Me have sass and attitude. I gather the authors are not geriatric since they have six pre-teen children between them.

But the recipes themselves are no laughing matter. They're the answer to "What's for dinner," said Albert, in a phone interview from Toronto. "We're not celebrity chefs. We don't do mushroom foam or blow torch our food. These are family-friendly recipes. It's not grandma's cookbook, but at the same time, it provides realistic options for dinner and it's also about having fun."

Albert and Gnat aren't the first Canadian sister duo to write a cookbook fizzy with the leavening agent of humour. The Podleski sisters, Janet and Greta started out similarly. Those unproven authors self-published their first Looneyspoons cookbook when no one else would. It proved to be a huge hit and they published two sequels and then got a gig starring on Eat Shrink And Be Merry on the Food

Network.

The Bite Me authors also published their cookbook themselves and before they knew it, Indigo Books was calling, wanting an exclusive deal to sell the book from September until after Christmas. And they scored real estate on “Heather’s Picks” table, referring to Heather Reisman, founder and CEO of Indigo Books.

“It’s the first cookbook to be chosen for her table,” said Albert, the loudmouthed sister (her own words). “It kinda felt like a no-brainer.”

Bite Me is edgier than the Loonyspoons cookbooks and the writing is more rooted in pop culture, family anecdotes as well as wicked comments about the recipe. The Clash, Elvis, The Twisted Sisters, their dad, their brother and a personals ad make their way into recipe intros; a song list helps cook’s good times roll with music to sing and cook to.

“When people ask us if we have a celebrity profile, we say, ‘Um, yes, for a 30-block radius and everybody who’s been on the treadmill next to us,” Albert laughed.

The book was gestating for 30 years, meaning since childhood. “We share a deep love of food, family and fun. My sister’s background is in cooking [graduate of George Brown College in pastry arts]. Mine? I was told I wrote good ‘thank you’ notes so I followed up with the writing this book.”

I could see college students in shared basement suites liking this cookbook. When papers are due, when crushed by the weight of academia, what’s not to like about a photo of little plastic firemen climbing around the pasta puttanesca, one of them using a fettucine noodle as a firehose; or an Elvis impersonator kicking up his white jet boots; or of a giant inflated hamburger crushing a long-legged beauty (we presume her comeliness but all we see are flailing high-heeled legs).

But Albert says Bite Me draws fans of colour all ages. Her 90-year-old grandmother loves it and sent a book to a friend in New York. “The friend found the book in her mail and she ended up eating a bowl of cereal for dinner because she was too busy reading it,” she says.

Albert and Gnat will be at in Vancouver in November to promote Bite Me but the date has not yet been set.

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