



Artichokes & City Chicken

Jan Groft's new book, *Artichokes and City Chicken*, reads like a mid-life "coming of age" story except instead of recounting the fading of adolescent angst as girl becomes woman, Groft writes of shedding her self-protective armor to embrace life the way it should be lived, with a wide-open heart and her internal chatter stilled to the point that she can almost hear God breathing. Through scripture, life review, and self-analysis, Groft reaches that still small space that often leads to revelations. A beautifully written homage to her mother, now deceased, *Artichokes and City Chicken* is part memoir, part cookbook, and part primer on *how to let go and let God*. The story is loosely centered around Groft's relationship with her mother who for years struggled to understand a daughter she could not hear. By the time Groft's mother died, she was so hard of hearing, and had been for years, that it was difficult for Groft to have even a small conversation with her. This fact permeated many aspects of their troubled relationship which had the effect of pushing

Groft toward a stronger relationship with her father, perhaps as compensation, but more likely because they saw the world the same way.

Groft's previous book, *Riding the Dog*, showcased the steadfast loyalty and easy camaraderie she shared with her father, but no such emotions were in play when it came to her mom. Her mother had her own soul-crushing demons to contend with as Groft describes early in the book, yet all one had to do was look at the energy she spent cooking consistently amazing and abundant meals for her family to know that Groft's mother had no shortage of love for her child, just an inability to communicate that love in ways other than through food.

Making peace with those we struggle with is never easy, and Groft's was particularly difficult. In fact, it never really happened. Groft's mother passed and all the unspoken hopes and frustrations were left to simmer on the back burner, never cooling and never coming to a full boil. How then does one explain or ask for forgiveness and give it in return when the object of your malaise has already crossed over? Groft's deft hand touches every page, finding connections where before existed only confusion and doubt, especially as it relates to her mother. In a case of art imitating life, Groft experienced some severe cases of writer's block while writing this book, that is, until she put her preconceived notions down and listened. And what she heard was the 3-D equivalent of angels singing. One of the things that came to her then — in addition to most of the book — was a memory of herself as child, sitting on the ottoman in front of her mother's chair, watching T.V. together while her mom stroked Groft's hair, a small, elegant, impactful symbol of a love that was always there, Groft just had to listen to remember. Is it a perfect Hollywood ending where everything is resolved and everyone gets what they want? You'll have to read *Artichokes and City Chicken* to find out.