

# Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

---

Review of:

## ***Flavors from Home: Refugees in Kentucky Share Their Stories and Comfort Foods***

Aimee Zaring. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015. Pp. 291, appendices, bibliography, index.

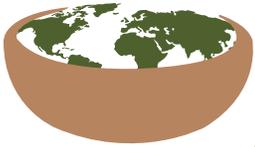
By: Lucy M. Long

---

Personal food stories are a powerful way to explore the experience of being a refugee. These stories give voice to individuals who have lived through such circumstances and also help us understand the history—and implications—of cultural migrations. Aimee Zaring allows readers to hear those voices in this excellent collection of oral histories of 23 refugees to the United States from around the world over the past 50 years—and presents recipes from each (42 in all) for dishes that remind them of home. These selections oftentimes represent the best and the favorites of a food culture, but they also are comfort foods, evoking memories of the past while also bringing together new friends and communities that help to create new homes. Each chapter presents an individual's life story, discusses the person's relationships to food, and offers one or more recipes. Each refugee's journey to the US and commonwealth of Kentucky is contextualized within broader political, economic, and cultural facts, offering a glimpse into how events frequently thought of as happening "over there" can impact the everyday lives of ordinary people.

The recipes have been kitchen-tested, oftentimes being translated from oral tradition into written forms that will make sense to mainstream Americans. Photographs, both black and white and color, show individual cooks and dishes in their home contexts in Kentucky, affirming the idea that these are real people—not just "informants."

Zaring is an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher and writer in Louisville, Kentucky, where she has worked with students from numerous cultures. For this book, she started with individuals she knew, but also sought out others around Kentucky in order to try to capture a broader swath of the diversity now found in that state. She does not attempt to be comprehensive,



# Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

---

but is offering a taste of this more multicultural society than in usually thought of as representing Kentucky. As such, she challenges some notions of what it means to be an American and who can claim that identity. Zaring also points out that the book focuses on refugees—individuals forced to flee their homeland for their own physical safety. She observes that they differ from immigrants who come to the US for other reasons, such as economic or educational opportunities. Material goods frequently could not be brought, so cooking skills and remembered recipes serve as highly-valued souvenirs of the past. Recreating them in new contexts then becomes a tangible way simultaneously to re-enact heritage and negotiate new identities.

This book was sponsored partly by faith-based nonprofits providing assistance to refugees (Catholic Charities and Kentucky Refugee Ministries), and some of the proceeds return to those organizations. While it does not address scholarship on foodways, tradition, ethnicity, or other pertinent areas, its approach will resonate with many folklorists. Perhaps more significantly, it offers refugees a chance to document and share the multiple ways in which food has served them, and it introduces general readers and cooks to the idea that there can be much more to a recipe than simply another way to make a meal, demonstrating that food provides many kinds of sustenance.