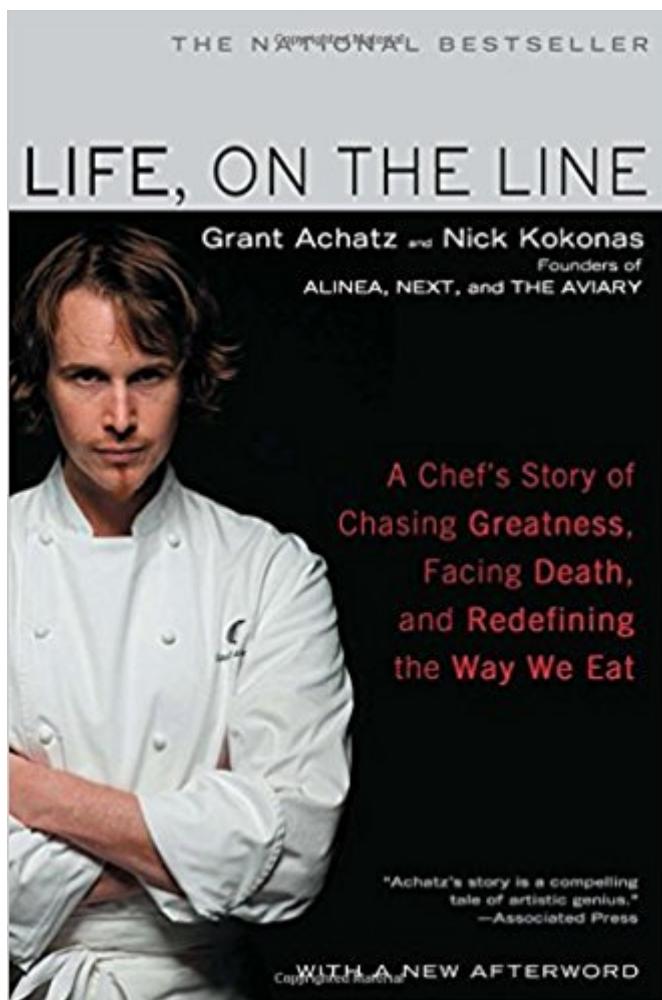


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Life, On The Line: A Chef's Story Of Chasing Greatness, Facing Death, And Redefining The Way We Eat



Synopsis

"One of America's great chefs" (Vogue), Grant Achatz, shares how his drive to cook immaculate food fueled his miraculous triumph over tongue cancer. By 2007 chef Grant Achatz had been named one of the best new chefs in America by Food & Wine, he had received the James Beard Foundation Rising Star Chef of the Year Award, and he and Nick Kokonas had opened the conceptually radical restaurant Alinea, which was named Best Restaurant in America by Gourmet magazine. Then, positioned firmly in the world's culinary spotlight, Achatz was diagnosed with stage IV squamous cell carcinoma-tongue cancer. The prognosis grim, Grant undertook an alternative treatment of aggressive chemotherapy and radiation that ravaged his body and left him without a sense of taste. Tapping into his profound discipline and passion, he trained his chefs to mimic his palate and learned how to cook with his other senses. As Kokonas was able to attest, the food was never better. Five months later, Grant was declared cancer-free and went on to achieve some of the highest honors in the culinary world. Life, on the Line is not only a chef's memoir, it is also a book about survival, about nurturing creativity, and about profound friendship.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this curious memoir, chef Achatz and his business partner, Kokonas tell of their Chicago restaurant, Alinea, as well as his cancer diagnosis and recovery. Achatz grew up in Michigan in and around restaurants, the only child of a troubled marriage who spent an otherwise contented adolescence around kitchens. He eventually attended the Culinary Institute of America and studied

with Charlie Trotter and Thomas Keller with whom he began developing both his palate and culinary vision. He returned to Chicago, where he met Kokonas, who became his business partner in 2005, when they opened Alinea. As Alinea evolves from drawing board to reality, the narrative alternates between the two men's voices. They discuss finding the right team of chefs and dealing with Achatz's diagnosis with stage IV tongue cancer. The various narratives--childhood, professional development, Alinea, Kokonas, illness--have individual strengths, but the whole feels oddly disjointed and in places, such as the section on the restaurant's genesis and development, turn into more of a business how-to. Nevertheless, the authors duly convey their passion as well as a solid business philosophy. (Mar.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This must-read for the culinary crowd is the literary equivalent of caviar and Krug. Foodies will marvel at Achatz's thought process on his molecular creations, while Kokonas provides a detailed glimpse of the artistic vision and creation of modern fine dining. The book takes readers into the passionate environment of a revolutionary kitchen, and through the eyes of the authors we are introduced to the future of gastronomy. Achatz's battle had its time in the weeds--his troubles with food writers, family relationships, and stage IV tongue cancer--but with perseverance and fortitude, he became one of the most controversial and respected chefs, ultimately opening what some critics call the best restaurant in North America, Chicago's Alinea. Kokonas was first introduced to the prodigy at Trio, where Achatz started his executive-chef career. After dining on hundreds of dexterous courses, Kokonas decided to stop gambling on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and create a restaurant with the then 29-year-old, and what began as a business venture became an indispensable friendship.

--Brian Lesson --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

By the age of 32 Grant Achatz, chef/owner of Alinea, had achieved his dream of having the best restaurant in America and, along the way, had completely redefined not only the dining experience but how we think about food and eating. In this book, Chef Achatz, along with Nick Kokonas (his business partner in Alinea and a first-time restaurateur), describes the path he took to reach his goal. If the story ended there, it would be an amazing story of hard work and sacrifice coupled with sheer genius and the audacity to succeed at all costs. The story takes a totally different turn when Chef Achatz is diagnosed with stage IV cancer of the tongue and is faced with the heart-rending choice of risking his sense of taste, and with it his livelihood and identity as a chef, in an attempt to

save his life. Though it sounds cliché, this book transcends genre and audience. For those interested in cooking and the life of a chef, it ranks alongside the works of Michael Ruhlman and Anthony Bourdain as the best in the genre. As a business book, it is a tremendous inspiration for the budding entrepreneur (or for a successful businessperson who is in the midst of doubt) and shows the power of making an audacious goal then driving forward to reach it. Above all it is the story of the extraordinary life of an extraordinary person as he strives to grow, succeed, live, and love. Chef Achatz has shown that he holds himself (and his staff) to the highest standards, and this book does not disappoint in any way. In short, the best book I've read in a very long time. Very highly recommended.

Behind the allure of Alinea, an intangible experience for many normal Americans, lies the story of Grant Achatz. His story is moving, witty, driven, and honest (with a hint of that chef ego that we all know is there). It doesn't pretend to be something it isn't, and opens up a world of food that would otherwise go unilluminated to the general public. I am thankful for the experience of reading this book. It was a great read. Oh, and I'm thankful that someone slipped a phonetically-correct definition of Achatz into the book. That did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. After mainly reading about Chef Achatz online, I was grateful for that small formality.

This is a fascinating book! A very open and honest personal story that provides incredible insight into the many components that go into the making (and operation) of a successful upscale restaurant. It is also an inspiration for anyone who is, or has, been stricken with cancer - just when life seemed so good.

As a seven night a week restaurant goer but not especially a fan of molecular cooking I was very curious about the Chef and the way he thinks. The book answers all of that in a beautifully written manner. The juxtaposed telling of the story by Achatz's business partner was brilliantly handled. I loved the book and have given it to several of my favorite chefs who will likely feel the same way. It seems brutally honest and as a result completely believeable.

As someone who has worked in the industry since my teens, and aspired towards greatness as a server, sommelier, manager and all that comes with it, I was utterly enraptured by Grant and Nicks (and their 'family's') story. I learned my way from Larry Stone, the Master Sommelier that opened Charlie Trotters and have been proud to know many who have been influenced by Chef Achatz.

Coincidentally, I was listening to the story of El Bulli and Chef Adria in tandem to reading this book and was struck quite often by the similarities in drive, dedication, perseverance and insanity of the two chefs that helped bring this incredible and revelatory style of cuisine to the world. Thank you so much for sharing your story and not only inspiring those in the culinary world, but also those who struggle with fear and despair of cancer diagnoses as well. As the Wine Director at The Inn at Little Washington, I see the quest for perfection everyday in our kitchen and on the floor and last Christmas I gave this book to the kitchen in a 'library' of sorts for those that chose to expand their understanding of a chef and team who have set a new bar for excellence and passion. It was the most 'checked out' of the books I gave them and each chef, green or seasoned, thanked me for giving them the chance to find their own answers to the question of 'what is Alinea?'. Keep rockin on and making dreams seem possible.

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