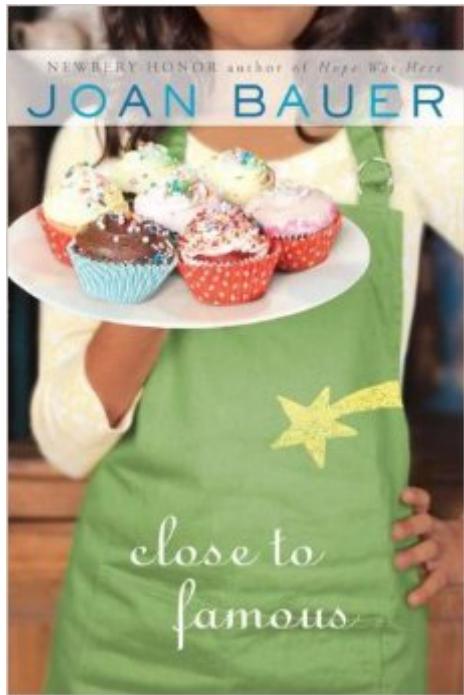


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# Close To Famous



## **Synopsis**

Foster McFee dreams of having her own cooking show like her idol, celebrity chef Sonny Kroll. Macon Dillard's goal is to be a documentary filmmaker. Foster's mother Rayka longs to be a headliner instead of a back-up singer. And Miss Charleena plans a triumphant return to Hollywood. Everyone has a dream, but nobody is even close to famous in the little town of Culpepper. Until some unexpected events shake the town and its inhabitants-and put their big ambitions to the test. Full of humor, unforgettable characters, surprises, and lots and lots of heart, this is Joan Bauer at her most engaging.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

You know how some authors are so reliably good that you simply buy their next book on auto-pilot, sight unseen? Joan Bauer is on that list for me. In my experience, this author's books are always feel-good reads, without falling into the trap of being overly sentimental. When the story begins, Foster McFee and her mother are on the run from Mom's abusive boyfriend, an Elvis impersonator. They find shelter in a small town where someone kind gives them a tow, someone else gives Mrs. McFee a job, and the tow truck people then offer them a place to stay. As for Foster, she is incredibly talented as a self-taught young cook, especially when it comes to baking. Unfortunately, she is incredibly un-talented at reading. In short, she can't read, though she covers it up like a champion. Now, as Foster spends the summer making connections with people like a young would-be documentary filmmaker and the actress who's hiding out from the pain of her all-too-public

dumping by a big-time Hollywood flame, she finds that her secrets are coming out. Another worry is the location of a certain pillowcase that contains the few items she has remaining after her soldier father's death in Iraq. Will this young cupcake maker be able to get in touch with her hero, TV chef Sonny Kroll? Will Miss Charleena ever come out of her house again? Will Foster's mom be recognized as having a star's voice, not a backup singer's? Will Macon ever make a documentary about the new prison down the road? Will Foster learn to read? Quite probably! The learning-to-read subplot resonated with me because I have a dear friend who didn't learn to read till she was 18, faking it in all 11 of the schools her drug addict mother dumped her in for 10 years running. I am happy to report that my friend went on to get her GED and graduate from high school at the age of 32. Struggling reader Foster is such a great character. Take a look at the way she learned to cook in the first place--by falling hard for the art (initially with a friend) and working her butt off till she got it right, relying on listening and memory because she couldn't read recipes. Now Foster begins to apply this same kind of effort to the far more daunting task of learning to read. Her determination and hard work are just a couple of the many nice things about Foster. I especially like it when she does episodes of her so-far-imaginary cooking show, performing in the kitchen with both sweetness and humor. Thank you, Joan Bauer, for giving us a girl to care about, as well as people to care about her. Note for Worried Parents: This is listed on as a book for teens, but I thought it was perfectly appropriate for fourth through sixth graders, as well.

Close to Famous is a nice feel good story that will hold special appeal for any 5th and 6th grader with a fondness for baking, and for any young girl who ever felt the sting of being unfairly judged. Foster is a baking whiz - what she lacks in reading ability she more than makes up for in kitchen creativity. She's still grieving over the death of her father and struggling to cope with a severe learning disability, when she and her mother are forced to flee their home to escape her mother's abusive boyfriend. It's in Culpepper, West Virginia that Foster finds the confidence to believe in herself, to stop running away, and to face her learning disability head on. She finds people who are genuine, and wins them over with her forthright manner and her incredible cupcakes. This story is a quick read, and although it often errs on the side of over-sentimentality and predictability, any reader will be quick to find themselves cheering for Foster and her cupcakes. It's a story full of homespun humour and common sense philosophy that will firmly plant a smile on your face as you picture these characters that the author so ably spins to life. It's always nice to read a story about a child who can overcome being labeled ("dumbest girl in Memphis") and succeed in learning the valuable lesson that we all have something important to offer the world. Lots of great lessons to be learned

here both for kids who might face a learning disability of their own and also for all the kids who know someone that does. Recommended.

As a twelve-year old who could not read, Foster McFee faced quite some ridicule from other students, and even her teachers did little to hide their dissatisfaction and actually explore the nature of Foster's learning disability. So leaving Memphis and this painful stigmatism behind offered Foster some relief, even though she and her mom were fleeing from her mom's abusive boyfriend. Their hurried escape led them to Culpepper, West Virginia, a small town with two claims to fame: a new state penitentiary that was supposed to bring new jobs to locals but did not, and an aging movie star who had gained as much notoriety for her husband's scandalous affair as for her own film achievements. These Culpepper features, together with a unique bunch of kind-hearted town folk, served as important ingredients in a sequence of events that taught Foster and her mom that they could afford to think big about their dream jobs in life. Cleverly wrapped into this engaging story line are some important themes in economics related to public sector job creation, investments in human capital, and entrepreneurial talent. The latter shines through clearly when Foster sells her homemade cupcakes at the local diner and her reputation as an amazing baker quickly takes off. Making this substantive content so easy to digest is Joan Bauer's ability to touch a range of emotions in every chapter. This novel is definitely recommended reading.

Foster is the kind of girl you really want to know right away, especially if you like baked goods. Her confections all sound delicious, but it's the care she takes and her little asides to the imaginary camera in her trailer kitchen, that make them so special. It's hard to write about a small town full of interesting characters without sounding trite and/or boring, but this book has it all--retired Hollywood star, escaped convict, Angry Wayne's Bar & Grill, a scary Elvis impersonator, and a wanna be film documentarian who has yet to get a camera. Reminiscent of IDA B, BECAUSE OF WINN DIXIE, SO B. IT--wonderful!

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