



# Bitting through the Skin: An Indian Kitchen in America's Heartland

*Nina Mukerjee Furstenau*

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At once a traveler's tale, a memoir, and a mouthwatering cookbook, *Biting through the Skin* offers a first-generation immigrant's perspective on growing up in America's heartland. Author Nina Mukerjee Furstenau's parents brought her from Bengal in northern India to the small town of Pittsburg, Kansas, in 1964, decades before you could find long-grain rice or plain yogurt in American grocery stores. Embracing American culture, the Mukerjee family ate hamburgers and softserve ice cream, took a visiting guru out on the lake in their motorboat, and joined the Shriners. Her parents transferred the cultural, spiritual, and family values they had brought with them to their children only behind the closed doors of their home, through the rituals of cooking, serving, and eating Bengali food and making a proper cup of tea.

As a girl and a young woman, Nina traveled to her ancestral India as well as to college and to Peace Corps service in Tunisia. Through her journeys and her marriage to an American man whose grandparents hailed from Germany and Sweden, she learned that her family was not alone in being a small pocket of culture sheltered from the larger world. *Biting through the Skin* shows how we maintain our differences as well as how we come together through what and how we cook and eat. In mourning the partial loss of her heritage, the author finds that, ultimately, heritage always finds other ways of coming to meet us. In effect, it can be reduced to a 4 x 6-inch recipe card, something that can fit into a shirt pocket. It's on just such tiny details of life that belonging rests.

In this book, the author shares her shirt-pocket recipes and a great deal more, inviting readers to join her on her journey toward herself and toward a vital sense of food as culture and the mortar of community.



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