

Home Baked

My Mom, Marijuana, and the Stoning of San Francisco

by Alia Volz

Reading Group Guide

1. Alia Volz introduces us to the “barge” in the prologue. She writes, “Equal parts therapist’s couch, executive boardroom, and ladies’ lounge, the barge was a place for sharing and intimacy” (x). What did the barge represent to Alia? What role did it play within the larger cultural and political context of the story? What did the barge—or spaces like it—offer to people in the community? What have been the most treasured spaces in your own life?
2. What were some of the challenges the Sticky Fingers crew faced when beginning to make and sell magic brownies? How did these challenges change between the 1970s and ’80s?
3. Alia describes an underground cannabis world powered largely by strong, ambitious women. How do the women in this story defy societal norms? In which ways do they conform?
4. Did this book change your understanding of the War on Drugs in the US? If so, in what way? Discuss its larger political and social ramifications. What roles have race relations and politics played in drug enforcement over time? What connections can be drawn between the Nixon’s era and today’s era of mass incarceration?
5. What were some of the social and political movements that took hold in San Francisco in the 1970s? How did Sticky Fingers interact with the activism of the day? Did that relationship evolve during the HIV/AIDS crisis?
6. Alia writes, “I grew up believing that I was made of my hometown, that there was no difference between me and the place where I was born” (x). Do you feel an

elemental connection to your own hometown? Has that feeling changed over time?

7. Discuss the influence of the occult on Alia's family and Sticky Fingers Brownies. How did "magic," as Alia writes on page 22, infuse operations and decision-making? Meridy survived twenty-two years of illegal activity without an arrest. Was it because of street smarts, the occult, or something else?
8. Discuss Meridy and Doug's personal and professional relationship. What did they offer one another? What were some of their biggest disagreements? How did their personal relationship affect business, and vice versa? How does Alia approach her exploration of their relationship?
9. Discuss the illustrations Meridy and Doug created as packaging for Sticky Fingers Brownies, as featured at the beginning of each chapter. Which ones stood out to you and why? Discuss the ways that creativity and business acumen aligned for the Sticky Fingers crew. How did the illustrations promote sales? How did they reflect the cultural and political changes in San Francisco?
10. Discuss how Alia balances history with memoir in her book. Do you think this approach is effective? Why or why not?
11. Meridy and Doug gambled with their freedom to operate an underground business. Why do you think they made those decisions? How does Alia feel about the risks her parents took?
12. Alia compares San Francisco in the 1970s and '80s with the city of today. She writes, "My parents belonged to the classic first wave of gentrifiers: white bohemians who moved into an inexpensive ethnic neighborhood and made it appear trendy." Now, with San Francisco serving as headquarters for powerful tech companies, the city has been "walloped by gentrification" (134). Talk about this change. What are the consequences of gentrification—both positive and negative? Do you see similar forces at work where you live? What is at stake?

13. Alia details how people showed up for one another at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis (336–39). Discuss the role of community organizing in this history. How can we apply these strategies to the challenges of today?
14. Among other things, *Home Baked* is a portrait of an unusual mother-daughter relationship that weathers significant challenges. What strengths and weaknesses stand out to you?
15. Discuss the role of HIV/AIDS activism in paving the way for modern cannabis legislation and cannabusiness. Were you aware of these connections beforehand? Has this book altered your understanding of medical marijuana?