

Maren Emde

THE AMERICAN SURVIVAL MEMOIR

Reading and Writing
in Survivor Culture

[transcript] Contemporary Literature

Maren Emde
The American Survival Memoir

Maren Emde, born in 1990, received her doctorate in American studies from Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz where she was a PhD-fellow in the DFG Research Training Group “Life Sciences – Life Writing”.

Maren Emde

The American Survival Memoir

Reading and Writing in Survivor Culture

[transcript]

This publication is based on a doctoral dissertation, which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) within the Research Training Group 2015 Life Sciences - Life Writing: Boundary Experiences of Human Life between Biomedical Explanation and Lived Experience.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available online at <https://dnb.dnb.de>

2026 © transcript Verlag, Bielefeld

Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

The automated analysis of the work in order to obtain information, particularly concerning patterns, trends, and correlations as defined in § 44b (text and data mining) of the German Copyright Act (UrhG) is prohibited without the written consent of the rights holders.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover design: Kordula Röckenhaus

Printing: Elanders Waiblingen GmbH, Waiblingen

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839477250>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-8150-5 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-7725-0

ISSN of series: 2701-9470 | eISSN of series: 2703-0474

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

Contents

Acknowledgements7

Preface: “I’m a Survivor, I’m not Gon’ Give up”9

1. Backstory I: Survivor Culture19

Psychology and the Popular: Theorizing Therapeutic Culture19

Psychology and the Political: The Formation of Survivor Culture 33

2. Backstory II: The Memoir Boom and Dynamics of the Literary Market 57

The Memoir Boom 58

Defining the Survival Memoir 61

Analyzing the Survival Memoir – Theory and Methodology 73

Tracing The Survival Memoir on the Bestseller List 81

Understanding the Survival Memoir 94

3. Born to Suffer? Childhood in Survival Memoirs

The Liars’ Club, The Color of Water, Blackbird, and Running with Scissors 99

Suffering in Childhood Memoirs: Dys/Functional Families and Extra/Ordinary

Childhoods 103

Early Survival: The Resilient Child 130

Conclusion153

4. Addiction and Recovery: How Self-Help Shapes Memoir

Drinking, Dry, Smashed, Tweak and Lit157

Alcoholics Anonymous in American Self-Help Culture 160

The Common in the Extreme – Suffering from Addiction in Memoir 164

Submit to Survive: How Self-Help Shapes Addiction Memoirs195

Conclusion214

5. The Journey of Healing: Surviving Divorce in Memoir	
<i>Eat, Pray, Love and Mennonite in a Little Black Dress</i>	217
Surviving Divorce or: The Extension of Trauma	219
The Happy Survivor: Positivity and Self-Help Narratives in Survival Memoirs	227
Divorce Memoirs in Intimate Publics – The Female Complaint and <i>Eat Pray Love</i>	247
Conclusion	252
 6. Long Lasting Bonds In, Through, and Beyond Memoir	255
The Memoirist as Advisor <i>In Memoir</i> – Seriality and Self-Help Guides	256
Formations of Extratextual Communities <i>Through Memoir</i>	266
<i>Beyond Memoir</i> : Reading and Writing in Memoir Communities	271
Conclusion	284
 Epilogue: “I Will Survive, Keep on Surviving”	287
 Bibliography	293