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Live Through This: On Creativity And Self-Destruction



Synopsis

A visceral look at the bizarre entanglement of destructive and creative forces, *Live Through This* (a finalist for the 2008 Lambda Literary Awards) is a collection of original stories, essays, artwork, and photography. It explores the use of art to survive abuse, incest, madness and depression, and the often deep-seated impulse toward self-destruction including cutting, eating disorders, and addiction. Here, some of our most compelling cartoonists, novelists, poets, dancers, playwrights, and burlesque performers traverse the pains and passions that can both motivate and destroy women artists, and mark a path for survival. Taken together, these artful reflections offer an honest and hopeful journey through a woman's silent rage, through the power inherent in struggles with destruction, and the ensuing possibilities of transforming that burning force into the external release of art. With contributions by Nan Goldin, bell hooks, Patricia Smith, Cristy C. Road, Carol Queen, Annie Sprinkle, Elizabeth Stephens, Carolyn Gage, Eileen Myles, Fly, Diane DiMassa, Bonfire Madigan Shive, Inga Muscio, Kate Bornstein, Toni Blackman, Nicole Blackman, Silas Howard, Daphne Gottlieb, and Stephanie Howell.

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Customer Reviews

Live Through This is a revolutionary, powerful, and potentially life-saving book. It's not just that editor Sabrina Chapadjiev has collected the work of some of the most creative female artists and writers, but that they in turn bravely take us behind the scenes to moments often before they became the bold-faced names they are today and share their darkest times and coping

mechanisms. The fact is, it's often hard to reconcile the women writing these pieces with what I know of them. Exhibitionism for the Shy and Live Nude Girl author Carol Queen was really once going to kill herself? And yet of course it all makes perfect sense. These women give readers an outlet not just to hear their stories, but to claim our own coping mechanisms without judgment. It's not that they are encouraging cutting or eating disorders, to name two examples, but that they've been there, done/heard that, and have moved on. Nicole Blackman writes of the power she unwittingly tapped into, becoming the keeper of her fans' secrets, and not knowing how to deal with such pain in their lives. Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle write of turning cancer, a deadly disease, into art, in one of the most powerful pieces in the book. Within these pages, everything is okay, if that's what you need to do to survive, as Kate Bornstein so eloquently points out: "Cutting, starving yourself, drugging, drinking... these are all rituals some of us develop in order to deal with pain. Each of these solutions to pain is in itself painful, so each solution/ritual contains a very personal lesson on how to handle the experience of pain." Her journey took her through Scientology and into art, among other things, and the stark examples of her artwork say so much about the pain she was living through. I don't think it's a coincidence that as I read this book while I was going through a very dark time, dealing with depression and anxiety. I read part of it during a medical crisis as I sat in the waiting room. Because that's another thing: even though this is a book about getting past those self-destructive, self-defeating, awful mental (and physical) struggles, these authors don't hold out any panaceas or claim to be completely "over" these issues. They have certainly learned and matured, but this is not just an "and I lived to tell the tale" book. It's much more than that, because one gets the sense that though they may have stopped drinking, getting high, and outright harming themselves, the challenges continue. Inga M. Muscio's essay is the kind that grabs your heart and holds tight until the end as she rights about the death of her brother. She concludes, "Most always, healing is not a destination or an objective. Healing is a daily thought process, a series of infinite questions and choices, a kill that is not taught, much less revered, in our culture." I don't mean to end on a depressing note, because I do believe this book is well worth reading for anyone, whatever gender, who has ever felt not all there, who has wanted art to save them but isn't sure it will do the trick, who has felt, even if they were surrounded by people who care, all alone. These authors get that and go there, to those places so many would rather avoid or pretend do not exist. By acknowledging that they do, sharing their stories, and, most of all, perhaps, not pretending to have all the answers, they prove themselves not "experts," but real, flawed, passionate, yet still brilliant, bold and creative people who have learned not everything, but something they can pass on to others.

This book doesn't offer answers, it is not a step-by step process for how to heal. Rather it is a collection of experiences... stories about how others have coped, fought and triumphed, using their own strengths and creativity. Just knowing that depression and destruction can be dealt with in ways that are not exclusive to a bottle of pills or weekly visits to a doctor is useful. For anyone who has been on the floor with no idea how to get up, I would recommend this book as proof of life.

There are so many different ways to be creative, just like there are so many different ways to self-destruct. The different examples of strong women artists dealing with both factors, gives me hope, because it makes me see that I am not alone, that there are other creative women out there struggling, but surviving. I picked up this book last week because I was having a terrible day and didn't feel like I wanted to live through much of anything. I read one story, and then another, and then another, of women who, at times, may not have felt like continuing on, but pushed through this feeling - or rather used this feeling - to keep creating and keep surviving. I am determined to become one of these women. And I am determined to live through this. This book is excellent.

when our female role models self destruct, we witness the media belittle them with glorified humiliation (read: britney spears) or morbid reverence (read: sarah kane).when we question why our loved ones are anorexic, bulimic, cutting, and otherwise hurting themselves, the conversation is silenced with shrugs or competitive storytelling."live through this" shifts that conversation by presenting the experience of an impressive lineup of womyn, who through their stories demonstrate a pattern of finding personal power through self-destructive experiences, then channeling that power into more positive and productive activities.beyond the stories themselves, the book challenges us to have a different kind of conversation about self-destructive tendencies. beyond medication, shame, and silence there is energy and power that has the potential to build creative, supportive community.an amazing read!

Great book with phenomenal insight into ways talent fights (and sometimes brawls) to balance the struggles and impetus behind massive creativity with the need for functionality and balance in the lay world. Interesting. Includes practical applications interspersed with the art of contributors.

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