



Disaster Preparedness: A Memoir

Heather Havrilesky

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A perceptive, witty memoir about the transformative humiliations of childhood-and adulthood-from a unique, already-beloved voice.

When Heather Havrilesky was a kid during the '70s, harrowing disaster films dominated every movie screen with earthquakes that destroyed huge cities, airplanes that plummeted towards the ground and giant sharks that ripped teenagers to shreds. Between her parents' dramatic clashes and her older siblings' hazing, Heather's home life sometimes mirrored the chaos onscreen.

A thoughtful, funny memoir about surviving the real and imagined perils of childhood and early adulthood, *Disaster Preparedness* charts how the most humiliating and painful moments in Havrilesky's past forced her to develop a wide range of defense mechanisms, some adaptive, some piteously ill-suited to modern life. From premature boxing lessons to the competitive grooming of cheerleading camp, from her parents' divorce to her father's sudden death, Havrilesky explores a path from innocence and optimism to self-protection and caution, bravely reexamining the injuries that shaped her, the lessons that sunk in along the way, and the insights that carried her through.

By laying bare her bumps and bruises, Havrilesky offers hope that we can find a frazzled and unruly, desperate and wistful, restless and funny and frayed-at-the-edges way of staring disaster in the face, and even rising to meet it head on. By turns offbeat, sophisticated, uproarious and wise, *Disaster Preparedness* is a road map to the personal disasters we all face from an irresistible voice that gets straight to the unexpected grace at the heart of every calamity.

Disaster Preparedness: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Disaster Preparedness: A Memoir for online ebook

Tracy says

This was a good memoir about growing up the 1970s. It was generally a series of essays. The book was not a compelling read in that I didn't constantly want to get back to, but it was solid. I thought overall, it was generally a 3-star book, but I loved the last essay so much, I bumped it up one notch. The last essay focused on how we would like to be the perfect mom with everything clean and neat and we'd like to be the person who hired people to help with every unpleasant task so we had tons of time to think and read and stare out the window, but that in the end, we were flawed people who would never be perfect and that the crazy messiness of life is really life and she loved hers and it reminded me that I love mine, crumbs on the floor/screaming toddler/no bread in the house and all.

Elliot Ratzman says

I read most of this mediocre memoir on a beach in NJ so perhaps it was the extreme environment that soured it for me. I had snagged it up on the historic last day of Borders' existence for a buck because AJ Jacobs endorsed it and the Library of Congress had it categorized it as 1. Pessimism 2. Emergency Management. Both Jacobs and the Library of Congress lied; I want a refund! In short: girl grows up in Durham, NC during the 70s and 80s with divorced academic parents. Yawn. My memoir-writing workshops produced much more interesting stuff than this. David Sederis makes the quotidian or common autobio episode funny and memorable. She's no Sederis, and she hasn't lived the life of Churchill, just another on-line wordsmith who once worked at the mall, lost her religion and virginity, tried out for cheerleading, fought with her siblings, etc. As such, Havrlesky's prose is track-laid pedestrian, taking us from one slice-of-life incident to the other uninteresting to anyone not in her family.

[Shai] Bibliophage says

Actual rating: 3.5

I enjoyed the author's narration of her and her family's life story. Although there are some parts that I doze off especially on the part where she tells her story about one of her exes. But some of her stories are quite comic like when she and her dad rode the plane and there was a turbulence. There are also some noteworthy subtle pieces of advice usually on every end of the chapters. If you are looking for a witty, quirky and light read novel this coming weekend; then this book definitely suits you.

Ame says

Heather is possibly one of my favorite people ever. I want her to be my 24 hour life coach. This is mostly

due to her column Ask Polly and is unrelated to this book. However, as it turns out, she is also from my home town, which made for an interesting read. I prefer her in advice giving, conclusions about life mode and the instances of that were few, but on point.

Liza says

I liked this! When I was in high school, I liked Heather Havrilesky's tv writing, and now I like her advice columns or whatever else pops up on the internet. In the same way, I liked this book.

What I did NOT like was the part where she confesses everything that's wrong with her to her future husband and he's like, "so you're a woman." Harhar. NO, WTF! I don't expect everyone to be a lesbian feminist (this might be a lie) but yeesh! Just sub "human" for "woman" and everything would be fine.

David says

Salon.com is just so much duller ever since Heather H. left. Their new TV critic has yet to write a column that maintains my interest. Hell, I can't even remember his name.

Unlike the vastly overhyped "Bossypants", which IMO barely qualified as a "memoir" at all (Fey told us nothing about her life that wasn't already public knowledge), this memoir does not shy away from exploring some of the difficult aspects of Havrilesky's past. This takes courage, but Havrilesky's candor makes this a much more interesting book than "Bossypants", which the Guardian reviewer correctly identified as more of an exercise in concealment:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio...>

It's also much funnier.

Jennifer says

Heather Havrilesky! I'm sorry! I love you and everything you write in Salon/NYT Magazine, but I didn't really like your book, and I really wanted to! I think the issue with this memoir was, nothing seemed to particularly happen in Havrilesky's childhood that was out of the blue or particularly engrossing, and the way that she naturally writes is more cerebral and less action-oriented, which isn't really conducive to a memoir where, to a certain extent, it's all about shock value. This book reminded me a little of Sarah Vowell's sassy ramblings (but maybe less hilarious?), but Sarah Vowell at least had some quirky hobbies and Vowell writes a little less educatedly and a little more wryly. I don't know. I'm sad. I wanted to like this, I really really did.

Miriam says

to be honest-- I'm not so much rating this book as memoir (it's more like a linked collection of essays

anyway, probably labeled memoir by the marketing department) but for H Havrilesky's impact on my life via the Ask Polly column. So much humanity, humor, empathy and heart, with a good dose of sourness thrown in, which is why I like her so much. OK people are saying that she didn't have enough bad things happen to her (?) That is not the point of an essay-- rather, it is the observations. And the part where she remembers her mother getting out in the middle of a camping trip just sticks with me. As well as Heather's thoughts on her father's reaching for grace while dating three women at the same time (& going jogging), her mother's Greek chorus of friends, and her high school ice cream job. This book is very honest-- sometimes social being a social winner means being a social winner (in a chapter on the cheerleaders) and yet I found her comments on the generosity of her cheerleader friends so humane and thoughtful. A lot of us have trouble getting over our outcast natures, and being honest and reaching out and actually connecting to people, and taking our own emotions and troubles seriously. That's why I love the "If a tree falls" chapter. <3 this book and also Ask Polly.

Karyn says

I love Heather Havrilesky's Television Reviews on Salon, and so I was very excited when I found her book during my pillaging of the Milford Borders' final day of sales (I think I bought 20 books for \$25 that day-- thanks, bad economy).

Havrilesky writes about her parents' failed marriage and how its impacted her adulthood: subject matter that's right up my alley. She also does a nice job looking at the larger context of disaster during the years she grew up. In many ways, this is the memoir I've wanted to someday write.

But the problem is: Havrilesky's book is a little boring. It's oddly organized--I think perhaps she strung together posts from her blog, because it reads like a series of disconnected blog posts. She does wayyyyy too much telling and not enough showing. She brings great insights into her subject matter, but, she doesn't earn those insights. She's often funny, but, there's not enough humor happening in scene. Her book taught me a lot about what I should not be doing in my own work; that's always a good thing.

If you do read this book, think of it not as a book-length project but as a collection of essays, and that will help a lot.

Laura Horan says

Felt like hanging out with an old friend

Book Bingo: Memoir

Katherine says

An uninteresting memoir about someone's uninteresting life. The "uninteresting life" part would have been fine if she had found some interesting or truly funny way to write about the average things that happened to her. But she didn't. So her parents got divorced. So she has flaws. BIG WHOOP. I kept reading this book hoping that it would have some kind of positive realization, but the maybe four times Havrilesky was

positive it felt saccharine and fake. Overall a cliched, repetitive, unnecessary book.

Rachel Ann Brickner says

Heather Havrilesky is one of the funniest writers I've ever read while still remaining earnest and tender. I laughed out loud on the street, on the bus, at the coffee shop, everywhere I took this book. I smiled in recognition, covered my mouth in embarrassment, and almost cried from grief while reading. Structurally, I was impressed by how Havrilesky handles time throughout the narrative. At first, I was suspicious of how we move through time in a way that could feel disjointed, but the book is organized thematically more than anything else, so this ultimately worked for me as a reader. I'm grateful to have finally read this memoir after being a longtime Ask Polly reader. I can't wait until Havrilesky's next book.

Dave says

Havrilesky grew up in Durham, NC and sprinkles this memoir with some fun details from the Bull City. The narrative is disjointed even for a memoir, but I persevered and was rewarded with some insightful, moving writing about growing up with difficult parents whom she still adored.

Emily says

The author shares my hometown, so it was fun recognizing the landmarks, roads, schools, etc. that she writes about. Also, the last few pages of this killed me.

"Please remember, we were not a disappointment. Not at all, not even close. We were gorgeous and strong, you and me. We were terrible and troubled and utterly divine."

Kater Cheek says

I've really enjoyed Havrilesky's advice column "Ask Polly" where she gently and empathically and sympathetically tells people in the nicest possible way exactly why they are full of crap and how all of their problems are their own fault. I love her voice, and figured I would like to read her memoir.

This is close to a "my childhood is worse than your childhood" memoir, except that it's more humorous than that. Havrilesky never takes herself too seriously, or thinks that her problems were as bad as her young self imagined them to be. This memoir doesn't feel like it's shooting for pure humor, however, as there are parts that made some profound emotional observations. (Specifically the chapter in which she reflects on her parents' divorce when she was young.)

One chapter, in which she describes how and why honest is not the best policy and how her therapist made her interpersonal relationships worse, made me laugh out loud. Any book funny enough to make me laugh out loud more than once is worth the cost.

