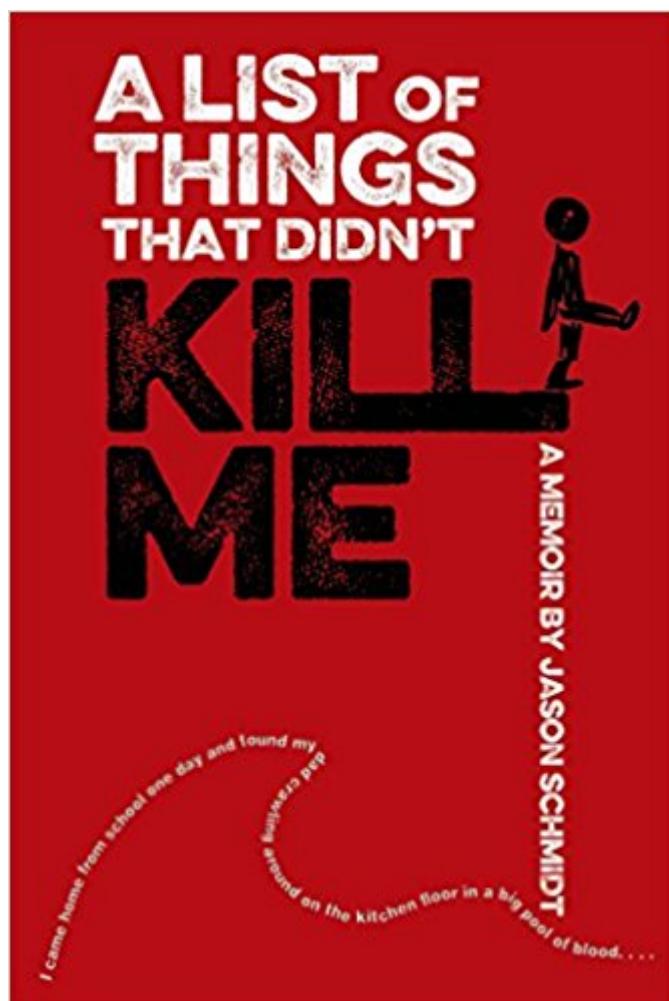


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# A List Of Things That Didn't Kill Me: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Jason Schmidt wasn't surprised when he came home one day during his junior year of high school and found his father, Mark, crawling around in a giant pool of blood. Things like that had been happening a lot since Mark had been diagnosed with HIV, three years earlier. Jason's life with Mark was full of secrets—about drugs, crime, and sex. If the straights—people with normal lives—ever found out any of those secrets, the police would come. Jason's home would be torn apart. So the rule, since Jason had been in preschool, was never to tell the straights anything. *A List of Things That Didn't Kill Me* is a funny, disturbing memoir full of brutal insights and unexpected wit that explores the question: How do you find your moral center in a world that doesn't seem to have one? *A List of Things That Didn't Kill Me* by Jason Schmidt is a gripping, heartbreaking young adult memoir.

## Book Information

Paperback: 432 pages

Publisher: Square Fish; Reprint edition (January 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1250073723

ISBN-13: 978-1250073723

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 57 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #333,569 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Teens > Social Issues > Physical & Emotional Abuse #11 in Books > Teens > Social Issues > Family > Parents #505 in Books > Teens > Biographies

## Customer Reviews

Gr 10 Up—In this disturbing, heartbreaking, and inspiring memoir, Schmidt provides an account of an unstable childhood and adolescence. The prologue begins with Schmidt at age 16, coming home to discover his father crawling around the floor, covered in blood. The author then pulls back, describing his early years. After Schmidt's parents separated, his father, Mark, took custody of him. The two moved from one decrepit home to the next in Seattle, as Mark abused and sold drugs, barely earning a living. Schmidt's voice will resonate with teens as he writes candidly about his father's negligence and abuse, adeptly capturing what it was like to grow up impoverished, the hostility he encountered at school, the injuries and illnesses he endured, his difficulty finding and

keeping friends, and the challenges of adjusting to his gay father's unstable romantic and sexual life. As Schmidt grew older, he believed more and more that he and Mark could never become "straights," or normal people. When the author reached adolescence, during the early 1980s, Mark and many of his friends were diagnosed with AIDS. It was a period when many gay men were dying, when those with HIV faced stigma, and when the effectiveness of medical treatment was minimal. Once realizing his father's fate, Schmidt feared what the future had in store but was inspired to take control of his life. VERDICT This unflinchingly honest work is a strong choice for readers who appreciate unfiltered stories, can stomach gruesome details, or aspire to work in social services. *VOYA* • Jess Gafkowitz, New York Public Library --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Schmidt’s memoir is heartbreakingly honest and touches the soul . . . Schmidt’s brilliant prose will fascinate and appall teens and adults who read memoirs.” *Kirkus Reviews* “Schmidt’s memoir spans his childhood to late adolescence and chronicles his abuse and near homelessness at the hands of his drug-addicted gay father. This is an emotionally demanding read.” *Publishers Weekly* “This title joins the ranks of harrowing true stories like Dave Pelzer’s *A Child Called It* (1993) and Augusten Burrough’s *Running with Scissors* (2002), compelling accounts of childhood despair that are painful to read and impossible to put down.” *Booklist*

As I finish reading this book, I wish I could give it to every teacher and elected official in the country. Where else could they get this understanding of what it's like to live as a good many of their students/constituents live, with drugged relatives and unstable homes and prevalent abuse and moments of love? And I want to give it to all my friends who love good writing and wry humour. And to all those who would marvel at how the book consistently uses the growing child's voice, presenting events as the child experienced them. Since I can't give it to you all, go get it! Read it and weep, and laugh, and remember your own growing up and rejoice that this man grew out of his chaotic childhood into a person able and willing to write this exceptional book.

It is important that you read this book. And, conveniently, you'll enjoy it, too. Here's why: The author

provides true stories, and doesn't tell you how to interpret those stories or what to make of a world that allows children to have such experiences. He does, however, tell the stories with just enough distance and wit to make them readable; without humor, the sadness and cruelty and neglect might be too hard to acknowledge, but with humor, it's fascinating and illuminating, and, well, funny! If you don't know such stories already, you're missing key elements of what it is to live in this world. If you already know similar stories, because you've seen them (whether through your own eyes or a friend's) I think you'll enjoy this viewpoint, and the sense that you (or your friend) is not alone. This book is a lovely proof that your upbringing need not define your adulthood, and that one person can make a huge difference for another. Read it for awareness and for inspiration. Then pass it on to others! A great read for adults as well as young adults.

Harrowing. Enthralling. Fascinating. Inspiring. I wish I had Jason Schmidt's facility with words to adequately describe the impact of this book. Knowing that he survived this horrifying childhood to become a productive and successful man, as well as a loving and gentle husband and father, fills me with hope.

Very impressed at Schmidt's debut book, 400 pages simply flew by. Jason has an amazing voice and style for the teen audience. At first I thought it too realistic and abrasive for a young readership, and then recognized that shielding / abridging / censoring is the last thing this audience wants. They can handle it. I found that the book stirred in me several emotions which made me appreciate the power of Jason's writing and his story: Incredulity at the events that spanned his young life; Empathy for how awful teen life can be and how cruel the players within it; Guilt for being a part of a system that allowed families like his to slip through the cracks and endure such hardship. A worthy read, certainly. My only complaint goes along with the challenges of writing a memoir - how to narrate and how to end it. I found myself wanting storytelling like Oscar Wao (albeit fiction) and an ending like Glass Castle; instead, the reader is left with hope but not a promise of a better day, which ended up being perhaps more thought-provoking in the end.

Jason Schmidt writes beautifully about a situation we've all faced: being smart enough to know that the grownups are wrong, but too naive to know the right thing to do. This is the story of how Jason learned what was right for him, despite the wild, contradictory "truths" he was told by the people around him. What makes this book thrilling is the combination of darkly humorous setups and wide eyed wonder that Jason brings to the story. When all the grown-ups are wrong, of course you'd do

as Jason did. And enjoy as much (and as little) as he did. And then live with the consequences. As the book progresses, Jason grows up and his family tragedies continue to pile up. The combination of bad history and rigged choices becomes wrenching for the reader. You want to reach in and help, or tell him that he's right and you can't win that game. But instead the pressure (and Jason's sardonic setups) continue to build up until his escape in the final pages of the book.

We mostly love this because our family member, Frank W. Ross, was a part of this journey. Even though Frank is not with us anymore, his "pay it forward" mantra will live on and we couldn't be happier. Beautiful things can come out of terrible situations and I, too, will be donating this book to our local high school, our local HIV case management program, library, etc. And, hopefully, many scholarships will be given out to others who need that extra support that can move them from despair to hope.

This book is a must read for anyone who enjoys reading memoirs. It's especially refreshing to read a memoir of a non-celebrity. Schmidt does a great job of creating a chaotic setting of life on the fringe in the 1980's. This one is a real page turner and goes by very fast. Highly recommend! My only complaint is that the "story" ends when he is ~18 years old and you never really hear about what happened during the next 25 years.

Jason Schmidt provides an authentic, gut-wrenching, thought-provoking and real view of a childhood that was anything but idyllic and in a voice tempered with humor and humanity, guides us through a coming of age while living with his drug-addicted, most times abusive, gay father who eventually contracts HIV. I know Jason personally, and was aware of some details of his childhood, but feel fortunate to have been able to read the book and have a fuller understanding of the amazing person he has become despite the challenges of his difficult "childhood." It's a great read, a real "page-turner." It is engaging because of Jason's unflinching commitment to telling the story as he lived it. It can be a tough read at times. There were times I might have closed the book in despair if I didn't have the advantage of knowing the man who emerges on the other side of the things that didn't kill him. The book doesn't include all of the happy ending, but enough that the reader is left with a great appreciation for resiliency!

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