



Still Points North: Surviving the World's Greatest Alaskan Childhood

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Part adventure story, part love story, part homecoming, *Still Points North* is a page-turning memoir that explores the extremes of belonging and exile, and the difference between how to survive and knowing how to truly live.

Growing up in the wilds of Alaska, seven-year-old Leigh Newman spent her time landing silver salmon, hiking glaciers, and flying in a single-prop plane. But her life split in two when her parents unexpectedly divorced, requiring her to spend summers on the tundra with her “Great Alaskan” father and the school year in Baltimore with her more urbane mother.

Navigating the fraught terrain of her family’s unraveling, Newman did what any outdoorsman would do: She adapted. With her father she fished remote rivers, hunted caribou, and packed her own shotgun shells. With her mother she memorized the names of antique furniture, composed proper bread-and-butter notes, and studied Latin poetry at a private girl’s school. Charting her way through these two very different worlds, Newman learned to never get attached to people or places, and to leave others before they left her. As an adult, she explored the most distant reaches of the globe as a travel writer, yet had difficulty navigating the far more foreign landscape of love and marriage.

In vivid, astonishing prose, Newman reveals how a child torn between two homes becomes a woman who both fears and idealizes connection, how a need for independence can morph into isolation, and how even the most guarded heart can still long for understanding. *Still Points North* is a love letter to an unconventional Alaskan childhood of endurance and affection, one that teaches us that no matter where you go in life, the truest tests of courage are the chances you take, not with bears and blizzards, but with other people.

Still Points North: Surviving the World's Greatest Alaskan Childhood Details

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Childhood Leigh Newman**

From Reader Review Still Points North: Surviving the World's Greatest Alaskan Childhood for online ebook

Julie Ekkers says

Still Points North is a moving, reflective, and deeply thoughtful memoir by a woman for whom my heart broke, for whom I rooted, and for whom I was so glad, ultimately, to cheer, "Yes!" The author's parents divorced when she was young, and her childhood was then divided between her mother in Baltimore and her father (who eventually remarries and has other children) in Alaska. In Still Points North, the reader is able to watch the author reconcile her knowledge and impression of her parents and the events of her childhood that she accumulated as a child with what she comes to know as an adult, with adult sensibilities. It's a wicked moment all around when children realize their parents are fallible, and parents realize that the jig is up: their children have seen them be all too human. What is so compelling about Still Points North is watching the author fight toward the grace that comes with realizing that sometimes, people who unwittingly hurt us and disappoint us, can also be loving us, as best they know how.

Melissa says

This is a tough one to rate and I'm not sure why. Her story is surely unique and I'm always drawn to insights into very different American experiences (most Americans get little exposure to the myriad cultures and ways of life in our own country). I think I wanted to be able to get into her psyche just a little more than I did. There is such a spectrum of deep emotional damage among the characters, but I wasn't quite able to feel them - to connect with the drivers behind the damage. It was like getting close enough to someone to be compelled by them, but not close enough to know them. I wish I could have gotten through the surface of it all.

Lynne Curry says

I loved this book, It was written with poetry and depth, a moving story, nonfictional but with a character arc. A truly good read.

Anna Rabinowicz says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The writer's voice is luminous, and the stories about her childhood in Alaska are compelling and unusual. I found myself wrapped up in these tales...didn't realize how much time had passed until I looked up at the clock. Highly recommended.

Holly Booms Walsh says

Refreshingly honest and open, this memoir was a mixed bag. On one hand, it's cleverly written with lovely

wry descriptions and a knack for telling details that encapsulate a person's character in few words. It is also a captivating description of a very unorthodox childhood in the wilds of Alaska, with fishing and hunting and Great Alaskan plane mishaps. It is also a sad story of how her parents' divorce broke her emotionally, and a rather wretched description of a lost and lonely and selfish young woman who almost wrecks her own marriage. I found it hard to like the protagonist - though I am very happy that the epilogue seems to hint that she is pulling it together in the end.

Jessica says

I was pretty disappointed with this book. It's a memoir about the author's childhood growing up in Alaska, so I thought it would be really interesting. But, it was more about how much her parent's divorce screwed her up both as a child and into adulthood. Her parents split up when she was 8 and she and her mother moved from Alaska to Baltimore, Maryland, but she spent each summer in Alaska with her Dad. Neither of her parents really talked to her about the divorce and she always felt like her loyalty was torn between her parents. She was a pretty dysfunctional adult and the last section of the book is about her struggles at the beginning of her marriage. Overall the tone of the book was sad and depressing and even though she decided to stick with her marriage it didn't seem great either. It wasn't a great book and I wouldn't recommend it.

Tina says

Newman captivated me. What an honest, transparent, refreshing coming of age story!

Newman's writing style is beautiful. In one sentence she fills your heart with emotion, gives you a giggle and leaves you with a photo. Truly amazing.

"Dad is smiling, too, but a happy, terrified smile, as if the world might turn out to be a bubble and pop."

"Trying to disguise my long for their dumb young bliss with a safe, prickly coating of distain."

And this book isn't just for children affected by divorce or Alaskans. This story is for anyone who is searching for their place in the world and has struggled along their way. Highly recommended.

Miss Leigh, you have gained a fan. I look forward to any of your future writings.

I received this book as a Goodreads giveaway. A free book does not equal a favorable review.

Jeanine says

I liked it very much and read it in a single night. I am not ready to summarize my thoughts yet.

Deborah aka Reading Mom says

Leigh Newman's memoir reminded me once again of the damage parents can do to their children through lack of communication and empathy during and after divorce; this time told through the voice and seen through the eyes of the child herself. The author's description of growing up in such diverse environments (Alaska when with dad, Baltimore when with mom) and with such pole opposite expectations of behaviour from each parent(outdoor, Great Alaska Kid with dad, charming, well-educated,cultured young lady with mom) only added to the confusion and loneliness of her life. Never feeling she could meaningfully and deeply communicate with either parent about her fears and emotions, never knowing exactly what happened to their Great Alaskan Family, feelings hidden, putting on her dad face, her mom face, her school face, her job face, constantly on the go, never feeling she could trust, love, or be loved. I'm glad that in the end (although it took a long time), Leigh was able to break the chain of dysfunction and make the decision to let love and trust in, to start her own family and treasure what she now has, finding her unique place in the world. This poignant, candid, and well-written book was an enlightening read.

Doug says

Still Points North is bracing and beautifully written. Especially captivating is how Leigh Newman traces the evolution and decay of the various denizens of fin de siècle America as they variously slide, crumble or leap into a new century. Just as she has convinced you that she is but a victim of the narcissisms of her father, who emerges in the first part of the book as sort of a revanchist hippie, and her mother, who begins as a feminist free-thinker that can't quite embrace womanhood, she lets you glimpse the complexity of her parents' parents and then the -- ahem -- uniqueness of the younger Ms Newman's own parenting practices, she makes you see, finally, suddenly, that the buck only really stops when we take full responsibility for where are, who we are and what we are doing. There is a a magically lucid moment with a dolphin off of the coast of Ecuador that encapsulates the woman and is not to be missed. Read this book.

Aj Sterkel says

Memoirs are so hard to review! What am I even supposed to say? “Yes, author, your life is sufficiently entertaining. I approve.” Well, **I approve of this memoir. It is sufficiently entertaining.**

Leigh Newman spends her early childhood in Alaska with her “Great Alaskan Father.” He flies his own plane, hunts, fishes, and lives off the land. Leigh’s mother isn’t as enthusiastic about all the nature stuff. When Leigh is seven, her parents divorce, and she moves to a wealthy part of Baltimore with her mother. She suddenly finds herself in a world of private schools, petty girl cliques, and museum trips. When she grows up, Leigh becomes a travel writer and travels all over the world, but she never feels at home anywhere. This memoir explores how the places we live shape who we become. What happens if you don’t feel like you belong anywhere?

“If you can't be yourself with yourself, how can you be you with other people?” – *Still Points North*

Unlike a lot of other memoir authors, **Leigh Newman can definitely write.** The book is full of keen observations and vivid descriptions. The author helps the reader see Alaska and Baltimore and how difficult it is to transition between the two. There are some heartbreaking scenes in this book. **It all feels very honest.**

I think anybody who has kids and is going through a divorce needs to read this memoir. It shows the importance of communicating with your kids and letting them know why their lives are changing. You can't just dump them into a new world and expect everything to work out fine. It won't work out fine.

I was surprised at the humor and liveliness of the writing style. Divorce is a depressing subject, but the book isn't depressing. Some parts of it remind me of Jenny Lawson's memoirs (but with less over-the-top ridiculousness). So, if you like Jenny Lawson's books, you'll probably like this one. The ending is hopeful. Leigh learns that parents are human. They make mistakes. Just because a parent screws up doesn't mean they don't love you. **Overall, this is an uplifting book.**

"Pain only seems scary while you're waiting for it to happen. After it does, it's just hurt and recovery." – *Still Points North*

I have the same problem with this memoir that I have with a lot of others. I don't see the author/narrator the same way she sees herself. **A lot of this book reads like a list of "all the ways my parents' divorce ruined my life." But, from my perspective, the author's life wasn't ruined.** It seems like her parents were pretty wealthy, even though her mother worked all the time. Leigh (mostly) went to great schools. She moved to New York, became a travel writer, got to see the world. She had a family of her own. This life doesn't seem too messed up to me. Actually, it sounds like an amazing life. I'd like to see the world.

Despite my complaint, I really like this book. I read most of it in one night. **The author's voice pulled me in and made me want to keep reading.**

TL;DR: Engaging memoir about divorce and belonging. I recommend it.

Melanie says

Not quite as powerful as Sheryl Strayed's "Wild" or as eloquent and striking as Jeanette Walls' "The Glass Castle", this memoir was enjoyable nonetheless and quite moving at times. I give it a 3.5.. Some of the narrative choices in terms of pacing and timing were jarring sometimes, not letting the emotions build up on their own, ruining the element of cumulative tension that is essential to any good story. It's always fascinating to see how crucial and determining a childhood is in anyone's life and its subsequent effect on one's existential philosophy.

Kris Irvin says

If there was a point to this book, I'm still searching for it. If you want to read a bunch of self important drivel with random stories from the past (that may or may not be true) thrown in between the nonsensical ramblings about Great Alaskan Fathers and how pointless marriage is, this book is for you.

If, however, you wanted a memoir about growing up in Alaska, or about reconciling with your father, or about anything with any meaning whatsoever, you're better off looking elsewhere.

What a waste of Great (Possibly Alaskan) Trees.

Sarah says

This book is the memoir and first book of a woman my age who grew up traveling worldwide and eventually settling in NYC. It takes you vividly through every step of the way, recreating the characters, the emotions, the places, tastes and smells. Leigh is a former travel writer and child of divorce, who grew up between tom boy Alaska where she hunts and fishes, and Baltimore, where she learns about antiques and literature (among other things). It is a fascinating journey, peppered with hilarious laugh out loud moments, several near death experiences, and a great deal of a struggle. As someone who has known the author for over ten years in NYC, I was amazed at her ability to bring memories to life! I felt I could reach out and touch them they were so true to life. Highly recommend!

Kathy Piselli says

I actually first read this book during a trip to Alaska when it first came out. I loved it then, love her writing and her turns of phrase (one that has stayed with me is saying something that's uncomfortable "fast, like ripping off a strip of duct tape"). Also, I never could get the Elizabeth Bishop poem that gives the book its title out of my mind. My father was dying the slow death of dementia which does give the family a long time to say goodbye, but in another sense the goodbye already happened in the past. He finally succumbed this year and I turned to this book for a reread. Somehow it reminds me of him - a long, slow, heartrending divorce, and the desire to return to a fairy tale.
