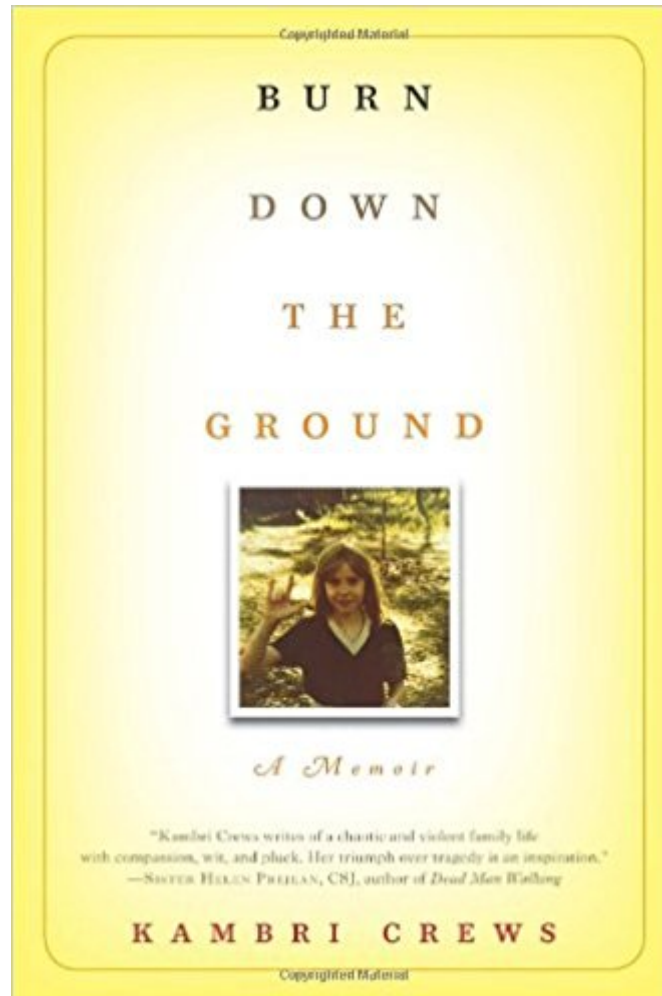




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Burn Down The Ground: A Memoir



Synopsis

In this powerful, affecting, and unflinching memoir, a daughter looks back on her unconventional childhood with deaf parents in rural Texas while trying to reconcile it to her present life—a one in which her father is serving a twenty-year sentence in a maximum-security prison. As a child, Kambri Crews wished that she'd been born deaf so that she, too, could fully belong to the tight-knit Deaf community that embraced her parents. Her beautiful mother was a saint who would swiftly correct anyone's notion that deaf equaled dumb. Her handsome father, on the other hand, was more likely to be found hanging out with the sinners. Strong, gregarious, and hardworking, he managed to turn a wild plot of land into a family homestead complete with running water and electricity. To Kambri, he was Daniel Boone, Frank Lloyd Wright, Ben Franklin, and Elvis Presley all rolled into one. But if Kambri's dad was Superman, then the hearing world was his kryptonite. The isolation that accompanied his deafness unlocked a fierce temper—a rage that a teenage Kambri witnessed when he attacked her mother, and that culminated fourteen years later in his conviction for another violent crime. With a smart mix of brutal honesty and blunt humor, Kambri Crews explores her complicated bond with her father—which begins with adoration, moves to fear, and finally arrives at understanding—as she tries to forge a new connection between them while he lives behind bars. *Burn Down the Ground* is a brilliant portrait of living in two worlds—one hearing, the other deaf; one under the laid-back Texas sun, the other within the energetic pulse of New York City; one mired in violence, the other rife with possibility—and heralds the arrival of a captivating new voice.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Photos from Burn Down the Ground Click on the photos to enlarge. Kambri, age 9, in front of the outhouse saying "I love you" in sign language. Kambri's father and their fancy Toyota! Oh, what a feeling!

Surprisingly funny and uplifting, this touching account of a deaf family living on the edge is raw and candid. Crews writes beautifully, honestly, and with deep affection about her conflicted relationship with her father and her love for her family, in good times and bad. "Paula Froelich, author of the New York Times bestseller *Mercury in Retrograde* Kambri Crews is an exceptional writer. Her voice is fresh, fearless, and singular with an ability to craft a story you will never be able to forget, but also won't be able to stop talking about." Mandy Stadtmiller, columnist, New York Post "A riveting American tale, delivered with clear eyes and great love. In the face of incredible hardship, Crews endures." Jane Borden, author of *I Totally Meant to Do That* "Addictive and heartbreaking, Kambri's memoir demonstrates both true grit and a sense of humor that exists only among the very sharpest of those who have survived extraordinary childhoods." Julie Klausner, author of *I Don't Care About Your Band* "Imagine living in a tin shed, growing up as the hearing child of deaf parents, seeing your father attack your mother, or sneaking gum into prison. Those are just half of the challenges Kambri Crews faced growing up. *Burn Down the Ground* is a story of triumph in the face of poverty, alcoholism, violence, and, worst of all, heartbreakingly powerful love." Annabelle Gurwitch, co-author of *You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up* "In my eyes, Kambri Crews is a heroine. It takes a person a survivor with a miraculous magnitude of strength to be able to see the human side of her father in spite of what he did." Julie Rems-Smario, executive director, DeafHope "Kambri Crews is a survivor, and a fiercely witty one. Her memories of growing up with two volatile deaf parents in the backwoods of Texas will inspire, delight, horrify, and amaze you. The matter-of-fact way in which she describes traumatic and painful events puts me in mind of Jeannette Walls's *The Glass Castle*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and Rick Bragg's *All Over but the Shoutin'*. Read this unforgettable account of an American family's tragic explosion and the tough-as-nails young woman who walked out of the ashes to tell her tale." Sara Benincasa, author of *Agorafabulous* "As well-paced and stirring as a novel." In her fluid narrative | Crews neither

wallows in self-pity nor plays for cheap black-comedic yuks. Instead, this book stands out for what matters most: Crews's story, bluntly told. "Elle Magazine" [An] unsparing yet compassionate account of [Crews's] dysfunctional childhood and the father who both charmed and victimized her family | Poignant and unsettling. "Kirkus" "Harrowing" [What Kambri has done is face the truth with an unflinching eye | a remarkable odyssey of scorched earth, collateral damage, and survival | intensely readable. "Publishers Weekly" [A] vivid and affectionate depiction of life with two deaf parents.. like Mary Karr's *The Liars Club*, *Burn Down the Ground* interweaves the toughness and laughter of an impoverished Texan childhood | Her story is a testament to her resilience, and to the power of recognition and forgiveness to heal childhood wounds. "BookPage" [Crews] renders a compelling testament to the strength of the human spirit. "Booklist"

This is a wonderful book, and I feel I'm better for having read it, on top of having enjoyed it immensely. Ms. Crews should be applauded for doing what so many authors of this type of memoir find so difficult to do: walk the fine line between sadness, happiness, and the truth -- both as she saw it then and sees it now. There is no sad-sack whining followed by triumphant bragging here. What there is is a life. Some people have it better than you, others have it worse. And that's the same for everyone, isn't it? She does an amazing job of not being judgmental, while calling a spade a spade where she sees it. And throughout there is a fascinating story of personal growth through interesting circumstances, all told with purpose, yet without an agenda. Isn't that everything we could ask in a memoir?

I stayed up past my bedtime to finish *Burn Down The Ground*. Crews is a fantastic storyteller who you can't help but root for. In the midst of chaos and violence, she finds hope and humor. This would make a great book club pick. Heck, I might even start a book club and make this the first book we read. Highly highly recommended.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this book and was pleasantly surprised. I looked forward to reading a chapter each night and was truly as surprised at the ending as if I had been reading a mystery. I didn't want it to end.

A loving portrait of an unique and colorful character--a father who has great creative energy, but is in jail for violent crime. I wish the book could have dug into why this man is this way--was it

upbringing, being Deaf in a hearing situation, or innate nature? Or of people who have helped and brought about what seems to have brought about spectacularly balanced, humorous people despite a challenging past. A thoroughly absorbing read and many thanks to Kambri for allowing us to see into her family.

It has been a week since I finished this book and it is still "staying" in my heart. I didn't realize the effect it had on me until I began sharing with family the experience of reading it.So, I clicked on "edit" and changed it from 4 stars to 5 stars..IMOThe paragraph below was my review with 4 stars:My most favorite memoir is "The Glass Castle" by Jeannette Walls. I place this book by Kambri Crews as my 2nd most favorite. At first, It seemed a little too detailed regarding the very early years of her childhood ...and yet, the ending would not have been near as gripping or breathtaking had she not intricately taken the reader thru the "Hero" relationship established with her father??? I loved this book - the struggle of a child's "perception" of Life and Family versus the nagging moments of Reality along the way.

Wow...just wow! An amazing story that interested me as I am hard of hearing with two hearing aids and have a younger brother that is hard of hearing too. What makes this one so interesting its told from the hearing daughter's view of the situation with two parents dealing with deafness and the frustrations of living with it along with a Father who was abusive and a mother who was trying to get past it and care for her kids. You could see how Kambri wanted to remember the good in her father but as a child had been a bit shielded from all of what her Father was doing and how manipulative he was. Its a sad story about alcohol, drugs, emotional and domestic abuse, poverty and living with deafness and neglect. Amazingly Kambri seems to have gotten past it all as an adult once her Father is in prison as it all comes out between her and her mother and she really sees her Father for what he really was. I also found it interesting that for a few years Kambri didn't live that far away from us when we lived in Katy, Tx at the same time. Plus ironically we now live in the Tulsa area and at one time lived south of Dallas so I could relate to the areas she mentioned in the book along with the deafness. This was a good story to read as it also showed what the deaf people had to deal with before certain laws were made along with two deaf parents trying to raise a family and work in the real world along with their frustrations and downfalls and breakdowns...a family shattered by it all.

This is the story of a dysfunctional family, and it covers the life of Kambri Crews, her brother David,

and her deaf parents. The memories are both humorous and terrifying. It does hold your interest, though, and you do want to know what happens next. I would recommend it, but know there is both violence and heartbreak.

"Burn Down the Ground" is a fascinating read in many ways. To grow up white and poor in America has become a bit of a novelty, something to be both lampooned and romanticized through pop culture - think Showtime's "Shameless" or "My Name is Earl" - and this is coming from someone who had one leg firmly planted in that life. Yet it is its own thing because although I believe there exists a solidarity amongst the poor across color lines, it is also the case that white people are privileged and so underneath any story of a truly poor white person is the chronic cultural question of: "how can you not make it work? You have so many more opportunities. You were born in America for Christ's sake!" In many cases in a story like this, the answer lies with the failure of parents and other authority figures. And in "Burn Down the Ground", the failure is spectacular (though the author's Mom gets my full sympathy and understanding). Kambri Crews tells her story with radical honesty and grace that is reminiscent of Jeannette Walls. The book also puts you into a world that many don't know: the world of the deaf. The opening chapter of "Burn Down the Ground" is so richly vivid as seen through the eyes of a very young Crews: the hearing child to deaf parents who sparkle and strut their way through a deaf bowling tournament at a medium-sized town's alley. Crews' remembrance of her mother simultaneously singing, using sign language and rhythmically swaying to the beat of a Fleetwood Mac song while others watch on in reverie is a joy to behold. Seeing how those shiny adults devolve is not, but man...I was glad to be there for the ride. A must read.

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