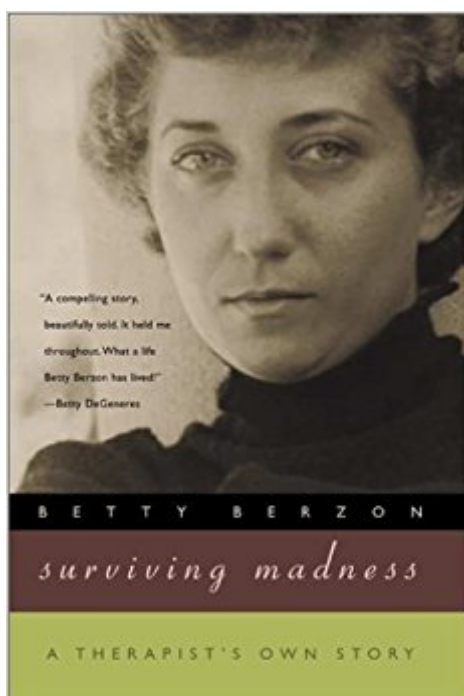


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Surviving Madness: A Therapist's Own Story (Living Out: Gay And Lesbian Autobiographies)



Synopsis

Betty Berzon, renowned psychotherapist and author of the bestselling book *Permanent Partners*, tells her own incredible story here. Berzon's journey from psychiatric patient on suicide watch with her wrists tethered to the bed rails in a locked hospital ward to her present role as a groundbreaking therapist and gay pioneer makes for purely compelling reading. Berzon is recognized today as a trailblazing co-founder of a number of important lesbian and gay organizations and one of the first therapists to focus on means of developing healthy gay relationships and overcoming homophobia. Her sometimes bumpy road to success never fails to fascinate. Along the way she encounters such luminaries as Anaïs Nin, Eleanor Roosevelt, the Sitwells, Evelyn Hooker, and Paul Monette. Her recollections here provide a collective portrait of her fellow pioneers and a stirring lesson in twentieth-century history. It is, however, the intimate story of Berzon's own private passage toward self-discovery from mental breakdown and suicide attempts, through hospitalization, eventual triumphant recovery, and her own coming out as an open lesbian at the age of forty that makes this memoir an urgent, insightful, and deeply emotional testament to human survival.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Betty Berzon is a treasure to the gay civil rights movement, a pioneering therapist who has shown

many the way in battling homophobia. Now, in *Surviving Madness*, we get a rich account of the fascinating journey of her own life, the remarkable people and places that punctuated it, and the war that raged inside her head within a culture that has often demonized homosexuality. It is an enthralling, instructive, and ultimately uplifting story." — Michelangelo Signorile, author of *Queer in America and Life Outside*

Living Out: Gay and Lesbian Autobiography Joan Larkin and David Bergman, Series Editors

This is a striking illustration of a complex woman with an expansive life story. I read it for a graduate school class looking to explore how doctors wrote about their patients and ended up finding it a compelling mixture of how thin the line can be between who is the healer and who is the person to be healed. Fabulous role model for LGBTQ people as well. Phenomenal coming out story.

What an amazing biography about an astounding psychologist! Definitely a must read for anyone "out" in the field of psychology. Also, great for anyone interested in historical steps made by leaders of the APA community!

A very compelling story of a top Psychotherapist who was also a deeply closeted lesbian for the 1st half of her life and a gay activist in the 2nd half. Ms. Berzon opens her heart to the reader as she shares her joys and her sufferings. She is also an excellent writer and for readers who would like to become writers, she offers some valuable insight.

This book is well-written and covers a lot of ground; it was just too impersonal for my tastes. The book starts out with the air of a traditional memoir, but towards the latter half it changes tone and becomes more of an historical account. It's an excellent history of the gay/lesbian rights movement as seen through Berzon's eyes; unfortunately, if you're not familiar with the players in that movement then it's easy to lose your bearings. Berzon's rise from the depths is inspiring, however, no matter what your background. It just got lost for me in all the names and dates towards the end of the book.

In addition to being an autobiographical tale, Betty Burzon's memoir, "*Surviving Madness*," is an amazing account of the gathering of forces of humanistic psychology, social organizations, and scientific truth that exploded in American life in the latter half of the twentieth century. Among the

professional theories developed toward humanistic treatment, are client-centered therapy, therapeutic groups of a great variety and the scuffle to finally remove homosexuality as a disease from the APA list of maladies. Medical treatment and pharmaceuticals, too, developed during this period reduced the danger of STDs and new medical and surgical techniques to perform abortions. The medical side of this equation surely implies a woman's right to access to the control of their own reproductive systems. These new learnings, however undeniable, became a part of the fabric which lay behind greater sexual exploration when there were cures that had not previously existed. Thus, the century saw that aspect also supported by the U.S. Supreme Court. At the same time, other minority groups (e.g. gay men and lesbians) as well as ethnic minorities worked toward greater access to civil rights. Unbelievably, Betty Burzon was involved in leadership roles in many of those activities. Today, perhaps most people consider these developments "progressive," but at the time of their introduction, they excited much negative attention, especially those ideas concerning sexuality or racial inequity. A residue of protest against such change remains in the U. S. today. The telling of this history is all the more meaningful because author Burzon lived through that period of explosive change while "Surviving personal Madness." It seems to this reader that the story is more powerful because Betty Burzon was there, i.e. an eye witness to the scene and often a principal player in the action. A second dramatic aspect of the book is the revelation of the Burzon family's painfully dysfunctional behavior which destroyed her childhood and left emotional scars that plagued most of her adult life. Incredibly struggling against enormous mental fear and pain, Betty Burzon conquered everything she tried whether starting a bookstore in her early twenties to become one of the nation's outstanding booksellers in three years. Further, while herself a patient, she was chosen to be a psychological aide for mentally ill patients, and went on to be recognized for her rare talents in that arena. Later, following horrifying psychotic episodes, Betty Burzon rose up to survive and grow stronger in recovery. From the many hours Betty Burzon spent in therapy, it seems her own illnesses led her to seek that career for herself. Also, because she was so talented and indefatigable, an extraordinarily capable woman, she was able to organize and administer programs and workshops as well as the necessary tasks of a board member and executor of professional organizations. "Surviving Madness" is well-written - a style that is reportorial, descriptive without being flowery, accessible and to the point. A reader quickly understands this extraordinary woman, identifies and glories in her victories and weeps for setbacks when they occur. "Surviving Madness" belongs on every contemporary reader's shelf both for its untangling of the many strands of the American Twentieth Century civil rights movement and the courage of a singular woman in American history.

Difficult to imagine that this revered guru of same-sex relationships was for many years the victim of her own internalized homophobia. The highs and lows of Berzon's life are vividly recounted, punctuated with names of friends like Anais Nin, Evelyn Hooker, Paul Monette, and Michael Murphy. It's no spoiler to say that she ultimately found happiness in a long-term relationship, making her tale that much more inspiring. Highly recommended.

An unbelievable journey that shows courage, an innate ability to survive, and a strength of character we all wish we could emulate. I know *Surviving Madness* was written with tears, because I shed them in so many parts of her story. Once I started reading the book I didn't stop till I had finished. What greater review can you give....

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