

Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life

By Amy Krouse Rosenthal

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From the author of the viral Modern Love column, "You May Want to Marry My Husband."

In *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life*, Amy Krouse Rosenthal has ingeniously adapted the centuries-old format of the encyclopedia to convey the accumulated knowledge of her lifetime in a poignant, wise, often funny, fully realized memoir. Using mostly short entries organized from A to Z, many of which are cross-referenced, Rosenthal captures in wonderful and episodic detail the moments, observations, and emotions that comprise a contemporary life. Start anywhere—preferably at the beginning—and see how one young woman's alphabetized existence can open up and define the world in new and unexpected ways.

An ordinary life, perhaps, but an extraordinary book.

Cross-section of ordinary life at this exact moment

A security guard is loosening his belt.

A couple is at a sushi restaurant with some old friends. They are reminiscing. In the back of their minds, they are thinking of being home.

A woman is trying to suck on a cherry Lifesaver but will end up biting it in six seconds.

A little boy is riding the train home with his dad after spending the day together at his office.

A man is running back into a grocery store to look for a scarf he dropped. He will leave with the phone number of a woman who will become his wife.

Words the author meant to use

Flair, Luxurious, Panoply, Churlish, Dainty, Folly

Wines that go nicely with this book

reds: Marcel Lapierre Morgon (France), Alario Dolcetto d'Alba Costa Fiore (Italy)

whites: King Estate Pinot Gris (Oregon), Landmark Chardonnay Overlook (California)

Book, standing in the bookstore holding a

If I am standing there with the book in my hand, one of three things has already happened: Friend recommended it. Read a good review. Cover caught my eye.

I can appreciate a cool cover. But it's like the extra credit part of a test—it only enhances an already solid grade. Getting it right won't help if most everything else is wrong. And getting it wrong won't hurt if most everything else is right. (There are countless books I cherish whose covers I don't like too much, or cannot even now recall.) The interior of the book—the terrain of its pages, where all those words took me, the tiny but very real spot it ultimately occupies in my mind—that becomes the book.

Next I go to the flaps. The front flap needs to intrigue/not bore me, and the bio needs to tell me just enough about the author. I'll do my best to extract the author's entire existence from their 2-X-2 inch photo.

Off to the back cover. I'll be momentarily impressed when I see a blurb by a hot writer like _____, but I know that it is just as likely that I'll like the book as hate it regardless of these quotes. I look at them in a more voyeuristic way, like a literary gaper's delay: Wow, the author knows So and So. Bet they send each other clever text messages. Really the only thing I can gauge from the blurbs is my own pathetic jealousy level.

To get a true sense of the book, I have to spend a minute inside. I'll glance at the first couple pages, then flip to the middle, see if the language matches me somehow. It's like dating, only with sentences. Some sentences, no matter how well-dressed or nice, just don't do it for me. Others I click with instantly. It could be something as simple yet weirdly potent as a single word choice (tangerine). We're meant to be, that sentence and me. And when it happens, you just know.

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Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life By Amy Krouse Rosenthal Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"I have not survived against all odds. I have not lived to tell. I have not witnessed the extraordinary. This is my story."

Amy Krouse Rosenthal, one-time *Might* magazine columnist and self-confessed hater of the segue has written a snappy, random, remarkable memoir--the first of its kind to give readers an honest flaws-n-all perspective of what it's like to be...ordinary. Initially inspired by the "bizarre, haphazard arrangement" of *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, Rosenthal has collected a lifetime of thoughts, observations, and decisions, and created an alphabetized personal encyclopedia, complete with cross-referenced entries and illustrations. Rosenthal reveals the minutiae of her life, from pumping gas ("Every. Single. Solitary. Time I go to get gas I have to lean out the window to see which side the tank is on"), to witnessing her son's accident ("I saw with front-row-seat clarity, just how quickly, randomly, and mercilessly your child can be taken away"), and in turns both playful and poignant, engages the reader in effortless and stimulating conversation.

Whether you are laughing aloud or nodding along, reading *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* is like being introduced to a new friend--one that you automatically connect with and feel compelled to share. Fans of Dave Eggers, David Sedaris, and shows like *Arrested Development* and *Scrubs* will appreciate Rosenthal's quirky, conversational humor and dead-on observations. Writers will see the book as a contemporary portrait of the fledgling artist, and should enjoy her aptly named, "Evolution of this Moment"--a timeline tracking her growth as a writer from her first word ("more") to publication of her fourth book.

Modesty prevents Rosenthal from acknowledging herself as anything other than ordinary--that, and the fact that she has not "survived against all odds"--but that certainly does not mean she has nothing to say, or to share. Her delightful memoir is a reminder that life is not always an adventure, but it can be full of sad, silly, and important moments that make it worth living. Witness the generosity of an author who is willing to reveal so much of herself, not just as a writer, but also as a person--share this delightfully quirky, utterly enjoyable book with family and friends with a note, "Here is someone I think you should meet." --Daphne Durham

Amazon.com Exclusive Content

The Lost and Found Project

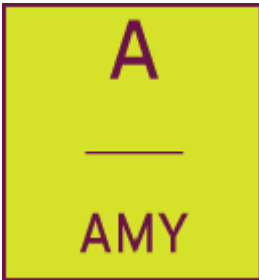


Between January 25th and February 1st, hundreds of copies of *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* were intentionally left in random places (taxis, public bathrooms, laundromats) in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. Each book was inscribed with a note from the author, and the finder was encouraged to report back to Rosenthal's website (www.encyclopediaofanordinarylife.com) when and where the book was discovered.

Watch the "Lost and Found" video directed by filmmaker Steve Delahoyde, documenting Rosenthal's test run and featuring her theme song, "This is My Story."

Listen to the theme song written by Tony Rogers.

Ordinary Life from A to Z



How do you interview a smart, creative, clever author like Amy Krouse Rosenthal? You agree to let *her* start with the questions, and hang on for the ride. Find out more about Amy and sneak a peek behind-the-scenes at Amazon.com with this decidedly ordinary email correspondence between Ms. Rosenthal and senior editor Daphne Durham.

Read our unusual interview with author Amy Krouse Rosenthal.

Extra Ordinary Excerpts

A

AMY ROSENTHAL

My father-in-law informed me that my married name could produce these two anagrams: Hearty Salmon. Nasty Armhole. I cannot tell you how much I love that.

B

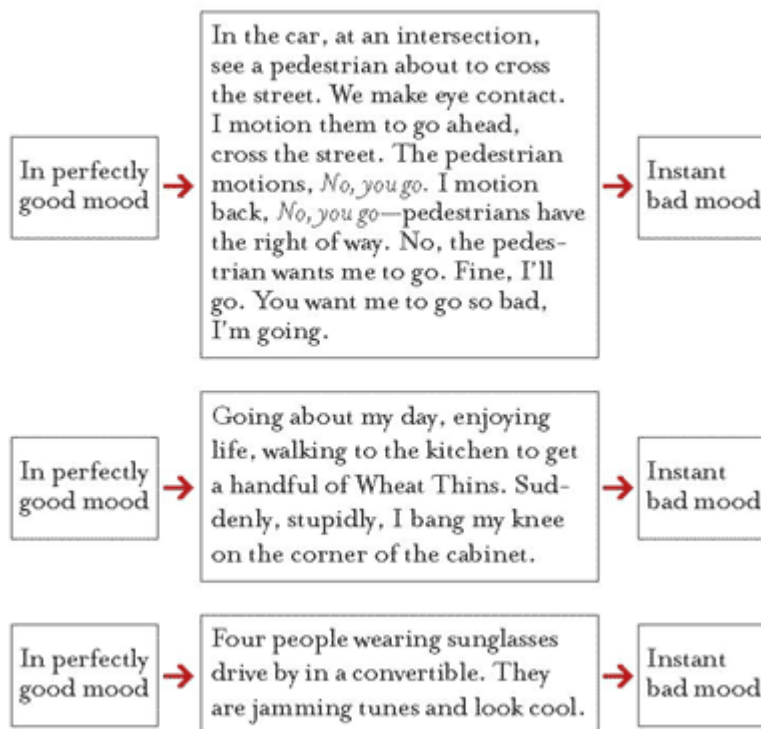
BOWLING

It would be difficult to convince me that leaning has no effect whatsoever on the outcome of my bowling.



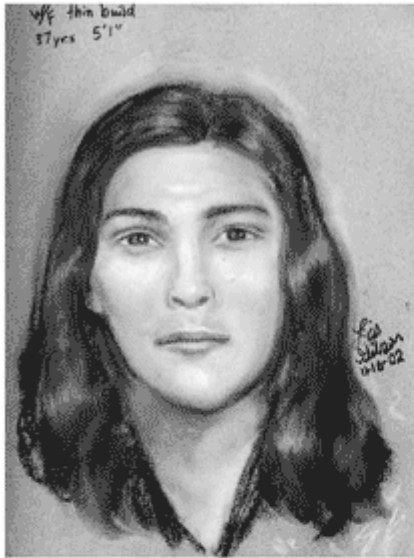
G

GOOD TO BAD MOOD



IDENTITY

Experiment: How might I look as a *Wanted* poster?



Drawing based on father's description to police sketch artist.



Drawing based on husband's description to police sketch artist.

WABI-SABI

I was noticing how more and more I was feeling both happy (actually, content) and sad at the same time. Happiness always seemed to be tinged with sadness, and, strangely, vice versa. I started asking around if anyone knew a word that meant happy and sad at the same time. People offered up *melancholy*, but that wasn't it—that's more sad than happy. And no, it's not *bittersweet*, either. I'm talking about complete happiness and complete sadness simultaneously, the way Van Morrison's music makes you feel, let's say. Maybe it's 55 percent happy, 45 percent sweet/sad. It's the way you feel when you run into a friend from grammar school, someone you haven't seen in twenty years, and it turns out he is no longer nine years old, he's a grown-up telling you about his work, he is a balding, padded stand-in, but it's so fantastic to see him, this generational ally you were shuffled along with from grade to grade, this person who once made up a significant percent of your world because back then your world was only ten miles wide and thirty kids deep, and as you hug good-bye—*it was so great to see you, so amazing, okay you too, take care*—you know that this chance encounter may very well constitute your one and only reunion.

It is feeling content, peaceful, hyper-aware of loss, in awe, perfectly, gently happy/sad. What is the word?

I continued probing friends, even strangers, for a few weeks; eventually I got the hint that no one really felt this way, and anyway, there didn't seem to be a word for it, so I stopped asking/searching.

A couple months later, I picked up *Utne Reader* magazine. I was

From Publishers Weekly

Rosenthal likes lists: of low points in her life, codes that people memorize, sounds that seem loud though they're actually quiet. She loves inadvertently mysterious signs, like this public restroom gem: "PLEASE DO NOT FLUSH EXCESSIVE AMOUNTS OF TOILET PAPER OR SHOES DOWN THE TOILET. THANK YOU." She's collected some wonderful words like "flahoolick" (meaning generous and expansive) and "wabi-sabi" (which seamlessly fuses two moods), as well as some pairs of oddly similar words like applause and applesauce. But what to do with all this trivia? Why, frame it all around some lists of childhood memories and career milestones, alphabetize it and—voilà—she's assembled something like a memoir. Rosenthal warns readers that her life has not been extraordinary in the least—she hasn't "survived against all odds," recovered from any addictions or been a genius, misunderstood or otherwise. Not only does she consider her life "ordinary" (actually, she's worked for ad agencies, written a few books and worked for several public radio stations), but her preoccupations are with the entirely mundane: breaking appliances, leaving messages on answering machines, loading dishwashers, loving Q-tips. Browse this "encyclopedia" in any bookstore, and it looks too cute to resist, especially with its coy, reference book-type illustrations. Whether it remains endearing once it's home depends on how fascinating people find someone else's somewhat ordinary life.

From [Booklist](#)

Who would challenge a Chicago parking ticket on grounds of karma (and succeed)? Or have a professional police artist draw sketches of her based on descriptions from her father and husband? Professed "ordinary" person Amy Krouse Rosenthal, that's who, and in this immensely readable and frequently hilarious encyclopedia-cum-memoir, Rosenthal alphabetically explores her life as a woman who has *not* "survived against all odds." With vignettes, lists, charts, and much more, we're introduced to a woman who grew up in a happy family, got married, and had kids. Rosenthal documents with considerable wit experiences we all have but never think twice about (how hard it is to load someone else's dishwasher, for instance). But what's most delightful is that there's a real story here--readers will find themselves connecting the dots through the entries, slowly uncovering more and more about Amy's life. And as she moves away from "Amy" and toward the final entry, "You," readers are likely to learn something about themselves as well--like how much there is to celebrate in their own ordinary lives. *Leon Wagner*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Stacee Stern:

In this 21st century, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive right now, people have to do something to make these individuals survive, being in the middle of the particular crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that oftentimes many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Yes, by reading a e-book your ability to survive improve then having chance to remain than other is high. For you personally who want to start reading the book, we give you this Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life book as starter and daily reading guide. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

Carolyn Foley:

As people who live in often the modest era should be revise about what going on or info even knowledge to make these individuals keep up with the era and that is always change and make progress. Some of you maybe will update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice for you but the problems coming to a person is you don't know which you should start with. This Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, since this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Jason Norfleet:

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Herbert Mikula:

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