



How We Survive Here

Families Across Time

The discovery of 19th-century letters propels Claire Gebben on a challenging quest spanning two centuries and five generations, weaving together a compelling memoir of how we must strive to survive.

Claire Gebben, letter translations by Angela Weber

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Hook

When Claire Gebben's German relative Angela visits her in the Pacific Northwest, she brings along a surprise—ancestral letters written by immigrant blacksmiths to Ohio containing untold stories, and keen impressions of the New World. Captivated, Claire embarks on a quest to write about her ancestors' lives. Spanning two centuries and five generations, this memoir weaves together a story of how we strive to survive.

Full Description

As far back as Claire Gebben can remember, her grandmother wrote letters to the “relatives in Freinsheim,” relatives living in a rural wine-making town in Germany. After her grandmother died, Claire's father and family kept the tradition alive, writing letters and emails, and also visiting the relatives in person. Then in 2008, when Claire's relative Angela Weber travels from Germany to visit her in the Pacific Northwest, Angela brings along a surprise—over a dozen 19th-century letters found in an attic in Freinsheim written by their common ancestors.

As the two set out to translate the Old German Script, Claire and Angela become captivated by the stories, and the immigrants' impressions of the New World. That same fall, Claire enters a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program and chooses to write about the people of the letters for her graduate thesis. Her decision sparks a journey both challenging and inspiring, a research adventure including four days of intensive blacksmithing and a month-long stay in the German Rhineland-Palatinate.

Even as Claire wrestles to bring her ancestors to life on the page, she suffers through loss in her own life and finds strength through new family connections. Via 19th-century correspondence,

21st-century emails, and present-day relationships and encounters, *How We Survive Here: Families Across Time* weaves together a story of how we strive to survive, amid experiences past and present, and within the broader sweep of history.

How We Survive Here includes translations of over two dozen authentic 19th-century letters written by German immigrant blacksmiths and wagon-makers to Cleveland, Ohio.

Selling Points

- The author has an MFA in Creative Writing through the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts, and a BA in Psychology from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- The author's writing career includes ghostwriting and work as a columnist on writing, reading, and publishing for *The Mercer Island Reporter*.
- Her debut novel *The Last of the Blacksmiths* opened opportunities for her to speak at various venues and share her work.

Platform

- Physical review copies to major reviewers and newspapers.
- Author will promote book at readings and signings and on her website and blog.
- Outreach through social media.

About the Author

Claire Gebben was born and raised on the southeast side of Cleveland, Ohio. After earning a BA in Psychology from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, she settled in the Pacific Northwest, where she worked as a resource center manager, newsletter editor, communications director and ghostwriter, all the while raising a family. In 2011, she earned an MFA in Creative Writing through the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts. Her debut historical novel *The Last of the Blacksmiths* (Coffeetown Press, 2014) is based on the true story of her German immigrant ancestor who pursues the American dream. Since the novel's publication, she's been invited to speak at various venues on the untold stories of 19th-century immigration history, on creating legacies using family genealogies, and on research and writing. An adventurer at heart, she enjoys hiking, bicycling, traveling, and even on occasion blacksmithing. Ms. Gebben is married, has two adult children, and lives on Mercer Island, Washington.

Author's Prior Titles: *The Last of the Blacksmiths* (Coffeetown Press, 2014)