



## What I Thought I Knew

*Alice Eve Cohen*

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**What I Thought I Knew** Alice Eve Cohen

**A personal and medical odyssey beyond anything most women would believe possible**

At age forty-four, Alice Eve Cohen was happy for the first time in years. After a difficult divorce, she was engaged to an inspiring man, joyfully raising her adopted daughter, and her career was blossoming. Alice tells her fiancé that she's never been happier. And then the stomach pains begin.

In her unflinchingly honest and ruefully witty voice, Alice nimbly carries us through her metamorphosis from a woman who has come to terms with infertility to one who struggles to love a heartbeat found in her womb - six months into a high-risk pregnancy.

*What I Thought I Knew* is a page-turner filled with vivid characters, humor, and many surprises and twists of fate. With the suspense of a thriller and the intimacy of a diary, Cohen describes her unexpected journey through doubt, a broken medical system, and the hotly contested terrain of motherhood and family in today's society. Timely and compelling, *What I Thought I Knew* will capture readers of memoirs such as *Eat, Pray, Love*; *The Glass Castle*; and *A Three Dog Life*.

## What I Thought I Knew Details

Date : Published July 9th 2009 by Viking Adult (first published April 4th 2009)

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Author : Alice Eve Cohen

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## From Reader Review What I Thought I Knew for online ebook

### **Kelly Collins says**

This was a quick read (started & finished in one day, even with a toddler running around). It reminded me very much of my brother & sister-in-law's experience with an OB who made some pretty serious errors and did not diagnose my nephew's life threatening disabilities until my SIL was well into her third trimester. We were all grateful to have their son in our lives for the 12 short days he lived, but the idea of a wrongful life suit certainly has entered my thoughts over these last four years.

Ms Cohen's story, I suspect, is not entirely unique. Putting words to her feelings, many of which could be considered shameful, was a brave thing to do. This was a gripping, honest memoir and I'm glad I was introduced to it on NPR.

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### **Cheryl says**

Author, Alice Eve Cohen met her second husband, Michael at a conference. Michael is ten years Alice's junior. Alice already had a daughter named Julia when she and Michael met. Things were looking up for Alice, when she received the biggest shock of her life...she is pregnant!

What I Thought I Knew is author, Alice Eve Cohen's memoir into her life as a mother, wife and writer. I really liked this book more than I thought I would. I say this because memoirs are not typically my first book of choice. Mrs. Cohen shared every aspect of what she went through when she learned she was pregnant at age forty-four. The "What I Know" lists that Mrs. Cohen made were good. I liked learning what she knew as she was learning about different things. Mrs. Cohen opened the door into her life and let readers in. From what I read about Michael, he seemed like a nice guy. He was a good father to Julia. Eliana is one special and bright girl. There were some humorous moments. What I Thought I Knew is a book worth reading.

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### **Tattered Cover Book Store says**

Jackie says:

44 year old Alice was sick. Months of tests and doctor's exams left her with a portfolio of diagnosis--early menopause, a bladder disorder, middle age loss of muscle tone, a malformed reproductive system because of her mother's use of DES, sore breasts from wearing underwire bras, anemia, depression, and a large lump in her lower abdomen. Finally a new doctor sends her to the hospital for an emergency CAT scan and the real problem is revealed--Alice is 6 months pregnant (despite having an internal exam by her gyn just 4 weeks before who somehow missed the fact there was a baby in there). Which is a REAL problem given all of the medications she's been taking, no pre-natal care until that point, her age and the condition of her uterus. Her story is horrifying--a litany of medical malpractice and callous behavior that ran a chill up and down my spine. Her agony is palpable and haunting. You won't forget her story.

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## **Ryan says**

The story of a woman who unexpectedly becomes in her 40's, and doesn't find out until she is 6 months along. I think a lot of the drama in the book is sort of lost on me, as I had my own terrifying pregnancy nightmare where I lost the baby at 6 months. It just didn't make the kind of impact on me that it might have made on someone who hadn't had experiences similar to mine or the author's. I wasn't a huge fan of her style of writing - at one point in the book she said that she had lost of her sense of humor, and I think this showed in her writing. Her tone was very flat, clipped, and devoid of affect. It was like being in the head of a very, very depressed person, and while perhaps that was the desired effect, it wasn't exactly fun reading, to put it mildly. Again, having been through a high risk pregnancy, I just didn't care to relive it, or deal with somebody who was in the midst of it. And for what it's worth, I never lost my sense of humor - it was what got me through. So reading this humorless memoir was a bit of a chore.

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## **Jill says**

So you're 44 years old and this is what you know: your life is looking pretty darn good, at long last. You're getting married in a few months to an all-around great guy, your adopted daughter is thriving, your career is more and more satisfying. Except or this large, hard lump in your abdomen, things are really looking up.

But that lump does not go away. In fact, it gets bigger. You are anemic, depressed, and more than a little worried about cancer, since you're a DES daughter. Your gynecologist assures you that everything is fine.

And then you get the word that you are pregnant. Six months pregnant. Which, you think, is an impossibility since you were told you were infertile and likely in menopause.

This is the scenario that Alice Eve Cohen faced. By profession, Alice is a solo story performer, and she does what comes naturally – she tells a story. And what a story it is.

Her insurance plan, predictably, sucks. No high-risk obstetrician wants to take her on since Oxford Liberty pays so little and so late. Since she IS a DES daughter, her cervix is likely to dilate early... plus, at her age, 75% of pregnancies end in miscarriage. Oh yes, and she has a deformed uterus, no prenatal care (in fact, she was on heavy hormones) and a definitely ambivalent attitude about carrying to term. At six months, termination of the pregnancy is challenging and yet there's a good chance the baby might have major issues.

Urggghhh!

Alice Eve Cohen's story veers from a black comedy to a Kafka-type nightmare. She doesn't try to pretty it up. Even those of us who are pro-choice will wince at her desire to end her pregnancy so late in the game, and precisely what that entails. Her inability to feel love for the fetus – soon-to-be baby – is in direct contrast to the love she feels for her adopted daughter, and is fueled, the reader suspects, by her high-adrenalin fear of facing the unknown.

She's besieged with doubts about what is loving and what is right. And she is forced to explore what it truly means to be a mother. Is it biology? Unconditional love? Can a real mother's love be conditional? Is she a real mother...if she doesn't yet feel love, hopes it will awaken in her, and in the meantime gives us everything to protect the child?

Alice can be selfish. Temporarily insane. Infuriating! Yet her voice is authentic and candid and she doesn't shy from describing exactly how it was – and is. As we take the journey through doubt and a broken medical assistance, we ultimately arrive with her at renewal. While not a literary masterpiece, I give it 5 stars because once started, it's hard to tear oneself away from the trek.

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### **Sheree says**

4.5 stars

This was such an open, honest read for me. Actually it was more than a read, it was like sitting with a best friend and sharing your darkest thoughts and fears, things you don't usually tell others for fear of being judged. I found Alice Eve Cohen's candidness and amusing sarcasm refreshingly honest, it was an intimate look at thoughts and feelings not often voiced, in circumstances one would hope never to find themselves in.

I found it very easy to identify with the author having had my own struggle with infertility, high risk pregnancies and uncertain outcomes but I think this is a story that most people will find compelling. It could easily be titled "Pregnancy Disaster 101" but with Alice Eve Cohen's dark humour, understandably pessimistic views, the story's engaging format and my obviously warped sense of humour I saw the funny side in what really was a medical fiasco.

What I Thought I Knew is about life, love, losses and finding the courage to face all challenges. Kudos to Alice Eve Cohen for her courage during this journey and in bringing us her very touching story.

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### **Sara says**

Here's what she thought she knew:  
That she was in love with her soul mate.  
That she had a beautiful adopted daughter.  
At 44 she had finally enabled her dream life style and financial situation.  
It was medically impossible for her to get pregnant.

Only to discover during a medical crisis that she was indeed six months pregnant. Due to her age and prenatal neglect, her pregnancy is high risk, and she is grossly under insured. The doctors tell her with certainty that her baby will be born with one deformity or another. And that is if she can avoid a likely a pre-mature delivery. It is far too late for a legal abortion, so Cohen has few options in the face of an increasingly frightening pregnancy.

As each new piece of worse news filters in, Cohen repeats and repeats what she knows of her situation in a mantra of literary panic. The scarily candid Cohen admits to being not sure if she is capable of loving or raising her surprise baby. She also admits those thoughts are despicable, and yet it is hard to read that a mother could have such thoughts, but it is harder not to feel for her predicament. Cohen's emotional story of a mother grappling with guilt and shame on the eve of an inevitable change of life is unforgettable.

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### **Mary (BookHounds) says**

#### **ABSOLUTELY LOVE IT**

I adored this book! Once I started reading *What I Thought I Knew*, I couldn't put it down. This is one memoir that will stick with you and you will want to read about the next chapter of Alice Eve Cohen's life. I have just found out that she is working on another memoir so I can find out what happened next. Normally, memoirs are just one story, but this one left me wanting a bit more. I become so wrapped up in the author's life that I can't wait to find out how everything turned out.

The book takes you through all of the heart breaking decisions that Cohen had to make with her health and that of her unborn child. It put a face on the major problem that the lack of healthcare can have on a person. Even when that person has access to doctors and minimal health insurance, it is difficult to obtain quality care. Cohen finds herself with serious of bewildering symptoms. She is told that she is in early menopause and told she can't possibly get pregnant. A series of blunders by multiple doctors leads to serious complications when that turns out to be untrue.

This is also a cautionary tale of how people shouldn't believe whatever their doctors' tell them at face value and that they need to take an active part in their health. Even when Cohen tried to do this, she was shot down for trying to be proactive in asking for a pregnancy test. I mean, did you know that those tests are only accurate during the first three months after conception? She is really lucky that everything turned out somewhat in her favor and that her daughter was born with issues that could be helped. I really think that Cohen did every woman a favor by writing this book.

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### **Lauren says**

I really enjoyed this book and was barely able to put it down (it's also quite short, making it an easy read). It is well-written and brutally honest in a way that endeared the author to me. But, I can't lie: this book terrified me!! The entire time Alice was pregnant I just sat there wondering what I would do and how I would react and it honestly made me panic, which either means Alice Cohen is a great writer or I have some

psychological problems (probably a bit of both). And, probably due to my "position" in life right now (unmarried and financially unstable), I couldn't help but relate to the idea of an unexpected pregnancy also being unwanted and the guilt associated with that thought.

Let's not even get me started on the medical- and insurance-related issues that this book touches on. How on EARTH some of the people Alice encounters are medical PROFESSIONALS escapes me completely!! And if you needed a reason to support health care reform, you'll have plenty of reason to after you read this.

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### **Vivek Tejuja says**

So when I laid my hands on "What I Thought I Knew" (actually it was sent to me as I wanted a review copy), I read the synopsis and thought to myself: How different could this memoir be from the others that I have read? Each memoir consists of the same ingredients anyway (as though writers dish recipes out – freshly baked!), don't they? I am glad that I was mistaken and proved wrong.

When I started reading the book, to be very honest I could not put it down and I am not just saying this because I received a review copy. I am saying this because though I am not a woman, I felt for Alice and what she was going through. More than that I guess I knew it was not easy for her and yet she was there – facing it all and emerged a different person.

Who would not? Imagine that you are a 44 year-old woman living life the way you are supposed to. Your career has never looked better. Your boyfriend and daughter seem the only world to you. Everyday seems like a blessing and that's precisely when you think something will happen (its true, I completely agree with this theory)and it does. You feel your stomach turning hard and wonder what is wrong with me? You have been diagnosed as being infertile in the past and before you know it you are six months into pregnancy and without a clue.

I can't begin to imagine what would have been my state had I been in that situation. To add to which you have a history of ailments in your family which could either endanger you or the baby. There is a lot to what meets the eye in the book and one has to only dig deeper while reading it. The emotions. The chaos. The battle at some point to take a stand and make a moral decision. The idea of loving a child, who may be you were not prepared for. Its true. How does one do it?

That's the beauty of the book, according to me. It is real and honest. Alice does not mince her words or her feelings and I love that. It is a rollercoaster ride of emotions that all must venture to ride at least once. Go read it! It is brilliant.

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### **Jeanette says**

This read was a single sit down. It takes no deciphering at all. There are sections of lists at points of time which fill whole pages with about 20 sentences at the most per page. So it's very short and a quick read. It doesn't need any serious full attention to plot either. It's Alice telling her year and then an aftermath. Honesty, memoir style and the personalities do come through. Especially her own. No shrinking violet,

Alice!

For me, it would have been 4 star if she hadn't been so obnoxious blunt and just plain offending with some categories of comments and judgments about "the other". Whoever the other was in the pertinent issue of the moment. Judgmental- very!

The gist is a pregnancy story. One that couldn't happen and should have been noticed. But how many doctors for various other issues she had visited and addressed in the spring to fall months? I refuse to count them. A lot of doctors. With a lot of advice and medicine. All taken. Most of it completely wrong. And of course, harmful.

It's about her physical state plus her state of mind. And the decisions she confronts and then eliminates. Usually because the circumstances are so gnarly and criteria unusual enough.

It lost a whole star for her authority trust cognition and how she never writes of/for any realization in that fact of her own doctor obedience at all. And the judgments she makes too (she seems to make them in a yes I will, no I won't merry go round sounding board method) because IN that mode, she nearly always ignores her own instincts/guts. Mostly she just negates them completely. Seems so strange to me to have a woman with this much talent to creative individualism and word power doing the work she does of difficult one woman shows- BUT OUTSIDE of that field- having so much intelligence and common sense dominated by AUTHORITY. She virtually ignores her own knowledge for "knows better" overthrow. And she does it constantly, even within all the aftermath tale, IMHO.

It was brave of her to expose the entire, but I think the hyperbole/ snark intrinsic to the style of the telling made me want to overlook that bravery factor by the third quarter of the book. It really turned me off some of her treatments to her future spouse- those especially.

Her oldest daughter, Julie- I was happy for her and it was nice to hear about years later.

It's not a bad microcosm of life. You just never know. And those who plan it all out to a T? The story of her friend, Dina- that was a excellent point of example to put in the middle of this.

In my own set of friends/ peer experiences: TOO many doctors, TOO many medicines, TOO many anxiety regimes for stuff that never happens or existed, TOO many examples of doctors' giving terrible advice taken as if it were written in stone, just TOO much information at the wrong times and for the wrong reasons. But possibly, less lawsuits? Doubt it, but maybe.

Wouldn't mind hearing about now- 17 years later? She's 62 now and he's barely 50? I'm such a cynic.

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### **Anna says**

Although I only gave the book three stars - it was because four stars means I really liked it, and that's not the words I would use to describe reading this book. If it were stars for "I really appreciated this book" then it would be four stars. I love how Cohen is simply frank about a very difficult journey - one that makes her questions what she believes, what she wants, and what she will do. There is no debating of anything here, no telling us what we should do, just Cohen relating her experience with an unexpected and uncertain pregnancy and her thought/heart process.

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### **esmepie says**

I would give the contents of this book a '5' rating, but the actual writing knocks it down to a '3.' The author is a performance artist and the whole book reads like it would be much better as a performance piece. The book is structured with an arc from pregnancy to wedding with lists of things she "knows" along the way. To me, it seemed the whole book could have been tightened into a longish magazine article, and the author would have benefitted greatly from an editor who knew how to write dialogue. The remembered conversations are so poorly written, stiff and formal.

But, the story is so provocative. The author discovers at 44 that she is six months pregnant after a life of thinking she was infertile. She has had no prenatal care and struggles with her decision to not only have the baby, but also whether to keep it after birth. This is a real account of someone grappling with ethical decision both before and after her daughter's birth. I couldn't put it down despite the writing.

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### **Linette Blaszak says**

This book was completely different then I thought it would be. I thought it was about someone similar to myself with 2 kids, this was not the case. Never being depressed myself it was hard for me to read about her trials and difficulties but I empathized with her none the less. I hope to never be in that place mentally. I was happy with the ending!

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