



This I Know: Notes on Unraveling the Heart

Susannah Conway

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Part memoir, part creative journal, *This I Know* chronicles Susannah's journey through bereavement and healing, taking the reader on a ride into the possibilities of unravelling — and healing — her own life too. It's a guidebook of sorts, a collection of thoughts and theories, with creative exercises for you to try, and dreamy light-filled Polaroids dotted throughout the text. It's a cosy blanket for your heart.

This I Know: Notes on Unraveling the Heart Details

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From Reader Review This I Know: Notes on Unraveling the Heart for online ebook

Kristi says

This is a really lovely and inspiring book about overcoming grief, loss and other obstacles to live a heartfelt and authentic life. The writing is breathtaking in parts and the photos are gorgeous. It's a nice pick-me-up of a book if you're looking for inspiration.

Donna Wynn says

I am halfway through and can't put this book down, it speaks directly to the heart. I have followed the author's blog for quite some time and this book is like having her right in my home with me! Love it!

Jill Salahub says

Disclaimer: I love everything Susannah Conway does, her blog, her ecourses, her photography, and now this book, This I Know: Notes on Unraveling the Heart. She is consistently honest, open-hearted and funny, willing to share her “wobbly bits” along with the brilliant beauty of life.

Any woman who has experienced grief and loss (that is, every woman alive) should read this book. For some of us this is the loss of a loved one, for others the loss of self, or for others still it might be the loss of both. This book is a map of one woman’s personal journey through bereavement and rediscovery of self, but it is also offered as a guidebook for those making their way along the same path, traveling through that same territory of loss. And yet, as Susannah says, this “is not a story about grief, although it informs everything I’ve learned about life. This is a book about unraveling the layers of our lives and exploring what we find in order to better understand ourselves, our relationships, and our path.”

This book embodies, through both word and image, the tender heart of that sadness, not shying away from the reality of it, the truth that life can kick your ass but that we can also lean into joy and be softened by beauty, can and will encounter grace, and know love. We may have tears streaming down our face or feel bad about our thighs, but with our eyes and heart open wide to both the brutality and beauty of life, we can heal, we can live a wholehearted life.

This book might first be about one woman’s individual journey towards wholeness, but in the end, it is an offering to the reader, an invitation to unravel our own hearts. Sometimes, simply knowing that others have walked a similar path is all the medicine and advice you need, but Susannah Conway takes it one step beyond, offering a reflection at the end of each chapter, small creative exercises that invite the reader to explore, to unravel. In this way, it is a book that one could come back to again and again.

In the end, this book is like a long, intimate conversation with the best girlfriend ever, one who has been where you are, can authentically sit in that dark place with you, but who also has a map that shows the way

out, an invitation to the rest of your beautiful life.

Amelia Maness-gilliland says

While I enjoy this authors blog on occasion- I really did not understand the purpose of the book- it felt disjointed- it was also a very similar experience as her course- no new material really. The writing is basic- yet sincere. With that said- the author has clearly mastered Polaroid photography- a real expert.

Jenny says

Something different happened when I finished reading This I Know: Notes on Unraveling the Heart. Something that has only happened after watching 10 Things I Hate About You. I immediately wanted to start it again.

I want to re-read and savour every single word Susannah Conway has written. I want to read every single blog post she has ever published, so I can continue to lap up her beautiful way with words. She's the blogger I wish I was. The writer I'd love to become.

Susannah's boyfriend, very unexpectedly, died of a heart attack. But this book is more than just a story of dealing with grief and loss. It's about finding yourself, reconnecting with your creative side, learning to appreciate yourself. Dotted throughout with Susannah's beautiful polaroid pictures, this book is a delight for the eyes as well as the soul. I especially loved the 'reflection' exercises at the end of each chapter.

I've never dealt with grief directly, not true grief. Not grief that stops you getting up in the morning. Nor grief that suffocates and interferes in everything that you do. But I've been close to it. Last year, a wonderful friend's boyfriend was killed in a car accident. Unexpected and cruel. And just last week my good friend from korfball lost her dad. A stroke. Mortality slapping me in the face again. Making me realise that my parents aren't young any longer and death doesn't give a shit about age anyway. I don't want to have to lose someone to make me realise that I want more in life. To make me find myself. To make me strive for the things that really matter.

The last chapter particularly spoke to me. Susannah writes of being an 'introverted soul' and how working from home is perfect for her as it brings a sense of freedom into her life. I wanted to share this paragraph with you:

'I've only touched on a few possibilities in the space I have here, but whether you're in between jobs, craving change, going back to work after a period away or just sure that you were meant for something more, the best place to start is within, unravelling the dreams that call to you when you close your eyes.'

Cliché, but it's almost as if she was writing a note directly to me.

I'm already recommending this book to so many people. If I could buy you all a copy I would, because if you're a blogger, I believe this book will touch you in a way no other book will.

Jennifer Loudon summed up my thoughts quite well:

"You hold in your hand one of those books. You will buy multiple copies of it to press into the hands of friends. You will mark it up with notes, and read passages again and again. You will not lend this book out. This book was forged in grief and is lit by love. Feast your creative heart!"

I'm off to purchase my very own copy right now. I will laden it with sticky notes and read it time and time again.

Todd says

To "ravel" is to "entangle or confuse". "This I Know" is a story of un-raveling ... untangling or eliminating (reducing? can we ever truly eliminate?) confusion in the life of the author. After a period consumed by intense grieving, confusion and a near-total loss of self (although the author, I think, makes an excellent case that she was quite "lost" before her loss) caused by the tragic loss of a still-growing and deepening love, Ms. Conway found her way through by "un-raveling". The word simply came to her, and grew into a touch-phrase (touch-word? touch-stone?) for her to understand the process that she was going through, needed to go through still, to heal after her loss.

"This I Know" (TIK) is a journal of how Susannah (can I call her that? reading this story allowed me to become so intimate with her thoughts that using "Ms. Conway" seems severely formal ... and although Susannah seems far too presumptuous, I can't seem to think of her in any other way) came through the processing of her grief, how she learned much about herself and her wants and needs, to find herself. "Finding" yourself seems cliche' ... but that is exactly what Susannah did.

Susannah Conway has unique and wonderful talents. A favorite passage:

"Sometimes I'm a writer who writes with a camera; sometimes I'm a photographer who shoots with words ... When I read I see images; when I take photographs I hear descriptions. This is my creative world, the two disciplines informing and supporting each other, my photographs telling stories, my words filled with images, the visual and the narrative fusing together."

To hold great depth in either of these talents is rare in and of itself. To exist together in one person ... one body, one heart, one soul ... to the amazing degree that they do within Susannah Conway allows her to express creativity beyond simple description. As with nearly all authors I come to love, I would so enjoy spending time ... a day, a week, an hour ... with Susannah. I do not have these talents. I write without her depth, photograph without her eye for composition, detail and innate descriptive message. To listen to her describe how they work together, to learn how someone with that rare and unique combination thinks and feels and displays those thoughts and feelings ... it's difficult to think of a better use of time.

TIK itself was, to me, a challenging read. Not because of the material or the style or even the words, but because of the thoughts and deep self-examination they caused within my own mind. I found myself reading a page or two or five and setting the book aside as I drifted into introspection. The "Reflections" sections at the end of each chapter are intended, I think, to induce that introspective self-examination (and they did so wonderfully) ... but they were, for me, unnecessary. So many times I found myself sitting with the book open on my lap, thoughts far away, relating her themes to my own process of unraveling.

I save my "5" ratings for books that can, most likely will, cause change in the lives of the reader. TIK

deserves a 5+. Someday I hope to meet Susannah Conway and thank her for having the courage to share her story with the rest of us.

ADDED SEPT 27, 2012:

My reviews are being reviewed! Valuable feedback received ... "Your review was incomplete. You mention your own process of unraveling and you say that you reserve 5s for books that can cause change in a reader's life. How did this book help you in your process and how did it change your life?" Good questions ...

Simply put, I am a person who values a roadmap. It's not enough for me to know where I'm starting and where I will end ... I like to have a sense of the route, be able to track my progress, see the milestones and the guideposts along the way. And even though I completely understand that every person and every instance and every situation is totally different, being able to see, hear and feel the path another has taken through uncharted waters helps me. In the introduction, SC writes: "Unraveling is not a bad thing. It's not coming undone or losing control. It's letting go in the best possible way, untangling the knots that hold you back, unwrapping the gifts you've hidden for too long, unearthing the potential that's always been there, finally ditching the labels and should-haves, and letting yourself be what you were always meant to be". I've searched for the "who" of my potential and who I've always been meant to be. I've defined a purpose and identified the "things" (not stuff) my life is missing, the "whats", essentially the gifts I have been given and not been grateful enough to develop and display. Now I'm working on "how" to let go, how to untangle, how to unwrap and best display those gifts and transition from a life that does not fit as it should to a life that does.

The way she both works through her grief and let's her grief work through her, understanding that it's a process with starts and stops and fits and reverses and has no set path was valuable to me. It reinforced my own feelings, though my own "grief" is very different than hers. The feelings that she dealt with on the first anniversary were an example of a surprising reaction along the path that I could relate to. The first reflection helped me define my thoughts and feelings towards people I love ... past and present. The honesty of how she recognized that her memories were possibly tinged pink by what or how she wanted to remember. Her discussion of the body and aging and how essential it is to "look after yourself ... to do something kind to yourself every day" helped me remember that I'm a very physical person and ignoring that as I focus on my mental and emotional well-being is leaving out a piece that is exceptionally important.

Honestly I could go on and on with examples. I can also say that I can't find myself yet able to be as totally open as SC is. I'm both in awe of, and jealous of, her ability to do so. I continue to strive towards greater openness, towards a higher degree of being "real" with and in my life. I've long understood that it's not a switch that can just be flipped. It takes time and effort and a rearrangement of a life that has for far too long not been that way. Those that truly know me are patient and kind as I work my way through. And I love them even more for that.

I hope that helps answer the questions. I know my answer is not complete, but if you read it closely enough, I think you can understand why I enjoyed and value TIK so deeply. My life has changed, and is changing ... for the better ... This I Know.

Christy Twait says

After coping with a great deal of loss myself the last few years, some to death and some not, I found myself dog-earing every few pages. I took photos of the passages I most wanted to recall and am adding them to my

journal. I think it takes a great deal of courage to let yourself unravel because we don't always want to revisit what's underneath. I would love to meet Susannah Conway.

Barb Lawrence says

Quite possibly the most profoundly important book I've read. Susannah spills her heart and soul on those pages and spoke directly to me. I bought copies for my friends, and as I go into health coaching, I'll be buying copies for my clients as well. For anyone who sees the world through a camera lenses and/or written words, it quenches a thirst.

Lisa says

I felt so connected to this author that it was as if I wrote this book myself. I was drawn to this book after running across Susannah's blog and decided to read it for blogging inspiration and what I assumed would be mostly a book on creativity - which it was. But it was so much more than that for me. Although I knew she touched upon grief issues, I did not expect this aspect to resonate with me. It did. I was also happily surprised that she wrote about her introverted nature as I connected to her on so many levels in this way. She gave permission to embrace one's introverted nature and showed, through concrete examples, how to use my introversion to help find my best, most true self. Finally, I loved how the author ended each chapter with a reflection which really turned out to be small creative assignments for the reader. So much wrapped up in this little book of yummy goodness!

Barbara says

This book helped me tremendously as I've grieved the loss of my special dog, Frankie, known as the "walk 'n roll dog" this summer (she was in a doggie wheelchair due to disc disease).

Susannah's book gave me so much hope that I will find a new bliss and direction for my life after such a deep loss. Frankie and I were a team and she was my life and work the past six years, making close to 350 appearances at schools. She was also a therapy dog and we did many visits to a senior assisted facility and hospice.

She was part of my journey and purpose, no doubt, and losing her in June was one of the hardest things I've ever gone through. Your book came along just at the right time. We read it for our Creative Book Salon that writing coach Cynthia Morris leads.

One paragraph in particular really struck me and helped me so much: "Each person experiences grief in their own individual way. And though I have often thought to lose a child would be the most devastating loss of all, there is no hierarchy to grief- only we can know the pain we fell and what we have lost."

There is no right or wrong way to grieve--though so often I think many don't understand that losing a pet can be just as hard, sometimes harder, than losing a human in our lives. But what Susannah shared about the fact that there is no hierarchy to grief is so true. Thank you.

Reading her book has given me hope that through my grieving process I will come to a new place, a new path and the journey will continue in a new way. I look forward to that as it unfolds.

Thank you, Susannah, for writing such an honest and courageous book--you shared your heart and it truly showed--and it truly helped me.

Helen says

Wow, really enjoyed this, great if you have been bereaved but also if you haven't. I didn't do all the exercises rigorously but just reading and thinking about them was good for me

Kasey Jueds says

Thoughtful and honest. Susannah Conway is a blogger, and her book is quite blog-like, in a good way--very personal, very immediate, very heart-felt. It's also full of her polaroid photographs (there seems to be a sort of polaroid renaissance these days, which I didn't know about!)--which are soft-focused and beautiful and dreamy, other-worldy. The author comes across as a completely likeable person; I was so happy spending time with her. Love the way she refers to the books that have been important to her as "book friends" (that's exactly the way I feel).

Rachel Burton says

just beautiful

Emma says

I love Susannah's blog and think she's an excellent and honest writer but this book wasn't for me. Perhaps because I haven't experienced grief in the same way that she has. I'm sure that this is an excellent book for those in similar circumstances. I still love her. She is ace.
