



A Woman's Education

Jill Ker Conway

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The beloved bestselling author of *The Road from Coorain* and *True North* continues her remarkable autobiography with an account of her decade as the first woman president of Smith College—a time when she was faced with the challenge of reinventing women's education and with the demands of her own life. Conway took on the helm at Smith at the height of exploding culture wars and the rising popularity of coeducation. With the college's future at stake, she battled conservative faculty, ossified traditions, and doubtful funders to turn Smith into a place committed to preparing young women for the new realities of the future. Through it all, Conway served as an inspiration to thousands of students, while balancing the demands of her public role against the private pressures of coping with her husband's bipolar disorder. A moving tribute to the value of single-sex education and to one woman's achievements, **A Woman's Education** is sure to become a classic.

A Woman's Education Details

Date : Published November 12th 2002 by Vintage (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9780679744627

Author : Jill Ker Conway

Format : Paperback 160 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Nonfiction, Education, Feminism

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Misti says

Jill Ker Conway was the president of Smith College in the 70s and 80s, so this book holds special significance to me. It was interesting to read about her experiences guiding the faculty and her spending decisions which apparently dramatically affected the traditions and opportunities available to today's Smithies. The increased alumnae donation programs, better CDO and of course the amazing athletic facilities are all a part of Conway's legacy. And while there is a great deal of introspection here, it's intriguing to learn of the difficulties pervading Jill's life while she was in her prime.

A must read for any Smithie who wants to learn more about Smith's past and future.

Jean says

I read the first two books of Jill Ker Conway's trilogy and enjoyed each of them. This, the third book, is titled "A Woman's Education" covers the period of her career as the first woman President of Smith College, a women's liberal college. I feel it is important to read these books in order of publishing. The first book "The Road From Coorain" (about her childhood on a sheep/cattle ranch in Australia), "True North" (about her teaching career at University of Toronto and the launching of her career in Administration) "A Woman's Education" about her time as President of Smith College. I was surprised that Conway was the first President of Smith and that there were so many men teachers. I thought it would have been important to have women professors at a women's college. Part of the book is about her problems with funding, education goals and curriculum, changing faculty, and of course building the school for the future. Conway devised a ten year plan for the school, set up the funding, got the key people behind her and implemented the plan. She joined boards to learn more about business and investment banking to better accomplish her job. She asked CEO's why they did not recruit at Smith's. They said they had not thought about recruiting women. She asked what skills and degree's they were looking to hire. She pointed out the Smith women already had the foreign language skill they needed. Conway then set about creating curriculum goals to meet the demands of the business world. I was surprised she met opposition from the faculty in setting the required curriculum. I thought the goal of school was to teach you skills to be hired in your chosen profession. She set about correcting the school endowment and building it so it would last for many years. She had to learn all about investment banking and also fund raising. Part of the book is about what she sees as goals for women's education and also some history of women's education. The end of the book is about her goals for the last part of her life. She wants to do more creative things such as writing as well as learning skills in technology to be better able to write about the coming needs and goals in women's education. We all should be so through with our own goals in life. The story of her time a Smith's is a story about strong leadership. I read this as an e-book for which the book was well-suited to this format. If you are interested in Women's education, history, academia or women's memoirs you will enjoy this book.

Sally says

Enjoyed this short book by an Australian woman who became the first woman President of Smith College in the US. The whole idea of a female-only college was strange and interesting, and I particularly enjoyed her

take on institutional politics at such a tumultuous time in American society (and tertiary education) - 70s and 80s.

Connie Kronlokken says

More an exploration of ideas than a memoir, though we get glimpses. Rounds out her other two books. Quite wonderful. Makes me want to take my intellect seriously, as Jill Ker Conway does.

It is actually sort of a "how-to" book as well, if you read it closely. It shows you how to become involved in boards and committees, where decisions get made. Read the materials provided closely and be passionate about them! So few people do this that it takes you very far into an issue.

Sara says

An absolutely engrossing memoir from a truly admirable and intellectual woman. There was lots of good food for thought about the purpose of education, both generally and specifically the value of women's colleges.

Jo Young Switzer says

What an intense and honest book this is!!! For me, it was the third book by Jill Ker Conway that I've read. They were all beautifully written. Conway writes in a very concentrated way -- each word in each sentence is there for an important reason. In this book, she describes being recruited and hired to serve as the first female president of the prestigious Smith College. Her descriptions of the challenges facing her matched my experiences as the first female president of Manchester University. People made inaccurate assumptions about limitations she might have like making hard decisions or handling the maintenance of a campus. In the end, her leadership was tremendously effective at improving enrollment, increasing donations, and updating the campus. She is my hero.

Cecilia says

After hearing Jill speak at my 25th college reunion, I was compelled to read this book by and about a woman who, unbeknownst to me, had a HUGE roll in shaping my world view. When I arrived on the Smith Campus my freshman year, Jill was completing her last year as the president.

Of course our next president and every subsequent one since would be a woman - right? Of course it made sense for me to study math, become an Air Force officer and then a strategy consultant at a leading global strategy firm dominated by men. All women had access to great college counseling that would encourage such things - right?

I had no idea the contributions she made that enabled me and thousands, likely millions, of other women to lead the lives of our choosing. While it was Jill's memoir, she also sheds light on the lives of many women in

this current age.

Jennifer says

While this book is not as entertaining as Conway's first two books, I found this slim volume to be an interesting perspective on being the first woman president of a women's college (Smith) between 1975-85. Conway describes not just her experience being president but reflects on women's education in general and how it was changing in this time period--a period when I was in college. It made me reflect on women's roles not only in academia but in other careers and the different understanding that people have of what this means. Each decade/generation has its own issues/priorities and understanding of how we perceive the world, and Conway discusses how this changed from her experience in the 70s, 80s, to the 90s.

Suzanne Mundy says

While informative, I did not like this book as much as I did "The Road From Coorain". I am glad I read it, but I am not sure I would want to read it a second time.

Margo says

3.5 - Having gone to a woman's college, I agree with much of what she says. Many women do benefit from the environment, feel freer to discuss and debate.

Kathleen says

I read her first two memoirs and liked them very much -- especially finding out that the author had been friends with one of my favorite literature professors from college. I found this at a used book sale (thanks again to the friends of the Newport Beach Public Library). I enjoyed reading about her experiences in becoming the president of Smith College in the late 70's but overall it was not as enthralling a tale as the others. But I'm glad I read it.

Jill says

I've wanted to read this book for a long time. Not only because of her wonderful writing style but also because it's set in an area I lived in for years. So it was great fun to read about locations I knew very well.

What I didn't expect was how very candid she was and what a great insight she provided of the role of a president of a small liberal arts college for women.

It made me want to read more by Ms Ker Conway.

Laura says

This book is amazing! I've read both of author:Jill Ker Conway's books and have enjoyed them all. This book is inspiring. The things she has accomplished are unbelievable. It is an interesting look into her life and her role at Smith College as the first female president (in the 60s) of an all female institution. Even if you are not in this field, it will inspire you to go out and do great things. It gets you started thinking what else should I be doing? I highly recommend this book to everyone!

Noriko says

How she got to Smith's presidency and all the years she was there. I was on campus for her last year of her tenure.

Jocelyn says

Q: What to do if you're 40 years old, a VP at the University of Toronto, and passionate women's education?

A: Become the president of Smith College.

Q: What to do if you've tripled the endowment, built a new athletic facility, opened the College to older women, and stretched the mission of a very traditional liberal arts college to include educating about women, preparing female students to enter highly-paid professions, and marketing itself to prospective students -- and you're only 50 years old and you are still passionate about portraying women as intellectuals and leaders?

A: Retire from being the president of Smith College and write, including three memoirs about your experience as an educated woman and a leader.

A Woman's Education is the third memoir (following on The Road from Coorain and True North). It doesn't feature interesting personalities in the same way as its predecessors but it's full of observations about higher education and college politics. It's interesting for anyone who is involved in higher education and college politics, anyone who wonders about the idiosyncrasies of professors and their working relations, and anyone who wants to trace the career of a woman with a mission. Jill Ker Conway knew what she wanted to do, found the right mentors and allies, and accomplished her goals, setting up Smith College to be a leader in women's education for the 21st century. I'm betting she also made her fair share of enemies.
