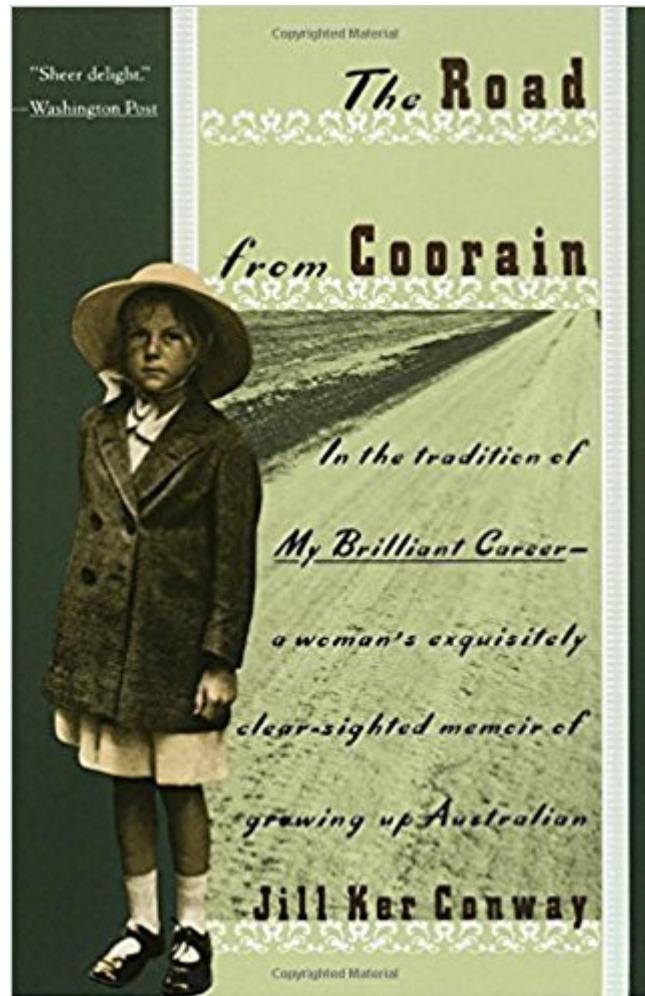




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# The Road From Coorain



## Synopsis

In a memoir that pierces and delights us, Jill Ker Conway tells the story of her astonishing journey into adulthood—a journey that would ultimately span immense distances and encompass worlds, ideas, and ways of life that seem a century apart. She was seven before she ever saw another girl child. At eight, still too small to mount her horse unaided, she was galloping miles, alone, across Coorain, her parents' thirty thousand windswept, drought-haunted acres in the Australian outback, doing a "man's job" of helping herd the sheep because World War II had taken away the able-bodied men. She loved (and makes us see and feel) the vast unpeopled landscape, beautiful and hostile, whose uncertain weathers tormented the sheep ranchers with conflicting promises of riches and inescapable disaster. She adored (and makes us know) her large-visioned father and her strong, radiant mother, who had gone willingly with him into a pioneering life of loneliness and bone-breaking toil, who seemed miraculously to succeed in creating a warmly sheltering home in the harsh outback, and who, upon her husband's sudden death when Jill was ten, began to slide—bereft of the partnership of work and love that had so utterly fulfilled her—into depression and dependency. We see Jill, staggered by the loss of her father, catapulted to what seemed another planet—the suburban Sydney of the 1950s and its crowded, noisy, cliquish school life. Then the heady excitement of the University, but with it a yet more demanding course of lessons—Jill embracing new ideas, new possibilities, while at the same time trying to be mother to her mother and resenting it, escaping into drink, pulling herself back, striking a balance. We see her slowly gaining strength, coming into her own emotionally and intellectually and beginning the joyous love affair that gave wings to her newfound self. Worlds away from Coorain, in America, Jill Conway became a historian and the first woman president of Smith College. Her story of Coorain and the road from Coorain startles by its passion and evocative power, by its understanding of the ways in which a total, deep-rooted commitment to place—or to a dream—can at once liberate and imprison. It is a story of childhood as both Eden and anguish, and of growing up as a journey toward the difficult life of the free.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

At age 11, Conway ( *Women Reformers and American Culture* ) left the arduous life on her family's sheep farm in the Australian outback for school in war-time Sydney, burdened by an emotionally dependent, recently widowed mother. A lively curiosity and penetrating intellect illuminate this unusually objective account of the author's progress from a solitary childhood--the most appealing part of the narrative--to public achievement as president of Smith College and now professor at MIT. Gifted with an ability to adapt to a wide range of cultures and people and despite ingrained Australian prejudice against intellectuals, Conway devoted herself to the study of history and literature, spurred on by excellent British-style schooling. Her further adventures could easily make a rewarding second volume. Paperback rights to Vintage; QPBC alternate. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Conway spent her first 11 years in the windswept grasslands of Australia, where her father owned 30,000 acres of arid land. Though his ability to understand the land was extensive, an eight-year drought finally defeated him, and he committed suicide. A few years later, Conway's oldest brother died in an automobile accident. The two deaths plunged her mother into depression. Out of this tale of hard work, drought, and sorrow, Conway emerges with character and personal strength. From the University of Sydney, she went on to study history at Harvard and eventually became the first woman president of Smith College. This inspiring book tells in full the details of her life and thoughts up to the time she left for America. Quality Paperback Book Club selection.- Judith Nixon, Purdue Univ. Libs., W. Lafayette, Ind. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Jill Ker Conway's autobiography, *The Road From Coorain*, is a beautifully written memoir. The flow of the narrative and the broad vocabulary used throughout the book are

exquisite. Although the impact of her life story is sometimes slowed by her mother's wants and needs, these experiences helped shape Conway and, as such, are an integral part of her story. Detailing her life growing up in the Australian outback during the second third of the twentieth century, Conway is able to draw the reader into that era. The beauty of the landscape and the harsh reality of the elements, the economic cycles, and the psychological impact on both men and women of these influences are vividly described. The elitism and the class differences between landed individuals and those who managed or worked on the stations become evident as the Conway family's fortunes roller coaster between wealth and economic hardship. Societal attitudes toward women's roles and acceptable occupations could have discouraged Conway from ever progressing. However, Jill Ker Conway's intellectual strength, coupled with her work ethic, propelled her beyond those roles accepted and available to women in the mid-twentieth century to becoming a university professor and eventually president of Smith College. Today's young women may view much of "The Road From Coorain" as ancient history. Women who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s may remember or may have experienced situations similar to those Conway encountered. All will be inspired by and amazed at Jill Ker Conway's life and accomplishments.

This book, *The Road from Coorain*, was a great fit for me as I too grew up on a sheep ranch and made a life off the ranch. The experience of growing up on the ranch affected the remainder of my life as growing up on a sheep station in Australia did the author. The isolation brought independence and inventiveness. The writing is descriptive and brings you to the scene--I could smell the odor of the lanolin at shearing time!

An inspirational story for young women who are trying to understand how far they can go in their lives and careers.

When I finally got around to reading this book I really enjoyed it. I had assumed it would be an entertaining childhood story of life on a sheep station in Australia, but it was so much more. I should have known a woman of such achievement would have written an interesting, thought-provoking story. She not only shared her struggle as a woman in a male-dominated profession, but also a look inside the attitudes of the typical educated Australian in that era. This one is a keeper.

The book provides an intimate look at the progress from the back country of Australia to a busy

world. It is interesting to see how different cultures perceive one's place in life as well as the customs and expectations that govern people, especially women. To be different is often intimidating. Jill's thoughts and reactions to who she is inside and whom she becomes are fascinating. Though sometimes ponderous because of the long, dense paragraphs, the book is rewarding.

Jill Ker Conway well depicted life and described the environment on an outback NSW sheepstation: the struggles, the work, the droughts with their searing dust storms. I assume this novel is somewhat autobiographical in describing the yearnings of a young intelligent woman who wished to escape fulfilling the expectations of family, which choked her aspirations to pursue her dreams. The novel is an authentic, credible, and enjoyable read for any educated woman who was emerging into adulthood in the era.

Enjoyed it but the end was disappointing..

ONE OF THE BEST BOOK DISCUSSIONS WE HAVE EVER HAD, WAS ABOUT THIS BOOK. IF YOU LIKE NON-FICTION, DON'T MISS THIS STORY ABOUT A WOMAN WHO WAS BROUGHT UP IN THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK AND ENDED UP AS THE HEADMISTRESS OF SMITH COLLEGE IN MASSACHUSETTS.

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