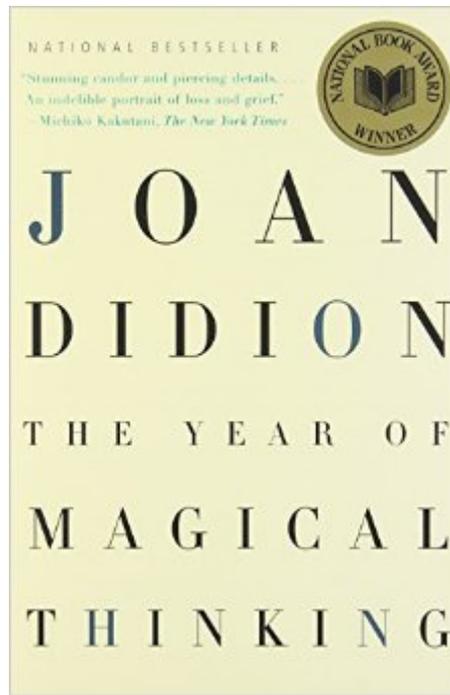


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The Year Of Magical Thinking



Synopsis

From one of America's iconic writers, a stunning book of electric honesty and passion. Joan Didion explores an intensely personal yet universal experience: a portrait of a marriage--and a life, in good times and bad--that will speak to anyone who has ever loved a husband or wife or child.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I stayed up almost all night just to finish reading it, unable to put this down, although I confess I had to keep a box of tissues nearby. I've lost 5 people in the last few years and, just recently, another friend and so I related very strongly to this book. Didion's unflinching account of the sudden loss of her husband (which occurred while their only child was in a coma in a hospital (!)) deserves to be a classic in the genre of books written by and for those who are grieving. It is hard to find books like this, which are both honest but not overly sentimental, not resorting to the tropes which seem to surround death. She doesn't offer vague platitudes or advice. She simply relates her very personal experience, including the inevitable vulnerability, unexpected moments of being blindsided by memories and sudden tears, etc. She covers all the bases, including the kind of insanity that can seize one in the throes of grief, those moments when you forget the person is actually dead, when you turn to speak to him or her as you normally would at a certain part of the day or reach for the phone to share the latest news. The book is raw. If you're looking for religious or spiritual guidance and inspiration, this is not the book for you. As Didion herself noted, writing about the book recently, it was intentionally written "raw". I assume she didn't want to wait, to distance herself from the intensity of the experience as she wrote it down, quite unlike many other books she has written.

Raw or not, it wasn't sloppy, overly sentimental or complete despairing.

I'm not 100% sure why I bought this book. Certainly, the extremely generous reviews were a big push, as much as the fact that I recognize that Joan Didion is a superb writer. Maybe more than that, because I lost my mother and my grandmother within a very short span of time, and they lost their brother/son, then father/husband, in an even briefer time period. For awhile, "Magical Thinking" enthralled me with Didion's honesty and brutal detail. It even gave me nightmares, which I'm sure was not the author's intention, but that's how effective the writing is. Part of Joan Didion's truthfulness is in dealing with her own avoidance of grief, and the extent to which an extremely intelligent, ever-thinking person will go to escape facing pain. But halfway through this short book, only 105 pages from the end, I almost gave it up, and I'm not sure I'm glad that I didn't. The endless facts, medical explanations, and most of all, Joan's continuous detachment from any emotion, left me feeling beat up and worn down. Yes, it even annoyed me a little. I give her all the credit in the world for approaching her task. Her love for her husband and daughter is extraordinarily apparent by the picture she paints of them, but she still comes through as only an observer. "The Year of Magical Thinking" is written in the first person, but not for a split second do we get a glimpse of any sensitivity coming from her. She only looks, thinks, and writes. But who is Joan, and what is going on inside her? Anything at all?? Buddhists have a valuable outlook on death. They meditate on it regularly, often among the bodies of the departed. Not viewed as morbid or surprising, death informs them how to appreciate life.

"Grief is a multi-faceted response to loss. Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, it also has a physical, cognitive, behavioural, social and philosophical dimensions." Wikipedia
Joan Didion starts her book: "Life changes fast Life changes in an instant You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends." On December 30, 2003 Joan and her husband, John Gregory Dunne were just sitting down to dinner about 9pm. They had returned from visiting their daughter, Quintana, who was comatose in an ICU in New York City. They were having a conversation as Joan put dinner on the table. She looked up, it was very quiet, John was not responding. He was slumped over the table with his hand raised. She realized all was not well, and in that instant her life changed. An ambulance was called; the trip to the Emergency Department, the meeting with the doctor, massive heart attack mentioned, and she knew her husband was dead. She returned home alone, did a few chores and went to bed and slept soundly. She awakened and realized something was wrong, and her first taste of grief descended. Joan Didion has written a

devastating story of her first year after the death of her husband, and the grief that enveloped her. She writes as she thought, and the story is laid out in detail as it happened and in her own words. She has friends and family but John isn't there. She talked to him every day for the forty years they were married. They talked constantly and were with each other all the time. Even though conventional wisdom has it that absence makes the heart grow fonder. She remembers thinking "there is no one to hear the news, no where to go with the unmade plan, the uncompleted thought. There is no one to agree, disagree, talk back".

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