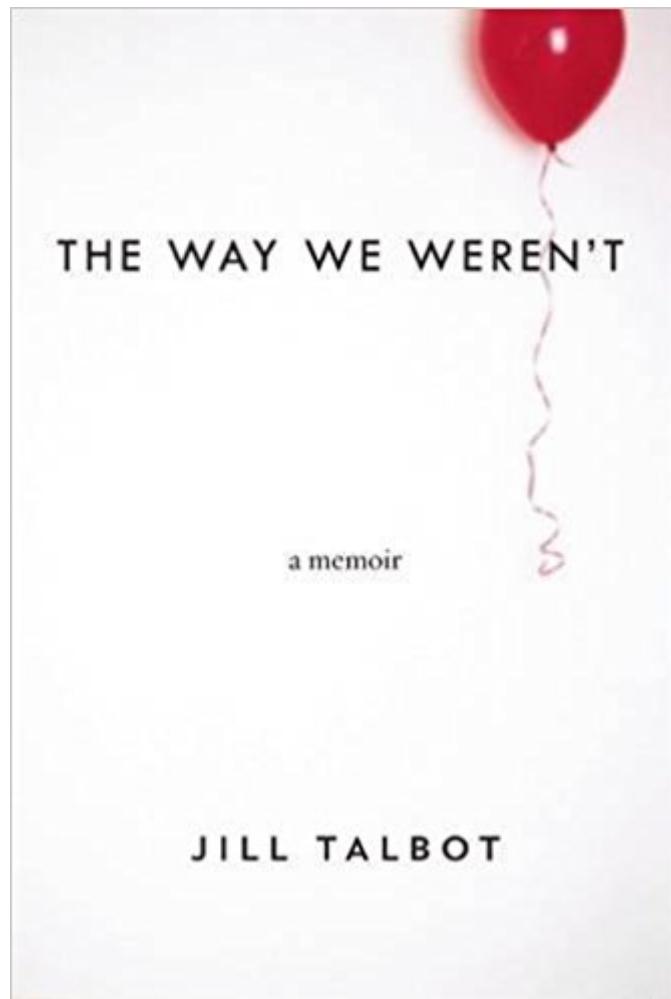


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# The Way We Weren't



## Synopsis

After years of futon passion, Hemingway discussions, and three-mile runs, Jill Talbot's relationship with a man carved in her doubts so deep she wrote to ignore them. And even though he was as unwilling to commit to a place or a job as Talbot was to marrying him, he insisted that she keep the baby when a pregnancy surprised them during their fourth year together. As it turned out, Kenny wasn't able to commit to a child either, so when the court ordered visitation and support for their four-month-old daughter, he vanished. His disappearing act was the catalyst for Talbot's own, as she moved her daughter through nine states in as many years; running from the memory of their failed relationship and the hope of an impossible reunion, all the while raising a daughter on her own. Then, one day while packing boxes, she found a photograph that changed everything. In this memoir-in-essays, Talbot attempts to set the record straight, even as she argues that our shared histories are merely competing stories we choose to tell ourselves. A bold look at the challenges of love and the struggles of a single mother in America today, *The Way We Weren't* tells a complex, unforgettable story of loss and leaving, and of how Talbot learned that writing can't bring anything back, but that because of it, nothing is ever really lost.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"simple and highly addictive . . . the reader might feel herself gripping the book not only to see where Talbot and her daughter Indie end up . . . but also to eat up her delectable prose." Brevity "A magnetic pull sets in while reading *The Way We Weren't*, a sinking

into the author's state of heart and mind, a compulsion to keep turning the pages. The memoir's allure is a testament to Jill Talbot's formidable talent." The Boston Globe; To say that Jill Talbot steps into the controversial borderlands between fiction and non fiction with *The Way We Weren't* is a vast understatement. It is more like she plunges into them off the fifty-meter springboard, doing three somersaults and a half gainer on the way down. This gut wrenching tale of abandonment (though it is never perfect clear who was the abandoner, who the abandonee) makes us ask giant, soul-bending questions, like "Does anyone ever know anyone?" and "Are we always the creators of our own misery?" A brave story of one woman's fight to survive, most of all, her own proclivities. "Pam Houston, author of *Contents May Have Shifted*" White-knuckled on the steering wheel, Talbot drives her readers headlong into the fray of her own past. Powerful, effective, and relentless, Talbot reminds us that life is always half-highway and half-dirt road, that our experiences no matter how universal demand we pave the way ourselves." B.J. Hollars, author of *Dispatches from the Drownings*

Dr. Talbot is more than amazing! Read this and comprehend each word because they all serve a purpose.

Talbot writes, "Fiction and history are neighbors. The stories we tell about our own histories might as well be fiction--for what we tell, what we don't." This book is about being left and then leaving--via a Ford Escape and heartbreak and relocations and glasses of wine. It is about the ways a woman navigates and makes space in her own life for creation. Above all this book is about the varied and shifting stories we tell ourselves. I always find the urgency and specificity of Jill Talbot's writing transfixing, and this book is no exception. Talbot's narration shifts between third and first person, crossing state lines and swirling around the pairing of a mother and a daughter to create a specific and compelling portrait of single motherhood without child support--a huge challenge that Talbot meets gamely. The essays here play with form and point of view, and come as a wine list, a syllabus, a court transcript, and all dazzle with their intensity.

This book is practically perfect in every way and I mean even down to how it is structured. I appreciate the different sections and how they \*feel\* differently...depending on the location/what's happening in her life @ the time. I don't read a lot of memoir/creative nonfiction...rarely does it interest me to be quite honest. I like to read military nonfiction and I like reading abt motherhood

(sometimes) but that's about it. That being said: JILL TALBOT IS ONE OF MY V. FAVE MEMOIRISTS. The reason is because I never feel like Jill is writing simply just to tell us abt herself....I feel like Jill writes to tell us about OURSELVES...to allow us to dig deeper into/write our own stories. That interests me...the universality of all it. I like spending time there, reading abt her life/her daughter/her anxieties and cravings/fears/addictions/triumphs/failures. Jill does something different w/memoir and creative nonfiction...something that flips a switch in my heart and I'm not easily made to feel that way. There has to be a spark...a bigness made small...that's how Jill's writing makes me feel.

This is, hands-down, the best memoir I've read in years. Part of what makes Jill Talbot so successful as an essayist and memoirist is that she is a bit odd to say, given her public statements about the ways facts can be blended with fiction in this type of writing. It is the unflinching, sometimes cruel honesty she employs when talking about herself. Her relationship with Kenny seems self-destructive on both of their parts, at times she hates him for leaving even as she acknowledges that, in some ways, maybe she was the one who left the relationship first. She is someone who will complain about her poverty even while springing for an unnecessary hotel room so she can go swimming. At times, the wine that we both enjoy seems to have a pretty tight hold on her, leading her to make phone calls she shouldn't make and take risks that a single mother perhaps ought not take. She knows herself well, and she is fearless when it comes to sharing that knowledge with her readers.

Jill Talbot takes one defining moment in her life and teases out of it stories that are funny, contemplative, deeply personal, confessional, damning, and profoundly moving--sometimes all of these at the same time. She is an alchemist, a wizard, and an indispensable voice in the world of non-fiction prose. I can't recommend this book enough.

I couldn't figure out if the author was running away from something or towards something (even towards an absence) and very soon I did not care. Setting a few brief Ray Carver-esque glimpses of the sad and the doomed lives the author intersects with, there isn't much to recommend this one. And no, Kenny isn't my drinking buddy.

A beautifully observed and provocative look at the life of a single working mother in America today. Heartbreaking and completely necessary. I couldn't put it down.

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