



You Can Say You Knew Me When

K.M. Soehnlein

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Charming underachiever Jamie Garner is living a sexy slacker's life in San Francisco during the dot-com boom-avoiding his stalled career as a radio producer, barely holding on to his relationship, but surrounded by fun-loving friends. And then Jamie gets the call he's always dreaded: Teddy, the father who never accepted him, has died. It's time for the prodigal son to come home to the subdivisions and strip malls of suburban New Jersey to face the emotionally barren family he left behind years ago.

Caught between the guilt he wants to shake and the grief he can't express, Jamie takes solace in a box of memorabilia he finds in the attic, marked "1960," the year his father spent in San Francisco but kept secret. Jamie is especially drawn to a moody, enigmatic photo of the stunning Dean Foster, his dad's closest friend, who headed west then mysteriously disappeared.

Determined to unlock the mystery of his father, Jamie seeks out the artists and poets, the free spirits and wild men mentioned in Teddy's letters to Dean. It's a journey that takes him deep into the subcultures of San Francisco, from the bohemian heyday of the Beat Generation through the Internet mania of his contemporary world, even as it unleashes something primal, hungry, and slightly dangerous in Jamie. As his search for the elusive Dean Foster turns ever more obsessive, undermining his friendships, his income, and his fidelity to his partner, Jamie is forced to decide what he is willing to risk in the pursuit of the truth.

You Can Say You Knew Me When Details

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Al says

While Soehnlein's novel can be enjoyed on many levels, say, as the story of a man trying to come to grips with the death of a father with whom he was estranged, or as an adroit comparison of life in mid-90's San Francisco with that of the early 60's. By the novel's end, the reader realizes that Soehnlein had even great ambitions with his work, to explore that exciting period in their twenties when many people leave home in hopes of change. This fantasy is often met with hard reality, but some at least partially succeed in breaking away from their past life, their past upbringing. There are a variety of characters in "You Can Say You Knew Me When" who have tried or are still trying to make that break with the promise of a better, more rewarding life ahead. Some are drawn to other cities; some are just drawn to a place that is different. Soehnlein successfully works this theme throughout his novel, leading up to a surprisingly moving ending. Recommended.

Patrizia Brucini says

Avrei gradito una sforbiciata di almeno un centinaio di pagine, in alcuni punti il libro diventa ripetitivo e monotono, ma quando pensavo di non farcela più con tutto questo sesso e droga (niente rock) trovavo un paio di pagine di bella scrittura che mi hanno convinta ad arrivare alla fine.

Michelle says

The beauty of K.M. Soehnlein's novels is in his character development. As we journey with Jamie Garner in the search for information about his father's past the reader feels his regrets, lives the pain of his father's rejection, and goes through the frustration of his money struggles. Jamie is a flawed and very real character who brings this book to life through his quest, thoughts, and relationships. You Can Say You Knew Me When was a riveting tale - one I know I will read again.

K.M. Soehnlein is one of the best writers I have come across, and my only complaint is that he hasn't written more books. I have read them all now. Sigh...I want another one.

Larry-bob Roberts says

Unemployed radio producer researches his late father's beat-era San Francisco sojourn, and is surprised to learn that his homophobic pa had queer friends. Excellent plotting and characterization, and the period details both of the dot-com era and beat-aping writing of the main character's father are spot-on.

Salvatore Gnechi says

Probably my favourite book ever.

Milan/zzz says

It's a lovely story that unfolds itself slowly which is a big plus. I love the images of the San Francisco in the dot-com era (early 90-ies) but even more I love SFO in beatnik era when Jack Kerouac was there. Btw, "On the Road" is definitively my next tbr. There are so many references to that book; it's kind of homage to Kerouac's book as well as Kerouac's America. Not being there, not being an American I've found this totally captivating, even exotic.

It's deeply personal story about (mostly) father/son relationship but also story about pre AIDS America from the 60-ies (and earlier) when the fight for today's liberties started.

Chris says

Jamie Garner is the scale model thirty-something struggling creative-type from San Francisco who has flirted with success, both personally and professionally, but just can't seem to form a lasting relationship on either end.

Author K. M. Soehnlein introduces Jamie, some time in the mid-90s, en route to his New Jersey hometown for the funeral of his father, whom he hadn't spoken to in the last five years. In spite of their tumultuous relationship, Jamie remains connected to his sister, Deirdre, who cared for their father in his final days. As teenagers, Jamie and Deirdre lost their mother accidentally during a routine hospital visit, an event from which their dad never recovered emotionally.

While going through his father's belongings, Jamie discovers evidence, in the form of letters to and from former acquaintances, that his father was a beatnik in the early 60s and rubbed elbows with the likes of Kerouac, Burroughs and Ginsberg. There also appears to be a connection between his father and his sister Katie's brother-in-law, Danny--better known as B-movie actor, Dean Foster. Jamie is determined to find out more about the actual nature of his father's relationship with Dean--was it sexual, perhaps?

Jamie's quest to learn more about his father, which he believes will somehow help him better understand (and perhaps, forgive) him, turns self-destructive, and has a detrimental effect on his finances, employment prospects, and above all, his two-year relationship with Woody, a dot-com lackey mired in the belief that his company's IPO will provide instant security.

The novel is readable and there are enough twists and turns to keep you interested. I found the characters from his father's life to be more interesting than those from Jamie's life, with the exception of his sister, Deirdre, whose personality is the most realistic and relatable. Throughout the story, Jamie has moments of epiphany or spiritual reflection that are either completely unfounded or simply (for lack of a better word) hokey. Otherwise, while Jamie isn't altogether likable, his struggle with family and identity is familiar and worthy of the reader's empathy.

Loren Olson says

Complex and at times emotionally difficult, and not a book I wanted to read just before trying to fall to sleep.

Soehnlein's book captured the struggle of monogamy so well. Having been in a committed relationship for 24 years, my husband and I know those struggles very well: The ease of committing to monogamy, the temptations, the relationship conflicts which allow one to justify unfaithfulness and the issues of loss of trust and attempts to re-establish it if the vows are broken.

The search for the father was also interesting to me. Having lost my father when I was three, I had always searched to fill in the fragments of him.

Thanks for this book and the others. I'll keep reading and blowing my horn about Mr. Soehnlein's writing.

Loren Olson

Tim says

This is an engaging story of a self-involved thirty-something who sets out on a quest to find information about the father he never understood. On his way he loses much but gains a better understanding of himself and does a bit of growing up. It was difficult for me to like Jamie, the main character, because he is not the kind of squared-away person that attracts me, but the author makes him seem like a real person by giving him the weaknesses that we can see in ourselves.

David says

First off, this book struck me as too long. I don't know if this is true and I don't know that it's wrong but after finishing it I feel like I achieved something. Only I don't want to brag about it because I don't really share this nonsense with others. This is the story about some flitty mo that cheats on his boyfriend and his unwashed laundry kinda tears his world apart. Well great. Is there any great redemption or revelations?

I definitely rated the book down because of behavior I don't condone. It's not that I think it's poorly written, I just didn't enjoy it.

I would appreciate some more dimension to the characters. I would like it if the highlight of the protagonist's day wasn't getting stoned and bouncing checks. I would like it if he actually accomplished something. I think at the end he makes some progress at emotional development but ... that's not the satisfying conclusion I wish the book would come to. I guess that's a spoiler.

Matty says

Good writing, but I found it was too long. The characters were well developed but there were so many secondary characters and twists and turns that I had trouble keeping track and wondered where the book was going. By the time we got back to the Dean/Danny storyline I had completely forgotten about it.

Scott says

This hit close to home on many social levels. I was engrossed with the protagonist's issues of infidelity and searching for acceptance from a recently deceased father that never really supported his life or who he loved. That alone was heart-breaking and as someone who never felt that alienation from family, I am always shocked and "pulled in" when I read this theme in literature or recognize it in art.

The early SF urban landscape of high rent, AIDS, dot.com nouveau-riche and connecting with family on an adult and purposeful manner leads the reader on a quest of mind-altering proportion (literally.)

Jack says

This is a really awesome book. Soehnlein is a writer with a good style. Not unique, just...good. The plot is well-crafted and the story moves along at a steady pace. There's one or two chapters that are jussssst a bit redundant, but for the most part it's a really enjoyable read. Soehnlein is a LAMBDA award-winning author for his book "The World of Normal Boys" (which is marked on my "to read" shelf) and I'd have to say, judging from this novel, that it's well deserved. "The World of Normal Boys" will be my next purchase.

Rei says

Following his father's death, Jaime finds some old pictures in a box labeled "San Francisco" while halfheartedly attempting to clean out the attic. The pictures, scraps, and keepsakes lead Jaime on a journey to find out who his father really was and why his father rejected him when he came out.

This story focuses on misconceptions, misunderstandings, and forgiveness with a stunning resolution that reels Jaime's life into perspective.

Alinola says

Il padre del protagonista non ha mai accettato che il figlio fosse gay. Poi muore. Il protagonista va da San Francisco fino in New Jersey per il funerale e mentre elimina le cose del padre si accorge di una scatola. Il libro vero finisce qui.

Poi succede che il protagonista va in giro a scopare, a drogarsi, a mandare a puttane la sua vita e i suoi rapporti umani per superare il trauma del suddetto padre morto.

Poi ad un certo punto si sbroglia la situazione, ma solo quando dopo trecento pagine l'autore finalmente arriva lì dove Leavitt aveva già marciato ovvero: <Cielo! Mio padre era ricchione come me!>. Ovviamente noi questa cosa del padre la sapevamo 200 pagine prima. Attendere trecento pagine mi sembra un po' troppo. Alla fine si ristabilisce tutto, tranne il nostro umore che avevamo speso 20 euri circa sperando in un librone, invece è una storia banale e troppo lunga e troppo poco emozionante.
