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Autobiography & Memoir

This Is How I Speak: The Diary of a Young Woman
Sandi Sonnenfeld
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"I know all about fear," says the author. "I'm afraid of failure, growing old, gaining weight, the whole concept of motherhood, and insurance salesmen. But most of all, I'm terrified of complacency, the fear that I might settle for what I have simply because I'm afraid of so much else."

This book narrates the events of Sonnenfeld's first year in the fiction writing MFA program at the University of Washington. Based on her journals, the memoir is an honest, smart, irreverent, and unsentimental account of the twenty-four-year-old woman's striving to navigate her way and find her place in the world.

A dancer and writer from Long Island, Sonnenfeld enters the MFA program after completing her bachelor's degree at Mount Holyoke College. Through the course of her journal entries, the reader watches the growth of a young woman experiencing the confusion, pain, joy, and despair that she, as an aspiring artist, struggles with in the process of discovering her own voice.

Sonnenfeld's observations about herself and the world resonate with truth as she experiences the world around her. She struggles to understand the expectations that society places on women, wading through the contradictions of the feminist viewpoint, and surviving within a social climate that feels increasingly misogynistic. Sonnenfeld expresses her frustrations with the narrow intellectualism that she encounters in her department at school, and describes an excruciating relationship with her unimpressable dance mentor. She deals with lust, love, sex, friendship, betrayal, disappointment, and fear. She talks about a terrifying sexual assault, guilt, anger, and reclaiming her power.

Sonnenfeld discovers her sense of self in spite of the sometimes overwhelming and undermining influences of her family and friends. She ultimately finds her voice and is able to speak about her fears and pain through a dance piece that she writes and performs herself at the

end of the year.

This Is How I Speak is a joy to read. The narrative style is engaging, with good forward momentum. Sonnenfeld's honesty and vulnerability are both reassuring and affirming; her insights are level-headed and wise.