

LoveReading Reader reviews of If I Knew You Were Going To Be This Beautiful I Never Would Have Let You Go by Judy Chicurel

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

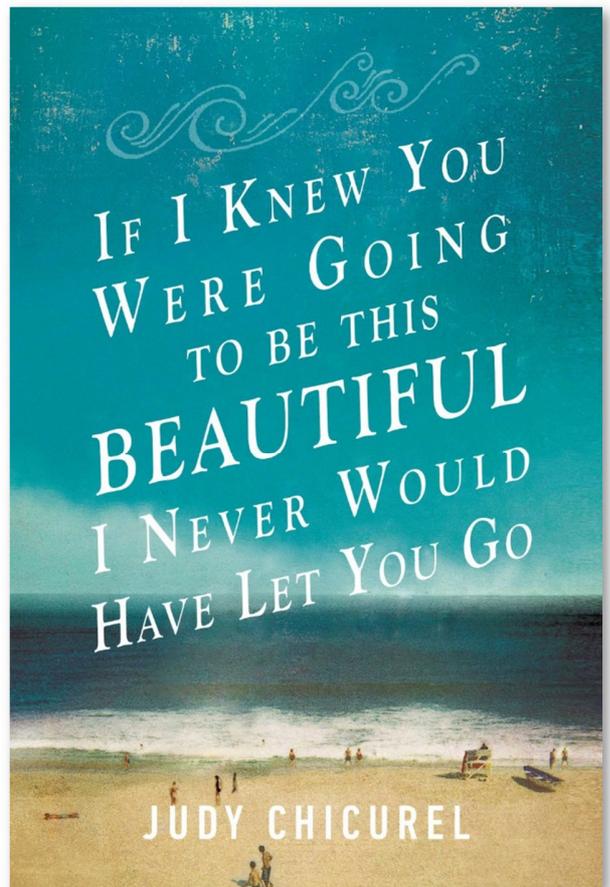
Catherine Jenkins

*The prose of this novel is so evocative of the period it describes that you can almost taste each word on your palate - just as if language were one of the chocolate egg creams the narrator favours at her local diner. The time and place - small-town America, in the midst of the Vietnam war - are rendered with both a sensory and sensual pull, forming a heady experience all the more absorbing for the juxtapositions these forces create: high-school drama versus the conflict in Nam; the growing pains of an individual set against the wider scarring of the events in the jungle. **A book of searing impressions, Chicurel's narrative will stay with the reader beyond its conclusion.***

Phyllippa Smithson

A book full of friendship, emotional conflict, young love, hope and loss, hopelessness and growth. Loved it.

'If I Knew....' was fascinating on so many levels. The story unfolds through the eyes of Katie growing up in Elephant Beach which is (possibly) located on Long Island, New York. Along with her friends she spends her days drinking, smoking and, basically, existing. Unlike her friends, Katie seems to have her head screwed on. She is not pregnant after a one-night. She is not experiencing an abortion after a one-night. Nor is she reckless when it comes to ensuring she avoids drunken nights when she faces work the next day, a job which is



unrewarding, undemanding but, it's a job.

What drives Katie is hope that Luke, a recently returned Vietnam vet, will notice her. She has held this hope for a long time and continues to wait as Luke is a man in conflict. His Vietnam experiences haunt him and he is evidently psychologically troubled by what he saw.

A fellow Vietnam survivor, Mitch, is not the most articulate individual, but he has seen Katie's hope despite her believing even her closest of friends do not know. It's Mitch who cautions her to wait, adding the wait may never end.

As a Brit who loves any stories based around how World War 1 / 2, I found this book absolutely fascinating to get an appreciation of how life was impacted by 1970s US during the Vietnam War.

This novel is a vivid portrait of a world of conflicts - mothers and daughters, self against self, hope and loss – all pulled together under a mood of raw grittiness.

Cath Humphris - www.cathum.wordpress.com/

It took me a few pages to get into it, but by the time I'd finished the second chapter I was hooked. This is a lovely coming-of-age story, thought provoking and evocative.

This book has attitude. Elephant Beach, the fictional Long Island setting for the story was a thriving seaside resort for a few years during prohibition. By the 1970s it's faded. There are surfers and workers and teenagers, eighteen and waiting for something to happen.

There's a lot of smoking and all sorts of drug-taking and heavy drinking. This is the time of the Vietnam War, of changing values and rebellion. There's also love, and expectations of love, as seen and experienced by Katie, the narrator.

The traumas and triumphs of the various characters Katie tries to fit in with felt authentic. 'It was summer, and anything was possible.'

At times, I thought I could guess where the story was going, but I was wrong. I'm glad I read this. It's one of those that linger, long after finishing.

Angela Rhodes

Set in the summer of 1972, in Long Island, a small community are trying to come to terms with The Vietnam War.

The story is told by Kate, a young woman, who with her small group of friends,

have hard decisions to make and trials to face.

In the beautifully written debut novel, written by Judy Chirurel, the topics are far and wide, touching ever so lightly, on racism, teenage pregnancy, to name a few. It makes you question your beliefs, and the way society wants you to be,

I loved and cared about the characters and yes, I had a favourite one, Mitch the Vietnam Vet because I think, he had so much passion for life.

Judy's book, compares with the likes of Anne Tyler and Elizabeth Berg, I so want a follow on book, and you will too.

Rebecca Whymark

Well written but not my cup of tea.

This book was a disappointment to me. I was really looking forward to reading it based on the description given. Although I can appreciate that it is well written and a good story I felt that I was constantly having to remind myself which character was which as there seems to be a few and it isn't always clear who is speaking. This may be just me. I struggled to get into it but persevered. Not one I would read again. But that is just my opinion. I was also put off by the swearing again, even if the author feels that it is part of the scene and it wouldn't work without it there must be some other words that could be used instead. It just instantly puts me off any book. Again just my opinion. Someone else may feel differently.

Emma Smith - www.mrsredwhite214.wordpress.com

It is a haunting book that gets right in the middle of the harsh reality of the time.

'If I knew you were going to be this beautiful I never would have let you go' is set in a "fictionalised Long Island" in 1972. It follows the lives of working class teenagers dealing with the pressures of growing up and the consequences of the Vietnam War.

The title sounds so romantic, but this isn't a traditional love story that will sweep you away. It is a haunting book that gets right in the middle of the harsh reality of the time.

I found this book took an awfully long time to pull all the threads of the plot together, but by the time it got there I really had a good feel for the characters

*and the place they grew up. The story felt real, as if this was someone's account of their teenage years rather than a story written to entertain. The end of the book particularly had me hooked as the war and its consequences became more of a focal point. **I'll be thinking about this one for a while.***

Victoria Whish - Twitter @VicKWhish Blog

www.thewhishlist.co.uk/2014/08/09/if-i-knew-you-were-going-to-be-this-beautiful-by-judy-chicurel-reviewed-for-lovereadings/

A portrait of small town life in 1970's Long Island that focuses on the lives and loves of a group of family, friends and neighbours in a series of stories.

This is the story of small town life in Long Island, 1972 in the shadow of Vietnam. It is narrated by Katie a sympathetic character who introduces us to the diverse cast of characters that make up this close-knit community. It's somewhere we can draw parallels between it and our parochialisms but also enables us to glimpse the wider generalities of human nature across time and place.

The depiction of a down-at-heel seaside resort is brilliantly drawn and its sense of desolation, faded grandeur and future uncertainty is both a trap and a spur to action for the individuals living there.

It's not an easy, light read but it's well written and will make you think about the specifics of these characters and setting and the wider world today.

Megan Williams

A touching and beautiful novel with a poignancy that lingers with the reader long after you've put the book down.

'If I knew you were going to be this beautiful, I never would have let you go'. I fell in love with the title before I'd even begun to read the book, and thankfully I wasn't disappointed. Although I didn't grow up in the USA, and was never a teenager in that era or area, Judy Chicurel portrays her characters with such poignancy and humanity that I found I could still relate to them on some level. The book's real strength lies in its ability to give the reader an array of characters and personalities that cover such a wide spectrum yet each portrayal is done with such depth and feeling that I was touched by these glimpses of life. Chicurel has captured a certain segment of American history and made it real and palpable in her novel. She writes with prose that weaves

beauty from the mundane and dreary and left me genuinely missing the characters when I'd finished and desperate to know what happened to them all. A touching and beautiful novel with a poignancy that lingers with the reader long after you've put the book down.

Sarah Harper

A truly accomplished debut and a thoroughly absorbing read, this book will stay with you long after you've read the last page.

By 1972, Elephant Beach, Long Island, has become a run down resort, way past it's prime. The movie stars and high rollers who built their mansions there have all moved on, leaving derelict properties and empty shops in their wake. Its inhabitants seem tired of life, struggling to make ends meet and filling their days with alcohol and drugs in order to escape from reality.

You would think that this would make fairly depressing reading but the fine details of these characters are enthralling. I wanted to know more about them and why their lives took the route they did. Eighteen year old Katie watches her friends throw their lives away, dropping out of school and heading for dead-end secretarial jobs in the vain hope of marrying their rich bosses. She sees the haunted, broken spirits in the young Vietnam veterans like Mitch and Luke as they attempt to readjust to civilian life.

Some, like Georgie, make it out of Elephant Beach to start new lives in the city but this is Katie's whole world, she's worked so hard to be accepted there that she never wants to let it go.

Judy Chicurel constructs the characters and scenes with a very delicate touch. Her writing style is easy to read and brings the characters alive, ensuring that the readers fall easily in love with them and really care about their fates. This is one of those books where certain characters like Mitch and scenes like the sugar at the supermarket, stay with you long after you've finished the book and this is a real testament to the authors skill.

A truly accomplished debut and a thoroughly absorbing read.

Suzanne Beney

You can't help but be drawn in the 1970s and the life of Katie as she transitions into adulthood.

The synopsis of this book really doesn't do it justice, and in fact I felt

slightly mislead by it and settled down in the anticipation of a very different novel. ***However, my expectations were surpassed and I found myself drawn into 1970's America.***

The descriptions and dialogue bring the book to life and, although I wasn't even born in the 70's, I felt a strong sense of nostalgia. I loved how the book was broken down into short stories based around Katie, the central character, as the common thread running through them all. Yet equally, each chapter could have stood in isolation.

The effects of the Vietnam War on the community is very subtly covered, and doesn't form the central theme that you might have been lead to believe by the synopsis. For me, this book was more about the transition of becoming a young adult in the 1970s, and the many different factors that play a part. It just so happens that the Vietnam War is on such factor.

There are some tough topics covered, and handled, really well both from the authors perspective but also shows a level of maturity from the main character. It often had me thinking 'could I have dealt with these things at her age'?

For me it was quite a slow going book, and I definitely enjoyed some chapters – or episodes, more than others. But, on the whole, considering there wasn't really a central story line, it was a very enjoyable read and one that I would recommend.

Neil Beattie

I loved it, and didn't want it to end. The characters were written so well they became like friends.

When you see this book on the shelves, buy it, read it and you won't be disappointed.

The author welcomes us into the lives of Katie (the narrator) and her friends Liz and Nanny. Along with the secondary characters Mitch, Luke, Voodoo, and the other residents of Elephant Beach. With the Vietnam War raging on overseas the characters spend most of their time getting stoned to escape their less than exciting lives. We enjoy their triumphs and feel sadness at their losses.

I will be honest I didn't think I was going to enjoy this book, how wrong I was. I loved it, and didn't want it to end. *The characters were written so well they became like friends you would meet to catch up on the gossip. Judy captured the once prosperous but now decaying Elephant Beach perfectly. The secondary characters became as important as the main ones in*

some sections. *I enjoyed the way it was written a collection of stories to form a longer novel. I was quite sad when it ended as I knew I probably will never meet these characters again. It's been a long time since I've got emotionally attached to fictional characters in such a strong way. My only gripe is that perhaps Chapter Sixteen (Death to the Working Classes) should have been left to the end as an epilogue, but that is only a minor thing and more of a preference than a criticism.*

When you see this book on the shelves, buy it, read it and you will not be disappointed. After an amazing debut I look forward to see what Judy Chicurel writes next.

Katie Hoare - Twitter [Katie@boggedoff](#)

This beautifully written and well observed debut novel is narrated by Katie, who was a young woman in the summer 1972, telling her story of what it like to live in the fictionalised Long Island. This novel is told through eighteen short stories that give you a sense that they could be like journal entries, telling you what it was like to live in a very diverse working class community at this time, and each story tells you of different points of view, of friends and other events that were happening in her life at this point. You are made aware of the various communities living within this one community, such as the Puerto Ricans and Catholics. She shows you her observations and her friendships from each of these communities, some from school, some outside and others from work. Chicurel gives reader an excellent sense of time and place with regards to the movies and music of the time which have been deftly written into the storyline, and has given the reader a fantastic sense of place and description in her writing of Long Island. She gives the sense that part of this area had seen better times, when there had been a wealthier community living there, then moved out, and how it had changed to how it is in the 1970s. You are also given a sense of the aftermath of Vietnam War and how people dealt with this.

Josie Barton - www.jaffareadstoo.blogspot.co.uk/

Caught between the past and the present, this book shows a community in turmoil and of lives irrevocably changed by circumstances.

Long Island 1972, and in the fictionalised town of Elephant Beach, the working class community face a time of great social and economic change. For Katie and

her friends, newly graduated from high school, it is a time of discovery and of great personal development, but amongst the awakening of new found desire, lies the horror of lives irrevocably changed in the aftermath of the war in Vietnam.

What then follows is an evocative, and at times emotional, look at the dissatisfaction which dominated American social history during the early part of the nineteen seventies. The unhappy image of young men with lives permanently altered by dissatisfaction and of young women caught up in hopeless situations is captured in minute detail, and at times makes for uncomfortable reading. The carelessness of unprotected sexual encounters and the dark escape into drug abuse, sits uncomfortably with casual racism, and yet interestingly, there is a fundamental optimism along with the hope that life can only get better.

*Initially, I found the book difficult to get into as there is much to take in, but by about a third of the way into the book, I began to appreciate more the true nature of the story and became more emotionally involved with the characters. **There is no doubt that the author is writing with authority, and is entirely comfortable recounting a story which has a realistic historical feel to it and which works as a social commentary** about a determined working class community during a time of great social change.*

Evelyn Love-Gajardo

It took me a while to get into this book, but by the end I really cared about the characters and what happens to them. It's very poignant and bittersweet, funny in places and very sad in others. It gives a real sense of the time in which it's set, and what I imagine it was like to grow up in a small town in America at that time. The effects on soldiers returning from the Vietnam War are very clearly described throughout, but the book deals with many other issues without being too heavy handed about them.

***It's beautifully written and the author has a way of switching from colloquial to lyrical language within a couple of sentences. So definitely one to recommend,** but be warned, it will make you feel a bit sad and very nostalgic by the end.*

Lynne Morgan

Warning - this book is addictive – you will not want it to end!

*Judy Chicurel has the ability to make you feel as though you are standing in the same room as the characters and listening to them talking – it's a very intimate experience. You feel that you are right there with them sharing their lives, and you cannot put the book down, you want to know what happens to them. The story is set in the 1970's on Long Island in America, where the impact of the Vietnam War has left a lasting effect on the young men, and these effects are also unavoidably felt by the young women growing up with them. One of these young women, Katie, tells her story and that of her friends trying to cope with growing up at this time. Their struggles to find and keep relationships are made all the more difficult by the devastating after-effects of the men's experiences, which are not spoken out loud in this book, but nevertheless are understood. In order to cope, the young men, and the women, turn to drugs and alcohol, which quickly become the normal way of life for them. The subsequent resulting addictions only add to their problems. In our anti-substance times, it's a little shocking to read how freely these substances are used. **This is an amazing first novel, a very human story, sensitively written and with a clear insight into humanity.** I look forward to reading more from Judy Chicurel.*

Pam Kennedy

***The most interesting bit of this book was the title, I did not like this book at all.** I found it truly tedious, a lot about nothing.*

To me the title was the most interesting thing about the book. I cannot see in any way shape or form why it needed to be written. For me there was not atmosphere no reality completely no point at all. I do apologise to the author if she reads this bit I just did not like it. I let my friend read it because she can read anything (I cannot) and even she could not understand it.

Nicola Kingswell

A moving and thoughtful story about growing up at the time of the Vietnam War

*Judy Chicurel's novel is set in Elephant Beach, Long Island, New York during the early seventies. The main protagonist, Katie, has recently graduated high school and deciding the path of her life. The stories of Katie and her friends are told in present day, flashbacks and the occasional flash forward. It is a very moving and emotional novel that stays with you long after you close the back cover. **Each chapter could almost be a short story in its own right,***

which is a nice way to write and to read, but there is an overall thread weaving though the book. At times it is bleak and sad, learning about Katie's peers and their experiences in the war and the depression gripping America at the time. There are some funny moments too, and I liked the language of the time and the narrative of a has-been seaside town. Ultimately it is a story about self-discovery, fitting in and trying to do the best for yourself, even if your surroundings are not conducive to doing so. I very much enjoyed the book and would recommend.

Clare Turner

I loved this book! It is beautifully written, full of characters, emotions and episodes that remain with you. It is also slightly non-standard, in that it is a series of stand-alone short stories – well, maybe more vignettes than stories (No surprise to learn that the author is also a playwright). Through these we join in the lives of a collection of friends and family members, in a dying Long Island seaside town, in the early 70s. We are never conventionally introduced to the protagonists, but we become increasingly involved in their lives and come to care deeply what happens to them – especially Mitch, an older man, and Luke, whom Katie, the narrator, has loved for years, both of them damaged by the Vietnam War.

That the book works so well is due largely to the very appealing Katie, who has just graduated from the local high school and is waiting to go to college. She is different to her friends for a number of reasons – not only is she beautiful and bright, but she is adopted and her adoptive family has ambitions for her. All she wants is to fit in with her friends – or so she thinks – but nevertheless she remains rather detached from and undamaged by the drugs and sex that are all around her, and her observations are the more powerful for it.

Part of the appeal of the book for me is that its period is also mine, and many of the concerns of the protagonists were mine also. It captures the era so well, especially the haunting background of the Vietnam War.

Read it for the writing, for the story, for the atmosphere – but read it!

Genevieve McAllister – twitter @genmcallister

Summer 1972 in Long Island where the spectre of the Vietnam War is never far away and the Summer of Love has taken its toll.

The year is 1972. Eighteen year old Katie and her friends are living in Long Island and hanging out for one final summer before they decide what to do with their post high-school life. But the spectre of the Vietnam War isn't far away and the Summer of Love has taken its toll as well. Some of the people in this novel don't have much to look forward to and real life keeps rearing its ugly head; this is no golden generation.

Woven through the stories of how Katie and her friends navigate their challenges is Katie's constant hope that her high school crush will notice her and her vision of a life where her mother hadn't put her up for adoption.

*At times poignant and at others shocking, especially when we get glimpses into the long-distant future, Judy Chicurel's debut novel hints at the horror of war, and how it took choices away from a generation. **It wasn't the novel I thought it was going to be – no rose-tinted glasses here – but it was gritty and challenging and a worthwhile read because of it.***

Glenda Worth

A poignant novel about the youngsters in 1970's Long Island growing up in a jaded seaside resort. The Vietnam War has had a big impact on many of the residents.

A poignant novel of youngsters growing up on Long Island during the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Based around the local bar and told through the eyes of Katie. She is comparatively well behaved compared to others who end up pregnant, or on drugs. She spends a lot of her time off from work drunk and develops a crush on a veteran Luke who has not long returned from Vietnam. Katie is friends with Mitch who has suffered greatly and lives at the bar, he was injured in the war and spends every day drunk. Katie works hard to become accepted in the long island lifestyle and hangs onto that for grim death.