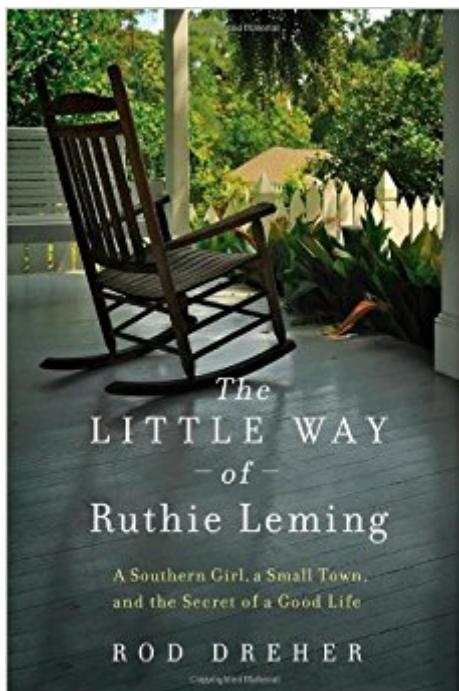


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# The Little Way Of Ruthie Leming: A Southern Girl, A Small Town, And The Secret Of A Good Life By Rod Dreher (April 9 2013)



## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I love Rod's writing and I've been looking forward to this book a great deal. His writing throughout his sister's illness and in the wake of her tragic death was beautiful, heartfelt, and poignant. It also made me think. When I heard he got a book deal to write this story I was thrilled, because I know the ultimate message of this book is something that we all need to hear. I particularly love the way Rod manages to tell the tale of Ruthie's small town life in a real and honest way. It would have been easy to ignore Ruthie's flaws and pretend she was perfect. Rod manages not to do that, which is a real triumph. Instead he makes Ruthie real and he ensures we can all identify with her one way or another. I hope this book is a smashing success and I highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in community, faith, and family. I promise it will make you think--and you'll be all the better for it.

With topnotch, absorbing, compelling writing Rod Dreher gives us an account of his torture at finding peace with his deceased younger sister Ruthie. At 40, Ruthie succumbed to a virulent form of lung cancer (she never smoked). She had been a beloved member of a small southern town, St. Francisville, in Louisiana. Living in Philadelphia as a writer, journalist, and critic and embracing an urbanite lifestyle, Rod is moved and shaken by the close-knit community. She's support of his sister and her family as they go through this harrowing ordeal. Many years earlier, Rod, a naturally gifted writer, broke the heart of his father and Ruthie for moving north east to pursue his dream. Rather than share in Rod's happiness for success, Ruthie and his father condemn him, seeing his move to the big city as a betrayal of family and working class roots. What makes their condemnation worse is that Rod deeply loves his father and sister. They are loyal, strong, loving, and connected to their community. However, their inflexible views on staying close to home compel them to judge Rod harshly and unfairly. Worse, his sister's rebuke of her older

brother, both implicit and explicit, ripples through the community and makes Rod's return difficult, to say the least. Rod internalizes the guilt and questions his decision to move to the urban world, explore fine wines, sophisticated dishes, philosophy, cafÃ© society, and the like. Ruthie is appalled by Rod's sophisticated lifestyle, which she sees as self-involved snobbery. Rod takes her judgment to heart and wonders if he's compromised his Christian faith for blind ambition. As I read this tormented memoir, I felt that Rod all along never did anything wrong, that he is a good person, a good Christian, and has nothing to apologize for to his family. However, Rod drinks his family's tribalistic, provincial Kool-Aid, so to speak. His cultural criticisms that are published began to point their finger at him. He sees himself as a hypocrite, someone who let self-fulfillment, career advancement, and the entertainments of urban life cause him to abandon his family. He moves back to find connection with the small town that raised him. He never condemns Ruthie for her unfair judgment of him, but emphasizes her loving, fiercely courageous, empathic nature. However, in this painful memoir, we see a very good man who needed to leave his small town to spread his wings. His return home was based on both guilt and an honest desire to feel the connection of a small community. But can you really return home? Can you really appease the tribalistic impulse? Is it wrong for a gifted writer to find success in the big city? In this complex, compelling memoir, we find there are no easy answers. A complement to this book that amplifies a lot of his struggles is Rod Dreher's *How Dante Can Save Your Life*. Both books are highly recommended.

I'm a longtime reader of Rod Dreher's and was looking forward to this book, which he heavily promoted in his column. Generally, Rod and I are on the same socio-political side. (A forewarning for those family and friends of the Drehers and Lemings who might read this: You might not like my honest opinions after this point.) Overall, it's written well. Rod's feelings about his hometown, state and the characters that inhabit them bring a particularly delightful quality to his writing. I also appreciate his showing his family's unflattering side (and his family's willingness for that side to be revealed), though his blog posts about the same are not as comprehensive. For example, a few of his blog posts about Ruthie have a Photoshopped picture of her with a halo, which I thought was too much; I'm not sure if it was brotherly love, grief, guilt or some combination thereof that precipitated those posts. What was she? The book finds her to be a loving and beloved daughter, wife, mother, sister (a loving sister, to some degree) and friend who loved her hometown and had a simple faith. She's one of many women in that form and I didn't find her particularly remarkable in that sphere. However, to her brother and those whose lifestyle - albeit an honest lifestyle such as Rod's -

clashed with her thinking, she was also narrow-minded and nasty. For me, her character could not recover from the Christmas dinner incident, which reflected poorly on her, her husband and on Rod's parents (who showed an unsaid favoritism to their daughter, IMO) as well (and was a poor example to Ruthie's oldest child who must have been present). Her later "holier-than-thou" comment and the discovery of how she damaged her children's relationship with their uncle sealed the deal. Now, on the other side, as much as I like and usually agree with Rod in his blog, he can indeed come off as being pompous (for lack of a better word), especially when he's going on some philosophical, existential-type, over-thinking bent in a post (which are the posts I usually ignore), though I believe he's a well-meaning man who has OCD when it comes to analyzing things. As an example, think about the part when he and Hannah are in Paris when he starts blathering on about something philosophical when he and Hannah could have enjoyed a QUIET reflective moment, and Hannah shuts him up. Rather than simply explain to her kids that her brother and she were very different, and to love Uncle Rod as he was (and try to ignore the stuff that could drive you crazy), it became apparent that Ruthie sniped about him to her children and placed an impediment to their developing an untarnished relationship with him. How petty. There is also no doubt for me that she was jealous of Rod's hard-earned success, which any longtime readers will know, has brought him fame and threats to him and his family. If there is a positive thing about Ruthie that I wish readers would take away, it was telling her children not to be mad at God for her illness. (I'm always amazed that people get mad at God for bad things, yet conveniently forget to be thankful for all the good He gives them.) I think the late Elizabeth Edwards told her children the same thing. We ALL die; Ruthie wasn't going to be any different. We ALL experience trials and tribulations, some, such as illness, which will lead directly to our deaths. My belief, and God grant me the strength to keep this belief should I suffer a terminal illness, is that part of our duty on this earth is to take the worst that life throws at us and accept it with grace. On this thinking, I do salute Ruthie. Rod hit a home run with the concept that we all need to belong to a community; that we all need roots; and the importance of contributing to our community, although the community in which we choose to settle does not have to be the community in which we were raised. The outpouring of love and support from the townspeople before and after Ruthie's death opened his eyes to the value of living somewhere where everyone knows everyone; it not only drove home the importance of community, but it also literally drove him back to the community to which he'd thought he would not return. Overall, it's a decent read, and it's worth it for Rod's insights on community (and some regarding family dynamics) but you might not come away with loving the person around whom the book is centered as you would expect to do, particularly if you were familiar with Rod's posts about his sister.

I stayed on this because I felt I was familiar with some of the stories.

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