Foreword

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For women who have been in the last two centuries' struggle for equality, walking through the Women's Museum is an emotional experience. I found myself weeping and cheering. Everyone should take this trip, ideally with a young woman—a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter.

Nicely housed in the renovated Administration Building at Dallas's Fair Park, the Women's Museum opened in October 2000. It's the first and only comprehensive museum of women's history in the United States. Exhibits throughout the museum acknowledge the achievements of America's most respected and celebrated women. But along with these, a visitor will find the humbler tales of women who made their contributions with no public (and maybe no private) recognition at all. At an array of computer stations, museum visitors can write their own life stories: each individual's experience contributes to the collective memory.

We are all storytellers, and our best tales come from real life. I've made a living by talking and writing for almost six decades now, beginning as a young reporter in Washington during the final years of the FDR presidency and now, in part, as a memoirist fortunate to enjoy an audience for the recollections of my eventful life. Countless women have been less lucky. We'll never know how many women's stories have been lost because

they weren't thought valuable. Like the Women's Museum, *With Courage and Common Sense* makes it a point to honor the women whose stories might have gone untold.

Many of the women whose writing you'll read in this book came from Texas, and their stories evoke imagery long taken as typically Texan. Eula Rae McCown tells how her skill with a pistol enchanted her husband-to-be. Erin Colleen Moore remembers how she saddled up and rode along on cattle drives. Other women came to Texas from somewhere else. They're Texans now, but in their writing, memories of other homes linger too. But for the circumstance of war, Mathilda Mimun might have remained in Tunisia, Sarah Lichtman in Poland, Jean Wyllys and Eileen Titus in England. Grace Schmitt writes of going back, with her son and granddaughter, to find the Greenwich Village apartment building where she'd grown up.

Much of the time our society stereotypes and dismisses old women as ridiculous, troublesome, irrelevant, and (worst of all) boring. These memoirs contradict the assumptions. The women who wrote them have experienced solid, hearty lives, with a characteristic vitality enduring into old age. Writing about her work as a professor at American University, Faye Kelly remembers the man's world that was academia and the first efforts by female faculty to move the profession toward gender equity. A memoir by Dolores Muhich tells how she and her traveling companions escaped the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Jeanie Forsyth writes about her blistering three-week mid-summer Outward Bound excursion at Big Bend as a member of the "geriatric patrol." The fullness of these women's lives also shows in their stories about meaningful small events. Marji Smith writes about the sympathetic vet who accepted office cleaning as payment for doctoring her injured puppy, freeing up her last two dollars to spend on flour tortillas and honey, enough to last two days.

No one can live six decades or more without facing hardship and loss. In this book, memoirs recall the collective ordeals—the economic despair, the wars, the assassinations—interpret-

ing these momentous public events as they were privately experienced. Perhaps because of happenstance or because it's a generational trait, these writers often locate the small incidents of good found even in adversity. Jean Leonard's Pearl Harbor memoir features the coincidence of that infamous day with a fondly remembered Sweet Sixteen surprise party and birthday concert at Radio City Music Hall. There are stories of personal trauma that must have taken courage to retell. Ruby Bishop writes that "no child should witness" what she saw as her mother descended into schizophrenia and forced institutionalization. Selah Rose's memoir counts all that she gave up to free herself from an abusive forty-year marriage. More important: it concludes that her renewed, true-to-self life, with its fresh anticipation of the future, has been worth the cost.

Twice events have called on me to remake my life, so I have some experience with renewal. In 1974 my husband Leslie died, and Washington, where we had savored living together for more than thirty years, no longer felt right. I returned to Texas, settled into a home on a hill overlooking Austin, and filled my days with writing and speaking, feminist causes, and friends who brought the zest back into my life. Then, in 1991, my brother Tom died and his three teenagers came to live with me. I wasn't sure I had the resources—physical, emotional, financial—to deal with this unplanned return to parenthood. I felt reluctant to sacrifice my work, my friends, and my freedom. But I could not fail to take care of those children. The challenges of seventy-something surrogate motherhood were hard. And they convinced me that I could handle the surprises that life has left for me still.

Firsthand insight into ordinary people's lives and witness to the monumental events of last century, these memoirs contribute to history. The memoirs are a valuable legacy, but not the only one. These memoirs teach us, but subtly: they don't tell us how to live, but rather, how the women who wrote them lived. Theirs is the power of example. Simple and unpretentious, the writing in this book is endowed with truth and meaning.

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