

## *"A Collection of Voices"*

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By the time I was 8 years old, I was old enough to know about Christopher Columbus, the struggle of the Pilgrims, the American Revolution, and everything else important enough to be in our school textbooks. As time went on and it became apparent that almost all the major historical figures and authors were male, I began to realize how few women's voices were represented in our classroom studies. Those that were mentioned were written about; they did not write their own viewpoints, but were the object of study (such as the historical "pioneer wife" figure). Luckily for me, there was someone at home who introduced me to many women's writings, which gave me my first glimpse of women writing about their own experiences and lives.

My mother began reading to me and my sister ever since we were old enough to hold our evening snack in our hands without spilling any crumbs in the sheets. She would read Laura Ingalls Wilder, L. M. Montgomery, and others while we snuggled in our bunk beds, curling our toes to feel the heavy warmth of the quilts. As we lay awake and heard the adventures of Anne Shirley, Laura Ingalls and Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, we would let our imaginations enter the story until they became our dreams and mother would silently place the bookmark and turn off the light. This period was crucial because not only did I inherit my mother's love for literature, but it was during these bedtime readings when I realized that, contrary to our school textbook, women can use their own voice to tell their own stories.

From that point on, I have been avidly collecting women's literature; novels, poems, stories, experiences, and lives. Although all women's writings are significant, my collection focuses on those writings which deal directly with women's issues, such as gender roles, self-esteem, sexual orientation, discrimination, domestic violence, and rape. Each book in my collection tells a woman's story which is not only her own, but is shared by countless women everywhere. Although the issues dealt with in these books are serious, they are not sad stories. These books are jubilant because every time a story is read, more people come to understand these issues facing women, and every time a story is read, a woman's-voice is heard. Toni Morrison, Jeanette Winterson, Doris Lessing, Alice Walker, and others all share their own songs, not just for others to hear, but as an invitation to join in the singing as well. My bookshelf contains not just volumes of ink on paper, but a living chorus of women's voices that sing aloud.

This collection of women's stories has taught me a lot about women's experience in the "real world" and has forced me to examine my own identity of who I am as a woman, as opposed to what society thinks a woman "ought to be." I treasure these books and, although they are currently only being read by myself and occasional friends, I look forward to the time when I can walk in my mother's shoes and share real women's stories with my children, just as my mother did with me.