

Women of Oklahoma tell their stories of struggle and transformation

Voices from the Heartland

Volume II

Edited by Sara Beam, Emily Dial-Driver,
Rilla Askew and Juliet Evusa

Despite progress in recent years, Oklahoma hardly ranks as woman-friendly. The state holds the highest incarceration rate of women in the nation. It offers women no legal protection against being fired due to sexual orientation or gender identity. Its Native American and immigrant populations struggle for access to community resources. And Oklahoma is still governed largely by men, leaving women without adequate political representation.

In 2007, the highly acclaimed anthology *Voices from the Heartland* provided a much-needed platform for Oklahoma women—prominent and unknown—to tell their stories. This timely sequel reflects an even broader cross-section of women's experiences.

Just like its predecessor, *Voices from the Heartland: Volume II* offers memorable accounts of struggle and transformation. It does not sugarcoat the problems that women face in contemporary Oklahoma—and in many parts of underprivileged America: racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, addiction. The 38 contributions gathered here are honest and, at times, raw. They cover such varied topics as girlhood, trauma, the workplace, parenting, politics, and religious beliefs. Taken together, the essays comprise a living artifact of women's history, accessible and, as an anthology, ideally suited for classroom use.

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, it is more important than ever to listen to what women have to say about their own lives, including—and perhaps especially—to women from flyover states like Oklahoma. As Sara N. Beam states so eloquently in her preface, “You’ll read their stories here as they want them told: in a mix of poetry and prose, in the voice of a relative, in the voice of a tired person across the breakroom table, in a secret hush, or in a voice not unlike that of your best friend or mother.” These voices from the heartland inspire us to pause, to listen, to understand, to evolve, and to make a difference.

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