

Weaving Her Story Into History



As authors of *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*, we truly welcome the opportunity to tell you more about the women on whose shoulders we all stand. Each month our plan is to highlight and profile women from our book—women who have made a difference! Throughout our country's history, women have made contributions in the sciences, in the arts, in sports, in politics, in business, in medicine, in fact, across every field of endeavor. Women's accomplishments to our country's history will no longer be minimized, forgotten and/or ignored. We will highlight women across a wide spectrum of accomplishments and topics and weave their stories into the history with which we are far more familiar.

The theme of this month's digital magazine is "Women in Transition." That theme brings us thoughts of life changes (e.g., the birth of a child, death of a spouse, divorce), career changes (e.g., changing careers, finding a job, losing a job) and body, mind and spirit changes such as entering menopause, accepting one's physical changes, and the like.

Two women from our book who can be described as "women in transition" offer all of us both lessons and reminders. Women provide amazing support for other women; we share our stories to help each other cope with and manage through transitions of many kinds.

Anna Mary Robertson Moses may be described as a woman who was "in transition." At age 76,

she was unable to continue doing embroidery due to her arthritis; she was unable to hold the needle. She could, however, hold a brush. Thus, she began painting. Many of her early paintings were given to family members or sold for a modest sum.

A collector discovered her paintings in a drugstore window in upstate New York and bought them all. Moses was 78 years old at the time. A year later, her art was featured in an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City where she was featured as a "contemporary unknown painter." She didn't stay unknown for much longer.

Today we know this artist, whose style is referred to as "primitive art", as Grandma Moses. She painted primarily rural scenes that many people were drawn to. There was an immediate, emotional response when one viewed her paintings. Critics suggest that she "touched the heartstrings" of many. One fan described her paintings this way: "There emanates from her paintings a light-hearted optimism; the world she shows us is beautiful and it is good. You feel at home in all these pictures, and you know their meaning. The unrest and the neurotic insecurity of the present day make us inclined to enjoy the simple and affirmative outlook of Grandma Moses."

It is truly astonishing to report that Moses painted more than 1,000 pictures; working and painting even after she turned 100 years old. Her work hangs in the White House and in many museums. It has appeared on the cover of Hallmark cards, and it has been featured on a U.S. postage stamp (a six-cent stamp issued May 1, 1969).

In her autobiography, Grandma Moses stated her basic philosophy of life: "I look back on my life like a good day's work, it was done and I feel satisfied with it. I was happy and contented; I knew nothing better and made the best out of what life offered. And life is what we make it, always has been, always will be."

What an amazing story of optimism, enthusiasm! Don't think of transitions as limitations; think of them as new beginnings! Many women, like Grandma Moses, featured in *Her Story: A Time-*



line of the Women Who Changed America successfully made major life transitions.

Malvina Reynolds is another example of a woman who made a major life transition. She did not start to write songs until she was in her forties! Her name might not be well known to many of you, but many of her songs are very well known. Her career as a songwriter focused on writing folk songs that identified her political views. Her most famous song Little Boxes was recorded by Pete Seeger, among others. A song written in opposition to the use of the atomic bomb, What Have They Done to the Rain, was recorded by The Searchers and Joan Baez. Harry Belafonte sang her song Turn Around. Reynolds also composed children's songs; she was a contributor to Sesame Street and even appeared as a character on the show.

The idea for the song Little Boxes occurred to Reynolds during a driving trip in California. She

saw the suburban sprawl and the "sameness" of the small, tract homes in Daly City, California. She was inspired to write the song and asked her husband to take the wheel so that she could write down the lyrics that came into her head. Before her death, she had written six albums of songs for adults and three song albums for children.

Reynolds was very opinionated and didn't want other people to romanticize her. She said: "I don't think of myself primarily as a writer of children's songs. In fact, I tend to avoid that title, because the first thought is, you know, this nice old grandma who makes cookies and sings for kids, and that's not my character at all. I have a very acid edge toward many aspects of modern life, and I'm pretty outspoken about it. I don't mind crossing swords with people when I disagree with them, and I'm not your nice old grandma. However, I always make it clear that the reason I have this sharp cutting edge is because I do care for people."

Both of these women made successful transitions. We are proud to share their stories. They did it. You can do it, too! Take heart from the many women in Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America.

You can succeed. It takes character traits that you already have – passion, determination, and persistence. As Rosie the Riveter famously modeled during World War II: We Can Do It!

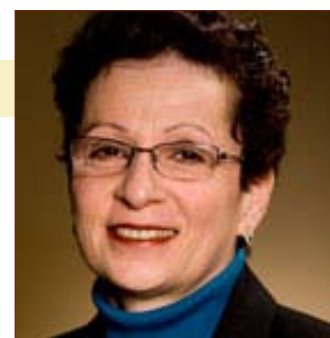


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