

# This Lady Ain't Kiddin'

History mixes with unflinching memoir in *Never In My Wildest Dreams*

There is a rising trend in the world of memoir, and it's simple to explain: The ladies are getting cynical. Perhaps as a backlash to the labeling of *Eat Pray Love* as Chick Lit, the women working in this genre have grown angrier, more stylistically ornate and less dependant on emotional transformation as a hook. These writers have stories to tell, damn it, and they're not to be lumped into some arbitrary category because they possess two X chromosomes. The gloves are off. The historical references are frequent and spot-on. The character development has more details than ever. And girl, it makes for great reading.

The latest wave of this trend is *Never In My Wildest Dreams*, written by Belva Davis. The first female black news anchor to be seen on West Coast television, Davis describes a life where breaking social norms was necessary for survival, if not always intended.

The story of Davis' life has all the elements of classically successful memoirs: a troubled childhood, rising above obstacles both personal and societal and an eventual reconciliation between past and future selves. Davis describes growing up as a young child in the Jim Crow-era South, flitting from home to home whenever work was scarce or a relative was threatened

with tarring and feathering. She runs from an abusive husband, poverty and even journalistic trends with which she did not agree. Her nerve, and her unwillingness to be spoken for, earned her respect from the world.

But Davis' role as a deliverer of news pervades the storytelling, with fantastic results. Historical references are peppered in with personal anecdotes. Davis' first trip to Washington D.C. is complemented by a quote from a speech by the Truman Committee on Civil Rights. The gritty details of UC Berkeley's student protests and incidents of police brutality during 1969's "Bloody Thursday" goes hand in hand with Davis' quest not to ever look like an oversensitive "girl" to her macho colleagues. Nothing is ever without context. The book's title itself includes the subheading "A Black Woman's Life In Journalism," and it fulfills that classification to the end.

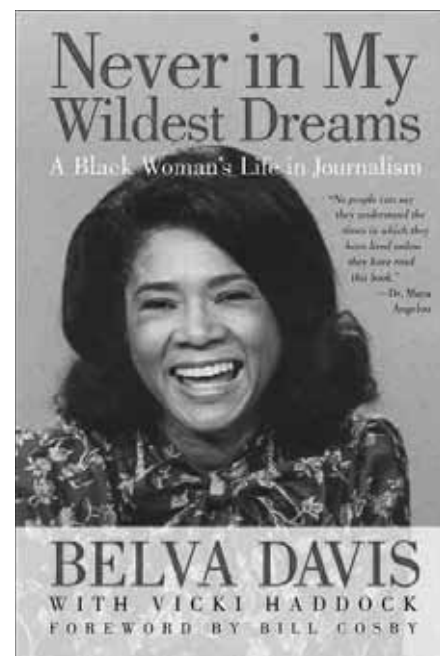
Davis nearly falls into some of the traps of women's memoirs — mentioning weight, maternal or other insecurities at unnecessary moments — but her shrewd timing prevents such blips from hurting the work. The only time body size is mentioned is when Davis describes sleeping on kitchen floors as a child or appearing on television next to white anchors.

Insecurities regarding motherhood are analyzed in a quasi-Freudian manner, with no dramatic screaming. Sure, she mentions crying on the job because of pre-exclusive interviewing jitters, but none other than her interviewee, Fidel Castro, gives her comfort.

The picture on the cover of *Dreams* is undoubtedly that of Davis while on the air, with her hair in a perfectly flipped bob, her '70s-era rosy blouse loose but unwrinkled. Her face engages you, her eyes warm but also distant, mouth parted in what is either a laugh or a sob. And perhaps that is the point of this book: We aren't supposed to know if Davis is laughing or crying. That's not our place. We are the audience, and she is the journalist. The entire book has a cold, fourth-wall distance between author and audience. It doesn't carry a cozy, sweater-and-coffee vibe.

*Dreams* is ushering in a new era of autobiography: the historical memoir. You don't read a book of this type to get an emotional pick-me-up. After all, subjects like the Black Panthers and the People's Temple suicides are tucked into this slim hardback. Davis' story shows that no person is an island, that huge social movements do indeed affect people all over a nation regardless of location.

Overall, Davis' book is an unabashed



lesson in the progress of the nation. It is a shrewd, intelligent story of a life in America during a period where people like Davis were not expected to succeed. She is black, female, a single mother at certain points in her career, and was economically disadvantaged and without a college education. But succeed she did, to an incredible degree. Her final words, however, are humble, and she happily states during her time spent reporting of the 2008 presidential election, "Don't ever let anyone tell you history doesn't have a sense of humor." **EW**

**Safe Removal of Mercury Fillings**  
Wellness Centered  
Dentistry  
868-2008  
300 Country Club Rd  
Ste 290  
Rob Whicker DDS [www.wcdentistry.com](http://www.wcdentistry.com)

**traveling soon?**  
medical advice for global travelers  
**THE TRAVEL CLINIC**  
John D. Wilson, M.D.  
1200 Hilyard St., Suite S-560  
541/343-6028  
[www.TravelClinicOregon.com](http://www.TravelClinicOregon.com)  
Questions? Email us at [travelclinicoregon.343-6028@gmail.com](mailto:travelclinicoregon.343-6028@gmail.com)

**IT'S A SOUP-CENTRIC UNIVERSE... AND YOU'RE INVITED!**

Open Later!

**Over 80 Varieties of Soup**  
**Our Menu Changes Daily!**  
Soups ~ Salads ~ Sandwiches ~ Frozen Soup To-Go  
Full Espresso Bar! Open M-F 8-7, Sat. 11-6

★ 525 High Street ★ (541) 683-1999 ★ Like us on Facebook ★

**GREAT HORSE PROPERTY!!**

Beautiful 4 BDRM, 2.1 bath home in Clear Lake Estates on almost 5 acres. Backs up to horse trails. Home offers shop, garage and carport, plus several fenced and cross fenced meadows. The house has been beautifully updated and has a mudroom, office, formal and informal living. Carefully maintained grounds are peaceful and relaxing!

Kit Sixel, Principal Broker/Owner  
541-951-1915  
Kit@SIXELre.com

Sixel Real Estate Office: 541-654-0501  
497 Oakway Rd Fax: 888-887-8165  
Suite 280 [www.EugeneBestHomes.com](http://www.EugeneBestHomes.com)  
Eugene, OR 97401  
*Million Dollar Service In Any Price Range*