

Web Books Blog



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# The Road Trip Edition

Before we left for Spain in February we prepared our house to go on the market. That process could occupy a whole essay in and of itself. All that "de-personalizing," hiding everything that made the house our home and turning it into a saleable product, meant changing our relationship with the place in a way that reminded me of turning a much-loved manuscript into a book for sale.

We told our realtors, half-jokingly, that we'd like them to sell the house while we were gone. And before we came home we were in contract: An all-cash offer from people in a hurry. So when we got home, tired and jet lagged, we launched right into the process of actually emptying the place. There was no time to line up our next abode. Because we didn't know where we would live next (House? Apartment? Two bedrooms? Three?), we made decision after decision based on guesswork. I do not recommend emptying a five bedroom house in two weeks, and am glad I'll never do it again.

But we got it done, and got the house all cleaned for the next folks, within hours of their inspection. And did we rest after that? No. Right after the bulk of our worldly goods left for the west coast in a pod, we embarked on a cross-country drive to Oregon in an electric car we'd loaded with the rest of our stuff. As I write this we are in Amarillo, Texas, in a historic hotel with an etching of crossed six-shooters on the elevator floor and an actual Prohibition speakeasy in the basement.

So far we have visited Civil War battlefields in Georgia, Tennessee, and Louisiana. Next we head for Santa Fe and then on to San Diego to visit the grave of my mother who died at the height of the pandemic. Then we're off to my 50th college reunion near Los Angeles, and thence to our old haunts in the Bay Area. We will eventually arrive in Oregon, where we'll take up residence in the rough vicinity of daughter #1 and her family.

How are a couple of seventy-somethings finding the energy to do all this? Beats me. But I can tell you one thing: The final edit of my essay collection, *Rock On: Power, Sex & Money after Sixty*, has taken a back seat (quite literally; the printout of the latest version is in the back of the car, under a pile of stuff). Too bad about the delay, because I'm excited about this next

book and I believe you will enjoy it. The Beta readers and early reviewers certainly did!

Meanwhile, what have I learned on this trip so far? While touring Civil War battlefields would be sobering under any circumstances, the juxtaposition of those thousands and thousands of graves (most bearing the inscription "Unknown Soldier") resonates with the national events of the past few weeks, lending extraordinary depth to both then and now. Historians like Heather Cox Richardson trace the fracturing of our body politic from the Civil War right up to today (see her book, [How the South Won the Civil War](#)). And in a recent *New York Times* article, Ezra Klein interviews historian Steven Hahn, author of [Illiberal America: A History](#) about the many times the United States has veered toward autocracy. The Trail of Tears, the Ku Klux Klan, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the Joseph McCarthy era, all were manifestations of the illiberal impulse in the United States that hearken back to the Civil War. In the interview, Hahn places our present moment squarely in that heinous tradition.

I shy away from writing about politics because I welcome to my readership Women of a Certain Age of all political persuasions. But as others have said, what is happening right now goes beyond politics. For starters, let's consider the well-being of older women in this present moment. If you took a married name, your right to vote may be [compromised](#) by the SAVE Act. If you use any of the many services our nation provides to older persons, from Meals on Wheels to Social Security and Medicare, your access to these may be hindered under the [2026 budget](#). The FDA Guidance that requires [including older persons](#) in clinical trials was deleted by the new administration because its title includes the word "diversity." This nonsensical change allows pharmaceutical companies to go back to their prior practice of excluding people over 65 from trials, thus depriving doctors of data they need to make informed treatment decisions. Changes such as these will affect older women regardless of our political leanings. And just as real, just as detrimental, are changes that affect every other marginalized group in the United States. If ever there was a time when it's essential to join together, this is it.

While the illiberal strain of American life is very real, there is a powerful impulse in our society to bend toward the light. This trip across the country with its many interlocking cultural strands leaves me with a hunger to

understand the movements that have succeeded in bringing about progress. Women's Suffrage, the Civil Rights Movement, the Disability Rights movement, the Vietnam Anti-War Movement: These are examples of times when Americans chose to stand up for equality and made change happen. What did these movements have in common? How did they prevail? And how can we, as older women, help move our history in a direction that preserves our own rights and the rights of others?

As my partner and I continue our journey across this fractured country, I will keep looking for answers. May all of us join in supporting the rights of everyone affected by the changes we are experiencing in our country today.

And I encourage you to [write about your experience](#) during this crucial time. Now more than ever, your story is essential.



Keep the pen moving, or the keys clicking.

All the best,

Stella,

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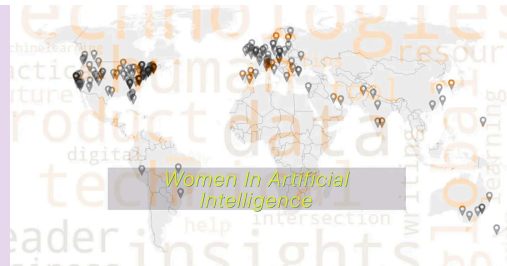
**From the blog this month**



## Seller's Remorse

**Stella Fosse**

We bought our house in North Carolina on the first anniversary of our first date. We saw it on a whim. We had flown out from California to take care of grandchild #1 when grandchild #2 was just born. It was Sunday afternoon, the new baby was crying, and we ducked out for a few minutes of peace and quiet. What to do when it's Sunday in a place you've never been? Tour open houses. We fell in love with the first one we saw. It was five bedrooms on two acres; rather large for a couple of empty-nesters, but absolutely splendid. We packed a U-Haul and drove across country. Everything we owned fit into that little truck. We bought lots more furniture to fill the new house, and over the years we bought enough stuff to fill up all the ample closets.



## Women in Artificial Intelligence

**Karen Smiley**

On December 19, 2024, having finished my holiday shopping, I was relaxing by browsing Substack articles about one of my passions, AI ([artificial intelligence](#)) (Yes, that's relaxing. Proud data geek here!). I came across a post by an author I won't name. He asked four questions of ten Substack authors writing about AI, and recommended subscribing to them. Care to guess how many of the ten were women?

Yeah, none.

That didn't sit right with me. So I sent a message to the author of the post.

*"Hi XXX, your piece XXXXXXXX was interesting. I noticed that all ten people appear to be men. With so many women working in AI nowadays, it was disappointing to*

Eight years later the grandkids had moved away. Weeding and cleaning seemed to take more energy in our seventies. After my 2024 double whammy of cancer and cardiac procedures we began to consider a smaller house near a different child and grandchild. In March we staged our house, turning it from a home into a product in a process that reminded me of marketing a book that had been a beloved manuscript. Our house went on the market during our vacation in Spain, and it sold to an eager buyer before we got back. Suddenly we were on a quick march to empty our home with no other place lined up.

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*see an article with none.*

*Something to consider for future?"*

His response?

*"Certainly! These were all people I had connected with on Substack and unfortunately both in the field of AI and writing about it on Substack there are far more men than women. I'm glad to connect with you, Karen!"*

He's not wrong that *"unfortunately both in the field of AI and writing about it on Substack there are far more men than women."* And that's not as it should be. But I knew I was far from the only woman working in AI and data AND writing about it on Substack.

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Stella Fosse



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