

# Transitions: Get Clear & Get Going!

BY ANN DALY, PHD

Like the bumper sticker says, I'm not a native Texan, but I got here as fast I could. Of all things truly Texan (barbeque, live oaks, Friday night lights, to name a small sample), my favorite is the Texas Woman. You know who I mean--that strong, good ol' girl with the sly wit, broad smile, and big hair.

As a Yankee, I've learned a lot from the Texas Woman over the past two decades. When I arrived here, my New-Yorker's-eye-view of a Southern woman was an over-refined, over-domesticated belle. Imagine my surprise at the gutsy, ballsy, larger-than-life women I encountered here.

Ann Richards, of course, was hard to miss. And not just because of her white helmet coiffure and Harley hog. Her famous quip at the 1988 Democratic National Convention about that infamous silver foot revealed to me that the Texan Woman's tongue may be slow, but her wit is quick.

Closer to home, the first neighbor I met in my first house, in south Austin, was a retiree named Melba. I remember when she came over to introduce herself. I was on my hands and knees in the front yard, pulling up the runners of my St. Augustine lawn because it looked like the weed we northerners call crabgrass. She invited me to come see her "meta," and for as many times as I asked her to repeat the word (cautious about what I was being drawn into), she finally spelled it out for me: m-e-a-d-o-w.

Melba was gentle-spirited, but she also spoke her mind plainly. Shall we say bluntly. She picked up the trash on our block on her morning walks. But time had taken its toll, and she insisted that intruders were getting into her sock drawer. She decided that hooligans were stashing their weapons in the 10-foot fountain grass in my next door neighbor's front yard. It was a tribute to the affection we all felt for Melba that Julie cut down that magnificent plant, to ease Melba's fears.

The thing about a Texas Woman is, she surprises you. I was used to Melba's sturdy, forthright manner, so I was delighted (and touched) to see her at the book signing for my first book. She was decked out in a soft, flowing dress and a spectacle of a hat. The stack of books she purchased reflected a sophisticated aesthetic that I had not suspected.

Here are a few of the qualities I admire about the Texas Woman:

## *Humor*

Sometimes the best way to make an unpopular point is with down-home humor, impeccably delivered. It may be a less direct tactic, but it's more devastating, and harder to attack.

## *Grit*

Don't let that smile fool you. The Texas Woman is in it for the long haul. She doesn't let any little thing like sexism get in her way.

## *Passion*

Because her actions are driven by her passion, she is unstoppable.

## *Big Hair*

As often as this is literally true, big hair is, more importantly, a symbol for the way that the Texas Woman brands herself for maximum visibility. She's no shrinking violet, and she refuses to be invisible.

## *Public Spirit*

Not only is the hair big. So is the vision. The history of Texas is filled with women like Lady Bird Johnson who worked tirelessly to improve the lives of all citizens.

## *Grassroots Know-How*

It's not just a network, it's a mafia. When Texas women get together to advocate for social change, they know how to leverage

the power of ordinary people.

Personally, I'm still a work-in-progress. There are some things Yankee that I'll never let go of. But I must admit, I did recently buy some hairspray.

*(For further reading about Texas women, pick up a copy of PJ Pierce's Texas Wisewomen Speak, available from The University of Texas Press.)*



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