

CHAPTER 1

I Double-Dog Dare You

Thirty minutes of TV changed my life.

I owe it all to Bea Arthur in *Maude*. You may remember her if you're over forty. Google it if you haven't seen the show. Maude had a cynical cast to her face, a deep, raspy voice, and a take-no-prisoners attitude. She was a very strong, aggressive woman, and she dominated the screen. What Maude said about something, you could take to the bank. The show came on in the middle of the workweek. In this particular episode, Maude was waiting for an old classmate to show up in town many years after their high school graduation. Maude had been the star of her high school class, seemingly destined for great things. Maude, the invincible. Maude, the bright star in her particular firmament. But now, here she was in her late forties, fading in her appearance, beached in life, acerbic, and not the powerhouse she had thought she was going to be. Greatness had eluded her. The classmate, nicknamed Bunny (perhaps because of her teeth back in high school), showed up with a whole new persona, someone totally different from whom she had been.

The gorgeous actress Barbara Rush played Bunny—glamorous, successful, and with great teeth—transformed, and everything Maude was not. If memory serves, Bunny even arrived on her own plane. She ran her own company, and her life was so much of a contrast to Maude's that I was riveted to the TV. The expectations Maude had

nourished had come to nothing. The expectations of Bunny, on the other hand, had been dismal; Maude was supposed to be the star. Yet life had taken an unexpected turn. Bunny had changed; Maude hadn't.

I was in my late twenties working in a boring job in New York City, with no goal or vision of what should come next in my life.

I realized that I was on the verge of becoming Maude. My parents had sacrificed to send me to an expensive school, and here I was, doing . . . what? Working in a job in the federal government where I was never going to do anything earthshaking.

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The TV show woke me to the fact that I had to define my future. No one else could do it for me. That thirty minutes made me determined I would avoid the Maude trajectory. The next morning, I telephoned the administrator of the Law School Admission Test and signed up to take the test, cramming over a two-week period before going up to Columbia University for the exam. I received a good score, and I was admitted to the University of Texas School of Law for the coming fall term.

Maude made me realize that I not only had the power to change the direction of my life, but that I *had* to do it. We have to will ourselves into our futures, even if at first, the future looks murky at best.

In my own case, I would never have imagined, at the age of twenty-one as a new college graduate, that I would go to law school; be a prosecutor; run for elected office multiple times statewide in Texas—and win; and also spend thirty years running a cattle operation during much of that same period. In the meantime, I married

a wonderful man with whom I had three sons, now adults; wrote a romance novel, which caused consternation in some quarters; and learned a lot about people. Lessons I still apply.

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I just didn't think about it. I am still not sure why that is. My parents weren't intentionally or deliberately "pro-women" . . . they just wanted their two kids to be happy and succeed. My mother wasn't a feminist; my father, as a rancher, was more concerned with rain and cattle than with my being a leader in any particular area. But together they cultivated good instincts in me and laid down rules for life that seem still relevant.

Plain speaking was welcome in my world, as were humor, great stories about individuals, and a love of language. These habits and beliefs brought substantial success and fun and helped me conquer and overcome obstacles several times. Other times I faced closed doors—not because of being a woman, however—and either had to kick them down or get another door to open. All of it was energizing! I retired from elected office in 2015 and projected that my next year or so was going to be calm, serene, perhaps even boring.

A new *Maude*-type event occurred a year ago. In the spring of 2015, I was jolted into a fresh awareness that society's views on women had not materially advanced in many ways. What woke me up to this fact? I really wonder why I hadn't been noticing; perhaps because the

obstacles I encountered were the result of what I was trying to do, not that I was a woman trying to do it. I suspect I was rather insular in that regard.

A recent Austin, Texas, city council election meant that there would soon be a majority of women on the council. By way of context, Austin is well known as a liberal and forward-thinking city, even if not everyone agrees with its path at a particular time.

A male city staff member thought that this electoral shift was so significant that special training needed to be conducted to deal with this remarkable occurrence. Women assuredly were different, weren't they? Needed special handling? Presumably their brains were different, since their bodies certainly were. And yet there had been female council members before. What had changed? To this day, no one can pinpoint a reason why this happened, but it is noteworthy.

The male staff member hired a super special consultant team to deal with this earthshaking event, for who knew what might happen if staff weren't trained to deal with women! The result was probably not what he wanted or had imagined by the end of the consultant's contract.

Here's why.

The male consultant began by describing his experience base for how women learn, lead, communicate, and deal with issues—as a means of demonstrating his expertise and showing how he could provide help. Are you ready? He told the city staff that women don't like numbers, and they also ask a lot of questions. Interesting. As proof of these unassailable “facts” about women, he offered an illustration of the source of his experience and knowledge. Ready? He had been driving his eleven-year-old daughter to school recently, and in the ten minutes or so of the drive, she asked a whole bunch of questions—which he “answered patiently.” Really?

Two things horrified me about this scenario and his words and

assumptions. First, he used an eleven-year-old girl as an example for the best way to deal with adult women who are elected officials, who had run hard for their positions, and who had persuaded a majority of voters that they were skilled and competent. But second, he prided himself on his ability to answer “patiently” the questions from his daughter—his female child, to belabor the point—as if he were sacrificing himself in offering this remarkable service. On so many fronts, it was both a sad and frustrating commentary. It was also insulting and seemed to reinforce the stereotypes that are often repeated about women.

By implication, the male city council members accept and believe everything the staff tells them, never question any fact or conclusion, and vote in lockstep. Nice compliment for them, too! This all resulted in an uptick in national interest in Austin, with Conan O’Brien and a host of others commenting about the situation on TV. Not really what you want to be known for—either as a consultant or a forward-thinking city.

But perhaps the most striking thing to me was that this took place in 2015, in Austin, not exactly a bastion of conservatism. The social media lit up with people asking, “How on earth did the staff member, who hired the consultant, ever think this was appropriate?” I believe he is still employed by the city.

I have to tell you it got me pretty fired up. Nothing about the entire episode could pass muster on any account—not for women, or for men, or the assumptions and stereotypes that it perpetuated.

I asked myself a few questions: “If this could happen in Austin, Texas, how pervasive is this? Why is this view of women still so prevalent? Why were we even in this situation in 2015—and what do we do about it?” This last point made me decide to do something.

We did some focus groups on the topic of how women perceive themselves, and several things came out of that effort. First, the majority of the women expressed that they lacked self-confidence in

the workplace. They didn't feel comfortable asking for a raise. They weren't sure they were ready for the next level in their career. However, they felt talking to other women was energizing, and they all enjoyed the sense of community they derived from speaking to each other. At a breakfast in Austin with about two hundred women in attendance, heads nodded all around the room as the three of us panelists talked about self-confidence. The word "confidence" spanned appearance, salary, life skills, future career, and the ability to get on or off the track they were on. It covered all areas of life. Except, interestingly, they all stated they felt most fulfilled in their home lives. Whether they had children or were single and childless, and happy that way, by and large felt they were "okay."

A recent lawsuit in the high-tech sector that garnered a lot of attention concerned the case of whether or not a particular woman was held back by her gender. The court found that she had been supported by males and that it was probably not her gender that slowed her upward progress. This lawsuit is an outlier as such lawsuits are pretty rare. From my observation, women are reluctant to rock any kind of boat, and a lawsuit is a very big, difficult vessel to manage. What also has cropped up over and over, whether in large meetings or one-on-one conversations, is that women repeatedly state that they don't feel women encourage and support each other.

And the perception of those of us who have achieved some level of success is that the women coming behind us are not at all as far along in terms of achievements as we would have imagined they would be by now. I absolutely would have expected 2016 would have seen full career equality if I had thought about it in the mid to late seventies. That has to change. So now, in 2016, I am embarking on a definite and deliberate mission: a mission to help women. This mission is taking two forms.

*Being pissed off is who I am and
I embrace it—and use it for good.*

First, I decided to write *Texas Tenacity* to show how women can have rich and varied lives if they recognize opportunity when it knocks. And if they come to a closed door, they have to learn how to unlock it, or they have to find a new door, or they have to work around that door. Or they just have to plain kick it down. Basically, we women have the tools necessary—if we choose to use them.

Second, we are launching a new website and social media effort called Herdacity, whose tagline is “Where Women Dare.” Maybe this strikes a chord with you, or maybe you’ll ask, “Dare what?” In part, it’s for you to decide, based on where you are in life or where you want to go. Maybe you dare to be who you want to be. Dare to take a leap. Dare to express your opinions. Dare to change jobs. Dare to pursue your dreams. Dare to embrace who you are. Defining the daring is up to you, since each of us is different and unique. What we have is the unifying female gender bonding us to one another. We have a lot of work to do with the project, with its goal to educate and empower women across this country. I am really excited about it and look forward to seeing what we can accomplish—and how women choose to use these resources to dare a bit more.

Since you may not know me, let me return to my comment about being fired up. I had a wonderful business partner in the cattle business for over a decade, and one day he remarked idly that I was very “even-tempered.” I mentally preened over what I thought was an accolade. With a deadpan expression, he then added, “Yes, you are always pissed off.”

So there you have it. Being pissed off is who I am and I embrace it—and use it for good. It is also what prompted this book and the

larger Herdacity effort, as well as a few job choices, running for elective office, and speaking my mind—even when it was unpopular.

Yes, I have dared in life, taken risks, fought and conquered nearly debilitating fear, seized opportunities, and held optimism close. With my life's pursuits, I have mostly focused on making a difference. I was powered by a passion to make a change or to achieve a certain goal. This includes a focus on protecting children, changing a few things in our government to make life better for the men and women in Texas, and now to help one specific group—women. Although this boldness is a thread that has run through most of my life, I didn't always know it was there, or even how best to use it. But there are certain pivotal moments along the way that illustrate this determination and strength—and I share them with you in the hope you create a similar story of success and satisfaction and stand up and be who you want to be.

I wasn't particularly introspective in my girlhood, being more concerned with how others saw me and how I could and should fit into a particular environment. But I now believe that women have to help other women with advice, encouragement, and nudges—nudges that say to women, “Be who *you* want to be.” Not who others tell you to be or want you to be. Only then can the real you emerge.

The pivotal moments that changed my life won't be yours, but you will have your own. Encouragement goes a long way to moving us along life's path, and we have to dare to keep moving forward. I double-dog dare you to be the person you want to be!