



# Red Dirt Women: At Home on the Oklahoma Plains

*Susan Kates*

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For many people who have never spent time in the state, Oklahoma conjures up a series of stereotypes: rugged cowboys, tipi-dwelling American Indians, uneducated farmers. When women are pictured at all, they seem frozen in time: as the bonneted pioneer woman stoically enduring hardship or the bedraggled, gaunt-faced mother familiar from Dust Bowl photographs. In *Red Dirt Women*, Susan Kates challenges these one-dimensional characterizations by exploring—and celebrating—the lives of contemporary Oklahoma women whose experiences are anything but predictable.

In essays both intensely personal and universal, *Red Dirt Women* reveals the author's own heartaches and joys in becoming a parent through adoption, her love of regional treasures found in “junk” stores, and her deep appreciation of Miss Dorrie, her son's unconventional preschool teacher. Through lively profiles, interviews, and sketches, we come to know pioneer queens from the Panhandle, rodeo riders, casino gamblers, roller-derby skaters, and the “Lady of Jade”—a former “boat person” from Vietnam who now owns a successful business in Oklahoma City.

As she illuminates the lives of these memorable Oklahoma women, Kates traces her own journey to Oklahoma with clarity and insight. Born and raised in Ohio, she confesses an initial apprehension about her adopted home, admitting that she felt “vulnerable on the open lands.” Yet her original unease develops into a deep affection for the landscape, history, culture, and people of Oklahoma.

The women we meet in *Red Dirt Women* are not politicians, governors' wives, or celebrities—they are women of all ages and backgrounds who surround us every day and who are as diverse as Oklahoma itself.

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