A Tyranny of Petticoats

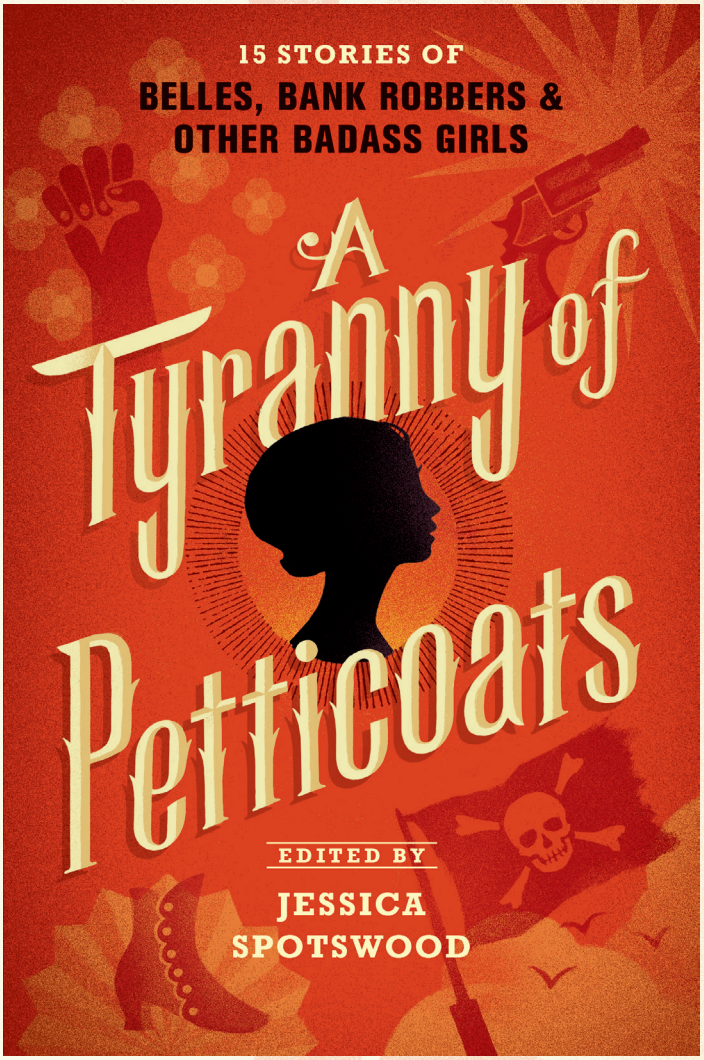
15 STORIES OF BELLES, BANK ROBBERS & OTHER BADASS GIRLS

Crisscross America—on dogsleds and ships, stagecoaches and trains—from pirate ships off the coast of the Carolinas to the peace, love, and protests of 1960s Chicago. Join fifteen of today's most talented writers of young adult literature on a thrill ride through history with American girls charting their own courses. They are monsters and mediums, bodyguards and barkeeps, screenwriters and schoolteachers, heiresses and hobos. They're making their own ways in often-hostile lands, using every weapon in their arsenals, facing murderers and marriage proposals, spies and spitfires, ghosts and goddesses. And they all have a story to tell.

Our authors are as diverse as their characters. To give readers a better sense of their processes and experiences writing for this anthology, we asked three questions of each contributor:

1. What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?
2. What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?
3. Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

Here are their answers.



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J. ANDERSON COATS, "Mother Carey's Table," 1710: British North America

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

As the so-called New World was developing, the frontier was everywhere, and a lot was possible on the frontier that couldn't happen in a place with established institutions and social customs. The sea was a frontier unto itself, and an ideal place to bring together folklore and a girl who benefited from that lack of legal fixity while at the same time facing very real threats from inherently unstable circumstances.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

Piracy was a lot more complicated and a lot less glamorous than many traditional depictions would have it, but it offered opportunities to a specific set of people who weren't going to experience autonomy any other way. One of the very real appeals of piracy wasn't treasure—few ordinary sailors lived long enough to get rich—but something a little harder to come by for pretty much everyone during this time: freedom of action.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

I've always admired Countess Constance Markievicz. She was born into privilege in Ireland but joined the 1916 Easter Rising against British rule. Among numerous other things, she was a sniper, a medic, an activist, and Ireland's first female elected official. When asked about fashion advice, she advised women to "dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots, leave your jewels in the bank, and buy a revolver."

ANDREA CREMER, "High Stakes," 1861: Boston, Massachusetts; and Natchez, Mississippi

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

I've always been drawn to the study of race and gender in history, and antebellum America offers a compelling focal point of conflict and change regarding both. Klio's story is about finding strength and justice in a society that marginalizes her and those she cares about. Very recently there has been a push to change history textbooks to tone down the negative aspects of American history—particularly the history of slavery. I find this trend not only alarming, but also deeply irresponsible. History is complex and often troubling. Whenever particular subjects are ignored, blurred, or erased because they make us uncomfortable, we hide pivotal struggles and triumphs that created our present. If confronting the past makes us uneasy, we should consider all the more why that is rather than turning away.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

Prior to becoming a full-time author, I was a history professor, and my specialization was early American history, so I came to the writing of this story already bearing much of the research I needed to complete it. However, I did have to dig up details about transportation and clothing specific to the time, and that was lots of fun! I probably spent more time looking at the interiors of carriages than I needed to.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

That is such a difficult question, because there are so many amazing women throughout history. On another day I'd likely give a different answer, but for today I'll say Ida B. Wells. Born a slave, Wells was witness to a tumultuous series of events in U.S. history. Her family was emancipated in the Civil War, and she grew up to become a suffragist and a journalist. Long before Rosa Parks made history by refusing to give up her bus seat, Wells refused to move from the first-class cabin of a train in Tennessee (for which she had a ticket) and ended up winning a suit against the railroad. Wells is best known for her campaign against the lynching of African Americans that proliferated in the 1890s, an incredibly dangerous endeavor that she strove for tirelessly. She is one of the most inspiring and courageous women in history.

Y. S. LEE, "The Legendary Garrett Girls," 1898: Skaguay, Alaska

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

I'm always entranced by people and places on the margins, so Alaska was instantly appealing. The gold rush was such a giddy, reckless, greedy, brutal time that it's almost impossible to exaggerate. Researching it was endlessly fascinating; I couldn't look away.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

The quotation that inspired the whole story comes from the *Seattle Daily Times* of 1897: "They now say there are more liars to the square inch in Alaska than any place in the world." The moment I read that, I knew I'd be writing about con artists and desperadoes.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

I don't have a favorite person, but I do have a favorite type: scrappy, underprivileged, lesser-known women, the kind who seldom appear in conventional histories but fought fiercely, nevertheless, to live as interestingly and independently as possible.

KATHERINE LONGSHORE, "Hard Times," 1934: Washington State

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

My enduring fascination with both hobos (that is, people who hitch rides on freight trains) and old movies. At a very young age, I was given a book that included illustrations of hobo symbols, and I have looked for signs of train jumpers ever since. As a teenager, I was obsessed with Hollywood's early golden age and binge-watched swashbucklers, musicals, and screwball comedies. That these two worlds coexisted during the Great Depression is a dichotomy I was eager to explore.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

I don't know if you'd call it research, but I was impressed by the number of people who have either jumped trains or know someone who did: from the family friend who remembers feeding hobos out of her back door in Ogden, Utah, to the critique group partner whose father rode the rails, to three famous Jacks—London, Dempsey, and Kerouac. For a while, it seemed that everyone I spoke to about "Hard Times" had their own rail adventure to tell.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

I don't have a favorite—there are too many to choose from!—but I think my first historical crush was on Amelia Earhart, another 1930s icon. Even as a child, I saw her as a heroic figure and a star of feminism. Her courage, stubbornness, and mysterious disappearance make her endlessly fascinating.

MARIE LU, "The Journey," 1723: The Great Land

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

One of my favorite childhood novels was Jean Craighead George's *Julie of the Wolves,* and I fell in love with it because of her portrayal of the life and landscape in Alaska. So when Jess first pitched the idea of *A Tyranny of Petticoats* to me, I immediately knew that I wanted to set my story there. The environment is just so magical, beautiful and wild and harsh—the name *Alaska* derives from the native Aleut word *alyeska,* which means "the great land." I wanted to tell a story about what it might have been like during the time when Alaska's indigenous people first started encountering outside explorers, and what that meant from various angles, including from the point of view of a young Inupiat girl.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

There were so many! I especially loved reading mythology from the indigenous cultures, stories about why the stars and animals exist, what the dancing northern lights mean.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

Wow, it's impossible to pick a single woman! My best attempts to narrow this down still end up with two: 1. Marie Curie, perhaps the first famous woman I ever read about as a little girl, and from whom I think I picked my English name to model, and 2. going more modern, Malala Yousafzai, who has already made history and will no doubt continue to for many decades to come. She inspires me every time I think about her.

KEKLA MAGOON, "Pulse of the Panthers," 1967: California

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

I've been interested in the 1960s and the Black Panther Party for quite a while. My first novel, *The Rock and the River,* and my third novel, *Fire in the Streets,* are about teens who become involved with the Black Panther Party in 1968 Chicago. When I thought about what historical moment I'd like to visit for this short-story collection, it was a natural choice. I hope that by writing about this topic, I can help introduce people to a slice of American history that often gets overlooked.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

Most people are fascinated to learn that the Black Panthers were much more than an armed self-defense collective—they led community-organizing programs, provided free breakfasts for school children in poor communities, established free health clinics, created food pantries, published a newspaper, offered legal aid, established charter schools, and ran candidates for political office. Their work affected and supported thousands of struggling individuals and families in cities nationwide. I'm intrigued by the courage and sacrifice of these black activists, and I continue to be troubled by the lack of attention paid to this moment in history by mainstream education and storytelling. This short story allowed me to explore a character who is on the fringes of the Black Panther movement, which was a fun angle to consider after so much time spent looking toward the heart of black activism in the 1960s and the events and context that spurred the Panthers to turn to self-defense and community-organizing strategies to create change.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

There are so many amazing women in history. One of my favorites is Zora Neale Hurston, a black author, anthropologist, and activist from the Harlem Renaissance era (1920s and 1930s). She wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and other things, but she wrote, spoke out, and made herself heard at a time when black women were discounted and overlooked even more than they are today. I also aspire to speak truth in the face of oppression and to be remembered for my voice, and she is an epic model of that specific achievement.

MARISSA MEYER, "Gold in the Roots of the Grass," 1877: Deadwood, Dakota Territory

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

A number of years ago, my husband and I were on a road trip to visit friends in Minnesota and decided to take a detour through the Badlands of South Dakota. We'd both heard of Deadwood but weren't very familiar with its history, so I didn't know what to expect. Driving down into the gulch, though, I instantly fell in love with it. There's so much history there! When we got home, we marathoned HBO's *Deadwood* series, and I became more and more fascinated by the people who had flocked to such a lawless town in search of riches. I was excited to research more about them when I was invited to join this anthology, and the more I read, the more interested I became.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

There were so many seedy characters in Deadwood during the gold rush, but I became most fascinated with Al Swearengen, the owner of the Gem Theater. In the HBO series, Swearengen was portrayed as . . . well, not a good guy, but someone who had at least a little integrity beneath his rough exterior. But the real Swearengen, it turns out, was horrifically ruthless and cruel—even going so far as to take out newspaper ads in small towns that advertised respectable jobs for women, only to force the women into prostitution when they showed up in Deadwood and couldn't afford the train ticket back. Sadly, his lack of morality paid off. It's estimated that at the height of the Gem's success, Swearengen was making $35,000 a week, while the average miner made only $24! The piece of me that believes in karma was horrified to read that.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

I have to go with Cleopatra, a woman and ruler who has captivated us for millennia, spurring countless books, plays, poems, and documentaries. I particularly love that we have this common perception of her being a great beauty, but historians say she wasn't really all that beautiful after all. Rather, it was her wit, charm, and intelligence that men of her time found so beguiling. Just as it should be!

SAUNDRA MITCHELL, "Bonnie *and* Clyde," 1934: Indiana

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

The place was supereasy—I wrote about my home state. I thought that would be fun, and it was. I got to use a lot of local trivia and details that I haven't gotten to use in fiction before. As for the time period, I had several ideas when I started and settled on this one because I realized I wanted to write about a bank robber during the Depression. I didn't find out until after the anthology was all put together that I managed to pick exactly the same year as another author!

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

There was no one thing that stuck out to me—but! This is one of those stories where, as a writer, I got to really marvel at how near and how far history really is from the moment I'm in. Take one kid from Indiana in 1934 and realize: her grandparents experienced the world of the American Civil War. In turn, those grandparents were the children of the Revolutionary War.

These events aren't distant, isolated moments in time. When Americans fought the Revolutionary War, much of the thinking of the time was that Colonists were enslaved to Britain and deserved to be free. The Colonists won that war, and they raised children who then had to grapple with the fact that they had created a government in which people were enslaved and deserved to be free.

So come back to our kid in 1934: She becomes the parent of someone who marches in Birmingham in the 1960s for the civil rights movement. She becomes the grandparent of someone who fights for equal rights in the 1980s. She becomes the great-grandparent of someone today who's joined the protest because #blacklivesmatter.

Who we are today isn't just the time period in which we live; we're the living memory of time recently, and not so recently, past.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

This is absolutely impossible to answer—there are too many amazing women that we know about, and so many whose names and achievements were lost or obscured. But I will say that Olga of Kiev is one of my all-time favorite hardcore battle queens. She slaughtered two armies sent to force her to marry a neighboring prince, then razed an entire town by tying embers to doves' legs and setting the birds free to fly home. Ninth-century Russian queens don't play.

BETH REVIS, "Pearls," 1876: Chicago, Illinois; and Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

I grew up on Westerns, mostly thanks to my father and his love of Louis L'Amour. As a child, I knew the stories of Butch Cassidy and Wild Bill Hickok and Wyatt Earp as well as I knew Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty. I once spent an entire summer telling my brother, "I'll be your huckleberry," even though I had no idea what it really meant.

One thing that I particularly loved about the Western stories is that the West was the great equalizer. Much of the rest of the world during this time wasn't particularly fair to women or minorities, but in many cases, the only thing that mattered in the Wild West was your skill. Yes, there was still prejudice and hatred, and certainly life wasn't fair, but about one-fourth of the cowboys were black, the gold rush brought a sweep of immigration from across the world, and enterprising women could make a name for themselves on the frontier. Racism and sexism was still very much present: Jim Crow laws were at their height, lynching affected not just African Americans but also the new Mexican and Chinese immigrants, and the opportunities women had were limited. But the Wild West held *possibility,* much more so than many other parts of the world.

A shining example of that to me is Annie Oakley. She was a crack shot and revered not because she was "good for a woman" but because she was *good*—full stop. She was the best of the best, and it didn't matter that she was a woman—she was still the best.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

We take education for granted. To us, it's standard that our children have the right to attend a clean, well-maintained school that is staffed with qualified, educated teachers who focus on one subject or grade level, and each child is provided with the basics they need to achieve their education, from textbooks to food. We don't question this—it's a fact of life.

But it really wasn't that long ago when that was *not* the standard, particularly in the Wild West. The Western frontier wasn't friendly to anyone, especially children. Most children in the remote areas were homeschooled, which meant any education they received they got at home, but that didn't mean a formal education with tests and papers. For most, it meant learning the basics to get by in life.

As settlements became towns, schools started cropping up. But they still weren't like the schools of today. The buildings were sparse, often assembled by the community or a church, and supplies were extremely limited. It wasn't uncommon for the only book in the schoolhouse to be a Bible.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

The first person I think of is Queen Elizabeth I, who ruled an empire in a man's world and did it better than any of the men before (or after) her. But I also love Murasaki Shikibu, the first novelist in the world, an elegant Japanese lady who revolutionized literature. I have always thought Katharina von Bora, the wife of Martin Luther, was fascinating; without her, I wonder if the religious and political landscape after the Reformation would have held as strong. And Audrey Hepburn was so much more than an actress; as a child during World War II she helped the Allies, and then she helped the children of war through her charity and work with UNICEF. Harriet Tubman is perhaps the greatest American hero in all of history, defying certain death to oppose great injustice.

But I think perhaps my favorite woman in history is Anonymous. To paraphrase Virginia Woolf, "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman." And so my favorite woman in history is all of the women who toiled in anonymity. Despite the odds stacked against them, despite the fact they never achieved fame, much less recognition, despite all that, they quietly *got it done.* And that is truly admirable.

CAROLINE TUNG RICHMOND, "The Red Raven Ball," 1862: Washington, D.C.

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

As a kid growing up in the Washington, D.C., area, I've always been fascinated by the Civil War. It always struck me how D.C.—the capital of the Union—butted right up against the Confederate border. The city was well-fortified, but it still must've been scary to live in the capital during the war, with Confederate troops looming nearby. So when Jessica Spotswood kindly invited me to contribute to *A Tyranny of Petticoats,* I immediately wanted to set my short story in Washington during the Civil War, and that's how "The Red Raven Ball" came to be.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

Finding an old photo of my husband's ancestors! My husband is related to a famous nineteenth-century politician named Robert Ingersoll—dubbed "the most famous American you never heard of" by the *Washington Post*—and I wove a few details of his life into "The Red Raven Ball." While researching Ingersoll, I came across a photo of him with his family. It was such a treat to study their faces and know that their blood runs in my daughter's veins!

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, hands down! Stanton dedicated her life to fighting for women's suffrage in the United States, and she was basically a nineteenth-century badass lady. One example of her awesomeness? Prior to her wedding, she instructed the minister to omit the phrase "promise to obey" from her vows. She also raised seven kids while working tirelessly as a suffragette, abolitionist, and social activist. She's truly an inspiration to me.

LINDSAY SMITH, "City of Angels," 1945: Los Angeles, California

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

I'm deeply drawn to twentieth-century history—that sense of immediacy while still being at a slight historical remove is fascinating to me. When Jessica Spotswood mentioned she hadn't gotten any story proposals set during World War II, I knew I wanted to pick that time period. The idea of a home-front drama really appealed to me because of the significant roles women got to play in the war effort that they had rarely been offered before the 1940s. Evelyn's and Frankie's characters just grew organically from that setting.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

I fell down a rabbit hole researching all the tiny details of munitions and airplane factory life for women during World War II. They could earn the right to fly particular banners over their factories, for instance, if they sold enough war bonds. All of the home-front stories I read as research were inspiring, though—that curious mix of patriotism, determination, and sisterhood these women felt as they tended victory gardens, rationed meat, and collected scrap metal for the war effort.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

I love disruptive women in history! Catherine the Great, Alice Roosevelt, Empress Dowager Cixi—all women who cared nothing for others' opinions of them and didn't let others stand in their way when they set out to accomplish their goals.

JESSICA SPOTSWOOD, "Madeleine's Choice," 1826: New Orleans, Louisiana

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

I've been fascinated with New Orleans since my first visit when I was twelve. The city was French, then Spanish, then French again briefly, was sold to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase, seceded to join the Confederacy, then became part of the United States again. The architecture, food, and music all reflect this unique history as well as Creole, Cajun, and Haitian influences. By 1826, there was a large number (according to the census, perhaps as many as twelve thousand recorded in a city of forty-six thousand) of *gens de couleur libre,* or free people of color, which made New Orleans unique among antebellum Southern cities. Most free blacks were mixed-race; some were descended from slave mothers and white fathers, and others emigrated from Haiti after the revolution. They were educated property owners, a thriving middle class of businessmen, shop owners, and tradesmen who went to mass at Saint Louis Cathedral, attended the theater and the French opera, and sometimes had slaves of their own.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

In 1786 Governor Miró passed the tignon laws, which required women of African descent—slave or free—to cover their hair and refrain from excessive attention to their dress. In response, women of color began to wrap their hair in beautiful, colorful scarves called tignons and were still as beautiful and eye-catching as ever. The law was basically to preserve racial and class distinctions, because some free women of color were so light-skinned and richly dressed that they were mistaken for white.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

I'm fascinated by Nellie Bly, who was an intrepid lady reporter. She wrote about the problems of poor working girls and called for the reform of divorce laws. She was a foreign correspondent in Mexico, but the editor of her Pittsburgh paper kept assigning her stories for their women's section about fashion and flower shows, so she resigned and moved to New York. Most famously, she feigned madness while working undercover to write a series on the abuse of institutionalized women at the asylum at Blackwell's Island. In 1889, she also tried to re-create Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* and filed dispatches to her paper via telegraph. She only took seventy-two days, like the boss she was.

ROBIN TALLEY, "The Whole World Is Watching," 1968: Grant Park, Chicago, Illinois

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

Nineteen sixty-eight was a time of massive protests across the United States—much like the present day. I was interested in exploring the history of antiwar protests in the 1960s and how they intersected with the ongoing civil rights movement, the burgeoning feminist movement, and the very early days of the movement in support of equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people. As an added bonus, the sixties had some truly amazing clothes, hairstyles, and slang that were fun to think about.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

The antiwar protests at the Chicago 1968 Democratic National Convention were crushed by what were then considered extreme police tactics, and there was a national outcry after video of the police brutality was shown on live TV. Hundreds of demonstrators were injured by police and National Guard officers who dramatically outnumbered the protestors and who didn't hesitate to use violence against them. In my research I learned that the police tactics used were unheard of at the time, such as the use of military-style weapons like tear gas and the wearing of protective gear like riot helmets over their regular clothing. But today many police units combating protests in places like Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, have taken much more extreme approaches, including the use of advanced military gear and weaponry. It was interesting to learn how things have progressed in terms of police tactics, and the public's reaction to them, over the past few decades. What was once considered extreme would be considered commonplace, maybe even tame, by today's standards.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

There are way too many to pick just one favorite! So I'll name the woman who I think is the obvious choice to go on U.S. currency (preferably the twenty-dollar bill so we can get rid of Andrew Jackson)—Harriet Tubman. Through sheer determination and a lot of skill she took the biggest risk imaginable—and she succeeded, changing the lives of so many and changing the world at the same time.

LESLYE WALTON, "El Destinos," 1848: Southwest Texas

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

I was interested in exploring the juxtaposition of power and limitation, a blurred line that has defined the lives of women throughout history. I wondered what it might have been like to live as a young teenage girl during a time of upheaval and change in American history, while also capturing a time and place where cultural and national identities felt at odds. I suppose these thoughts wove themselves together, because suddenly I had Valeria, Rosa, and Maria Elena, three immortals sent down to live as Mexican-American sisters during the years after the Texas Annexation.

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

I loved learning all the intricate details about the family ranchos of that time and the lush Rio Grande landscape of yucca plants, honey mesquite trees, and prickly pear cacti.

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

Oh, this is an impossible question! There are so many admirable women in our world's history, all with incredible and oft times terrible stories; it's virtually impossible to pick a favorite. I suppose, though, if I had to choose one, I'd have to admit that I am currently infatuated with Petra Herrera, a revolutionary war hero who led over four hundred female soldiers during the Mexican Revolution, if only for the sole reason that she proved that women could be just as effective as men in the art of combat.

ELIZABETH WEIN, "The Color of the Sky," 1926: Jacksonville, Florida; and Dallas, Texas

What inspired you to write about this particular time and place?

Bessie Coleman, the first African-American woman to become a licensed pilot, inspired me!

I earned a private pilot's license late in 2003. That year also happened to be the one hundredth anniversary of the Wright brothers' historic first powered "heavier than air" flight. I took part in a worldwide celebratory fly-out on December 17, the exact anniversary. But I was also the *only* female student pilot on the airfield where I learned to fly, so I became interested in flight, the history of aviation, and women in aviation all at the same time.

Bessie Coleman is one of the most amazing early female aviators. She got her international pilot's license in 1921, and she was not only the first black woman to do so, she was the first *American* to do so—male or female, black or white. No one—of any color—would teach her to fly in the United States, because she was black and/or because she was a woman; so she took some French classes, found some sponsorship, and went to France to learn to fly. I am in awe of her initiative, her positive outlook, and her determination.

Though she died young, and tragically, in a flying accident (which is what my story in *A Tyranny of Petticoats* is about), Coleman was committed to opening a flying school that would allow young people of all races and sexes to learn to fly.

Until her early death she traveled around the United States giving lectures and film presentations in schools to encourage young people to learn more about aviation, as well as fund-raising for her flight school dream.

The time and place of my story was dictated by the focus on Bessie Coleman—but to make it authentic, I ended up finding out quite a bit about Jacksonville, Florida, in the 1920s—its schools, churches, neighborhoods, and transportation systems!

What was the most interesting piece of research you uncovered while writing your story?

It was undoubtedly the amazing real historical characters I discovered as I was peopling my fictional tale. I want to write stories—books, even!—about all of them.

Except for my main character Antonia and her family, most of the named characters in "The Color of the Sky" are based on real people. In addition to the obvious—Bessie Coleman herself—I also had to find out more about the lives of Myrtle and Henry Wade Vencill, Louis Manning, William Wills, Robert Abbott, and John Thomas Betsch. I desperately hope I've been respectful of their historical counterparts—especially Betsch, who is in jail when my story ends!

The week following Bessie Coleman's death in April 1925 must have been a heartbreaking time in John Thomas Betsch's young life. He was only twenty-one at the time. College-educated, Betsch was the publicity chairman of Jacksonville's Negro Welfare League and an aviation enthusiast; he was also a strong advocate for racial and sexual equality in Florida and continued to be so throughout the first half of the twentieth century. His legacy is evident in the lives of his children: MaVynee Betsch, who graduated from Oberlin College with a double major in voice and piano in 1955, sang with the German State Opera, and then devoted her later life to conservation; Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole, who became the first female president of Spelman College, president of Bennett College for Women, and co-author of *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities;* and John Thomas Betsch, Jr., a jazz musician who has lived in Europe for the past thirty years. It makes me happy to know what a better world John Betsch helped to create for his own children and for generations to come. I'd never have known about these people if I hadn't been digging for information about the circumstances surrounding Bessie Coleman's fatal accident.

Another fascinating woman I learned more about while writing "The Color of the Sky" is Willa Brown. I'd known about her because she turned up in the research I did for my novel *Black Dove, White Raven,* and I like to think that the life of my original character Antonia will closely follow that of Willa Brown. Brown graduated from Indiana State Teachers College in 1927 and went on to help establish the Coffey School of Aeronautics in Chicago. Willa Brown was the first African-American woman to earn a private pilot's license (which had not been established when Bessie Coleman earned her international license). During World War II, in addition to training black pilots and flight instructors, she joined the Civil Air Patrol and became its first African-American officer. Throughout most of the twentieth century, Willa Brown was a tireless activist for racial and sexual equality, both on the ground and in the air.

I would love to go on—every single one of the characters who appear in "The Color of the Sky" has a fascinating history—but perhaps these brief portraits will inspire readers to do some digging for themselves!

Who is your favorite woman in history and why?

This isn't a question I've thought about before—I don't have a tried and tested answer that I give. I have many favorites, for different reasons at different times in history and at different times in my own life. If you'd only asked me to name "my favorite woman of all time," I'd have said my grandmother, Betty Flocken.

But I'm going to go with Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906–2001), because her voice as a writer and a pilot sings to my soul. I knew and read her written work long before I became a pilot myself. Her inspirational *Gift from the Sea,* which has never been out of print since it was first published in 1955, has been my guide throughout my adult life—as it was to my grandmother fifty years ago. Indeed, it was my wonderful grandmother who introduced me to Anne Morrow Lindbergh's writing.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh was the wife of Charles A. Lindbergh, the early aviator who's best known for his pioneering flight across the Atlantic in 1927. As a couple they skyrocketed into the media in 1932 when their infant son was kidnapped and murdered. Charles Lindbergh bordered on being a Nazi sympathizer in the years leading to World War II and, though he flew fifty combat missions in the Pacific for the United States and finished his life as an environmental activist in 1974, his image never entirely recovered in the public eye. Anne Morrow Lindbergh soared to fame on her own as a gifted diarist and travel writer, managing to transcend the brightness and shadow that her husband cast. Her clear-sighted and lyrical voice is one of the most prolific and honest of the twentieth century.

She was the first American woman to earn a glider pilot's license and accompanied Lindbergh on early global exploration flights as his radio operator as they attempted to discover the best long-distance routes for future commercial airlines to places like South America and eastern Asia. She was a friend and deep admirer of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, another of my pilot-writer heroes (and author of *The Little Prince*). Despite the tragic loss of her first baby, she went on to raise five children, a free-thinking collection of writers and aviators in their own rights.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh was a quiet, private, shy, and privileged woman and didn't have to do the kind of groundbreaking work that Bessie Coleman had to do. But her dedication to her craft, her prolific life's work, and her ability to recover and forgive make me strive to be like her.
