

## **PRAISE FOR MARY T. WAGNER and *HECK ON HEELS***

“Whether coping with aging parents or a new-found love, Mary Wagner brings wit and candor to stories that are universal in their appeal and revealing in their honesty.”

Paul Salsini, author  
*The Cielo* and *Sparrow’s Revenge*

**Winner, INDIE EXCELLENCE AWARD for “Inspiration”**

“Watch out...Mary T. Wagner will pin you right where you sit with her stilettos until you read all of her wonderful essays-and you won’t even mind the heel marks!”

Kris Radish, author  
*The Shortest Distance Between Two Women,*  
*Dancing Naked at the Edge of Dawn,* and others

**“BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS”**

**Finalist, ForeWord Reviews**

“Stilettos, heels, even flats - I couldn’t possibly walk in any women’s shoes, but if I could without severely pulling a hamstring, I would want to walk in Mary Wagner’s. Her personal stories are warm, funny, engaging, and fit perfectly - even on the feet of a man. These wonderful stories are not just observations about women, they’re about all of us.”

David W. Berner, Author  
*Accidental Lessons: A Memoir of a  
Rookie Teacher and a Life Renewed*

“Mary Wagner is the Midwest’s answer to Carrie Bradshaw!”  
Paula K., fan

“Mary Wagner writes beautifully about all the large and small things that make our lives memorable. From the mundane to the major, her meticulously worded prose places the reader at her side and into her thoughts on her journey as a mother, attorney, journalist and all those other roles that she and each of us assume as we wend our way through life. A great read!”

William Rawlings, author  
*Crossword, The Tate Revenge*, and others

“With great humor, the author reminds us that we all have ventured down new paths - some of which worked well and others not so well ... Readers will find - as I did – reading ‘Heck on Heels’ by Mary T. Wagner was like having tea with a wonderful friend and re-living the wonderful and crazy things we did in life.”

*ReaderViews.com*

“Mary’s stories are thought provoking and entertaining. You feel the life in her words as you’re reading them.”

Gracie Hill, author  
*Where the Brothers At?* and *Sorrows of the Heart*

**FIRST PLACE AWARD—Illinois Woman’s Press Association**

“Both funny and touching, ‘Heck on Heels’ is a wonderful slice of Midwestern life.”

Maureen Lipinski, author  
*A BUMP IN THE ROAD: From Happy Hour to Baby Shower*

“Each essay is concise yet complete; a moment in time fully encapsulated including the wisdom or heartache gained ... a compelling but also immensely likeable book.”

*U.S. Review of Books*

“ROYAL PALM LITERARY AWARDS” Finalists—essays  
“Love in the Time of Cupcakes” and “May it Please the Court”

***And Praise for RUNNING  
WITH STILETTOS...***

**Gold MOM’S CHOICE AWARD  
Inspirational/Motivational Books for Adults**

“An inspirational and entertaining read with a wealth of resilience and wit that will resonate with readers from all walks of life—no matter their footwear. Life writing at its best.”

*U.S. Review of Books*

**2008 SILVER FEATHER AWARD WINNER  
Illinois Woman’s Press Association**

“From cookies to Harleys, Catholic school to country living, Mary Wagner wields a pen of steel that hides a marshmallow hart. Read these essays and try your best not to smile.”

Frank Joseph, author  
*To Love Mercy*

“Enthusiastically recommended...”

*Midwest Book Review*

**FIRST PLACE AWARD, NON-FICTION**

**National Federation of Press Women**

“Funny, pluck, razor sharp, and occasionally heartbreaking, *Running with Stilettos* is a breezy, marvelous read. Wagner gives ingenious vent to the precarious balancing act of every woman’s life, whether teetering fashionably in high heels or desperately mastering a cordless drill in wet, muddy sneakers.”

Leslie Talbot, author  
*Singular Existence*

“...a consummate wordsmith...”

*GrowingBolder.com*

**ROYAL PALM LITERARY AWARDS Finalist**

“Mary T. Wagner’s stories in *Running with Stilettos* charm and amuse. Whether she’s taking you with her on the backseat of a Harley or into a courtroom in high heels, it’s one heck of a fun ride. Take a walk in Mary’s shoes, and you’ll be wearing a lasting smile.”

Randy Richardson, author  
*Lost in the Ivy*

**SILVER “IPPY” AWARD—Independent  
Publisher Book Awards**

“Take a whirlwind tour through the moments of ordinary life with someone who is anything but ordinary. If you want edgy, spunky, funky, fun, this is your book!”

—Tama J. Kieves, author

***THIS TIME I DANCE! Creating the Work You Love  
(How one Harvard Lawyer Left It All to Have It All!)***





g u t t e r

# *Fabulous* IN FLATS

Putting my best foot forward!



MARY T. WAGNER

iUniverse, Inc.  
Bloomington

Fabulous in Flats  
Putting my best foot forward!

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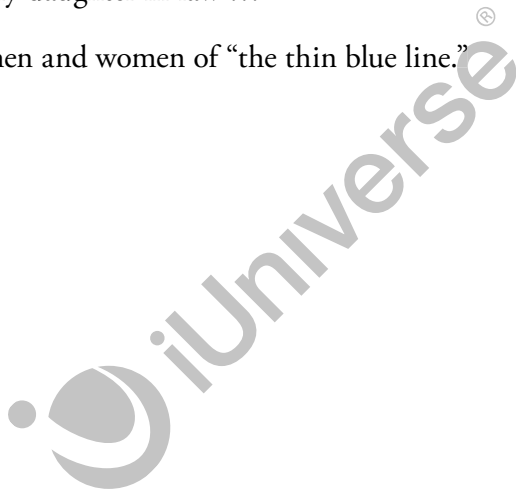
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This book is dedicated to...

the “new kids on the block”—my son-in-law Barrett, and Hannah,  
soon to be my daughter-in-law ...

and to the men and women of “the thin blue line.”





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## Forward

Let's get one thing straight right off the bat.

I am *not* giving up my spike heels in court. I am not surrendering the three extra inches in height they give me; or the fact that when wearing them I look more slender in a skirt; or the ability to look taller, male attorneys straight in the eye; or the feeling that in a pinch I could use them as defensive weapons; or the delightful sound they make on a polished stone floor, announcing the trouble is just around the corner ... and closing fast.

Nope, none of that is being thrown overboard.

But the thought that I may have unwittingly boxed myself into a sartorial corner dawned on me halfway through cleaning out the garage last fall.

This was a Herculean project. It was a three-car garage, full of the detritus of a quarter century spent in marriage and raising a large and busy family. There were things that I had set down there "just for a minute" and never returned to for decades; things my ex-husband had banked over the same time span such as paint cans, tarps, automotive lubricants, and a puzzlingly large assortment of scrap lumber; and just plain "stuff" whose original import had faded or vanished long ago. The collection required days of deciphering, remembering, evaluating, relocating, hauling ... and sometimes just plain burning in the fire pit in the front yard. It was quite the bonfire.

The man of my dreams stood at the ready to reorganize the space with peg-boards and workbenches and hooks for hanging shovels and rakes, and racks for holding firewood. But when it came down to the days-long business of figuring out just what was there in the first place, of sifting through every page of schoolwork and every cobweb-covered beach toy and assigning each a sentimental value, I was on my own.

It was a dirty and dusty job, albeit an archeological tour through my past, and I dressed for the occasion. And at some point mid-excavation, I made a run to the hardware store to get something pertinent. I pretty much looked fresh from the garage—covered with dust, and spider webs, and dirt from various sources, in a sweaty t-shirt and a pair of baggy shorts and grungy sneakers.

As I pushed a cart through the store, I ran into a married couple I knew from when our sons were much younger and on the same soccer team. We caught up on life and the kids. They'd both read my books. And then the dad viewed me from top to bottom, in all of my sweat-stained garage-cleaning splendor, and asked, "So, where's your stilettos?"

Oh dear God, I thought. I'd just managed to jump from one pigeonhole to another.

There is a short but great scene in an episode of the TNT series "The Closer," which stars Kyra Sedgwick as touseled-haired-spike-heeled-soft-spoken-steel-magnolia-police-woman Brenda Johnson. Johnson's stock in trade seems to be tricking the bad guys into confessing by the end of each episode. In the episode "The Last Woman Standing," Johnson is preparing to interview for the job of L.A. Chief of Police, a job she's not really sure that she wants. On the other side of the metaphorical table urging her to take the interview more seriously is an upper echelon, starched and uniformed by-the-book female

police Captain who wants Johnson to think of the service she would be giving by example for the young women who would follow in her professional footsteps.

With the weight of history and glass ceilings and earlier feminist struggles being pushed upon her narrow shoulders, Johnson pushes back, asking whether all the strides that have been made and battles fought in the name of equality can perhaps justify the right to make up her own mind and do what she likes?

In that fine and rebellious spirit, I'd like to strike a blow for a little variety in our shoe racks. Stiletto heels, I will admit, are feminine and gorgeous and empowering, but not quite suitable for every occasion. Snowshoeing, for example. Doing housework ... although June Cleaver gave it her all in "Leave it to Beaver." I wouldn't recommend that you wear them on horseback. Or cleaning out the garage.

Flats, on the other hand, may do fabulous duty in navigating cobblestoned streets in Europe and Philadelphia ... but give little force to hammering a picture nail And for heaven's sake, put on your lug-soled work boots before you pick up a chain saw.

In the final analysis, you may have to buy a bigger shoe rack to embrace the diversity. But as I like to think and often write, there's always room in our hearts for more love, in our souls for more chocolate, and our closets for more shoes.

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## The Sisterhood of the Chop Saw

My son looked at me and my accoutrements with skepticism through narrowed eyes. This would be the son with the tattoo between his shoulder blades, the hand-rolled cigarette, the assortment of earrings, and the riot of curls that—at the right length—give him a jaunty, *Viva la Revolución* Che Guevara vibe.

He's a hard one to impress when it comes to sartorial unorthodoxy. But impress—or stun—I did. “Mom, you look like you're ready to break into a chemical plant.” From out of the mouths of babes.

I'd be lying if I said I took the assessment calmly. Rather, I'd caught a glimpse of myself just a few seconds before in the glass on the screen door, and was already hovering on the edge of hysteria. It was ninety degrees out, and I was decked out in a spaghetti-strapped top with a wet bandana across the lower half of my face like a bank robber; safety goggles over my tri-focals; giant padded vinyl ear protectors that would have kept my hearing safe on an airport runway; and a pair of green suede work gloves. I personally thought I looked a bit more like a galactic bounty hunter from “Star Wars.”

My son started to laugh, and that was all I needed to become completely unglued. Once the safety goggles started to steam up,

they clearly had to go. I pulled off the scarf, ear muffers, gloves and goggles, and laughed, holding on to the porch, until tears came to my eyes. I kept on laughing until I got just about all of it squeezed out, then suited up again. One ridiculous piece at a time—scarf, goggles, headgear, gloves.

Because operating a chop saw isn't really a laughing matter.

My composure marginally reclaimed, I finally approached the reason for all the caution: a rented "chop saw" sitting on the tailgate of the Ford F-150. It had a circular blade about a foot in diameter . The blade pivoted up and down, ready to slice through concrete, metal, wood, errant limbs, whatever was called for, with lethal efficiency. It looked menacing just sitting still, lurking beneath its bright red metal safety guard. It was about to give a whole new dimension to my acquaintance with power tools.

Boy, how things change.

Six months ago, I'd never heard the words "chop" and "saw" used in the same sentence. I was feeling mighty pleased with myself, in fact, that I'd acquired a cordless drill and a battery-operated chain saw since the divorce and wasn't afraid to use them. Really, I thought, I was pretty well set with a couple of hammers, a set of hex wrenches, some screwdrivers and a retractable tape measure.

Then my aunt passed away, and I spent hours driving back and forth to Chicago with my friend Mary Kay to organize an estate sale of my aunt's things. As the miles sped by, the topic of putting in a brick patio next to the house came up, and I picked her brain for suggestions. I'd wanted a patio in that particular spot for about twenty years. The days were long past for sitting outside and watching the kids ride their bikes or play basketball, but that didn't mean I couldn't enjoy having a cool drink on a chaise lounge with a good book in the same spot.

Mary Kay is a very handy gal, able to pull off both spike heels with a slinky black evening dress and home improvement projects involving power tools with aplomb and panache. She is far more experienced than I when it comes to wielding a hammer, and routinely takes a more active role in shaping her environment. I tend to get backed into making repairs because things break, such as pasture fences, or when trees come down where they shouldn't. The most initiative and daring I show usually involves a paint roller. Mary Kay, on the other hand, has been known to dismantle and rebuild her foyer while Mike, her husband, was away on business for a few days, just for the fun of it. When it comes to using power tools, she not only talks the talk, she walks the walk. I was learning at the feet of the master.

"You're going to need a chop saw," she said as I drove, and I duly made a mental note. I had no idea what a chop saw was, but I was assured that one was needed for cutting bricks. And for a person with her heart set on a herringbone brick pattern, I understood that some bricks indeed would require cleaving.

Months later, both the estate sale and the winter snow cover behind us, the plan was finally ready to roll. I had pallets of bricks and sand stacked in the driveway, lumber ready to be picked up for framing, two brand new shovels, weather that was warm and dry, and most important, a supply of "volunteer" labor in the form of three of my kids, one of their friends, and the man in my life. Don't think that THAT didn't take some coordinating! I'd played the "let's celebrate Mother's Day late!" card. It worked.

I had spent the day before cooking almost non-stop to feed this busy crew, and naively assumed that once I'd picked up the saw from the nearby rental place, my project duties would mainly consist of finishing up the potato salad, keeping the beer cold, and bringing food out from time to time.

The best laid plans ...

By the time we actually got started, it was one in the afternoon. Since the man in my life was the only one among us who'd had any experience at all in laying patio brick or in building and setting wooden frames, the job of cutting the bricks suddenly shifted to me. Wielding a pencil and a calculator while sitting in the shade, I'd figured out that setting this particular pattern would require cutting a minimum of eighteen pavers into two parts. Never let it be said that you don't need math after high school.

We measured the first brick and lined up the metal guide together, and then he pushed the "on" switch and set the blade spinning. As diamond-edged blade met concrete paver, the noise level ramped from loud to absolutely searing. An incredible cloud of brick dust erupted and hung in the air, drifting toward the garage and filling the pickup truck with fine white powder. He stood back, incredulous at the magnitude of the mess a single brick had left behind. There were nineteen to go.

Well, he said with a shrug, the beauty of having an old truck is that you can mess it up and there's no harm done. Cleanup would come later, when he'd park it on a hill and run a hose over the inside. We left the chop saw on the back of the truck, and I gamely stepped in for the rest of the job. After I finally quit laughing.

Thank god for ear protectors. And safety goggles. And being able to find a cotton bandana to soak and cover my face with! Even with my ears covered, I could *feel* the screaming noise through the vibration of the machine. There was a primitive, visceral feeling of accomplishment to be had in watching the cloud of dust kick up as the blade cut a slot through one side of the brick. Then a short pause while I turned the brick over, lined it up again, and finished the cut.

It was a thing of wondrous, smooth beauty, especially when compared to the Neanderthal alternative method of hitting it with a hammer and chisel. It was empowering and frightening all in one. And my triceps ached for two days afterward just from the effort of pushing the blade downward into concrete again and again.

Driving to work the next day, after I'd dropped the saw back at the rental shop, I called Mary Kay to bring her up to speed on my admission to the Sisterhood of the Chop Saw. When I got to describing the work outfit and my son's observations, both of us were sputtering and laughing so hard we could barely talk. "Feels pretty good, doesn't it?" she asked.

Yup, it sure did.

A little later in the drive I thought about a much younger guy who'd had the office next to mine before he left for greener pastures, and I found myself grinning from ear to ear. A few years earlier I'd come to work one day and popped my head into his office, regaling him with my exploits of buying my first hand saw to cut up some branches that had fallen across a hiking path. At least I *think* it was the story about the hand saw. It might have been the cordless drill adventure.

"That settles is, Mary," he said. "You are officially manlier than I am!"

Well then. If he'd so been impressed with my using a hand saw, what would he think about cutting concrete pavers off the back of a pickup truck?

I didn't have to wait long to find out. I had an email message from this very man waiting for me in my "in" box, asking about the status of a case I'd argued on appeal months ago. We traded thoughts about the case, and then I filled him in on the "chop saw" afternoon.

Mary T. Wagner

He was impressed, but stressed that now that he was married and a homeowner to boot, he felt like he was finally started to catch up to me. He had just recently finished remodeling a bathroom, in fact, and was now well acquainted with the art of cutting tiles. We were both justifiably proud at the ground we've covered, me since the divorce, him since he was a young single guy living in an apartment.

I suppose, if he's really nice, we'll officially admit him into the Sisterhood of the Chop Saw. And if he sends imported chocolate, we may even waive the part about the spike heels.

