

PHYLLIS NORTON HOFFMAN

Publisher of

**SOUTHERN**  
*Lady*

“PHYLLIS AND I  
HAVE TAKEN MANY  
STEPS TOGETHER.  
I TAKE MINE  
IN FLATS!”

—Paula Deen

# “HONEY, IT’S ALL IN THE SHOES”

Celebrating the  
Footsteps of the  
Contemporary  
Woman

SAMPLER

# “HONEY, IT’S ALL IN THE SHOES”

Celebrating the Footsteps of the  
Contemporary Woman

Phyllis Norton Hoffman



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# PROLOGUE

## Honey, It's All in the Shoes

I was recently on the Internet and ran across a web page that listed the "Rules for Southern Belles." As the publisher of *Southern Lady* magazine and a born-and-bred Southerner, I couldn't help but pause and read these "rules" with interest. They included advisories to "never show anger in public" or never "chew gum or smoke on the street." The writer's well-intended words also urge budding young belles to always write thank-you notes and to "charm, charm, charm." But the number-one rule that all Southern ladies are expected to abide by—and this simply can't be written or stated often enough—is "never wear white shoes before Easter or after Labor Day." The author of the web page rightfully noted that the *only* exception to this rule is a bride on her wedding day. This so-called rule about white shoes is actually more of an inviolable code among Southern women. I have always wondered where it came from, and

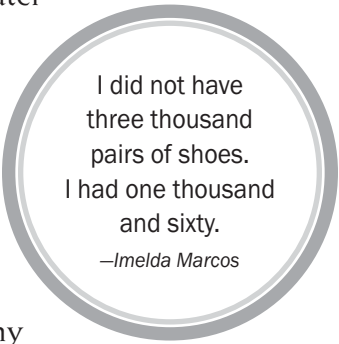
for the life of me, I couldn't tell you. I can only tell you that I have never, ever met a Southern woman who hasn't heard it her entire life.

In the South, shoes are a subject of much discussion, fascination, and decorum. For instance, we would no more ask a woman her age than her shoe size. It would be unmannerly! The fundamental rules of good breeding in the South also dictate that your shoes should always match the hem of your garment, and that your hose should never be darker than your shoes. Any Southern woman worth her red lipstick knows that shoes are important from a fashion standpoint. They make an outfit. I've always known that, of course; Southern women are raised on it. But what they might not know is that shoes are a common metaphor for all women, and for the footsteps of our lives. There is a reason why women have been obsessed with footwear for as many centuries as we can account for. For one thing, we are, first and foremost, creatures of the heart, and shoes allow us to fall in love over and over again! And like love, they make us feel. Our shoes change with our moods, the seasons, and with the different paths—both planned and otherwise—which our lives take.

*Honey, It's All in the Shoes* (my personal slogan) started out being a simple little tell-all about my favorite fashion fetish and ended up being a book that has surprised even me. Until I sat down at the computer, started writing, and truly connected the dots, it hadn't occurred to me that my favorite accessory is more than just matching the perfect pair of shoes

to an outfit. Now don't get me wrong, that matters! When I meet another woman, the first thing I look at is her shoes. Does the color work with the rest of her ensemble, is the shoe's silhouette especially striking, how high is the heel, or does the peep-toe show off her pedicure to perfection? But this book is more than just a diary of my shoe obsession; it is an extension of my passion for exploring the multi-faceted elements of femininity, and for sharing those discoveries with other women.

Just as no two women share the same shoe closet, no two women share the same exact life experiences. But it is our commonalities that interest me most. Women, as a rule, tend to love shoes, because they are an outer expression of who we are inside, at least for that moment. It is both the privilege and the prerogative of every woman to change her shoes as often as she changes her mind or her mood! I never dreamed I would write a book about my shoes or my footsteps in them along the way and over the years. When I was a little girl, I dreamed about becoming many things. I wanted someday to be a gracious woman, a true Southern lady in the tradition of my mother and her mother before her. I wanted to be as funny and flippant as Lucille Ball, as fashionable as Jackie Kennedy, and as audacious as Scarlett O'Hara.



I did not have  
three thousand  
pairs of shoes.  
I had one thousand  
and sixty.  
—Imelda Marcos

I grew up to be a publisher of magazines and books; a mother and grandmother; a Harley Davidson-riding, piano-playing, certified shoe fanatic who is lucky enough to have the opportunity to share a little of my lifelong infatuation with footwear and a few of my stories with you. I dedicate each page to all the Southern ladies out there—regardless of your geography—and to every woman who is struggling, even a little, to find her way. I wish you well on your quest and I invite you to examine mine with me in *Honey, It's All About the Shoes*. More than anything, it is my most sincere hope that you find the perfect pair of shoes to take you wherever life takes you next. You never know where that might be or what it might entail, but the right shoes can, and do, make all the difference in getting there!

CHAPTER

1

## Shoes for the Journey

**G**rowing up in an average American family in Birmingham, Alabama, the oldest of three children, I had dreams of becoming what every young Southern girl hopes she will someday be. I longed to become a wonderful wife and mother and a woman of substance and style, a woman who is sure of herself and the image she wants to always portray through the clothing she wears, the words she chooses, and her actions towards others. Well honey, I can tell you, I never expected to find myself here: a woman in midlife steering a \$50 million publishing company while navigating life changes; the mother of handsome, grown, twin sons who are setting out on journeys of their own; an employer to nearly 200 people; a friend to some wonderful

and influential women you probably have heard of, like Nancy Grace, Sandra Lee, Dixie Carter, and Paula Deen, and others whose names you may not know but whom I treasure as dearly as diamonds. I think that’s what women are—we are diamonds, rare and precious jewels, multifaceted, and always mysterious, and I have devoted my entire adult life to exploring in print our inner and outer lives, publishing such magazines as *Southern Lady*, *Victoria*, *Sandra Lee Semi-Homemade*, *Cooking with Paula Deen*, *TeaTime*, and *Taste of the South*.

My career has been built on the idea that you can tell a lot about the inner thoughts of a woman through her outward expressions—her taste in wardrobe, how she decorates her home, the meals she prepares for herself or her family, how much care and time she takes being gracious and hospitable to others. You will see all of those elements in the magazines we produce at Hoffman Media; they are reflections of a woman’s personality. In this book, I am taking on a single aspect of the feminine panorama I have adored and explored for more than twenty-five years now: Shoes. Why? Because I love them, of course, but also because I believe that shoes are so utterly iconic to our daily lives as women, and through them, we connect to each other. The majority of the time, women dress for other women, not for men, and I believe that shoes, and the footsteps we take in them, are our common link, a way for us to get to know, appreciate, and even mentor one another as women.



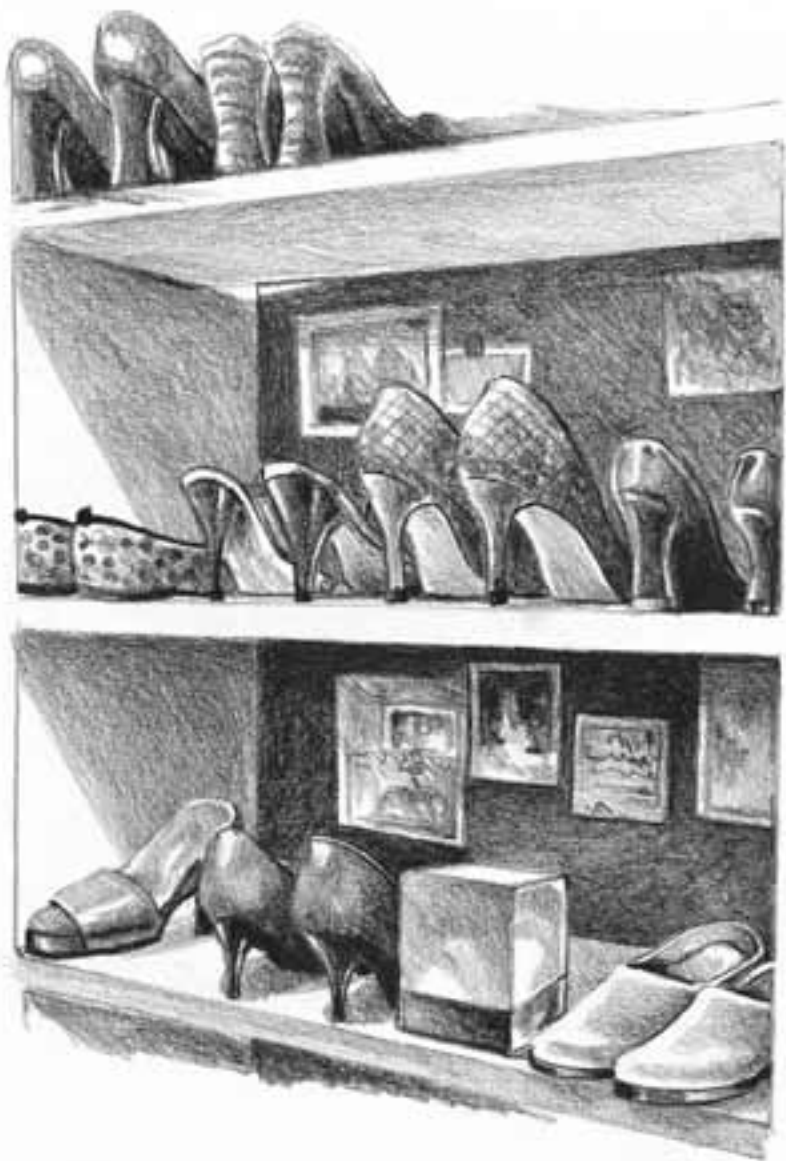
Shoes are more than mere fashion accessories—they are metaphors for a woman’s life, and for me, they are a happy obsession. Women are unique among God’s creations; we mark the milestones of our lives with feminine totems that symbolize each precious stage of our development. For some women it is jewelry—I have a dear friend who has oodles of brooches, ranging in value, but each with a special memory attached to it—and for others it is purses or hats. For me it is shoes, and it has been since the very beginning. For instance, though I can’t tell you what song was playing, I *can* tell you exactly what pair of shoes I was wearing when I first went to church and discovered a lifelong love of music. And though I’m not sure what was served in the cafeteria for lunch that day, I remember with perfect clarity the shoes I was wearing the first day of school. Junior high dances, senior proms, college entrance exams, first job, the birth of my sons, the conception of my career and company, and the weddings and (sadly) the funerals of friends and loved ones—all are organized in the calendar of my memory not by day or month or year, but by the style, fit, and color of the shoes I was wearing at the time.

What makes a woman tick? I’m still finding out. What makes *me* tick? I’m definitely still finding out—and part of my journey towards that discovery is writing this book. As women, we are always in transition. From the time we are young girls with uncharted dreams, we think we know exactly where we’re going, but then, on any given day, along comes a phone call, an e-mail, a letter, or even a conversation that changes everything, and we find our circumstances setting

our course instead of the other way around. I've lived long enough to know that while I can't always be sure of where I am going, I know for certain where I have been, and looking back on those footsteps gives me fresh perspective, even hope. I have so much to share with other women who may be traveling on some of those same roads and asking some of the same questions that have confronted me in my life, and shoes seem to me the perfect metaphor for the journey!

Aside from my wonderful family, my friends, and my readers, I am quite simply in love with shoes! I would rather have a new pair of shoes than almost anything. When my world weighs heavy on my shoulders or when I simply need a little lift, I head for my shoe closet. Shoes are the perfect tonic for whatever ails me. As you'll learn throughout the book, shoes offer me comfort when I need it, adventure when I crave it, motivation when I lack it, and humor when I wish for a lift in my spirits.

My closet is truly a sanctuary where I keep the things that are most precious and personal to me. I open the double French doors and immediately, the cares of my heart are truly lessened and lifted as I start trying on pair after pair, until I find the perfect ones to suit (or change) my mood. On the shelves that line the walls, my shoes are grouped neatly by color or heel height. Some days I'll reach for a pair of three-inch stilettos in a "hello world" color, but other days may be more of a two-inch Palin pump kind of day, where I am, either by necessity or mood, more business and less play.



## CAN YOU REMEMBER THE MAGIC

you felt when you slipped on your mother's high heels; your very own first pair of pumps; your excursion for the perfect professional pair; the glory of finding the most comfortable shoes; and your first ballet slippers, Mary Janes, or running shoes?

In these pairs of shoes reside distinct journeys, phases of life, triumphs and tragedies, precious memories, and lessons learned. In *"Honey, It's All in the Shoes"* Phyllis Norton Hoffman takes you on a journey examining these defining moments, sharing what she has learned when she was required to wear different shoes—from a mother and wife to entrepreneur and businesswoman to publishing powerhouse to doting grandmother—and provides advice for women on putting their best foot forward, no matter their role, circumstance, or stage of life.

Hoffman's fun, nostalgic, and intriguing exploration of the phases of her own life and the virtues that she's lived by gives you hope, confidence, and pride in the life you are already living and the life you are planning ahead. Everything you need is all in the shoes! Through your own recollections and understanding of what your own shoe closet holds and represents, you will discover your true worth as a woman.

"THIS BOOK IS AN INSPIRATION, A COMFORT, AND A MOTIVATOR."

—Nancy Grace

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