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## Stories of Mighty Women: New Biographies for Adult Readers

Posted on December 20, 2014 by [Katherine](#)

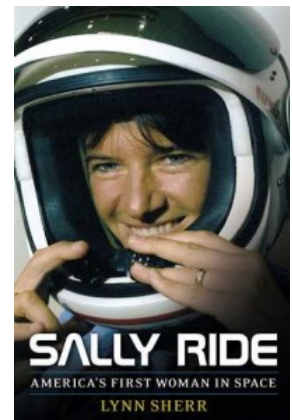
By Katherine Handcock, A Mighty Girl Communications Specialist

When we share stories about famous women from history, adults in [our community](#) often comment that they've never learned about these world-changing women. And, while people love the [biographies](#) we post for children and teens, many adults would also like to learn more about these inspiring women. To that end, in our first-ever post filled with reading recommendations for adults and older teen readers, we're sharing twenty books about incredible women of past and present.

Our recommendations are all biographies with the exception of one remarkable work of historical fiction, [The Invention of Wings](#). Moreover, to help you discover a few of the amazing new biographies which have been recently released, all of our recommended books have been published in the past two years and several are brand new releases.

Since A Mighty Girl's website does not have a book section for adult readers, you won't find these recommendations on our site; however, we've included links below to Amazon so you can learn more or order individual titles.

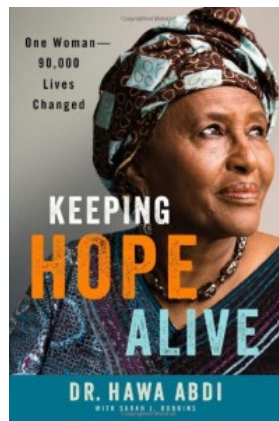
So whether you're looking for a good book to delve into or a last-minute holiday gift for a friend, these women's stories are sure to inspire!



#### [The Invention of Wings](#) by Sue Monk Kidd

In the 1830s, Sarah Grimke, the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, was one of the most reviled women in the US. With her sister, Angelina, she rebelled against family, society, and religion, speaking out for liberty and equality both for African Americans and for women. In this fictionalized biography, on her 11th birthday Sarah is given a 10-year-old slave nicknamed Handful to be her lady's maid, but instead, the two young women grow up together, each striving for a life unimpeded by social expectations. While a work of historical fiction, Kidd goes beyond the historical record to flesh out the rich interior lives of these remarkable real-life women.

[Keeping Hope Alive: One Woman -- 90,000 Lives Changed](#) by Dr. Hawa Abdi



When the Somali government collapsed in 1991, aid groups had to flee, so Dr. Abdi, who is often called "the Mother Teresa of Somalia," turned her 1,300 acres of farmland into a safe haven. There, up to 90,000 people, ignoring the clan lines that so often divided Somalia, sought comfort and shelter. Yet, while her humanitarian work, which has saved tens of thousands of lives, was rewarded with a Nobel Peace Prize nomination and other accolades, her story is also one of personal struggle, loss, and the determination to change the country that will always be her home.

#### [Dearie: The Remarkable Life of Julia Child](#) by Bob Spitz

She began as an unconventional young woman who ran off to join a spy agency, and ended up an icon of both television and cooking! This entertaining and

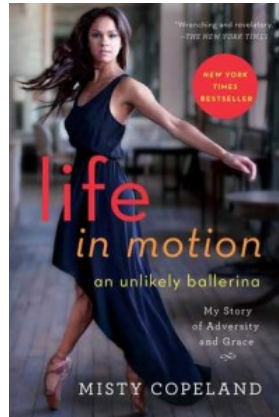
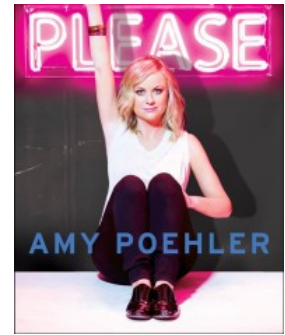


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detailed biography of the beloved TV chef captures the supreme confidence Child demonstrated throughout her life — including her willingness to take the pretentious down a peg. Her light tone and sense of humor passed on that confidence to cooks across America, reassuring them that they, too, could achieve what they dreamed. She may have only been seeking a way to express her true self, but she also changed American culture forever.

**[Yes Please](#) by Amy Poehler**

This funny and candid book is a collection of lists, stories, poems, and other fragments that come together to reveal the life and career of one of the world's favorite comedians! She talks about a "too safe" childhood, her early years in New York, breaking into entertainment, and then the realities of life in Hollywood and "the biz." Additional touches in this memoir provide words of wisdom about work, love, self-image, and above all, being true to yourself and finding the people who appreciate you for who you are.



**[Life In Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina](#) by Misty Copeland**

Misty Copeland was living in a motel room with her five siblings when she first laid her hands on a ballet barre at the Boys and Girls Club of Los Angeles. Within a year, she was performing professionally. Today, she is the first African American soloist for the American Ballet Theater. During her meteoric rise, she found herself caught between the joy she found in ballet and the tough reality of her family life, culminating in a custody battle between her ballet teacher and her mother. With an honest, warm voice, she talks about the challenges of poverty, dance, and finding the balance between achieving your dreams and staying true to yourself.

**[Rocket Girl: The Story of Mary Sherman Morgan, America's First Female Rocket Scientist](#) by George D. Morgan**

Morgan's son tells the story of the little-known woman whose work was critical to the launch of America's first satellite. As a teenager in the late 1930s, Morgan dreamed of a career in chemistry at a time when most of her peers

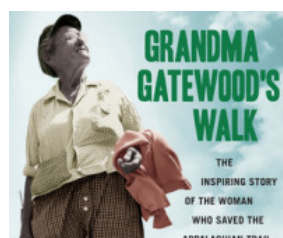
dreamed of husbands and children. When top scientists like Wernher von Braun could not find solutions to the repeated failures of the American space program's rockets, the job was given to North American Aviation — and to Morgan. The formula she developed for rocket fuel launched Explorer 1 into the stratosphere and beyond.

**[My Beloved World](#) by Sonia Sotomayor**

Sotomayor went from a Bronx housing project to a sitting as a federal judge, the first Hispanic and third woman appointed to the US Supreme Court. Although her mother and grandmother loved her fiercely, a childhood illness taught her that she herself held the responsibility of seeking a better life. A television character set her sights on a future in law, and she went on to be high school valedictorian and receive the highest honors at Princeton. With grace and candor, she reveals how the joys and challenges of her life — both personal and professional — have inspired her to become the person she is today.

**[My Name Is Jody Williams: A Vermont Girl's Winding Path to the Nobel Peace Prize](#) by Jody Williams**

As a child, Williams' sense of compassion and justice was driven by the bullies who tormented her deaf brother Stephen. As a young adult, she protested the US' involvement in Vietnam and later, the war in El Salvador. Then she was asked to head a campaign to ban and clear land mines around the world, and she began a truly extraordinary journey — one that finished with the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, for which she shared the Nobel Peace Prize. And although her accomplishments seem astounding, Williams' message is clear: anyone can change the world.



**[Grandma Gatewood's Walk: The Inspiring Story of the Woman Who Saved the Appalachian Trail](#) by Ben Montgomery**

In 1955, 67-year-old great-grandmother Emma Gatewood told her family she was going for a walk. The next time anyone heard of her, she had walked 800 miles of the 2,050 mile Appalachian Trail. And she wasn't done yet: at the end of five months, she became the first woman ever to walk the full length of what was then a little-known and poorly maintained footpath. Her stories of surviving a rattlesnake, two hurricanes, and more captivated the country — and her



criticism of the state of the path led to public attention, saving the Appalachian Trail.

**[Sally Ride: America's First Woman in Space](#) by Lynn Sherr**

She broke through 25 years of white male fighter pilot astronauts to become America's first woman in space on the seventh shuttle flight. But in addition to her inspiring firsts, Ride contributed decades of her life to striving for the stars — both in her continued work with NASA and in her promotion of science

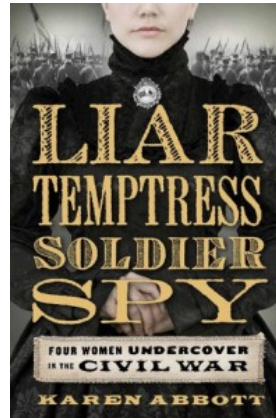
education for children, especially girls. This insightful biography also explores Ride's personal life, including that, despite her prominence, it wasn't until after her death that the world learned of Ride's love for her partner Tam O'Shaughnessy. Sherr, a news commentator and one of Ride's close friends, paints a remarkable portrait of a woman who changed the way we thought of science, space, and women.

**[Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy: Four Women Undercover in the Civil War](#) by Karen Abbott**

Abbott chronicles four very different women who made their mark in Civil War history in this fascinating story that almost seems too far-fetched to be true! These women, Belle Boyd, courier and spy for the Confederate Army; Emma Edmonds, who assumed a man's identity to become a Union soldier; Rose O'Neale Greenhow, who used her affairs with Northern politicians to gather intelligence for the Confederacy; and Elizabeth Van Lew, who used proper Southern manners as she concealed a wide-reaching espionage ring, show how women have never truly just sat on the sidelines.

**[However Long The Night: Molly Melching's Journey to Help Millions of African Women and Girls Triumph](#) by Aimee Molloy**

When Molly Melching spent time as an exchange student in Senegal in 1974, she became aware of a world she had never seen at home in the US. When she returned home, she was determined to help, and founded Tostan, a group dedicated to helping African communities develop. Unlike many organizations, she insisted that Tostan empower local people through democracy and education, so that the change would come from within — and thanks to her dedication, Tostan's strategies have led to improved education, better health care, and a decrease in child and forced marriages in Senegal and elsewhere.



**[The Woman Who Would Be King: Hatshepsut's Rise to Power in Ancient Egypt](#) by Kara Cooney**

She was the daughter of a general and a royal mother, but instead of bearing sons to rule Ancient Egypt, Hatshepsut ruled the country herself. As pharaoh and regent for the infant Thutmose III, she assumed a male identity. While she reigned, Ancient Egypt entered one of its most prolific building periods. Yet, after her death, many of her monuments were destroyed, leaving details of her rule shrouded in mystery. Egyptologist Cooney dramatizes the story of this remarkable pharaoh for an intriguing and compelling portrait.

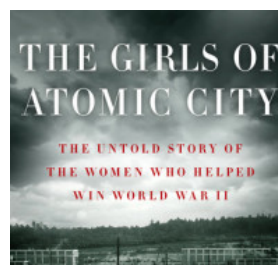
**[I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban](#) by Malala Yousafzai**

On October 9, 2012, when shots rang out on a bus in Pakistan, the whole world took notice: Malala Yousafzai, already known for her passionate writing in favor of educational access for all, was catapulted to international attention. Since then, she has become a global symbol of peaceful protest and the youngest

person ever to win a Nobel Peace Prize. In this memoir, Yousafzai writes about her childhood under a restrictive Taliban regime, her father's determination for her to achieve an education — and why speaking up for education for all children was worth facing an assassin's bullet.

**[The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II](#) by Denise Kiernan**

In Oak Ridge, Tennessee, at the height of World War II, nearly 75,000 people had no idea that their real purpose there was to create an atomic bomb. These people, many of them women from small towns, were recruited with promises of excellent wages and came to do everything from janitorial work to engineering. With the project shrouded in secrecy, though, it wasn't until years later that they understood the part they had played in history. Kiernan talks to 10 different women who worked in Oak Ridge to capture the strange contrast of

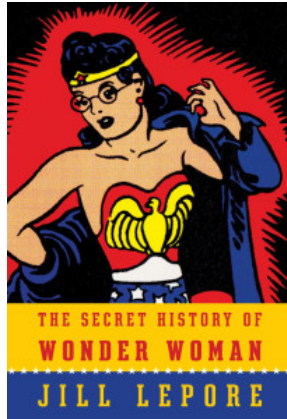




the city: dances and rations side by side with uranium and fission.

**[Eighty Days: Nellie Bly and Elizabeth Bisland's History-Making Race Around the World](#) by Matthew Goodman**

Nellie Bly, reporter for the *World* newspaper, was a scrappy hardened journalist; Elizabeth Bisland, journalist from *The Cosmopolitan* magazine, was born to privilege and preferred novels to newspapers. But on November 14, 1889, each of them set off on a quest to outdo Jules Verne's fictional Phileas Fogg's 80-day trip around the world. This remarkable story of two round-the-world journeys, from their frenzied starts to the aftermath, chronicles how two very different trailblazing women found themselves rivals in a race the world would never forget.



**[The Secret History of Wonder Woman](#) by Jill Lepore**

Lepore examines the surprising origins of [Wonder Woman](#) by delving into the papers of William Moulton Marston. Even as he wrote articles celebrating "conventional family life", Marston lived a highly unconventional life behind closed doors — and when he set his mind to creating the world's most popular female superhero, he took inspiration from early feminists and suffragists, including Emmeline Pankhurst and Margaret Sanger. The story of Wonder Woman's secret history highlights how this remarkable character bridged "waves" of feminism and what she still has to teach us about feminism today.

**[Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin](#) by David Ritz**

She was a gospel prodigy, a teen mother, and a struggling artist, until a music producer who saw her potential suggested she return to her gospel and soul roots and a star was born. Ritz chronicles Franklin's ups and downs with honesty and sympathy: her musical successes, her difficult relationships, her career reinventions and her life's ambitions. Through it all, Ritz celebrates how

Franklin manages to triumph over the challenges in her life and remains one of the most influential musicians of recent history.

**[The Favored Daughter: One Woman's Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future](#) by Fawzia Koofi**

As the nineteenth daughter of the family, Koofi was left by her mother to die in the sun as an infant, but she survived. Despite her abusive family, the brutal Russian and Taliban regimes, numerous attempts on her own life, and the murders of her father, brother, and husband, she has remained determined to change her country — and she has risen to become the first female Afghani Parliament speaker. With painful honesty she tells her story, interspersed with letters she wrote to her own daughters before each political trip. This is not just her personal story, but the story of her dream of the Afghanistan of the future: one where her daughters, and all women, will be truly free.



**[A Century of Wisdom: Lessons from the Life of Alice Herz-Sommer, the World's Oldest Living Holocaust Survivor](#) by Caroline Stoessinger**

Before she died at the age of 110, Alice Herz-Sommer was an eyewitness to some of the most dramatic moments of recent history. This remarkable biography follows her from a childhood in Poland to life as a celebrated pianist, imprisonment in a concentration camp, and finally a simple life playing well-attended home concerts in Israel. Despite the tragedies she suffered, she proudly lived without bitterness, refusing to let the hateful actions of others make her forget the goodness and joy of life. A beautiful story of the woman who became known as the subject of Academy Award-winning documentary *The Lady in Number 6: Music Saved My Life*.

These stories of Mighty Women should not just be for our children, but for all of us. We hope that these books help you learn more about the unsung women of the past.

### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- For biographies for toddlers to teens about girls and women throughout history, visit our [Biography](#) section.
- For more books about Mighty Girl history for kids, check out our [US History](#) and [World History](#) sections.

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