

Honoree Bios – VFA Event Dallas 2010

Ruth Pennebaker—More than anything, what influenced my becoming a feminist was being the older daughter of a mother who was a highly intelligent, frustrated and deeply depressed housewife. She was part of an era that urged women to stay at home, support their husbands and do far too much for their children. I was fortunate enough to be part of an entirely different era (which is another great feminist influence: timing and luck) that made me question a woman's place in the world, what her ambitions could be, how much she should sacrifice for her family.

I'm not a joiner, so I've had little formal involvement in the women's movement. But I've always written as a feminist, including stints as a columnist for the Dallas Morning News and the Texas Observer, work as a commentator for KUT public radio, and in my three young adult novels, *Don't Think Twice*, *Conditions of Love*, *Both Sides Now*, all of which center on young women's lives. I think of *Don't Think Twice*, in particular, as a feminist novel, since it focuses on a pregnant, unwed teenager in 1967—the era when I came of age—and looks at how few and difficult her choices were. I wanted younger generations of readers to understand what life used to be like for pregnant young women when I was growing up and how much society had changed in a few short years. My adult novel *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakthrough* is about three generations of women living under the same roof, told from each of their perspectives.

Much of what I've written over my career has been shorter non-fiction, usually essays, about life from a woman's perspective. I've written about aging, motherhood, marriage, family life, politics, sex differences, my own and others' experiences with breast cancer and depression, you name it. Most of my writing has used humor, because that's simply the way I see the world and react to it.

Most recently, my writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Texas Monthly*, and *Alcalde*. I also have an Instagram project on aging with artist and cartoonist Marian Henley about aging and life from a woman's perspective, *Blue Hour Dames*.

On a personal note, I've been married for almost 50 years to James W. Pennebaker, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, and am the mother of a daughter, Teal, and a son, Nicholas, and the grandmother of four. In 2003, Teal and I marched together in the massive pro-choice march in Washington, D.C. We continue to march in pro-choice marches, now with my grandchildren. I just wish there weren't so much to protest about these days; it's overwhelming.