

Grand Opening
American Women Writers National Museum
Remarks by Carol Ann Riordan,

Interim Executive Director, The American Press Institute, Reston, VA

Thank you, Janice, for the lovely introduction. I am honored to be with you and all of your guests on this historic day.

I had the great good fortune of meeting Janice last fall after attending the Baltimore Book Festival. I was waiting to catch a train back to Washington when I spotted her on the platform. I immediately thought, “By her very demeanor, she must be a person of great substance ... *and she also has shoes to die for.*”

By chance, we sat next to each other on the crowded train and started a conversation that I know will last many years.

(Unfortunately, we did not know we were in the “Quiet Car” until we received a stern warning from one of the conductors, and tried to keep our conversation on the quiet side. But we didn’t stop talking.)

What I immediately learned is that Janice truly is on a mission: to honor, discuss and celebrate women writers of all genres with the opening of the American Women Writers National Museum.

Women writers – particularly women journalists – have shaped my life. They inspired and educated me, opened new vistas and occasionally made me angry. But they never, ever bored me.

My dad was an editor and publisher for weekly and daily newspapers in the Midwest. Reading at least two newspapers a day was practically a requirement to sustain membership in the family.

Marji Kunz, a fashion writer for The Detroit Free Press, inspired me when I was growing up. She didn’t cover her beat like every other fashion writer: getting swept away by clothing that only Size “0” models could wear or turning fashion designers into cult figures.

Marji’s value to readers was covering fashion from a consumer’s point of view – real women, real men, who wanted to look their best without spending a small fortune. For her, fashion spoke volumes about our society, how we perceive ourselves and what we value.

Marji also surprised and delighted her readers. My favorite column was when she attended a formal affair for Detroit's glitterati. She went to the bargain basement of a Detroit department store, where she purchased her ensemble for the event: a pale blue chiffon nightgown that cost \$7 and a pair of fancy bedroom slippers for a couple of bucks.

Marji swept into the event and immediately was complimented right and left by the Motor City's social set for her outstanding outfit. It wasn't until the next morning that the high rollers of Detroit society discovered – in a full account she wrote illustrated by photos -- that Marji pulled off the ultimate fashion makeover for under \$10.

Women journalists – like Marji Kunz -- have had a great impact on us all. Some of their contributions are legendary:

- **Nellie Bly**, the intrepid reporter for Joseph Pulitzer's New York World who went undercover and shined a bright light on the brutality and neglect of women patients at an asylum. She also beat the fictional Phileas Fogg's record by going around the world in 72 rather than "80 days."
- **Marguerite Higgins**, an American reporter and trailblazing war correspondent who covered World War II, the Korean War and the war in Vietnam. Her bravery and professionalism "helped advance the cause of equal access for female war correspondents."
- **Erma Bombeck**, who started out as a reporter and became one of America's most beloved columnists by writing about the ups and down of everyday life with a common sense, down-to-earth approach that made us laugh and sometimes made us cry.
- **Nancy Hicks Maynard**, the first African American female reporter at The New York Times, who covered everything from race riots and student takeovers at Columbia University to the Apollo space program. With her husband Robert, she was co-owner and co-publisher of The Oakland Tribune, and co-founded the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education
- **Katharine Graham**, who started her career as a reporter and became publisher of The Washington Post after her husband's death. There were no role models for Mrs. Graham when she took over the company. But she led The Post through Watergate and the publication of the Pentagon Papers. She became the most powerful woman in publishing and one of the industry's most respected leaders because of her courage, integrity and smart business decisions.
- The numerous **women journalists** who literally put their lives on the line by reporting from danger zones around the globe. They cover the perils and the realities, the horror and the heroism of a world in crisis.

(Source information: Wikipedia.com)

What binds these women together is a desire to tell the truth ... to shine a bright light on stories both significant and small ... to provoke change ... to express themselves ... to have a voice.

Their voices -- and countless others -- will resonate in this special museum in the months and years to come. Their work will be celebrated, discussed, promoted and made more visible. They are part of our history and heritage. Through their many contributions, women writers have inspired and educated us ... and, along the way, helped us find our own voices.

Thank you.