How Two Women Transformed a Journey into the Most Important Record of the Second Feminist Wave

belatina.com/feminist-road-trip-kirsten-grimstad-susan-rennie/

January 14, 2020



When we talk about the *road trip* phenomenon in the United States, our minds immediately turn to Route 66, to Jack Kerouac, and to that post-war generation that saw, under the policies of the Eisenhower administration, the development of the national highway system, a series of arteries that would connect two oceans and millions of lives.

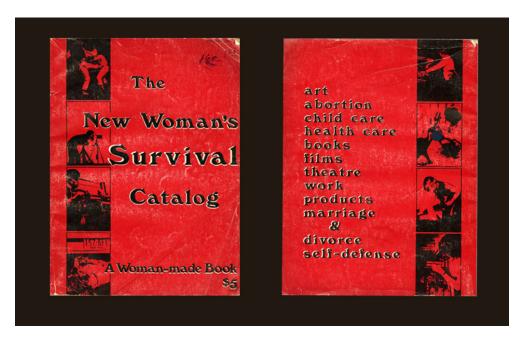
With it came everything else: the fast-food culture, the auto-industry boom, and thousands of pages of travel literature. More importantly, it would lay the foundation for the most important cultural scene of the decade: the 1970s.

While the highways were created at the speed of light, the second wave of feminism took shape with the <u>first publications</u> in English of works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* or Betty Friedman's *The Feminine Mystique*, which put domestic politics in context in the Kennedy Administration.

While this manifested itself in legal victories such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the *Griswold v. Connecticut Supreme Court* ruling of 1965, it would not be until some years later that a catalogue would put the true scope of the feminist revolution on the map.

This was the project of Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie, two university professors who left their homes, their husbands, and even their dog, to embark on the real feminist road trip.

In <u>a story</u> published by *Vice*, the two women told how, in a rented car, they drove around the country to search every commune, every organization, and every women's group that was doing something for gender equality.



"The book offers a lively window into the pre-Internet era of political organizing," says the story, "and a look at the priorities of the early second-wave feminist movement."

It is the <u>New Woman's Survival Catalog</u>, a compendium of zines that collects "information on feminist health collectives, credit unions, arts organizations, union organizing, woman-made clothing, and legal advocacy groups to help women obtain affordable divorces."

Grimstad and Rennie traveled thousands of miles during the summer of 1973 to see first-hand how the second feminist wave was brewing precisely on the ground and far from academic circles.

"What was exciting was not just what people were talking about in consciousness-raising groups or studying through academic studies, but how these things were being lived out on the ground by women all across the country," Grimstad said.



"It was very rare that we were in a place that didn't have a specific group of women that we were going to talk to," Rennie said. "We'd come into town, and then a lot of these groups were actually communes or collectives, so we'd stay with them, or someone would offer us a spare room. They attracted a bit of attention even on the road, she added: "We had a bumper sticker saying, 'Women pick up women. There was a hitchhiker culture at that time. When we were on the road, truckers would see this and honk and blast their horns and we never knew if they were saying 'Fuck you' or if it was good. We got a lot of attention from the truckers."

This is another one of the many stories that remain buried in the collective memory, overshadowed by the colorful impact of the hippie revolution, the culture of psychedelia, and the post-summer love.