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THE FOURTEENTH OF SEPTEMBER
By Rita Dragonette

**AWARD WINNING NOVELIST PENS VIETNAM-ERA STORY FROM
RARE FEMALE PERSPECTIVE DEFTLY CAPTURING THE
ESCALATING TENSION AND COMPLEX EMOTIONS OF THE TIMES**

Fifty years ago, America was at a critical turning point in history as radical social and political unrest swept the nation, much like our nation's current climate. The 1960s brought about an upheaval of change — from voting rights to feminism, from the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, to the promise of space travel. Above all, the Vietnam War came to a head, casting a shadow over American life that profoundly affected most aspects of that and every generation since. Inspired by the fact that so little was known of the female stories of that time and determined to give voice to the women of her generation, debut novelist **Rita Dragonette** drew upon her personal experiences as a student on an army scholarship during the Vietnam War years and crafted the compelling coming-of-age, historical novel: *The Fourteenth of September* (She Writes Press, available now in paperback, ebook and audio formats).

Private First Class Judy Talton celebrates her nineteenth birthday by secretly joining the antiwar movement on her college campus, a move that plunges her into a journey of self-discovery. As the recipient of an army scholarship and the daughter of a military family, Judy has a lot to lose. But her doubts about the ethics of war have escalated, especially after her birthdate is pulled as the first in the new draft lottery. If she were a man, she would have been among the first off to Vietnam with an under-fire life expectancy measured in seconds. The stakes become clear as Judy is propelled towards a life-altering “coming-of-conscience” choice as fateful as that of any male lottery draftee.

“Though women weren’t in danger of actually being drafted, they were ‘in it’ sharing fear, outrage, and activism, particularly during the days of the first Draft Lottery and Kent State, when it felt an age group — a generation — was in jeopardy, not a gender, even if that wasn’t always fully appreciated,” Dragonette says. “It’s an important perspective with a rich and complex backstory that has informed the involvement of women in protests through to and including the current ones today.”

With such timeless themes of feminism, war, and the domestic politics of protest that still resonate today, *The Fourteenth of September* is historical fiction at its finest.

Praise for *The Fourteenth of September*

“Rita Dragonette has written a strong-hearted and authentic novel about a naive young girl and her struggle to reconcile the dissonance between the world she sees and the world she was raised to believe in. Judy is truly a quiet hero; you won’t forget her.”

– Jacquelyn Mitchard, author of *The Deep End of the Ocean*

“A brilliant depiction of how the urgency of political commitment complicates the self-absorption of adolescence. This is a novel for those who marvel at the profound decisions we were called upon to make so young, but also for a new generation facing the crucial questions of the turbulent world that will define them.”

– Barbara Shoup, author of *Everything You Want*

“An often fresh take on the collegiate anti-war movement in small-town America.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“. . . beautifully written with compassionate and thoughtful narrative and engaging characters who play out all the angst of the era set on a Midwestern college campus when America was at its most vulnerable. Dragonette show us what we can be, both in our best and our worst.”

—*Windy City Reviews*

- ❖ **2020 Readers’ Favorite International Book Awards, Finalist, Historical Fiction**
 - ❖ **2019 Best Book Awards, Finalist, Historical Fiction**
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 - ❖ **2018 Beverly Hills Book Awards, Winner, Women's Fiction**
- ❖ **2018 American Book Fest Fiction Awards, Finalist, Literary Fiction & Best Cover Design**
 - ❖ **2018 Hollywood Festival, Honorable Mention, General Fiction**

About the Book

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Q&A WITH RITA DRAGONETTE

So much of your book is about activism. How do you think what you lived through in 1969-1970 relates to what we see happening right now in the United States?

DRAGONETTE: What keeps occurring to me when I see, for example, the responses to the protests after the last election, and, in particular, the “Black Lives Matter” movement, is the similarity. If you look at the world today, you see how we’re questioning our top leadership and governing bodies. Like during the Vietnam War, the situation in the country inspires frustration, rage, and fear. You protest when you don’t have power. In the time frame of my story, the whole atmosphere — aside from genuine fear — was of being powerless. Today, the presidential vote itself was a protest for

certain segments of the population who felt they weren’t being heard. Having no power always feels like something is not fair. And when you can’t impact what you feel isn’t fair — you protest. Different tools are available at different times — voting, marching, property destruction, social media campaigns. The vehicles change, but the impulse is the same. The proper channels have let us down, so we turn to emotion — it’s rage. When that fear and rage are channeled into the political process, it can be positive. When the government appears entrenched in a point of view, it seems hopeless. Our answer was to hit the streets.

You call this a coming-of-conscience novel which is a term you created. Can you explain what this means?

DRAGONETTE: I think we’re all familiar with the coming-of-age novel, where a character grows into adulthood. Judy is only 19 and she evolves from a wide-eyed, naive new recruit, into a member of the counterculture who accepts everything and goes with the crowd, and finally into what we’d probably call today a critical thinker with a mind of her own. Further, all her issues have to do with character. She works really hard to figure out who she is if she stays in the army and who she is if she leaves. She weighs the stakes, the impact, the consequences — and not only for her — for her family, for her country. Ultimately, she has to decide who she is and in many ways, who she will be ever after, before she can decide what she will do. That’s pretty heavy for a teenager. I think “coming-of-conscience” characterizes it much more specifically than “coming-of-age.”

You’re currently working on a couple of books. Can you tell us a bit about the projects you’re writing and what we can expect next from you?

DRAGONETTE: When I wrote my debut novel, I was pretty hard on myself in terms of refusing to work on anything except that book until it was done. Now, I’m much more organic about how I approach projects. I’m simultaneously working on two books about the generation

that my character Judy, from *The Fourteenth of September*, has grown into. One is an homage to *The Sun Also Rises* about older expats who have come to San Miguel de Allende with their last dream. The other is a memoir in essays about inflection points that resonate across a life. I'm also doing preliminary research on a novel set in World War II about two women: an American Army nurse and a German who was part of the Lebensborn program. I continue to be fascinated by the subject of war through the point of view of women.

About the Author

RITA DRAGONETTE is a writer who, after spending nearly thirty years telling the stories of others as an award-winning public relations executive, has returned to her original creative path. She is currently at work on three other books: an homage to *The Sun Also Rises* about expats chasing their last dream in San Miguel de Allende, a World War II novel based upon her interest in the impact of war on and through women, and a memoir in essays. She lives and writes in Chicago, where she also hosts literary salons to showcase authors and their new books to avid readers.

To learn more please visit www.ritadragonette.com

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