



# "Scribbling Women": True Tales from Astonishing Lives

*Marthe Jocelyn*

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In 1855, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote to his publisher, complaining about the irritating fad of “scribbling women.” Whether they were written by professionals, by women who simply wanted to connect with others, or by those who wanted to leave a record of their lives, those “scribbles” are fascinating, informative, and instructive.

Margaret Catchpole was a transported prisoner whose eleven letters provide the earliest record of white settlement in Australia. Writing hundreds of years later, Aboriginal writer Doris Pilkington-Garimara wrote a novel about another kind of exile in Australia. Young Isabella Beeton, one of twenty-one children and herself the mother of four, managed to write a groundbreaking cookbook before she died at the age of twenty-eight. World traveler and journalist Nelly Bly used her writing to expose terrible injustices. Sei Shonagan has left us poetry and journal entries that provide a vivid look at the pampered life and intrigues in Japan’s imperial court. Ada Blackjack, sole survivor of a disastrous scientific expedition in the Arctic, fought isolation and fear with her precious Eversharp pencil. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram’s diary, written in a field hospital in the steaming North Vietnamese jungle while American bombs fell, is a heartbreaking record of fear and hope.

Many of the women in “Scribbling Women” had eventful lives. They became friends with cannibals, delivered babies, stole horses, and sailed on whaling ships. Others lived quietly, close to home. But each of them has illuminated the world through her words.

**A note from the author:** OOPS! On page 197, the credit for the Portrait of Harriet Jacobs on page 43 should read: courtesy of Library of Congress, not Jean Fagan Yellin. On page 197, the credit for the portrait of Isabella Beeton on page 61 should read: National Portrait Gallery, London. On page 198, the credit for page 147 should be Dang Kim Tram, not Kim Tram Dang. We are very sorry about the mix-up in the Photo Credits, they will be updated on any new editions or reprints.

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