

Bookends: Two Women, One Enduring Friendship

Leona G. Rostenberg



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The rare book dealers who delighted readers with the history of their bookselling days in "Old Books, Rare Friends" now offer the other side of their story -- an intimate look at the joys of a relationship that has lasted more than half a century. When their friendship and business partnership began in the 1940s, Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine Stern were pioneers in a man's world. Now approaching their nineties, the duo, who -- among their many discoveries -- unearthed Louisa May Alcott's pseudonymous blood-and-thunder stories, remains a vibrant institution in the rare book trade, even as the Internet changes their field -- and their community -- forever. After publishing "Old Books, Rare Friends," Rostenberg and Stern received a flood of fan mail asking about their personal lives, and they have responded with poignant honesty and the warmth for which they are famous, as they reflect on their lives and their remarkable partnership. "Bookends" recounts their fascinating histories: family backgrounds, business adventures, the men they did not marry, and their approach to the bittersweet trials of aging. More than just a dual memoir, "Bookends" is also a chronicle of the cultural changes of twentieth-century American life and a loving farewell to the golden age of book collecting. Filled with wisdom and humor, this volume is a tribute to Rostenberg and Stern's passion for the written word -- and for life itself. Catching us off guard with their candor, they offer their insights regarding their business, their way of life, and their worldview. Above all, they present the story of a special relationship. At a time when people find it increasingly difficult to connect, here wehave the seamless story of a shared life. It is the unique product of an earlier time, yet it is a timeless reflection on the very nature of friendship. Though their fantastic partnership is un-reproducible, the ideal they have established, for the integration of one life so completely with another, contains lessons for all of us. Without husband or children they created a loving home when this was uncharted territory for women. They nurtured a business and life partnership that has lasted more than half a century and has only gotten stronger with time. When the passing years began to claim one's hearing and the other's sight, they became each other's eyes and ears. A meditation on aging and togetherness, this book is also the narrative of two pioneering single, Jewish women making their way in tandem through a world largely organized to keep them in their place. It is a gentle, wise story, told in their inimitable style, sparse, unadorned, and honest. Their affirmations supersede their uncertainties. As they write, "Bookends support books and come in pairs...If the word encapsulates our past, it looks also to the future, and to the books -- lived together, written together -- that will follow." They confront the challenges of aging in a no-nonsense tone, and, in facing them, give us an ideal of enduring human friendship that can't help but touch the heart.

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