



Fanning the Spark: A Memoir

Mary Ward Brown

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In 1986, after years of publishing stories in literary magazines and periodicals, Mary Ward Brown published her first book, the story collection *Tongues of Flame*. It soon received regional and national attention, and the following year won the PEN/Hemingway Award for fiction. Mary Ward Brown was sixty-nine years old. Though she would go on to write and publish many more stories and a well-received second collection, *It Wasn't All Dancing*, Mary Ward Brown's late acclaim hardly hints at the rich and varied life that prepared the way for her success.

Fanning the Spark is the story of her life as a writer—her upbringing in rural Alabama; the joys of college, marriage, and motherhood; the sorrows of becoming a widow; and a lifelong devotion to writing, writers, and literature, and the company of those who shared those loves, nurturing and feeding her interior life in the face of many challenges, losses, and obstacles, both emotional and material.

Here, in prose every bit as eloquent, evocative, and incisive as her stories, are her remembrances of loved ones; her letters fraught with worry to her son in Vietnam; periods of emotional isolation and unbidden silence; her invaluable friendships with renowned writers, editors, and agents; her love of community and place; and immeasurable delight with every award, speech, and public reading, the many recognitions she has garnered late in life. Above all, it is the story of the competing demands of art and of life, the constant struggle between her need to write and the practicalities of family, duty, and day to day living.

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