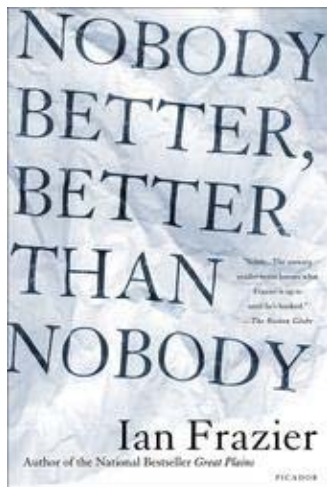


Excerpt from Nobody Better, Better Than Nobody
by Ian Frazier



Heloise was born in Fort Worth, Texas on May 4, 1919, to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bowles. She¹ and her sister Louise were identical twins. Heloise's mother was herself an identical twin, and the day on which her daughters were born also happened to be her own birthday. As a girl, Heloise liked to rub empty spools on the soap when she was in the bath, and blow bubbles from the hole in the center of the spool. She was interested in the Orient - an interest encouraged and shared by her mother, who gave Heloise and Louise matching Chinese cedar chests for their sixteenth birthday. Heloise went to public school in Fort Worth, and she was the only girl in her high school to take shop class, and she got an A in it. She also took private lessons in smoking, to learn how to smoke a cigarette

glamorously. She attended the Texas School of Fine Arts in 1938, and in 1939 she graduated from the Felt and Tarrant Business College and also from Draughn's Business College.

In 1940, she married Adolph Risky, an Air Corps pilot. After two miscarriages, she thought that she could not have children, so she and her husband adopted a son, Louis. She and her son stayed in Texas when her husband went off to war. In 1943, he was shot down over Europe. Heloise received a flag and his medals in the mail, but she did not have enough money to go to Cambridge, England, where he was buried. (Thirty years later, on her only trip to Europe, she did visit the grave.)

In 1946, at a party in Fort Worth, Heloise met Marshal (Mike) Cruse, a captain in the Army Air Forces. He asked her out, and on their first date they went target shooting. They were married three weeks later, and they honeymooned in Mexico. Early in 1948, she and Louis went to join her husband in China, where he had been stationed. First, they lived in Shanghai and then they lived in Nanking. Heloise was both thrilled and horrified by China. In her book *Heloise in China*, written in 1948 (published in 1971), she said, "There are no words in the dictionary to describe this country and its people." She visited Peking, which she thought was the most beautiful and mysterious city in the world. Outside the Forbidden City, she saw many Communist students machine-gunned by Chinese Nationalist troops. She managed a household without a stove or heat or running water. She used rice water for starch, beet juice to dye clothes, and cabbage to clean rugs. She shot a .22 rifle to scare away Chinese people who broke down the bamboo fence around her house and began stealing clothes off the clothesline. She and her husband became friends with their upstairs neighbors, Major Les Garrigus and his wife, Helen, who were also from Texas. One day, Helen and Heloise made one huge Texas state flag and two smaller ones and hung them on the house, causing people to wonder what new embassy

¹Birth name was actually Eloise. She later added the H for alliteration.

that might be². Another time, Helen and Heloise were going shopping and they saw a Chinese man raping a goat. This became a running joke between the couples, and in later years whenever they called each other long-distance they began the conversation by saying “Baa-baa-baa.”

The Cruses left China in 1948, before Communists took over, and moved to Waco, Texas, near where Captain Cruse was stationed. In the first five years of her second marriage, Heloise became pregnant five times. She always knew she was pregnant when she felt a strong urge to go out in the yard and suck rocks. All those five pregnancies ended in miscarriages. Finally, after a difficult pregnancy and a difficult labor, she gave birth to Poncé on April 15, 1951. The Cruses moved from Waco to Arlington, Virginia, in 1953, and in 1958 they moved to Hawaii. In 1958, Heloise and her husband went to a party of Air Force people where everyone outranked them. The conversation turned to different ways to supplement service pensions after retirement. Heloise said that she would like to write a column in the newspaper to help housewives {an idea born at her kitchen table, surrounded by other military wives during morning coffee klatches}. A colonel laughed in her face and bet her a hundred to one she couldn't get a job on a newspaper. Heloise had some engraved calling cards made, and then she dressed in her best suit, with matching purse, hat, shoes and gloves, and she went to the office of the *Honolulu Advertiser* when she knew the editor was out to lunch. She made sure she created quite a stir, and she left her card. Two days later she went back, and this time a secretary gave her an appointment to see the editor. Heloise often dyed her hair offbeat colors; for the appointment she sprayed her hair silver {to convey wisdom}. The editor asked her if she could type, and she said no. She told him her idea for a column and offered to work for free for thirty days. The editor decided to give her a chance, and she soon began a column called “Readers Exchange.”

At first the column offered both practical and personal advice, but after a while the household hints that the column printed attracted some attention. Once, Heloise printed a hint from a reader which said that Sanford's X-it, an ink eradicator, would remove banana leaf stains, and all of Sanford's X-it in Hawaii sold out and fresh planeload had to be flown in. Another time she said that Hershey's cocoa butter was good for soothing rough hands, and the same thing happened. After the *Honolulu Advertiser* had been running the “Readers Exchange” for less than three years, its circulation was up forty percent, and the editor said that it was mostly because of her. *Time* printed an article on her and her column in June of 1961, and Elwin Thompson, the editor at King Features Syndicate, saw the article and suggested to Heloise that she go into syndication. In September of 1961, King Features began to distribute “Hints from Heloise” nationally, and by April of 1962 the column was appearing in a hundred and fifty-eight papers. Her readership was so enthusiastic that when she offered free to anyone who asked for it, a booklet about laundry that she had written, the response was overwhelming. She received two hundred thousand requests³ - the largest delivery of mail to an individual in the history of Hawaii. In November of 1962, she published her first book *Heloise's Housekeeping Hints*.

²The flags were taken down the next day

³This figure may be incorrect as cited in NATIONAL BANK OF COMMERCE, Independent Executor and Trustee of the Estate of Heloise Bowles, and Hearst Corporation, Plaintiff, v. SHAKLEE CORPORATION, Defendant, the figure is one hundred thousand.

Early in 1963, Heloise published her second book *Heloise's Kitchen Hints*. In 1964, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, she received the Silver Lady award from an association of communications executives called the Banshees, in recognition of her achievements as a columnist. By the end of 1964, her column was appearing in five hundred ninety-three newspapers, in American and foreign countries. The colonel who had laughed at her at the party in Hawaii wrote to her and asked how he could get a job.

For a long time, Heloise and her husband had been looking for a place to move after he retired. They wrote to chambers of commerce and considered many cities all over the country. They wanted a place with a good climate, low cost of living, good military hospitals, and good mail service. San Antonio won out, and in 1966 the Cruses moved into a five-room apartment on Broadway, eighty blocks from downtown. They also rented an adjoining two-bedroom apartment, converted it into an office, and knocked out a wall in a closet so Heloise could go back and forth easily. *The San Antonio Light*, a newspaper that carried Heloise's column, sent a reporter named Marjorie Clapp to do a story about Heloise soon after the Cruses moved {to San Antonio}. Marjorie Clapp mainly wrote stories about medical science, and she was unhappy to be assigned to a celebrity interview. When she arrived at Heloise's apartment, she noticed that Heloise was barefoot and had blackened out several of her teeth with some kind of black gum. She also noticed that the closet that let to Heloise's office still had clothes hanging in it, and to get through she had to push the clothes aside. Marjorie Clapp was not surprised by Heloise's strange appearance or bowled over by Heloise's celebrity, and that pleased Heloise, and the two went on to become close friends. Not long after the Cruses moved to San Antonio, Heloise and her husband divorced. In December of 1970, remarried; her third husband was A.L. Reese, a Houston businessman and widower, whom she met while doing volunteer work with the Optimist Club. Heloise did not want to move to Houston, and Mr. Reese did not want to move to San Antonio and so, they divorced⁴, and Heloise went back to calling herself Heloise Bowles, her maiden name.

Heloise had health problems her whole life. In addition to having seven miscarriages, she had a growth in her stomach (it was successfully removed), a disease of the heart carried by pigeons, tic douloureux (a nervous disease involving severe facial twitching and pain, sometimes leading to loss of consciousness), arteriosclerosis, and a cracked vertebra, suffered when a car she was riding in was struck by a drunk driver. (After the accident, Heloise sent state legislators letters printed on little Japanese fans saying that they should pass stricter laws against drunk drivers.) At one point when Heloise was very sick, Dr. Denton Cooley, the famous Houston heart specialist, told her he could help her if she agreed to stop smoking, and she said she just couldn't, and he said, "Then I can't help you," and walked out of the room. She planned her funeral over several years, with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Lelon Cude, a couple she met at a party. They visited many cemeteries shopping for burial plots. The Cudes (who owned a funeral parlor themselves) later remembered that at one cemetery she told the director in detail how to get rid of the ant hills. She had picked a site, and had a tombstone carved and set up, by 1975. The

⁴In less than six months.

tombstone read Heloise, Every Housewife's Friend. She died December 29, 1977, and⁵ was buried in a red silk Japanese wedding robe, which she had always worn on New Year's Eve. At her funeral⁶, each mourner was given a long-stemmed red carnation, and a friend, Mrs. Paul Loomis, sang "*There Are No Phones to Heaven*" - a song written and copyrighted by Heloise.

Several obituaries recalled that she had liked unusual hair coloring, and these ended with a quotation taken from an official biography distributed by King Features Syndicate: "I just can't abide a dreary look, and when I wear a blue dress and blue shoes, why I'm going to have blue hair."

⁵initially hospitalized with pneumonia, she died from complications associated with her heart problems

⁶Attending the funeral, her identical twin sister Louise, shocked many mourners who thought Heloise had risen from the grave.