Through her own words, Helen Jacobus Apte tells of growing up as a Southern Jewish woman, as well as providing insights into the world around her. "Born in Hawkinsville, Georgia in 1886, Helen Jacobus spent her early childhood in Hawkinsville and Richmond Virginia, and her adolescence in Atlanta. She married Day Apte, a Florida native, in 1909. They spent most of their married life in Florida and Atlanta, ending her life in Miami in 1946" (p. v.). Additional time was spent in Missouri, particularly St. Louis, while the two also traveled the country and the world in their times. Through careful editing, Rosenbaum retains the true nature of the diary, spanning the time of Apte's marriage in 1909 to her death in 1946, while at the same time adding historical and other research notes throughout the book to enable the reader to better understand the times and situations faced by Helen while writing her diaries. Bringing the first Temple to the town, facing strikes and eventual unemployment, the opening of the Panama Canal, "Halley's Comet, the Great Celestial Wanderer," (p. 24) two World Wars, the Depression, changing attitudes towards those of African descent, the death of F.D.R., and more, Helen's entries provide the insights of an optimistic woman, both young and old, as she faces it all. Despite her own many illnesses which were never truly diagnosed, Apte never loses faith, even in her diary, retaining herself true to the morals and values she was raised to appreciate as a young Southern belle. Apte shares personal vignettes as well as ones of general interest, such as being present at FDR's assassination attempt, to the experiences of the declarations of World War I and World War II. Sharing experiences from 1909 to 1946, Apte has borne witness to many world-shattering events.

Historically accurate, as only a first-hand account can be, the additional research by the editor, Marcus D. Rosenbaum, makes Heart of a Wife: The Diary of a Southern Jewish Woman a truly remarkable read. While we might not be familiar with the lives of our grandparents or great-grandparents, the additional essays provided will help even the least-historically-interested person gain a true sense of history of the early to mid-1900s in the South.

The growth of Apte, as an icon for many women and Southerners in her time, can be summed up in a short incident in her life, where her views towards Negros changed over time, with her gaining more understating even if she did not lose her paternalistic attitudes. As Rosenbaum points out, "In 1945 she wrote about learning of Franklin D. Roosevelt's death this way: 'The colored waitress said, with tears in her eyes, 'I just heard on the radio our president is dead.' 'Our' president – from a Negro. What greater eulogy?'"(p. 31).

Despite many lapses, some of over two years, the diaries present an accurate insight into Apte's life and times. However, as these were written as diaries and not intended for
publication, there are many vague names and references that one would not understand. It is only through the careful footnoting, research notes, and endnoting of Rosenbaum that one can truly follow the storyline from marriage to death of Apte. The introductions to each chapter, organized by book of the diary, also help the reader to keep pace with the changes in times of the diaries, and provides a refreshing recap and prelude.

The many photographs, both interspersed throughout the diary by Rosenbaum and included in the center of the book, add to the personalization of the main characters discussed in the diaries. In all, this book brings to life a character that otherwise no one would have met. The woman who sat behind FDR at his assassination attempt while traveling before his swearing in as president of the United States, the woman who survived miscarriages, a weak heart, several bankruptcies and moves across the country simply to survive, this woman is one any female would be proud to emulate. Despite the many Victorian beliefs shared in the diaries, Apte's triumph over adversity is what shines through and provides inspiration and encouragement.

Though the book lacks in talking about many Jewish themes, in fact often discussing Christmas and other non-Jewish practices, the book itself is a tribute to the adaptation of the Reform Jew to situations that would otherwise cause impossible situations for living.