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In completing the necessary research and finishing a book-length project, you miss a lot. I was sorry to miss a reunion of my classmates after twenty years of not seeing one another together in the same

place. We are like family, many of us having known each other since we could walk. There are countless ways the members of the Okmulgee, Oklahoma, class of 1997 and our experiences—how we grew up and learned to think about the world together, the friends we lost too young along the way, our commitment to one another "4-Life"—drove the desire to write about home and do the work represented in this book. Many of the themes that appear in the following pages are themes of our lives in Oklahoma. The people with whom I grew up shaped me as a person and the way I think. I appreciate and love them for remaining close in spirit even as I have been physically far away.

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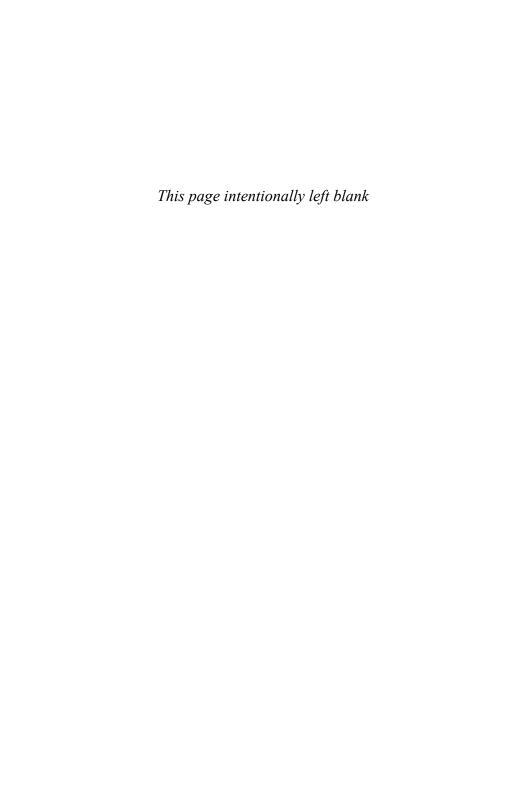
I live with two people without whom nothing about writing this book would have been the same.

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It goes on one at a time, it starts when you care to act, it starts when you do it again after they said no, it starts when you say *We* and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more.



DUST BOWLS OF EMPIRE

