

QUIT BEING SO GOOD.

STORIES OF

A SMART, NICE GIRL

AN UNAPOLOGETIC WOMAN

KRISTI HEMMER, M.ED.

PRAISE FOR *QUIT BEING SO GOOD*

“If it’s moxie you’re looking for, Kristi Hemmer’s new book has plenty of it! With humor, candor, and a distinctive approach, Hemmer provides suggestions for how you can get your needs met directly and unapologetically. Not for the faint of heart, but rather for women ready to break out of their self-imposed constraints with abandon and gusto.”

—**Lois P. Frankel**, PhD, author of
Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner Office

“In *Quit Being So Good*, Kristi Hemmer mixes stories from her childhood, and from her grown-up travels and work all over the world to show girls and women they can find the deepest fulfillment from growing to become more of themselves, not shrinking to be less of who they are. She illustrates that thriving in life is a goal that can take as many forms for women and girls as it can for men and boys, even when it means that girls and women defy expectations of how they ‘should’ act or exist in this world. This book is like a series of long talks with your best girlfriend, aunt, or mentor. It leaves you inspired, resolved, and ready to use your power for good in your own life and in the lives of others.”

—**Emily Yellin**, journalist and author of *Our Mothers’ War*

“Hemmer’s personal anecdotes and expansive life view provide a courageous and unapologetic roadmap for women and girls everywhere.”

—**Romy Newman**, president and cofounder of Fairygodboss

“In *Quit Being So Good*, Kristi reminds readers that much of what holds women back is in our heads. Combining her own experiences with a three-step process, she encourages readers to dig deep, question everything, and use our power to topple structural inequities in our professional and personal lives.”

—**Renee M. Powers**, founder and CEO of Feminist Book Club

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To all those who have been told *Quit Being So Good*, this book is for you. Keep it up; other women and girls are watching.

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Prologue



The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off.

—GLORIA STEINEM

DUBUQUE, IOWA, JANUARY 1983.

When I was in eighth grade, my Future Problem Solvers of America team was the only one from my junior high to advance to state. It was a big deal. My mom took me to JCPenney, where I picked out a brand-new maroon corduroy blazer with puffy sleeves and new navy pants with an elastic waist to fit the belly that was getting ready for my first period. I would be the most fashionable Problem Solver out there.

Growing up, I was labeled the “smart, nice girl.” I was told I was smart by teachers, my family, and my friends. As a Future Problem Solver champion, I was labeled as smart. With my Coke-bottle glasses, I looked smart.

But on this Future Problem Solver team, I was the dumbest of the smart. Everybody knew Kathy was the smartest—then Lavonne, Colleen, Lisa, and me. On competition day, we were told that only four of us could compete on the team. One of us would need to step down. I volunteered right away; I felt it was the smart and nice thing to do.

Curious, I recently looked on the Future Problem Solving Program's website from the year I competed and noted the problems that needed to be solved in 1983 were Electronic Games, Prisons, Lasers, Nuclear Waste, and Genetic Engineering.

Thinking of my “smart, nice” label, I wondered, “But what about the topic of Identity?” As an educator I saw girls shrink in eighth grade and the boys take up even more space. And when I was an eighth grader, I started to shrink and drop out of things I liked and was good at—like the Future Problem Solver Team.

As an educator and counselor, I knew from Joan and Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development that “Identity v. Confusion” is the stage adolescents must resolve to develop a sense of self. At thirteen—when developmentally I was asking myself, “Who am I?” and “What can I be?”—the world told the rose-tinted-glasses girl to accept being “Smart, Nice Kristi.” This is a problem.

Today, when I work with high-potential women and ask them what they want to be known for, the two words that are most common are “nice” and “hardworking.” Of course, you need to get along with others and work hard to do well, but these labels are not differentiators. They do not show your potential, your possible, or what you want. Just like being labeled “Smart, Nice Kristi” did not serve me, because I was so much more than that.

I liked to be on stage. I liked to dance. I liked winning. I liked competition. I liked writing. I liked leading. And I really liked learning.

I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up—and that's what I did. I became a teacher who was intentional about not letting society's labels define potential. A principal at an all-girls school

who coached not only her girls to be self-assured—but also her all-female faculty. A counselor who “recognized the equality and full humanity” of girls and boys. What Gloria Steinem would call a feminist.

JAPAN, AUGUST 2007.

When I started teaching in 1992, I said I would never teach above second grade; my first job was teaching third grade in inner-city Houston. My principal saw my ability to bring out the best in each student, influence social consciousness, and stretch all of them into their best possible selves, and he said I was needed in middle school. I trusted his judgment and indeed fell in love with teaching and counseling middle schoolers. To me, it was the best of both worlds: the lower-school pedagogy with the upper-school ability to solve big social problems.

I taught and was a school counselor for sixth grade for eight years at three different schools when, one fateful day in August 2007, I stepped into my international, eighth-grade Language Arts classroom. I was struck by the suffocating testosterone wafting through the room; I opened the windows. These almost-men who were taller and bigger than me took up plenty of space. The girls were tentative and quiet, took seats at the back of the room, and tried their hardest to take up no space.

This wasn’t like my sixth-grade classes of the past eight years, where the girls came in talking loudly and took seats in the front and the back of the room while the boys filled in the spots.

After a quick review of the syllabus, I opened my eighth-grade class with a question. I asked, “If this class was really helpful to you now and in the future, what would you learn?”

The boys raised their hands. “How to create a video that will go viral.” “How to write a song that will go viral.” “How to use commas correctly.” “What is the meaning of life?”

The girls sat on their hands. Boy after boy shared.

This wasn’t like my sixth-grade classes, where the girls’ hands

flew up in the air and waved all over the place trying to get my attention while the boys waited to be called on.

Straight away, I noticed the gap between the girls and the boys. However, it was my first time teaching eighth grade, so I gave more wait time, hoping that was what was needed.

Nothing from the girls. Nothing. They had given up.

“Let’s hear from the girls,” I said.

Nothing.

I waited. Still nothing.

Aaron, the most popular boy in class, sighed and said, “Girls, just answer. Ms. Hemmer’s not going to move on until you do.”

Finally, a girl raised her hand timidly; her voice was so soft we all had to lean in to hear her. She said, “I’m not sure if this is right. But I think I’d maybe want to know how to write a college essay—if that’s OK.”

It was so painful. And I thought, *Why do girls shrink? With their minimizing word choices, their inaudible voices, their self-doubting thoughts, and their invisible bodies?*

And then I thought back to the years when my name was “Smart, Nice Kristi.”

It was then that I painfully understood that this universal shrinking of girls’ voices, ideas, and existence at a time when their identities were forming was not only a problem but a crisis.



When I was eight (one year before confidence peaks for girls in America), I was the Connect Four champ; nobody wanted to play with me. The message I heard was one I’d come to hear again and again as a girl and then as a woman: *Quit Being So Good.*

As part of the Future Problem Solvers of America team mentioned above, I was told, “Don’t be too smart, boys won’t like you.” *Quit Being So Good.*

My best guy friend in high school said, “You’re too smart to be a teacher, Hemmer.” *Quit Being So Good.*

My college advisor said, “Don’t show your GPA because it looks like you haven’t experienced failure.” *Quit Being So Good.*

When I was thirty-three and the principal of an all-girls school, a city council member told me I was too young. *Quit Being So Good.*

I didn’t know it then, but my first day of teaching eighth grade was when I decided to quit being part of the problem. Three years later, I quit my job, traveled the world for four years learning from changemakers while living on twenty dollars a day, and was inspired by the young women I met around the globe to start my own social business, Academy for Women’s Empowerment. Because the schools I worked in for over twenty years were more concerned that you knew how to conform than they were about equality. There was no room in the curriculum for equality.

I was pissed off.



Now I realize the question that I have been pushing up against since I was eight is: “Why do women and girls shrink in a classroom, boardroom, and conversation?”

As a good Future Problem Solver, I still love solving problems.

This book explores, plays with, and challenges every change-maker to imagine a future world where it’s safe for a woman and girl to show up not as “Smart and Nice” but as “Unapologetic.” Even if it hurts somebody’s feelings.

If you identify as female, the book will give you tools to be unapologetic, stories to let you know *you’re not alone*, and the MOXIE to do something about it.

If you identify as male, it’s like reading your sister’s diary. The book is a safe space to listen and learn, so you can be a more empathetic brother, partner, father, leader, boss, colleague, and

direct report. And it will (hopefully) inspire you to help create a safer and more equitable world for women and girls.

This book is NOT about changing you. It's about showing up as MORE of who you are—even at the risk of hurting somebody's feelings. It's about reclaiming the little girl inside you who climbed to the very top of the jungle gym, who tried her best to win every time, and who was proud of being a Future Problem Solver.

Go back to when you were a little girl. Before your confidence peaked (age nine) and before you started “dropping out” of sports, your passions, and your life (age fourteen). What is something you liked to do as a little girl that you “dropped out” of? This book will help you to reclaim it.

And now, what would be different if you were creating a future where girls and women were equal and safe all over the world? If you were a Future Problem Solver.

HOW TO BE A FUTURE PROBLEM SOLVER.

1. Take up space. Unapologetically. What are you known for?

_____ Now, what do you WANT to be known for?

_____ I was known as “Smart, Nice Kristi.” Today, I want to be known for inspiring changemakers to be unapologetic so that they can disrupt the systems of power to create a more equitable and safer world for women and girls. Go ahead, fill in the blanks. How will you take up space, unapologetically?

2. Be first. There is power in going first. As girls and women, we are taught to follow. In Scooby-Doo, Daphne and Velma follow Fred into the scary swamp. Even though it's Velma who solves the problem, Scooby and Shaggy get the credit. Be the first to speak up at the meeting, to start your own business, to choose not to get married, to live overseas, to climb Kilimanjaro, to buy a house. And then show those who are watching (and believe me, people are watching) that they can be first too.

Where do you want to “go first” in your life? What will it give you?

3. Look for the helpers. Mr. Rogers said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” Mr. Rogers’s quote is powerful, especially for women because women are often the helpers and struggle with asking for help. I purposely did not say, “Be a helper,” because you already know how to do that. Now is the time to learn to look for the helpers.

Helpers look like many things. They can be allies. They can be sponsors. They can be men. And they can be women. Helpers can live on a dollar a day or have the glass office on the top floor in a big international city. When you’re out there being more of you, you are not alone. There are helpers. Surround yourself with them. What is something scary for you right now? Who are your helpers? Now, go ask for help.

**GO FORTH, FUTURE PROBLEM SOLVER.
TAKE UP SPACE, UNAPOLOGETICALLY.
AND MOXIEON.**

P.S. MOXIE. It means guts, pluck, sass, courage, and energy. I use it as an adjective, noun, and verb. When I say “MOXIEon,” I mean “Be your most powerful self and change the world.”



9

IT'S OK; YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET MARRIED.

I have yet to hear a man ask for advice on how to combine marriage and a career.

—GLORIA STEINEM

SUMMER 2020.

I get a text from my niece. “I have a semi-loaded question.”

I texted back, “Are you safe?”

“Yes. Thank you for asking.”

“I’m ready,” I replied.

For me, the role of Auntie Kristi is the ultimate sponsor. I’m here to listen, to share wisdom, and to love, love, love. Although I have only one full biological niece and three acquired nieces, I’m an auntie to hundreds of young women and girls around the world.

“OK, so like first of all yeah. I’m 19 and obviously have years before any of this is a real topic or concern but this has been in my head since last week, and I really think you understand better than most. I have NEVER EVER EVER wanted children. And I’ve also never been too keen on the idea of getting married. Like never. Marriage seems scary.”

The texts kept coming.

“Anytime the topic ever comes up, I hear, ‘Oh, you’ll change your mind!’ But I don’t think I will. I feel like there’s so much

pressure on women to choose between having a really successful career and personal life and having a family. To be honest, between the two I'd pick the first without a doubt, and ever since I've known you, I've always really admired you as a person because I think you have such a good heart and strong personality.

"And this is honestly none of my business, so forgive me, but do you ever regret not doing the whole marriage and kids thing? And how did/do you deal with people pressuring you to have kids and get married?"

I was relieved. This felt easy compared to other texts I'd received from young women over the years about not wanting to live anymore, not wanting to eat anymore, or fearing this time he was going to kill her. I responded. "First, I'm honored you reached out to me. Second, I am with you. I never saw myself getting married or having children. Children are one of my favorite things in the world, and I've built a life around them (especially girls), but I don't want the lifestyle. And yes, I would have been a kick-bum mom, but I'm an awesome auntie. I feel like my role in the world is to give love where it's needed, and where I can. There's plenty of opportunities to do that. No regrets."

I added, "I don't usually get pressure because of what you call my 'strong personality,' which tells me that people DO know that what they're asking is not helpful and is judgmental. I have a story I wrote for my friend Haley. Do you want me to send it?"

"Yeah."



DECEMBER 2015.

"I've scoured the bookshelves for somebody to tell me it's OK to not want to get married and have babies. It's OK to want to live a life I want. It's OK to not belong to somebody else." Haley

splayed her body across the table in defeat. “Kristi, you need to write it.”

I was shocked. Haley is one of the few other women I’ve come across that has self-assurance as one of her innate strengths.¹ She had just been hired by Facebook, had been chosen by Steve Case to present her idea on a big stage, had made the first cut in a national start-up competition, already had a TED Talk under her belt, and wanted *me* to tell her it was OK?

I struggled with this because I teach women that waiting for permission is giving your power away. Haley didn’t need permission to be fierce, brilliant, nor confident. What was this about? Why me?

I was in my late forties and for the first time in my life had a boyfriend. I’d been to sixty-five countries and lived out of a backpack for a total of six years of my life on twenty dollars a day.

“How did you do it?” Haley asked.

“What do you mean?” I replied.

“How did you deal with the pressure? The questions? The judgment?”

Haley was folded over. Exhausted. Her face was sullen. I wanted to lean over and give her a hug, but that’s not what she needed. She needed me to put it in words.

“After Michael and I holiday on Condado Beach in Puerto Rico, I have a week at a hostel in Old San Juan. I will write something for you,” I promised.



PUERTO RICO, 2015.

After our five days at a fancy ocean suite in Condado, Puerto Rico, my boyfriend flew back to Minneapolis to work, and I

¹ Strengthfinders 2.0. <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/>

transferred to my four-bed, all-girl-dorm-room, seventeen-dollars-a-night hostel for an additional week in Old San Juan. I have found that when I travel solo, I learn a lot more about the location, people, and myself.

Please don't let me get a top bunk. Please don't let me get a top bunk, I chanted in my head as I lugged my suitcase up six flights of stairs in the ninety-degree weather. What was an adventure when I was in my teens was now a punishment in my forties; the rungs on the ladder hurt my feet, and without my contacts in it was hard to see the ladder. I got the top bunk.

As I pouted on the top bunk, thinking about the infinity pool I'd just left, a dirty-blonde girl clad in a clichéd Panama hat stormed into the room, looked up at her bunk, and said, "I'm too old for a top bunk. And it's my birthday." I giggled; we became best friends on our top bunks, swapping life stories. I learned Mindy had a baby named Jack she hadn't planned for and a divorce from a husband she didn't want. She missed her travels and life "before Jack."

Mindy felt guilty for not missing Jack. She felt guilty she was in a safe job that allowed her to give Jack a ride to school in the morning and pick him up. She shared her dream of working in hospice one day when she could afford it. Distraught, Mindy decided to abandon the "top bunk" life and splurge on a \$160 room at a hotel so she could do some soul searching. She left me with our two other roomies—each of whom had a bottom bunk and was probably in her twenties.

The next day, she texted me that she had been up for hours pooing. I brought Gatorade to her fancy-schmancy inn and stayed to make sure she felt better. "Maybe I don't have the flu," Mindy said. "Maybe I don't have food poisoning or IBS. Maybe I'm purging the crap in my life?" She described the countless women she saw as a nurse who used their health as an excuse to escape from their miserable lives. "Have I become them?"

I sent Mindy off into the sunset of poo and existential ques-

tions and rushed off to meet the twentysomethings who had the bottom bunks for happy hour.

Megan and Emily were forest firefighters who lived in Colorado and were sent to the wildfires we see on television—but only from April to October, when the fires rage. When not fighting forest fires, they traveled around the world.

I changed into a dress and heels and even put on my signature hot-pink lipstick. “How did you fit a pair of heels in that bag?” Megan asked.

“Always pack something you can interview in, something you can attend a gala in, and something you can salsa in,” I said.

Emily and Megan laughed. “We have a lot to learn from you,” said Megan.

“Traveling the world, listening to my ambition, and being true to Little Kristi’s dreams have taught me a lot. And I’m still learning,” I replied.

We headed to the rooftop for four-dollar sangria happy hour. Megan told me about her iguana hunt from the day before and how Emily had got the big one. “There was this one that I didn’t hit just right . . .”

“This is the part you shouldn’t tell Kristi,” Emily interjected. She shifted in her seat and leaned in. “Why is it that boyfriends don’t understand that as a forest firefighter, I am on twenty-four seven during the season? That I can’t just hop in a car and be there? And so we break up.”

We made a pact over sangrias that society’s expectations wouldn’t be the barrier to our success. We were not damn Cinderellas; we would create our own happy endings.

“And why do the women who are now in leadership positions at the firehouse ignore me and make things worse?” Megan added.

We made another pact: we wouldn’t be the barrier to another woman’s success. We would bring other women along in our success.

The next day, the girls headed back to Colorado, and I snagged a bottom bunk. Dani and I were the only ones in the room. As we sat alone in the room, she asked, “What are you doing for dinner? I don’t like to eat alone or go out alone.”

“What made you come on this trip alone, then?” I asked.

“I’m graduating from Columbia University at the end of the month and going back to China.” For the next thirty minutes, I listened to Dani describe her time in NYC, the rough adjustment to American life, her boyfriend waiting for her return after her degree in construction management, and her parents telling her, “Do not push yourself too hard; you don’t need to do big things. You have us and your boyfriend here. Come back to China.”

Dani’s warmth and directness were refreshing. In her sure-fire, staccato way, she asked, “What if I regret it? What if I’m missing opportunities in the States? What if I do want to push myself and do big things? When I’m old, will I wonder about what I could be doing instead?”

“Your boyfriend is an architect. Would he join you in the States?” I asked.

Sigh. “If I don’t come back, we will end.” Dani didn’t look sad. She didn’t look lost. Her dislike of being alone felt like a limiting belief; she enjoyed herself. Loved herself. She was stronger than she thought.

I ended up going for tapas with Dani on the rooftop. I headed back early to read and journal, and she stayed with our Swedish roomie Anna and an American guy staying at our hostel.



I met our next roomie, Eve. Eve was a New Yorker. She appeared bold, self-assured, and unafraid. She was living in La Ceiba, Honduras, doing impactful work with the locals.

She told me that she had just nailed an interview for her dream job in Seattle, but her boyfriend was studying medicine in Guatemala. She wasn’t sure what to do.

"How is this your dream job?" I asked.

"It will make BIG impact, it pays well, and it's where I want to be," she fired back.

"Why would you say no to that?"

"I'm not sure he will allow me to do both."

"Both?" I questioned.

"Be his girlfriend and work in Seattle," Eve replied.

"How will you decide what to do?" I wondered.

"I'm not sure."

She flopped on her bed and put her eye mask on. As I worked on this story, Dani came back, stuck her earplugs in, and passed out on her bed. I finished up my work and turned the lights out.



I woke up to hear a man and a woman arguing outside our dorm room. I knew the sound. Anger. Our Swedish roomie Anna stormed into the room and huffed up to her bed. The guy pounded on the door. She yelled for him to stop. He continued. She climbed back down the ladder and stepped outside.

I couldn't hear the words, but I could tell he was agitated. She snuck back into the room, slammed the door, and locked it, then climbed back into bed.

"Sorry," she whispered.

"You should be for waking us up," said Eve.

"Are you OK?" I asked. No answer.

I was on red alert. The pounding continued. It grew louder. A neighboring guy heard it, stepped outside, and argued with the guy about leaving us alone. The voices grew more agitated and the pounding rattled the door. I looked for escapes. There was a tiny window that dropped off the fourth floor.

"Do you think we need to call the police?" I asked Anna.

"I'm getting the number now," said Eve. She screamed into the night, "We're calling the police! I have the number right here. I'm ready to dial it."

"If you pound the door one more time, we're calling the police," I added with authority and experience.

I knew the type from my work in domestic violence. The pounding stopped. The others fell asleep; I waited another twenty minutes before I started to relax.

I awoke early to write; it's my travel routine learned from all those years of sharing rooms with others. When I returned, Eve and Dani were gone. Anna came back from the shower. "I want to apologize for last night," she began. "I don't know what happened. He was an OK guy when we were drinking; he said nice things and told me about his success in America. He said he'd walk me home since we were staying at the same hostel. He followed me to my room, and when I said good night, he freaked out. He couldn't believe I didn't want to hook up with him; he couldn't accept I didn't want to be with him. I'm not that kind of girl, you know." She looked down at her feet.

"Are you in danger now?" I asked.

"No. I found out he checked out, and I'm going to check out also. I'm so ashamed."

"What are you ashamed about?" I asked.

"That he woke you up, and I drank too much," she said.

"He was the one pounding down the door," I added. She smiled.



I think back to my five days in the hostel, Haley's desperate questions, and my niece's painful text. No wonder young women are struggling.

I think about how my role as auntie (sponsor, ally, advocate, mentor) is even more important than I imagined.

So here it is; the validation you've been craving. You are lovable without a partner. You have value without children. In fact, a recent headline in *Business Insider* read, "Women who are unmarried and childless are the happiest people of all."

Paul Dolan, a professor of behavioral science at the London School of Economics, says that while men benefit from being married, women generally don't. Although tying the knot and having children are typically considered markers of success in our society, women who shun this pressure, despite the stigma, tend to be happier and healthier as a result.²

There. You have proof now.

But really, living the life you want is about knowing yourself and valuing what you want—no matter what anybody says or thinks. It's about choosing. To get married, or not. To have children, or not. Owning your power.

It's OK to get married. It's OK to not get married. It's OK to have children. It's OK to not want children. Ultimately, it's OK to be you.

But *really*, Haley, my beloved niece, and all of you nodding your head right now, you didn't need to hear that from me. You knew it all along. Believe in you.

HOW TO BE “OK.”

1. Take up space. Let your dreams take up space. Your business. Your innovation. Your name. Don't change your name if you don't want to—or have your partner take on your name. And when you need it, here it is: “It's OK to be you.” Take out a sticky note or your phone and write, “It's OK to _____.” What would you write on the line?

2. Be first. To not get married. To not have children. To create your own definition of “family.” I was talking to my friend who is in her late fifties about this phenomenon, and she said

² Oppenheim, Maya. “Women who are unmarried and childless are the happiest people of all, according to a professor of behavioral science.” *Business Insider*. <http://static1.businessinsider.com/unmarried-childless-women-are-happiest-expert-says-2019-5>

that it feels like it's more OK to not get married than to not have children. The childless woman is the bottom of the hierarchy. She said that often women will whisper to her, "I'm sorry that you and your husband couldn't have children." Or she gets a cheerful, happy, "Why don't you adopt?" Nobody seems to hear, "We don't want children."

As you read above, I never saw myself in a white dress getting married. I didn't see children for myself. However, I'm an educator; you don't go around broadcasting that you don't want children when all day long you work with other women's children. When I told one mom I didn't want the lifestyle, she told me, "You probably shouldn't tell other moms this, or they won't want their children in your classroom." I replied, "Moms should want me. The teachers who are moms are thinking of their own children all the time. Not yours. I only have yours on my mind." I smiled my Blessed Southern Smile, and she shut up.

What do you see for you?

3. Look for the helpers. Look for your aunties. I am president of my company. I am an author. I am a world traveler. I am a social entrepreneur. And my favorite title is auntie. When I was living in Japan, I became fast friends with Intern Aya. She affectionately called me Oneechan (big sister in Japanese), and I called her Imouto (little sister). But really, with our age difference, I was an auntie. I was there to share my wisdom and experience; she was there to remind me to play and embrace what's possible. We learned from each other—without all the family dysfunction. Who is the "auntie" (sponsor, ally, advocate, mentor) you can turn to for support?

NOW, GO FIND YOUR "AUNTIE." AND IF YOU HAVE A FAVORITE ONE ALREADY, GO THANK HER! WE AUNTIES LOVE WHAT WE DO, BUT THERE IS NO AUNTIE DAY. YET.

Epilogue

THANK YOU, GLORIA STEINEM.

A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men.

—GLORIA STEINEM

MINNEAPOLIS, 2014.

I was at a high school, about to meet with a group of young women who were interested in my Changemakers Course. There was a freshman boy sitting there as I set up, and he asked what I was doing. When I turned to tell him, his teacher chimed in, “She’s doing feminist work.”

The student looked at him and asked, “What’s a feminist?”

His teacher replied, “I’m a feminist. Are you a feminist?”

Looking lost and confused, he said, “I don’t know.”

He replied, “Look it up.”

I was anxious. I wanted so badly to share Hillary Clinton’s quote, “Human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights”; to defend feminism; to tell him that it wasn’t an F word. But I followed his teacher’s lead, even though I was fearful he’d find the Urban Dictionary definition: *A woman who turns a relationship with a bad father or husband into a political agenda, seeking not equality, but revenge.*

The boy went to the Almighty Google, and read it out loud, slowly. “The belief that women should be allowed the

same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way.”

His teacher asked, “So, are you a feminist?”



I was a feminist when I called myself a feminist.

I was a feminist every time I rejected the “Quit Being So Good” message the world was telling me.

I was a feminist when I was told by my professor that women couldn’t stand up in front of large groups and lead, so I co-created and co-led the Challenge of Teaching Conference at my university.

I was a feminist when, as a teacher, I created a safe space for girls to fail and boys to cry in my classroom.

I was a feminist when I gobbled up authors like Gloria Steinem, Maya Angelou, Sylvia Plath, Amy Tan, and Zora Neale Hurston.

I was a feminist when, as an intern at the Houston Area Women’s Center, I co-created and co-led a group of men focusing on the healing of their own sexual abuse growing up and rehabilitation from domestic violence.

I was a feminist when I was almost fired for allowing the group to choose the topic of LGBTQ at my SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) meeting.

I was a feminist when I founded Academy for Women’s Empowerment to create a safer and more equitable world for women.

I was a feminist when I marched with other women at the first Women’s March in January 2017.

I was a feminist when I wrote and published *Quit Being So Good* to inspire changemakers to disrupt the systems of power and create a more equitable and safer world for women.



His teacher asked, “So, are you a feminist?”

He paused. Scanned his screen, looked up, and said, “Yeah. I guess I am.”

And you can be one too.

HOW TO BE A FEMINIST.

1. Take up space. For women and girls. For men and boys. To me, being a feminist is expecting, demanding, and fighting for “the equality and full humanity of women AND men.” In The Representation Project’s documentary “The Mask You Live In,” it is said that the three most destructive words you can say to a boy is “Be a man.” As an educator and businesswoman who has worked with boys and men, I see and feel their pain as limits are forced on their identity too. How will you be aware of stereotypes and limiting beliefs that limit boys/men as well as girl/ women?

2. Be first. To call yourself a feminist. “If you say, I’m for equal pay, that’s a reform. If you say, I’m a feminist, that’s a transformation of society,” said Gloria. How will you transform society? Start small. Look right in front of you. What needs to be changed to create a more equal world for all? That’s where you start. What is your first step?

3. Look for the helpers. Look beyond gender. Find partnerships in the intersectionality of “full humanity.” Some of my favorite “helpers” are SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity), founded by Peggy McIntosh (author of “White Privilege: Unpacking Your Invisible Backpack”), Family Tree Clinic in Minnesota, and Project Diva International. Who are your partners?

GO FORTH, FULL HUMAN. MOXIEON!

Gratitudes

TO MY DREAM KEEPERS.

This is what fifty looks like.

—KRISTI HEMMER

Writing and publishing *Quit Being So Good* has been my dream since I was eight; thank you for being part of the dream. Gratu-
itudes to my Dream Keepers, who have protected my dream of
being a published author from, as Langston Hughes wrote, “the
too-rough fingers of the world” all along.

Linda Hemmer: for believing that I was always writing a book.

Dennis Hemmer: for teaching me not to give up.

Michael Bartus: for loving me as a single, childless woman.

Amy Quale: for believing the three steps could dismantle the patriarchy.

A-team: for encouraging me to write the book and believing that it was a Big Deal.

Team Kristi: for the feedback, the pushback, and the “I have your back.”

My students (young and old and the young who are now old): for making me a better human.

My teachers (like Mrs. Cain, Mrs. Boyes, and Mrs. Leifker): who inspired me to teach, to write, and to love unconditionally.

Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: for making me not feel so alone.

Gloria Steinem's *Revolution from Within*: for "getting" me.

Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*: for inspiring me to own my power and make sure other girls and women do too.

The Wise Ink team: for your extra hours, love, and time for making my voice readable.

You, the Reader: for your trust and guts in reading until the MOXIE end.

IN LOVE AND MOXIE,

Kristi

About the Author



Kristi, age eight, when she first declared she was going to be an author.

Why do women and girls shrink in a classroom, boardroom, and conversation? This question made educator Kristi Hemmer so mad that she quit her six-figure job in Tokyo to answer the question and solve the problem. For four years, she traveled the world on twenty dollars a day learning about social entrepreneurship. In the process, she founded Academy for Women's Empowerment (AWE). AWE has inspired thousands of changemakers around the world to disrupt the systems of power and create a safer and more equitable world for women and girls. Kristi Hemmer has a master's degree in education. She lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and everywhere else in the world, for that matter. To learn more or invite Kristi to your organization, visit www.kristihemmer.com.