

# Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE



Issue Thirty-six  
Autumn 2022

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@her\_edit

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thank you

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Front cover image  
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## Welcome to Her Edit

Welcome to this long-overdue issue. Sometimes life gets in the way of the best-laid plans, but then I've never been a planner and serendipity is my friend. So it was when a casual conversation on a sunshine-soaked street revealed itself to be a conversation with the legendary Irma Kurtz. She is as warm, iridescent and fascinating as her well-lived and joyful life.

I am also delighted to feature the irrespressible journalist, film-maker and campaigner Madeleine Holt. Not only is Madeleine incredibly passionate about making our education system socially equitable, but she is also one of my favourite people to share a bottle of wine with.

It's always a thrill when we get positive feedback from people on the magazine and I don't think there can be any better approbation than people offering to write for us. Tracey Leese's book, *Teach Like a Queen*, offers inspiration and practical tools for women teachers to develop their leadership skills, but I think there are lessons for all of us. Jesse Thayre's project to read a book authored by a woman from every country in the world has certainly encouraged me to broaden my literary horizons and I'm looking forward to reading her top five recommendations.

It's no secret that one of my favourite pleasures in life is a gin and tonic, so I've particularly enjoyed learning about the journey of the founders of the Still Sisters distillery. Not only are they producing award-winning - and delicious - gin, but have a very life-affirming and positive story to share.

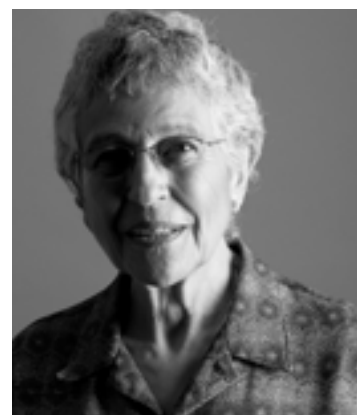
Please send your stories and ideas to us at [editor@heredit.co.uk](mailto:editor@heredit.co.uk), share your thoughts on our website and keep in touch on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/her_edit).

Enjoy the issue and, till next time, keep safe and well.

# Her Issue Thirty-six



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Irma Kurtz photographed at home

Journalist and writer Irma Kurtz is the author of three self-help books, several novels and travel-focused books. Her autobiography was published in 2014. Irma has presented travel programmes for the BBC and contributed to countless radio and television broadcasts. She is grandmother to her son Marc's four children. Jayne Phenton went to visit Irma at her home in Bloomsbury to hear about her remarkable life.

# IRMA KURTZ

## La bohème

**“The main reason I did the agony work was curiosity. I’ve always been driven by curiosity.”**

In her book reflecting on her iconic agony column in *Cosmopolitan*, *My Life in Agony*, Irma Kurtz describes herself as a ‘Purveyor of Common Sense’, yet there is nothing common about her or her extraordinary life. Her sense of adventure took her from middle-class New Jersey to Paris in the 1950s to London in the 1960s and a career as an author, writer, broadcaster and mainstay of one of publishing’s most iconic titles for 40 years.

A graduate of Columbia University’s prestigious women’s college, Barnard, Irma rejected her parents’ career ambitions for her to become a social worker and got a job as a waitress in Manhattan to save the money for her passage to Europe. Describing it as, ‘in many ways one of my most satisfying and unforgettable jobs’, it was a daily lesson in human nature as she served the ‘ladies who lunched’, tightly bound by 1950s convention.

‘Women were not free to be themselves. They had to obey certain unwritten rules of behaviour and one of them was that ‘you don’t wait on tables if you’ve been to Bonnard college.’

Irma’s wanderlust began at an early age. Standing on a chair in her bedroom she could see the Statue of Liberty and once she realised the city was only a 25-minute subway ride away, ‘Jersey didn’t see me anymore.’

As a teenager, she would hang around cafés in Greenwich Village and Washington Square. At a favourite haunt, the legendary White Horse Tavern, she noted a regular, always asleep in the corner. Later she realised it was Dylan Thomas.

**‘Like all Americans of my generation, Paris was the dream.’**

Irma was in love with the Left Bank and set sail to find her Bohemia. She taught English at the Berlitz School and then got a job writing articles for Hubert Givenchy which paid a small wage,

but secured her the precious work permit. From her window she’d watch a solitary Coco Chanel signal for a taxi home from her atelier each day. Irma would ‘find these wonderful stories’ and began writing for the *American Army Times*, but found Bohemia wasn’t quite what she thought it to be and eventually ‘felt rejected by Paris’.

‘I wanted to live in Paris. I don’t ever remember wanting to be a writer, there was just nothing else I ever was, except a waitress and a sea cook. I lived on a yacht for a year and a half cooking. I had wanderlust bad. I wanted to see the whole world. It seems strange to me now. I don’t understand the source. I wasn’t in flight – I wasn’t looking for anything.’

**‘In my opinion, London is the greatest capital city in our part of the world.’**

Irma had visited England once, on a college trip, but unable to ‘face the defeat’ of going back to America, she headed across the Channel.

‘In those days London was still a wounded city.



Irma Kurtz photographed by Neil Spence

There were bomb sites everywhere. I liked Londoners – everyone said they were cold and unfriendly, but actually I found them shy. They weren’t quick to enter into conversation – they were cautious. But once you get to know them, they have a wonderful sense of humour.’

Irma was hired by pornography publisher and ‘King of Soho’ Paul Raymond to write profiles of the women who performed in his strip club. Writing under a man’s name for his publication *King*, she interviewed the women, many who had been abused by men, sometimes sexually.

‘The women were fascinating. Very few were British, most came from abroad, Eastern Europe mainly. One said to me, ‘I love to abuse the men’ because when the women were stripping, the men were weak. I learned a lot about people and about women.’

Irma’s only friend when she arrived in London was a British editor of the *American Army Times* who introduced her to Fleet Street. Immediately she fell in love with the journalist culture which

prevailed before the migration of newspapers to Docklands. Each pub was the territory of a different newspaper – only to be ventured into if you were planting a story or looking for gossip – and Irma became an habitue of the infamous Wig and Pen, where journalists had notoriously drunk since the 1900s although she laments that they wouldn't serve women in the bar back then.

Irma got a staff job at the new, progressive magazine Nova. It was as notable for its bold coverage of subjects such as abortion, homosexuality and divorce as for its prestigious roll call of contributors – Graham Greene, Lynda Lee-Potter, Susan Sontag, Molly Parkin – and radical cover images and art work by Helmut Newton, Don McCullin and Terence Donovan.

Irma's interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono was Nova's cover story published in 1969 shortly after they'd got married in Gibraltar. The 'sweet' Lennon sent Irma a thank-you note.

'It was a magical publication. Working for that magazine was probably the best [job]. It was near to Fleet Street and across the road from a posh Italian restaurant which we went to all the time because it was on expenses. I lived in Notting Hill in a one-bedroomed flat and paid £8 a week. Covent Garden was still a fruit and vegetable market then. That's when I really fell in love with London.'

**'I didn't want to marry anybody. I was a dedicated romantic.'**

Driven by a desire to have a child, in 1972, Irma gave birth to her son, naming him Marc so the spelling would be recognised in all languages and giving him his artist father's surname.

'I know I'm one of those women who must have a child. I'm not saying all women have that need, but I do and I knew I had to. I thought it's

now or never. I was already 35 which was old then to have your first child.'

Irma's relentless romanticism and pursuit of Bohemia meant that marriage was never going to be part of the story.

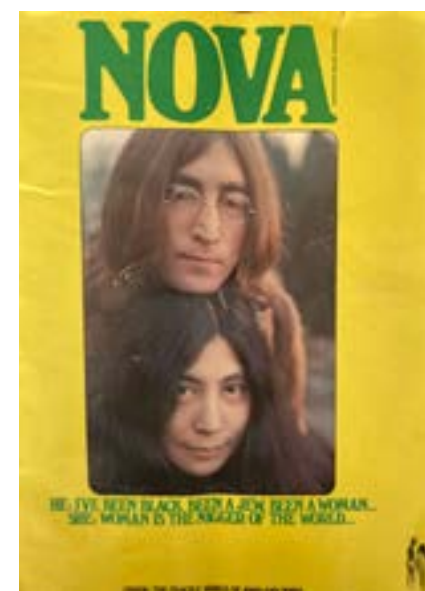
'I always had a boyfriend. I was always in love. I believed in love, love, love and I thought marriage was like putting love into a legally binding contract. I thought love was more important and should not be restrained by law.'

A single mum, Irma worked hard, 'for anybody who would pay', and bought a house in a tree-lined street in Shepherd's Bush. A chance meeting with a Qantas Airlines PR led to a commission to write articles for its inflight magazine in return for a first-class ticket around the world. She left Marc with his father and travelled for three months visiting Vietnam, 'because I hadn't been to a war zone before', and landing in India without any money, but 'stretched out in the most expensive seat I've ever been in in my life.'

When Marc reached the age of 14, Irma thought it would be better for him to go to school outside of London. She learnt to drive and decided she would write fiction in the countryside. On the way home from visiting a prospective school, Marc asked if they could afford for him to be a boarder, seemingly enchanted by a female pupil he'd spend the entire tour talking to. Agreeing this was a solution, Irma moved to Soho.

**'I probably drank too much. I didn't get sloshed, but I'd drink every night.'**

Irma's duplex in Old Compton Street was diagonally opposite the Coach and Horses where for over 60 years 'London's rudest landlord', Norman Balon, would serve a clientele that included the staff of Private Eye, George Melly, Francis Bacon, Peter Cook and,



IMAGES

Right: The cover of Nova magazine for which Irma interviewed John Lennon and Yoko Ono; Above: Irma with her son Marc

## 'I realised Soho was the most congenial Bohemia I've ever been to.'

most famously, the writer Jeffrey Barnard. He was Irma's best friend.

'We met at the Coach and Horses. He used to say, 'we're good friends Irma because we never did the deed.' I wouldn't have; he was always drunk!'

Irma embraced Soho and the triumvirate of the Coach and Horses, the French House and the Colony Rooms welcomed her. The owner of the Colony, Muriel Belcher, made Irma a member on sight and didn't charge her a penny. Notoriously a 'difficult woman', Irma describes her as 'wonderful' and gay at a time when it wasn't easy to be so, even in Soho. Irma had found her Bohemia.

'I realised Soho was the most congenial Bohemia I've ever been to. The church there has a fair every year and it was always a mix of rich and poor, famous people, prostitutes, artists, well-known writers, snobs, a real mix. I thought this is it – this is Bohemia.'

**'I was always looking for work because I was a single parent.'**

In 1970, Irma was commissioned to interview publisher and editor Helen Gurley Brown whom she admired hugely. Gurley Brown offered Irma the agony column on her magazine *Cosmopolitan*.

'I said, 'I'll do it for a year', then every time she launched a new magazine somewhere else – France, Japan – she would employ me to go out there and answer the letters until they had found a local for the job. I was working my tail off.'

In its own way *Cosmopolitan* was as radical as *Nova*. 'Faintly naughty', it celebrated women's new-found equality and sexual freedom. When I told a friend I was interviewing Irma, she said,

'Irma Kurtz is the reason I bought *Cosmo* when I was in my twenties'. If women were writing a new rulebook, then Irma was shaping the rules. Each month she would select four or five letters to respond to in print from the thousand or so she would receive (and open!).

'[The questions] came in letters then, not emails. I could read a lot into the handwriting and if you held them up to the light, an awful lot of times, they'd scratch out things and you'd learn more sometimes from what they'd scratched out.'

'My responsibility was to be honest and always write what I thought was true and never say, 'this is what you should do.' I would always say 'you could do this', but if you don't want to, here's another route. I began to get into the world of self-help. Groups for women were just starting so it was wonderful to be able to refer them to people I trusted and they could trust.'

Over a decade ago Irma left her Bohemia for a bijou art deco flat in Bloomsbury.

'I found it and lost it. I lived there for about 10 years and then one day what had been a pub was being turned into a café or something and I thought, 'I'm not leaving Soho, Soho's leaving me.'

Now in her eighth decade and a doting grandmother of four, Irma retains her energy and curiosity about the world characterised by her compassion, humour and humility. She is currently writing a novel and then plans to explore Britain, but her heart remains in the capital.

'I'm a walker and London is a great city for walking. I can walk every day to Petticoat Lane and not take the same route. It's magic. I was amazed it had taken me so long to fall in love with London.'



Irma in conversation with literary critic John Carey at the 2014 Oldie Literary Lunch

Madeleine Holt began her journalistic career as a reporter on local newspapers. She joined BBC Radio Cornwall in 1989, going on to work as a reporter on the Today programme and as arts and culture correspondent for the newly launched News 24. Madeleine was arts correspondent for Newsnight until 2010. In 2012 she launched Meet the Parents, a social enterprise which works to encourage communities to support their local schools. She is a co-founder of the campaign group Rescue Our Schools and active in the More than a Score alliance advocating for alternatives to SATS. Madeleine and film-maker and editor Steve Sklair make films to showcase innovative education as Schools on Screen. In 2019, Madeleine received the prestigious Fred & Anne Jarvis Award from the NUT for her passion, 'for what is fair, right and just in education'. A modern history graduate of Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge, Madeleine lives with her family in north London.



Pictured above: Madeleine Holt

# MADELEINE HOLT

## Miss-education

'When I left Newsnight I didn't have any firm plans, just to see where life took me. I've always been obsessed with getting everyone to go the local school which stems from my own educational experience. I was brought up in a family that was constantly going on about the value of comprehensive education. My dad set up quite a progressive comprehensive school in the 1960s when it was quite exciting to be in state education.'

'When my family moved to Devon my brother and I went to the local school, but because it had been a secondary modern school a couple of years before it had a predominantly secondary-modern intake. Not a single day went by when I didn't think how much better the school would be if the whole community supported it.'

'I think those things have had a really powerful influence on me. At the BBC it always struck me how many people – particularly in senior

positions - didn't support their local schools. Anyone with money seemed to do anything they could to send their children anywhere except the local school. I don't really get invited to certain dinner parties anymore because I find it very hard not to make my views clear on the subject!

'My kids went to the local state primary school, but a lot of people were choosing not to support the local state secondaries. When I spoke with the people who had supported them it seemed to be a perfectly reasonable option, so that's when I started to try and persuade people to stay local.'

'Meet the Parents was a simple idea started 10 years ago to get families from the local comprehensives to come into the feeder primaries and talk honestly about their experience and to show worried primary school parents that it was fine to go local.'

'At first it was just the parents - hence the name of the project - but then it became apparent that the teenagers were brilliant because they tell it how it is. I started it voluntarily then Camden Council asked me to roll it out. It seems worthwhile because we seem to be winning over a cohort of parents who are quite difficult to convince. Research we commissioned from Queen Mary University of London concluded that we are quite unusual in persuading this group to stay local.'

'Once comprehensives attract these kinds of parents it can change the tone of a school and encourage others to become more ambitious educationally. Most importantly they reflect the community more accurately. That's why I started it really, to build community cohesion. It's really behind everything I believe about education.'

'In her Jubilee speech, Queen Elizabeth said, 'I hope this Jubilee will bring together families

and friends, neighbours and communities.' When we do come together it's such an uplifting thing - whether it's the Jubilee or the Olympics - and then we go back into our largely class-dominated silos and I think education is our very best chance to try and break that down.'

'My other initiative is making films about schools which are doing things differently. I can't say, 'send your child to the local school' if that school doesn't work for everybody'; it's important to show what can be done.'

'I made a film about XP school in Doncaster. It's like the dream school. It's totally non-selective and there's no setting. What's the point in having everyone in the same school and then divvying them up and having bottom sets which destroy people's confidence? Showing alternatives through film is really powerful because you can't fake kids being happy and feeling fulfilled in their education.'





Madeleine speaking in 2016 at an NUT rally in Parliament Square after their march through London. It was a day of strike action against cuts in government funding and deregulation of teachers' pay and conditions through the increasing pressure on schools to become academies. ©Peter Marshall/Alamy Live News

## ‘I’m hoping this is going to be a moment of real change, but schools have to be far more innovative...’

‘The third thing I do is a campaign group called Rescue Our Schools which I set up with someone else in 2016. It’s an attempt to raise everyone’s spirits. We upload articles and research on-line and try to build a community of people who want to make the state system better.’

**‘If you’re in a completely selective system, it’s very difficult because inevitably the schools for the kids who don’t get into grammar schools are operating with one hand tied behind their back.’**

‘I understand why parents would want to get their kids into grammar schools, but that doesn’t make the system right. If we could get rid of selection, then parents wouldn’t be faced with the dilemma and nor would they have to tutor their kids up to the eyeballs to get them through the 11+.’

‘I’m not a great fan of choice – I just think every school should be brilliant and work for everyone. In reality most parents don’t have much choice - they can merely show on their application form their preferences for certain schools. While I recognise middle-class parents’ fears about the kind of landscape that their kids might find themselves in at a comprehensive, I don’t think it’s always justified.’

‘At a recent screening of the documentary about XP Steve and I made, there were quite a lot of people there who had chosen to send their kids to private school. I said, ‘if you’d had a school like this on your doorstep would you have made a different decision’ and they all said, ‘yes’.’

**‘I think we’re at a really fascinating point in this whole debate.’**

‘Employers are saying, ‘we want a diverse workforce and to take on people from a less

elite background who have been in a social environment with everybody so they understand what the customers want’. Companies like Price Waterhouse Cooper and Google don’t look at qualifications, not even degrees, because they want a broader mix of people. Oxbridge says very clearly that they want more people from state schools.’

‘Families who would automatically not go local are starting to realise it’s becoming a harder decision to make. I’m hoping this is going to be a moment of real change, but schools have to be far more innovative and prepare kids for the challenges of the future. The digital and the technical part of the curriculum just isn’t there in some schools.’

‘The recent Times Education Summit was really insightful. People like James Dyson, the chair of PWC, Kevin Ellis, the businessman Damon Buffini, and the vaccines chief Kate Bingham, all saying education needs a total overhaul to prepare kids for the future. PWC looked at the factors in people’s background which meant they were doing better in their careers than others. The three things that emerged were an adverse childhood experience; experience of working in a team – playing football or playing in an orchestra – and having a job when you’re a teenager. There was no correlation between people who were doing well in the company and their GCSE grades. If anything, the people with the lower grades were doing better than the ones with the high grades.’

**‘I have a large wooden spoon on my wall at home that my grandmother gave me which says, ‘world’s greatest stirrer’.**

‘I have a lot of her genes in me. She was a Labour councillor and came up with the idea of day centres for older people. She was quite political and determined to change things in

her community and I think I’ve inherited a lot from her.’

‘My nickname at school was Red Mad because it was around the time of ‘Red Ken’ [Labour politician Ken Livingston]. I remember we were going to lose part of our fifth-form common room area and I led a procession down to the headteachers’ office. We knocked on the door and a load of us were ushered in and said it was really unfair. And we won! I’ve always been an agitator.’

**‘What I love about XP is this devotion to making the learning relevant to world issues.’**

‘The transcending thing about XP is the concept of ‘Crew’ – the idea of a second family at school, which for some might be their first family. I like it because it’s such a simple idea and the least difficult thing your average school could introduce. You split your tutor group into 12 to 15 students and get a member of staff to run this group which you call Crew.’

‘It’s about devoting up to four and a half hours a week to building relationships between the students so they’re not being pitted against each other, they’re supporting each other; finding out why someone hasn’t done their homework, what’s going on in their home lives and building respect, not just between each other, but with the teacher/Crew leader. I think it’s an idea for its time. Post-pandemic we’re seeing a lot of issues with behaviour, more disruption, the whole debate about MeToo, the social media lack of respect between boys and girls, particularly boys towards girls, so I feel Crew is a really transformational thing schools can do.’

‘The other thing I love about it is the way they learn with cross-curricular expeditions. I’ve

always thought it’s ludicrous to teach things in subjects because we don’t live in subjects. It seems such a no-brainer to break down those subject walls and link learning to the community to make it come alive. I’ve had three children go through a system which has been very influenced by Michael Gove and the concept of a canonical body of facts advocated by [Victorian poet and social commentator] Matthew Arnold, which I find really sterile and not a very useful approach to education.’

**‘It pains me to say it, but lots of schools are really brutal environments.’**

‘I’ve known parents who’ve looked round schools and chosen not to send their child there because they feel it’s not kind or compassionate enough. The thing I love about XP is the focus on compassion; schools must be kind places. I have a real problem with the zero-tolerance approach, encouraged by the Government. You need to find out the cause of [children’s] anger and brutalising behaviour. Treating kids all the same and sweating the detail in the hope all the rest of the stuff will go away doesn’t make sense and not really a solution.’

‘The danger is that schools react to that behaviour by being brutal themselves and it’s self-defeating. The consequences are far too many kids being thrown out and they’re always from a certain social group and often with a certain ethnic profile. It’s amazing how some people deny that’s happening or simply don’t care.’

‘I’m really optimistic that things can change, but the key people you have to win over are parents - aka voters - who, in my experience, are increasingly dissatisfied with the system. It’s very stressful for a lot of parents and I think they feel very disillusioned, but don’t realise it can be different. They think all countries have

## ‘Schools have become well-oiled exam factories, but that doesn’t mean that heads and staff don’t see the limitations of it.’

GCSEs at 16 and highly selective universities. I’m driven to make more films about the alternatives, then parents can say, ‘we want something different, this isn’t good enough’.

**‘Bringing about change is tough because we’ve had years of this very exam-orientated measurement-obsessed approach.’**

‘Parents should watch the film about XP! They need to get together and talk to local councils and media and say we want our local schools to be different. Schools have become well-oiled exam factories, but that doesn’t mean that heads and staff don’t see the limitations of it. I think they’re acutely aware of it, but they’re exhausted, the schools are under-funded and the path of least resistance is to carry on what you’ve been doing.

‘I’m not blaming schools and headteachers for not investing in innovative practice because they’re operating under a climate of fear that’s been a very deliberate strategy since 2010 kept in place by Ofsted and the punitive accountability system. I’m a school governor so I know the pressures.

**‘I don’t want to be seen as anti-school.’**

‘I fully understand the challenges heads face, but I do think there is room for small innovations particularly in years seven, eight and nine before exam pressures kick in.

‘XP has an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted rating in all categories. All their resources are free on-line, although the expeditions do require a huge amount of planning and I understand why that’s a big deal.

‘If you get the values right, you get the culture right and Crew is at the heart of that and doesn’t cost anything. The kids at XP are confident in an authentic way. At the film screening, some students sat on a public panel with no preparation and I was struck by their attentiveness when speaking to adults and the way they communicate. It’s awesome what they’re doing.

‘I’m thinking about future-focused education more powerfully. I want to make more films about schools in England and elsewhere which are genuinely innovative and promote deeper learning and the skills all young people need. But the films need to be part of a wider initiative to change the narrative on education and create a consensus among parents about what a great education looks like. It’s going to take money. If there’s anyone reading this who likes the sound of this, I would love to hear from them. I am convinced now is the time for change.’

**Find out more about [Meet the Parents](#) and [Rescue Our Schools](#) and view [Madeleine and Steve’s film about XP](#) here.**

IMAGE

Madeleine at the NUT conference in Liverpool in 2019 where she received the Fred and Anne Jarvis Award



Tracey Leese is an Assistant Headteacher, literacy specialist, parent governor, ECF Facilitator and mother of two. She describes herself as a proud feminist, passionate about fighting for more recognition for women, especially in the workplace. With her brother, mathematician and teacher Christopher Barker, she is co-author of *Teach Like a Queen*, which brings together leadership theory, popular culture and action research to inspire and empower female teachers into leadership roles

## TRACEY LEESE

### Teaching Like a Queen

Once upon a time the term queen was used to define hereditary privilege. A word once so synonymous with exclusivity has evolved to empower and uplift all women. So, when my brother and I sought solace in creating a book proposal during the first Covid-19 lockdown, *Teach Like a Queen* was the obvious title.

*Teach Like a Queen: Lessons in Leadership from Great Contemporary Women* aligns 7 iconic women with the Nolan principles as a basis for value-driven leadership. In the book we ask women to channel inspirational women in order to inspire like Michelle Obama and emulate like Jacinda Ardern to facilitate visionary leadership in schools, because that is absolutely what our students need and deserve.

In each chapter we distil the success of our diverse power women into key lessons for female teachers and leaders. Each chapter concludes with a case study of a female practitioner in order to contextualise the lessons and principle in question. On the off-chance that being full-on Obama in the classroom seems too much of a stretch.

It's our belief that school leadership is not domain-specific and that, we can learn a great

deal from women who aren't teachers. Ethics, communication and trust are universally valued in leadership and of course in teaching too. For too long the concept of leadership has been dogged with masculine connotations of strength and power – whereas actually in the book, we argue that it should be characterised by compassion and empathy.

Women are not underrepresented in teaching – in many ways it is a female-centric profession – but women are most definitely underrepresented at every single level of educational leadership, most prevalently at secondary headship level. It's vital that we look at who is shaping policy and practice in education and we need to be bold enough to imagine a future where more schools are run by women and who are paid the same as their male counterparts. According to data from NAHT's *Closing the Gender Gap* published December 2021, by the age of 60 male headteachers earn £17,334 more than female headteachers.

*Teach Like a Queen* started as a book but quickly feels like it's becoming a movement – or at least a contribution to the existing discourse in which women's voices are becoming hard

to ignore. We are not unique in wanting to address this, and the issues are certainly not specific to teaching. It's widely acknowledged that men and women lead differently; according to research from Forbes, statistically men are more likely to negotiate salaries and that women are far more risk-averse in the workplace, which is perhaps one factor affecting the gender pay gap.

However, the reasons why women are earning and leading less are more complicated than this simple generalisation. Women are not a homogenous group and therefore obstacles vary enormously. With that said, in researching the book our interviews with high performing female leaders were punctuated with recurring themes of risking disapproval, imposter syndrome and an intangible (but pervasive) lack of self-belief.

So, what is stopping women from leading in teaching? Motherhood plays a role; the desire to work flexibly is often cited as a key reason. Little wonder, when we consider that Action Aid suggest that up to 75% of unpaid care work is completed by women. This is supported by the fact the Department for Education's own research shows that women are most likely to



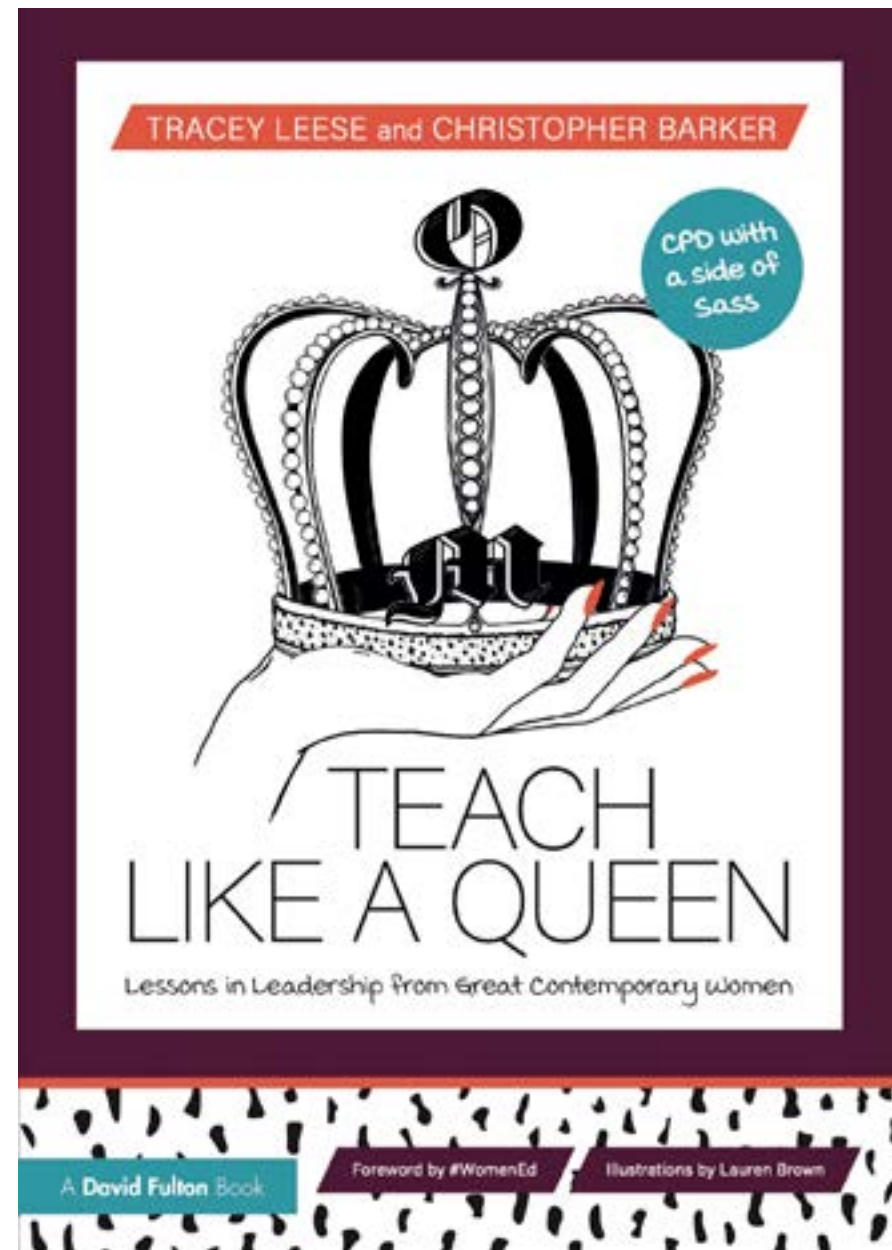
Image courtesy of Tracey Leese

leave the profession altogether between the ages of 30 and 39, essentially cutting the supply line of future female leaders.

Pay gaps and a lack of diversity in schools are an injustice and we are all stakeholders in education as society is inevitably a product of its education system. If we imagine a world in which more Queens are in leadership roles, not just in teaching, but in all professions, what meaningful change could this bring? At its heart leadership is about taking people with you; acting with integrity, empathy, compassion, tenacity with the ultimate goal of empowering and inspiring others.

It is my sincere hope that *Teach Like a Queen* challenges some widely held expectations about leadership and some limiting assumptions which some women have about themselves and that more women rise up and lead and teach like the queens they doubtlessly are! Yes, to live happily ever after, but also to take up space and add their voices to the movement.

**Follow Tracey on Twitter @mrsqueenleese**  
**Teach Like a Queen is out now and published by [Routledge](#)**



IMAGES

Above, the book cover of Teach Like a Queen and right, co-author Tracey Leese, both courtesy of the author





Hannah and Tori

Hannah and Tori have worked in the alcohol manufacturing industry for over 13 years, winning over 30 awards for their range of drinks including accolades from the guild of Fine Food.

They worked closely with The Craft Distillery business in 2019 to develop and create their award-winning signature London Dry gin.

Hannah, our mistress distiller, comes from a background of creativeness! Enjoying her degree in English Literature, with a love for the arts, she channels her creative energy into developing beautiful recipes working closely with local suppliers and growers to bring exquisite local flavours to life through the distillation process.

Tori brings the product to market, studying consumer psychology and achieving chartered status in business management. Tori drives, shapes and grows the business exploring routes to market, marketing and product branding.

Together they launched Still Sisters. Now with a team of 15, Still Sisters goes from strength to strength.



Above, Hannah and Tori  
All images courtesy of Still Sisters

## HANNAH AND TORI

### Still sisters

Still Sisters was born in 2019, my sister and I wanted something we could truly call ours. With our business acumen and lessons learned from working in the alcohol industry for over ten years, we thought, if not now, then when?

Still Sisters is about collaboration, partnership and working together. My sister and I are very much yin and yang (although people tell us we are more alike than we'd like to hear!) One doesn't work without the other. Life, work and living are all about balance: the good and the bad.

We need rain and sun, storm and rainbows (I like a weather analogy). We don't appreciate the good times unless we have suffered/learned from the bad. It's been an arduous journey that started as two women with a vision and a story.

Our still was appropriately called Storm, as, without the storm and chaos, we don't appreciate the still and calm when it arrives.

We also like to think we are Somerset Sisters causing a Storm! Still Sisters is in her third year of trading, and it hasn't been smooth sailing. This bumpy journey we all go through, we can't do it alone.

Since 2019 we have launched five award-winning Gins sourcing locally grown signature botanicals, collaborating with small independents in Somerset. We have built a distillery shop, set up a Gin School and created a mobile horsebox/bar. All during a pandemic, this is a testament to the team of 11 (nine of which are women).

Still Sisters is about finding your 'sister' or 'sisters' and coming together to achieve some great stuff! We can't do it alone. We have a fantastic team who help drive and shape our business daily. We work with some incredible Frome/Somerset women-led businesses too!

Each of us adds a different dimension, and we celebrate this! We wouldn't be the business we are today without everyone involved. Collaboration and partnership are essential. Our success is down to inviting everyone to the table.

We invite everyone to find their Still Sister, no matter their differences. We all bring something that is uniquely us. This post isn't a call to action; it's a call for compassion—a call to listen. Celebrate differences, embrace

differences because when sisters come together, great things can happen.

To all the 'sisters', start the conversation, start the business, develop the idea and do it together. Support, inspire and help each other because life is tough and the journey is not smooth or easy. Lift each other and listen compassionately. Now more than ever, we need each other.

**Find out more about Still Sisters' drinks on the [website](#) and follow their progress on [Facebook](#)**

Jesse Thayre is a languages teacher and translator. She has taught in state, private and international schools and given private tuition across the world including in Chile, Spain, Tanzania and Cambodia. In 2018, Jesse began a project to read a book by a woman from every country in the world, *Around the World One Female Novelist at a Time*, which became a blog. Jesse currently lives in Cambodia.



Images above and over the page: Jesse Thayre, courtesy of the author

## JESSE THAYRE

### Lost in Translation

In October 2018, whilst living in Tanzania, I started a book project called *Around the World One Female Novelist at a Time*. I turned it into a blog called [Women Writers Worldwide](#), and created an [interactive map](#) to track my progress.

The premise was to read a book written by a woman from every country in the world, inspired by a fellow bibliophile Sophie Baggott. She had written in an article that 'the number of novels by women that reach the English language remains shockingly low.' Consequently, she wanted to read as many books written by women from as many countries as possible. I decided I wanted to do the same.

The first book I read was recommended by a friend; a Senegalese novel, *Une si longue lettre* by Mariama Bâ. The project has grown from there. So here I am, 171 countries and many

blog entries later! It has been a joy to see the world through the pen and lens of such a range of diverse female writers.

My blog has really gained some traction now and I was invited to be the guest editor for #WomenInTranslation Month last year for the Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLI) blog. #WomenInTranslation Month was founded by research biologist, book blogger and bibliophile Meytal Radzinki in an attempt to address the gender imbalance in translated literature and to increase the number of international women's voices accessible to a global readership. I was also selected to ask questions in an edition of World Book Club on the BBC World Service last year.

I began this project almost four years ago not knowing where it would take me. I hope to finish it by Christmas 2022, but the pandemic, having

a baby and returning to work have all got in the way, so that may be an unrealistic goal. Like many, I have lost my reading mojo at times over the last couple of years, but it has returned now.

I always regarded myself as being well-read, but I have realised there is a world of literature beyond English or Spanish speaking authors. What I have loved about this project is I am reading books by authors from countries that I know little about and I am learning about their history, culture and society. That is the beauty of translation; it removes the language barriers and takes you into a new world that is familiar, yet so very different. Two good examples of this are *Silence of the Chagos* or *A Spare Life*.

The important role of small independent publishers in discovering books, authors and translators cannot be under-estimated. They give literature a chance to be read more

widely. I have also come to value modern communication tools like Twitter which have enabled me to connect with authors and translators in a way I could never have dreamt of as a child.

I'm currently reading a book from the Moana. Next up is a book from Lesotho. There are 27 countries remaining in my project, so please take a look at my [interactive map](#) and send me your suggestions.

**If you would like to keep up with Jesse's progress, then do follow her [blog](#). If you have suggestions of books she should read, you can find her on [Twitter](#) and as [JThayre](#) on [Good Reads](#).**



## Jesse's top five reads so far

### Senegal

So Long a Letter is written by Mariama Bâ and translated by Modupé Bode-Thomas. This was the very first book I read for this project.

### Afghanistan

Washing the Dust from Our Hearts: Poetry and Prose from Writers of the Afghan Women's Writing Project, translated by Pari and Ahmed Aria. This is a bilingual anthology, first written in English then translated in its entirety into Dari (Afghan Persian). The collection is split into five sections: Marriage and Family, Love and Forgiveness, Education, Our Afghanistan and Our Strong Voices. I loved this and read it in one sitting. It gives brilliant insight into life as an Afghan woman and is now a rather poignant selection given the devastating situation Afghan women now find themselves in.

### Mauritius

Silence of the Chagos. written by Shenaz Patel and translated by Jeffrey Zuckerman, is about the plight of the Chagossian people, who were expelled from their archipelago to enable the United States to build one of their main military bases. It is an eye opening read and gives a fresh perspective on how the USA's occupation and colonisation impacts others.

### Colombia

Holiday Heart. written by Margarita García Robayo, translated by Charlotte Coombe and published by Charco Press. Gender, motherhood, identity, racism, the end of love and dis-belonging are all at the heart of this wonderful novel.

### Cuba

Havana Year Zero written by Karla Suárez and translated by Christina MacSweeney. Part detective story, part musings of a mathematician, part comedy of errors and and part historical novel.



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