

# INTRODUCTION

WOULD YOU LIKE TO join a movement of powerful moms who are changing the world, one conversation at a time? While society is struggling with a lack of empathy, equity, and justice, mothers are rising up to be voices of reason and compassion. Together, we can:

- ✦ Create a better world for our kids
- ✦ Engage our families in activities that cultivate generous hearts
- ✦ Have meaningful dialogues about something other than diapers, daycare, and dinner plans
- ✦ Uplift other mothers while empowering ourselves

My sisters in motherhood, I'm glad you are here. We have incredible power to shape our own destinies and influence the future of our world. We can be more than consumers and stereotypes. We can shape opinions in our communities and inspire actions for global transformation. We can be *mom-advocates*. For all you moms who want to get started making the world a better place, let me introduce you to a special kind of volunteering called

*advocacy*. You may not be familiar with that word, but at its core, advocacy is simply speaking out to inspire action from another person with the power to help. It involves showing up when it counts and saying what you believe. Whether you prefer to express your opinions by handwriting a thoughtful letter, making a quick phone call, sitting down face-to-face with your senator, or organizing a playdate phone bank, you can use your mom skills and experiences to influence our national conversation and define the future our children will share.

Regardless of educational background, employment status, outward appearance, or inner beliefs, mothers of young children want to give kids secure lives full of opportunities. When moms get together and combine this mutual motivation with individual passions, we can bring about the change we envision.

Although there are many dad-advocates I respect and admire, I'm writing this book for mothers for two reasons. First, motherhood is my own personal experience and the one I know best. Second, I want to promote a new path for moms who have trouble seeing their own potential to influence.

I encounter a distressingly high number of mothers who wrestle with power and self-identity issues as they navigate shifting expectations in professional and domestic roles. While this can be frustrating, motherhood also enables women to redefine our roles in life and create new visions of ourselves. Becoming a mom-advocate can introduce us to new skills, new ideas, and new purpose during this time of natural transition.

When I first became a mother, I was a highly educated woman married to a loving husband, assured of a stable income, and living in a safe neighborhood. Despite my security, motherhood shook my self-assurance and stripped me emotionally bare anyway.

At no time in my life before or since have I ever felt less confident, less capable, and less sure of the future.

During those long, sleepless nights, I began to realize that somewhere a mother was feeling exactly what I was feeling, except, unlike me, her fears were her reality. Clean water, food, heat, doctors, medicine, a safe place to sleep free of war and violence—I had all of these things and still felt vulnerable. How was it fair for me to worry when others lacked so many basic resources I took for granted?

Over the course of my daughter's infancy, I resolved to do *something* to support mothers who loved their children as much as I loved my tiny girl but had far fewer resources to offer them.

My journey started with baby steps: making small monetary donations and writing a few letters. Gradually, I moved from hopelessness and vulnerability to action and empowerment, from clinging to my baby in my bedroom to striding around Washington, D.C. in a powerful partnership with mothers living around the planet.

After nine years and a lot of trial-and-error lessons in activism, the United Nations Foundation invited me on a trip to meet moms and babies in rural Uganda. Seeing the love those women had for their healthy infants assured me that I had actually managed to turn my own fears into positive action for a generation of new mothers.

My goal today is to inspire American moms to think of themselves as mothers to our communities and our nation. I'm writing this book to help other women become the change they want to see in the world. I spent too many years aimlessly wondering what to do and how to do it. I want to help you skip right past those questions and frustrations. I'm sharing my story and the lessons I've learned along the way to clear the path for you and make your journey easier and a bit more comfortable.

Most mothers, especially those with young children, crave both convenience and empowerment. Advocacy can be both convenient and empowering, especially if you utilize the advice that follows!

## **How To Use This Book**

These pages hold the insights learned during my transformation from stay-at-home mom with a baby on my hip to global activist with my teen-advocates by my side. Whatever issue you choose to address—hunger, climate change, systemic racism, paid family leave, or so many others—this book will equip you to become an agent of change *and* a great role model for your children. You won't follow the exact same path I did because we all have different lives, personalities, and challenges. My intention is not to provide a one-size-fits-all model but to provide you with inspirational stories and tools to help you find your own way.

I work mostly on global causes, so much of my advice focuses on interacting with U.S. senators and representatives to influence national and international policies. However, many of the actions I describe work just as well at the state, county, city, school board, and neighborhood levels. Learn the basics from this book and then boldly and creatively adapt these general principles to fit your own situation and personality.

The book is divided into three sections. Part I explains why mothers make great advocates. Part II helps you figure out how to get started. Part III provides practical advice for taking some basic yet powerful steps to change your local or global community. This “Advocacy Made Easy” section serves as a quick resource guide.

I didn't become the advocate I am today by myself. Not only did I have great coaches, but I also met extraordinary mothers along the way who inspired and influenced me. Learning from them allowed me to adapt my own strategies and understand how other people use different tactics to achieve the same ends. Their day-to-day lives may not look like mine, but we all share a passion for shaping our society into something better to share with our kids. Throughout the book, you will find profiles of some of the mothers I most admire so that you too can learn from these remarkable women. You'll also encounter "Storytime" sidebars with real-life stories offering glimpses of moms advocating in the midst of everyday life.

I hope that this book inspires you to 1) take action and 2) bring other moms with you into advocacy, encouraging each other to take small steps and build large movements

With hope #1 in mind, I hereby give you permission and even encouragement *not* to read this book in order. If at any point you feel moved to act, flip to the third section, choose an action, and do it. You don't have to wait until you've read the book cover to cover. If you feel motivated and can't wait to get started, then by all means jump in before you talk yourself out of it!

As for hope #2, I have included questions for discussion throughout the book to prompt further reflection. Of course, you can read this book alone, but there is great strength in sharing ideas with other women. Gathering a group to read and discuss this book is a great way to start building your own community of advocates. Look to faith organizations, moms' groups, neighborhood book clubs, and local chapters of advocacy associations to find thoughtful people who might be interested in exploring these ideas about mom power. Create a space where you can discover your personal influence and grow the movement of mom-activists.

If you truly want to create a better future for you and your children, I challenge you to become the hero reflected in the eyes of your child. Let go of those hopeless feelings, put on your Super-mom cape, and start saving the world with me.