

part one

*Doing Everything  
Wrong*

I wish someone would have sat me down when I was a little girl and told me, “Sherri, you can’t do anything right.”

Hold on—I can explain.

We women are trapped by our circumstances in a way that men are not. We are bound to our families. Our connections to our loved ones are intricate and profound. We stand in the center of a deep pond, surrounded by our children, husbands, boyfriends, parents, siblings, co-workers, and friends. Every move we make has a ripple effect on the people in our pond. If we make a small move, we create a small wave. Big move, big wave. The bottom line is, even if you’re doing the right thing, you’re making a wave. And that means somebody in your pond is going to get wet.

How many times have you left the house at 8 AM, only to be haunted by competing cries as you shut the door?

*“Mommy, I don’t want you to go to work!”*

*“Baby, you gonna put in a few more hours this week so we can pay the cable bill?”*

## Permission Slips

When I say we can't do anything right, I mean that *we can't win*. I'm not implying that men aren't bound to their families, or that their actions don't matter. In fact, men live the same way we do. The only difference is, they don't notice as much if someone gets wet.

That's a huge difference.

Most men lead astonishingly guilt-free lives. I would love to be a man for one day, just so I could enjoy twenty-four hours of not being responsible for anyone else's pain.

*My wife's mad at me? Well, she should stop being so emotional.*

*My dad's disappointed in me? Well, his expectations are too high.*

*I'm broke? Stupid economy.*

That sounds like heaven. But if men don't take enough responsibility, women take on too much. Have you ever sat with your husband at a parent-teacher day-care conference, only to get chewed out by the teacher?

*"You need to bring your son to school by 8 AM. When he's late, he misses out on the first art project of the day."*

If you're Mom, you're instantly stricken with "bad mother" guilt. But Dad, who thinks he deserves a medal for (a) getting his child to school before noon, and (b) even *being* at the meeting, will get insulted.

"So?"

I envy men. And while I don't believe we women can rewire ourselves to be like them, we must learn to forgive ourselves as much as we forgive others.

Remember: Every time we women make a "right" decision, half the people in our lives will think it's the "wrong" decision. And when they start squawking, we are deluged by guilt. So to feel better, we start judging other women. And that old adage—*When we point our finger, three more are pointing back at us*—proves true, because we save the harshest judgments for ourselves.



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I never met a man who obsessed about being a perfect husband, but I know plenty of women who want to be perfect wives.

It ain't happening. We women have to start accepting that no matter what we do, someone's always gonna be cranky about it. Instead of feeling guilty, let's make it okay.

Let's give ourselves *permission* to make ripples in our ponds, even if we get a few people wet. In fact, I recently bought a boxful of pink permission slips, just like we all used to get at school if we had to come in late or leave early. Remember how *free* you'd feel? Leaving the principal's office, running down the hallways with that signed slip . . . it was like having diplomatic immunity (or better yet, *Survivor* immunity). No one could say that you were doing something wrong. Well, I decided to see if they feel as liberating now, with me simply running around my apartment.

And guess what? *They do*. If I'm about to cause a ripple, I pull out my pad and write myself a slip.

"Sherri, you have permission to see a movie with your girlfriend, even though it means you won't have time to read so-and-so's book before she comes on *The View*."

Then I stick it in a shoe box. If anyone asks what the heck I was doing last night, I have my slip.

The truth is, I'm not even perfect with the slips—in fact, the first one I wrote to myself gave me permission to skip writing a permission slip whenever I wanted.

That way, I'm always covered.

*Do you need a slip?*

If so, you'd better give yourself one. Immediately. So many facets of our lives conspire to make us feel like crap. If you don't give yourself a break, do you think your kids will? Your husband? Your boss? They want you to keep producing, keep giving. I think you'll see in this book that I've inadvertently made every mistake a woman can possibly make. But I'm not living in a cave, and I



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haven't quit show business. Instead, I give myself permission to be flawed, and you know what? It's working out okay.

### *Men*

When I look back at my life, I can honestly state that every bout of near insanity can be directly attributed to a man. After I die, I would like to have a sit-down with God, in His family room. The two of us will curl up on a comfy couch, with hot chocolate and M&M's (I'll be able to eat that stuff in Heaven). God will turn on the TV and show me that, lo and behold, my *entire* life has been saved to a DVR. Then He'll hand me the remote and say, "Sherri, ask me anything." I will immediately fast-forward to all my bad dates. And each time a man's about to do something stupid, I will put my life on pause, turn to God, and say, "Lord, what the *heck* is that man thinking?"

Because I need answers.

I admit it, I have a tendency to generalize about men. And that's okay—what are the odds that a man is reading this book? Listen, I'm speaking from my experience, and what I say about men is true for about 80 percent of men in general, and 100 percent of the men I've dated.

Men lead charmed lives. We women always feel like we're not doing enough for the people in our lives. Men are exactly the opposite. The less they do, the happier they are. We are yin, they are yang, and if you ask me, being yang looks like a lot more fun.

When men forget to do something, they don't feel bad for inconveniencing you, they feel bad because they got caught. Have you ever gotten your wires crossed when arranging who's picking

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up the kids from school? So badly that your kid spent an extra hour outside the building?

Both Mom and Dad feel bad, but for different reasons. Mom, you imagine your child, crying, with no one to play with, wondering when Mommy is going to come. Your heart breaks a little and you feel like a terrible mother. Now let's cut to Dad. He is imagining how mad you're going to be when you find out that he was an hour late. He visualizes that he will not be having sex tonight—or this weekend—if your child is still crying by the time they get home.

After your child is brought home safe and sound, Mom, you will feel guilty for weeks afterward, and probably binge on cheesecake, which will make you feel worse. Dad, on the other hand, will consider the child's safe arrival to be a "crisis solved" and promptly forget the whole thing ever happened.

Charmed lives, I tell you. Charmed. Sometimes I think we overcompensate for their gruffness. For example, on a guilt scale of 1 through 10, if you feel a 5 for leaving your child at school, and he feels a 0, we women will often subconsciously try to make up for our men by working ourselves up to a 10.

Do you know how many binge-cakes a 10 is on the guilt scale? A lot.

My suggestion? Write yourself a permission slip to think like a guy for a day. (Don't worry, you won't be able to do it. But it's fun to try.)

We women also ignore men at our peril. They tell us who they are, but we don't respect their opinion. We think, *Oh, I know that's who you think you are, but I know what you can be.* As if we're shamans with mystical powers that allow us to change the elements.

*Hey, we rationalize, if Jesus turned water into wine, why can't I change this player into a husband?*

Well, (a) Jesus's feat is considered a miracle, and (b) you ain't Jesus. Women, we need to get realistic about our abilities.

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Sometimes men are right, especially when they're telling us who they are.

If you married your husband thinking you would change him, now is the time to give yourself permission to lose that battle. I married a man who *told* me he couldn't be monogamous. *Told* me. Looked me dead in the eye and said monogamy wasn't his thing.

And what did I do? Thank him for dinner and leave the restaurant? No. I decided to *make* him monogamous.

I think you know how that turned out. And if you don't know, hang tight—it will be revealed to you shortly. The bottom line? I failed to change him. And I spent years after my husband cheated feeling like a failure, when the war to make him monogamous was actually unwinnable. Life is hard enough; why do we women want to make it *impossible*?

The next time you are stricken with the female urge to tell a man who he *can* be, after he has told you who he *is*, stop. Stand up. Walk outside. Look up to the clear blue sky, and tell that sky that the only thing keeping it from being bright purple with orange polka dots is a woman's touch. Because that makes about as much sense.

It's painful to reorient your way of thinking. But when you finally see men as they see themselves, your taste in men will change dramatically. It's like you've been going through life slightly buzzed, and now you're sober. And that guy who seemed so cool when you were high? Now you have the clarity to see he's a mess. But that dull civil servant who comes home every night? *Not so bad.*

Write yourself a permission slip to let your man be himself, because that's what he's gonna do anyway.

Of course, there are some men who *do* want you to change them, and it's because they're too lazy to change themselves. Like you, this man wishes he wasn't "water"—and he's hoping you can make good on your promise to turn him into "wine." Now, we have already defined this as a task achievable only by Jesus. But you came along and volunteered to change him—heck, you *prom-*

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ised him that you could change him! Home cooking, a white picket fence, a baby . . . you've got it all planned out. So guess who gets blamed when, five years later, he's still "water"?

You.

But now you got a baby to raise.

And as women, if we do divorce (and 50 percent of us do), prepare for judgment and recriminations from every direction, especially if there are kids involved. People will say, "You shoulda tried harder." But if you stay in a bad marriage, someone will say, "You shoulda got a divorce." And if you remarry, you'll get nailed for "caving in too soon." And Lord help you if you stay single, 'cause that means: "You're too picky."

I haven't solved this riddle. Every couple of days, I get a case of the you-shoulda-tried-harders. On Saturday nights, I'm plagued with a case of the you're-too-pickys. Even though I did try hard, and I'm just picky enough.

Women often take on the job of marriage caretaker. If the relationship starts to sour, we're the ones who point it out and insist on therapy. We also find the therapist, make the appointment, and remind our men of the time and day at least twenty times.

Half the time, they forget to show up anyway. Men fix things around the house, but we are charged with fixing the emotional problems. And when the marriage fails, we blame ourselves.

*If you're divorced, write yourself a permission slip to learn lessons from your "starter" marriage and apply them to your next one.*

## Permission Slips

### Sex

I'm gonna recommend something that might make you want to close this book and throw it across the room.

Celibacy.

Not for wives, of course. In fact, if I could go back in time and have a talk with my married self, the only thing I would whisper in my ear would be, "Put away the vacuum cleaner, and start putting out."

More on that in a second.

I'm a single mom. Obviously I've got no virginity to protect, so it's fair to ask, "What's the point of being celibate now?" Especially since having a toddler kind of makes me celibate by default. As a dater, I'm competing with women who do put out on the first date. In fact, some probably put out *before* the first date. But if a man just wants sex, I'm not the right one, anyway.

I'm no prude. I had lots of sex, and I had it early, too. However, it's been my experience that holding out forces you and your man to work on the emotional and spiritual connection first. And if he's not interested in those things before you have sex, he sure won't be interested in them after.

You don't have to be celibate indefinitely, but it helps separate the wheat from the chaff, and if you're a mom like me, you don't want your kids growing up thinking that "uncles" are men who go away every six months.

And wives? Well, if you've been married for more than five years, congratulations, you know more than me. But if you're a newlywed, please take my advice and have more sex than you feel like having. A quickie can take minutes, and if he's got stamina, it's really just an hour of your life. If you put that never-ending to-do list out of your mind, you might even enjoy it, too. But even if you'd rather be finishing the dishes, take the apron off and give



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it up. Sex is the glue that can hold you two together when you can't stand each other.

Mark my words, over the course of a fifty-year marriage, you will have moments when you hate each other.

Also sex, like classical music, calms the savage beast, and sometimes that's all men are. If he wants to do something kinky, and it's legal and within your moral comfort zone, try it once. You might like it, and even if you don't, you get points for being a good sport.

We wives get so bogged down in completing chores and taking care of the kids that we forget to take care of the biggest child in the house, our husband. Learn from my mistake. Every so often, let the dishes rot in the sink, put the kids to bed without a bath, shut down your computer, and go get with your man. Chores will always be there, waiting for you, but he might not be.

*If you're single, write yourself a permission slip to wait until you're ready. If you're married, put away your permission slips, put on a black slip, and finish this book tomorrow.*

*What are you still doing here? Go!*

## *Permission Slips*

### *Mom*

Going from wife to mother is a game changer. (Or girlfriend to mother. Or one-night stand to mother. No judgments here; things happen.)

We moms are backed into a corner. We want the best for our babies, and there's no end to things you can do to make your child smarter, healthier, happier, and more successful. Here are just a few things that can freak you out during your pregnancy: mercury in tuna, hormones in the water, Baby Einstein—yes or no? Plastic bottles or glass ones? What causes autism, ADD, ADHD, and asthma? How come pregnant women in Europe get to drink wine every day but I can only drink it once a week?

Fifty Web sites will give you fifty different answers. It's not enough that you sacrifice your body and your life, now you gotta get an advanced degree in biology—while you're throwing up.

And the kid ain't even born yet.

*Before you forget, write yourself a permission slip to give the baby tap water, from a plastic bottle.*

When we become moms, we become more responsible. When men become dads, they stay the same, which means they actually become less responsible.

For example, let's say no one does the laundry for a week. At the last minute, your son has to wear dirty underwear to school.



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You feel like a bad mother. But your husband? He thinks it's funny, and he'll convince your son it's funny, too. Men have a lower threshold for what's disgusting. So if the laundry piles up, guess who's doing it at 2 AM? The parent who doesn't think it's hilarious to wear filthy underpants—you.

*Write yourself a permission slip to wash only your and your child's laundry. If your husband thinks it's so funny to wear dirty briefs, let him.*

And the worst insult is that no matter how great a mom you are, at some point your children will hate you. They will even hate the good things you did. In fact, when your child becomes a teenager, all the good things you did as a parent will be used against you.

Are you a stay-at-home mom?

*"Mom, you were a terrible role model! I'm never going to be like you!"*

Are you a working mom?

*"Mom, you put your career first!"*

Do you work two jobs so your kid can go to private school?

*"Mom, you were never home when I needed you!"*

Did you quit your second job so you could be home when your child needed you?

*"Mom, I had to go to public school!"*

You can't win. My son is only three, but I'm taking as much video as possible. In ten years, I want to be able to look back and remind myself that, at one time, he was adorable, and he liked me.



## Permission Slips

*Write yourself another slip: When it comes to your children, you have permission to do everything wrong. Because according to them, you did anyway.*

### Family

It takes having kids before you realize that maybe your parents weren't all that bad, crazy, ridiculous, or lame. How many times did your parents tell you, "Wait until you have kids!" Of course, you'd smugly vow to be so much better, cooler, funnier, funner, or nicer than they were. Cut to twenty years later—you're saying the exact same things to your kid that your mom said to you.

Are there any relationships more complex than the ones we have with our parents? I was barely twenty-three when my mom passed away. We fought like cats and dogs (or I should say "mothers and daughters") for most of my teens. Luckily, we made up before she died. My dad and I are very close, although he lives in Chicago, so I see him infrequently.

Parents are frustrating because you can't change them. Of course, you can't change *anyone*, but at least with men there is the *illusion* that you can change them. (As we discussed, you will learn the bitter truth at some point.) And your kids—well, you're convinced you can direct them.

But the parents? No matter how old you are, one of them



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will always give you that look of disapproval, the look that says: *I wanted more for you*. Unfortunately, you can't change their expectations. If they wanted you to stay in a nine-to-five and you quit to join the Peace Corps, they will be disappointed. If they wanted you to get married and you got a divorce, they will be disappointed. If they wanted you to be a Jehovah's Witness and you became a Pentecostal, guess what—you let them down.

It's okay to do that, because usually you're right. My dad was disappointed when I quit my nine-to-five. I wanted a storybook ending to my life, and he thought that was impractical. In fact, he'd had so many part-time jobs that he thought my job at the legal firm, with its pension and 401(k), *was* a storybook ending.

I disagreed. After many years, my handsome prince came in the form of *The View*, but if that hadn't happened, he'd probably still be giving me that *I-told-you-not-to-quit-a-solid-job* look.

Parents come around to your way of thinking once you have success. If I was still temping and taking the bus to auditions, my dad would not be happy for me.

I think I understand my mom a lot more now that I have hopes and dreams for my son. Our fights were about my rebellion. She saw that I was in pain and thought the church could take it away. I saw different, and my journey took me down a few paths she wasn't thrilled with. I'm pretty sure that she would be proud of me now, and I know she would be crazy about her grandson. A great freedom comes from making peace with your parents.

And it's ultimately a compliment to them when you declare your independence from their expectations. It's like you're telling them, "You raised a person who thinks for herself and congratulations, because I'm finally gonna do what I want!"



## Permission Slips

*So write yourself a permission slip  
to disappoint your parents a little bit.  
You never know when they might come  
around.*

### *Thighs*

Can we women all just let up on our thighs? As you'll soon find out, I grew up around amputees. In my neighborhood, *somebody* was always losing *something* to diabetes. A toe, a foot, a leg. To me, knowing someone with one leg was as American as baseball and syrup on apple pie. (And if you've never put syrup on apple pie, then your family members probably have all their legs.) I don't care how thick your ankles are, if you've got both of 'em, you're doing better than a lot of folks.

Trying to have a perfect body is a lose-lose. From what I can tell, no matter how many pounds you lose, you could always lose five more. There's always another pair of jeans you can't quite zip, always one more celebrity who bounced back from pregnancy better than you did. (Nicole Kidman, anyone?)

Once you head down that path of body obsession, it's near impossible to veer off. You're either bingeing, purging, starving, or exercising. Counting calories like Bridget Jones, hating yourself for eating something good. Feeling guilty, eating more. And repeat. How many times have you canceled a date or something fun because you "felt fat"? And you probably weighed exactly the same as you did the day before. But you ate too much and now you don't want to look anyone in the eye.



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Stop me when I've described your life.

Diabetes helped me veer off that path. When I stopped dieting for vanity and started dieting to stay alive, my perspective changed. Every day my blood sugar is stable is a good day. That's twenty-four more hours of love to give my son. My weight still fluctuates—I wish it didn't. But I see the big picture, and so far I'm still in it, hanging out with my little man. We're having a good time. And if I can keep my emotions on an even keel, it's not too hard to eat normally. I try to avoid getting too lonely, hungry, tired, or mad. A binge could really knock me out of that perfect picture.

It's ironic—I missed so many fun times because I didn't feel good about my body. And now that I feel good about my body, I'm too tired to have fun! Don't let this happen to you.

*In other words, write yourself a slip to eat something, so that you don't feel deprived and eat everything. If I'm too late and you just ate everything, backdate yourself an all-access pass to the pantry and start over tomorrow.*

## *Aging*

If we're lucky enough to stay in the picture, then we're gonna get old. Every damn one of us. Not even the big shots can stave off aging forever. I had an epiphany when I was reading a gossip magazine. Apparently, during Madonna's divorce, Guy Ritchie



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said that making love to her was like “curling up with a piece of gristle.”

Whoa.

Now, Madonna was fifty years old at the time, and working out about four hours a day. She was in amazing shape, better shape than most of us are, *ever*, in our entire lives. She had the best plastic surgeons and dermatologists at her disposal, and still, her younger husband called her “a piece of gristle.” That tells me that none of us is safe. You fall apart, you’re a fat cow. You keep it together, you’re gristle.

Give me a break.

If we women took the hours we waste worrying about our looks and used them to find a cure for cancer, in five years Lance Armstrong could stop wearing bracelets. Our looks are an obsession that starts in our teens and never quite goes away. Aging follows the same trajectory for everyone—for a while you look “great,” then you look “good.” Next you look “good for your age,” then you’re “hanging in there,” and finally you’re dead. No quotation marks, you’re actually dead. If you find a way around that time line, bottle it and sell me some.

We’re all “too” something. Too fat, thin, light, dark, tall, short, old—every adjective under the sun except *young*. In our culture, no one’s too young. Which is great when you’re twenty-five. The world revolves around your natural collagen and fast metabolism. After you pass thirty, you notice that you aren’t being catered to as much. At forty, there is a definitive shift.

Remember that scene in *It’s a Wonderful Life* where an old guy says to Jimmy Stewart, “Youth is wasted on the young”? It’s true. (By the way, you know you’re old when that line makes you laugh. I never met a teenager who thought that line was funny.)

Imagine if the twenty-year-old you possessed the wisdom





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of your forty-year-old self. You'd have realistic dreams and the confidence to pull them off. And what if the forty-year-old you had the audacity of your twenty-year-old self? All right, I'm getting confused here, too, but my point is, I agree with that old man. The only time youth and old age cross paths is when our ninety-year-old body has a one-year-old's bladder.

I see my girlfriends and me wasting a lot of time. Whether we're sixteen or forty, we're always trying to look thirty. We have to stop that before we turn into "cool moms." You've seen those women—they can't quite accept that they've moved on to another stage in their lives. They wear their daughters' jeans, they shop at Forever 21 (for themselves), and their foreheads don't move. It's weird. Sometimes I want to lean over and whisper in their ears, "I know you're the same age as me. *I know it.*"

You can't Botox away the look in your eye that says, *Honey, I've seen it all.*

And why would you want to? All the fun women have been around the block. They're the ones with stories to tell. They've made mistakes that will make your jaw drop and make you feel like you're not the only klutz in town. In fact, I don't want to sit next to you at a dinner party unless (a) your heart's been broken, or (b) you've been in jail. And if your heart was broken *while* you were in jail, I won't leave your side.

Can we women, as a group, agree to get old and ugly together? Let's have crow's-feet, flappy underarm skin, and that deep, vertical frown line between our eyebrows. We can show our daughters what they're supposed to look like when they get old. (And give our sons realistic expectations of their wives.) C'mon, I don't want to have surgery so I can keep up with y'all. I don't like scalpels.



## Permission Slips

*So write yourself a permission slip to look your age. And if you're Madonna, write yourself a slip to skip Pilates today.*

### *Girlfriends*

Sometimes we women take our girlfriends for granted. We call them when we're lonely, and drop them when we're not. We find love, fall down the "man-hole," and completely disappear . . . until we're single again. C'mon. That's no way to maintain a lifelong relationship.

My circle of friends has saved or changed my life too many times to count. And that circle is always contracting and expanding. I lost some friends to religious differences (theirs, not mine) and gained others as motherhood and *The View* took me to new places, figuratively and literally. But over my lifetime, my girlfriends have given me a stability I couldn't find in my relationships or, sometimes, even in my own family. They encouraged me to try stand-up comedy, covered for me when I was late for work, told me when it was time to leave a no-good man. (Okay, *men*. There was more than one.) They prayed for me and then reminded me I could pray, too.

Often, we get so caught up in the impossible task of doing everything "right" that we forget to reconnect with our roots. Our base. Strength can be found in comfort, and sometimes all you need is a familiar voice to say, "Girl, I hear you."



*Sound familiar? If so, then write yourself a permission slip to call an old friend and pick up where you left off.*

## *Faith*

Oh, hey, speaking of old friends, I should probably add God to that list. Atheists, feel free to roll your eyes and skip ahead a few pages. Just understand that I'm not preaching, I'm sharing. And if you think I'm a lunatic, that's okay. I would be honored to be your goofy, lunatic friend.

I know many people who were, like me, raised in a strict religion. And if, as an adult, you resist adhering to the strict rules you were raised with as a child, it's important to remember that you can have your own relationship with God. You don't need to go through a church elder, a pastor, a minister, or a priest to pray. Lots of people rebel against their church. How many ex-Catholics, Mormons, Baptists, and Witnesses do you know? Some of us stray so "far" that we think we are unreachable, that we can't return to God. You might be reading this thinking, *Well, that's fine for you, Sherri, but I've had abortions and promiscuous sex; I've hurt people I love.*

All I have to say to you is, "Ditto."

I'm living proof that at any point in your rebellion, you can drop to your knees, close your eyes, clasp your hands together, and say, "Hi."

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You will not get yelled at or told to sit in a corner. You will be welcomed back like the prodigal son, and if your homecoming is anything like mine, you will wonder why you ever left.

It has been my experience that God just wants you back. Remember running away from home when you were a kid? When you returned, the first thing your mom did was hug you and cry. The second thing she did was grab a wooden spoon, bend you over her knee, and swat you hard on the behind, yelling, “Don’t you *ever* run away again.”

Coming home to God is like that, minus the punishment—because you’re already doing that to yourself. We are rarely having real fun during those “away” spells. I believe that God doesn’t pull out the wooden spoon upon our return because being away from Him is enough of a swat on the behind. He just hugs us and cries with delight.

I truly don’t know how atheists do it—they must have stronger constitutions than I do, because the times I’ve been without God have been the loneliest times in my life. And all that pain was self-inflicted. I could’ve made the call at any time, I just didn’t think God would want to hear from me after all the things I’d done.

Boy, was I wrong.

When I ended a rough patch in my thirties with a loud wail to Heaven, the response on the other end of the line was so joyous, it was almost embarrassing.

“SHERRI! Where you been? I HAVE MISSED YOU!”

I tried to explain I’d been out doing this and that, dating felons, serving time for warrants. God cut me off.

“I know! I’m just so thrilled you’re back. You were always My favorite!”

Of course He says that to everyone, but still, it’s nice to hear. No matter how long you’ve been gone, no matter what you’ve done, you’re always welcome back to God’s house. I believe that



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certain embrace is the gift of faith, and if I can give that gift to my son, I will have done my job. We humans will always stray, always. The story of Adam and Eve, whether you believe it actually happened or not, is the perfect example of how we humans will fail at almost every opportunity. But the amazing thing is that the path back to God is always lit, always safe, and always open. Like Motel 6, God always leaves a light on for you.

I hope my son knows that when he runs away God will take him back, no questions asked. I also hope he knows that I'll bend him over my knee and swat his behind with a wooden spoon. Because I'm human that way.

*So write yourself a permission slip to come back to God at any time. In fact, if you kneel while you scribble, you're halfway there.*

## *My fellow Americans*

I wasn't raised in a politically active family, and look at me now. Maybe it's the homework I do to prepare for *The View*, or Barack Obama's presidency, or the fact that I have a personal stake in the future (my son), but politics has become a very interesting subject to me.

I'm proof that you don't need a master's in political science to have an informed opinion. Start small. Follow an issue that has a direct effect on your life and you'll probably find yourself

## *Permission Slips*

tracking the moves of the secretary of state in a few months. The other ladies of *The View* were miles ahead of me when I started, and I'm having fun catching up.

If you're starting from scratch, like I did, I have some advice: First, don't be afraid to ask questions, and if someone tries to make you feel dumb, start talking to someone who doesn't. Anyone who would belittle you for trying to get smarter is a jerk, and you can quote me on that.

Looking dumb is an understandable fear. All I can say is take comfort in the fact that no one has ever looked dumber than I did when I said I wasn't sure if the earth is round. On national television, and then YouTube, about ten million times (so far). Just know that you will never feel as intellectually humiliated as I did during the weeks after I made that unfortunate statement.

In fact, feel free to use me as a worst-case scenario to make yourself feel better. No matter how lost you feel when it comes to understanding politics or global warming or the deficit, at least you know the shape of our planet!

The more interested I've become in issues, the more engaged I've become as a citizen. I've been privileged enough to meet ordinary women from other countries during my time at *The View*, and hearing about their lives has made me so grateful I was born in the United States. Like my faith, I want to pass on that gratitude to my son, and to the people I meet every day.

We take when we're young. We take energy, attention, love. When we get older, we are able to return the favor. Not just to our families but also to our neighbors, our communities, and our country. Do something tiny. Help clean up a park or walk a shelter dog. If you can do it with your kids, even better. I've learned that a political view doesn't make you patriotic, but the acts of participating and giving back sure do.



*Doing Everything Wrong*

*Write yourself a permission slip to bloom where you're planted and start small.*

I've made every mistake that a decent person can make, and I'm still here, still learning. Probably like you, I could have given up about a million times by now, but I didn't. Hopefully, I've got at least forty more years' worth of gaffes and mistakes to make. I can't wait!

One thing I've learned while writing this book is that I'm the Fairy Godmother of people who wish they could have a do-over. If I had a wand, I would grant you that wish.

