

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #123: Get Up and Go – The World Needs Your Story

Cheri

Let's talk about women that we read about when we were growing up that we admired and wanted to emulate.

Amy

Well, there were two that I thought of immediately. Number one is Jo in *Little Women*. I wanted to be her. Now, it was so funny, 'cause I've been watching *Little Women* on PBS.

Cheri

Yeah.

Amy

And I still love Jo, but now, I identify with Marmee, but that's a whole different conversation. But I wanted to be Jo, because she was bold and she was courageous. She was quirky and different and kind of bucked the system. She was a great writer. And then the other person, probably for the same reason some, was Elizabeth Elliot. Because she was bold, she went back into the territory where her husband had been killed. So those were the women that attracted me, are these very strong, bold women. How about you?

Cheri

Well, I thought of Jo as well, 'cause I read *Little Women* and the entire series, but then I was like oh, no. I read the book *Jane Eyre* like dozens of times when I was a teenager. I love how she spoke up, and she would not be silenced. She refused to give up even though she was poor and came from low circumstances, and she did what was really hard. When she found out the truth about the man she loved she went ahead and left because it was the right thing for her to do, but then when some other guy wanted to marry her, but didn't actually love her, she said, "I scorn your idea of love." So yeah, there are so many things that she said that run through my head because I'm like, you just go Jane! You be bold, and you be passionate. And in the end it did all turn out okay, which is how the world should be.

Amy

Well, that's kind of our goal isn't it? We want it to turn out okay while being the star, right?

<Laughter>

Cheri

Exactly.

Amy

One of our listeners said something similar, she said, "So my biggest struggle is staying on top of everything and not only achieving success in my eyes, but in everyone else's, or at least in the opinion of the people that matter. I tend to have perfectionist tendencies, and I'm hypersensitive to criticism. I hate conflict and will do almost anything to get positive feedback or to be a star."

Cheri

Oh, we love the idea of being a star.

Amy

We do. We do. Well, avoiding conflict and craving positive feedback, those are things I think we can all relate to. Thank goodness we've had role models in books and in real life to help us navigate those sticky issues.

Cheri

Well, this is Cheri Gregory.

Amy

And I'm Amy Carroll.

Cheri

And you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace. Good girls breaking bad rules. The podcast that equips you to lose who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy

Today, we're talking to Susy Flory, author of *So Long Status Quo, What I Learned From Women Who Changed the World*. Susy Flory is the New York Times best selling author of 14 books. A graduate of UCLA, she has a background in journalism, education, and communications. She serves as director of the West Coast Christian Writers Conference and loves writing stories about unforgettable people who are living lives of adventure, courage, hope, redemption, and transformation. Susy and her husband, Robert, have two young adult children and live in the San Francisco Bay area.

So Susy, I love a little sass, and you have a little sass in your title. Why did you write *So Long Status Quo*?

Susy

I am a little sassy, although I try to stay away from that word, mainly because I'm tall. I feel like sassy women are kind of small, feisty women, and I'm more like this amazon type. So I feel more like a cave woman than a sassy, little woman. I wrote it because it was a challenge to myself. The whole book is trying to get my own butt, excuse the word, but my butt out of my couch, because I literally had a body-shaped indentation in my couch with a place where my

butt was. And it was like my cocoon. So this book was all about just launching myself out of that.

Cheri

I love it. So it was a challenge for yourself first and foremost?

Susy

Absolutely, and also, I had the privilege of going to college and never studied anything about women's history. There just wasn't really anything available. All the history I'd studied growing up wasn't about women, and I just was really curious about the girls, the sassy girls who came before me and what they had done and what they were like as real people. So that's kind of what was driving this whole book is who are these girls, and how did they get up off of their couches.

Amy

Well, just to clarify sassy in the south is a major compliment. So there you go.

Cheri

Thank you for translating for us California girls, Amy.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

All right, well, in your book you share what you learned from women who changed the world. So I'm curious, which lesson was the easiest for you and why? And which was the hardest and why? And I'm really interested in the one that was the hardest.

Susy

Okay. The first one, the easiest, was the writing. It was actually easy/hard at the same time, because I already had started writing. I'd written some articles. I had written my first book. This book was my second book. It actually turned out to be the hardest book I've ever written, because it was very personal. I was challenging myself and trying to step out of my comfort zone. And I actually had to get a writing coach to just talk me through it, because I was just traumatized by writing this book. And I think anybody who's written a memoir or written personal stuff where you're admitting the really hard stuff and dredging it out and bringing it to light, I think, can relate to that.

I think the hardest thing in this book was ... a couple of challenges I gave myself was one was to fast, which I literally had never gone on a fast except to get a blood test. But to just fast for a whole day, I thought it would be a piece of cake, and it was so hard. And then also I spent some time in silence and solitude and that also was hard. And I'm not a huge talker. I'm an introvert. You would think this would be easy, but I think, because they're things that we don't typically do or practice in most evangelical churches, or we don't do them that much. You have the

occasional outlier. The bold, brave person who does it, but most of us don't do it. So those two things were really hard.

I didn't know how to do it, and it was harder than I thought. But also the benefits were amazing. Like how I just felt closer to God. I was hearing from Him. It just awoke something inside of me. It was amazing.

Cheri

I just have to ask, who was your writing coach who got you unstuck?

Susy

You probably might know her. Her name is Kathi Lipp, and she and I were friends at that time, but not super close. I knew she was coaching, and she just literally held my hand. I was a month late on the book because of just my own fear. That was the only reason. I was up all night worrying about it. It was that kind of thing. And Kathi just was my friend and coach, and coaching really is just a friendship.

Cheri

Well, I asked that because it leads perfectly into my next question. Kathi is just the queen at helping people overcome, whether it's procrastination or fear or perfectionism or whatever word you want to use. You've written quite a few books that are by and for people who achieve amazing things. You're a collaborative writer. Is that how you would describe yourself?

Susy

Yes.

Cheri

Okay. And so, I'm now curious, since you know probably that our podcast is for reforming perfectionists and people pleasers, what role does perfectionism play in the lives of these people that you've written books with and in their success?

Susy

The thing I learned from the women in this book and from people I've worked with. I've worked with some celebrities, like you mentioned. I've worked with inventors, missionaries, and explorers; just people whom we don't typically meet in everyday life. They're just kind of in their own stratosphere in a way, and I've been lucky to be able to get to know them and see where their struggles are. And I can report back to you both from the women in this book, and the people I've worked with they all have the same struggles we do, exactly the same struggles, sometimes more intensely just because they put themselves out there.

I would say a commonality that I see among all of these people is that they because comfortable with failure, because we're all going to fail. So the guy I just wrote a book with, he's an astronaut named Scott Parazynski. He has this kind of jokey title as the man with the longest Wikipedia entry because when you literally list everything he's done. It's, like, who

could do all this? And he has. He's super human, I think. But we made a list of all of his failures, and it was a very long list.

Cheri

Wow.

Amy

Wow.

Susy

So that encourages me that these are normal people who don't give up. These are normal people who have an extra measure of sass. They don't give up. I think one of the secrets, too, is they surround themselves with people to help them, because nobody can climb Mt. Everest alone. Nobody can go to space alone. Nobody can write a book alone. We need our people around us.

Amy

Oh, I hear Grit 'n' Grace in that. They don't give up. They have grit. And the grace is surrounding them by people who help them. That's amazing!

Cheri

You were supposed to tell us they were ultimate perfectionists and that following rules is what makes you successful, Susy. I don't know what to do with that answer that you really gave.

Susy

I apologize.

Cheri

All right, well, so many of our listeners ... and you and I were actually hanging out together last week and you expressed a similar thing with the writers that you are trying to mentor and coach. So I'll just say so many women that we know long to do these great things for God, but they have trouble getting started because they're so afraid of failure. So what advice would you have for them? How can they take action and become women who actually change their worlds?

Susy

I actually just had this experience, and what happens is that you start to notice a need around you. At first it can be something that's annoying; somebody who wants your help, somebody who's pestering you, somebody who's hanging out. A few years ago I had met a woman, she's actually one of my best friends now. Every time I turned around at church, she was there. She would bring me things. She would try to be my friend, and then I ended up having to go to Haiti for a book project, which was an incredible experience, and she said, "Can I go? Can I go with you?" She ended up going with me, paying her own way, and just so many ministry things and friendship things and profile things have come out of her being there right in front of me.

So I think sometimes we need to ask God to just open our eyes to what's right in front of us. I had a similar experience, I think I was talking to you, Cheri, and the other girls when we were on this writing retreat about feeling annoyed that people kept asking me to write their stories all the time. Every writer is going to get those people wanting help. And I get a lot of inquiries just because I think I show up in search engines now. And I've been annoyed by them asking for help. Finally, God opened my eyes to say you need to do something to help this group of people that's asking you for help. They're never going to make the bestseller list. They still need my help. I can do that.

Amy

So Cheri and I talk a lot about the value of candor in relationships and since people pleasers have such a tendency to avoid conflict at all costs. So what have you learned about candor and conflict as a collaborative author who works with celebrities? 'Cause I'm imagining that celebrities are surrounded by a lot of people pleasers, so how do you navigate those waters?

Susy

Honestly, I think it comes back to friendship again. And the weird thing in some of these collaborative relationships is that it's a little one-sided. I'm kind of being their friend, and I'm serving them as a friend. I'm helping them tell their story. I'm helping this book project or their dream come true. They don't necessarily always reciprocate. So when I'm working with a person on their story it's kind of all about them, and I act like a friend to them and it feels like an intimate friendship for this time period we're working together, but they don't always return it and that's kind of how service is sometimes.

I think when we serve sometimes we expect it to be two-way. They're going to care about me as much as I care about them. And so I think once they sense that I have that servant attitude, and I'm living that out in this relationship where we're working on something together, they trust me. And that trust grows, and then I can speak the truth and love and just say, "No, we're not going to tell that particular story. Yes, we do need to tell this hard story that you've never told anyone before."

So I think a big part of it is developing that relationship of trust and not always expecting that you're going to get a 50/50 relationship. I mean it's kind of like marriage, right? It's not always 50/50. That being said, you still want to keep healthy boundaries. You don't want to be a martyr. You don't want to destroy yourself to make this person happy. But going in as a servant rather than expecting a 50/50, I think, builds that trust.

Amy

Very good. So, okay, my understanding is, well, I know, that you are a woman of faith, but a lot of your books kind of cross the line into the secular world. So we're curious, how many Bible verses does it take for a book to be a "Christian book" or an author a Christian author? How have you found that to be in kind of going back and forth between the secular and the sacred in your writing?

Susy

Yeah, one thing I've learned ... I mean, I started this on my first book, because the first book I ever wrote was about evangelism. And the number one thing I learned about evangelism, and I was co-authoring with this amazing woman evangelist, is that you take out the preachy language and you take out the preachy attitude. And I think I'm kind of a preacher at heart. I want to preach. Like I preach to my daughter and that doesn't always go over well. Preach to my husband, same thing.

Your life and your writing and everything that you do, when you love God and He's the center of your life, it is going to come out. It's going to come out in a lot of different ways. So I think of myself primarily as a storyteller. I'm a storyteller kind of writer. And my stories reflect my faith. And Jesus was the same way. Sometimes he preached and taught, but a lot of times he told stories, and he didn't preach. I kind of looked to how he did it. And I did have an interesting thing happen with my book *Thunder Dog*. It is a Christian book. It has a whole chapter in the middle with this amazing God moment and kind of unpacks Psalm 23, but Christian bookstore owners of Christian bookstores, did not buy the book. They felt like there wasn't enough scripture in it. It wasn't infused throughout the book. There was no preaching and no teaching.

However, it went over into the general market and sold really well. So it was a message that people wanted to hear. So people who weren't at a Christian bookstore were picking up this book, reading it, and getting this whole lesson on Psalm 23 kind of right in the middle of the book. So I think if you're a believer it's going to come out organically.

Amy

What you're telling us is there's such power in story. So talk to our listeners a little bit, those women who feel like they would love to be able to tell their story either by speaking or writing. What advice would you give them if they're thinking but why would anybody want to read or hear what I have to say?

Susy

I think every writer, every communicator, struggles with this. And I know that I have. I think there are two things. One is you have experiences with the Lord that no one else has because of your own unique story and of how you hear from God. All of us kind of hear from God in different ways. That's worth it right there. Just reporting back what God has done in your life to encourage someone else to lead them kind of down that path. And I know I could list hundreds of books that have been meaningful in my life.

I think the second one is voice. You're going to have your own voice and your own way of telling a story. So if you, Amy, had told the *Thunder Dog* story it would have been a different story. And if Cheri had told the *Thunder Dog* story it would have been a different story. So it's like the different books of the Bible, they each have a different way of telling these stories. That's why we have four gospels.

So we absolutely need every voice and every story and if God has laid something on your heart, you need to be faithful to deliver that, even if it's only to one other person. And this sounds sort of morbid, but if you have something on your heart that needs to be shared and you go outside your front door and get hit by a bus, that story's going to die with you. So you need to be faithful and share it, even if it's only to one other person.

Cheri

I love it. So the size of the audience doesn't matter. All right, well you and Kathi and I have worked on the board of the West Coast Christian Writers Conference for several years, and so I'm curious, what is the most important lesson you've learned about leadership?

Susy

It's interesting when you have leadership ability, and I'm just starting to teach on leadership so I'm thinking about this a lot. You see what's wrong with organizations. Or you could be in a small group Bible study, and you immediately see what's wrong and what that person could do better who's leading. You just kind of have that in your DNA. As a leader, once you move up into some sort of leadership role where you're leading a team or leading something, you can see what needs to be done a lot of times, but the others don't see it yet. And it doesn't always help to just announce, "We are going to do X, Y, and Z because I see that needs to be done." They have to see it as well.

So here's the key I've learned. What I've learned is to, when something's brought up and we're discussing and making a decision, I let everyone speak first. And maybe I don't even weigh in on it, but for sure I weigh in last. And that is so hard when you have that leadership stuff inside of you, you want to just clear it all up, lay it out, make it, you know, here's what we need to do. And you can't. What you can solve in 10 seconds sometimes might take hours or days or weeks or months.

Cheri

If you want the team to come along with you.

Susy

Yeah, if you're growing other leaders and then kind of being ... as you're growing other leaders. So it's very important, I think, to let that happen organically. I guess that's my word of the day, organic.

Cheri

I love it. I love it. All right, well, since we've tackled the topic of leadership let's go on to another timely topic. You've initiated some conversations about the 'me too' movement. So what does 'me too' mean to you?

Susy

I hate that this conversation is happening among women and in the church and in the culture. I also love that it's happening. I grew up in a church that I loved. It's where I found Jesus. It's

where I learned all my foundational stuff about the Bible, about Jesus, about how to live the Christian life, but at the same time, it was a church where women were treated as second-class citizens and we were taught that in our theology. And I grew up believing that men were more valuable, inherently more valuable, and had opportunities to do ministry that I could never do.

And that was in my soul. It was, like, a burden that I carried that women brought sin into the world, basically. I mean that's a heavy, heavy burden. I since do not believe that anymore. I've been freed from that. But I think the 'me too' movement is saying to women you are not second-class citizens. And, yes, men who have perpetrated these things, women do these things, too, but men statistically more so. These kinds of predatory men are not more important. Their comfort and their reconciliation with their job or whatever they're in trouble with for doing these things is not more important than the woman they've victimized.

So that's just part of my own journey of feeling and learning that women are equally as valuable to God as men are. And I think that's part of the 'me too' movement. It's a messy thing. There are things where they don't make sense. We're all trying to figure all this stuff out. I had a personal experience when I was five where I was nearly molested by a male babysitter. And it was a very close call. This phone call came and distracted him, and I was saved from it. But it was close enough that I just kind of have a little bit of knowledge of what that must be like for women.

So as you can tell I'm very passionate about this, and I think it's something that's coming out in the open, but it's hard.

Cheri

And that leads into your current project, which is another book of your heart. Tell us a little bit about it.

Susy

Yeah. And, first of all, I want to say this is a book I've been working on since 2009. So for every listener who has a passion project that is in their heart sometimes these things take time. Mine has taken a long time. And it's grown and changed, and I think it's much better than when I first thought of it. And also the timing is good. The book right now is called *Is Jesus for Women*, and it's about Jesus's interactions with women, which I think all women love to hear about. It's just how Jesus treated women as equals, when in his culture; they were not treated that way. He blew every stereotype out of the water. He broke every stereotype.

And then how Paul went on in his letters to talk about all the women leaders in the church and the coworkers and the women that he was sharing the gospel alongside. So this book is about that and my own journey from feeling like a second-class citizen to this value that I have in Jesus's eyes. And I'm writing it with a friend who serves on staff at a very progressive church. So we just kind of talked back and forth through all of these things, and one of our key things is why was Jesus born a man? All the questions I've always had that I could never ask in church, we're going to discuss in this book.

Starting with Jesus interacting with women, and I can never get enough of learning about that, thinking about that, and dreaming about that.

Amy

Oh my goodness. I'm overwhelmed. I cannot wait to get my hands on this book, because these are things I've been grappling with and thinking about a lot and trying not to speak because I'm just mad at this point, but anyway. So I need your book to help me work through all that.

So what closing words would you like to leave our listeners with today?

Susy

The subtitle of this book, *So Long Status Quo*, is Women Who Changed the World. And I grappled with that, because I think all of us want to make some sort of difference in the world maybe small scale, maybe large scale, depending on the plate that we have. As Kathi talks about, how big your plate is. So I grappled with that. I'm never going to be a person like a Harriet Tubman who's saving people from trafficking. It's not my gift. I don't see myself doing that. It's not in front of me. It's not what God has given for me to do.

So I'm looking at these women who changed the world. Like, another woman, Elizabeth Fry, who was born in the prison system in England. And just saved so many people and made life better for so many people. How can I do that? And I can't. But I can do what God has given me to do. My task right in front of me, the things that are annoying me, my pain points, the things I feel God calling me to do. And then I think what happens is there's a sort of divine arithmetic. It's like the loaves and the fishes. If you are faithful and you give your little basket of tiny little fish and dried out bread to God, He's going to take it and make something beautiful.

And I think He does that with our efforts. When we offer Him what we have and we take that step, even though we're scared. Even though we know we're going to fail, we take that step and do something He's asked us to do or put in front of us, He's going to multiply that and it's going to be beautiful.

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode123.

Amy

There you'll find this week's transcript, the digging deeper download, our bible verse art, and a chance to win a copy of Susy's book.

Cheri

If you've enjoyed this episode of Grit 'n' Grace, would you leave a review for us on iTunes? You'll find a link in the show notes.

Amy

Make sure to join us next week when we'll be processing together what we learned from Susy.

Cheri

For today, grow your grit; embrace God's grace, and when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do. Go right on ahead and...

Amy and Cheri

Break it!

Outtakes

Cheri

Okay, so let's just be clear. You're not recommending silence and solitude to Amy and me? No, no, that will not be a takeaway from this episode. Amy, we will not be discussing that next week.

Amy

I'm pretty sure that challenge would involve duct tape. I'm just saying.