



Helen Reddy: The Power of a Woman

By
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Helen Reddy is a name that has faded from the headlines it filled thirty-five years ago. But the words to her most famous song continue to resonate for new generations of women finding their own ways to roar.

A better chance at a career led the Australian-born divorced singer to carry her 3 year-old daughter Traci to New York City. Reddy was 24 with only \$230 to her name. Taking the risk to reap the opportunities to succeed as a singer became the embers of the fire of determination she penned in her lyrics.

Reddy's "I Am Woman" soared to #1 on global record charts in 1972, bought up by those who found a synergy of her words to the women's revolution sprouting and gaining footing in the U.S. and around the world. In one period, 25,000 copies of the song were being sold in a day, putting Reddy on the road to becoming a millionaire. It also earned her a Grammy and her place in the pantheon of female leaders of the 1970's.

Today, at 65, Reddy shares with *Spy Glass* her view of the world, the power of individual actions and social duty plus the need for a sustainable economy for future generations.

Shattered: Have we collectively fulfilled the power of your message in, "I Am Woman?"

HR: Not yet. It won't be fulfilled in my lifetime. "I Am Woman," was about empowerment. And women are empowered. But there's other work we need to do.

Shattered: Women today have a lot of power. Is that what you meant by empowerment?

HR: I think we have a warped idea of what power is. Power isn't money and force. Business is dictated by male rules and male energies. For instance, they enact the cuts in the areas of children and education. We as women need to show people by example how to change and not just force them to change.

Shattered: If money isn't the source of power, what is?

HR: Power comes from within. A lack of self-esteem in women is universal. My work today is working one-on-one with women to improve their outlook and their sense of self-worth so that they can make a valuable contribution to the world.

Shattered: You wrote, 'With a long long way to go until I make my brother understand.' Do men get it?

HR: It takes nine months from conception to birth to bring a life into this world. In a split second, that life can be wiped out during a war. Who has the greater power? Men envy

women's ability to create life. They are continuously thinking of ways to end life. We can't follow male models of power.

Shattered: What do you suggest?

HR: We need get off our butts and be our own leaders. Do whatever we can to empower others. Create stronger social and business networks. We are changing but we can't follow male models.

Shattered: Are you saying that women need to redefine success?

HR: We need to bring our values to the table. This is the work that can be done by women no matter where there are – at the top of the corporate ladder or right out of school.

Shattered: What about the economic impact of our decisions?

HR: Our global economy is predicated on unlimited growth. This way of our thinking will eventually destroy us. Women need to turn the current business model on its ear because it is unsustainable. We have to remember that we don't live in an economy; we live in a society. To paraphrase a Native American Indian saying, every decision has an impact on the next seven generations. We need to not think in terms of a decision's impact on the next quarterly report but future generations.

Shattered: Are we better off than we were thirty-five years ago?

HR: Our technology is separating us from each other. We are eliminating linear distance yet losing interactions with each other. We are far too dependent on a very vulnerable and arrogant technology. It makes me think of the Titanic!

Shattered: To quote your words, time seems to have 'deepened the conviction in my soul.'

HR: Our culture is being formed by the media. We are being fed needs that we don't have innately. And we are being controlled. What I mean by that is that the media can control the amount of knowledge we get. The behaviors viewers see on a TV sitcom or drama can be accepted as normal. But they're not.

Shattered: What can we do to avoid this level of control?

HR: Don't be a couch potato. You aren't living a life watching a reality show. You have to live your own reality. Watching TV too much you might miss the call, a calling to do something meaningful for yourself, for the world. You have to make the decision yourself to be open to listening to what it is you want to do.

Shattered: Women were angry when they were marching for equality in the 1970's. Are women angry enough now to enact change?

HR: There was a lot more convergence of energies in the 1970's. There was more energy from young people on college campuses rallying against the war. There was more energy from civil rights activists demanding equality in segregated areas. With tremendous anger in the 1970's, we were able to use our collective energy for change. Now there is a feeling of hopelessness. We need to do something to give people hope that they can make a difference.

Shattered: Where should women make their investments?

HR: We need to rethink how we look at money and how we invest in the future. For thirty years, I've put my money in ethical investments, watching very closely which companies got my support. We also need to be aware that \$10U.S. can buy a mosquito net or \$20U.S. can dig a well in a third world country. That small effort can make a major difference.

Shattered: Germany has a female Chancellor for the first time in its history and Chile and Finland elected women to top jobs. What does this say about the U.S.?

HR: We couldn't even elect a female vice president in the United States. It's ridiculous for America to lag behind.

Shattered: Since you are registered to vote in the U.S., will you vote for Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton if she wins the democratic presidential nomination?

HR: I don't know. I have to wait to see who else is running. I don't believe Hillary will be the first female president of the United States.

Shattered: Does Australia recognize International Women's Day?

There are many events going on here sponsored by a variety of women's organizations. I'm going to attend as many as I can.

Shattered: A twenty-six year-old woman I know told me that when she dates, her criteria to continue seeing the fellow is that after they were married and had children, he would stay home and raise the kids while she continued working to get a "C" level job.

HR: She may be on to something! I know she's saving herself a lot of agonizing divorces!

Shattered: How have men changed in the last thirty-five years?

HR: Men are not afraid to develop their feminine side, especially younger men. For instance, thirty-five years ago an Arab man walking with his family might have been three paces ahead of everyone. Now the father is carrying his baby walking side-by-side with his wife. More men are involved in their children's lives providing a healthy balance of time given by mom and dad.

Shattered: What is the most profound change you've seen in the last thirty-five years?

HR: Women are more visible. Years ago, an NBC executive told me that there would never be a female news reader. Female journalists were delegated to writing about fashion, beauty, advice to the lovelorn and social events. Today, I love it when I see women in the field, no make up, hair blowing, fully engaged and passionately reporting the news.

Shattered: You make me think of a line in your song, that you are 'determined to reach my final goal.' Are you close to that?

HR: My final goal keeps moving. I've had over thirty-five years of riches and success. I've achieved a place within me where I am truly happy and I respect myself. Gloria Steinman would often quote a saying, "I'd like to be the person I want to marry." Well, I've now become the person I once wanted to marry. I'm complete within myself and I don't need someone to complete me.

To hear Reddy sing, "I Am Woman" and to find out more about her, go to www.HelenReddy.com