

THE POWER OF SELF

Writer and activist **Gloria Steinem**, 82, has been one of the world's leading feminists since the 1960s. In her memoir, *My Life on the Road*, the *Ms.* magazine co-founder describes a life of nearly constant travel, from her itinerant childhood to her ongoing global advocacy.



What was a defining moment in your life, related to gender?

It's difficult to think of a defining moment because gender, in my generation, was just so assumed. I never remember wanting to be a boy, except perhaps to put my feet over the movie seat in front of me in the theater. And I never remember feeling limited as a girl, because I was not going to school very much. It came as a shock and surprise when I got to be a teenager and gender became very limiting and very important. There were always whispers and rumors about girls who got pregnant and had to get married. If someone was raped, it was her fault. In my teenage years I became aware of being careful.

What do you consider the most pressing gender issue today?

I suppose getting rid of [the idea of] gender. You know, living in India was a revelation because I came to understand that there were old languages that didn't have gender—that didn't have "he" and "she." The more polarized the gender roles, the more violent the society. The less polarized the gender roles, the more peaceful the society. We are each unique and individual human beings. We are linked; we are not ranked. The idea of race and the idea of gender are divisive.

What advice would you give to girls and boys today?

To trust the unique voice inside them. And to be sure and listen as much as they speak, so that they are honoring the other unique people outside them. It's important for girls not to internalize a sense of passivity or inferiority or second-classness, and for boys not to internalize a sense of having to be stronger or superior or in control. What helps the most is for boys to be raised to raise children. I don't have children, but I was raised to raise children—to be empathetic and pay attention to detail and be patient. Boys are often raised that way, but not often enough.