

INTRODUCTION

The Thoughts in My Head

I kept noticing two glaring moments where I thought mamas were trying too hard.

One - those mamas who feel compelled to seem like they have it all together on social media with the perfect family photo or the latest kid achievement. They compete with other moms, relentlessly pursuing social acceptance. And for what real gain?

Two - mamas forget about themselves and constantly wonder why they are tired, frustrated, and a little crazy. They need to learn to be good to themselves so they can be good to others. They hide their vulnerabilities to the point that the only one to crumble is mama.

I wanted to take these thoughts and put them into actionable things mamas could easily implement into their daily routine.

So I did. You're Welcome, Mama.

Heather Cook, the Mama

I grew up without my biological mama, so I found myself constantly seeking teachers, neighbors, and strangers to be my mama. I was raised by two wonderful grandparents, my mama's parents, who are the reason I turned out okay. I was always surrounded by love (and wouldn't change a thing), yet I must have had a small hole in my heart left by my real mama, because I kept trying to fill it.

When I became a mama, I wanted to make sure I was doing everything right, everything possible so that I could always be my daughter's mama. Every time I messed up, I worried that someone would think I wasn't fit to keep my baby. That was silly. I know better. Yet, I think many mamas have similar feelings of wanting to get it right and thinking they are not.

No pity needed here. I am thankful for my life, how I was raised, and how I turned out. The ebb and flows in my life led me to where I am today, and I'm thankful.

As a mama, I wanna love. Love people. Love experiences. Love things. Love the world. Love moments.

I love to dance, even though my moves are not as good as they used to be. I love to sing out loud, and I think I have wonderful intonation and inflection. Ha! I love to eat at cool restaurants where I can't pronounce everything on the menu, and I love to travel to new places. My husband and I take our daughter somewhere new every year so she can experience all kinds of things. I love homemade vanilla ice cream topped with extra Nutella and fresh strawberries. I love to sit on the back porch and listen to music and smile. I love to help my daughter try new things. And, I really love watching mamas be good to themselves. Permission granted to go and be awesome!

You're welcome, Mama.

The Light Bulb Moment

I wrote this book to share with all young mamas that "You've Got This!" I want my stories, my failures, my crazy moments, and my triumphs to be a small snapshot that resonates with what most mamas deal with. Mamas need someone in their life constantly giving them permission to be good to themselves. They deserve it.

I was sitting in a cozy, coffee shop one morning with some mamas trying to sort through a bunch of titles for my book. We had been there about an hour, and I was starting to feel bummed that we couldn't find the right one to connect to the purpose of the book.

All of a sudden, one of the mamas looked at me, and said, "I've got it!" She went on to recount the story about when she first read my manuscript. She shared a time when she sent me a really, really long text thanking me for letting her read the book. She told the mamas she wrote, "I would never have done this for myself. You gave me permission to be good to myself."

Voila - there's my title: You're Welcome, Mama: Permission Granted to be a Better You.

This book is my gift to mamas.

I know how I felt, and still feel sometimes, as a mama trying to get it all right. I want to share my stories and encourage other mamas to be good to themselves. It will make them better mamas for sure.

How to Read this Book

This book is intended to be whatever you need it to be. I wrote it because I find many women try to hide their vulnerabilities, actions which keep them from overcoming them. I wanted mamas to know that we all have these, what seem to be, universal moments we try and tackle alone. No matter what part of the roller coaster you're on, someone is there with you and gets it. This book is real. This book is funny (I hope). This book will get you on your way to creating the life you deserve.

We often don't give ourselves permission to be good to ourselves. Baby first. Kids first. Others first. If we ever allow ourselves some "me time," we end up feeling guilty. I hope this book inspires you to do something for yourself because it will make you a *better* person, not a selfish one. My sole purpose in writing this book was to grant permission to other mamas, because we will never give that permission to ourselves.

Each chapter has a theme with a story included, a story that happened and is real. I'm guessing most mamas can relate.

Each chapter starts with an old adage that connects to the theme. After each story, I provide my own, updated adage that seems way more applicable to today's crazy life!

Finally, at the end of each chapter, I include a challenge and action items to support each theme. The challenges are memorable and the action items are bite-sized, which means everything that speaks to you can be added to your life in a reasonable way.

This book can be a light-hearted read that makes you laugh and brightens your day. It can serve as a resource, depending on your stage of motherhood and what problems you're currently tackling. It can be a constant reminder that no matter how far you've come in your journey, you may get kicked back down to survival mode from time to time. You can also take each chapter at your own pace and diligently implement the challenge and action items to become a better you, the real you.

This book, hopefully, is something you will refer to as a nice refresher. Just like a good professional development session to re-energize you, sometimes, you just need permission to do something for yourself.

Everyone benefits.

The Gap

The gap is between what you want and what you get. Unfortunately, many mamas persist in this gap. The purpose of this book is to take you on a journey from "I can't even..." to "I'm ready for more..." Wherever we are in life, we *all* could use a little nudge and a little humor sprinkled throughout our days.

But how do we actually do it? How do we get there? We already want more out of life, but rarely do we get there.

Great advice surrounds us. Why can't we accept it? Why can't we change? Some say we're hard wired not to change, and some say we're too busy. Excuses are never in short supply. Permission is *always* in short supply.

I think it's because change is uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable for you and for others around you. Take for instance, trying to lose weight. You're cranky because you're eating less and that affects everyone around you. The doctor says you're on the verge of a heart attack, but you really, really love steak. Should you be cranky and eat better because your life depends on it? Yes. It just pushes you out of your comfort zone.

Your boss gives you a poor performance review, yet he hadn't said anything to date of your inability to complete a task. That's because it was uncomfortable to tell you.

The lists are endless as to why we have this gap, and we always find a reason not to close the gap. It's either too hard, too messy, or we're really not motivated yet.

Most of the time, we have not reached a place where we feel it's so uncomfortable that it's actually worse *not* to change. When our consequence (fear of dying) exceeds our behaviors (start healthy habits), then we can start to close the gap.

Closing the Gap

Self-help books. Counseling. Alcohol. Yoga. So many methods. While there are successes, there is no secret. You just have to decide you want to close the gap. No one can make you. Just knowing you need to, that's not enough. You've got to really want to. And then, you've gotta have someone who will give you permission to work on yourself. And most importantly, *YOU* must be the one to give yourself permission to close the gap, to be better. Good luck!