

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM
Episode #8 Transcript
Written by Gabrielle Mirabella
Music by Ernie Bird

PRE-INTRO CREDITS: Catchup Crew, Patreon.
INTRO MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: Hello! And welcome to another episode of “What will she do next?” I’m your host Gabrielle Mirabella and together with composer Ernie Bird, (**ERNIE:** Hello!) we’ve created a podcast that celebrates some of our *favorite* historical women! On today’s episode one brave woman uses her voice to inspire change. This episode was written by myself with music & production by Ernie Bird (**ERNIE:** Hello!) Our featured guest stars include:

JONATHON: Jonathon Timpanelli!

GABRIELLE REID: Gabrielle Reid!

C.E.: And, C.E. Smith!

GABRIELLE: And playing today’s leading role we have...

YASMEEN: Yasmeen Sulieman!

GABRIELLE & ERNIE: Enjoy!

GABRIELLE: Are you feeling...stuck? Does the challenge presented before you seem pretty “unsolvable”? Or, perhaps, like many of us right now, you feel confined; with no place to go, no room to grow? Well, don’t worry, you’re not alone.

Join us, as we investigate seemingly “impossible” situations from the lives of history’s most famous women, and ask ourselves...what *will* she do next?

THEME SONG PLAYS:

*“What will she do next?
What will she do next?
Her aim is true but will she see it through?
Oh, what will she do... next?”*

GABRIELLE: Today’s historical woman: Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm; Teacher, Politician, the first Black Woman in Congress, and the first to run for President of the United States of America. Now, before she gets too “stuck”...

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SHIRLEY: Excuse me. Could we try something *new* this episode? Maybe shake up the system?

GABRIELLE: Not at all, Congresswoman Chisholm!

SHIRLEY: Thank you. I'll take it from here... Like she said, my name is Shirley Chisholm. And, I'm here to prove how everyday citizens, just like yourselves, have the power to stand up for what's right, and the power to make change happen. But before we do all that, let's *first* take a look back...

(Heading back in time -the sounds of an old radio- static. We hear an early 70's political anthem sung by students.)

STUDENTS:

MY VOICE IS YOUR VOICE!

MY VOTE IS A VOTE FOR THE FUTURE!

THE FUTURE... THE FUTURE...

(The radio station changes. We are in a different setting.)

SHIRLEY: I was born on November 30th, 1924 in Brooklyn, New York. My parents, Charles and Ruby St. Hill were both immigrants from the island country of Barbados. Not long after I came along, I was joined by my two little sisters Muriel and Odessa.

I just loved to learn! By the time I had finished high school I was top of my class. And, after that, Brooklyn College where I studied to become a teacher.

After graduation I began searching for employment. But, although I had graduated with top marks, finding a job proved difficult. Back in the 1940's, employment opportunities for women were scarce, and even more so for women of color.

DIRECTOR: Thank you for coming in, Miss. I'll see you out now...

SHIRLEY: Did I get the job?

DIRECTOR: Pardon?

SHIRLEY: I have everything you need; the skills, the education, the talent...

DIRECTOR: Yes, but...

SHIRLEY: At least give me a try.

DIRECTOR: Let me be frank, dear. This is a *leadership* position and you look, well... *too young*.

SHIRLEY: Alright. Let *me* be frank. I think you're wrong.

SHIRLEY: Well, I got the job. Director of daycare centers all across New York.

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Education was my passion. It gave me purpose and joy. But, it also gave me insight into the lack of resources available to the Black and Puerto Rican families of my city. I knew this was wrong and I knew it had to change! But, it would be a few more years before I figured out how.

(The radio changes. We are in a different setting.)

Let's fast forward to the 1960's. We're still in Brooklyn. But, I'm a bit older, and I'm ready to make change happen. That's why we're *here*: The 17th District Democratic Club. A group where, once a month, residents are able to speak with their elected officials, members of the State Assembly.

ASSEMBLYMAN: Go ahead. What's your question?

SHIRLEY: The Assemblymen sat high on a platform while, one by one, the residents approached the microphone.

(Mic feedback.)

CITIZEN #1: Sir, sanitation continues to skip our block. They drive right past us on their way to the white communities...

CITIZEN #2: I've been without work for months now. All I ask for is an opportunity.

SHIRLEY: While the residents spoke, the assemblymen sat, quietly listening. And, then, do you know what they did next? ...Absolutely nothing.

ASSEMBLYMAN: We'll deal with all this next meeting...Goodnight!

CITIZEN #1 & #2 sigh/groan.

SHIRLEY: So, the next meeting, I decided to do something. I walked right up to the microphone, and I spoke.

ASSEMBLYMAN: Yes, Miss. What's your question?

SHIRLEY SINGS.

SHIRLEY:
WHAT IS THE USE OF THIS COUNCIL?

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ASSEMBLYMAN: *Excuse me?*

SHIRLEY:
WHY WON'T ANYTHING GET DONE?

ASSEMBLYMAN: One question at a time!

SHIRLEY:
I WOULD MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE, COUNCILMEN.
I'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN.

THE PEOPLE OF THIS CITY WAIT PATIENTLY, QUIETLY.
YET, ALL THEY SEEM TO HEAR IS, "WAIT YOUR TURN."
WHILE THE LEADERS OF THE BOARD SIT PASSIVELY, SILENTLY.
AS IF THE PROBLEMS OF THE PEOPLE WEREN'T THEIR CONCERN!

YOU MADE A PROMISE TO KEEP THIS CITY SAFE AND FREE,
AND, IF WE CANNOT COUNT ON YOU, THEN IT MIGHT AS WELL BE ME!

OH, WHEN SOMETHING BREAKS, YOU FIX IT!
IF YOU STEP IN A MESS, DO NOT DISMISS IT!
THE WAY IT WAS DOESN'T WORK ANYMORE...
SO, WHY NOT
SO, WHY NOT
SO, WHY NOT TRY SOMETHING NEW?

(The crowd claps)

(Shirley's narration continues)

SHIRLEY: After I spoke that night, do you know what the assembly did next? They actually did their jobs!

CITIZEN #1 + CITIZEN #2: Finally!

SHIRLEY: And, over the next few years, I worked with other women of the group to raise money for the community. Women were the backbone of the club, yet we weren't allowed to handle our own money. You bet I spoke to the council again. But, this time I wasn't alone.

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SHIRLEY:
WHAT IS THE USE OF THIS INSULT?

WOMAN #1: Tell them, Shirley!

SHIRLEY:
WITHOUT US, NOTHING WOULD GET DONE!

ASSEMBLYMAN: *Ladies!*

SHIRLEY+WOMEN:
PLEASE MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE, GENTLEMEN.
WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN.

SHIRLEY: THE WOMEN IN THE ROOM WORK TIRELESSLY. ENDLESSLY.
(WOMEN: ENDLESSLY.)

SHIRLEY: YET, ALL THEY SEEM TO HEAR IS, "KEEP YOUR PLACE".

(WOMEN: TELL ME, WHAT'S A WOMAN'S PLACE?)

SHIRLEY: THESE WOMEN HAVE SO MUCH TO OFFER US. LUCKY US!

SHIRLEY+WOMEN: SO, IT'S TIME WE TOOK UP JUST A BIT MORE SPACE!

SHIRLEY: YOU HAVE A DUTY, YOU HAVE THE PEOPLE'S TRUST.

SHIRLEY+WOMEN: BUT, IF THEY CAN'T RELY ON YOU, THEN I GUESS IT'S UP TO US!

'CAUSE, WHEN SOMETHING BREAKS, YOU FIX IT!
IF YOU STEP IN A MESS, YOU CAN'T DISMISS IT!
THE WAY IT WAS DOESN'T WORK ANYMORE.
SO, WHY NOT
SO, WHY NOT
SO, WHY NOT SOMETHING NEW?

SHIRLEY: The women of Brooklyn joined forces that day and won. And, in 1964 they elected me as their New York State Assemblywoman.

WOMAN #1: Yay, Shirley!! Wool!

SHIRLEY: My work in Albany was important, but to truly change the broken system in New York, I had to go farther. So, in 1969 I ran for Congress. People shook their heads. A Black Woman had never done it before! But, what they didn't realize was that I wasn't running alone.

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(Shirley on the streets of Brooklyn.)

SHIRLEY:
MY VOICE IS YOUR VOICE!
MY VOTE IS A VOTE FOR YOUR FUTURE.
I SPEAK ONLY FOR YOU.
NEW YORK, I AM HERE WITH YOU!

(People begin to gather around Shirley.)

PEOPLE: MY VOICE IS YOUR VOICE...
SHIRLEY: LET THEM HEAR OUR VOICES!
PEOPLE: MY VOTE IS A VOTE FOR THE FUTURE...
SHIRLEY: I AM HERE FOR YOU! NEW YORK...
PEOPLE: THE WORLD CANNOT CHANGE
SHIRLEY+PEOPLE: WITHOUT ME AND YOU!

SHIRLEY: And, do you know what the people of my district did next? They elected me as their Congresswoman.

SHIRLEY + PEOPLE:
THE WAY IT WAS DOESN'T WORK ANYMORE!
SO, WHY NOT
SO, WHY NOT
SO, WHY NOT TRY SOMETHING NEW?

SHIRLEY: I entered my first year of Congress fighting! They even gave me a nickname, "Fighting Shirley Chishom." Has a nice ring to it.

Now, the first thing you do when you enter Congress is to be assigned a "committee"; A group that focuses on one very important issue.

(The hit of a gavel. Men convening, talking, laughing.)

SPEAKER: Committee assignments are on their way.

SHIRLEY: I couldn't wait to hear my assignment! Would I be on the Education committee? Or Housing? Employment? How best could I help the people of New York City?

SPEAKER: Congresswoman Chisholm?

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SHIRLEY: Yes, Speaker McCormack! I'm here!

SPEAKER: Let's see where they've put you...*(reading)* huh...well, I don't know how many cows they have in Brooklyn, but you've been assigned to... Agriculture!

(The hit of a gavel. Men convening, talking, laughing.)

SHIRLEY: *Agriculture?*

TRANSITION MUSIC.

SHIRLEY: Did you say *Agriculture?*

SPEAKER: Yes, Congresswoman. That is your assignment.

SHIRLEY: But! ...But, I can't help the people of Brooklyn through *farming!*

(The men grumble in confusion.)

REP. GILBERT: *(kindly)* Congresswoman, may we speak for a moment?

SHIRLEY: Representative Jacob H. Gilbert of the Bronx pulled me aside, guiding me towards his office.

REP. GILBERT: I know it's frustrating, Shirley. But, new members rarely get what they want.

SHIRLEY: This is not about what I *want*. This is about what's best for the people I represent. Don't you see that?

REP. GILBERT: I do. But, this isn't Brooklyn. If you break the rules in Washington, there's no coming back... It's just the way it is.

SHIRLEY: But..!

REP. GILBERT: Just *think* about it and come back in when you're ready.

(Shirley is alone with her thoughts.)

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SHIRLEY: If I fight this I could risk my entire political career...But, if I don't fight for what's right, I risk so much more...What will I do?

UPBEAT MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: Good question, Congresswoman...What *will* you do?
But, before we find out, let's first take a look at her options....
Will Shirley choose option 1?

SHIRLEY: Fine! They can have this one. But, in a few years, I'll really make a difference!

GABRIELLE: Or, will she choose option 2?

SHIRLEY: Agriculture doesn't sound *terrible*. Maybe I'll move to a farm!

(Cow moo.)

GABRIELLE: Or, will she choose option 3?

SHIRLEY: The only reason I'm here is because of the people I serve. No way am I keeping quiet.

GABRIELLE: Now that we can clearly see her options, which one do YOU think she will choose? Take a moment to think it over...

THINKING MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: Alright, got your answer? Now, let's find out which option she will choose.

(The hit of a gavel as men talk, laugh.)

SPEAKER: Take your seats! We're back... I'd like to first look at this newest legislation...

(The sounds of men are hushed by high heels walking across the floor.)

SPEAKER: *(confused by the silence)* What? What's happening?

(The sound of microphone feedback.)

SHIRLEY: Mr. Speaker, I have something to say.

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SPEAKER: This is highly irregular, Congresswoman.

SHIRLEY: Not for me it isn't.

My fellow members of Congress: I think it would be hard to imagine an assignment that is less relevant to my background or to the needs of the predominantly Black and Puerto Rican people who elected me, many of whom are unemployed, hungry and badly housed, than the one I was given. Therefore I officially reject my committee assignment.

SHIRLEY: And, do you know what Congress did next? They changed my assignment. And, from that day on it was clear exactly *who* I was fighting for...

PEOPLE: MY VOICE IS YOUR VOICE...

SHIRLEY: THEY WILL HEAR OUR VOICES!

PEOPLE: MY VOTE IS A VOTE FOR THE FUTURE...

SHIRLEY: I AM HERE FOR AMERICA...

PEOPLE: THE WORLD CANNOT CHANGE

SHIRLEY+PEOPLE: WITHOUT ME AND YOU!

SHIRLEY:

CAUSE WHEN SOMETHING BREAKS YOU FIX IT
IF YOU STEP IN A MESS DO NOT DISMISS IT.
IF THE WAY IT WAS DOESN'T WORK ANYMORE...
THEN WHY NOT
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GABRIELLE: Shirley Chisholm was faced with a seemingly impossible situation. But, no matter the consequence, she remained a catalyst for change. So, the next time you feel stuck, I wonder, what will you do next?

KID'S CORNER MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: At the end of every episode we are featuring a very special guest star...*you!* Today we have Molly from the Small But Mighty Podcast! Molly's podcast is all about kids and making an impact in the world.

GABRIELLE & ERNIE: Hi, Molly!

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GABRIELLE: Tell us all about your favorite historical woman!

MOLLY: Hi my name Molly and I live in Des Moines. Today I am going to be talking about Kate Sheppard. She is my favorite historical woman from history. She was born in 1847 in Liverpool, England. She grew up in England then moved to New Zealand when she was twenty-five. Kate is most remembered for her fight for women's rights, and thanks to her now we can vote, wear any clothes we want and play sports. She most inspired me because -pictures this- 74 ice-cream trucks by each other, she had a longer role of signatures than that. I know, amazing!

End of Episode.