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March is Women's History Month -

Celebrate Her!

By April M. Merenda, Assistant Professor, Hospitality Management, Industry Professional at St John's University and co-founder, Gutsy Women Travel, LLC

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Since 1987, the United States has formally recognized the month of March as National Women's History Month, a time when the nation shines a well-deserved light on the amazing accomplishments of strong, determined women in the U.S. As the co-founder of Gutsy Women Travel, the largest U.S. niche marketing company promoting small group travel designed exclusively for women, I have seen first-hand the determination and resiliency of the type of women we celebrate.

Think about Harriet Tubman, Amelia Earhart, Eleanor Roosevelt, Gloria Steinem, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Kamala Harris — just a sampling of famous women in the United States who have spearheaded groundbreaking moments that have impacted lives forever. From Susan B. Anthony's groundwork in the Women's Suffrage movement and her fight for women's right to vote to famed "firsters" like the first woman on the United States Supreme Court, Sandra Day O'Connor; the first woman to rocket into space, Sally Ride; and the first woman CEO at General Motors, Mary Barra. Every day women continue to amaze us with their ability to blast upward and outward, exemplifying "... the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world," and take all of us to new and exciting heights. *(Randa Yosry, 2021)*

American women are unabashedly standing front and center in every aspect of our history, our culture, and our society making large contributions in business, education, the arts and sciences, sports, politics, the workplace, and the home. We celebrate not only the famous newsmakers but the "extraordinary everywoman" — the mothers, daughters, sisters, friends who are shaping the future. The slogan, "You've come a long way, baby," originally a tag line for a cigarette ad of the 60s became the mantra of the feminist movement of the 60s and 70s, thankfully steering away from an advertising image of women smoking cigarettes. *(Stanford University, 2022)* Women have indeed come a long way evolving past the surface traits of 1960s-era independence and marking

significant trailblazing moments that will and should forever be remembered.

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, women comprise over half the population (51 percent) and continue to display their smarts, outnumbering men in earning the most bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees, according to Mark J. Perry, Senior Fellow of the American Enterprise Institute (2020). One thing to note in the AEI report, though, is that we have a long way to go in earning degrees in the STEM field. The report went to note that women earned the majority of doctoral degrees in 2019 for the 11th straight year and outnumbered men in grad school 141 to 100. *(Perry, 2020)*

Similarly, the non-profit Catalyst (2020) noted, “Despite a record-high number of Fortune 500 women CEOs in 2020, there are still nearly 13 companies run by a man for every company run by a woman.” According to a recent Fortune 500 list, the number of female Fortune 500 CEOs hit an all-time high of 41 in 2021, up from just two in 2000. Admittedly, these are low numbers compared to the number of men CEOs (459), but we are making steady inroads into the C Suite. *(Quantic.edu, 2022)*

Despite the pandemic of 2019-2022 when many women were forced to return to their homes and work remotely, join the gig economy, or even leave their jobs entirely, in a survey conducted by American Express, women-owned businesses represent 42% of all businesses — nearly 13 million — employ 9.4 million people and generate over \$1.9 trillion in annual sales to our economy. *(Florida International University, 2022)* Yes, women are continuing to crack glass ceilings with their ability to “bring home the bacon as well as fry it up in the pan.” *(Retroist, 2018)*

In my own role as president of Gutsy Women Travel, pioneering and designing international small group travel for women only, I have partnered with thousands of women over the past 20 years and marveled at the independent, go-get-it spirit of these American women. Creating female-centric travel itineraries I introduced for the first time the opportunity for women to jet out of their comfort zones, forge new relationships with like-minded women, and venture on a trip of self-discovery as they themselves become a part of the larger mosaic of women whom we celebrate each March. Women travelers like Pat, a retired senior bank executive, and independent consultant; Joan, a very successful realtor; and Valerie, a homemaker, and business owner; explore the

world to dive deeper into themselves and cultivate their mindfulness of the world beyond their home borders. These three women, who are highlighted in my business memoir, *It's Your Life. Live IT!*, signify the yearn to discover and experience new adventures – trailblazers in their role as “everywoman”.
(*Merenda, 2021, pp 29, 40, 41*)

Today women are traveling on their own more than men. In a recent study conducted by Overseas Adventure Travel (oattravel.com), the organization found that while 47% of travelers [who] register[ed] as ‘solo’ travelers, an astounding 85% of those were women. (*OAT 2021*) Internet searches for “Solo Women Travel” are surging, growing to a jaw-dropping 230% increase in 2019. (*Solo Traveler, 2020-2021*) Google reported a 230% increase in searches on the words, ‘solo female travel’. (*Solo Traveler, 2020-2021*)

I knew there was a growing demand for women-centric travel when I launched my travel business shortly after 9/11. Despite naysayers who questioned the timing, and a travel industry adjusting to dramatically different parameters, I successfully navigated uncharted territory facilitating small groups of women-only travel departures worldwide.

Over the years some of our trips have experienced the worst-case scenarios including an evacuation during the Arab Spring revolution, dangerous weather conditions, aircraft equipment issues, sickness, and all matter of travel mishaps, but never could I have imagined a scenario that would shut down worldwide leisure travel as the Pandemic did in 2020. Living in the suburbs of New York City I watched as my world became the epicenter of the virus and once again, the travel industry was turned on its head. But, we women persevere. In June 2021, we were back traveling and I led our first group of women to Iceland – I dubbed them the Pandemic Pioneers – where vast landscapes, cascading waterfalls, and the geothermal waters of the Blue Lagoon washed away the mental and physical effects of our forced isolation.

There are countless, extraordinary American women who have earned their place to be celebrated to the fullest during Women’s History Month. As an educator at St. John’s University, I am particularly proud of the self-confident young women I have mentored to be tomorrow’s leaders, particularly in the fields of business, hospitality, and tourism. They surprise me as they display their creative spirit and intellectual curiosity to become productive members of

society.

I marvel each day at all the incredible, creative, daring, curious women whom I have journeyed with on my tours and those students who I mentor to be the next generation of daring women. All are fearless flyers in their own right.

I know Amelia Earhart is saluting them with a celebratory fly-by. I salute them, too, each day and especially this month.



About the author:

April M. Merenda has held key positions within the hospitality and tourism industry for over four decades, most notably as the co-founder and president of Gutsy Women Travel, LLC., www.gutsywomentravel.com, the largest niche marketing company promoting travel designed exclusively for women and their

unique interests. April is also an Assistant Professor at St. John's University and Program Coordinator for the MSIHM program www.stjohns.edu/ihm at St. John's University Collins College of Professional Studies. She recently published her business memoir "It's Your Life...Live IT!" Which is a testament to how resiliency, saying yes, and following your passions led her to become a pioneer in the travel and hospitality industries.

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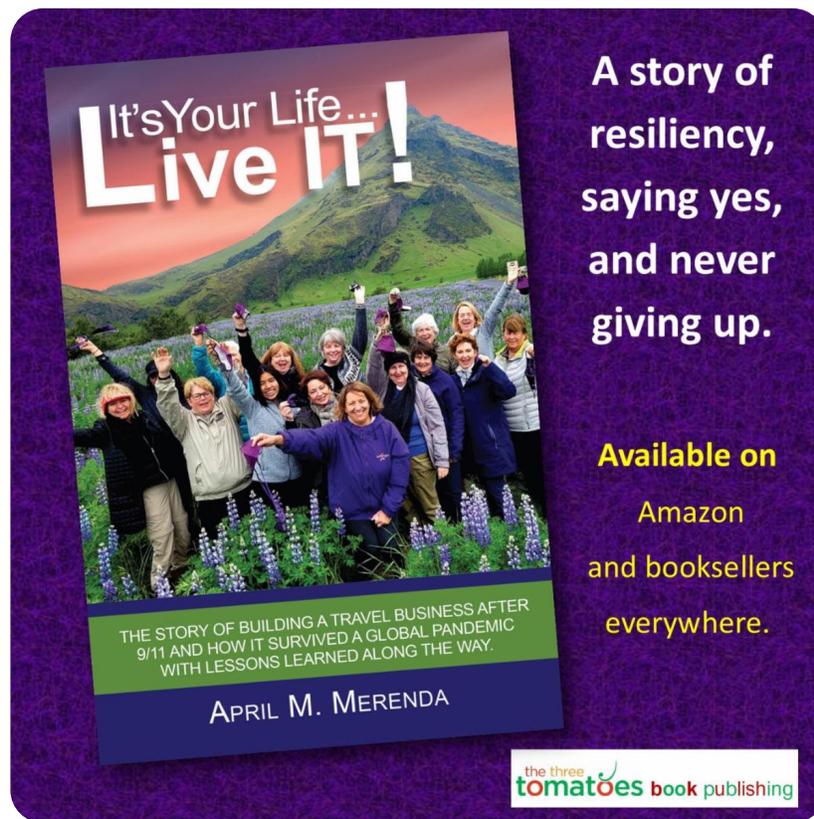
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My business memoir "It's Your Life..Live IT" shares how my travel company Gutsy Women Travel was created under the Icahn business portfolio so be certain to watch the HBO Max documentary [Carl Icahn: The Restless Billionaire!](#)

Trailer link: <https://lnkd.in/dDwyxGRZ>





"It's Your Life...Live IT!"™

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