

# Women in their fifties *love to bend the...*

Don't hold back, writes the author Bella Pollen. Life doesn't follow the rules - so why should we?



**BELLA POLLEN, 55, is a bestselling novelist whose books include *Hunting Unicorns*. Previously, under the name Arabella Pollen, she ran a successful fashion label. She is married with four children. Her memoir, *Meet Me in the In-Between*, is out this month.**

I've never been very good at being told what I should or shouldn't do. It's more about working things out for myself than anarchy. I grew up in Sixties New York. It was the time of civil resistance, Martin Luther King and the Black Is Beautiful movement. It seemed that the only people doing anything interesting were those kicking against the system. I took note - rules and the bending of them is how we shape the world we want to live in.

Everyone needs a code to live by, but rules shouldn't be followed without question. Too often they veer towards the petty, restrictive and unimaginative. No, no, no is hardly an inspiring call to arms and it brings out the contrarian in me. I've spent a disproportionate amount of my life doing the opposite of what others have advised - you can't start a business at 19, marry a gambler, call

yourself a feminist and enjoy being wolf-whistled at. You can't flirt with danger, run away from your marriage, run away from yourself...

Well, I could and I did, though others were eventually proved right. I had no design background when I fell into the fashion world, and though for a while it was a grand and exciting adventure, ultimately, I was no match for the deadening mindset of corporate thinking. A clash of both culture and temperament put paid to marriage at 23 with Giacomo, an Italian art dealer.

**"I've learnt to write my own rules"**

I regret neither. I'm cursed with a restless spirit and tend to find out about the world by crashing through experience. Still, if there's freedom and opportunity in ignoring prevailing wisdom, there is risk and heartache too. From the salutary to the mortifying, I've learnt some tough life lessons over the years - about staying true to myself, about the value of friendship. I've discovered that home is a concept, not a geographical place, and that you can't love another person without fighting them too.

Where does that leave me in my fifties? Well, I think I understand my heart better now and what drives it. I've learnt to write my own rules, big or small, according to what makes me happy. If that's dancing on the table, starting a

new business should the mood take me, or travelling the world alone, so be it.

Some things never change though. I guess I'll always be caught between opposing desires - feeling safe, but warming my fingers on the edge of danger. Being married, being part of the family, but needing to spend time on my own. London and the west of America, the two extremes I call home. As a flawed feminist, I will continue to march for equal pay and rights while celebrating that men and women are fundamentally different.

Rules should be more about integrity than morality. I don't want to feel constrained by age any more than I want to feel constrained by gender, race or an agenda set for me by others. Women in their fifties? We're a powerful force. If there was ever a time to kick against the system it's now. We must be willing to bend the world into the shape it needs to be. To hell with the disapprovers, the naysayers - negative voices too complacent or scared to challenge the status quo. Life doesn't follow the rules, so why should we? Besides, it's fun to make a little trouble out there. **w&h**

*Meet Me in the In-Between* by Bella Pollen (Mantle) is out on 18 May.

