

Kathleen Hanna

The concert is in a smoke-filled dark room, neon lights flashing and hot, sweaty bodies jumping together. On the stage is a group of four – guitar, drums, bass, microphone. Kathleen Hanna, the singer, leans into her microphone and shouts. “All girls to the front,” she says. “I’m not kidding. All girls to the front!” The crowd is confused. This Bikini Kill concert is full of boys who love the punk-rock scene, feminists who are inspired by the band and their music, and drunk youths who are just out for a party. And this woman at the microphone is calling the girls to the front. “All boys be cool, for once in your lives,” Kathleen continues. “Go back... back. Back.” She starts to wave and smile at the girls pushing to the front. The boys are forced back, and the show begins.

Kathleen Hanna is, among other things, an American singer, musician, artist, feminist, activist, punk zine writer and a founder of the Riot Grrrl movement from the 1990s. She screamed for change, she showed up on her own terms, she wrote songs and poems and stories and cried and laughed and lived supporting the women around her. She is an inspiration to me because of her strong will and determination to find equality because she told her truth and thoughts without letting people put words into her mouth. She is such a strong, powerful voice in the feminist community it is awe-inspiring. Kathleen Hanna stood up to the people who were discriminating against her and every other woman around her. She was one of the few people who stood up to men and empowered and encouraged other women to do the same, through zines, music, and her powerful voice.

Kathleen Hanna, born in 1968, first became interested in feminism when she was nine, in 1977. Her mum – a housewife to most eyes, especially her unapproving husband, a feminist to others – took her to a DC rally where Gloria Steinem (a feminist activist and social political leader) spoke. From then on Kathleen was obsessed with feminism. When she went to university, in

the late eighties, she and her friends set up a photo exhibition that dealt with AIDs, feminism, and sexism. The photos were taken down before the exhibit opened, so she opened an independent feminist art gallery shortly after and began doing spoken word poetry in the gallery. Spoken word led to music. Kathleen tossed between a few feminist punk rock bands before settling on beginning a band called Bikini Kill.

Bikini Kill was a band heavily involved in the Riot Grrrl movement. When Bikini Kill began touring in 1991, Kathleen noticed their concerts were full of men and these men were very aggressive and violent, especially to women and girls attending the show. Kathleen began asking girls to come to the front of the crowd so they would feel safe and kicked misbehaving men out of her concerts.

The Riot Grrrl movement from the 1990s was founded by a group of women who strongly believed in women's rights. The movement began with women musicians meeting to discuss the male-dominated punk scene. Riot Grrrl grew from there, to more meetings where women and girls could express their feelings, thoughts, and opinions. Another way to spread the culture of Riot Grrrl was zines (mini magazines created by hand that were easy to share and distribute), written by feminist punk bands, musicians, and fans of these fabulous women. Subjects in these zines were feminism, sexism, racism, rape, anarchism, and gay and lesbian rights. Kathleen started a zine named after her band where she shared her thoughts about feminism. Kathleen was also a prominent contributor in other zines, not just her own.

The Riot Grrrl movement started dying down in the late 1990s due to the bands involved breaking up and the members moving on. Bikini Kill broke up in 1998, but Kathleen did not end sharing her opinions, continuing to create art, selling and publishing zines and writing feminist pieces on her website. Not long after, she started writing and recording songs in her bedroom

with a \$40 drum machine. The album, Julie Ruin, had 15 songs on it. Kathleen said Julie Ruin helped her remember she was just a person who liked being creative.

“Girl’s bedrooms sometimes can be this space of real creativity. The problem is that these bedrooms are all cut off from each other. I wanted the Julie Ruin record to sound like a girl from her bedroom made this record but then didn’t just throw it away or it wasn’t just in her diary, but she took it out and shared it with people.”

- Kathleen Hanna

Kathleen recruited two friends to help her perform songs from the Julie Ruin record live, and from there Le Tigre was born. Le Tigre was an electronic rock band; their music was about feminism and the LGBT community. During the period Le Tigre were together, Kathleen began feeling ill, tired, and not able to sing. After a while she announced she would not be performing anymore and would be leaving Le Tigre, which crushed her and a lot of the feminist community.

Not long after Kathleen left Le Tigre, she was diagnosed with late-stage Lyme disease, a disease transmitted to humans by ticks. She went undiagnosed for a long time, which caused her to have problems concentrating, vertigo, dizziness and pain in her joints. Kathleen started taking medication to treat it and slowly started getting better, embracing the simpler life she led when she wasn’t performing music. Instead of performing, she dedicated her time to helping young feminists and female punk rockers rise to success and embrace themselves for who they were. In 2015 tests came back that she was Lyme free. In 2016 she released an album, *Hit Reset*.

Kathleen Hanna has led a very inspirational life. All through it she has faced difficulties with men, with music, and with the walls that kept men and women apart. She has prised those walls apart. I find her very inspirational because feminism is something I care about maybe more than anything else. She is the figure I look up to because she never stopped fighting in

every part of her life, from her bands to her zines, from her disease to her incredibly loud voice that shocked crowds with its powerful tones and screaming rage. Because Kathleen Hanna never gave up, I never give up.

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