

# REAL LIFE



hometown  
AUSTIN



**TABLE TALK**  
“Technology is amazing, but it can’t replace face time with friends,” says Kristin, standing.

EVERYDAY HERO

## Front-Yard Friends

Kristin Schell turned a picnic table into the heartbeat of her community — and launched a movement

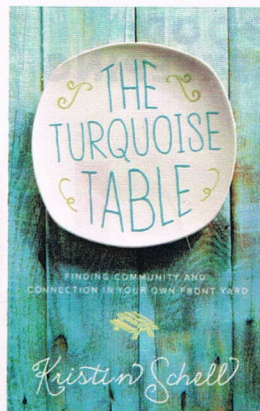
**GOOD FENCES MAY MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS**, but Austin mom of four Kristin Schell craved connection. “I was always crazy-busy,” she says. “Everything was fine, but we were missing family-and-friends time, and social media was playing a larger and larger role in our lives. I wanted more eye-to-eye than ‘i-device’ contact, but didn’t know how to start.” She found her answer by happy accident when a picnic table she’d ordered for a barbecue was mistakenly left in her front yard by deliverymen. “I suddenly knew it was right where it belonged,” says Kristin, 48. “I thought, *What if we took all the activities that we do inside, like homework and hanging out, moved them to the front yard and started living more visibly?*” She painted the table turquoise, her favorite color, and sat down at it one October morning in 2013. Five minutes later, a neighbor stopped by to say hello — someone Kristin had never met, though they lived three houses apart. Within →

LIVE  
LIGHTER

A hug a day keeps the doctor away by helping to reduce stress.

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#### GET MORE INSPIRATION!

Stuffed with tips, recipes and uplifting anecdotes, it's a great guide to building true community where you live.

and inspirational stories of how tables have brought people together. Versions of Kristin's table are now in over 40 states and seven countries. "They're in Australia!" says Kristin. "I'm touched that this resonates on the other side of the world."

Kristin has expanded her mission by partnering with ReWork Project, an Austin nonprofit that employs formerly homeless people as woodworkers, to produce turquoise tables for sale. She will soon also launch a home-goods line, and her book (above) comes out this month. Her ultimate goal? "For people to care for one another again. Let's put away what divides us and love each other for who we are." Her tips for starting your own front-yard table:

**JUST GET OUT THERE** Sit at your table while families are walking to the bus stop, for instance, or ask moms to bring their kids over on Friday evening in their PJs to run around before bed. "It's about inviting others to join you," says Kristin.

**BE CREATIVE** No front yard? Look for other places people naturally gather, like church patios. "The table isn't the hero of the story," says Kristin. "People are. The table just gives us a welcoming place to start." —Christine Kopaczewski

days, more neighbors dropped by, and Kristin knew she'd struck a chord. "We all long to connect with each other in meaningful ways," she says. "When I grew up, we were front-yard people—out in the neighborhood until called home for dinner. I wanted that for my family." Besides hanging out at the table, once a week Kristin began hosting "Front Yard Fridays," a neighborhood get-together. "It's come-as-you-are easy," she says.

The table also became a makeshift community center for bake sales and school-supply drives for refugee children. "I think of it as the old village well," says Kristin. "People gather there and talk about what matters."

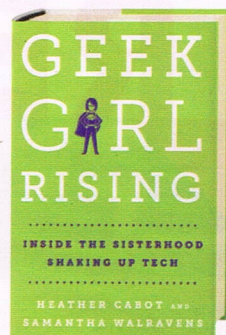
Before long, similar tables began popping up all over Austin. "It became a movement," says Kristin. In response, she launched [theturquoisetable.com](http://theturquoisetable.com), a website with recipes for tabletop treats



## PRETTY SMART *kind cycle*

### BLING THAT GIVES BACK

Look good, do good! Profits from jewelry in the new collection from the social enterprise group Me to We provides income for 1,400 artisans in Kenya. Each semiprecious stone used also funds a specific local cause—sales of sodalite convertible-wrap bracelets (\$50; left), help provide clean water, for instance. [shopmetowe.com](http://shopmetowe.com)



## LOW-TECH TRICKS *from* HIGH-TECH CHICKS

Author Heather Cabot got breakout women in Silicon Valley and beyond to spill all their secrets in her new book. Try them—no coding skills required!

### 1. Unplug

Device-free dinners, no-tech bedtimes, etc., give your brain the breathing room it needs to process and plan, says Cabot, who interviewed top techies for *Geek Girl Rising*, written with coauthor Samantha Walravens. Block off the time on the family calendar and connect with one another instead.

### 2. Recharge

Exercise is the go-to rejuvenator for most of the tech smarties Cabot talked to, "but it could also be a manicure or meditation," she says. Who has the time? You do, if you get up (and go to bed) an hour earlier. Knock off your workout at dawn for an energized start to a more productive day.

### 3. Be fearless

"The tech stars I talked to identified problems worth solving and never took no for an answer," says Cabot. Like Debbie Sterling, founder of girls' engineering-toy company GoldieBlox, who was shown the door by big toy companies before she took to Kickstarter to prove them all wrong. Atta girl.

—Rachel Rothman, GH Chief Technologist