

Wendyl Nissen on being 'The Supportive Wife'

**Wendyl Nissen: Time for women to abandon weight of expectations**

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"You'd still fog up a few mirrors," said the man selling me my new car.

"Good to know," I said hesitantly, unsure whether what he just said was offensive or flattering.

We had been talking about the possibility that I might have to view my new car down in the workshop. "You might get a few wolf whistles while you're down there," he said. "Sorry about that."

"Oh for goodness sake," I said. "I think there are much younger and fitter models than me to get excited about!" Which is when the conversation turned to mirrors.

As I drove home in my sensible Toyota Corolla I regretted the fact that the Prius we had bought months earlier officially belonged to my husband. I was so busy trying to work out how I could get him to agree to swap that I forgot about the smoke and mirrors thing. "I'm the Green Goddess, so technically the Prius, being an environmentally friendly vehicle, should be driven by me," I said after he had looked down his nose at the Corolla.

"You can drive it," he said. "It's still mine though."

"Fine," I grumped. "Anyway, apparently I can still fog up a few mirrors, so there."

"That's nice dear," he mumbled from behind his laptop.

A friend came around for dinner the next night and we had a brief discussion about how people perceive me. Well, the ones she talks to anyway: "Oh, they're all going on about how you've put on weight," she said in the way that women in their 80s can with no idea that they're striking a dagger through the heart of your self-esteem.

It's true that the kilos I lost in a flurry of gym training and not drinking or eating much last year have found their way safely back to my hips and stomach. They were welcomed back by the four months of high stress involved in selling my much-loved house and then buying two new ones, while also supporting my husband as he launched a few books, including my own.

**"Welcome home," the vodkas said to my fat cells as I poured them down my throat. "Come on in," the takeaways bought in a hurry because there was no time to cook announced as they greedily fell into my mouth.**

Meanwhile, my husband, who has put on a bit of weight too, has never been more popular. "I had no idea your father was so hot," a woman recently said to his son. I didn't like hearing that very much. I may be still going on about it four weeks later.

At times like this I look for larger women role models to make me feel better. Adele is a good one, so is Dawn French. "They might be big, but they're awfully good at what they do," I tell myself. But deep down I know that the forces of age and body shape take their toll on women every day of their lives. Millions of women get on their scales in the morning and allow a few numbers to dictate how their day will go. Up a few kilos and the world is about to end. Down a few kilos and they skip off to work. The reality is that those few kilos could be dictated by something as simple as holding on to a bit of fluid.

Last week I was asked if I would feature in a magazine about body shape. I would be required to have a picture taken in a slip and say that I was happy with my body. I just couldn't do it. Years of diets and pressure to be thin had taken their toll on my self-esteem.

In my year as a supportive wife I've tried very hard to also support my daughters. To not be the kind of mother who comments on the shape and size of my daughter every time I see her. Instead, I look at all three of my daughters and say what I am thinking. "You look so beautiful."

The other day one of my daughters told me she had lost weight.

"I'm not at all happy about it, I like my body the way it is," she said.

I didn't know what to say. Could this be a turning point in women's lives where weight loss is not seen as the ultimate achievement on a daily basis?

"Good on you," I finally said. "Glass of wine?"

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