

BOOKS

The Fat Girl's Guide To Life On Paperback

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With the April 2004 release of her much applauded book *The Fat Girl's Guide To Life*, 33-year-old writer and comedian Wendy Shanker made a national assertion: Fat is a beautiful thing! Since then, she has been an active proponent in an important societal discussion regarding weight, and the stigmas attached to the appearance of anyone who doesn't reflect the size of the latest cover model. Her inspiring words have been heard on a variety of programs including *The View*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS Sunday Morning*, *The Jane Pauley Show*, and *Life & Style*. Shanker has worked tirelessly to raise the self-esteem and self-image of the millions of people who feel inadequate due to some aspect of their physique. Their positive responses cover the first few pages of the new paperback edition of *The Fat Girl's Guide To Life*.

In the past few months, Hers at Macy's presented a series of Fashion Presentations for women sizes 14W-24W. **The Long-Islander** caught up with Wendy on a break from her hectic travel schedule as the host and comic relief of each show.

The Fat Girl's Guide To Life has been on the shelves for more than one year. How have your readers responded to

your words?

The response has been huge and shocking to me. I thought my mom and best friend would buy a copy, and that would have made my day. But this book quite clearly has touched a chord that has been waiting to be touched. I think it was a combination of the subject matter and the timing. It came out around the same time that the film *Super Size Me* was released, and the book *The Obesity Myth* came out. There were a couple of other publications that were opening up people's minds about how to think about fat, style, and lifestyle, and all these different issues. I thought the title was going to either turn people on or turn them off, and I was really lucky because I fell into the turn-on category.

And you've given that response a dedication, per se, in the new paperback edition?

The best part of this experience, besides the media response and selling a lot of copies (*laughs*), has been with the letters I received from women saying, "I read your book, I always thought I was nuts, and now I'm reading your words and understanding someone else is feeling the same way I do. I'm not crazy, I'm not evil, I don't hate myself, I'm just fat." So we put in a



Photos Courtesy Wendy Shanker

Writer and comedian Wendy Shanker's book *The Fat Girl's Guide To Life* (Inset) is now available on paperback, after its hardcover release in April 2004. The author has appeared on television programs including *The View*, *Good Morning America* and *CBS Sunday Morning* to share her belief that fat is beautiful.

Fat can be beautiful

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just sort of a universal issue. People think that it must be so much harder to live in New York or LA because they're cities equated with fashion and looks. But I think it's hard everywhere because we make it hard for ourselves. Things are definitely better than they were a year ago. I think there's much more criticism now when we see those *Us Weekly* covers with the skinny women under the headline "Look How Much So-and-So Has Lost." There seem to be more plus size women on the pages of *Glamour Magazine*, and fat actresses on television. They're making *Hairspray* into a movie, and people are talking about making my book into a television production. So I think that's sort of a response to people saying that they're sick of feeling crappy all the time. And I hope my book is part of that movement, and that my book has made things happier and easier, and even more challenging.

How do you feel about the fact that you've made it to the Tivo Wishlist?

It's crazy! How did that happen? So I guess I've officially made it! A year later I'm on that list, and I'm still getting calls from *Good Morning America* and CBS because they're interested in talking about the subject. It's just wonderful. It shows me that this is an issue that's really important and engaging to people, and that there are no easy answers. So I'm happy to throw my two cents into the discussion. The more the merrier!

As a comedian you must be having a lot of fun hosting fashion shows!

It's really amazing because we're so used to seeing one thing at fashion shows! When all of a sudden you see something very sexy and very fun on a runway and you can say, "Wait a sec, I can actually wear what that woman is wearing!" it kind of blows your mind. You realize, "I don't have to feel excluded all the time." It's really so enlightening and empowering. I try to make some of it funny, I'll read some funny stuff from the book or make some funny comments during the show, so it seems to go really well.

Why is it important for everyone to have a copy of *The Fat Girl's Guide To Life in their library*?

You can put your hand over the word fat and just put anything you want in its place. It can be 'The Bald Guy's Guide to Life,' it could be 'The Skinny Girl's Guide...' Fat becomes a sort of metaphor for whatever's bugging you. After you read this book you walk away going, "Maybe I'm taking this a little too seriously," or "Maybe I'm concentrating too much on stuff that's out of my control, and not investing my energy in parts that are in my control." We're so freaked out by our bodies, but our bodies are pretty amazing, no matter what size they are.

For more information about *The Fat Girl's Guide To Life and Wendy Shanker*, visit www.wendyshanker.com.

magazines and stuff, but what was more important to me was what I heard from real girls. So I really wanted to be sure to include that in the paperback. I remember how hard it was for me to put these things on paper, and it was very liberating for me to do that. But for someone to write back to me and tell me how they feel, I just think that that's an enormously generous thing to do.

In what other ways has the book been liberating for you?

My whole life I was always so scared that someone was going to say I was fat. And here I wrote a book that was saying, "Yeah, I'm fat! Hi fat!" There's no more fear around that for me, because I own that now. I wrote down how much I weighed and people thought, "Oh my god, how could you say the numbers?" To me it's like, "Well, if you look at me you'll know how much I weigh anyway!" There's just nothing scary to me about the numbers anymore. If a woman wrote back to me, then at least she had one minute dedicated to feeling positive about herself, and that's what I'm trying to do. I hope that now that it's in paperback it will be able to get into schools, and that young girls will have more access to it.

You've said that everyone always wants to know why you would want to write a book about this subject. What do you tell them?

I had to, that's why! It had to be written. There's just too many people wearing

panty hose, and feeling the same way. There's more to life than dieting and failing at it and feeling miserable about it. Which is what it seems to me every woman of every shape and size is doing right now. And we have to do better than that. We're just wasting time. And while we're busy dieting, the president of Harvard is calling us stupid. And I would like us to be doing something else with our time and energy.

Have you gotten used to seeing and hearing extreme reactions when you tell people the name of your book?

Now it has become so much fun to tell people the title of this book. I could be wrong, maybe it's just me feeling more comfortable with it. But I swear, a year ago if I told someone, "I wrote this book called *The Fat Girl's Guide To Life*," they'd cringe. Now when I say "*The Fat Girl's Guide To Life*," they just say, "Oh." Somehow we're taking apart that word and making it a much less scary concept. And the book is coming out in several different languages. We've got the Italian and the German versions, and we're waiting on the Spanish and the Japanese. I think that these western food and western issues are just spreading everywhere.

How do you feel the nation's attitude has changed in the past year when it comes to the subject of self-image and weight issues?

I grew up in the suburbs but I've also lived in the city. And I do think that it's

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