

CHAPTER 1: HOW I FOUND THE JUMBLE

In 2006 I found myself staring into my wardrobe on the verge of tears. At my feet were just about every pair of trousers I owned, and not one of them fitted me any more.

I'd had my second daughter about six months earlier, and I was due to return to work the following week. My shape and size had changed so the only things I could still get into were a pair of maternity jeans and a pair of pyjamas. I didn't think my colleagues would be too impressed with me rolling back to work in a pair of tartan PJ's so I reluctantly decided I would have to get something new. The idea of trundling along to the shops in my baby sick t-shirt to find something to fit me was far from appealing. Like booking a wax, or opening the latest credit card bill.

So I did what I always did when I got a bit stuck because I needed some clothes but didn't know what I was looking for and didn't have much spare cash; I went to the Next sale. I managed to get a suit and a couple of tops so I thankfully wouldn't need the PJ's, but the pale grey pinstripe suit did absolutely nothing for my confidence, my colouring, or my figure.

A good friend of mine tactfully suggested a trip to see an image consultant to sort me out. That visit completely transformed the rather dim view I'd fallen into that shopping for clothes was tantamount to torture and completely unnecessary because clothes didn't really matter. Actually the clothes themselves don't, but how they make you feel and what they do for your confidence absolutely does – I know that now! That day I learned why everyone always thought I was ill when I wore black, and how I've always looked a bit startled when I try pink lipstick. I realized I should never have dyed my hair that shade of blonde, and I discovered that my love of flares was completely natural, in fact encouraged, as was a hankering for wooden jewelry and chunky knit jumpers.

Looking back now, I can see that learning my rules of what suited me and complimented the natural me was something of a mild epiphany. It really helped me to define and express who I felt I was at the time, to merge all the roles I had (wife, mum, sister, employee, friend, daughter etc.) and to feel

more of a whole person. I changed my hair, wiped off the baby vomit, bought some new clothes and ditched the utility trousers – why was I even wearing those? I looked like one of those outdoor-y adventure mothers who would light fires and carry their babies in various impressive body slings. That wasn't me at all; I guess I just thought all the pockets would be useful.

After my turnaround I remember buying a new outfit from Jigsaw for my baby's christening. It was a pair of linen trousers and a metallic loose knit top, which I put a teal belt over. It was the first time in a very long time that I felt great about how I looked. I really started to think 'hell, yeah, this is me people!' It was a fantastic feeling that I had completely lost in my life, and I know now that it was an important feeling. Wearing clothes that really express who we are is what makes us stand tall, chin up. It's a caffeine hit of confidence right between the eyes.

It's you, going out into the world wearing your identity. When that happens the world says, "OK then, well this is someone awesome." The way other people interact and respond to you changes, improves, and this feedback makes you feel even more confident in your new skin.

It's quite amazing actually.

I have of course made mistakes along the way, plenty. That day I went to work in a bright floral silk dress with a grass green cardigan and magenta shoes was definitely a mistake. Hawaiian Show Girl looks are no longer in my repertoire after that disastrous management meeting. But looking back, the mistakes have been as useful as the triumphs (dark brown wool crepe dress that made me look ever so slightly curvy and got lots of compliments springs instantly to mind) because that's how we learn. And I can promise you that I've learned a lot.

Thanks for reading that little extract...now if you'd like to find out what I learned that I share with you in the rest of the book, just go to inthejumble.co.uk and order a copy.