

# JUST Beautiful

The UK's first free Lifestyle Magazine dedicated to the plus-size woman

JANUARY 2007

Issue 2



*Learn secrets of residual income for financial security*

## Tracey Carr

"We are not a hidden sub-class"



How fat became the New Black



Linda Koch on Big Girls Paradise



PLUS PLUS PLUS PLUS PLUS PLUS PLUS PLUS PLUS PLUS

**BBW artist**  
*exclusive interview*



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# ISAA UK

## Denounces Anti-Obesity Stories

### In UK Media

LONDON - The United Kingdom Branch of the International Size Acceptance Association (ISAA UK) is very concerned about the recent series of media articles on cosmetic/weight loss surgery for plus-sized children and even the contemplation of the idea of "health warnings" on plus-size clothing. ISAA as an organization has a firm stance against bariatric weight loss surgery of any kind.

"The thought of it being used on growing children is unconscionable to ISAA," said Fatima Parker, President of the ISAA UK branch. "It will invariably deny them the nutrients they need to grow into healthy adults and could result in death or extremely poor quality of life." by failed weight loss efforts.

Also, the suggestion that plus-size clothing needs health warnings is abhorrent to ISAA UK, which sees it as an attack on the plus-size fashion industry. It is also potentially the first step in a slippery slope of separating fat people from society in order to further discriminate against them and profit from the weight-cycling caused

"One would not be safe from the fat police, even in their own clothes," said Parker. "Would they put health warnings on size 0 clothes as well? How about on the show clothing that the extremely thin models wear in fashion shows? If you open that Pandora's box, where does it end? The whole notion of health warnings on plus-size clothing is biased against the fat and indicative of the prejudice we face daily. ISAA exists to combat such discrimination."

ISAA's mission is to promote size acceptance and to help end weight-based discrimination throughout the world by means of advocacy and visible, lawful actions. ISAA has branches in the U.S., Brazil, Canada, France, Middle East and Africa, New Zealand, the Philippines and the UK. ISAA also has several virtual chapters online. ISAA was founded in 1997.





# BIG GIRLS PARADISE

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# A Paradise for Big Girls

**L**inda Koch is the Founder of Big Girls Paradise a hugely successful organisation that puts together some of the most talked about BBW club nights around the UK and has expanded to include dating and other ventures. "I first decided to put on an event for BBW's almost 12 years ago. I had previously returned from living in the USA and after a massive weight gain from having my children, plus living in Las Vegas (together with eating out almost every night), I had now become what is considered in this country as 'morbidly obese'. I soon realised that the UK's attitude towards us larger folk was definitely different to that of the people in the USA; who were from my experience more easy going and tended to accept people more for what they are than what they look like.

"The idea of running BBW nights came after revisiting some of my old nightclub haunts with my friends and quickly realised that people who had previously been great friends of mine where 'turned off' but my larger appearance, in fact one guy who used to fancy me told my friend that he could hardly bring himself to talk to me as I had ruined myself by getting so fat he said he was disgusted with my appearance.



At the time I was devastated that someone could be so cruel, as I was still the same person inside."

A careful observation in the club led her to realise that she wasn't alone. "I sat there looking around the night club -at all the big girls sitting watching all the slimmer ones dancing, I knew that secretly they wanted to be up on the dance floor too, but were reluctant for fear of ridicule. That is when the idea came to me about a club aimed at big girls and their admirers. The very next day I started on my mission to create an environment for big girls to have a great night out in a place where we would feel comfortable to wear what we wanted, socialise and dance the night away with like minded people."

Since then, Linda has not looked back and has successfully continued to provide a healthy environment for BBW's and their admirers to interact and have fun. Linda has noticed some changes from when she first started. "A lot has changed since I first started running Big Girls Paradise," she said. "The first night we had over 200 people in attendance which totally blew me away! The club has grown from strength to strength and I have never looked back. What started as a hobby has turned into a 24/7 project which I thoroughly enjoy."

She is never short of people dishing out kudos to her on her achievements, yet does not rest on her laurels. "I think the reason that my events are more popular that

Others is because we were the first, We are extremely well organised and we have a very friendly team who go out of their way to make our customers feel welcome. We are also consistent and listen to our customer's comments and needs. Hence launching BGP Dating and doing a BGP Tour last year. I am also very careful about whom I network with and you will also notice that I do not link to any other website. The reason for this is that I never want to take the chance of being three clicks away from porn; which can often happen when you link to other sites and people immediately associate you with it."



Continuing on the subject of a clean image she said: "I am very aware of 'keeping it clean' and keeping away from anything sleazy. There are other organisations that cater for that side of the BBW market but it is not for Big Girls Paradise. I am proud of our sleaze free reputation. I do listen to my customer's comments and this is something that people tend to like about BGP. I like to think that I run a classy establishment, and if you speak to my customers I am sure they will be more than happy to reiterate this."

Her general feeling towards the current state of size acceptance in this country is that: "In general the attitude towards size is getting better in the UK. But I still feel that we have a long way to go. However, considering the fact that almost half of the UK adult population is now over what is deemed a 'normal' size, we really have to get away from the stereotyping of the past and bring in a more realistic size acceptance for all our sakes.

"I think that there are not a lot of full figured women on the television because it has always been made apparent that you have to be thin to be successful in that particular field, and also to be in the public eye. But I also think the attitude towards that is changing. I know many full figured women who are very successful and their size is not a hindrance to them at all. Their confidence within themselves has made this so. I personally feel that currently, being a BBW in any field, you still have to go the extra mile to become successful.

"It has recently to been brought to attention that the actress Natalie Cassidy who plays Sonia in Eastenders has gained some weight. The other day a slimmer friend of mine was commenting about how she shouldn't be allowed to do that, I turned to her in horror and said; 'does it affect her acting ability?' To this she answered 'well not really', so I said, and your point is?? I think that the girl is a fabulous actress and that she plays a vital role for younger BBW women who are in the same profession. Natalie Cassidy also won best actress in 2001! On the other side of the coin I noticed an article on the front of a magazine the other day regarding the recent weight loss of the beautiful Fern Britton. It stated something like 'would her weight loss affect her future career?' which begs another question and opens up a whole new debate!"



However, there are a number of plus-size women that Linda does tend to have a high regard for. "I do admire many of our full-figured TV personalities. The obvious is the hysterically funny Dawn French, who many of my customers tell me she is in the top ten of people they would most love to meet. Her size has clearly been an asset in the success of her career and she often uses her size to gain some great laughs, Dawn is clearly one of the most popular TV personalities of today and has been for a number of years. More recently there is the lovely Alison Hammond who does some presenting on This Morning. She gained her popularity through appearing on Big Brother and then in Celebrity Fit Club. She has a great giggle a great personality and I had the pleasure of meeting her when we did a show together. She is as lovely off screen as she is on."

Linda believes that there is still hope for those dealing with the BBW market. "I do think that there is a future for the BBW market. However I do not feel that the market is as big in this country as people think it is. There are quite a few failed BBW orientated businesses out there, and I am not sure if this was down to bad management or the particular area of the market that they chose to go into."

BGP has been noticed by various media outlets, but Linda is still very cautious. "I have been fortunate enough to have had a lot of coverage in the media over the years. In fact, BGP has been covered in some way or another by most of the women's magazines and many of the national newspapers along with many TV channels both UK based and on an international basis since I started.

Obviously we were the first and have remained the leader in the market to this day. In the early days I would do most articles within the media, but over the years I have learnt that it pays to be choosier when talking to the media as some of them will seriously misquote you

And often even make up their own stories without ever talking to you. I have had reporters in the past who have wanted to write about the club without even visiting and I do not feel that one can write an accurate story without first having the 'BGP experience' which I believe is second to none! I do believe that the media exposure has helped to boost the profile of Big Girls Paradise but I also think that a lot of my customers come from word of mouth and the internet."

With regard to fashion designers and their designs of clothes, she wishes "that they would bear in mind when they are making clothes for us larger ladies and that they have to do more than just take a size 12 garment and make it bigger. It is all about pattern cutting; not all big women are built the same. Some are larger on top and some have larger stomachs and thighs. That is vital to know when you are designing for us. If there is not enough fabric in a garment then it will not hang properly and in some cases can make people look worse and feel incredibly uncomfortable. For example skirts and trousers often come up shorter, especially skirts. In some cases they will hang lower at the front than the back, because the designers have not taken into account that larger hips will make the length shorter therefore making the outfit in some cases look hideous. I know a few people who buy two of the same garment and make it into one. I think a few of the high street shops one in particular have taken it for granted for way too long. They were the only place for us big girls to shop and I am now delighted to see that a lot of the other well known high street stores are now stocking larger sizes, there are also many places online and mail order companies available to us so the days of going for a night out and running the risk of showing up in the same outfit as 10 other big girls I am pleased to say is a thing of the past."

*Look out for Linda Koch's exclusive column in Just As Beautiful from next month.*

# What Is It With The Media?

By Allen Parker, Director ISAA

It seems like “obesity” is still the freakshow topic of many media outlets. It's the mutant menace of our day, the thing that will bankrupt all healthcare systems and devour our children. Why, it's a wonder we're not all fat already oh, wait, we almost are, according to most studies! Then there's the news stories that are basically infomercials for weight loss methods, especially surgery. Very little is reported about the dangers of these procedures, the death rates, the complication rates or repeat surgery rates. Now, to their credit, some media outlets do some reporting on it but most do not. If it's medical and it causes weight loss, it's A-OK in the media.

It really would be nice to see some objective journalism when it comes to size- and weight-related topics. Occasionally, it happens. Recently, a few Health At Every Size (HAES) articles have seen publication but they are few and far between. Also, over the years, I've met some really nice media personalities who are sympathetic to the cause of size acceptance and who don't like size discrimination. At the very least, while some may not agree with us, they at least hear us out, which is more than I can say for others.

More commonly what we see is biased reporting such as the tabloid-like headlines of some of the UK papers (the Daily Mail has had a lot of them recently).

Since when is a suggestion from a professor considered newsworthy? Noone is even considering this idea, no government or legislative body at least. And yet, it makes it all the way to the Drudge Report and other international media outlets.

I guess I take some personal offense, not as a size acceptance activist and educator, but as a former journalist who was trained in the fundamentals of journalism. And those fundamentals are pretty simple:

1. The only place you put your opinion is in an editorial;
2. Report the facts and report what people say about the facts;
3. Don't make up the news, report it; and
4. Try to show both sides of any issue, if it's possible.

Instead of these standards, what we tend to get in “obesity reporting” is either an entirely one-sided story with a focus on how obesity will supposedly kill you if you don't submit to surgery or at least dieting in order to lose weight or it projects the writer's fears about obesity, which can include insulting fat people or writing things like “why can't you just put the plate of food down?” In other words, generalizing without any factual backup whatsoever.

Sometimes there are “sympathy” pieces, written by people who agree that discrimination against fat people is wrong but also fear the heralded medical ills of obesity. And then there are plus-size fashion pieces, which even come under attack now and then, like this week. If the headline has “obesity” in it, 9 times out of 10, it will ultimately be about weight loss...which means, it's ultimately a self-defeating article that won't help anyone. So why do we see so many of these headlines? It's been known for a long time that the media is a great advertising medium in the guise of supposed “news.” Are you a scientist that made a mouse lose 0.0075% of its body mass in a poorly controlled environment with a drug you're trying to sell? Never mind that it writhed in agony the whole time or grew an additional leg, publish the results in a press release claiming the “potential” cure to obesity! Have a position of some prominence and an outrageous opinion that would impede the rights of fat people “for their own good?” Tell the news all about it, it will sell!

So where does ISAA come into all of this? Well, ISAA works with the media whenever we can. We respond to legitimate inquiries from the media, give our positions, try to clear up misperceptions and engage in dialogues.



ISAA distributes press releases also and we try to communicate using our own media capabilities (email lists, podcasts, e-zines and now blogging). We know we can reach people with information they can use to help themselves.

ISAA also encourages you to contact any media outlet that publicizes anything biased or factually inaccurate and let them know what you think. Just as we want to know what you think about us, most media outlets welcome public feedback, even if the public doesn't agree with them. They may not change their stance on the matter but if enough public pressure builds, they will respond. It's definitely worth the effort. We've seen many successes over the years because of public input caused businesses to reconsider their position on a size- or weight-related matter. It can happen.

It will take time and it will take perseverance in the face of all obstacles. But ISAA is more than just its volunteers. ISAA has become a concept, a size acceptance idea that has begun to take root all over the world. It may not be evident immediately upon review right now, but give us time. We may surprise you. And you might surprise yourself!

# ISAA UK



Allen Parker, Director ISAA



## Curvy Chicks

Curvy Chicks is for everything BBW/BHM related. It is a free and easy to use website with resources and ideas, chat and fun for big people in the UK and beyond.

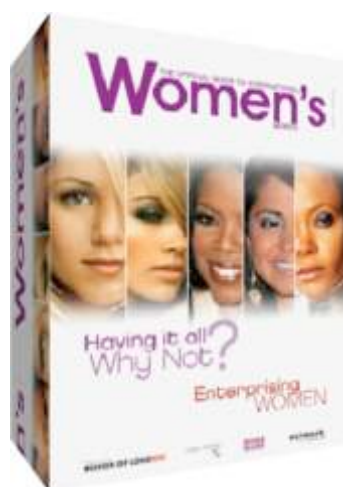
Curvy Chicks gives positive messages to members and also encourages them to accept who they are and helps towards building a positive outlook. For more information on Curvy Chicks log on to: [www.curvychicks.co.uk](http://www.curvychicks.co.uk)

Carin, Co-Owner of Curvy Chicks, joins Just As Beautiful as a gossip columnist from next month

# Women's MONTH

THE OFFICIAL GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL

*International Women's Month (IWM), is celebrated every March across the world and incorporates international Women's Day on March 8<sup>th</sup>, a day that globally recognises the political, economical and social achievements of women. The official guide to International Woman's Month, (IWM Magazine) made its debut at the Mayor of London's CAPITAL WOMAN conference and has been distributed there ever since. The aims and remit is to celebrate the achievement of women across the world and their contribution to society. Through its coverage IWM aims to inform, educate, stimulate public debate, challenge outmoded views about women, and promote action designed to achieve equality between the sexes. ANNUAL publication date: March – April.*



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### Ruched surplice dress in black

Looking sophisticated yet flirty at the same time has never been easier.

Super soft jersey knit is draped into a body conscious silhouette that complements your curves. A ruched high waistband, forgiving short dolman sleeves and a subtle crossover v-neckline make this dress perfect for an evening out or attending a wedding.

#### Features

62% Polyester, 33% Rayon, 5% Spandex 4' ruched high waistband 27' skirt length



### Lace overlay dress with channelling

Leave them speechless in one of the season's prettiest dresses. An intricate scalloped lace overlay and stretch satin charmeuse slip bring a gorgeous marriage of texture and color. Scalloped edges, dainty ribbon tie and surplice neckline lend plenty of feminine charm.

#### Features

Lace: 66% Nylon, 21% Rayon, 13% Spandex Lining: 97% Polyester, 3% Spandex Dry clean only

## Damaris

The picture says it all. Sexy and elegant with a touch of glitz! Enough to leave any man speechless - what else can you say?

*Available in all sizes from 0 to 44  
Made to Measure service available  
Choice of lengths  
Matching wrap available  
Cocktail length  
Fully lined.*





## Kaila

Kaila has a wide square neckline and an asymetric skirt giving this style a contemporary feel - and you can accessorise with a matching or contrasting belt in 15 different colours to make your completely unique.

*Available in all sizes from 0 to 44*

*Made to Measure service available*

*Choice of lengths*

*Fabric: Satin Crepe*

*Matching wrap available*

*Cocktail length*

*Fully lined*



# Curvy Kittens & Paradise Guys

If you have ever been lucky enough to attend a Big Girls Paradise club night, then you would definitely have noticed the Curvy Kittens and Paradise Guys. They are a very unique set of model-looking hosts whose main function is to entertain guests and they do a very good job of it. As you would have probably guessed, the Curvy Kittens are the ladies while the Paradise Guys are men.

"I decided to introduce the Curvy Kittens to show that just because you are a big girl it does not mean that you can't be big beautiful and sexy, also to help the other girls in the club feel that there is nothing wrong with being a big girl and that showing off our curves is a great way to prove that we truly do celebrate the beauty of size at Big Girls Paradise. The girls love being a part of the BGP team and I am inundated with girls who want to become kittens. I am always taking applications and currently have a waiting list of girls. I do like to alternate the girls, and give the others a night off when I can persuade them to do so, and believe me that is a hard job as they all love wearing the outfit and working the club night! We have our Head Kitten who is in charge of making sure the Curvy Kittens and Paradise Guys are organised and fitted with the correct outfits; and to show them the ropes and be on hand should any of them or the customers have any queries," said Linda Koch.

Linda is always very careful with her selection as she sees this as a reflection of what Big Girls Paradise (BGP) stands for. "The Paradise Guys are hand picked hunks who I always make sure are BBW admirers, as I believe this helps them to interact with the customers in a positive way. They are very friendly, polite and some of them are professional dancers, some models and some of them are just guys that I know. Others are guys that have seen the website and asked if they can join our amazing BGP team. The Paradise Guys are very popular with the girls and are not threatening in anyway to our male customers; as they chat to the guys too and often help introduce people to each other if they are too shy to make the initial move.



"I think that I have the balance right. We have a fantastic atmosphere at the club and it is an extremely friendly place to come to. A lot of single people come along on their own and the Curvy Kittens and the Paradise Guys make sure that nobody is left out in the cold and will do their best to introduce people and make sure that they have a great time. Visitors can see from our attendance we always have a great turn out."



The Curvy kittens and Paradise guys are ambassadors for the club and often make appearances in the media representing Big Girls Paradise. "I also make them available for BBW promotional events which people can book through Big Girls Paradise. So if there are any girls or guys out there who fancy joining our team why not email us at: [biggirlsparadise@aol.com](mailto:biggirlsparadise@aol.com) with your details with a recent photograph and we will arrange an interview," she said.



BGP's February party is the Valentine party, which takes place on Saturday 3rd February. If you would like to know more about BGP club nights then please check out their website at [www.biggirlsparadise.com](http://www.biggirlsparadise.com) or you may like to join their dating site

[www.bgpdating.co.uk](http://www.bgpdating.co.uk)

# A Woman of Substance



**T**racey Carr is a very busy woman to say the least. She is one of the most renowned plus-size business women in the country, and her interests span fashion, modelling and acting. As Owner and Head Designer of BeaBea, Tracey has every reason to be happy her label, BeaBea, is celebrating its fourth successful year of trading.

Most recently she appeared in the Little Britain Abroad Christmas Special, and has also appeared in a number of current affairs and human interest TV and Radio programmes. Tracey is a passionate and articulate advocate of the size acceptance movement and welcomes the opportunity to communicate her vision. Her warmth and enthusiasm make her an excellent communicator able to reach a wide range of audiences.

"I think the best way to increase size acceptance is for all of us to try to make tiny steps forward. Accepting new and exciting challenges and getting out into the world helps us demonstrate by example that we are not a hidden sub-class and that we refuse to be ignored," she says.

Tracey was formerly an IT Manager for a multi-national financial institution. But spent most of her free time was spent designing clothes for herself and her plus-sized friends. Deep down she had always dreamt of making a change and becoming a person to reckon with in the UK's plus size fashion market. As luck would have it, she was made redundant in 2003 and went to work for a plus-size fashion company as a buyer and to develop their plus-size fashion lines. Unfortunately just six weeks into the job, she found out that the company didn't share her same level of enthusiasm when it came to servicing the plus-size market.

Handing in her notice, sold her house and invested all she had into setting up BeaBea. Although she knew that she was taking a huge risk, she also knew that there were many plus-sized women out there who wanted to express their personal style and creativity through their clothes. "Bigger people can sometimes be portrayed as being sad, lonely and out of control, but every time we are seen in public, looking fabulous and having a great time, we help prove that myth wrong."

Tracey took the unconventional step of 'throwing away the size chart' in favour of individuality. "Fashion doesn't need any more victims. Too many women feel excluded from looking stylish because of their measurements. Bigger women have been denied access to good design and forced to accept poorly fitting clothes for too long. We believe every one deserves great clothes and an excellent fit. Looking good has no upper size limit, and neither do we!





"By throwing away the size chart we've set fashion free. Beautiful and stylish clothes are now available for everybody. Our styles are designed to fit curvy figures from the start. We have no upper size limit on any of our exclusive designs and because we specialise in plus-sizes we know what will really fit and flatter voluptuous bodies," Tracey points out.

Tracey was introduced to the media while modelling. "My media appearances came about by

purely by chance. I was given an opportunity to try modelling and having said 'yes' to that I've been lucky enough to be offered many more interesting experiences. I'm a real believer in the power of positive thinking and in trying new things, so if I get a chance to try something new I try to say yes. We need lots more positive role models in the media so if you get a chance to get involved why not give it a go?"

If you're wondering where you have seen her face before, she has appeared many nationwide television such as This Morning, The Jeremy Kyle Show (Fat and Happy segment), Vanessa's Real Lives show, and documentaries ranging from ITV's 'Chubby Chasers' to the BBC3 Body image series 'F\*\*\* Off, I'm fat'.

For more information on Tracey's BeaBea range log on to [www.beabea.co.uk](http://www.beabea.co.uk)

# COMPETITION

Hi I'm Vicki Swinden and here's my FATTITUDE.

I know what it's like as an overweight person to feel excluded - to feel that we don't count. People like you and I feel defeated when the glossy magazines depict what they consider an ideal and the more defeated and excluded we feel, the more we lose our sense of self-value, self-worth and self-esteem.

**FATTITUDE** aims to change all that. Words like obese and morbidly obese can frighten us into thinking that we can't be fit, that we can't enjoy life to the full. Don't let anyone tell you that there is anything you can't achieve! You are an important, wonderful, miraculous human being with loads to offer.

It doesn't matter what size you are; you don't even have to concentrate on changing your size; changing your attitude to **FATTITUDE** is all you need!

**FATTITUDE** isn't about calories and weight loss. **FATTITUDE** is a state of mind.

We've translated our **FATTITUDE** into a fantastic workout plan which will help you achieve your healthier and fitter lifestyle. Its been designed by an expert specially for people who are overweight, the routines and exercises are all tried and tested by Julie, Linda and Vicki - we're sure you can do it too. Whatever your current level of fitness or confidence, **FATTITUDE** is for YOU!

Sometimes, simply moving round a little bit more, taking that walk in the park, playing in the garden with the kids, joining Julie, Linda and Vicki in the **FATTITUDE** routines, will result in weight loss, but **FATTITUDE** is not concerned with vanity or external appearances. **FATTITUDE** aims to help you focus on what's happening under your skin - with your joints, muscles, limbs, hearts and lungs. We'd love you to join us!

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### 5 **FREE** FATTITUDE DVD'S

Simply email [Vicki@fattitude.org.uk](mailto:Vicki@fattitude.org.uk) with your contact details and we'll pick 5 messages out at random each of whom will receive a FREE copy of the DVD. Just put the words **FATTITUDE YES PLEASE** in the subject line on the email. Winners will be announced in the next edition of just as beautiful. **FATTITUDE** will not pass on your details to any other companies but reserve the right to contact you via email with more information about **FATTITUDE** and the products.

Showing your **FATTITUDE** can become a way of life!

# Diary of a Big Mama

## THE TEENAGE YEARS

### RECAP

*Having been left in Jamaica as a toddler, when I eventually came to the UK I collapsed into the arms of a mother I did not know and spent the first two weeks of my life at death's doors in hospital, suffering from malnutrition. Once well again my mother tried her best to fatten me up (mostly out of guilt). I was on the road to a fuller figure and it tasted sweet.*



I was going to fast forward and recap growing up and falling in love and discovering it wasn't the be-all and end-all, but then realised I would be missing out on a lot of experiences that made me the well-balanced woman I now am (yeh, right!), so let's take it nice and easy.

The years skipped by once I'd settled into school. I met Mandy, a blonde haired blue eyed neighbour who became my best friend once I'd stopped pulling her long shiny yellow locks out of sheer jealousy. I took to putting a towel on my head (held down with two large hairpins) so I too could pretend to have long, blonde hair - remember I was five years old!!

School was fun despite the fact that I was chubby and could not keep up with my trimmer mates during rounders in the playground but I had lots of friends and was the first to get breasts (mostly fatty tissues but WHO CARED! I had something to put into a bra at the age of 10 whilst they had boring, flat chests. I also got my first boyfriend.

What I thought was a terrific accomplishment became the bane of my life. It's difficult to get a fellow female to understand that it's no compliment to be chased by guys - considering most of them were dead ugly (in character as well as if not facially) and therefore it became an insult to be approached by them. And the approach? Forget "Hi, my name is.." It was "Whappen, Baby?"

At parties and dances they would simply jerk your elbow towards them if they wanted to dance with you and if you objected they said you were stuck up. Walking down the road became a nightmare. Guys would lean out of windows and yell to me (although I did roar with laughter when one crashed into the back of another car) and walking past a building being renovated by outdoor workmen was hell on pavement. My friends

said that I should consider myself lucky - after all I was fat, with glasses and there they were, slim, with perfect vision and they couldn't get chased by the local (four-legged) dogs never mind one with two feet - sorry to all the decent men out there - I know there's some cos I met the two of them. But I digress.

At the age of 15 I discovered I could sing. Well, I knew I liked to warble a bit, but to be told by the head teacher that your voice was so good that the school was willing to pay for me to have private singing lessons - well, what a compliment. When I found out the teacher was going to be teaching me opera I ran a mile. I opted instead to join a young, local group called The Cool Notes singing soul, and a little reggae. I must admit it was mostly because they had this cool-looking guitarist called Charlie and I secretly had a mighty crush on.

*"Guys would lean out of windows and yell to me"*

I and my best friend Deloris would spend hours curled up on bed in my room, reading Mills & Boons, fantasizing about how I was going to get him to notice me, experimenting with different hair styles. Charlie was nearly 17, with a slim frame, lovely almond shaped eyes, a big smile, white teeth and a teeny moustache that did not quite need trimming yet. He would smooth it endlessly when he was in thinking mode, and when he played the bass guitar my heart beat in tune to every strum.

The other girls in the group thought he was pretty cool too and so did the girls in the audiences when we performed at gigs. Often I despaired that Charlie would even notice me. I'd taken to taking off my glasses (the amount of times I walked into chairs or tipped over someone's feet became a bit of a joke). I combed out my hair until it became a huge afro, wore heavier make-up, well in those days lipstick and eye brow pencil was pretty heavy! I was two sizes bigger than my fellow classmates and didn't feel comfortable wearing short skirts or bell-bottom pants or ankle length gypsy skirts but I made the most of my by now pretty sizeable cleavage.

One day Charlie walked me home after a gig and I invited him in, safe in the knowledge that it was

Saturday night and my mum was at bingo and my dad at the pub. He asked to use the bathroom. I did the grown up thing and fixed us both a drink coca cola on the rocks. When Charlie called me upstairs I thought maybe the water had run cold. I tentatively knocked on the bathroom door, which swung open to reveal him sitting on the edge of the bath. He used a single finger inclined towards him to ask me to come in. I was bubbling with excitement and secretly scared. Once close to him he asked which one of one flannels belonged to me. When I pointed it out to him he ran it under the hot tap, wrung it out and slowly came towards me.

"Close your eyes," he whispered. Almost shaking in anticipation of the unknown I did so and pursed my mouth. Charlie gently wiped the flannel over my eyes, then went on to wipe the bright red colour of my lips. "You don't need all this muck to look good," Barbara, he said with the task complete. I tentatively opened one eye in bewilderment, then the other. "You're naturally pretty; you don't need any help from this lot. One day you'll meet someone who will truly appreciate you for who and what you are. And you really should wear your glasses;

You'll do yourself some damage otherwise."

Then he smiled and asked for his coke. I wanted to kick him. His rejection and my embarrassment pervaded through me, but I gritted my teeth, swallowed my disappointment and smiled graciously as I followed him downstairs to the front room (the one we weren't allowed into). We listened to my Dad's records, and made fritters to munch on with the coke. Of course I made sure to only nibble at mine, I didn't want him thinking that I spent all my time stuffing my face.

At 10.45pm Charlie said he had to leave. I went to show him out. As we approached the front door he turned around and without a word placed his hands on my shoulders, leaned in and put his lips gently against mine. My first kiss. I was in seventh heaven. Yeh, alright, I stood there not knowing quite what to do as he bade me farewell with a cheery see you tomorrow. I'd forgotten all that I had practiced whilst kissing my own hand or the mirror in the sanctuary of my bedroom, and my tongue remained stuck to the bottom of my mouth as I gawped like a fish - HE'D KISSED ME!!

*My first kiss. And I hadn't had to diet to get it!*

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Subscribe to receive your copy of Just As Beautiful by simply sending an email request to [info@justasbeautiful.co.uk](mailto:info@justasbeautiful.co.uk)

Also, watch out for the Miss Plus-Size UK beauty pageant. If you would like to be a part of it, send an email to: [info@weightlovingpr.co.uk](mailto:info@weightlovingpr.co.uk) requesting further information.

**And don't forget to watch out for our fashion parties!!**

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# Taking BBW Art to the world



One of the few artists to concentrate on a BBW audience and make a name for themselves is the American artist Les Toil. His inspiration came from many sources. "I've always been a fan of classic pin-up art. Art from World War II by such legends as Gil Elvgren, George Petty and Antonio Varga. Because those artists were so important to the morale of the soldiers, they became as known and as respected as many of the movie stars at that time. Even today there are still many people--young and old--that can identify a Varga Girl and a Petty Girl. So I coupled my love for Classic pin-up art --which used to be known as "cheesecake art"--with my love for big, gorgeous women. When I first logged on to the internet eight or nine years ago, I found myself falling in love with BBW's all over the place!"

Les Toil has a deep view of the difference between the way BBW's are seen in real life society and the way they are seen on the internet. "The lack of acceptance and lack of exposure of the BBW in our society is a different story online. I mean, there appeared to be a growing community and apparently men were less inhibited about expressing their love (and, of course, lust) for the BBW. That's both a good and a sad Commentary.

It's good that the blossoming community of fat appreciation brought men out of their closets and in front of their computers. However, it's sad that many men still haven't left the security of their bedrooms to express that appreciation."

He remembers how he really got going. "I quickly immersed myself within the community and found myself falling in lust with so many women. At the time I was single and I sincerely wanted to meet and fall in love with one and live happily ever after; mainly because it takes me so long to loosen up with any woman to the point of feeling happy and content and casual around her. I enjoyed communicating with the many different gorgeous BBW I met in all those AOL chatrooms back in the 1990s, but I really had the nerve to meet only one of them in person, and when I did, that was someone I stayed with for seven years.

"Before that, I found myself drawing portraits of a few of the women I had discovered and communicated with online. I knew I would never meet them as they all lived states away from me, but it was kind of nice to communicate with them as if they were celebrities. They all had websites and to me, that meant they were

Famous--at least at that time in my life. The first one took her portrait (her name is "Alissa" and I'm sure her Toil portrait is floating around the net somewhere), and she showed the Portrait to an online group of other BBW and they, in turn, expressed interest in my drawing them as well. I guess the rest is history."

Business is food for Les Toil at the moment and he's happy about that. Much of this he believes is due to the changing attitude of society towards BBW's. "I feel very fortunate in that the country is very slowly expanding its view of beauty and both BBW and FA are expressing their dissatisfaction with the media's portrayal of fat people and how they're excluding them from the notion of beauty. Women are feeling much more confident and they love the idea of celebrating their beauty by having their portraits done. The concept of plus-sized women as calendar and pin-up queens seems so natural to me and it seems that frame of mind is spreading."

But Les knows that there is still a long way to go when it comes to BBW art. "My main source of income is still largely from commercial illustration (magazine, newspaper, book, advertising, etc), because big,

huge publishing companies and industries aren't hiring me to draw big women. It's big women themselves that are saving their hard-earned money to have a portrait done. Single moms, single women, college students and the like. Most of them are definitely not huge wage earners and I really try my best to price my portraits as to not exclude women who don't happen to have money to burn. But of course with today's economy and so much of our tax money going towards wasteful and destructive endeavours, I fully understand even the thought of hiring someone to do your portrait is a luxury."

His artwork has positively influenced a number of people and for Les Toil, this is an achievement in itself. "I'm sure most artists dream of touching even one stranger with his/her art, but the idea of one's art actually making a positive difference in many people lives is the ultimate gratification. How can I not feel that I've accomplished something worthwhile after reading even one of those empowering letters I receive? I started out drawing sexy big girls just for kicks and it seems to have lead to something much, much more important."

Although he maintains a positive mindset, Les knows that BBW's are usually not given the opportunity that they deserve in professions where commercial looks tend to reign supreme. "I can't say plus-size women are given a real opportunity. You don't see any women legitimately large doing the news or hosting some entertainment tabloid show. And the ones that are -like Oprah and Ricki Lake and Carnie Wilson and Starr Jones -all felt pressed by the world to lose weight. Interestingly enough the vast majority of those women that lost all their weight also lost their fame. That speaks volumes to me. Society probably preferred them when they were heavier probably because

their persona and energy was happier and stronger when they were at their original weight. Starr Jones now looks and acts as if she's in dire need of a blood transfusion and a decent meal."

Society needs to wake up and realise the plus-size women are just as beautiful. "Most people live their lives glued to the TV screen, therefore they assume fat women aren't worthy of praise if they don't see one starring opposite George Clooney. Not seeing a gorgeous BBW in all those hair product ads makes them either ignore big women or scoff at them when they see them in public. It's truly all brainwash. We were once conditioned to admire women with full curves back in the 1950s and 1960s; not to mention all through the 18th century and long before that! But now we men are trained to drool at the site of an emaciated young girl who has as many curves as a skinny young boy.



The weird thing is if they paid attention to their environment they would see how few skinny women exist in the world. People come in many different sizes for many different reasons. People will laugh like hyenas at comedians on TV telling fat jokes while their plus-sized mothers and sisters are sitting right next to them -and the sisters and mothers will be laughing along with them! Fat-phobia is so deeply ingrained within us all. Size acceptance has to come from within. Having a true sense of worth. A strong self-esteem. A lack of self-esteem can topple a nation. It's a difficult thing to maintain in today's society but gradually it can happen.

Just as Beautiful Magazine is extremely instrumental in building confidence within women who don't happen to have Angelina Jolie's dress size. It's an intelligent, inspiring and aesthetically-pleasing publication that demands respect and instils it in the people that read it," he believes.

Les Toil is no stranger to media interest. "I was interviewed by the BBC a couple years ago. That was nice. They were extremely gracious and complimentary. I was also featured on a few early morning shock jock radio programs in the U.S. They were anything but gracious. I realized I was asked to be on the show as some sort of oddity. They apparently thought anyone who draws sexy drawings of women bigger than Rosie O'Donnell is good for a laugh. It was all low-brow humour for their low-intelligence audience, but it gave me tremendous exposure. It's too bad the media from my own country tried to treat me like rubbish.



To visit the Official Toil Girl's Gallery go to [www.toilgirls.com](http://www.toilgirls.com)

# how Fat

## became the New Black



Vicki Swinden began her company - Fat Is The New Black - as a result of yo-yo dieting (a situation many of our readers will be familiar with). "I had been "on a diet" pretty much all my life, certainly in my memory since I was 4 years old. I recall my Mother hanging a piece of graph paper on the back of the bathroom door above the scales, I was weighed and my weight noted on the graph. I presume someone at the school gate must have said to her that I was looking chubby' although looking back on the photo's of me at that age I don't look to be anything other than normal. But the dieting began and I firmly believe that was the beginning of the end."

Over the years Vicki tried everything she could as far as dieting was concerned. "Every slimming club has benefited financially from my efforts. Cabbage soup, eggs and grapefruit, food combining, high fibre, low fat and The Beverly Hills Diet; which was virtually all fresh fruit, most of which you couldn't even buy in the North West of England in the 1970's! Every single one of those diets and slimming clubs worked, I lost weight every time. Guess What? Every time I tried to re-introduce a relatively normal diet, my weight piled back on....more each time. I was swinging between the alleged ideal weight for my 5'7" large frame 10 stone 3 lbs to the highest weight I recorded of 24 stone. I was a classic yo-yo dieter," she admitted.

"My last diet was supervised by the local hospital. It was made up of an entirely liquid diet, sachets of nutrients in varying flavours plus 10 pints of water each day. And you know what? I lost a whopping 6 stone in just three months! I was 14 stone. There should have been a celebration shouldn't there? But no, very quickly I became ill. My hair started to fall out, my skin broke out in lesions. I looked and felt dreadful. Still under the auspices of the hospital I began to reintroduce food into my diet, and we're only talking grilled chicken and fish here with fresh vegetables, my weight began to shoot back up. Within the first two weeks I had put on eleven pounds. I was too ill to go and splurge on new clothes for my allegedly wonderful figure. My 11 year old daughter was asking how soon she could go 'on a diet'. I was horrified. My whole life was centred around my self and my need to be thin.

"I spent nearly two years visiting an eating disorder clinic my mind set was virtually that of an anorexic I no longer had any realistic idea of my own body size. My family were suffering because I was unable to look after them. I realised that my three beautiful children were becoming as obsessed as I with food products, labelling, calorific value etcetera."

Vicki knew that something had to be done, and quickly too. It was also while searching for an answer that she found her calling. "I had to make a change. I committed to re-learning all about me, taking the focus off food and living life normally again. And what a change it made. It occurred to me that other people could benefit from my experience and understanding of weight management.

"The phrase Fat Is The New Black entered my head I realised we can be the height of fashion whether we are large or small, fat or thin. Once we start believing we are miraculous, wonderful and beautiful people irrespective of our size, we take far greater care of ourselves. We need no longer be obsessed with the food we eat. We can live without the diets which simply don't work in the long term. We can make healthy lifestyle choices without believing that we need to restrict our intake. We are happier, healthier people whose hearts are far less strained by maintaining a heavier weight than ever they were when we were in the whirlpool of failure that is dieting. It worked. For the first time in my life my weight stabilised. My weight began to reduce. I was taking a very active role in life. I benefited and as a result those closest to me benefited."



Vicki now had to get the word out about what she was doing and how it could benefit others. She also had to let people understand that they are not alone with what they might be going through. Then something strange happened, which would propel her into becoming one of the UK's most sought after experts on 'fat'. "I was listening to Radio 2 whilst in my office building and the Jeremy Vine Show were asking for listener's experiences of being fat. I called the show and within 48 hours was travelling to London to join Jeremy in the studio as "The Expert On Being Fat" my life changed hugely at that point and a "Talking Head" was born.

"After the hour long show I came back to the North West and back into my office where I was greeted by literally thousands of emails. In the main they were from other fat people telling me that I had inspired them. Of course, we also received messages from people who were very unhappy with me, suggesting I should "pipe down tubby" and "stop eating all the pies" with the permission of the authors of many of the messages; good or bad, I posted the messages on the Forum at [www.fatisthenewblack.com](http://www.fatisthenewblack.com). In general the messages protect the author's anonymity I don't see why people should be personally vilified for their opinions. The Forum is free to join and requires a simple registration procedure. I still find most people email me directly for my opinions and I post those emails up as messages on the Forum as often as time allows. It's a great place for people to gain insight and information into the "world of fat". I believe knowledge gives us the power to move forward."

Vicki has now worked with almost all major UK media, ranging from the BBC to Sky. She has also appeared on numerous television and radio talkshows. "I absolutely adore working on the radio. I love answering questions and taking part in live debates about my specialist subject, Fat! My first appearance on the Jeremy Vine show kept me on air for an hour, answering phone-in questions from both members of the public, Dr Mike Smith and Vanessa Feltz. I was very nervous but the show went well and I must have given a good account of myself as I have been "on-air" frequently since. As the alleged "fight against obesity" heats up, I can be asked to comment sometimes every day. I once did an incredible five interviews in one day rushing from one radio studio to another and even conducting an interview in the car on the mobile phone in between studios!

"Nina Myskov and I took part in one of Jeremy Vine's wicked Wednesday debates entitled 'Can I Be Fat and Proud' and as often happens with my 'contenders' Nina chose to call me names. On this occasion I was called 'lardy'. Recently I was compared to "dog muck under people's feet" on Radio London, and a few weeks ago was described as "a gateau guzzling beached whale" on Radio 5 Live. I must admit, I find it great sport to point out to the so called celebrities and to the world in general that as long as fat people are made fun of, as long as we feel that there is little or no place in society for us, we are not able to make happy, healthy lifestyle choices. I have worked with Sky, BBC News 24, The Trisha Show, The Stephen Nolan Show, BBC World Service, most BBC national and local radio channels and many more besides."

As if this isn't enough of an achievement, Vicki has also influenced the country's educational curriculum. "Recently The Wellcome Foundation included my findings and words in a paper they were writing which forms part of an A Level syllabus. The Wellcome Foundation are currently building an exhibition in which my voice and comments are used to tell the story of obesity.

"I have appeared in many magazines and newspapers and the story is always the same. We at Fat Is The New Black passionately believe that the way to conquer the alleged obesity crisis in this country is to make people want to take care of themselves and that in order to do that, we all need to feel a sense of social acceptance. We don't need to be the butt of everyone's jokes. We don't need to see people dressed in fat suits to be made fun of. We all want to live as happy and as healthy a life as we can."

Vicki still believes that despite the wider availability of products aimed at the plus-size, society still needs to learn more regarding size acceptance. As she says, "Acceptance is still poor. People still think it's OK to make rude and deriding comments about fat people. I believe it is endemic in this country and it is something we learn in the school yard....make fun of the fat kid. To me that is simply not acceptable but we will need to go a long way to make changes. As I grew up in the late '60's and early '70's I had a miserable time trying to find clothes to fit me. 30 years on there has been an improvement in that but this is no time for fashion designers to rest on their laurels. I am often interviewed with models and designers and always ask that clothes for fat people are not restricted to "hanging garments"



but that form, fabric and structure should be relied upon to dress us well. There is more choice on the high street for us and I venture to suggest that unless marketers continue to offer wider size ranges, they will lose out to the abundance of opportunities we have for buying clothes from the internet. I am particularly thrilled that fashionistas used some larger sized models in their shows this year. About time! The media are a long way behind. If, as we are told, 40% of our population are going to be a size 16 or more then we must have proportional representation of that in the media. I am sick of seeing size 00 girls on the front cover of magazines there are more of us than there ever will be of them, so why aren't we being seen?"

Vicki is a very busy woman. "I am working on promoting my DVD, Fattitude. It is completely revolutionary and shows fat people doing a work out specially designed for fat people. Linda Koch of Big Girls Paradise, Julie Richardson and I worked very hard learning all the routines and putting together a really great

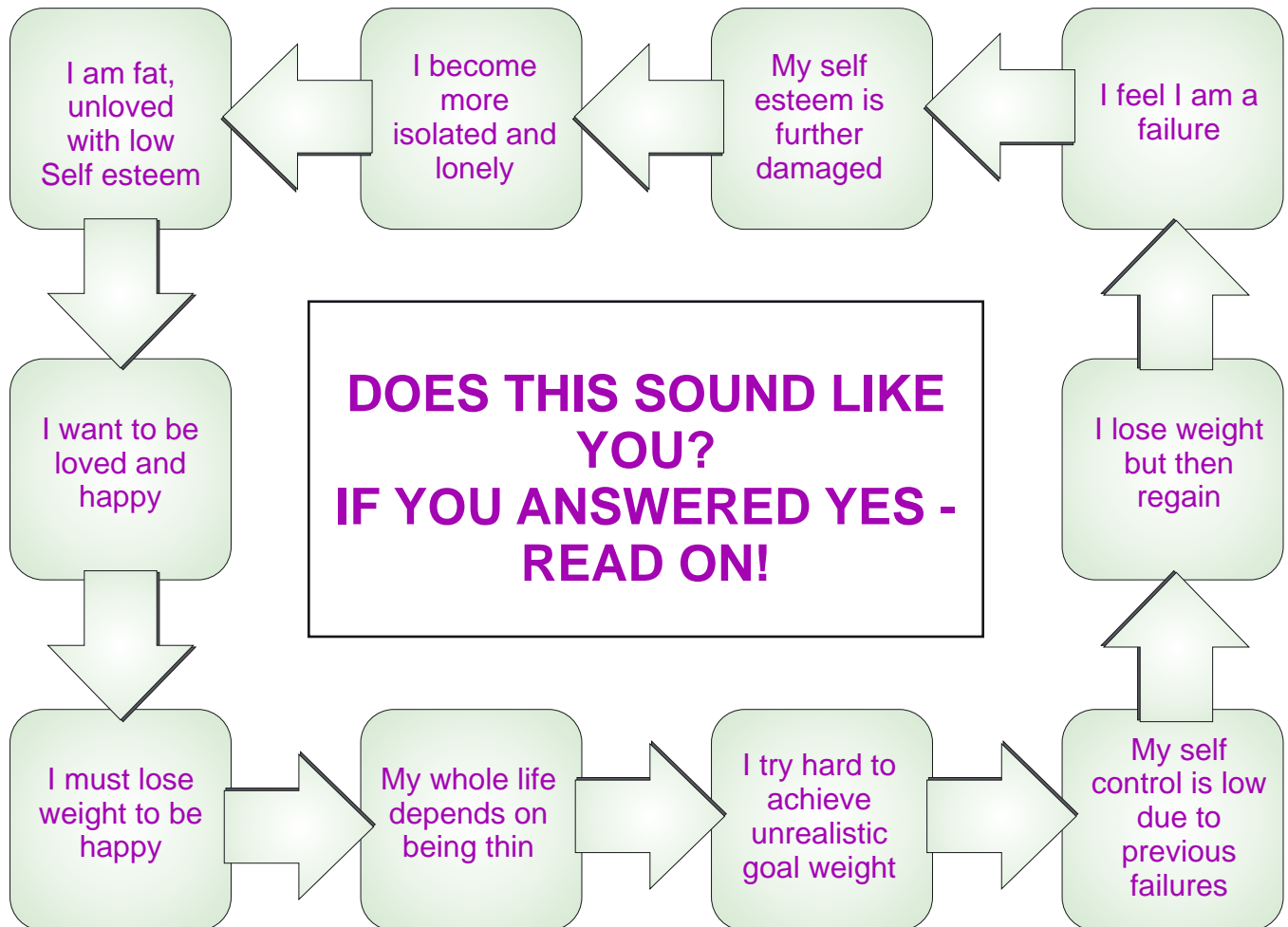
product to help us all be as fit as we can be irrespective of our size. The programme even shows the exercises you can begin to do in your own armchair if your current fitness does not allow you to stand for long periods. We never ask you to raise your arms above your head in case your blood pressure may be adversely affected and we never ask you to lie on the floor for any exercises in case you are alone and find it difficult to get back up again. In short, the entire programme is designed just for us, no matter what our level of fitness is at the time we chose to start the programme. I would love to bring this programme to attention of the government as I firmly believe that if Fattitude was on prescription via our G.P's then so many more people would feel the benefit of increased fitness. I am looking forward to working on similar projects specifically designed for men and for young people," she says.

*Look out for Vicki Swinden's new column "Ask Vicki" in Just As Beautiful magazine starting from next month*



# Time for change

by Vicki Swinden



## change your *Thinking*

1: You are wonderful. There is no-one who can look after you better than you can look after yourself. You are worth it.

2: There is nothing to fail here so don't fear failure.

3: Take the focus off the food. Stop eating when you stop feeling hungry. Don't wait until you are full.

4: MOVE! Stick the stereo on and have your own private disco whilst you are cleaning the house!

5: Don't concentrate on your size, concentrate on your health.

6: Take care of you because without you, we'd be lost.

7: Get in touch with us @ ([www.fatisthenewblack.com](http://www.fatisthenewblack.com)) there's nothing quite so good as sharing your feelings with friends we're waiting for you to join us.

8: Never, EVER again think that you won't be happy unless you are thin..... Health and happiness go together not thinness and happiness.



# Get on the *Ladder*

David Salmon has arranged over 2,000 mortgages for people. Here are his top 10 tips for homebuyers.

## Why should you buy yourself some residual income?

If you know what motivates you to develop financial freedom, it will make the process of buying and renting property a lot simpler. Start by thinking for yourself and begin listening to what you want.

## Don't rely on the press hype if you want to buy-to-let.

Last Sunday morning I looked through three national newspapers and saw three different views on the state of the property market. One said, 'Sell!!' The other said, 'Keep Investing' and the lame duck said, 'Don't be too hasty!' If you are new to the property game or have already secured a few houses, trust your own judgment but take a little advice along the way.

## What are you looking for?

Do you expect that the money you generate will solve all your problems? How about education for your children? Consider the frightening cost of education in seventeen years time. If the cost of living virtually doubles every seven years and the value of money falls, then how much do you need to be putting aside now? How about the costs of clearing your debts? If you could pay these off quickly, is it likely that you could motivate yourself to see the value in buy-to-let. In the event that you suffer a long-term debilitating illness preventing you from being able to work, how long would you last on the savings you have now?

## Stop looking for answers in your Crystal Ball!

Redundancy, shrinkage, downsizing and rationalisation affect everyday people. It hurts to lose your job! Locally we see people who are up and strong one day, riding the corporate 'grave train' to their next promotion, to appear the next moment as the victim of a corporate process of 'letting-go'. When the job is gone all of a sudden we question who we are because we were that job, the job was 'us'.

## Avoid such disaster and take control while you can!

By developing residual income alongside your job you are beginning to protect yourself against outside financial troubles. The actual ability of a pension to pay out at your retirement age is being decimated by the falling number of contributors to the fund. Many are less willing to commit to long-term savings for lack of certainty or guarantee of returns.



David is a full time property investment coach and also invests in residential and commercial property. He has also recently climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa (5865 meters).

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