



Neal and me

Nannie's KNICKER SHOCKER!

Hitting midlife, I discovered it was easy to become invisible. To fight that, I decided to make sure all eyes were on me.

By Tina Boden, 58



Me and Maisie



Me

Lacy knickers, silky knickers, massive knickers that could hold everything in – the array of gorgeous undies in my friend Jayne's shop was amazing.

I'd popped in for a chat as I was passing, and she had exciting news.

'I'm putting on a charity fashion show,' she said. 'With volunteers modelling my underwear.'

'They're brave,' I replied. 'There's no way I could strut down a catwalk in my undies in front of hundreds of people.'

'But you're so confident!' Jayne gasped. 'You get up on stage to speak at business events all the time.'

'Yes – but I'm fully dressed!' I said, laughing.

Like Jayne, I ran my own business and we'd become friends after meeting through the national campaigning I'd done for micro-businesses.

Alongside my career, I'd raised two boys, Tom and Charlie, with my husband Neal and was now a proud grandma too. But while I was

a confident person, the thought of stepping out on a catwalk in my undies at 52 was out of my comfort zone.

Only now, Jayne seemed determined to persuade me to be one of her models.

'It's all in aid of a cancer charity,' she cajoled.

And I found myself saying, 'OK then. I'll do it.'

When I told Neal, he rolled his eyes, like he always did when I agreed to do something a bit out there. But this was wild even for me!

Arriving backstage on the day, I felt a twinge of regret.

Not only was I the oldest model there, but I was also the only one with wobbly bits.

'It's for charity,' I told myself. But when I finally strode out onto the catwalk in my bra and knickers and heard the 250-strong audience applaud, I felt a rush of euphoria.

'I want to do it again!' I told Jayne.

Afterwards, an older lady who'd been watching said,

'You're an inspiration.

You were the most natural-looking woman up there. You look like I do.'

Hearing that made it even more worthwhile.

When COVID-19 hit soon after, I adapted to doing meetings online. But not seeing the boys and our grandkids was tough.

Neal and I were hands-on grandparents. We loved taking them for days out and having them to stay for sleepovers. And while we saw and spoke to them on videocalls, it wasn't the same.

Then one night, I woke with terrible abdominal pains. When I called 111, they sent an ambulance to my home in Flixton, North Yorkshire.

In hospital, scans revealed I had two large cysts on my ovaries and I was soon back in hospital to have my ovaries removed.

As I was wheeled into the operating theatre, the surgeon said, 'This is going to put you into surgically-

enforced menopause.'

A day after the operation, the symptoms hit me like a truck and my usual confidence and control was lost in a mess of mood swings and insomnia.

I struggled on, but when our takeaway didn't arrive on time on my 53rd birthday, I lost it and stormed out in an explosion of hormonal rage.

Neal rang me as I marched towards the beach and I tearfully told him, 'I'm not coming home.'

But once I'd calmed down, I went back and we talked.

'I don't want to feel like this. It's awful,' I said. 'I thought I could get through it on my own, but I can't.'

My doctor prescribed HRT and in time, I began to feel human again.

But I realised something.

There must be loads of women juggling work with supporting the kids and grandkids – and their ageing parents too, I thought.

So I developed a programme called the Making Midlife Matter Method to support women over 40. I also

in the finals.

Despite being up against a load of gorgeous 20-somethings, I finished in the top 10.

Buzzing, I posted a photo of myself on stage in my green swimsuit to my professional LinkedIn account, chuckling as I imagined the reactions of some of my stuffier, older male contacts.

I also added a challenge to any brands or marketing people who might see it.

If this picture ends up in your feed, be aware that 5ft 3in, naturally grey, ageing midlife women are extremely underrepresented, I wrote.

It got thousands of likes and shares, with over 500 comments from women agreeing and saying they felt invisible.

Now, with the bit between my teeth, I contacted a body-positivity campaigner and model I knew, Rachel Peru, and said, 'We can't be what we can't see, so how

do we change that?'

Together, we founded a new movement called AWWA – Accepting Who We Are – and invited women to send photos of themselves in their swimwear for our social media. Around 50 responded.

For our next idea, I roped Jayne in to help.

'We're going to be live models'

'We're going to be live models in our undies in Jayne's window,' I told Neal.

'Did I just roll my eyes?' he asked.

'Yes, you did,' I replied, but it only

encouraged me to go for it!

Arriving at Jayne's shop, Sheer Bliss, on the day, we found pretty sets of lingerie laid out waiting for us.

Mine was red, lacy, and very sheer.

'Good job I gave my bikini line a bit of a shave last night!' I chuckled.

Jayne also got me a nude thong to wear underneath to protect my modesty.

'Ready?' I asked Rachel once we were in our

undies.

'Ready,' she replied and we took our positions in the shop window.

Straight away, shoppers began to notice us. Some just stared, but lots of women smiled and gave us a thumbs-up.

One young woman came into the shop with her mum, and said, 'You scared my dad!'

'He doesn't know where to look,' her mum added.

I loved that we were causing such a stir.

And when van full of open-mouthed builders drove past, I couldn't help aiming a cheeky wave their way!

Like most 57-year-old women, I had wobbly bits and stretchmarks. But posing in my red bra and briefs, I felt empowered and even a bit sexy! I was a nannie in knickers – and proud!

As word of our stunt spread, we found ourselves in demand from other independent boutiques keen to champion our campaign. We've already done another live session at one of them.

And things have taken off on social media too. My granddaughter Maisie's friends follow me and call me her *glam-ma*!

I was chuffed to bits when she had to do a video about someone who inspired her and she chose me.

'It's because you don't care what people think, you just go for it,' she said.

Although our aim is to inspire older women, we also want to encourage the young to love the skin they're in.

While standing in my undies in shop windows isn't something I thought I'd do – especially not at approaching 60 – I'm proud to be a role model for body confidence and self-acceptance.

I want to tell every woman out there to love every crease, wrinkle, roll of flab and grey hair. It's who you are – and it's incredible.

● Find Tina at tinaboden.com or mrsbdoesmidlife.com on Instagram.