

The day I learned to LO

Do you wish you had a better body?

We asked seven women to talk about the day they finally stopped hating their figures and how they learned to embrace their real size

"I realized I had to stop abusing my body."

◀ CATHY

"My friends told me my shape was sexy."

RHONDA ▲

"My husband taught me to appreciate my curves."

KRISTA ▶

WE MY BODY



"I discovered even models have flaws."

VERENA ▼



"Another culture taught me to love my size."

▶ PAISLEY

"My body was a comfort in a time of need."

▶ STACI



"An inspirational book changed my perspective."

▶ LYNLEY ▲

The day I learned to LOVE MY BODY

Cameron: I am an appreciator of the female form. All shapes and sizes are beautiful. I try to encourage all the women I love to find one thing about their bodies that makes them feel good about themselves and to focus on that rather than fixate on what they find unattractive. Once you focus on the uniqueness of every woman's body, you can learn to love your own. The women on these pages have done just that.

"I realized my health is more important than my appearance."

CATHY, 27, MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

■ In 1992, I was 5-foot-5, weighed 150 pounds and was struggling with my weight. Once, I canceled a date because I felt too fat to fit into any of my dresses. Then I stayed up all night crying.

After that, I began running seven miles a day and would only eat fat-free food—mainly frozen yogurt. Still, my body wasn't responding to my new routine, holding on to every ounce of fat it could.

Then, in August 1997, I went for a long, hard run. Afterward, feeling completely exhausted, I was surprised by the amazing muscle definition in my throbbing calves. Suddenly, it struck me that I'm lucky to be blessed with a strong, athletic body that can endure everything I put it through—like the long run I'd just completed. I also realized if I didn't stop abusing my body, it might not be so capable in the future.

So at that moment, I decided to focus on my health—not my body's appearance. To start, I stopped exercising for three months to let my exhausted muscles recover. I also began eating more protein and drinking tons of water. Ironically, I ended up losing 30 pounds. But the real reason I value my body now is that physically, I feel better than ever. Once I stopped treating my body as the enemy, it treated me better, too.

"My friends convinced me my body is beautiful."

RHONDA, 32, CONTRACT ADMINISTRATOR

■ In 1990, I was completely miserable being 5-foot-5 and weighing 210 pounds. Even my father was embarrassed by my looks and stopped introducing me to his friends. Prompted by this, I lost 30 pounds, but my feelings of inadequacy stayed with me.

This all changed last May though, when I vacationed with five girlfriends in Miami. The first day at the beach, everyone except for me stripped down to a teeny bikini. So of course, my friends started badgering me to take off my t-shirt and knee-length shorts, too.

When I admitted I felt way too big to show any skin, my friends immediately assured me I was sexy enough to go topless. Two of my friends who model even said my body is just as sexy as some of the models they've worked with, and that I should be proud of it.

Boosted by their encouraging words, slowly, I took off my shirt. When I did, my girlfriends cheered, "You go, girl!" which made me feel brave enough to remove my shorts.

Ironically, while I was standing there in just my bikini, it clicked: The more confident a woman seems about her body, the more attractive she is. Now, thanks to my friends, whenever I look in the mirror, I love the woman who looks back at me. ▽



The day I learned to LOVE MY BODY

“The man in my life taught me to love my body.”

KRISTA, 29, TEACHER



■ When I was 23, I met my future husband, Tommy, who helped change my attitude toward my body. Even though I'm 5-foot-9 and only a size 8, I had always hated my hips and butt. And though none of the men I'd dated before ever said I had a bad body, Tommy was the first to really embrace my curves.

Tommy never missed an opportunity to compliment my shape. In fact, not so long ago, I lost weight and he told me not to lose any more because I was getting too skinny.

Though I tried to believe all of Tommy's reassurances, I still hated my bottom half. Then, a few months ago, while getting dressed for a wedding, I broke down to Tommy and complained that my big hips made my tight-fitted dress look really unflattering. Tommy then took me firmly by the shoulders, looked me straight in the eye and said that it was precisely my shapely hips and thighs that made the dress look so amazing on me.

At that moment, I thought, if Tommy can love me as I am, why can't I? I made a conscious decision to embrace my figure from that day on. We got married last July, and on our honeymoon, all I wore were shorts and tight dresses.

“A life-threatening accident made me appreciate my body.”

STACI, 33, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

■ Throughout my teens and during college, I was totally dissatisfied with my shape—especially my stomach. Even though I was only a size 6, I couldn't get rid of my “pouch.” This used to drive me so crazy, I'd only wear blousey shirts that hid my stomach.

All of that changed, though, in 1996. After college graduation, I took a trip to Italy, and while on a moped in the countryside, I was hit by a car. As I lay in the street with a broken collarbone, bruised arms and deep cuts, the only way I could comfort myself was to rest my arm on my stomach. Because I recognized the soft mound as a familiar part of my body—it was the only part of me I could touch that made me feel whole and safe—I found this position extremely reassuring.

During my six-month recovery, I kept my hand on my belly the entire time. Essentially, the familiarity of my stomach gave me the

confidence to believe that, despite my injuries, I could be my old self again one day. Afterward, I started to think of my body not just as a sum of its parts, but as a valued whole. This made me realize that—stomach or no stomach—my body is beautiful simply because it's mine.



“I discovered that even supermodels don't have perfect bodies.”

VERENA, 29, SINGER

■ The first time I remember hating my body was during college. One day when I was wearing short shorts and tights, another student told me I looked like a sausage. Afterward, I became completely self-conscious about my 5-foot-9, size 8 body. So when I was invited to a swimsuit runway show in New York City five years ago, I thought it'd be depressing to see supermodels flaunt their perfect bodies in bikinis. But ultimately, I decided to go.

To my surprise—and relief—the models didn't look nearly as good as I'd thought they would. For one thing, they were so skinny, they actually looked unattractive. Plus, despite being just skin and bones, the models had visible cellulite and jiggy thighs—just like me.

I realized that my own standards of beauty had been completely unrealistic. After all, these models are considered to be the most beautiful women in the world and even *they* didn't meet my criteria. Seeing them also made me believe that my curvy body is actually more attractive than a really thin one.

So essentially, I left the fashion show with an instant boost to my body image. And from then on, I stopped tearing myself apart over minor imperfections. Now when I spot cellulite, I remind myself that every woman has some; it's part of being human. ▽

The day I learned to LOVE MY BODY

“Living overseas,
I learned my
body type is
ideal in
other countries.”

PAISLEY, 27, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

■ Growing up, I was never obsessed with dieting or working out, but I did receive the same message every girl in America gets: Nobody will value you if you're overweight. The idea that thin is good and fat is bad was everywhere from Barbie dolls to beauty magazines. If you couldn't fit into a size 6, you weren't ideal. Because of this—and the fact that I was a size 12 and not skinny—I couldn't help but have some insecurities.

My perspective changed in 1996, when I took a job in China teaching English for one year. After losing 10 pounds over winter break, my Asian students said, “You lost weight, but you are still very beautiful.” It was the most unusual compliment I had ever received, and I realized that in China, less guilt is attached to being overweight than in America.

I started paying attention to how Asians address body issues. My Asian friends often remarked in an upbeat way that I was “so very fat,” as if they were saying I was cute. Plus, there are no supermodels in China and happily, scales aren't in every bathroom.

On my plane home, I made a vow not to subscribe to America's cultural obsession with being thin. Sometimes when I tell people my perspective, they look at me like I'm crazy, but I'm an average-sized American woman—and I'm OK with that.



“I read
something that
improved my
body image.”

LYNLEY, 31, FRAGRANCE COMPANY OWNER

■ The first 29 years of my life were dedicated to hating my body, even when I was at my thinnest. Any stress in my life was projected onto my body. At work, whenever I had a conflict, I was sure it was because my co-workers hated fat people.

Finally, in 1998, a friend told me about a body-image workshop given by Jane R. Hirschmann and Carol H. Munter, authors of *When Women Stop Hating Their Bodies*.

After the workshop, Carol gave me a copy of their book; I read it cover to cover in one night. Their suggestions showed me an entirely new way of thinking about my body. For example, I had been weighing myself several times a day on two different scales. But after I followed the book's advice and threw out my scales, I realized that I had been a slave to them.

One night, while telling Jane about the harshly negative thoughts I had about my body, she asked me, “Would you articulate those things to a friend?” I had an epiphany—that I should treat myself with the kindness, respect and compassion I would a friend.

Now I put all my energy into my new business, a fragrance company called Love Yourself, Inc. Traipsing around the beach in a size 22 bikini inspired me to create my latest fragrance: It's called Shameless.

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