

Island author pens a must-read book for all mothers and daughters

By Eileen M. Daly

When Jamestown resident and author Dara Chadwick signed on to write a monthly magazine column, she had no idea the exercise would turn into her new book “You’d Be So Pretty If . . . Teaching Our Daughters to Love Their Bodies—Even When We Don’t Love Our Own.”

The book chronicles the complex and often difficult relationship between mothers and daughters regarding body image. The idea for the book began when Chadwick, a former magazine staff editor, agreed to write the 2007 Weight Loss Diary Column for Shape Magazine. “Like many women, I gained a few pounds after my pregnancies and then allowed myself to be at the bottom of my priority list,” Chadwick said.

She had recently lost her mother when a friend mentioned that Shape Magazine was seeking a writer for the 2007 column. “They provided me with a dietician, a life coach and a trainer,” Chadwick said.

For her part of the bargain, she agreed to write a monthly column with an accompanying photograph of herself and her progress to chronicle her journey. Writing the column and re-focusing her priorities in the wake of her mother’s death seemed like it might be healing, she said, explaining why she decided to do the project.

The book grew out of one of the monthly columns, Chadwick said. The column she wrote that May focused on how her mother’s body image affected her own and how her body image, in turn, affected her daughter’s.

“I learned so much about my body—and about myself—during my year as Shape’s Weight-Loss Diary columnist. But watching the effect that the experience had on my daughter, just at the time when she was beginning to think about her own body, really opened my eyes to the effect that my words and behavior have on her. That led to many conversations between us . . . I wanted her to know that it was all about be-



Dara Chadwick

ing healthy for me (my own mom died young) and about becoming the best me I could be. When I talked to some of my friends about their mothers’ influence and their body feelings, I realized this was a universal topic among women and I wanted to really explore it,” Chadwick said.

Although the book focuses on the mother-daughter relation-

ship, Chadwick acknowledges that there are other factors that have an influence on body image and she is careful to point out that this is not a “mom-bashing” book.

In fact, Chadwick aims to help mothers become positive role models for their daughters and to change the negative body image legacy. “I want readers to close this book and say, ‘Wow, I don’t need to be a supermodel or be perfect to help my daughter to feel good about her body.’ The practical advice and collective wisdom in this book—my story, and the stories of the women and girls I interviewed—will give readers the tools and encouragement they need to change the body image legacy that they pass on to their daughters,” she said.

Chadwick offers the following five tips as a means of beginning to change that legacy:

- Change your tune: If you’re usually harsh or critical about your appearance, let your daughter hear you say at least one positive thing about yourself every

day.

- Don’t do comedy: It is okay to laugh together—even about your bodies—on occasion, but don’t make your butt the “butt” of every joke.

- Corral your compliments: Resist the urge to focus on weight when doling out compliments. Let your daughter hear you tell a friend she looks fantastic or healthy or happy without it being about having lost weight.

- Examine your example: Don’t refuse to wear a bathing suit or dance at a wedding because you think you’re too big or don’t look right. You’ll be teaching her that only “perfect” people get to have fun in life. Do what you can to look your best, then forget it.

- Skip the mirror: No one’s advocating leaving the house without a glance at yourself. But once you’ve done that, resist the urge to constantly re-check your look in mirrors, store windows or any other reflective surface. You know you look fine, so just let the obsession go.

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