

'Having my colours done' in May 1992 was an event that was going to change the direction of my life.

I had seen an article about an Image Consultant in our local paper. I had never heard of this before but was intrigued by the service she provided. Her job was to show people the clothes that would suit them and how to put together a co-ordinated wardrobe. I wish I had kept that article to remind myself of exactly what made me ring the next day and book an appointment but I didn't. I certainly wasn't expecting that I was approaching a crossroads in my life.

At the time I was in my mid-thirties. I was happily married and had established a successful career. I was a Professional Training Manager working in the NHS. I had developed my career in training and was required to speak at meetings, workshops, seminar and the occasional conference. I had quite a high profile, I was ambitious and I needed, and always tried, to look the part.

The late 80's were a time of glamour and relative wealth and as an aspiring thirty-something career girl I needed an extensive range of smart clothes. I had a different suit or at least a jacket and skirt for every day of the week in a variety of power colours. Black was the favourite. Practical, easy to buy, easy to wear, suitable for day or evening it was the colour of choice for my wardrobe. Little did I know then that black did my image and me no favours at all.

It is fair to say that although I was never obsessed by my appearance I did always 'make the effort'. Suit or jacket was always accessorised with a scarf (or in those days with a 'pussy cat' bow! I always wore earrings and always make up. In short I did my best with the knowledge I had at the time. I looked the part -or so I hoped!

So exactly why I booked my 'Colour' appointment I'm not sure. Maybe I had got to the stage where I was spending a lot of money on my clothes but had the feeling 'I could do better'. Maybe the article gave me the solution.

Anyway, within a couple of days there I was sitting in front of the mirror in the Image Consultants studio.

Over the next couple of hours I witnessed a total transformation. As the consultant draped different coloured scarves across my by now bare face, my make up having been removed and my hair rather unfetchingly scraped back from my face I watched as the subtle differences in skin tone were revealed.

I watched as the colours I'd worn for so long-black and grey, cast ugly, dark shadows across my jawline and around my eyes. Paler colours, the colours I avoided as too pasty and too girlie took the shadows away and somehow made my normally grey skin look fresher, brighter and my eyes sparkle.

It was a shock! 'I can't wear pink' I protested weakly. 'I'll look like a Barbie Doll', as I saw a healthy glow replace a sickly pallid skin brought about by a drape in my favourite shade of peach.

But I was captivated. This was hard but it was a revelation. The Consultant described me as an 'Ice maiden'. This appealed to me. Memories of childhood came flooding back. I remembered a time when at the age of 5 I wanted to be 'Ice and Snow' in the school play. The reason was I loved the silver and icy colours of the costume. But I was selected to play 'the sunshine' and my mum made me a yellow net outfit in which did not feel right and I envied my sparkly, silver grey co stars!

The consultant went on to apply make up in my new colours- I loved the new look. Greys and pinks instead of my browns and spicy tones. As she suggested I changed gold jewellery for silver I wondered why I always chose gold when now the differences were pointed out to me. I think I chose gold because that's what I chose. Full stop. No reason. But forced to think about it I never felt 'at one' with my gold wedding ring or my gold watch.

I left the studio feeling thrilled and confident-looking forward to trying my new colours. One hour later while searching for some silver earrings the salesman invited me out on a lunch date. Not that I went but I was delighted that my new look would so quickly bring about such dramatic results!

I knew I was onto something when first of all my husband noticed and then the next day wearing a new pale pink T-shirt and an older rose beige suit which I never been sure of but now was brought to life by my new top and wearing my new make up, my colleagues did a double take. Everything took off from there.

Compliments flowed, I enjoyed shopping with my Colour Swatch as a guide and most importantly I felt different, more confident and more daring.

From this day to this I have never worn a colour next to my face that is not in my colour swatch. I started off trying to wear my 'old colours' for now but it didn't work for me. I found it was one thing being in blissful ignorance of those dark, sallow shadows but now I had been educated and trained to see the differences I couldn't bring myself to wear them. As a result people always pay me compliments but dressing and make up is no effort. I only buy a small number of clothes, just High St brands. The beauty is once you know what you are looking for suddenly your clothes suit you and match each other so your wardrobe automatically co-ordinates. This means almost everything 'mixes and matches'. All my tops go with all my trousers. My work wear can be changed by wearing different tops that create a different look according to what's required for the day ahead.

I have a simple range of basic make up colours that can be low key for day but glammed up a little in the evening. Simple, easy, quick and great value for money.

When I look back now to Julie the Career Girl I can see that my power dressing did me no favours. I think my black made me look cold, stern and hard as I was too dominant against

my very Pale look. I think that's how I came across and how I was treated. Now in my blues and soft colours people seem to be more attracted to me. I feel I must look softer, fresher and friendlier. My image is much less harsh, much more me, and people seem to warm to me.

I would love to go back and try that career again but this time in the right colours. That of course can never be but I do envy the young women whose mothers treat them to a consultation for a Special Birthday treat or as a graduation present. They learn about their colour and style from an early age. They will always know how to look great, saving money by always making wise buys.

So, having my colours done was a revelation- but my life was about to take a new turn. I had been so enthusiastic about my 'colours' I couldn't stop talking about it and it was suggested that maybe Image consultancy was something I should think about doing. However with a busy lifestyle, no background in fashion or beauty, no money to invest and anyway I had a 'proper job' I thought it would be impossible. I had heard of training costing thousands of pounds so though the seed was sown it was a while before it would germinate. Within 6 months I met the person who would change my life. Meeting Annette Hughes through my husband's business was a chance in a million- I believe fate took me in hand on that day. Annette is a gorgeous, lively, motivated person. She charms everyone she meets with her enthusiasm, positivity and love of life. She introduced herself as a Colour Consultant and offered to train me for a very modest investment. So after a few sleepless nights at using my limited savings to fund my new venture I committed myself to my training. I decided that the worst that could happen was that my business would be an enjoyable and sociable hobby. At best it would help through the inevitable downsizing of my Training Department which I suspected was just around the corner. I knew my job was vulnerable- this could be an alternative source of employment in recession hit Britain.

I nervously started my training. I qualified and one month later I had paid back my original investment. Everyone wanted their colours done; my idea had taken off.

My friends, colleagues, and other contacts all wanted their colours done. I was ecstatic! At first I fitted it in around my reasonably flexible job but it wasn't long before a redundancy possibility came up and although I was very sorry to leave the NHS after 15 years, particularly my great BDC colleagues, it was a great opportunity to establish Colour & Style Consulting as a full-time business.

As time went on and I realised the potential of my service and the demand for it I took further training modules in Style Analysis, Make Up Application, Wardrobe Planning and Personal Shopping.

Using my training/ teaching/ management training background I started to run 'Positive Image' Workshops for Companies and I designed a popular leisure course which has now run many times in the Coventry and Warwickshire areas.

I called my business 'Colour, Style & Confidence -helping you look your best whatever your age, shape, size or budget'

My business grew through word of mouth and by giving talks, presentations, demonstrations and Workshops in my local area. I have forged links with local Training Providers, Colleges, Adult Education Centres, local Companies and Charities. I work with Department Stores, High St chains, fashion boutiques and dressmakers. I have travelled the world giving lectures on Cruise Ships and appeared on radio and TV.

It is a wonderful job. Almost every day I get to help people transform their appearance and watch their confidence grow as a result. Getting paid for helping people and making such a difference is a dream come true.

Over the years I have met thousands of women (and some men) who need a new look and often a fresh start. Confused by the variety of clothes available forced by the fashion industry to buy clothes which seem to be aimed at a different shaped body and a different age group women I get to meet have lost confidence in how to look their best and love the service I provide. Many simply say -not only have I changed their appearance I have changed their lives.

This book recognises that not all women have access to my classes but still want to know how to look good.

This book is a guide to how to analyse your own colour and style and how to put together a value for money colour co-ordinated wardrobe. You will learn 'The Shopping Rules' and how they apply to you.

You may still want a session with an Image Consultant but working through the exercises will give you much more idea of what you are looking for.

My aim has been to give you practical tips and simple advice to people just like you and me who want to look good but don't want to spend more time and effort on our appearance.

We want to do it faster, easier and better.

'The Look Good Club: Shopping Rules for Women' will be available from Spring 2008. [To receive details of its launch please click here.](#)