

SURVIVING THE SQUEEZE #1:

by Mike Cooney

How to be a
**DOMESTIC
GODDESS**

on a budget

A CONVERSATION WITH WENDYL NISSEN



Recession. Slowdown. Job losses. Cutbacks. We're all affected, one way or another, whether we've been hit hard by the economy or are surviving the squeeze with ease. And we can all use some recession-busting ideas. Which is why we turned to Wendyl Nissen. This popular media presenter has edited a string of high profile women's

magazines, and knows her way around the glitzy world of celebrities. But she's even more at-home chasing chooks around her backyard and whipping up cleaning recipes in her kitchen. Wendyl Nissen's latest book *Domestic Goddess on a Budget* has been a sell-out success, liberating women all over the country with its handy tips on how to save money and time and still be gorgeous. When we called, she was throwing baking soda and vinegar down her toilet ...



PHOTOGRAPHY: GREG BROOKES. MODEL: WAI-FUN & TIM.

GRAPEVINE: What inspired you to write *Domestic Goddess on a Budget*?

WENDYL: It came about during a big lifestyle change I made about five years ago. I decided to move home to work and, at the same time, give up my mad corporate life. Funnily enough, I've always been interested in how things were done in the old grandma days, and I'd started making my own cleaning products. Things like laundry detergents, floor cleaners, spray cleaners. I'm a bit of a greenie, and I discovered that it was a lot healthier for the environment when I wasn't filling my house with chemicals.

GRAPEVINE: Then one day you thought, "I need to put pen to paper!"?

WENDYL: It was boredom! What started as just an interest had become my hobby. In my spare time, I would research all the old books and try out new recipes – it's delightful! And then the stuff I'd been creating kind-of became my work!

I started sharing the recipes with *April in the Afternoon* on the *Living Channel*. They invited me on to just talk about anything really – and the recipes took off! I got hundreds of emails from people wanting them. So then I began putting them in my *Agony Aunt* column in the *Woman's Weekly*, and got the same reaction.

People kept asking if I'd do a book – and the rest is history!

GRAPEVINE: A cynic might say your

ideas are typical of nature-loving greensies, living in a house-bus in the bush in the middle of nowhere – not a razor to be seen. But can this lifestyle work for your average city-dweller?

WENDYL: Oh absolutely! I live in the heart of Grey Lynn in the inner city. I live in a posh street with million dollar homes – and then there’s my house!

HOME, WHERE THE HEART IS:

It’s an old villa with trees out the front, and it looks like a mad bunch of hippies have just moved in! I mean, you walk up the path and there are hens everywhere. Yes, I’m living proof that you can do it ...

GRAPEVINE: But come on – lots of your readers must be busy professionals, city women trying to balance work and family. Do you really expect them to come home after a hard day in the office, and whiz up a batch of lavender-scented flowing soap?

WENDYL: Well, lots of my readers are city women. And you’re right: they’re busy. So I purposely made the recipes easy – I think the longest one takes about 10 to 15 minutes. Some recipes that I’ve tried over the years, you had to search all over town for the ingredients – it was just a nightmare! So I made these ones very easy – and people often email me saying, “I love making these – they don’t take any time!”

GRAPEVINE: When you went from the high-flying, corporate world to advocating a more domestic lifestyle, did you get much grief from other women – particularly those of a feminist persuasion?

WENDYL: I think that nurturing is a really big part of who we women are. Growing

up in the 60s, we were told, “You can do anything!” – and we did! I ended up at 40 doing everything – having five kids, a blended family, full-time career. But suddenly I found myself thinking, “Hold on! This is just not working!”

I realised that what I was missing, what I really needed to do, was nurture my family. I wanted to spend more time with my kids. I wanted to fill the house with smells of baking. I know it sounds really anti-feminist, but actually I think it is feminist. It’s feminist to think that your family comes first and that you really want to nurture them.

That was a big turn-around for me – and it feels so good!

GRAPEVINE: So how do busy working mums find more time to nurture their families?

WENDYL: It’s not as hard as it sounds. I’m not saying, “Give up work, go home, and become a domestic goddess.” What I’m saying is look at how you can manage it a bit better. Most bosses value family these days. And with concepts like nine-day fortnights, they’re not going to look at you and say, “I’m not going to hire you because you’ve got kids.” In fact, most bosses will say, “Yeah, sure, work home one day a week if that’s going to suit you.”

Many employees are just too scared to ask. Let’s face it, with internet and email, *BlackBerrys* and *iPhones*, there’s no reason why you can’t spend more time at home these days!

GRAPEVINE: You’re strong on the need for life-balance – women nurturing themselves, having time for themselves as well as for their families ...

WENDYL: I talk a lot to women’s groups



around the country, and I start by asking: “How many of you get an hour to yourself every day?” Hardly any hands go up – and the hands that do go up are from people who don’t have any children!

OUT OF BALANCE?

It's really sad when, as women, we can't have one hour on our own. Yes, we can do anything, we can have full-time jobs, we can be independent, we can support ourselves – which is fantastic. But we also have a right to enjoy our lives ...

If women don’t get time to themselves they quickly forget who they are. And that spirals into self-doubt, low self-esteem, and a dependence on others for their identity.

So once you’ve got your hour – enjoy it! It’s the first step to engaging with yourself again and bringing back some balance.

GRAPEVINE: This growing interest in a simpler, more sustainable way of living – does it signal that ‘old-fashioned’ becoming fashionable again?

WENDYL: Yeah, it is! My favourite catch-phrase is, “It’s okay to be Nana!” Seriously, that’s my big message: it’s okay to live like your grandma or your great-grandma did. And that extends to what you eat as well. They didn’t eat anything that was processed – it was mostly fresh. And, personally, I don’t think we should be eating food that has more than five ingredients listed on the packet – especially if there’s anything you don’t recognise! All those chemicals ...

People tell me, “Oh, but they didn’t live as long as we do!” And I simply say, “Well, we’ve got antibiotics – that’s the big difference!” The reality is, if you eat and live the way they did, then you’re going to live a lot healthier and a lot longer – and the environment’s going to be better for it.

Think of the way they reused stuff in

the old days – like using old bread to make bread puddings! Our waste as a society is huge: everything is disposable, gets thrown out. You get a new toaster every two years – it's just crazy!

GRAPEVINE: What advice can you give families – and particularly mums – on how to beat the recession, cut costs and save money?

WENDYL: Get back to basics! That's my advice to anyone – and that's what we've done in this house to save a bit of money. Probably the best budgeting tip is one I got off my mum. She grew up in the Great Depression and World War II, and the best advice she ever gave me was to ask myself "Do I really need it?" before buying something.

That one question can save you thousands!

I go to The Warehouse because I need to buy a bucket. And, suddenly, I've just spent \$200 because I decided I also needed a new rug, or something! You've just got to keep asking yourself, "Do I really need it?" – because, 9-times-out-of-10, we don't. We're just so materialistic: "Oh, I've got to buy that, because it looks good!"

Another thing is, think about how your Nana cooked and cleaned. Just the cleaning tips mentioned in Domestic Goddess – using baking soda, vinegar, and all that stuff – will save you around \$35 a month.

Also, grow your own! Even someone who's hopeless at gardening can grow salad vegies in their backyard. It's as simple as opening a bag of potting mix, throwing on some seeds and in six weeks you'll have salad. Not only is it better for you, it's cheaper!

GRAPEVINE: Where, in your experience, do people have their worst budget blow-outs?

WENDYL: Oh, it's definitely entertainment

– at least it is for us! People have stopped having parties, choosing instead to go out for dinner. So I say, have people over home instead!

ANCIENT FUN:

Some of my best memories are having my friends around the table, and cooking for them. I mean, sure, you have to clean up and stuff. But it's what we used to do in the old days!

And if you have to go to the movies, go during the Tuesday specials!

GRAPEVINE: With December 25 just around the corner, any Christmas advice?

WENDYL: Go homemade! When it comes to Christmas presents, you can make so much of it at home – even if it's just a herb salt, some bottled fruit, or a chutney! Make some cookies. Bake a loaf of bread and take it around to their place. People appreciate homemade stuff much more than something that's bought from a shop – something they don't even need!

Get back to the old ways. Find an Aunt Daisy cookbook in your local op-shop. Have a look at what she used to do – then see if you can do some of them! ❁

ASK AT ANY GOOD BOOKSHOP FOR WENDYL'S BOOK ... GO TO WWW.TRADEME.CO.NZ FOR HER 'GREEN GODDESS' PRODUCTS ... AND EMAIL GREENGODDESSNZ@GMAIL.COM FOR HER NEWSLETTER.



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HAVE YOUR SAY!**

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