

**Episode Title: Growing Louder and Guilty Pleasures**

**Guest: Wendi Aarons**

**Episode Link:** <https://grownasswoman.guide/episode178>

**Jackie MacDougall:** One of the things in your book, sprinkled throughout – well, it's made me so happy because it's my love language – you refer to being a *grown-ass woman*.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah. Yeah. We were just destined. It was destiny, written in the stars that we would meet. Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Exactly. What does that mean to you, to be a grown-ass woman?

**Wendi Aarons:** It just means being confident, finally, for once – and not-- That doesn't mean I'm confident all the time. That doesn't mean I don't have uncertainty or still get nervous about things in life, but it just means that I finally feel like I'm the adult in the room; and I'll couch that with, of course, *what it actually is, being an adult*.

But it's just letting go of all of the weird insecurities and uncertainness...like I used to be insanely nervous about getting up in front of a crowd to do anything, and I've kind of like shaken that off. I'm just like matured and gotten out of that, and faced the fear and done it, and now it doesn't bother me.

So, apply that to like a million other things in my life, and I feel like I'm just a like grown-ass; and I will say what I think and I'm not scared about the repercussions as you know, you see me on Twitter. It's just kind of getting over yourself, I think, and coming into your maturity.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Wendi Aarons is a writer and award-winning humorist whose work has frequently appeared in outlets like McSweeney's and The New Yorker, among many others. At 54 years old, she became a first and second-time author of two books, the middle grade novel *Ginger Mancino*, *Kid Comedian* and *I'm Wearing Tunics Now: On Growing Older, Better, and a Hell of a Lot Louder*.

I listened to the audio version of the book and could be seen laughing to myself all over my community, in my car, with my earbuds in at Costco; it was hilarious. *I'm Wearing Tunics Now* takes us from Wendi's 20s working in Hollywood, through those painful parenting days with kids in elementary school, all the way through midlife where she's found her voice and her stride.

This is *The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide*. I'm your host Jackie MacDougall. When you read Wendi's book, you will hear how the Texas mom of two's writing career first took off, with a viral blog post she wrote in the form of an open letter to the brand manager at Proctor & Gamble.

It's a very funny read, even 16 years later; I will definitely link to it in the show notes. That post sparked a career in blogging; ultimately landing her on stage, and changing the trajectory of her life. Don't let Wendi's soft voice and quiet presence fool you, this woman is an absolute powerhouse.

When's the first time, I mean, I don't expect like you're like, 'I remember the day I became a grown-ass woman' – but like, do you remember the time when you started to go, *why am I trying to please everybody else?*

**Wendi Aarons:** It was probably-- It took a while because I was trying to please everybody, all the moms at school and just trying to be the good girl and do all of that. But it was through writing, it was, that's where I really found my voice – through writing these satiric pieces where I kind of took on a character that was tougher and more ballsy than I really was.

And I did that for a while until, eventually, my real self caught up with my writing character, somewhat. That gave me the courage to say these things on paper. And then I started finally saying them out loud in person or speaking at events; and yeah, it was just a merging of my two selves, I guess.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I think that's really relatable. Not necessarily going and writing for *The New Yorker*, and things like that--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -and speaking at mom blogger conferences and all that. But finding your crowd – finding the people who think like you, who you can be yourself with.

**Wendi Aarons:** Exactly, like you need the right audience. You could be the most brilliant performer in the world; and if that audience isn't your crowd, it's not going to go well. So yeah, go where you're wanted.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right. But most people, myself included, I think, would think, 'Oh, then I must suck that there's something wrong with me'--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -instead of like, 'I need to find a new audience'.  
[laughs]

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah. That's natural. That's a natural thought. And I've had it up myself – but at a certain point, you're like, *'No, the stuff I'm doing or who I am...I'm like a really great person, I'm a great friend, I'm a decent human being. So, if these people don't recognize it, I'm going to go pick up my stuff, and go find the people that will.'*

That's very flip for me to say it that way; it's a lot easier said than done, and it takes effort – and it takes work. But even if you just meet one new friend that gets you on that level that you can be yourself with, that'll lead to another one – or, hopefully, your circle will widen.

And my circle has gotten wider, but it's also gotten more narrow – in that, it's closer friends and they care more about the things in life that I do than just having kids. It's different than just the mom crowd. It's more finding people who relate to you as a human being rather than just, you know, a coworker or situational friendships from parenting, whatever.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right. Geographically desirable friendships. [laughs]

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, exactly. Exactly, because you reproduced at the same time. So, now you're supposed to be friends, but it doesn't much work that way.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. I think we did it to the kids when they were little too. It was like, *'That kid's three, you are three.'*

[laughter]

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right? But now I think we are discerning. I love my friends, my friendships so very much. And I'm also like, 'I don't necessarily need more, but if I meet that person...I'm like, *oh yeah, come on in, come on in.*' You know?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah. Good, good. That's the best way to be. And form your little coven of like-minded people. And that doesn't mean you're all like *Stepford Wives*--

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right.

**Wendi Aarons:** -but we can kind of celebrate each other more and have deeper friendships at this age...after you're kind of through the trenches of being a parent, you know; you're not as anxious about things, you're not as worried about what you look like.

And at least people I hang out with aren't, probably to a detriment – but I don't know, I think the superficiality of a lot of younger friendships is something that goes away once you get a little bit older.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. If you could go back, you've probably heard this question before, but I have to ask; if you could go back and talk to younger Wendi – the one who's trying to get the attention of the moms in the classroom and the school and all that – first of all, would that Wendi actually listen to older Wendi?

**Wendi Aarons:** Probably not. Probably. Well, maybe, although maybe I've always had a respect for elders – so, probably. But what I would say is now that I'm an empty-nester, I would say to revel in the good parts about the kids being small and not get so caught up in the stupid room mom and all of that stuff. Just pay more attention to how cool it is to have kids that age.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, I'm probably going to start singing '*Sunrise Sunset*' at this point.

[laughter]

**Wendi Aarons:** But I'm like, you know, I think back, I'm like, I should have been like really just having so much fun in those days because they were so cute and there were all these school things that, at the time, seemed like a chore. But then when you don't have them anymore, you're like, 'Oh yeah, that would've been fun to go to the Valentine's Day party at school or just appreciate it for what it is at the time.'

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. It's hard to do.

**Wendi Aarons:** It's hard to do.

**Jackie MacDougall:** You know, I see that with people; and I try to kind of share that wisdom, which they're like, '*Are you kidding? I haven't slept in four years.*'

You know, but you talk about empty nest, I have four-- I don't know why I said that. I have three teenagers. It feels like four. I feel like one of the biggest struggles with empty nest will be that I can't use them as an excuse anymore to not go somewhere because I'm like, 'Oh, I'm sorry my kid has this activity.'

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I heard you on another podcast talk about that like, there's nothing funny in empty nest. Are you enjoying it at all? Like, be the ghost of Christmas future, what's happening?

**Wendi Aarons:** I will say I very much enjoy that they, both my sons are thriving. They're very happy where they are. They're not-- It would be a different situation if they weren't happy. So, that gives me a leeway to have more freedom.

I like that we don't have to buy groceries very often anymore; and my husband and I, we did have to reconnect a little bit because we had gotten into these habits where I just go watch TV in one room and he'd go watch it in the other.

And we were used to having kids around to kind of be the buffer. And we finally sat down a couple months ago and he's like, "We need to like watch something together, we need to consciously do something together in the same room."

So, it's been good reconnecting with him; and we've gone on a few trips together without kids – and that's a little shift because you're like, *'Oh, we don't have to go to the zoo or to an amusement park. Like, what are we going to do?'* So, it's, you know, figuring out that.

But yeah, it's bittersweet, I guess, is what I'm saying. It's a little-- I get a little melancholy; and there's nothing real funny about it yet.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Wendi Aarons:** I will say that I'm on some of the college parenting Facebook pages; and there's a lot of humor there – but I don't know, because on the other hand, I'm like, *'God, I could really make fun of this...I could write something funny about this.'*

But then I have to think, 'No, these are anxious parents too.' They're like, that's how it's manifesting itself; and I don't never want to punch down, and make fun of somebody going through something.

So, my long answer is, I don't know if the empty nest, funny thing is going to happen. I think it's needed. I think that it would get an audience, because

that's definitely a time that you want something light to read and to think about and to share in somebody else going through the same thing.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah, for sure. Have you learned anything about yourself? You have a lot more time to think about where you're going, what you're doing, what you want...like that's a question that a lot of grown-ass women haven't asked themselves today; you know, *what do you want?* Do you find yourself wondering?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, I mean, it was good timing that I dropped my second son off at college a month before my book came out. So, that was-- I highly recommend having some project, not necessarily a book, but have a project or have something big that you can focus on.

Because then, then you are not spending time sitting in their bedroom, you know, with a single tear coming out – but just something that is yours that you can latch onto. Maybe it's an art project you've been putting off forever or something, and there's always going to be a million excuses to not do it – but that's the time to really focus on it.

I mean, we've been kind of looking around our house that's now too big for us; and I actually have started calling it Great Gardens, The Texas Great Gardens...because now that there's not activity, I'm like, *'Oh, this, we really need some painting in this room'*, and *'This is kind of falling down over here'*, and blah, blah, blah.

And, you know, and then I'm like Googling Spanish real estate at 3:00 AM every morning. Like, have these grand ideas of moving to Europe or whatever, but--

**Jackie MacDougall:** Really?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Do you think he would do it?

**Wendi Aarons:** I mean, my son is studying in London and he really wants to stay there, so maybe. I mean, it's, I do do a lingo. I do Spanish Duolingo just in case. Just in case the moment comes up.

**Jackie MacDougall:** You'll be good in six months, you're ready?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes. Yes, I'm ready.

**Jackie MacDougall:** That's awesome.

So, what's the response been like to the book from women in Midlife?

**Wendi Aarons:** I have to say I was very scared and nervous when it came out; I guess all authors are like that – but, you know, I wasn't sure how it would be received – and my friends liked it, but they liked me so I was, you know, kind of nervous.

I haven't been reading reviews, but I've been getting a lot of nice messages from people who say that they just really relate to it – even women that are, you know, 10 or 15 years younger...or even 10 years older, they're finding relatability and commonality in a lot of what I talk about.

I get a lot of comments about the friendship chapter, talking about friendship. And that seems to be what people really sparked to because everybody's had friendship difficulties or challenges or realized the importance of the support system of women. So, that's been really good.

My mom thinks I swear too much in the book; I've heard that a few times. I was invited to speak to a couple ladies' groups and asked in advance to not swear.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Oh.

**Wendi Aarons:** So, that's interesting. But it's fine. It's not like, I don't walk in and sound like Samuel Jackson.

[laughter]



**Wendi Aarons:** I know, it's been-- It's been great to see; and it's been great to hear people say like, "I thought I was the only one that felt that way." That was my whole point is, I don't want you to feel like you're alone in all of this.

And it can be easy to do that when, you know, everybody seems like they're thriving. Oh, that's another thing too, when I write about feeling like the odd woman out at school, when my kids were younger, I've talked to people who actually knew me back then and they're like, '*I thought you had everything sorted out, I thought you were fitting in uncomfortable.*'

I'm like, 'I thought you were fitting in uncomfortable.' And then, they weren't either. So, it's all like kind of breaking through what the facade or what your perception of everybody was or, you know, how you present to the world is maybe not the truth.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. I think it's all a bunch of bullsh\*t, you know?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Nobody has it together.

**Wendi Aarons:** You do the way to say it. Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** You know, we act like, *oh, that person's got it and, that person's got it...* and then you become friends with them and you're like, 'Oh no, you're just as messy as I am--'

**Wendi Aarons:** Oh, yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** '-which is awesome'.

**Wendi Aarons:** That's awesome. Sometimes you see these people whose life on Instagram is perfect – and then if you happen to know them personally, you just know what's going on behind the scenes...which is like a train wreck. And it's very fascinating to me.

So, it can be very depressing when you're scrolling through looking at everybody's vacation photos and, you know, you have that little jealousy *Fear Of Missing Out*. But yeah, it's not all as it seems – as you eloquently put it, it's bullsh\*t.

**Jackie MacDougall:** My other question about friendship though too is like when you became friends with some of those women when you first started blogging, and then you've evolved into who Wendi is today; *did you let any of those friendships go? Did you understand that they were kind of seasonal or did you feel that you had to force yourself to continue? Or were they just magical friendships that have continued?*

**Wendi Aarons:** Most of them have continued; and I'll say that because they were the ones that I connected with on a humor level, I guess. And it wasn't about parenting, it was more about what made us laugh, or they were also very funny; and we were all writers.

So yeah, there were probably more acquaintances that were doing like intense parenting, writing, or just had a different path than I did.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right.

**Wendi Aarons:** And so, I'm still acquaintances with a lot of people from those old days, but my core friendships are pretty intact; there's probably about 10 from those days, and we've all, you know, had different writing paths with--

Some of us have had books, some haven't. Some have completely left writing, but we're all staying in touch with text on a daily basis. We have a big text group, which has been like life-changing as far as connection goes.

If I had texting in high school, I know I probably wouldn't have gotten anything done. But, you know, it's just a nice smooth break to check in with everybody, just to tell a joke or whatever. And, you know, the connection is huge. Even though we're all across the country, it feels like they know more about my day-to-day than the people that live next-door.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right? That's so true. So, I have this group-- I did an episode with them in January, but these two women who are also podcasters--

**Wendi Aarons:** Oh.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And we've known each other on the peripheral peripherally.

**Wendi Aarons:** Sidelines. [laughs]

**Jackie MacDougall:** On the sidelines--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -through *She Podcast*. We went to a conference in Arizona back in end of 2021, and we got on Voxer. Are you familiar with Voxer? It's just like a walkie-talkie app. So instead of; you can text, you can add links, you can upload photos – it sounds like I'm doing an ad for Voxer, I promise I'm not.

But we talk every single day; and we just, sometimes it's about podcasting, sometimes it's about spouses, sometimes it's about just stupid creative sh\*t that we've heard. And so, it's incredible.

In fact, one of them is in Costa Rica right now, and she's not checking in every day; and I feel like a little lost, and they're not friends in my everyday life. There's power, I think, in having friendships with people who aren't in that 'everyday thing'--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -because you can just be who you are right now. They're not like a sister or a cousin who's like, 'No, no, no, that's not who you are...you know, when you were 12--' Like, they're just people who take you at face value for who you are in your 50s.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, exactly. That's genius. And you probably-- Did you meet my friend Nancy Davis Kho at that conference?

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yes. She's been on the show.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah. Yes.

**Jackie MacDougall:** She's amazing.

**Wendi Aarons:** She's one of my text friends. And years ago, she went missing or something, like she wasn't – she was going to some event in San Francisco and then we couldn't hear from her and she wasn't checking in. So, I still have that text saved because it was just, we were putting her face on milk cartons.

[laughter]

**Jackie MacDougall:** Wine bottles.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, exactly. This big like three hours of excitement for the text group. And she was fine, but it was just so funny.

**Jackie MacDougall:** That's funny.

**Wendi Aarons:** Anyway--

**Jackie MacDougall:** You referenced

**Wendi Aarons:** I hope the Costa Rica woman appears.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Oh yeah. Well, she checked in this morning, so I know she's all right.

**Wendi Aarons:** Okay, good.

**Jackie MacDougall:** So, we have to talk about something that you and I have in common. It could be seen as an affliction for some; you're also a Fanilow. [laughs]

**Wendi Aarons:** You're a Fanilow?

**Jackie MacDougall:** I can't believe I get to talk about this on my podcast.

**Wendi Aarons:** Oh my gosh.

**Jackie MacDougall:** If you're listening at home, Wendi's walked to the other side of the office and she's coming back.

**Wendi Aarons:** Well, I had to show you this.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Oh my goodness. Is that from--

**Wendi Aarons:** No, she commissioned it, my friend Lisa Rosenberg.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Oh my gosh. A picture of you and Barry.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Incredible.

**Wendi Aarons:** A Drawing. A drawing.

**Jackie MacDougall:** A drawing, yes. That's beautiful. I met him once.

**Wendi Aarons:** What?

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yes. We have to-- Oh my God. Okay, a Barry Manilow clock, that's incredible.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes.

**Jackie MacDougall:** You've one-up to me. I do have a signed CD from him because he was on *The Tonight Show* when I was working at NBC. And I went down there and I was trying to act cool. The stage director, who I knew at the time, introduced us and I thought I was like losing my mind. And my friend, who's now my sister-in-law said, "*You were so cool...it was like, I was surprised you didn't say, oh, what's your name? Larry? Nice to meet you, Larry.*" [laughs] Like I was-- But inside I was like, ah. Like, childhood Jackie was losing my mind. So, take me back, like, *when did this happen? How did this happen?*

**Wendi Aarons:** Well, I was born in 1967, so you couldn't escape Barry Manilow, you know? And I had the Barry Manilow piano sound book, so I'd plunk out all the songs in there, and listen to it. He's just such a great songwriter. And it's just like, I imprinted it on my memory, I think, because I was so young.

And then, I've seen him in concert maybe about six times. And you can't embarrass yourself at a Barry Manilow concert; you just can't. And the crowd is just strange and weird and fun. And my friend Isabel surprised me, took me to see Barry on Broadway when he was doing a Broadway theater in New York a couple of years ago.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Oh.

**Wendi Aarons:** And she was kind of-- All my friends I've taken, when they go into the concerts are a little bit like, you know--

**Jackie MacDougall:** This is cheesy.

**Wendi Aarons:** -holding their noses, but then they come out like a changed person.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Wendi Aarons:** They're like, 'Oh my God, that was the best.' And very so engaging in concert. And the Vegas concert's really good, if you haven't been to that one – with his new hips, he has new hips now so he can really dance.

**Jackie MacDougall:** [laughs] That's what I wanted – a singer-songwriter, his new hips. I remember it was 1994, it was a year before I moved to LA; and I was in a rental car, I think it was like a *Dodge Aries K* – or whatever those little crappy car.

And *Mandy* came on; and I found myself at a traffic light in Cambridge, Massachusetts with like the *tear* down my face. I think it was then that I realized like, oh my gosh, he is the soundtrack of my life.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Because I'm the 11th kid in my family; I have 10 older siblings.

**Wendi Aarons:** Oh my gosh.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And so, I was born in 71, but all of my musical influence is like 70s as they were older. And then my friends, like your friends, they've taken me or gone with me to concerts, like, '*Oh, I'm doing this for you, I'm taking one for the team.*' And then they leave with the t-shirt on, you know? [laughs]

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah. Nancy Davis Kho, I took her in San Jose; and she got the glitter Manilow T-shirt, and she'll wear it, unironically.

**Jackie MacDougall:** [laughs] That's amazing. And then I took my kids when they were really little to see him at the Hollywood Bowl, and it was like--

**Wendi Aarons:** Oh wow.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -one of those like, I don't know, like full circle moments, you know, to have them there. And one of them fell asleep to *Mandy*, which is funny because I used to sing *Mandy* to him when he was little, and then he like fell asleep as a six-year-old to *Mandy*.

**Wendi Aarons:** That's great.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Anyway, yeah, so every time I heard you talk about being a Fanilow in the book, I was like, yes.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes. No, let me know if there's a concert, hit me up, I'll go with you.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Let's meet-- We'll meet in Vegas. [laughs]

**Wendi Aarons:** We'll meet in Vegas.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Perfect. Okay, I digress. Let's get back to the show here. One thing I've been dying to talk to Wendi about, in addition to all things, Barry Manilow, is the subtitle of her book *On Growing Older, Better, and a Hell of a Lot Louder*. Can you talk to me a little bit about the *louder* part?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes. And as everybody has picked up by this point, I'm a soft-spoken person; I have a quiet voice. And I say if I had a choice as to



who would read my audio book, it would be Wanda Sykes because, in my mind, my voice is like Wanda Sykes – but it is not at all.

But yeah, *louder* in the, not volume sense, but in the just speaking out and speaking up – and sometimes that's by writing, sometimes that's by being the person that's standing up. Like, I never used to be that way.

But that sort of sense of, nobody's coming to save us anymore; we're the people that are going to save ourselves and save the younger generations – so we need to be vocal. We need to be going to marches and protests and writing our senators; and, in my case, sending nasty tweets to Texas lawmakers.

But whatever it is, it's just making your presence felt unknown more than you maybe have in the past, because there's no reason to keep quiet anymore once you get to this age. It's, you are smart and wise and you know the way things should be; and if they're not the way they should be, then it's kind of on us to tell people that.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. And so, where did you first start to hear your voice? Like, 'Wait, I'm speaking up.'

**Wendi Aarons:** Gosh, I have a story in the book about getting up on stage at a BlogHer conference, which were the big blogging conferences; and I was picked to be a *Voice of the Year*.

And I got up to read my blog post to like 3000 people; and I was terrified, terrified, terrified. And I read my piece, and it was great. And I got a great reception. And that to me was like a different experience than somebody just reading my work. It was much more powerful to have all these people bear witness in person.

And I really-- It really impacted me, and it led to me starting to write and produce a show in Austin called *Listen To Your Mother*. It was a national show that my friend Ann Imig started. And that to me was the best way to take this passion – newfound passion of speaking in front of people – and gifting that to other women and men in the community.

So, each year we'd have auditions for the show; and you just had to have a story about motherhood – you didn't have to be a mother, but just some story.

And we'd have auditions and we'd get like 150 applications, read the stories, have people come in and audition – and then we'd have a live

stage show with like 15 people getting up and sharing their story, sharing their life or whatever.

And so many of them, I could see how life-changing it was for them as well. And a lot of them went on to do more storytelling, or write even more on the topic, or produce their own shows.

I was just a facilitator between, you know; I got to do this really amazing thing and read my work on stage, and now I'm going to do something to help others do the same. And I think that was probably the first way I saw that my voice was powerful.

And even if I wasn't the one speaking, my voice behind the scenes, pushing these other people out on stage and saying, "Now it's your turn, you do it." So yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Wendi Aarons:** It's a big deal. But it's kind of, you know, probably akin to what you're doing with the podcast; you're facilitating getting people's stories out in the world, and sharing what they're doing and what they believe – and, you know, that must feel pretty good at the end of the day for you.

**Jackie MacDougall:** For sure. Especially the voices, maybe you can relate, the voices that wouldn't be heard otherwise. You know, the voices that, while I may have a bestselling author one day, I have another episode with a woman who's never been on a podcast...who has something really important to say.

And so, I do try to balance those voices, and find people that we should be hearing from, because sometimes--

**Wendi Aarons:** We should be hearing.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -we're only hearing from the louder people, you know?

**Wendi Aarons:** Exactly. Exactly. I'm glad you said that; that's really key too. If you can amplify somebody who isn't getting their work out there or getting people frequenting their business or whatever it is. I mean, I'm like a micro influencer – but when I can lend my voice to help someone, yeah, it's a big deal.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right. If you follow Wendi on social media, it does not take long to know what she believes in and what she stands for to stand up and say, "This is what I believe", especially living in Texas, the state being run in a way that isn't necessarily aligned with who you are. How do you navigate that?

**Wendi Aarons:** That's a great question. The chapter in the book called *I'm Wearing Fury Now*, it talks about my political awakening, which was Wendi Davis's filibuster for reproductive rights. And that was a great ex-- I don't want to say a great experience, but that's where I really started to find my voice and not be scared to share my political views.

And I went to the filibuster and started live tweeting what she was saying and why I was there, what other people were saying. And I started to get people reading what I said from around the country and around the world.

*And it was like, 'Oh, I'm just this small person...I'm just one woman in Texas, but I have enough of an audience that I can share what's happening here, and I can give my input and explain it and how it affects everyone here.'* But that led to getting more involved in various campaigns.

I worked for my friend MJ Hegar, who ran for Senate. So, I worked on her campaign. I started to do a lot of 'get out the vote' activities with other friends who also felt the same way.

The 2016 election really shook up a lot of people's friendships. So, that led to me getting closer with other women that I knew that aligned with me, that we could group up together and go do these things – go to rallies, promote different groups.

There was the RAICES (R-A-I-C-E-S) group that does a lot of immigration work in Texas; we've been highlighting them and trying to just raise up the voices of everybody that's doing good work in Texas.

So, there's a story in the book about how I spoke at the Women's March on The Capitol steps, which I wasn't even that scared to do it because I think everything I'd done up until that point had led me there.

And if I hadn't done the Voice of the Year way back when, that wouldn't have led to me going down this path to eventually meeting all these women and being invited to speak, and being ready to speak.

So that's a good lesson too, that you might not think what you're doing matters or it's not helping out your life in any way – but I always think things are just a stepping stone to what's next. So, you know, you can probably do this too at this age.

You can track back, like, *'I got a Film degree, which seemed like a waste of money – but Oh, that led to this, or then that led to me doing this.'*

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, it all makes sense if you kind of go do a backwards glance at it.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Wendi Aarons:** So, don't be so tough on yourself if what you're doing now doesn't seem to make sense or be pushing you forward – it probably will push you forward, you just don't know that yet.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah, that's a good point. I think we talk about using our voice and we definitely gravitate toward politics; and there's so much going on, and probably will be for the rest of our lives. Right? We always say, "Oh, right now things are--" It's like, 'Okay, don't, this is not temporary.'

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And it probably was always happening; we just have ways now to know people's views now, you know, when--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes, 100%.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -you used to be able to have a neighbor, and be like, 'Hi Bob', and not know that he spews hateful speak on Facebook.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And so, I know for myself, like I had a podcast years ago, I used to say 'No opinion was left unsaid'. And then I started to kind of like, pull it in a little bit and realize, I don't have to express every single feeling I have the second I have it.

And now I'm in this like center spot where I don't use my voice just for the sake of using my voice – but I do want to use my voice when it can make an impact.

And so, what would you say to the women out there who are listening to your journey and your path and they've listened to the book? I mean, it's pretty incredible when you actually like draw the line from where you are at the beginning of the book to where you are at the end of the book. How would you tell them that they could start using their voice if they're not ready to be out there at women's marches and things like that?

**Wendi Aarons:** I think they should just start going where the people using their voices are. So, you can be in the same room with the outspoken women, or with the women that are the leaders and fighting the fight and doing everything.

Just get in the room with them – and just learn what they're doing, how they're doing; information is power. It's easier to speak up if you know what you're talking about – at least for me, anyway – that's why I don't get in a lot of debates with people where I don't know, like, 'Well, *The New York Times* said this', like, I don't do that.

But yeah, just be around it; it's inspiring, and see what they're doing. And I used to work for these Conferences for Women; there's Texas, Boston, Philadelphia, and there's a upcoming one in California.

And those are great because all of these women who are very professional, some of who started a company a couple years ago – but they're all out there speaking and they're giving advice, and it's inspiring to be around just all these women who are trying to help each other, like supporting each other.

So yeah, I would say that when you're ready, you're going to be ready; and maybe you're not going to use your voice by making a speech on The Capitol steps – but maybe you're doing it by telling five friends, "*This is what's going on, come join me at this meeting or come help me write postcards about 'getting out to vote'.*" There are quiet ways of being motivational and inspirational; you don't have to be the one standing up raising your fist.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. I love that you said that because I think there are a lot of women out there. Like we celebrate the ones, right, who are willing and able--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -to get up and to speak out. And I think there's just as much power in introverts at home who are--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -listening and saying like, "Yes, I want to make an impact, but I'm not that person."

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah. My friend Anne Hebert in Austin is quieter than I am and doesn't get up and make speeches, but she is like biggest motivator of all of us for block-walking and 'getting out the vote'.

And she sends her emails, and she has a Facebook page; and none of us want to disappoint her so we're always like, 'Oh God, we better go or Anne will be upset with us.' But that's her power. And you know, she's using it for good, and then she's making a difference.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. I love that, finding what your unique power is and having the courage to use that. And I feel like that's exactly what you're doing. We live in a culture that's like; *if you want something, you got to make it happen – make it happen, make it happen.*

And when you started with one blog post that you wrote and you sold and you got it out there, it feels like – and maybe you can correct me if I'm wrong – that you just kind of like went with the flow...like, *this worked, I'm going to write another one, I'm going to write another one.*

I can only imagine that you – how many years ago...15, maybe years ago – weren't like, 'I'm going to do this, and then when I'm 54 I'm going to write two books and blah, blah, blah, blah'.

Like, we feel like we're supposed to have the whole plan. Right? So, we're supposed to have all of it mapped out. And so, what would you say to that? Like somebody listening who's like, 'I don't have it mapped out...I'm 54 and I don't have two books.' What would you tell her to do?

**Wendi Aarons:** Well, it's the whole, '*You don't know what you don't know*'. So, I didn't know I had this book in me. Obviously, I'm like, '*Yeah, it'd be great to have a book one day*', but I didn't know what that book was even going to be about. I didn't-- I wasn't ready to write it.

So, the time came when it should have come for me. And not everybody's going to write a book, but maybe you're going to find a job you didn't even know you wanted. I mean, there are jobs out there now that didn't exist 10 years ago.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Wendi Aarons:** Some that didn't exist five years ago. So, you can have a plan, you can have goals, but don't be surprised that those might not happen the way you think they will, because everything is different.

If you keep your possibilities open and you don't stick to such a rigid thing, if I had been like, 'I need to write a book by the time I'm 40, and it's going to be about this and this and this', and then when that didn't happen, I would've been crushed and thought I was a failure

And a lot of people do that. I have certainly had dreams and goals, but don't be so finite and set in stone, I guess, keep it open. You didn't know when you were 30, you're going to be a podcaster?

**Jackie MacDougall:** No. It didn't exist.

**Wendi Aarons:** No. Didn't exist, exactly. So yeah, keep your eyes open and keep your-- I would say keep your ear to the ground a little bit too, because things change so much and you just don't know what's around the corner and what piques your interest.

And I always say like, when I'm writing a humor piece, the way I decide if I want to write one is if I just keep having this thought that won't go away, it just like sticks in there. I'm, *'God, there's got to be something about that, what am I going to do about that?'*

And everybody has that. You have that little voice, like whatever it is. Like, 'I'm really fascinated by girls' athletic wear', you know, whatever it is. But maybe you keep thinking that, you keep thinking that and then you're like, 'Oh, I have a better idea of how this shirt can work or', that's probably a terrible example, but it's just like whatever your voice is pointing you towards, it's your intuition that we don't all understand sometimes.

But yeah, so I would say just be flexible; and certainly, you want to do things, but don't think it has to be set in stone what it's going to turn out to be or by when it's when it's going to happen.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Oh, right?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yes.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And if you're a parent, which not all of my listeners are, but if you are, also apply that to your kids.

**Wendi Aarons:** Oh yeah. Especially with these COVID kids. I mean, it's-- I had one graduate during the pandemic and the other one two years later, and they're both kind of on the path that they would've been on a little bit different – but every day here kids, they're just, they're not going to school right away.

They're not going to going to go a traditional route. They're a good example of how you just have to pivot. And I know we all hate the word 'pivot', but it's true.

I mean, and when you do have kids, you're still kind of at the behest of what's going on with them – but they're also good about just adapting, I



think. This generation's going to be more adaptable in the long run than any other generation.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. I repeatedly say to my 18-year-old, at least for me, when we were growing up, it was like, *figure out what you want to do, and then that's what you're going to do for the next 40 years.*

I think about like *The Flintstones* where he punches, you know, and slides down the dinosaur, and that's not the world we live in. Just like you said, like I could not produce podcasts and consult on podcasts 20 years ago; it didn't exist.

**Wendi Aarons:** Right. But you had a background doing TV and Production involved, so that all led you to what you're doing now; you just didn't have any way of knowing that it was going to happen.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right. Exactly. But I'm a firm believer of 'try something' because it's easier to jump into a different path or a different lane if you're already moving. It's like when you go to change lanes--

**Wendi Aarons:** That's good. Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** You don't change lanes from a stopped position; you have to like go with the flow of traffic, and then move over.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And so, try something.

**Wendi Aarons:** I like that.

**Jackie MacDougall:** If you're listening and you're 50, you're 70, you're whatever it is, like, try something because it might lead you to something else. I mean, you're the prime example of that.

**Wendi Aarons:** No, that's great. I've always hated that, saying that, *if you knew you couldn't fail, what would you do?* I've always hated that, because it's like, even if you know you're going to fail, you could still try...like you just said, just try it. Just get the experience or, you know, at least in my case, you get a funny story out of it you can tell later.

**Jackie MacDougall:** [laughs] Exactly. And it's going to lead you to the next thing that you--

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah, it'll lead you next.

**Jackie MacDougall:** -couldn't gotten there.

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Well, Wendi, I could take up your entire day, but I will not do that.

**Wendi Aarons:** I would let you. I would let you.

**Jackie MacDougall:** [laughs] I appreciate your time. I love the book. It's really funny.

**Wendi Aarons:** Thank you.

**Jackie MacDougall:** It felt like hanging out with you, especially the audiobook. I appreciate your honesty and your candor and your humor. It made me feel less alone, for sure. So, if that was your mission, mission completed.

**Wendi Aarons:** We will have to go to a Barry Manilow International Fan Club beat up sometime.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Are you actually a member of the International Fan Club?

**Wendi Aarons:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Oh, okay. So, you've one-upped me, for sure.

**Wendi Aarons:** Oh yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Teach me your ways, Obi-Wan Kenobi, I'm in.

**Wendi Aarons:** Okay.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Thank you so much.

**Wendi Aarons:** Thank you for having me. This is great.

Jackie MacDougall: Follow Wendi on her social channels, @wendiaarons; and check out All Things Wendi at wendiaarons.com. Thanks for listening. Connect with The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide on all social channels at grownasswoman.guide, and please consider supporting the show by sharing it with a friend. Or you can leave a rating and review on your favorite podcast app. I appreciate your feedback so much.

Until next time, remember, you are a grown-ass woman. Act accordingly.

The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide is produced by Grown-Ass Creative, a woman-first agency that empowers women over 40 with career and educational opportunities. For more information, visit [grownasscreative.com](http://grownasscreative.com).