


Kathie Bishop

founder of *Into the Wyld*



*It's Your
Power
Portal!*

**TAKE CONTROL OF
YOUR VAGINAL HEALTH
WITH HERBAL AND HOLISTIC CARE**

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health with herbal and
holistic care

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INTO THE
wylde

AEON

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To all the men. May you raise fearless daughters who know their own bodies and aren't afraid to speak up about them.

And to the wild...

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To my patients and clients. You teach me, every day.

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INTRODUCTION

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. Or maybe it's best to start these things with a little discomfort, for that's so often how an interest in vaginal health starts.

So, let's try on that mantle of discomfort for size, see how it feels: Repeat after me: Vagina. Vagina, Vagina, Vagiiiiinaaaaa.

Let it roll around your mouth, say it out loud, repeating in succession. Accentuate the vowels. How does it feel in your mouth? How does it sit in your bones? I'd love to say: 'see, it wasn't too bad was it?' But the reality is that there will be a large number of folk for whom that might feel, well, a bit self-conscious. A bit awkward. A hint of disgust? And that's ok. I want you to lean into your discomfort here. Breathe and relax. *B r e a t h e*. You're in safe hands.

Did you know that the accepted etymology of the word vagina comes from the old Greek word for sheath, or more specifically a sheath for a sword? And that gladius, meaning sword, was a common term for the penis. Slightly more acceptable is clitoris from

the Greek word *kleitoris*, meaning door-tender, but it makes you realise just how far back the subjugation of female parts goes back. And it's so weaponised ... What do you make of that?

My name is Kathie. I'm a medical herbalist specialising in vaginal health, and, well, these are the kind of things I'm likely to come out with if you hang around with me socially. I was recently at a birthday party in a local pub. There were quite a few people I didn't know there, friends of my friend and her husband, as well as one of my oldest friends. A good mix of men and women. We were sitting outside and many of the women had gathered around a large table. We were asking each other what we did, learning about each other and where we could connect. Many were full-time mothers, others professional women, one was a psychologist. The drink was flowing and the late summer evening felt good. Then it got to my turn. It can go either way when we get down to it. I started talking about my work, both as a clinical herbalist and as the founder of Into the Wylde, a female, herbal-based intimate pleasure brand. The women were fascinated, crowded in a little closer, glowing just a little bit more together, got really curious, eyes sparkling. We started an interesting conversation around the politics of sex, the physiology of the vagina, and female body positivity. Everyone brought their own stories to the mix, their own viewpoints and were fascinated to learn a few facts that they hadn't previously known. The sharing of stories was great. It's not something we do very often, talking about our intimate health. Especially in beer gardens. But the more conversations we have, the more we normalise our bodies and the topic, releasing the fear and the shame.

And then the men, the husbands, the friends and the partners came over, and asked 'What are you talking about?'. Vaginas, we said. 'Urgh' was the response. My heart sank. 'Why "urgh"?' I said, 'Don't you enjoy having sex? Weren't you there at the birth of your children?' But we'd lost them. They were turned off by the naming of our parts, and appeared not to be interested in the treasures to learn therein. Parts that hold an interesting place in our cultural imaginations. Parts that are at once desired but also derided. Parts that are simultaneously the ultimate taboo and the holy grail. Nightmarish images of 'vagina dentata' juxtaposing the deep holy reverence for the 'jade temple': The vagina as commodity and convenience in mainstream porn vs the birth canal for our children.

There's a lot of confusing stuff going on in society for us to get our heads around when it comes to vaginas, and I guess a beer garden late on one August evening in 2019 isn't necessarily ready for us yet.

But it really brought home to me a good couple of things. Firstly, the vagina needs a healthy dose of PR. Secondly, if good quality information about the vagina, its health, what to expect at different ages and stages, how to safely help ourselves and when to seek help, was easily accessible we would all be more empowered to take action. We could own the choices we make for the health of our bodies more easily, with pride. And that's where the idea for this book was born.

From the age of about 11, just after my menarche, I started a long, uncomfortable and deeply embarrassing relationship with thrush. I remember the first time on the GPs couch at that age, trying to pretend to myself I wasn't there, while they took a swab and sent it away for analysis. To wipe myself out of that picture. That first swab, plus countless others up to the age of 33, would come back with a positive result for *Candida albicans*—the yeast most commonly responsible for the majority of vaginal thrush infections worldwide. Over the years, becoming more frustrated, disillusioned and incredulous at my own body, I went on a journey, learning everything I could about how to reduce the occurrence and rid myself of thrush, consulting many allopathic and natural health specialists in this area, finally accepting that thrush was just something that was 'in me', like an invading force (which of course is what it is). I came to the conclusion that in order to deal with it I would just have to ignore it. In doing so I disconnected from that part of my body. Not so good, right?

In my 20s, whilst working in the arts, I decided to train as a medical herbalist. This had nothing to do with my own health history and everything to do with my own interests and hope for my future career path and work. Herbs and creativity are the threads that runs through everything I do and am. Through my own experiences and clinical work, it became obvious that vaginal health was the area I was set to specialise in. It's my passion. I'm passionate about ensuring that our experiences of vaginal health aren't marginalised, that everyone has a voice and is welcome to the table, and it is my passion above all to help women who have suffered repeatedly with bouts of vaginal issues: to reconnect them back to their bodies and creative power, with love and confidence, knowing that they have the knowledge and power to anticipate and manage their flare-ups and live an embodied life that they are the mistress of.

Will you join me?