



**Featuring:
Deborah Darling**

**#27: Women On The Move:
The Incredible Transformation**

Transcript

Heike: Well, hello everybody, and welcome to the Pursue Your Spark Podcast. I am so excited about my guest today. It is the fabulous Deborah Darling, and I was so excited that she actually said yes to be on my podcast, and as a glamorous and busy person that she is, so let me introduce Deborah Darling if you have not come across her on Facebook or Instagram yet. She says about herself she's an ageless style protagonist. Model and show-off. She says about herself, "I believe that growing older should only be perceived as a great thing; that there are many wonderful opportunities still waiting to be discovered, marvelous adventures to be had, and a full life to be lived."

She's a contributor to the Australian magazine Broad. She's featured in Woman and Home Magazine, in the Fine Line Magazine in the article 12 Silver Stunners to Follow on Instagram, featured on Josie, which I just learned today is the slang word for Johannesburg, in the Chatelaine Magazine, Gorgeous Hair Grey Hairstyles That Will Inspire You To Ditch The Dye. She's also, which I've learned today too, she's the co-host in a pilot for a TV show that just recently aired or started, so I want to know more about this later. The documinute a 60-second documentary Deborah Darling. Aside from that, she was a zombie in the film Blind and several TV commercials. I hope you guys are pumped about my guest, Deborah Darling, so welcome to the show.

Deborah Darling: Thank you. Thank you so much. I have a list of things going on.

Heike: No, I know you've been really busy with photo shooting and new modeling jobs. I was really excited that you were able to come on the show and say hi and share you with my viewers. You live in South Africa, if everybody wondered about the accent, it's not an American accent. You live in South Africa in "Joburg," as you guys call it. Tell us more about it.

Deborah Darling: Yeah, I've lived here for about 30 odd years, but I am English, well my parents were English, but I was born in New Zealand. They went to New Zealand when they were newly married. They were expecting me already then, so I was born in New Zealand. They didn't stay there for long. They had itchy feet and they went back to England, and then I've spent the rest of my life moving around between Zambia and Zimbabwe and back to England. I've been living in Johannesburg now for about 35 years or more. I'm a "Joburg" girl, I think, now with a twist of English maybe.

Heike: What made you stick in Johannesburg?

Deborah Darling: I don't know, I came here, I met a man, I met the man I married and he was South African. We moved here together and I had my daughter and set up home and set up life and this is where I live. That's how it goes, I suppose.

Heike: Yeah, it's just like here, I came from Germany to the United States and met my first husband. Had the kids, got stuck here on the East Coast of the United States and that's just where I ended up living.

Deborah Darling: That's it, that's how it goes. My daughter and grandson live here, so this is where I am for now.

Heike: I want to tell the viewers that I actually have never met you in person and I saw you on Instagram. Guys, I literally started stalking Deborah. I saw her cool hair and I was like, "Oh my god, this woman is so cool. She's so brave about her gray hair. She loves her gray hair and she looks absolutely fabulous." I was like, "Oh my god, I've got to know this woman," so I started literally stalking her on Instagram and listening to everything she had to say and the cool styles she had. Then I was wondering, "Is that her real name? Deborah Darling? How did she get to that?" How did you become or are you Deborah Darling?

Deborah Darling: I'm not Deborah Darling. My name is Deborah Chambers, and it's the strangest thing because about probably 10 or 12 years ago this Deborah Darling name, people started calling me Deborah Darling and I honestly don't know why or how it happened. Everyone at work started calling me Deborah Darling, my name on the telephone list became Deborah Darling, my parking spot became Deborah Darling. It sort of got a life of its own and became more and more. I like it, so I'm using it. It stuck and it's interesting that I didn't make it up, but it sort of just, I don't know, grew on its own.

Heike: Because it is, when I look at you, you do look at me definitely more like a Deborah Chamber, not like a Deborah Chamber, but like a Deborah Darling. That was the perfect fit and the perfect presentation on your Instagram account, so I have to tell the listeners too that I love your little videos that you post on Instagram. I think they're absolutely funny, informative, cheeky. Tell me, how did you get to be so popular and so involved with Instagram?

Deborah Darling: A friend told me when I started modeling and I had a few photographs that I was collecting, which was only three years ago, a friend said, "You need to put your photographs on Instagram." I didn't know what it was. I'd sort of heard a bit, but I didn't know, so I sort of investigated and I uploaded a few photographs. I didn't have any followers and I didn't really know how it worked.

But then it also started to grow and I started to get a few followers. Then about a year ago I started a little online styling business and when we were launching that I started making videos in my car. I decided to make a video, and they were about style, but they were sort of quirky and funny and silly. One of them I'm driving around with a mustache in my car. They were such fun and everybody enjoyed them. The business didn't take off and we were a bit too soon in the market for an online styling business anyway, but I continued making the videos. Now I make them, it's not a regular thing, but I try to make one once a week. The people seem to like them, so I'm very silly in them. They've become my thing, I suppose.

Heike: I always watch the video and I know you often video in the car and I know you guys drive on the left side of the road, but I'm always nervous. I'm like, "Deborah, keep your eyes on the road. Don't look at us in the camera. No, no, we're okay, we're here."

Deborah Darling: I don't touch the phone at all. I try to be very, very safe and I don't touch it when I'm driving and I glance at it. It feels very safe and it feels as though I'm talking to somebody, to a passenger. I don't like to think that it's not safe, but I think it's okay.

Heike: I think it's just as a mom I have my like, "No, hands on the steering wheel." I'm German, so we're always looking straight ahead. There's no looking around. Your little stories that you tell on Instagram or the questions you ask are so endearing and so, you just drive down the street and you look at us, the viewer, and say, "Hey, you, I just wanted to ask you about this. Have you ever thought about that?" It just warms my heart, I just love it, and I've said that before.

Deborah Darling: Oh, thank you, that's nice to hear because sometimes it's just me being silly, so it's lovely that people enjoy my silliness.

Heike: Too many people take themselves way too seriously, their Instagram, although you're a stylist, that's part of you. It's not like you're making yourself up before you go on camera or on video, other than your modeling jobs, but you always look fabulous. I did a little bit more today than I normally do because I want to look good for you too.

Deborah Darling: Thank you, I do try to post, I mean I do post sometimes videos with no makeup and things. I try to be, I mean nobody wants an unattractive photograph really, or video, but you've seen, I post them with no makeup sometimes, my gym photographs and things.

Heike: Yeah, but I think in our world of Instagram where everybody wants to look glamorous, and I just had a conversation today with somebody who says, "Oh, my friend, before she gets any photos or anything on Instagram, she has to be styled, she has to have makeup, she has to have her hair done, otherwise you won't ever see her on Instagram, or any social media for that matter." I know we're talking a lot about that, we're not real on our social media, but you know what? With you, I feel that is you. That is, you're the hair, you're the makeup, you're glamorous. I swear to god if I have my towel on my head and a glass of wine in my hand I don't look glamorous. To me, at least, it is so you and it's not put on, that's what I think I'm trying to say.

Deborah Darling: Well, thank you. I do try to make sure I've got lipstick on before going in front of the camera, but I do try to keep it as real as possible.

Heike: Tell me about your modeling career.

Deborah Darling: My little modeling career.

Heike: Oh my god, I think this is such an incredible story you shared with me before and I'm like, "The listeners need to hear this," because we're no young chickens. Getting into modeling at our age, and we're not telling you guys how old we are-

Deborah Darling: No, I don't mind. I'm happy to tell you my age. Do you want to know my age?

Heike: Yeah, go for it.

Deborah Darling: I'm 56 and a half. I'll be 57 in December. I think it's important to share our ages. I don't want to pretend to be younger than I am, so it's fine with me.

Heike: Tell us about modeling. I know you started modeling not too long ago. How did all that happen?

Deborah Darling: It was about three years ago and it was after my hair had turned silver that I started to get a lot of attention for my hair and people would stop me in the street and ask me if they could take my photograph and talk to me about my hair. That happens now, even. I get into conversations all the time with women saying, "Your hair looks great, I'd love to let my hair be gray, but my mum doesn't like it or my daughter doesn't like it or my husband doesn't like it." I'm always ambushed in shops and restaurants to talk about my hair. Anyways, I started to get a lot of attention about my hair, so I decided one night, you know you should never leave a granny alone at home with an internet connection unsupervised?

I sent some photographs off to, I just googled an agency and sent my photographs off and they phoned me and said, "Come and see us," and sent me for a casting. I didn't know what to expect. I really didn't have a clue, and it was a TV commercial. I really wasn't even sure that it was there from the brief. I was completely, I'd never done anything like it before. I went off to the casting, they had me do a few things and they cast me on my first casting. Got my first advert, which is very lucky and very unusual.

Heike: What was it?

Deborah Darling: It was a deodorant advert and I was the secretary showing somebody in. It was lots of fun, I loved it. From that moment I loved it. I loved them doing my makeup and dressing me up and primping my hair, so I loved it. I continued to do it and I've been in quite a few ads now. It happens sometimes that I go out and people say, "Oh, you're the lady from the TV."

Heike: It's quite a good compliment.

Deborah Darling: Yeah, people remember, even though it might just be a second or two, or a few seconds of your face.

Deborah Darling: I enjoyed that and I've had quite a few different jobs and some fashion shoots and some beauty shoots and TV commercials, so it's been fun. It's been three years, I started when I was 53, but accidentally almost.

Heike: Accidentally how?

Deborah Darling: Accidentally, I sent my photographs off not really expecting anything to come of it, I think.

Heike: You sent something into the universe and you go like, "Let's see what happens, what do I have to lose?"

Deborah Darling: Yes, yes.

Heike: The true spirit of an entrepreneur.

Deborah Darling: A bit terrifying, but I enjoy it. I still get terrified, I mean when I go for a casting I'm still nervous as I'm driving there thinking, "Oh my goodness, they're not going to like me." That's the thing, is to be brave and to try out new things.

Heike: That definitely is a very new thing. Putting yourself out there, and I love that you're owning your gray hair. I asked you that before, but I also want to share this with the listener, that your hair, and if they see you on Instagram or they watch also the video recording of this, her hair is really that color.

Deborah Darling: Yes. People stop me and ask me who colors my hair, more often than even who cuts it, or about the same. I have to tell them that it's not colored. People find that hard to believe. I get that from my mum, she had silver hair and she didn't like hers, she covered it up.

Heike: Many women do that, but I saw your hair and I said, "Wow, is this really real," and it's like, "Yeah." With the gray hair trend now being so trendy, and you said, "Yeah," and then you have this really groovy, funky haircut. It just fits your personality. You know, I saw a picture of you before you were Deborah Darling.

Deborah Darling: Oh, yes.

Heike: The one with the coat and there was just no comparison to the two women that I saw at least in the picture and the style and the vibrancy of the person. You went through a huge transition, share us with your story.

Deborah Darling: I used to be quite overweight, all my life. I was the classic dieter losing, I don't know, losing 5 or 10 kilos or more and then putting it all back on again and more, as is the classic situation. When I, leading up to my 50th birthday I managed to, at last, get a handle on it. I've been this weight for about seven years now. It's changed my life, I've become more active. I'm a different person now, I'm a healthier person, I am completely different, as you say from the photograph.

Heike: It was stunning when I saw the before and after and I'm going like, "Is that really the same person?" How did you get a handle on all of this, on your weight and, yeah, your weight? How did you get a handle on the transition?

Deborah Darling: I met a fabulous dietician in "Joburg" and I still see her a bit very occasionally. I haven't seen her probably for 18 months, but she's there if I need to just get a bit of a focus and so on, so it's nice to have her, or if I need help. If I'm doing more sport or something like that and I just need a bit more input. If I'm upping my cycling and I just want to make sure that I'm eating enough, and so on. One of the other things that I really do believe made a difference was that I started to think about my, because I've been to dietitians before, so it wasn't anything new, but I think that one of the things was that I started to think about my body in a different way and I started to think ... In fact, I wrote it down and I wish I could find it. I remember writing an A4, all these notes because I was constantly in this battle to lose weight and to resolve this problem that I had with myself.

Deborah Darling: I started to consider that the body that I didn't like and that I had grown to really loathe from my teenage years when I started to put on weight, that maybe it was a perfect body. Maybe it was perfect because of all the things that I could do. You think about that you can listen to music, that you can love, that you can dance, that you can make love, that you can have it, I mean I bore a child and breastfed the child for a year. That's amazing, I mean that's incredible stuff, so I think I started to reframe the idea of the body that I felt disconnected from and I didn't respect and didn't care for. I think that helped me to get a handle on it and to say, "Well, my body is okay. My body is actually very good in fact, all the things I can do." I think that helped me and I think I started to respect it and treat it in a more respectful way. I think that was a big shift for me.

Heike: I can totally see that because I hear so many women that I'm talking to, in particular in our age bracket, that are like, "I'm not losing weight, I'm doing everything." They all see themselves in a much more negative light. Like you said, you put it so pointedly, is our body can do so much. It doesn't matter if you have a few pounds more or less or if you're rounder or more voluptuous or whatever, but really that you honor your body and you love your body for who you are and really love the capabilities of your body, because you can't do a transformation with hating yourself, hating your body.

Deborah Darling: Yeah, and it's a big shift, you know, to think this body that I didn't like produced a child. That's amazing. It deserves a bit of love for that.

Heike: Absolutely, because it's a long time to produce and then you're stuck with them in the most loving way.

Deborah Darling: Yes.

Heike: I've got to share with the guys here, or the girls, that you are a triathlete that I had not known before. Tell us about what the role of exercise played. Once you've made the decision

that you love yourself, that you're an awesome person and your body is just exactly the way it should be, you lost the weight, but you didn't do it by just dieting.

Deborah Darling: No, in fact, diet is one of the key things I think to make the change was taking the word diet out of my vocabulary. I don't even use it anymore. I think that was one of the key things is that I stopped dieting, in fact. I learned that I could eat anything I liked. Diet, this idea of starving yourself, the diet is gone. I don't diet ever again. I think that was another thing that sorted the problem out, funnily enough.

Heike: Yeah, dieting, I'm like, "Dieting is awful." I like to come up with another word, sometimes you have to use the word diet, I'm on a diet, yes, but the overall notion that it has is just awful.

Deborah Darling: It's a healthy way of eating. It's eating nutritious food. I'm on a diet and you just know the minute you say that word it isn't going to work. You'll only be back where you were, so I removed that word, and I started moving. I started, I had never owned a pair of trainers even. I was a couch potato. I did do some swimming, I've always been quite a good swimmer, but running or going to the gym, I didn't do any of that.

Heike: Wait, a trainer is a pair of shoes, right?

Deborah Darling: A pair of shoes, yes, training shoes.

Heike: A trainer to me is something you hook on to your bicycle.

Deborah Darling: Oh, okay, training shoes or we actually call them techies, there's a word for you.

Heike: Okay, all right, techie, I like it. That's what they say in "Joburg". I'm wearing my techies today.

Deborah Darling: Yes, exactly. I bought a pair and I started walking in the mornings. Really, I didn't like exercise at all, it wasn't for me at all. I started walking in the mornings before work, just really walking around the block for a block or two. It's a bit boring, so I ran to the lamppost or ran to the dustbin or whatever it was, and soon I was jogging along. I don't know if you could call it running, it's sort of more of a stumble around the block, but anyway. I started running a little bit, I'm not a good runner at all, still, and then a friend persuaded me to or got me to go and try cycling, which I've tried and I liked that. I immediately liked cycling, so I bought myself a bike and started cycling. I need better friends, don't I? Now I had the three skills, the swimming, which I had always done and picked up, I used to do the Midmar Mile every year. That was the only thing I ever did, it's a mile open water swim here in "Joburg".

Deborah Darling: Another friend, a different friend, persuaded me to enter a sprint triathlon, which is half an Olympic distance triathlon, so it's about, I think it's a 750-meter swim, a 20-kilometer ride, and a 5K run, so it's a nice, and I did it. I was nervous and I managed and it was fine. I've done a few of those, which is nice. I love the medals, I love getting medals. I'd do anything for a medal.

And then a third one, she persuaded me, the same friend, she persuaded me to do, she's very sporty. She does a lot of triathlons and so on, and she persuaded me to do, I did one Olympic distance, standard distance triathlon as well a couple years ago, which I completed. I haven't done another one of those yet. I don't know, maybe I will in the future, but for now, I'm hoping to do some sprints this season again. They're nice, achievable, but still a stretch. You do have to train, you have to be fit, you have to be moving.

Heike: What is the weather like right now in South Africa?

Deborah Darling: We're coming into spring, so spring is the 1st of September officially, although it can still be quite chilly in the first part of September. It's warming up and the mornings are getting lighter earlier, but it's still a little bit cool.

Heike: Okay, I was just curious because we're still very hot here in DC, but the weather's winding down into more of fall type temperatures.

Deborah Darling: Yeah, our little spring flowers are coming out and spring is peeping through. It's not here yet properly, well, summer's not here yet either.

Heike: I was just looking into the weather as far as triathlons are concerned, like, "Oh, we need to know. That's the perfect weather to train is when it's, to me, when it's cool outside."

Deborah Darling: Yes, that's the trouble here. It gets so hot in the summer that it's very, very, I mean cycling in that heat is, ugh, it's tough.

Heike: Now, I know you talked about your daughter, but you also have a grandson, and I know from your posts that you guys have a blast together.

Deborah Darling: He's my, I love him to bits. He's a quirky, little old fashion chap. He's too funny, he's lovely. He's 14 and a half now and we're great friends. Still, I hope, long may that last I hope, and we started cycling together. We cycle together on some Sundays, which is fun.

Heike: I remember the helmet hair. I was like, "She's wearing a helmet here. I don't see a helmet."

Deborah Darling: No, it was my band to keep my hair down. Yeah, he and I, Caleb, we have a lovely time together. He calls me the cool granny, so that's nice. I hope it lasts.

Heike: Yeah, it's so nice that both your daughter and your son are so close to you so you get to see much more of them and hang out with them.

Deborah Darling: Yes.

Heike: My family lives in Germany, so we don't have that often. It's fun because my kids now also live on opposite sides of the world. My son lives in San Francisco, my daughter in Belfast, Ireland. We used to do things like that together, we'd bike together, do triathlons together or run together. I always cherished those times.

Deborah Darling: Yeah, I feel very lucky that they are close to me, but you can't guarantee it.

Heike: That's true.

Deborah Darling: You can't guarantee you'll be on the same continent.

Heike: One of the things that you shared with me, that I do want to touch on here, is many of us are divorced at this age. I'm divorced, you've been divorced, and also many of us are now back in the dating scene. As we get older, all of us find it very difficult to find partners that we can relate to or that can relate to us in our stage of life because we're not putting up with crap anymore like when we were younger. I know that you got divorced and then you met somebody.

Deborah Darling: Yes, yeah, and it's a strange thing. I must say that nobody imagines being divorced. It's just nothing, I was married for 25 years, I didn't think I'd be divorced ever. It was never in my future, not for me. Anyway, I found myself divorced in my mid-40s. I didn't think I'd find somebody, I didn't imagine finding somebody else and I think that you feel quite unattractive and old, and that's so silly, isn't it, but that is the way it can be. I met a very nice man within almost a little bit less than a year later and we're still together. That's from 11 or 12 years ago. It's a different relationship completely, as you say. We don't live together, we are not married and we don't plan on changing those things. I like that we choose every day to be together, it feels very authentic. It feels like that's where we want to be, so while we want to be there, we're there. I think that's the difference when you're older. You feel it can be like that, there's nothing clingy. It's a very different relationship.

Heike: It's so very refreshing to hear you mention this type of relationship because many women I had talked to, after the first time they're divorced, they go, "Never again. I don't want a guy in my life. I am just by myself happy as I can be." I think it's so important to have somebody that you feel close to, especially as you get older. I see it with my clients that are in much older stages in their life, but not necessarily marrying, but having the option to be with a partner on your own terms. I want the women out there to understand that this is an option. This is not weird or this is not something, "Oh my god, I can't do this. I have to marry or now we have to move in together." This is, "I would have never thought I would marry again and actually move in with my new husband, but he was just so cute I couldn't say no, so here I am." My second

choice would have been exactly what you have in your life, a relationship that allows you to live your life on your own terms with a partner that does the same and you love each other to death. I think that's so refreshing.

Deborah Darling: Yeah, it's nice. It feels, obviously it's been a long time. It's an old, comfortable relationship, but we have our own space. I have my own home. My girlfriends can visit me for sleepovers. I think it's the best of both worlds. I think you get the best of each other when you have time to do your own things. I can't see it running any other way, but let's see, never say never.

Heike: True. I have one more question for you before we close up, is what is the scariest thing you've done in your life?

Deborah Darling: I'm consistently scaring myself, I think that's my new motto, is to do one thing to scare yourself every day. I don't manage every day, but I do a lot of scary things, but I think the first thing I did that started off my transition and my transformation, if you'd like, was a year or two after I got divorced, it was in my late 40s, I went to Argentina on my own for three months.

I found myself between jobs and had a little bit of money saved up, so I went off to Argentina. I wanted to learn to speak Spanish. I didn't learn to speak Spanish enough because I had too much fun with all the people I met there, going out and about, but that was terrifying. I remember I didn't speak Spanish at all, I didn't speak a word of it. I've been laying in bed and how am I going to catch the train, because I went to school there in the mornings to learn to speak Spanish, but I didn't know how I was going to catch the train. I didn't know how I was going to do anything. I was laying in bed the night before I went and I just thought, "I can't do it. I'm petrified. How am I going to do it? I'm going to have to cancel everything."

I went, I think that was my first step to learning that it's scary. Things are scary, they don't get easier. They're always scary, some things, but you have to do them. I think that's the difference, I think that's what changed me was that I'm willing now to frighten myself. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience. I've made friends from different parts of the world and I had a beautiful time. It was all fine and I managed to buy the train ticket.

Heike: That's amazing because that is a scare. Three months is a long time to go somewhere by yourself not speaking the language. Well, more power to you. That set you up to become the Deborah Darling that you are.

Deborah Darling: Thank you.

Heike: Tell our listeners how they can reach you and find you and hire you and all this good stuff.

Deborah Darling: I think the best way is Instagram. I'm Deborah Darling, so I'm quite easy to find on Instagram. Facebook Deborah Darling as well. Those are probably the easiest ways. My website, www.deborahdarling.com, so everything hooks back to Deborah Darling, or if you're at a complete loss that's Deborah Chambers.

Heike: I will put your links in the show now, we can have you there at Facebook, Instagram, let's see, where else. YouTube? Do you have a YouTube channel?

Deborah Darling: Yes, I do.

Heike: Yes, so people can easily find you.

Deborah Darling: Okay, I'm all over the place, it seems.

Heike: You're keeping busy, that's for sure. I want to say thank you so very much that you had time to come to speak with us today and share your experience and your life with us because I think you're not only a darling, but you're fabulous, as far as I'm concerned.

Deborah Darling: Thank you so much and thank you for talking to me. It's been fun. We must do it again.

Heike: I loved talking to you. The last time we did it, we spoke for an hour and we're like, "Wait, wait, we're not done yet." Deborah, I'll see you soon and I'll talk to you soon. Bye.

Deborah Darling: Thank you, bye bye.

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