

Mel Wells BARE Interview

Susan: Alright. Welcome, everybody! I am here with the amazing Mel Wells of The Goddess Revolution. Hi, Mel!

Mel: Hi. So good to be here.

Susan: It's so amazing to have you here because, first of all, you're an author of two books. Your second book is coming out in July of this year, 2018, and it's called Hungry for More, am I right?

Mel: That's correct.

Susan: Yes! And so, I was delighted to welcome you to the show because you have an amazing personal history that is near and dear to my heart in terms of your own journey with food and body, and then I would love to talk a little bit about your new book because it's such a compelling topic, but - so, talk to us a little bit about - you know, one of the things that I help my clients do as part of the BARE process is to recognize where they got the messages that their body was somehow not enough, and usually it's culture at large or family of origin, peer group. But you have quite a unique story in terms of your personal life and also your profession, so -

Mel: Yeah. So for me, I grew up in the performing arts world and I was a TV actress at quite a young age. I got onto a soap opera at the age of 18.

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: So, I think my food problems really began when I was around 15, 16, and I went to performing arts college and, my God, that industry is (laughs) - it's very competitive. Obviously, it's very focused on how you look.

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: If you don't look right, you don't get the job, and you're kind of taught - especially as a dancer, you're taught to look in the mirror for flaws and, you know, perfection and extreme discipline is very much glorified. So, that was the world that I was in, and I was very, you know - I've always been Type A personality, have to be the best at everything, have to give it my all, and I got super-competitive and I had never - you know, my mum had a really good relationship with food and her body growing up. I never heard her talk about dieting. She never shamed herself or bashed her body in the mirror. She was super-confident and -

Susan: Wow! Wait! I have to pause for a second because that is super-unusual. (Laughs)

Mel: I know. And I say this to my clients all the time, and when I speak on stage, I'm always saying, like, my mother was a unicorn.

Susan: Right.

Mel: I have worked with so many women now with food and body image stuff and I realize how rare it is, but I mean, gosh -

Susan: But it came from another place.

Mel: Exactly. It still hit me. It still hit me. And I - yeah, it hit me when I was like around 16, and I think it was being in such a competitive industry and being such a perfectionist -

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: Really, when I realized that everyone there was really - really cared about their weight -

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: - and the girls around me - obviously, you know, you're at that age where you're kind of coming from, you know, a young girl into a woman, and so curves are coming out in those places you weren't expecting them to and you're starting to, like, have more sexual relationships with boys and, you know, you're really growing into a woman, and I think I wanted to halt that process almost because I didn't feel in control of it.

Susan: Mmmm.

Mel: And at the same time, the girls around me were all kind of picking themselves apart in the mirror, saying they had to lose ten pounds, and I was hearing from my agent, "The camera adds ten pounds," and all these kind of things that are thrown around. And I've always been really tall - I'm 5'10" - again, like, someone in the acting industry kind of said to me, "Oh, the perfect height for an actress is 5'4"," and I was -

Susan: Really?!

Mel: - 5'10" and I remember thinking, *Well, I can't shrink myself* - yeah. And I remember - because like, you know, I don't know. I remember thinking to myself, *Well, I can't shrink myself height-wise, so I've gotta shrink myself as much as I can physically because I look bigger on screen.* And so, you know, it kind of - it became a competition within itself, and the girls around me were all trying to lose weight, and I basically decided that I would do it better than anyone else and developed an eating disorder very quickly. So, it started out as, you know, I basically stopped eating and

isolated myself and punished myself with exercise and, you know, liquid diets and all the rest of it, and it was just dreadful. I felt completely ill the whole time, completely spaced out. And then, when I got this job on the soap opera, I moved cities. And the move of cities completely - like, it made me do a 180 basically. I thought that being up there and being on this show would give me more control, more reason to lose weight, more incentive to diet, and actually it made me completely overwhelmed by my environment, completely out of my depth, and I found myself binging like a crazed animal, and I literally binged on food like I'd never seen it before in my life. It was like I was inhaling it, like I couldn't get it into my body fast enough. And this went on for a while, and this is when I developed bulimia because I felt so ashamed and so guilty that I had to - I felt like I had to get rid of it.

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: And this went on for a few years and it was actually - I actually got called up to the office by my producer and she said to me, "I don't know what's going on with you, Mel, but one week on screen you're this size and the next week you're this size, and the next week you're back to this size, and you're ballooning all over the place," you know, "what's going on? Do you want to talk to someone about it?" And I was devastated and that - even that wasn't enough to wake me up. I still, you know, kept thinking that if I could just get the right diet, if I could just find the right set of rules around food, if I could just find that magical gold nugget, that would fix me. Then I would have everything under control, I would find the perfect diet, I would lose the weight, and then my life could begin. And this is how I lived my life and it took years (laughs).

Susan: I know.

Mel: It took years. Yeah. So, that was kind of my story and it only - it transformed when, first - I mean, there was a couple of things that happened. Firstly, I lost my dad quite suddenly to cancer, and that made me start to value my health, and I hadn't really ever valued my health before. I think I had valued weight and being, you know, ** (07:12) kind of sent me on this path to learning about nutrition and health coaching. But then, I learned everything there was to learn about nutrition and I realized that it didn't actually heal me.

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: I realized that I could read every single nutrition book in the world, but if I hadn't changed my relationship with food and my relationship with myself essentially, it was all just information. It was all just science and it wasn't actually making me love myself. And the work of self-love only clicked for me when I thought I might be pregnant, and suddenly it became not about me.

Susan: Mmm.

Mel: It became, *Oh my gosh, what kind of a mother would I be? How can I have a pregnancy if I'm abusing my body like this?*

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: And that was the seed that was planted. And I wasn't pregnant, but that seed changed everything for me because then I started going, *Well, what kind of a role model would I be if I was abusing myself like that?*

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: You know? *What kind of a mother would I be for me to go through a pregnancy hating and punishing and starving my body and binging? Like, no, that's not good, that's not the role model I want to be.* And when that picture became - when my picture became bigger than just *How can I lose weight* -

Susan: Right.

Mel: - when I started focusing on having a bigger mission, a bigger purpose in this life that was bigger than just me getting into my jeans, that changed everything for me.

Susan: Wow. That is so powerful.

Mel: And that was about four or five years ago. Yeah.

Susan: So, four or five years ago - and isn't it amazing that - and I think this is so true for so many women that I work with because I hear this over and over and over again - that it's - sometimes the wake-up call is that they notice that they have a daughter paying attention and this idea that *Oh my God, I don't want to pass this on to my daughter.* And for me, I was already on this journey and preaching, you know, an anti-diet message, but my daughter was in the 4th grade. She's now a junior in high school and - so, seven years ago - she came home and said, "Mom, every girl at the lunch table at school today said she was on a diet," in the 4th grade. And she had heard enough from me that this was not a good thing, but she didn't know how to "coach" her classmates that this was a bad, bad idea. But most of the women that I talk to, it's that, *Oh, my daughter's paying attention. I didn't think she was. Now she's wanting to diet or She won't get in a bathing suit,* and I think it's such a compelling - as women, to think about that we're not raised to think that we're precious enough on our own, but that if there is something else then it gets our attention, and then the work that you're doing and that I'm doing hopefully brings them back to the fact that, like, just you are important and worthy enough to cherish and take great care of, but I - I love that your false pregnancy woke you up.

Mel: Yeah, because I remember thinking to myself, *Well, if I had a baby in this body, I wouldn't be treating my body this way* -

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: - and then I was like, *Well, why am I treating my body this way? Why?* This is not cool. If I wouldn't treat another person this way, why am I treating myself this way?

Susan: And so, as you emerged years later, you know - so, four or five years ago, this woke you up, and then you obviously felt passionate enough about this message to write your first book, *The Goddess Revolution*, and now you have a second book coming out. And so, how has your messaging changed or progressed since *The Goddess Revolution* to your new book.

Mel: So, I would say that when I wrote *The Goddess Revolution*, that was - really, it felt like a battle cry for all women that have been sucked into diet culture and been made to feel like their bodies aren't enough and have turned food into a game.

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: And so, *The Goddess Revolution* is really a - I mean, I don't want to call my own book a Bible, but it's kind of like a handbook for anyone that is like just in those grips of diet culture and is playing games with food. And, you know, there's all these different labels and rules and, you know, all these stupid things that we kind of tell ourselves that we've been programmed to believe, and that book is really about unpicking all of that conditioning and all of that bullshit, to be honest, that we have told ourselves about diets, about weight loss, about, you know, carbohydrates and about our bodies, and basically it's about ripping up the rulebook and saying you get to decide. Like, let's heal our relationships with food, let's transform the way we feel about food, let's enjoy food again, and let's be free. Like, it's really about freedom. And obviously, you know, I am a coach and I've been working with women over the years on a one-to-one basis and through my programs and on my retreats. So, I've obviously seen firsthand the journey that these women go through and, you know, it's been amazing to be honest and so rewarding for me to work with so many women that are in a similar place that I was or, you know, at least, you know, somewhere around, you know, I can relate to it and get to watch them take the same journey as I did.

And so, I guess the second book is about the next stage of the journey, which is when we quit dieting, when we quit, you know, our disordered patterns around food and we actually do embrace freedom and self-love, what we tend to find is because dieting takes up such a massive, massive part of our lives, it's such a massive energy drain, and for a lot of women it becomes our identity. You know, we - I kind of have this inside joke with my, you know, women in my academy that, you know, we start these fake social media profiles - not fake social media profiles, but we start these separate social media profiles that is our diet account. What is that about? It's like we have no identity. We are just a dieter. We're just - our sole purpose is just to lose weight. So, I think when we strip that away and we really start to reclaim who we are,

because when we're not Mel the girl with the eating disorder or Mel the girl that's on a diet all the time, it's like, *Oh*. There's this massive space for me to create whatever I want in my life. And that is the journey that I see my clients go on. They go, *Okay, I'm not a dieter anymore. I've got this massive space. What am I going to fill it with?* And then, they start to pursue fulfilling, enriched lives.

And so, the second book is called *Hungry for More*, and it's still about your relationship with food, but it's really about using your relationship with food and your cravings to guide you in the direction of your soul's calling. So, you know, what is it that you are really hungry for? Is it really a whole tray of Krispy Kremes? Is it really getting a take-away? Is it really, you know, three caramel lattes? Or is it something deeper that you're craving? Is it love? Is it connection? Is it creativity? Is it change? You know, are you really hungry to change your life?

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: And you know, I'm sure you agree, so much of our patterns around food are never about the food at all. They're always about something that is going much, much deeper than that. And for us to tap into that, we can completely change the direction of our lives if we're prepared to actually listen to what those patterns and behaviors are trying to tell us.

Susan: Oh! So well said, and I am totally on this train with you, because I can tell you from my own journey. I remember I had a coach, a weight loss coach, and so this would've been 11 years ago, and every day, I would pick my kids up from school - they were little at the time - and they would sit at my dining room table with their little worksheets from school and I would go into the kitchen and practically inhale a wheel of brie (laughs) and some wine, and I was treating myself. And I remember my coach was like, *Okay. So. If you don't eat the brie and drink the wine this afternoon, I want you to sit there and actually feel your feelings and see what comes up.* And I was like, *Augh!* And so, I sat in this recliner and it was boredom. You know, the big earth-shattering message was that I was suppressing being completely bored. You know, I was scared to admit to myself that while I loved my children, I didn't quite love some of the parenting that went along with having these two little kids, and I would rather do *anything* than force them to do their math and English in the afternoon. And it was - like, just like you're saying, once I took the food away and quit dieting, it was - I had - I feel like I had created - I was a time magician. You know, I had all this time all of a sudden to build a business and write a book and do all the things that I thought were impossible before.

Mel: Mmm.

Susan: So, I'm really excited about the message - first of all, your first book, amazing. The second book is going to be, I think, such a great next step for everyone listening.

Mel: Thank you. Yeah, I'm really excited. And I completely know what you mean about, you know, feeling the feelings and -

Susan: (Laughs)

Mel: - something I ** (17:43) to my clients is like, *Remember that you can't eat your feelings*, so - you can try and eat your feelings, but it's not gonna work. Like, they're still going to be there, and if you're not feeling them you're never gonna heal them. They're just gonna stay suppressed.

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: But like, it's - you know, you can either keep going on diets over and over and over again for the rest of your life, you know, losing and gaining the same 10 pounds until the day you die or you can do this, which is pursue a fulfilled life and actually go deep with yourself and your emotions, and people don't want to do that. They want to download another meal plan because it feels like a quick fix and easy and comfortable, but this is the real shit. Like, this is where transformation really happens.

Susan: Mm hm. You're absolutely right. And it's shifting from being someone who relies on externals - so, someone or a plan or an expert or whatever outside of yourself - to *you*, and I think for many of us, that can feel really scary, but once you go deep and you get in there, as you've said, you know, then real transformation can happen. And so, I think that it's fascinating, the work that you do with your clients, the work that I do with my clients, like beating this drum of, *Hey! We're still not gonna talk about a meal plan! Hey! We're still not gonna tell you what kind of workout to do!* But it is so freeing to be a woman who walks through the world taking exceptional care of herself instead of depriving herself.

Mel: That's it. And I think we are in this age of empowered woman.

Susan: Mm hm.

Mel: And I think the empowered woman asks herself what she needs and what she wants, rather than asking all of these diet experts - so-called, you know, experts - *What should I eat? What should I do? How should I be? How should I live? What should I say?* It's like instead of asking for everyone else's approval, we are just giving our - we're approving of ourselves, and we're asking ourselves, *What do I need? Like, What feels good for me?* I was literally just having this conversation with a client this morning and she's, you know, something that we're working on is getting her out of what she should do or eat or how she should be in the gym, and it's just - I feel like a whole conversation in diet culture is like, *Am I doing this right? Am I being good enough? Am I - you know, Is this what I should eat? What should I eat?* And I think if we can just eliminate that word from our vocabulary, we can really actually empower ourselves from within. Like, forget that, forget what she's doing, forget what she's

doing, forget what that guru says I should do. What do I actually feel like doing? Like, what do I genuinely want to nourish myself with? How do I genuinely want to move my body from a place of love? And that is really, you know, what I think a goddess - that is what a goddess means to me, you know, a woman that makes her own choices and takes responsibility for them.

Susan: So beautifully said. Right? Does a goddess count Weight Watchers points? I don't think so. (Laughs)

Mel: Oh, hell no.

Susan: Oh, hell no! (Laughs) Alright, Mel. Well, you have dropped some amazing wisdom on us today. I want to thank you for being here, and of course, all the ways that people can contact you are down below, but why don't you tell people your favorite way to connect.

Mel: Sure. I basically live on Instagram, so come and find me on Instagram @iammelwells.

Susan: I am Mel Wells! Awesome. Thank you so much.

Mel: Thank you.

###