

## The Mirnavator BARE Interview

**Susan:** Welcome the Mirvinator - Mirnavator!

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** Mirvinator, Mirnavator!

**Mirna:** Mirnavator (laughs).

**Susan:** - the Mirnavator to the podcast! Thank you so much for being here.

**Mirna:** Well, thank you for having me.

**Susan:** I've already gushed about what a big fan I am. So, talk to me about - I found you, as you know, from the REI commercial that you did that was so badass, and it talked about just being a woman in the outdoors, running ultramarathons, and having people tell you, "You don't belong here."

**Mirna:** Okay, so (laughs) I've always been - you know, to kind of start from the beginning, I've always been the sort of person that, you know, as I said in one of my latest interviews, that just kind of sticks my ass in places where people think I don't belong -

**Susan:** Mm hm!

**Mirna:** - you know, and that could be explicit or implicit.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** And I just do my thing, and that's been the story of my life. So, you know, when it comes to the outdoors, historically, people who look like me in terms of my body type and my race have not always been welcomed -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - in outdoor spaces, and that - again, that's explicitly and implicitly.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** Most of it, for me, has been really an implicit thing where people - you know, they kind of look you up and down.

**Susan:** Uh huh.

**Mirna:** You know, they give you the once-over and in their body language they're expressing, *Well, why is she here?* or *Why is he here?* or, you know, *What does she think she's doing here?*

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** "Well, she can't do this." And that - you can tell a lot by people's body language and the way that they relate to you and the way that they speak to you. And all those are really kind of like soft things, like emotional things that - you know, that people call anecdotal, but it's a real thing.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** You know, like when you step into a space and you are immediately - and you have that feeling, you get a vibe that, you know, you don't belong. So, I get the vibe a lot, but less so nowadays. Now people know me and now that, you know, things are happening in the outdoor world where it's becoming a little bit more inclusive - in terms of everything. In terms of, you know, size, race, gender, all those things, but it's so, you know, surprising to some people when I, you know, I show up and they're like, *Huhn. Okay* (laughs).

**Susan:** Yeah. *What she think she gonna do?* you know kind of - I know exactly the kind of look that you're getting, not because - obviously not because I - I experience a tremendous amount of privilege because I'm a white blonde lady -

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** - but in terms of, like, male treatment when I have shown up in certain spaces where they're like, *What's this little girl think she's gonna do?* And it's like - it doesn't even have to be spoken, you just feel it.

**Mirna:** Mm hm. Right, right. Exactly.

**Susan:** So, how long have you been a runner?

**Mirna:** I've actually been a runner since 1989, which for a lot of people is very surprising because I get - a lot of people think that I'm an adult onset runner and I - I'm not. I actually started running when I was 13 in high school as a way of getting better at field hockey and lacrosse, both teams which I played varsity while I was in high school. But I did go through a period of four years where I wasn't really running. I'd run every now and then, but mostly I was living a very stressed out existence (laughs) -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - with my very young son, who at that point - when I moved from New York to Maryland, he was a year and a half old and I didn't have any family there, and I had to drive everywhere, which was a very, very new thing for me.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** And again, the life was very stressful, and so, you know, I found myself just not being in a healthy space -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - mentally, physically, spiritually, whatever. And so, I - so, in 2008 when everything came to a head and I had this health scare, that's when I started running again.

**Susan:** Mm hm, mm hm.

**Mirna:** So, really I've been running since 1989 -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - as a larger woman.

**Susan:** Mm hm!

**Mirna:** Yes. And people are really surprised by that.

**Susan:** You know, and it's an interesting discussion in the work that I do with BARE because part of my mission is to help educate people that size actually has nothing to do with health, actual health, and you know, even within my own house - I mean, I'm constantly throwing my husband under the bus, but he's one of those people who would eat a pint of Ben and Jerry's a night but is naturally thin.

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** And so, you know, he can walk into a room and people assume that he's fit and someone who is slightly overweight or overweight -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - could walk into a room and there's this assumption that you're not healthy because of your size -

**Mirna:** Right. Yes.

**Susan:** - and it's just not true!

**Mirna:** Mm hm. Yeah, and it's always interesting to kind of hear people's perspectives about, you know, what they think of me or what they - you know, or their assumption, like, when I walk into a class or I sign up for some kind of hike.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** And the assumption is that, number one, I've never hiked before, number two, I've never done whatever it is. I've never been, you know, on a spin bike -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - or I've never, you know, taken a boot camp class or something like that. And those are things that I do all the time.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** I own a spin bike (laughs).

**Susan:** Right, right.

**Mirna:** And I hike all the time. And I remember - actually a couple years ago when I lived in New Jersey and I signed up for this hike and I didn't know the people.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** But I showed up. I wasn't wearing hiking boots, but I was wearing trail running shoes -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - because I hiked all the time in my trail running shoes. And I had all of my trail running gear. And this woman continued to assume that I didn't know what I was doing. She's like, "Well, do you have enough water?" I like, "Well, I have a CamelBak on" (laughs) -

**Susan:** Right, right.

**Mirna:** - \*\* (05:42) miles. So, yeah. "Are you sure you have enough food?" I was like, "Well, I got a gel and I got a couple bars and stuff like that." And she kept coming at me with all these questions, like - I was like, "There are other people here who are, you know, in Keds."

**Susan:** (Laughs)

**Mirna:** “You can talk to them because I know what I’m doing.” But - you know, but I think it was still like - you know, people have these habits that they have around assumptions -

**Susan:** Right.

**Mirna:** - that they’ve always made about people’s fitness and their readiness and stuff. And so, I was like, “I’m good.” And it turned out - we turned out actually to be friends, and she eventually invited me and my friend over to her house because I was like, “I know what I’m doing” (laughs).

**Susan:** Right.

**Mirna:** “I’m not wearing hiking boots because I prefer to hike in my trail running shoes. Look at the treads.” Like (laughs) you know. And so - and I don’t get - I get annoyed, but I don’t get discouraged by those things, and I know how to deal with people’s distrust, mistrust, or their assumptions because I have the language for it. I know not everybody does.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** But I’m like, *Come at me.* (Laughs)

**Susan:** Right. So, talk to me about the language that you have for it, because I work with a lot of women coaching them to take up space -

**Mirna:** Right.

**Susan:** - and, you know, to go into the gym like you own the place.

**Mirna:** Right.

**Susan:** And you know, if the guys are manspreading all over the weight section -

**Mirna:** Ah!

**Susan:** (Laughs) - you claim your space. You deserve to be there, just like everybody else. But it takes building up the mindset to do that and to tell yourself certain things to get over the intimidation that someone’s going to look at you the way you described or, worse, say something to you -

**Mirna:** Right.

**Susan:** - that’s rude. So, what do you tell yourself or - since ‘89, you know, what have you been telling yourself about your right to be there on that trail with all those other ultrarunners?

**Mirna:** I would - you know, I think it comes with a lot of practice.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** I think that it's definitely a skill that some people have innately -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - to kind of assert themselves in different types of spaces and different types of social situations. I definitely have - most of the time, I've just had the skill innately, but it does come with practice. For example, going into a gym, I totally ladyspread, like (laughs) -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** - and I'm like (spreads out) *Oh-kay!*

**Susan:** (Laughs)

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** Here I am!

**Mirna:** Right? And I do, and I put myself all over the place and so that I know I'm staking a claim to my space. But I think as far as going into a gym specifically, a lot of people are afraid to do that because sometimes they don't know how to use the machines, sometimes, you know, they are worried about people looking at them. And you know what? People are going to look at you.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** That is - it's a fact of life, and I think once we get over that - because I know people are looking at me and wondering why I'm there, but I'm like, *I got work to do*. Like, if you have work to do, you need to do it. And if you have a goal, you need to be working towards that goal, no matter what is going on on the outside. So, it takes a lot of emotional energy in the beginning to kind of - to put your blinders on, put your headphones in, do your thing, know that people are watching you. Hey. Okay, fine. Look at my ass, I don't care.

**Susan:** Give 'em something to look at!

**Mirna:** You know, as long as people aren't harassing you or being unpleasant to you, I think that that is a perfect opportunity for you to just get into your own headspace and do your work, because it *is* work, right? You know, you don't go into your job and not work because people are looking at you or people are judging you, because you

have to do it. You know? And I feel like that for me fitness is my job; like, I have to take care of my body, I have to run a certain amount a day, I have to lift these weights, I have to do it. And if you're afraid of the machines, if you're afraid of going in because you think that people are looking at you because you don't know how to use the machines, learn how to use the machines.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** Usually (laughs), when you join a gym, you get that package, that intro package. Okay, you have an orientation for the machines, you have an orientation for this, take advantage of it.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** That stuff is there to help you. They're also trying to sell you on personal training -

**Susan:** Right.

**Mirna:** - and other things, which if that's what you want, sign up for it. And actually, I would say that if you have the money, if you have the resources to do personal training, absolutely because you are going to learn so many things that are going to make you a badass in the gym, outside, at home. You're gonna know how to do a proper push-up, you're gonna know how to use all the machines, and you know - and that just makes it a lot easier for you to go in and assert yourself.

**Susan:** I -

**Mirna:** Now - I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

**Susan:** No! No, no.

**Mirna:** I can talk for hours. (Laughs)

**Susan:** I'm loving every single bit of it. I love what you said about, like, it's work. Like you're there to work.

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** You know, I'm always like, *I'm not here to make friends, really*. Like, I'm friendly with people -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - but I'm there to work. And I had a woman just this morning at the gym. I had already run six miles -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - which is nothing compared to the running you do, but that's what I do.

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** And then I worked out with my trainer, and then I was doing a little extra on my own. So, I'm doing leg press, heavy - like, this is the very end of my workout - and this woman is like, *Smile*.

**Mirna:** Augh!

**Susan:** I was like, *I'm not here to smile*.

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** Like, don't tell a woman at the gym to smile!

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** Like, are you kidding me right now? And it's exactly what you were saying, like, I'm here to work, I'm here to get a job done.

**Mirna:** Exactly. I once had - it was really funny. One of my favorite gyms is Lifetime Athletic, and I've worked with all different types of personal trainers, but I've also made sure that they know that you know that I'm a runner, I do ultramarathons, I - you know, I'm doing it in my body, and I'm okay with my body. Show me how to be stronger, show me how to be a better runner, show me this new exercise that I've been hearing about. And so, with the exception of one, people have been very, like, awesome and cool about that. One time - I used to go to this boot camp class and I would go three times a week and then I - I would run before the class, do the class, and I would run after because I was also still training for marathons and stuff. And so, the teacher came to me afterwards. She was like, *You don't need to do all this*. I was like, *Brah. I'm training for, like, two marathons*. She's like, *Ohhhh! Well, that's great! How can I help you?* You know? So, when you let people know what you're about, what your goals are, you'll get support, and then people won't bother you (laughs).

**Susan:** It's true! It's true! When you decide in your mind - like, I said to my trainer six years ago -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - you know, they had this package where they would, like, measure you -

**Mirna:** (Rolls eyes)

**Susan:** - and try to give you this advice from a dietician and all this stuff. And I was like, *Listen. I'm not here for any of that.*

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** *I'm not here to be measured. I'm not here to lose or shrink or do any of that bullshit. I'm here to get stronger. I'm a runner.* Same deal, I'm a runner, like, this is add-on, like, make me stronger kind of thing, like, I'm not weighing in every week. And, like, as soon as I told them that, they were like, *Cool.* And now they're kind of coming over to the bright side -

**Mirna:** Right.

**Susan:** - you know, asking me, like, *What do I tell my female client who's obsessed about this or obsessed about that?*

**Mirna:** Right. Mm hm.

**Susan:** If the focus is shrinking, I'm out.

**Mirna:** Right. (Laughs)

**Susan:** So, let's talk about - so, this REI commercial comes on the scene -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - and your star is rising, exploding. Talk about this National Geographic Award.

**Mirna:** Ooh. Okay. So (laughs) - so one of the filmmakers on the REI documentary, Jenny Nichols, submitted my name as a contender for the Adventurer of the Year and then there - I think there are eight of us, eight or nine of us -

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** And I was like, *Wait. Wow. Wait.* Like, seriously? (Laughs) Like, why - me? (Laughs) I don't ice climb, I don't - I'm not a professional mountain climber. I don't win any-thing.

**Susan:** (Laughs)

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** This is a great point! Like, right? You're not winning time on these ultras or -

**Mirna:** Nah.

**Susan:** - anything like that.

**Mirna:** Not me.

**Susan:** You're just showin' up!

**Mirna:** Yeah. And so, it was really - it was a huge surprise to me that they actually chose me to be in this cohort for 2018. But, you know, more and more, I'm realizing that - I guess the message - and I never intended for this to be, you know, a big, national, international thing. You know, I just wanted to run trails and I wanted to run and do marathons because I like doing that stuff and it feeds me in a way - spiritually and emotionally and mentally in a way - obviously physically - that nothing else can do, and so - and I just wanted to share that with people, but you know, I didn't realize how many people looked to me as a role model, because I was just doing what I felt like I needed to do for myself, and I think that that is the message that has been probably the most important; like, I just do what I need to do in my big black body (laughs).

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** But people were surprised by that. They were surprised to see me, and so - and I think that's part of the reason the National Geographic thing came up, was because I think they realized that they needed more representation from other types of communities -

**Susan:** Yes.

**Mirna:** - of the non-extreme sports people. I mean, I wanted to learn how to do all those things (laughs), and I will.

**Susan:** Yes. I believe you.

**Mirna:** But yeah, I think that the larger message was one of inclusivity and body positivity.

**Susan:** It just - I was almost tearing up listening to you talk because, you know, like I am for sure, like, one of the slowest runners.

**Mirna:** (Raises hand)

**Susan:** I'm not the most coordinated individual in the world. You know? I'm not - like, even within my world of being a coach -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - and a writer and a speaker, there are people, you know, way more talented than me, but I show up because it feeds me.

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** And like, it's such a powerful message that, like, our culture is so obsessed with, you know, being the fastest, bestest -

**Mirna:** Right.

**Susan:** - richest, skinniest, like whatever, and it's like *No!* Like, *Show up and do what you love* -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - *and then everything - the whole sky will open up for you.* So, it just delights me to no end to see you out there shining and getting these awards and, you know, just raising awareness for all of us who are doing this kind of work and for all the women - I mean, let me tell you, like, all the women in my BARE community -

**Mirna:** Mm hm.

**Susan:** - know who you are because I'm always in there talking about you.

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** But like, you have so many women cheering you on.

**Mirna:** Mmm.

**Susan:** And so, this National Geographic thing is huge! So, what's next for you?

**Mirna:** Next! (Laughs) A lot of things. I'm actually leaving education, leaving formal education, in June.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** So, I'll be moving back up north, close to home. My home is New York City, but I'm probably going to move to New Jersey.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** And I'm working on a second book. I've got a documentary project that I'm working on. I've got a lot of different projects that I'm doing with various companies -

**Susan:** Mm hm!

**Mirna:** - and contracts (laughs). So - which is a great thing.

**Susan:** Contracts and deposits!

**Mirna:** Yes!

**Susan:** That's super-exciting!

**Mirna:** Yasss!

**Susan:** Get your paper!

**Mirna:** Yeah. And I've got a lot of speaking engagements scheduled for - I'm actually booked until January, which is really, really cool -

**Susan:** That is very cool.

**Mirna:** - for me because I've never - you know, I am just now stepping into this entrepreneurial role.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** (Enunciates) Entrepreneurial. (Laughs)

**Susan:** See? I'm like mispronouncing Mirnavator -

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** - and you're - we gotta teach you how to say "entrepreneurial" (laughs).

**Mirna:** Entrepreneurial, because it has not been a part of my vocabulary, you see. So, but now it suddenly is. And so, the learning curve is really great right now.

**Susan:** Mm hm.

**Mirna:** I'm learning so much about, you know, kind of putting myself out there, and I've had great practice in the last three years of all of this and public attention I've gotten so - so, yeah, I'm doing that, and yeah! My boy - my son is going to actually stay down here in Georgia and be a boarder at the school that I'm teaching at now, so -

**Susan:** Wow!

**Mirna:** - that'll be a little - yeah, so I'm really excited and - and just amazed at the generosity of my school. They've been incredible. And so, yeah! So, I'm going to try to just kind of spread my wings and fly and create new opportunities, do more speaking, do more writing, and - and just continue on this trajectory of trying to inspire people, motivate people, encouraging creating a whole new class of inspirers and motivational people. Yeah! So, I'm really excited.

**Susan:** I'm here for it. I'm here for *all* of it!

**Mirna:** (Laughs)

**Susan:** I'm so delighted. Well, thank you so much for taking time out of your busy day. I know you've got, like, a classroom waiting on you. So, I appreciate you. And if people want to find you and follow you, we're going to put all of your details below, but what's the best place that you recommend that people reach out, find you?

**Mirna:** I mean, there are so many best places (laughs).

**Susan:** Everywhere.

**Mirna:** Instagram is probably, I mean, my top place right now in terms of all my social media channels. I'm @TheMirnavator on Instagram, and I'm also on Twitter with the same name. You can find me on Facebook, The Mirnavator. All those places, you can find me.

**Susan:** Awesome. Well, thank you again.

**Mirna:** Thank you so much!

**Susan:** You're awesome.

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