

Beyond Sixty — Becoming a Movie Producer at 65



Episode 53: Beyond Sixty —
Becoming a Movie Producer at 65
with Melissa Davey

Gregory Anne: Welcome back everybody, to another episode of rebellious wellness over 50. I'm so happy to have Melissa Davey. Doing something that might've seemed outrageous probably did to a lot of people, but she knew she wanted to do it. So she made it happen. Melissa. Welcome.

Melissa Davey: Thank you so much. I'm so glad to be here.

Yeah. I'm glad to be here that you're here too.

Gregory Anne: And I want to tell the listeners what I think is so extraordinary. So tell us about your movie.

Melissa Davey: The movie is called Beyond Sixty. And it is a documentary film where I interviewed nine women from around the country, completely different backgrounds and stories.

They range in age from 63 to 86. They tell fascinating stories about their lives and they really make an impact. And they're inspirational to people. Because they're still relevant, you know, and it's this group of women that I wanted to find and tell their stories because we are still relevant and we we're resilient.

We've been through all kinds of things that we can share and hopefully help to inspire other women our age and older.

Gregory Anne: And there's always somebody younger and somebody older that might benefit from hearing something that we went through in our lives or accomplished in our lives.

Melissa Davey: Exactly. I bookend the film with young people. So there are some young people at the beginning and the end, just casually talking with them about how they feel about aging. Do they think about aging? And might they be curious about it and their answers are pretty interesting.

All throughout my discussions with people who have watched the film, there are many young people watching it saying, you know, this is really giving me hope for the future.

Gregory Anne: Oh, that's great.

Melissa Davey: That there's no end date. You know that I can continue to move forward, no expiration date, as I like to say.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. And I remember one young woman said that it's such a scary world that we live in. I hope what she took away, because what I took away was it's, there's always going to be stuff that's scary, especially when you're in your twenties, thirties, everything can seem daunting, you know, getting a job, having a family, married, whatever, but.

She, at the end of the movie, I almost feel like I remember her or somebody saying, like you said, this gives me hope for the future, or, oh, maybe I shouldn't be so worried because life comes up and you deal with it. And I think the message about staying relevant is so important.

I know a lot of my listeners would never feel irrelevant. But then something happens and something they listen to or see on Instagram or their kids. Adult kids

can have a strong opinions about their parents and something can knock us off our game. Do you find from the women you talked to off the camera that they had doubts as well? They told such great stories, but what about the times that they didn't the stuff that didn't get on camera? Did they also have doubts?

Melissa Davey: Absolutely. And when we filmed these

we spent one and two days with them. So, you know, that's, the beauty of filmmaking is you figure out how to take 80 to a hundred hours of film and put it into an hour and 20 minute films. So there is a lot that is said off the record, so to speak. And we talked a lot about the invisibility of women and they all, I didn't even have to ask most of the time.

They would bring it up. You reach a certain age and it's kind of our culture and the media plays with it very well. You know, the media is always about younger women, looking younger, anti-aging everything. The messaging is about not getting old. And then the idea with that is maybe there is something bad about getting old.

So that's the messaging. Even the young people I spoke to said that they were sick of hearing it. That kind of rhetoric that's put out there about women. We talked about that a lot. They all felt that it was an issue, but they also, most of them would say, but I'm taking advantage of it.

So while I am not as visible as I used to be. I can just go out and do whatever I want. And you know, and I'm not getting criticized as much as I might be at another age. So there is this. It's a funny thing. The invisibility factor is it's a very, very real. You can really use it to your advantage that you can be a little bit more bold and just kind of work under the radar.

Because nobody is focusing their camera on you.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. But you did. And I love the pompom girls.

Melissa Davey: The Sun City Palms.

Gregory Anne: That was such a great, so tell the people who they are.

Melissa Davey: They are a group of women in Sun City, Arizona, that live at this Sun City community, which is for people who are 55 and older.

It's one of those adult living communities that has all kinds of activities. So many activities that I got tired hearing about them. One of the groups is a cheerleading

group and it's been in existence for a few decades now, and it's all women over the age of 55 and they dance and they twirl batons, and they do parades and special events.

And they're busy about 50 times a year.

Gregory Anne: Wow.

Melissa Davey: We spent two days with them in Arizona. We followed them in the Wickenburg Arizona parade, the rodeo days. Which was amazing, cause it was two and a half miles long. And the average age of the women I think was a 64 .

And they marched and danced and twirled batons for two and a half miles. The parade was huge. Many different groups in it. They're just amazing group of women. And they're all dressed in sparkly outfits and the sparkly pom-poms and little boots.

Gregory Anne: And so many different expressions for a later in life experience. Right? So we have the pompom twirlers. We have a woman who always wanted to be an actress, becomes finally an actress and she is acting and then just so many different, great stories.

How many did you say, nine?

Melissa Davey: Nine full stories.

Gregory Anne: It made me think, who am I taking for granted because they're old? Not giving my full attention to when I have a conversation.

Melissa Davey: That's a great way to put it.

Gregory Anne: I've really leaned into my last living adult relative, somebody, not a sibling, is 90.

She lives in Mexico by herself. Her husband died a few years ago and we've stayed in touch on Skype. Over the years, but I don't know what happened, maybe COVID and I was worried about her down there. And since her husband died even more so, I literally make a point at least once a week. Do you want to talk, do you want to get on Skype? And she's, she's great.

Her mind is good. You know, it's a little bit slower in her conversations and stuff, but we talk politics and books. And sometimes I don't feel like keeping that Monday or Tuesday meeting, but I'm thinking, you know, I had opportunities in

my life that I squandered and she tells such great stories. Now she seems to be sort of more in storytelling mode.

So I've made it a point to enjoy her, but your movie brought back are there other people in my life that I can give more attention and put more weight on their life.

Melissa Davey: And I think that, one of the things that I was really hoping would come across in the film was that these are really everyday women, meaning that they're not Oprah.

They're not celebrities, you might hear about older women celebrities, but you don't hear about older women in general, and you could walk past any one of these women on the street and have no indication of what their story is, what their background is and what they're doing today. And you just brought that up.

It is really important to seek out people from the older generation and speak with them because you can learn from them and be inspired by each one of them. To think about doing something different or to think about how you have created a picture in your mind that might not be accurate about somebody older.

It really helps you think about what kinds of choices have you made about how you see older people?

Gregory Anne: What filters? There's a writer, a journalist that I read frequently his name is Frank Bruni. He writes for the New York times and he did a piece recently. I think it might be from his upcoming book.

And he talked about, you don't know what somebody has experienced or is experiencing. Cause we all tend to put on the face, the smile and as people get older, those accumulate, right? There's more experiences. Good ones, lots of maybe some more bad ones. Maybe they're dealing with a disease or a depression or something.

And that's when I think it's easy for people to dismiss, if they're not putting the face on, if they're not up to par, so to speak, why are you cranky today? Or why does that? We don't know what's going on behind the scenes of that life. One of your guests did tell a pretty horrifying story.

If something has happened to her. Yes. She seemed like the most positive love life kind of person

Melissa Davey: Unbelievable. That's Peggy. She's just amazing.

Gregory Anne: So we were talking before I hit record about how the work that you did, even though this becoming a filmmaker was not, you haven't been doing this for 20 or 30 years, and now you've just made this movie.

This is something totally new for you.

Melissa Davey: Yes.

Gregory Anne: Tell the audience, what a big leap this was. Where were you? And now you're a movie maker.

Melissa Davey: Yeah, it was a big leap. However, my whole life has taken a kind of circuitous route at all times. Mainly because I'm so curious about things. So I will change it up here and there and try new things.

And, but never anything this drastically different. I was in the nonprofit world for many years in my younger days, representing people who are disabled before the social security administration. So, storytelling was part of that job. I had to listen to their stories, understand them so that I could then recreate their story for a judge or an agency that needed to hear their story.

So, that was that. Then I went on to the big world of the for-profits and ended up as a senior vice president in a large national corporation also taking that disability experience and putting it into the for-profit arena. And there, I had to do the same thing. I had to listen to the stories of what the customer's needs were and then, you know, regale those stories back to the operations division to build something that that customer needs.

So it was always about listening and then creating something for them and making sure that the storytelling aspect didn't lose anything in the mix. And I love that part of my work, even though it was a far cry from filmmaking, the part that I liked the best was the interactions with the people and hearing the stories and getting people to trust me so that I could get into business with there's that whole trust factor. And when I did decide to leave, my career to become a filmmaker, that part was clear to me. You know, when I was 65, I said, gee, I'm really good at that part. And that's what this film is going to be about storytelling. I knew I wanted to do a documentary.

I thought that was safe as the first film, it would be meaningful to me and to others and it would be comfortable for me to do that. So those skills that I learned very early on and into my last job parlayed easily into the filmmaking piece. It didn't scare me. Whereas if I had thought about filmmaking when I was in my forties or even 50, I think my fear factor would have risen.

And I would have gone through that checklist of, I don't have that experience. I've never done anything like that. I didn't go to school for that. And you can talk yourself out of things very easily. But I find as I get older, That it's not as daunting. You can rely on all those experiences you've had and know that even when you failed, that you were able to learn from the failure, fix it, improve it and move forward.

There comes this sense of self, which is a much deeper as you get older. Fear is lessened. It's not that it's not there. You don't want to fail. The fear, just it lessens somehow and it's manageable and you almost like expect it to be there. And it's like, okay, come on fear

we're going to go try something else now.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. But how did you know? So when you're working for a corporation, the printer's there, the phone system's there, the HR department. All these things are there. You're making one part of how the money comes in.

But now you're switching into the world of entrepreneurship, which a lot of my listeners are also, I am, have been for 20 some odd years. None of those things are in place. We have to decide what we need in place. We have to decide how much money we need, then we have to get the money. And for your case, it was probably raising money. In my case, it's making sales and having clients.

How did you know that that was all going to go well?

Melissa Davey: I didn't. The little fear piece was with me at all times. But I did know how to organize how to understand what I don't know and how to seek that. So I knew immediately I was able to make a checklist of all the things that I didn't know and all the things that I would need just to get started.

And then it was just planning. Now, when I was leaving, when I resigned from my corporate position, I gave them a year's notice.

Gregory Anne: Oh wow.

Melissa Davey: And one was in order to mentor somebody to take over that division of the company and also give me time to plan this out, get what I needed in place. So that the day I walked out the door, it was already in process.

Gregory Anne: That's a very smart idea.

Melissa Davey: And that that was dealing with the fear. If you're afraid of, if you end it one day and you have nothing and then you start to figure out how you're going to do this, maybe that isn't the way to go. Maybe the way to go is start planning a little bit earlier.

And I had found that that had worked for me in the past. So I was able to create that environment where I was still working and getting paid. And I was developing a production crew to come along with me and actually working on the film before I left.

Gregory Anne: If there was one thing, when you were getting people on board, whether it was the women you featured or the crew, what was your sales pitch?

Was it about story? Was it about this is going to be a huge success or was it was your passion for this project that caught fire with other people?

Melissa Davey: It was, it was my passion for the project. It was me presenting myself as, at that point a 65 year old woman who was making a change and explaining that there's so many women doing the exact same thing and their stories are so important.

I really didn't have to pitch too much, which surprised me. I was just myself. And with the women that I brought in, each of the women that I asked to be in the film said, yeah, And they knew that I'd never made a film before. And you know, so that there was a risk on their part as to how this would go, whether it would be well done or, whether it would happen at all.

And they each said yes, which kind of blew me away, but it also solidified my thought about women who are getting older and how confident they are in telling their story. And also how much they want to support other women that came through to me each time. And I interviewed 80 plus women on the telephone before I picked up the nine and I was bracing for no, I was bracing for people saying, no, I don't want to be in your movie.

And that really didn't happen. And then when I went to find the production company, It happened very quickly. And the interesting thing with that is the three owners of this production company in Philly were all three very young men. And I was referred to them just to have the conversation, to see if they could put me in the right direction.

And we all just kind of fell in love with the idea and, you know, it was an immediate connection. They were like, what a great idea. And we want to hear

these stories. We want to learn more about women and these were, you know, 28, 30 year old guys. So that was exciting in itself.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. I think we underestimate, or maybe society has made us hardened against the idea that

there's this divide, the younger and the older, and there clearly are in some cases, like the "Okay Boomer" with the millennials or whatever, but it's certainly not true across the board. And I'm just excited to hear about your experience with those young men.

Melissa Davey: Yeah. And it, and it continued because the crew got bigger and there were women we brought in, young women and I've always worked with young people throughout my careers. I hired very young people, so I've always had that comfortable relationship with people and have been able to relate to anybody no matter how old they are. But I do think that there is I don't know, it's a misconception about the millennials and the younger folks not being interested

in older people's stories. I think that they are in general and the intergenerational work is so important. And it's so valuable. In this instance, the production company was the mentor and I was the mentee because I was learning about cameras and lights and sound.

And they were learning about older women and storytelling from our viewpoint. So it was an interesting inter generational collaboration that worked really well.

Gregory Anne: I'm thinking now, the pace of the movie and the storytelling, the way that you would have one woman tell part of her story, and then it would segue into somebody else's.

That doesn't sound like young 30 something men to me, but they allowed you they brought grace to the production. It seems to honor the stories being told to give them a space. There wasn't a lot going on. It was just right. And that made it very easy to listen to and watch the people.

Melissa Davey: Yeah, I'm glad. And we had our arguments together. Like you do when you're creatives butting heads. They were very open to listening to what I had to say. And I can remember on occasion hearing them say, well, wait a minute. They would come up with an idea that I really didn't like.

And I would just say no right away. And then after a while, they'd be like, yeah, I get what you mean. We can't make this into something modern. Because that's not what it is. It's just storytelling. We don't need to change the stories in order for it to

be palatable for the viewer. And a lot of the creatives who are very, very young are doing these really cool things with film, but this film, we didn't, I didn't want to lose the story.

And they finally got that. And when we went into editing, I sat with the editor and chose what we needed to do. And by that time we were into almost three years before we finished it. And they were right. They just were so synced with the women and with me and with the ideas, it was a great experience.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. the movie was playing in my head while you were just speaking. And again, the way that it's produced, it's almost like evolving of a life, right? The pace of it and the different women's stories that overlap or intersect, um, felt almost like it could have been one woman's journey.

There are just so many pieces of us as women through the decades. We become different people. But again, the way the movie was put together, to me felt like one whole life. And then it also felt like one community. I don't know whether those women ever met each other, but they could have been from...

Melissa Davey: They never met each other.

And they didn't see the film until it was completely done and ready to be out there. So there was this magical trust that they seem to have with me. Um, and they just let me go at it, which was great. What an experience.

Gregory Anne: You pour your heart and soul into something for three years to finally see it. There must be such a reward.

Melissa Davey: Yeah, that was great.

Gregory Anne: Now, beginning of the conversation, you said I wanted to start with a documentary because I knew that would be safe for a first film. Is there a second film in your brain?

Melissa Davey: Yes, there is. And it actually I've started on the pre-work for it. And I hope with fingers crossed to begin filming in May of this year. Which is just around the corner. This is a film about one woman, which to me is like, wow, this will be easy. One woman in Northern California. And so I have meetings this week with some crews out there instead of bringing a crew from Philly to Northern California, I'm going to build one out there and I think it will be much more affordable

and \work better for everybody involved. So this will be a one woman's story. And I can give you a hint that if you ever saw the documentary Free Solo. Oh yeah. About Alex Honnold yeah. It's his mother.

Gregory Anne: Oh my gosh.

Melissa Davey: And she has an incredible story. Wow. Very incredible story.

Gregory Anne: Oh, good for you. That sounds exciting.

And how long do you expect this will be?

Melissa Davey: You know, really if I had my druthers, the first one would have been done in a year and a half, but again, the production company was doing other things. Oh, so, you know, to pick to start, I picked nine people and they were from different states so I started as complicated as you could, which kind of dragged things out.

Now, I'm going to produce this myself, pull the crews together and whatnot. So it will be very focused. And I think that I could get this done in a year. I could be completely done in a year. That's that's my goal.

Gregory Anne: Okay, we're going to hold that intention for you. So you seem like a pretty confident, successful woman and who has figured a whole lot out.

What did you learn about yourself making this film?

Melissa Davey: What I learned about myself is that I am confident, that I do have abilities that even in the past, when my confidence wained, or thinking, how am I going to be able to do this? How will people see this? What will people think of me? I found that that doesn't really matter anymore, that I can put out what I want to put out.

And if that helps someone, that's my goal. My whole life I've been helping people. Helping people build a division for an insurance company or helping somebody get their social security benefits, or helping a poor family find housing or helping a woman tell her story. So if I can do that, none of the rest matters anymore.

And I think that that came with age as well. So I learned to be okay with the decisions that I'm making and not worry about what other people think where in the past, I probably would have worried a little bit more.

Gregory Anne: Hmm. Have you missed anything? I'm sure you have to give up things in order to make a documentary and then go right into another film.

Melissa Davey: No, I don't, I don't feel like I've missed anything. No, no. It's interesting. It is interesting. And you know, this one thing I will say, and I haven't said it yet is making a films and getting it distributed takes a lot of work.

It never ends. It's like the distributors have your film for 10, 15 years constantly putting into different locations where people can watch it. And you as the filmmaker remain on podcasts and on radio shows and at film festivals, and, you're still marketing this film forever. So, that stays with me as I move in to the next one and then promise myself that I find balance to, be with my family and do the fun things that I like to do as well.

Gregory Anne: Okay, so you haven't given those things up, it just sandwiching them in.

Melissa Davey: Yeah.

Gregory Anne: Speaking of distributing, where can people find the film and watch it right now?

Melissa Davey: They can find the film streaming almost everywhere. apple TV, Amazon prime video. Google TV, Microsoft TV. If you knew that they even had one.

Yes. It's amazing. Uh, Voodoo, Vimeo. So it's out there and it's also on demand. If people still have cable TV, you can go to your on demand section and just type in Beyond 60. And up it comes and you can rent it .

Gregory Anne: I watched it, I guess, through your beyond 60 website and that website beyond sixty.com has some more information about you and the people that were in the film and things like that.

Melissa Davey: You can see the trailer there and then you can also go ahead into Vimeo and rent the film.

Gregory Anne: I have to tell you that swimmer, people, you have to go watch this movie.

Melissa Davey: One of my favorite people,

Gregory Anne: You would say to yourself, why did I ever think I couldn't do X when this woman did that and this one lived through that and as you said, you'd walk by them on the street and this person's just like us.

Melissa Davey: And the swimmer Paula, she she's one of the most unassuming people

Gregory Anne: She seemed like it.

Melissa Davey: Completely. And when I, you have to know that when I asked her to be in the film after doing telephone interviews, She said "seriously, do you think people would think my story is interesting?"

I was like Paula,

really? I said yes. Yeah, absolutely.

Gregory Anne: There wasn't a single person of those nine woman women, that I thought, oh, let me go do the laundry while this one's running. they're fascinating. And the way you punctuated certain parts of a story to bring in another aspect of somebody else's life, kept it interesting.

The juxtaposition of the types of stories. One's a physical story. One's the educator, I think it maybe, maybe the women that are not on a film right now can look at their lives through a different lens.

Melissa Davey: Yeah, that was my hope. That was my hope. Just to make you think about your own story and how fascinating it would be for other people to hear and to learn from. And a lot of people are like, who would want to hear my story?

Like Paula? You know, I, I don't have stories nearly as compelling as hers. But I know that when I do tell stories, I have been able to help people. And I think we can all do that together as a community of women, especially.

Gregory Anne: Yes, absolutely. And that's another great message. Women supporting women. There's another, you know, false rumor out there that women are mean to women, women don't support women.

It is true that that occurs. Right. But I don't think it is the norm. And I certainly know that as we get older we're tend to be much more understanding, supportive, patient, wanting to help.

Melissa Davey: Yeah.

Gregory Anne: And that's a beautiful thing. A lot of people need support.

Melissa Davey: Yes, we all do. Yeah, we all do. Yeah.

Well, Melissa, this has been a great conversation.

Gregory Anne: I'm so glad I got to meet you as soon as I saw the movie. We must be on some podcast platform together.. And I might've re reached out to you. I think I did on messenger on Facebook, I don't know who I'm writing to because this is the first page for the movie expecting that I would get some person who answers.

And there you were.

Melissa Davey: Huh, there I was. I'm so pleased that you did it. It's been a wonderful conversation and I appreciate it.

Gregory Anne: All right, people, thank you very much for being with me for another week.

Be well till next time.