



Heidi Hauck: Hello and welcome! This is Heidi Hauck - I help Badass Bleeding Hearts release old stories, reclaim their power, and build thriving, sustainable businesses that make the world a better place.

As part of my mission to empower my fellow Badass Bleeding Hearts, I'm interviewing entrepreneurs from a wide variety of fields and specialties, sharing pieces of their journey as they've built their own thriving businesses that are making a positive difference in the world. I hope their stories and insights will help you to see the possibilities for your own dreams, purpose, passion, and journey.

Welcome, welcome! I am so pleased to introduce to you today Denise Barreto. She is speaker, author, founder of Relationships Matter Now, and one of my absolute favorite LinkedIn profile descriptions ever, a "Relationship Revolutionist." Thank you so much for joining me today Denise.

Denise W Barreto: Thanks for having me, I'm very glad to be here.

Heidi Hauck: Wonderful. Well, I love to start my guests out with what I jokingly refer to as the easy question, which is, "What is the... the big why, the purpose that drives your work?"

Denise W Barreto: Well, you know it's funny, we... when you think about that, it's always you want it to be like some one precise thing, and so - I think for me it boils down to improving relationships, because the reality is nothing good gets accomplished without good relations between humans, if that doesn't happen then you don't get anything done.

So, I'm always, always concerned about relationships, and so in my work and in my life any way that I can help improve relations between humans, that's what I'm doing.

Heidi Hauck: That's awesome. I love that! And absolutely, you know, one of the things that I talk about in my work, is what I refer to as the... the myth of the lone ranger, right? We have this... this sort of mythic idea, especially entrepreneurs, of the self-made man, right? Or like pulling yourself up by your boot straps and going it alone.

And it's really sort of romanticized to the point where, when people, they inevitably run into a place where they can't do it all themselves and they feel like a failure, and that is just absolutely not the way anything is built.

Denise W Barreto: That's correct. And I think we're so conditioned around certain ideas, it's so hard to unlearn things, I mean that's what I do every day when I'm sitting in an organization is helping people unlearn the BS that they've learned. And you know, it's funny... you know, learning is easy, unlearning is really, really hard.

Heidi Hauck: Yah! Oh yah! Absolutely. Especially because so much of what we've learned, we've sort of accepted as just like universal truths, right?



- Denise W Barreto: Well that, and then we get all the... the media images and narratives and things to kinda help solidify what those initial false learnings were, and so when you try to undo that, it's ... it's really difficult. It's not impossible, but it's really difficult.
- Heidi Hauck: Absolutely. Absolutely. You have to really be committed and willing to - sort of reconsider what you believe the world is.
- Denise W Barreto: Yup. And I would say that the average person won't do it unless something catastrophic happens for them. Like, honestly as... as awesome as my work is and who I am... you know... if I would've known I had to go through my husbands depression which led to our marriage dissolution, and me having to blow up my life as I knew it, I don't think I'd be doing the things I'm doing right now.
- So, I'm coming to the conclusion that there's only so much that people learn in comfort, there's only so much that people learn - just the regular way. Like it... it really... you know, I once... somebody once said to me that change happens between evolution or revolution.
- Heidi Hauck: Mmmm.
- Denise W Barreto: And I would say it's more revolution, because... you know... evolution can take forever, you friggng die before you figure it out.
- Heidi Hauck: {laughs} Right? Three generations later it finally makes a difference.
- Denise W Barreto: Right?
- Heidi Hauck: Right. Absolutely. Well, you know its interesting because this really parallels a conversation that I was having, or that I've been kind of repeatedly having lately, which is being willing to sit with that discomfort, and... that part of it is hard. But if you don't go through that, that difficult period, you don't ever get the gold on the other side.
- Denise W Barreto: Well, that's America.
- {laughs}
- That's our country! I mean, you think about how old other countries are, and the things that they've gone through and the many constitution changes. I mean, I believe we have the longest running constitution ever.
- Heidi Hauck: Right.
- Denise W Barreto: And I used to think that was a cool thing, until recently I'm like, maybe that's some fucked up shit! Maybe it should of... you know... maybe some things should have changed. Now I'm



- Denise W Barreto: not... I'm not advocating that, but... like, we pride ourselves in this, our constitutions the only original constitution that's still going. Is that a good thing?
- Heidi Hauck: Right.
- Denise W Barreto: And I think that we constantly ask ourselves that and I'm gonna say, I do think to some degree it is, and it really shows the foresight of those young men who started our country who had in no way shape or form any idea what we would be facing today or how we would be facing those things.
- But it has, it has endured, and in comparison, to other nations it's... it is a solid document. But I really am over people saying to me, "Well it must be good! Cause we're the only nation that has it like that!" And I'm like, yah that's... that's not exactly what that means.
- {laughs}.
- Heidi Hauck: Right? Right! Well and, and going back to the point you made earlier about how relatively young our country is, right? And...
- Denise W Barreto: Absolutely!
- Heidi Hauck: ...and I mean... lets acknowledge. A lot of the holding on to the original constitution, that really comes from ego, right? That doesn't necessarily come from - nothing needs to be changed about this document. It comes from like, just this... this pride of being the longest standing constitution.
- Denise W Barreto: Absolutely! And I also think the powers that be benefit from the constitution the way that it's written. So.....
- Heidi Hauck: Absolutely!
- Denise W Barreto: So - why would they make a change, right? Like, I mean... if I was a white guy, you know, my same self and I'm 47 and I'm a white guy and I may not think it needs to be changed either. I mean...
- Heidi Hauck: Right! It's working for a 47-year-old white man!
- Denise W Barreto: ...Yeah! Yeah! 47-year-old, entrepreneur, successful, like you know what I mean? You know? I mean... I get why people have the hard connection, I'm just not okay.
- {laughs}



Denise W Barreto: It's not.... It doesn't work for me, the 47-year-old black woman in America, at all! So... that's why I'm cool questioning that and pushing lawmakers and policy makers to blow up systems.

This morning I was working on the strategic communications for a family foundation out of Arkansas, and what they're setting out to do for their next strategic plan is so amazing, but it's a commitment, it's courageous, and it requires collaboration - because even with their millions that they sit on they can't do it by themselves.

They know they've got to partner with both public and private philanthropy and business and government. All those folks have to be in to get stuff done. And that's... right there... that's the crux of what I do, is being in the... facilitating those conversations so that we can take care of things.

And when I say take care of things, right now we're in the mode of these systems... we can't... they're not improvable. Right?

There's no more tweaks to these systems. It's time for us to build new systems so that we can blow these old systems up. That's truth.

I had a meeting today with the assistant principle of my sons junior high and I said I'm in the business of blowing up systems. And he's like, "Well, you can't blow something up without having something to put in its place!" And I'm like... sometimes... sometimes not.

{laughs}

Heidi Hauck: Yeah! And that's... I mean that's a really interesting question. It's one that I really feel is very close to my heart and the work that I do. I actually... last year, about a year ago I had a major, sort of... career crisis... because I'm a business coach, and it became increasingly apparent to me how our system of capitalism is directly designed to increase and encourage all the "isms".

Sexism, racism, ageism, ableism-destroy the environment. Like - all of the things that are really making life unlivable are built directly into our system of capitalism. So, how can I justify helping people build businesses, which are engaged in this system of capitalism, when I know that it perpetuates all of these isms.

And... you know... it really raised some strong questions of well, how can we build new systems? What can we do... 'cause... I mean, unfortunately capitalism at this point is so entrenched into our society, we basically have to be in a full-scale revolution of the military type to take on...

Denise W Barreto: Yeah!



Heidi Hauck: ...capitalism. So - how do you build these new systems when you're stuck in the existing system?

Denise W Barreto: Well I think part of it is reimagining. You know, it's funny. Earlier this year I was in Trinidad for five days for carnival. Really great time, and one of my biggest unintended bonuses, or... you know... one of the unintended consequences of Trinidad for me - it was great to be in a space where there's no white people. Like at all!

Heidi Hauck: Yeah!

Denise W Barreto: The five days, like everybody I saw on TV, all the magazines... it wasn't... I mean, I saw white people, but they were inconsequential to me, they were inconsequential to what was happening, they weren't the center of things. We were the center.

You know, and I've been to Jamaica... and I've been... you know, I've been to black places before, but I don't know that I noticed what I noticed this time. And I really know...actually now that I say that, I have to correct... 'cause Jamaica is definitely black, but it's all white who has all the power and the money and the decision making, it's all white people. So... and you can see that in Jamaica.

So, what I'm saying though is, while I was there and then, in some of the reflections when I got back, the way I thought about myself, the way I thought about my kids, the way I thought - just about life, was completely different.

And so, what that has told me is that I need to put myself in spaces where I'm not influenced by white supremacy - completely. So that I can imagine what kind of systems we need.

Because right now, when I'm sitting in America, and I'm trying to brain storm shit and I'm sitting here and I'm working with clients... and even... you know, this foundation, what we keep running into is -we don't know anything outside of white supremacy and oppression. We don't know anything outside. We can't even... we almost can't even imagine what that is.

So what that's told me is I need to be going to a Belize, or I need to go somewhere where I'm not influenced... I mean, and it's hard to find anywhere in the world that's not influenced by white supremacy.

Heidi Hauck: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Denise W Barreto: But it's possible. And I think that to be honest... I think that's... you know, that's kind of how... and I have a friend that has a cabin up in British Columbia, and I said, "You know, if I went there and locked myself in their cabin for a couple of days and... you know, I was self-



- Denise W Barreto: sufficient, didn't have to go out, didn't have to buy anything - I think I can channel what I felt when I was in Trinidad."
- Heidi Hauck: Yeah.
- Denise W Barreto: And I could... cause that... I hate to say it but, that's part of the problem. Part of the problem is just being entrenched in it. It's hard to think about "wow, what if?" You know, what if everyone could make a living wage? A family supporting living wage. What if? You know, what would it look like if everybody had health care?
- I don't want to look at other systems where white people have done it. Like I want to think about other stuff... I want to look at other systems. And so.... yeah!
- I feel like a lot of what is holding us back is whenever we're starting these discussions, we're starting them from a place of a... like you said, a system that we know doesn't work, and so it's like, well how do we tweak this? Or how do we do this? And it's all based on something that is fucked up.
- Heidi Hauck: Right. Yeah. Yeah... mmmm, oh my gosh! So much there!
- Denise W Barreto: I'm sorry {laughs}
- Heidi Hauck: No! Don't apologize! Definitely don't apologize! I just... I agree so much with... it's like I... there's this saying and I can never remember exactly... but like.... you know, "the fish can't see the water because they're swimming in it." Right?
- Denise W Barreto: Right.
- Heidi Hauck: Like we're all just so.... I mean we've been raised with these systems. We've been raised with these beliefs and these ideas that we've just accepted as fact. And, you know, kind of bringing it back to the beginning of the conversations, it's incredibly difficult to unlearn...
- Denise W Barreto: Right.
- Heidi Hauck: ...these things. And this especially for people who, you know, don't want to go there because it's uncomfortable.
- Denise W Barreto: Right, right! Well even just what I've just said, I mean I'm sure some of your listeners, that doesn't feel good. That not gonna feel good that... you know, I'm telling you I can't be as creative as I think I can sitting in this country with you. I mean... there's some people that, that might make them want to turn this off and not listen anymore.
- Heidi Hauck: Ohhhh.



Denise W Barreto: And unfortunately, that's a reality though. I mean... and you know, I didn't even know that until this year. Like until I had that experience I didn't realize how deeply, deeply entrenched this stuff is in... it's like, it's in my DNA and I can't ever get rid of!

But like, those 5 days... and part of it was from being with people who were raised outside this country. Black women who know where they're from, who know they can trace their lineage and their heritage, unlike me. And this... so, their experience in this country and in general, the way they walk in the world is different than me.

And so, being with them in their own country, just observing, just how free they were of some of the thoughts, and some of these things I talk about as being conditioned.

Those women aren't conditioned for that. Because they're conditioned that they're beautiful, they're conditioned that they are represented, they are worthy. I mean they... and they're all different sized women. They... but they have a sense about them that, you know, I can't even buy. I wish I could.

{laughs}

But I... I think I can get there in spite of what's happening, but I have to be intentional about it, and then I have to really work, you know, to undo and what I'm really hoping is that it's something that I can help my kids with.

It's just my kids are half Mexican, and so they're very... they know very well their Mexican roots and heritage and we know all the tribes indigenous that they're... you know, we can trace that back in Mexico.

And so, I'm hoping because they have that anchor, between that and then, you know, mom being a little bit more alert, they have a shot at having a very different view of themselves. And a way to view that can push them outside of what they see.

Heidi Hauck: Right. Right. I love that. You know, it's interesting because one of the things that I think is very unfortunate about American culture and our sort of societal attitude of America being like "the best place in the world!" or some nonsense.

So many people have no interest really, in visiting other countries and seeing other viewpoints...

Denise W Barreto: Sure.

Heidi Hauck: ...which is just... it's so tragic because again, when you're steeped in it, when this is the only culture you know... you don't know what you don't know!

Denise W Barreto: Right. {laughs}



Heidi Hauck: You know? And like you said yourself, you didn't even realize how deeply entrenched these things were until you went to a culture where it's just not a thing at all!

Denise W Barreto: Right. Right! Not only is it not a thing, but when I, in two different cases, and one of the stories I'll tell you. It has to do... the night I picked up my carnival... ah... costume. So I pick up my carnival costume and it wasn't what I ordered.

Heidi Hauck: Ahh! Okay.

Denise W Barreto: So, in typical ugly American style, and I'll say it, 'cause we are, we are like, "Hey! I paid for this! This is what I want!" So when I raised it the woman was kinda like, "Yeah! But you got a better... you got a better top than the one you ordered." And I was kinda like, "Yeah, but, like, where's the rest of it?" Right? Cause it was really tiny, not a lot of material...

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: ...and it was hilarious because everyone around me was like, what the hell? And they kinda just... you know... it was... it was this moment, so then I was like, okay, you know, whatever. And then they just threw some pasties at me, and they were just like, "you're worried? Here, use these, you'll be okay..."

Heidi Hauck: Yeah.

Denise W Barreto: ...next!

Heidi Hauck: {laughs} I love it!

Denise W Barreto: And so, for three days I had to wrestle with myself. I was like, I don't have a black bra, maybe I'll go buy a black bra. Maybe I'll go buy a swimsuit. I mean I was like maybe I'll wear my swim... my swimsuit was black, and I had it. And I was like maybe I'll wear my swim suit underneath.

I mean like I was in this place of "I can't wear this in public. I can't wear this in public." Every day that got closer to it, and I mean it was wrangling in my mind of whether my body was good enough.

Whether it was... it was enough covering.

I mean I went through all of that, and when it was said and done, fucking I looked amazing!

And it didn't matter.

There were people like all kinds... I mean, there were women with all sizes of bodies wearing as much as I was or even littler than I was. And you know, once I was out there, and





Denise W Barreto: first of all, you notice that nobody was looking at you because everybody's dressed like that! That's one.

But it's... it's that whole notion of what's appropriate and what's not appropriate. I mean literally that's what it really came down to, was... and then I... it's like... "OMG, am I going to post a picture of this?" Cause I do post a lot on social media, and I'm super active, and everyone knew I was going... so... I'm a business owner. And... do you know what I mean? Like there was this...

Heidi Hauck: Yeah. Yeah!

Denise W Barreto: ...crazy... like what? And then I decided, you know what I am.

Because I'm a badass for doing that!

You know I've had two kids, I'm recently divorced, I am in the best shape I've been in, in probably my life, really! I feel good, I look good, and if somebody wants to not give me business because they see me in pasties on Facebook, bye!

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: They're not my people and they're not somebody I want to work with!

Heidi Hauck: Right!

Denise W Barreto: So... and it's funny because like... it's just funny because months later I still get notes from guys I've either worked with, or guys I've served on a... you know I was elected.

So, one of my moral enemies, and I say that 'cause I've said it to his face so even if he listens to this podcast, he knows. He sent me a note saying how much he loved me in my carnival outfit, which is hilarious! Because he's the last person in the world that I want to look at me in that outfit, but...

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: ...but it brings to mind this idea of what culture does to people. Right?

Heidi Hauck: Mmmm.

Denise W Barreto: When you experience something different... like even people you fucking hate, and who hated you, all of a sudden, they can... it's like music, it's like sports, there's some things and... carnival is one of those things.



Denise W Barreto: Cause I've heard from hundreds of people messaged me. And people that I didn't even know... like, I mean I know they were connected to me, but I hadn't heard from, saw me and... and everybody was like, "Oh my god you look amazing!"

And not that I care what they think, 'cause it didn't matter what anybody thought, I already knew that. But it was really... it was a great experience, it was cool.

Heidi Hauck: Yeah! That's awesome. And yet another example of these internalized messages that we take on as members of our society and our culture about what is and isn't allowable.

The whole-body shame, especially for women, is just such a... I feel like it's more and more being exposed and recognized as a mechanism that is control.

Denise W Barreto: Yup! For sure. And white women, I think you guys have it worse than us. Cause in my estimation... like I know, that yes, we know you look at the statistics, you know, lots and lots of women have eating disorders, but that tends to not be something that we worry about in our community.

We're a lot more free to be who we are! And if that's large, or if that's skinny... and I mean... and trust me... we have a lot of the same... you know what's funny is... we have the same issues as white people, it's just pathologized when we have it. Right?

Like... ohhh... if it's... whether it's single moms, which, you know, that's one of my hot buttons. I purposely didn't even have sex in high school, even if I wanted to because I didn't want to be a teen mom. I was that... like, I am not being a teen mom!

And then I waited pretty much all the way through college too, because it... even though I know how that works, birth control, whatever, I wasn't emotionally ready. But I really was not gonna be a single mom!

And so, I can tell you toward the end of my sixteen-year marriage when it was clear that my husband wasn't gonna get help for his depression. When it was clear that he was not gonna get reengaged in our family, I gotta believe I was holding on to the marriage more for the shame of being divorced and being a single mom. I did not want that!

And I'm still working through my deep, deep... like that was... I wasn't even gonna do it to make sure that would happen. Right? So, I made decisions to build my life the way I wanted it, and I didn't want to have kids by myself, and here I am taking my kids over the goal line by my fucking self!

Heidi Hauck: Mmmm.

Denise W Barreto: And it's hard... it's hard because what I've just said... that's something I didn't want more than anything. Right? Like I would take diseases. And that's sad!



Denise W Barreto: Why in the world did we tell me, every black girl, or black... you know person... what it means... What is single mom hood... because it's what we would have heard... it's the images... it's...

You know, I can remember when Bill Clinton did the Welfare to Work signing surrounded by black women. Which is hilarious because it's white women who make up more of the welfare queen numbers. Okay!

Heidi Hauck: Right.

Denise W Barreto: We can go and look at that. But yet, it's something that I carry, like now when I travel with my kids, and, you know I can see people looking! You know, and I just dare people to say something to me, and we've had a couple, "Oh, your kids are so amazing! Where's their dad?" or one woman said, "I was married for sixteen years."

Right? Like... I'm not the one!

So it's funny... it's only happened once and I think it's because the look that I give. Like if you walk over here...

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: ...it's going down today! Like I will not be politely smiling, and nodding, you're gonna hear it. You're gonna hear my real story so that you can knock that crazy, fucking story you have in your head out.

Heidi Hauck: Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. And as you said, it is the stories, these cultural stories that we have. Because I've traveled with my two boys, just me and them, for various reasons.

And... it is absolutely, as a black woman traveling with children, they're making assumptions. I mean, they don't know... like, first of all it's none of their fucking business where their dad is...

Denise W Barreto: Yeah! Right. Right.

Heidi Hauck: ...and they're making assumptions about you being a single mom when they don't know shit about you. Right?

Denise W Barreto: Right.

Heidi Hauck: And as a white woman, the assumptions that are made about me are totally different! Right?

Denise W Barreto: Absolutely.



Heidi Hauck: And it...

Denise W Barreto: Absolutely.

Heidi Hauck: ...And it just goes back...

Denise W Barreto: And it's not equal... and it's not equally... and, you know... I'm not saying that the pain is equal. Right? Like whatever, I will say since I've been a single mom I definitely, first of all, have all the respect in the world for single moms.

I would've never done this without a man... I mean without getting married. So, I won't say without a man, I mean I guess people do it, two women too. But I... I would not have done it without a partner, for sure. I just wouldn't have.

And so I have all the respect in the world, and, I believe one of the things I am doing too is - I want to help reimagine what people think about single moms.

Because it's... you know, I've heard white woman say they've been mistreated. I mean when I look at the data on people going to get the social service help, white-black are indifferent the way people are treated when they go to get that help, it's horrible.

Heidi Hauck: Yeah.

Denise W Barreto: And that absolutely needs... and black people have to do it, get to an extreme, right? So, you know they're treating poor white people bad, then they really are treating the brown and black people bad.

And so I've been working on that in some of my policy making work too. It's like, how do we keep people's dignity, right?

Heidi Hauck: Yeah.

Denise W Barreto: Lots of people, they don't want the help, they... you know... I don't know anybody that gets the help that would rather, you know... they'd rather have a job that pays them enough, so they don't have to.

Heidi Hauck: Right.

Denise W Barreto: They'd rather have the... like you know, I live in the Chicago area. It's impossible...for what it's... minimum wage, I think about when I'm going to the airport sometimes I see people waiting at four in the morning for a bus.

Heidi Hauck: Mmhmm.



Denise W Barreto: Right. And I know that their waiting... they're going to a job that isn't paying them very much. And likely they're facing like an hour commute. Whenever I see someone on the bus stop that early, they're not going... they're usually not going to the job that's like going to let them be 20 minutes away....

Heidi Hauck: Right?

Denise W Barreto: ...I mean, they're getting up that early so they can be there on time and I'm just like, OMG, like I... transportation has been a thing that I've really noticed since I moved out of the suburbs where everyone has a car and pretty much everyone... you know everybody and everybody can get places.

Man, being in the city I can see like, even when my daughter with her job, right? When I couldn't be there to take her, and she had to take the bus. The amount of time was just crazy.

Heidi Hauck: Yeah.

Denise W Barreto: And there are adults that have to do that.

Heidi Hauck: Yeah. And then you know, you take into account, this is again going to those cultural stories, one of the things that just absolutely infuriates me is this cliché that we have around like, "poor people are lazy." Right? "They're poor cause they just won't work hard enough," or whatever.

I'm like... are you kidding me!

There are people who are making ends meet by working multiple jobs. I have known parents who barely get to see their children or even get much sleep, because they... and they're commuting by bus and...and like there's absolutely no truth to the, "you're poor because your lazy" story.

Denise W Barreto: Right. Right. Well, see the thing is... and that is what you just said is part of what my... so when I think about my core work, and then my, I call my "side work" that's gonna be my core work soon...

Heidi Hauck: Awesome.

Denise W Barreto: ...so my business, I work with government agencies, non-profit agencies and for-profit agencies, it's all about, you know... I'm changing the world one relationship at a time.

We are dismantling systems that take advantage of vulnerable people. I do a lot of marketing and branding, and helping people tell their story better. Especially in this work,



Denise W Barreto: that's really important because we've had people on the other side hijack words like diversity and equity and they hijack them and make them bad.

So what I do that is my day job. Right? And that's a hustle.

But then my other business that I'm just... we just incorporated this summer, it's Serket Productions, and we are going to be content producers. We have one show lined up ready to sell, and then we have a whole, you know, cannon full of ideas because we know that culture is impacted by television, by film, by music. Right?

Heidi Hauck: Wow!

Denise W Barreto: Like, people... you can change... you know... I think about Marvin Gaye and some of the things that, you know... his songs, why they have endured. It's because they were about a cultural revolution. Right?

And so, with, you know... originally when I started this project last year it was this long range, like "oh! We're gonna write a book, and then we're gonna try to sell the book and option it to Hollywood." But then MeToo blew up last fall, and all these fucking white guy projects started to get kicked out of Hollywood, and Hollywood has a hunger and a thirst for diverse stories.

And we see that with like Crazy Rich Asians and Black Panthers and so, we... what it boils down to is this. So, I grew up in a multicultural environment in the 70's, in the 80's, in the United States. There's not a ton of them, but there are lots of them!

Heidi Hauck: Yeah.

Denise W Barreto: But if you look at television, or if you look at movies, it would have you believe that white people only deal with white people, black people... I mean you would never know that there are generations of us who fucking have had to navigate with white people our whole lives. We had to navigate with Mexicans our whole life.

Like the town I grew up in and the town my partner on this project... she's Rochester, New York. I mean, our whole entire lives and we're both Gen Xer's, which means we're probably amongst some of the first generation... now you know it's more common too, right?

Places like Pearland, Texas, there's places that really are focused on diversity, are focused on attracting, but I'm thinking about these that just kind of happened because all our parents were blue collar workers together. And so, we were adjacent to a Ford plant, guess what? It was white people, it was Italians, Blacks, and Mexicans.



- Denise W Barreto: And so, I think at my high school I was the first black president of student council, even though the school had been integrated since the 20's. And so, what I'm saying is those are stories we never see.
- Heidi Hauck: Right.
- Denise W Barreto: You never see... you know it's always the token black friend, or there's the token Mexican friend, but you don't see rich stories of people across cultures sharing lives.
- Heidi Hauck: Right.
- Denise W Barreto: And that happens in America and we're about to start telling people about it. And I'm really excited because I know, first of all I dreamed of that I'd win an Emmy so that right there means...
- Heidi Hauck: Oh, I love that!
- Denise W Barreto: Gonna win an Emmy! So it's gonna be some kinda television thing.
- Heidi Hauck: Yeah!
- Denise W Barreto: I mean this... we have to reshape... and its sad because it's, how many years later, I mean I'm 47 years old soon, and... but that's been my whole life! My husband was Mexican.
- I've always, like, when you look at... I mean, I have a little thing I carry around when I do diversity training, and it has beads and colors of the beads of the ten most important people, and it's a rainbow, it actually is a rainbow. And people in some of these trainings, it's just like, wow! And it's like... but yeah!
- I mean there are lots and lots of American who have always, we've always mixed, and we've always learned and known how to navigate with each other. Why aren't we telling these stories? Well we're about to! We're about to!
- Heidi Hauck: That is beautiful. That is awesome! I love that! And also, like... taking these stories and breaking the characters out of their molds. You know, out of these...
- Denise W Barreto: That's what were' doing baby!
- Heidi Hauck: ...defined... you know like, what was it? There was some... I'm bad with names, but there was an Asian author whose book was rejected because his characters weren't "Asian enough!"
- Denise W Barreto: Right! Oh, that's so funny!



Heidi Hauck: What was that all about?

Denise W Barreto: Well, and it's because we have these set narratives of what black people in America are.

We're the set narrative of.... I mean I can tell you, I hate to say this, but I'll go ahead and say it, I've spent most of my life with black people telling me they were gonna take my black card, which I'm like, fucking try! I like... I mean, cause the reality is I have a very different black experience than a lot of people. Doesn't make me less black.

It's just that there's a different story, and unfortunately, black people have had such an impact in our culture, and people like, love us and want to be us so bad but they don't want the suffering and all the things that go with it.

But the point is, it's like been glamourized, this one narrative about Black Pride and even black people fucking buy into it, and that cracks me up!

Whenever I meet a black person that in any way, shape or form says something to me about my blackness, I'm done, because like, there's no authority on black. There's no, you know... "that's black, that's not. We're keeping you, we're not keeping you."

There's all kinds of black stories and I... I mean that's one of the reasons why... why do you think This Is Us has done so well? It's done so well because... you know... here we are, Randall... I mean it's still got its stereotypes. And Randall was adopted by these savior white people, but what I love is his dad was a person. Right?

He wasn't just a drug perp, we got to know that he was a musician, we got to see other facets of his dad.

Heidi Hauck: Right.

Denise W Barreto: You don't usually see that. We usually make the black... you know, we'll make the black drug addict and that's all they are, they're one dimensional.

Heidi Hauck: Right.

Denise W Barreto: Right. But they did such a great job and that's why that show, you know...and what makes that show even... you know, Chrissy Metz the overweight woman, I think they've done a great job of helping us meet her and understand what is behind her eating and her emotional health and seeing her as a person, right? And not just a fat stereotype, or what have you.

So I... because of that show I know my show is gonna sell, and I know my show is gonna do well, because we... I mean people have been hungry for something different, for a different story.





Denise W Barreto: And people wanna see themselves on TV, I haven't seen myself. I always joke that Aisha Tyler will play me because her personal life is very similar to mine and, you know, she broke up with her husband around same time I broke up with my husband.

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: But she has a very similar experience to mine... but you know... she doesn't get a ton of roles, like she's a very kinda obscure Hollywood person. But I feel like every time I see her, that's me, I relate, I relate to her. And I'm sure there's tons and tons of us that do, but because she doesn't fit the... the overall role...

Heidi Hauck: The expectations.

Denise W Barreto: ...Yeah! The stereotype! So she doesn't get as many roles, she doesn't get as much exposure, and so we revert back to that tired crazy often false narrative of what black women are.

So I cannot wait to get going. And what I hope too, is think about what I'm doing in my day job, what I'm doing in my side gig, they're intertwined.

Because this liberation is gonna come from all different ways, and we already know that policy making alone ain't gonna work 'cause we've had policies on the books and we still fucking can't get it right.

Heidi Hauck: Right.

Denise W Barreto: So we also have to win the hearts of Americans, and we have to bring something to them. I mean, it's sad... right now I am absolutely destroyed, one of my daughter's really good friend and former debate partner, he took his life last week. 17 years old, beautiful mixed-race kid, we're still obviously grappling with it.

Heidi Hauck: Wow.

Denise W Barreto: But even yesterday at his memorial, some of the kids were like... they don't even comprehend... they're like, "oh my gosh I wish I woulda reached out to him, or I wish..."

You know some of the kids talked about falling out with him in middle school and not talking to him and now they're feeling whatever... and what they don't understand is, first of all, I have so much respect for him because clearly he was in a ton of pain, and he... while I'm not for suicide, but I find them to be the most brave people, cause I'm a doer, right?

And I'm about taking care of myself and wanting to do that in a way that honors me, and so I have a very completely different view of suicide that I had in the past, especially in the last week. And... but what we... you know what I mean?



- Denise W Barreto: You think about the way... what we heard a couple months ago when we lost Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade and that.
- We like... people still just don't understand how... like how complex humans are. And there are no easy narratives for any human, human condition or any existence. And we have to be curious and stay curious because you know, the minute you think you know, you probably don't.
- {laughs}
- Heidi Hauck: Absolutely. Absolutely. Oh my goodness. Well I... so much sympathy for you and your daughter and your family. Losing somebody is never easy. And yeah! You know... facing reality of the... the pain and suffering that somebody has gone through to bring them to that point of suicide can be really challenging.
- Denise W Barreto: Definitely. And I mean my daughter is speaking at a funeral. Fucking... I just spoke at a funeral for the first time this year. So here's my 16-year-old, just lost her friend, and then just like, wow! Wow! And... and then you know... it's one thing to have your own pain, it's a whole 'nother thing to watch your kid's pain.
- Heidi Hauck: Oh yeah! No! That's way harder than dealing with my own stuff!
- Denise W Barreto: Oh! That shit! She's about to, you know... she's about to go to college next year, and so... it was kinda this glimpse of, oh my gosh! Right? You know our kids, at least for me, I'm a steward, those kids are not mine, they never were. Right?
- Heidi Hauck: Yeah.
- Denise W Barreto: Soon as they were born they were the worlds. And it's my job to get them to be, you know, wonderful contributing citizens of this world. But nothing really reminds you of them not being yours then watching them grow and watching them have pain and get accepted into fashion school.
- Heidi Hauck: Oh my!
- Denise W Barreto: You know watching them, you know... at their jazz concert and people talking about what great talent they are, and you used to be... I mean I used to be a singer and I laugh, "OMG, I guess I don't have any talent anymore because of you!"
- Heidi Hauck: {laughs}
- Denise W Barreto: But, you know, whatever! It's just... it's like I... and it's funny, one of the discussions right now among... I've got friends who have kids... and one of the things amongst my friend



Denise W Barreto: group is pulling out of, "I can't wait until my kids have kids." And I'm like, I don't say that. I don't say that! At all!

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: And I mean... and here's the thing, if they have kids or they don't have kids, I don't care. I don't care, whatever they do. I am... they're not obligated to give me grandkids. I mean if they do, great! It'll be nice, I'll try to be a decent grandma.

But like I... that is not like... so that's a conditioning thing, I never ever took part in.

And I didn't even think I was going to get married. I didn't see myself getting picked, I didn't go to weddings as a kid. I didn't see a lot of weddings in my family. So, white people got married. That's the way it was in my life. And so I never was that girl dreaming about getting married or having a beautiful wedding, or any of that.

You know that wasn't me, and so then I did get married and had a wedding, you know I had my beautiful kids, or whatever.

But I never bought into the grandparent thing, I was kinds like... and even holidays, you know, I try to have a good time with my kids, but I know if they get married or get partnered up, I might be on my own for holidays, and that's okay,

They're not... They're not mine, that's the thing. They're not mine, they're the worlds.

Heidi Hauck: Ah!

Denise W Barreto: So... but I'm pretty sure I've made really great traditions that they're gonna come home for.  
{laughs}

Heidi Hauck: I love it. I love it! Well your kids are incredibly fortunate to have that... that freedom from the expectation. Oh my...

Denise W Barreto: Yeah!

Heidi Hauck: and I, oh, I'm really enjoying talking with you! So this is the hardest part of the interview for me, where I have to say it's time to bring it in...

Denise W Barreto: {laughs}



Heidi Hauck: I could just keep talking for hours! So Denise, thank you so much for this incredible conversation. If there were just one thing that people were to take away from the conversation, what would you like that to be?

Denise W Barreto: So, I want people to live lives that they wanna live, period.

Denise 2.0, which is what I'm calling myself, and there's been a... you know, a yoga instructor, a nutrition coach, therapist... you know a lot of people on team Denise 2.0.

And part of Denise 2.0 is freeing myself from all those... those things, those stories, those narratives, and every... every year, every week, every 6 months that I've been on this journey of recalibrating every aspect of my life, 'cause everything's been on the table now. Right?

When your marriage abruptly ends and you weren't really expecting it, for me at least, everything is up for discussion.

So I want people to live their lives and be free and enjoy themselves. Cause we only get one life and the reason I really know that, my mom died when I was four, and so, I always lived like that... at least... and here's what's funny!

I thought I always lived like that, until my life blew up, and then I was like, "shit! There's a whole deeper level of shit that... that..."

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: ...I thought I was free, and I thought I was a non-conformist and I thought, "shit!"

It's been beautiful! And it's really lonely too because nothing prepares you for telling your friends you're divorced, and they're all scared because they hate their marriages. And so they... you know what I mean, and they hate their lives

Heidi Hauck: Yeah. Yeah.

Denise W Barreto: I can remember when I started my business - throughout my life, you know, whenever I've done something big and major, I'd watch people around me who just didn't have the courage, or the commitment, or the support, or confidence to do it.

And so, that's what I want people to get out of this conversation. That freedom is available to you.

Heidi Hauck: I love that. Oh my god! I love that so much! Yes! We only have one life to live. You've got to make the most of it. You gotta make it count for you.



Denise W Barreto: You know, what's in between those years. And see... because my mom died so young, I have a... a very different view on mortality I think than most people.

So, like if my time is up tomorrow, you know, my kids know me, they know they were loved, they know the kind of person I am, they know I believed in them and that I didn't impose myself on them and that I made them and that I treated them like I was a steward of their lives and not like control...

...I'm very proud of the family that I created because I was able to make up for family of origin I had through my family.

Heidi Hauck: Yeah... Yeah... That's beautiful. That's so beautiful. You've done good work.

Denise W Barreto: Thank you.

Heidi Hauck: Yeah... Oh. Denise, for those who are listening, they'd like to find you online and learn more about the amazing work that you are doing, where is the best place for them to find you?

Denise W Barreto: Well, I love Twitter, so Denise W Barreto on Twitter is definitely a place you can find me, you can also find me at [RelationshipsMatterNow.com](http://RelationshipsMatterNow.com). And I'm also, you know, I'm on Facebook, Relationships Matter Now! or Denise W Barreto, but Twitter is a great place to find me because I do a lot of ranting.

Heidi Hauck: {laughs}

Denise W Barreto: And for expert good stuff too! But it's really, like... if you wanna get to know me follow me on Twitter, that's a great place.

Heidi Hauck: Beautiful. Now for people who are interested in this amazing side project that you're working on...ahhhh...

Denise W Barreto: Ohhhh! Serket Productions

Heidi Hauck: Do you have any sort of... timeline as far as like when?

Denise W Barreto: Yes! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! So we just incorporated the business, the website any day now, so by the time we even air this it will have been up already. But yeah! And it's Serket Productions, and Serket just so you know... was a goddess of fertility...

Heidi Hauck: Ah!

Denise W Barreto: ... and Scorpion Goddess, and I'm a Scorpio, and very much all the traits of a Scorpio. So yeah! And because it's about fertility and birthing things, it's really cool, so, yes! Go out



Denise W Barreto: there and you'll see that... and Twitter is a great place because I often make reference; I call it my fiction baby, my fiction project.

Heidi Hauck: Beautiful! Awesome! Well thank you again Denise so much for joining me today, it has been an immense pleasure speaking with you and getting to know you better and your projects, and your glorious, glorious motherhood...

Denise W Barreto: {laughs}

Heidi Hauck: ...so much action and honor for you. I'm the child of a single mother, so I... I get how important the work that you are doing is.

Denise W Barreto: Yeah! Thank you, thank you for having me, And I am so glad to contribute to your series.

Heidi Hauck: Thank you so much!

Heidi Hauck: And thank you dear listener for joining my guest and I, as we explore this journey towards creating businesses that make the world a better place.

If you'd like to hear more of these interviews, you can listen, download, or signup for the notification list at [HeidiHauck.com/bbh-interviews](http://HeidiHauck.com/bbh-interviews).

This is Heidi Hauck saying, "Until next time."