

THE NEXT ACT | LIFE STORIES

THE MODEL  
Daphne Selfe, 88

# A fresh face

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER AT THE AGE OF 70 HELPED RELAUNCH ONE OF THE MOST ENDURING CAREERS IN HIGH FASHION. TWO DECADES ON, IT IS STILL GOING STRONG



I was always taught that if you work for someone, be as pleasant and helpful as possible. Some of this is down to upbringing. My parents were very loving but strict - that gave me discipline and a work ethic. It is an approach that has enabled me to have a career in this industry for as long as I have.

I started modelling in the late 1940s, when I was 20. Back then it was very different. You had to take all your accessories to a shoot - the bits for your hair, three pairs of shoes, gloves, hats, jewellery and make-up. Now you just go and everything is done for you.

My early modelling career lasted just five years, until I got married. This was the 1950s and you weren't expected to work after marriage. However, my husband was in television and although the modelling stopped, I started doing extra work on various light entertainment shows. That was nice because I had young children and I was able to work every now and then, rather than every day.

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DO WHAT YOU CAN WHILE YOU CAN

Over the years, I became better known and did some films and the odd commercial. But in 1998, when I was 70, I unexpectedly started modelling again. My agent at the time was looking for two models - a man and a woman - to appear in a Red or Dead show at London Fashion Week. This was very unusual as older models were not normally used in catwalk shows. A stylist who worked on that project mentioned that Vogue

magazine was doing an article on ageing, to be shot by the legendary photographer Nick Knight. I tried to get in on it and did. It was then that a scout from the agency Models I saw me and signed me up.

My husband had just died and I thought it would keep me busy and stop me from moping. At first, the industry saw me as a curiosity. But I soon got more and more modelling work and here I am, 20 years later. Now I can pick and choose what I do. I did a job for Dolce & Gabbana a few years ago, and was in a campaign with cool footwear company Vans and H&M's & Other Stories brand, more recently.

I'm not sure that there's a single key to staying active and healthy as you age. It's a combination of things. I've got my mother's cheekbones, which is very useful. Genes certainly help. I also look after myself. I still do a certain amount of ballet, yoga and

exercise. Anything you can do is good, even if you just get out to walk the dog. Food is very important, too. There are odd occasions when I go out and eat, but I mostly cook for myself.

And I don't believe in cosmetic surgery.

But the most important secret to enjoying a long life is how you view the world. I'm very energetic, just as my mother was, and I have an optimistic outlook. People seem to lose this, especially when they reach middle age. They become invisible and one shouldn't. If you're pleasant and outgoing, other people will want to talk to you. You should stay open to new experiences too. I will try anything once, or twice. My daughter skydives and if I were allowed to jump out of planes at my age, I would.

In this part of the world, we're not very good with old people. I've spent quite a lot of time working in Japan and they're much better there - they really look after them.

We used to have that here, when we all lived together in big happy families. I can recall a time when talking to granny was considered interesting. Now people live on their own and older members of the family are rather looked down on. We don't recognise the wisdom that older people have. On the other hand, perhaps the elderly should make more effort themselves to integrate.

Retirement is a wonderful opportunity to reinvent yourself, to play about and do something new. You're only in your 60s and still active. A lot of my friends have welcomed retirement as a chance to do something completely different. With any luck, you've got a good 20 years to play with, so go out and enjoy yourself.

As my 94-year-old neighbour says, "Do what you can, while you can."

This is the second in a series of profiles of individuals who are redefining later life that will appear in FT Weekend Magazine and at [www.nextact.ft.com](http://www.nextact.ft.com).

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