

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Aly Raisman

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness, and every week I sit down for a 40-minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by six-time Olympic medalist and captain of the Fierce Five and Final Five gymnastics teams Aly Raisman, where I ask her: Am I Your Favorite Non-Binary Gardener Slash Gymnast?! So if you are driving a-, you know where I'm from they call it vehicles, vehicles. So if you're in a moving vehicle, I need you to strap yourself in and don't freak out and don't veer off course because we have like literally one of the most prolific guests of "Getting Curious" history ever of all time. And I'm freaking out. So put your hands together and make so much noise for Aly Raisman.

ALY RAISMAN [00:00:48] Hi! That was the best introduction I ever got in my whole life.

JVN [00:00:51] No.

ALY RAISMAN [00:00:52] Hi. How are you?

JVN [00:00:53] I am doing much better. I have to say, now that I'm talking to you. I'm so excited that you're here.

ALY RAISMAN [00:01:00] I'm so excited to be on the podcast. I feel like we've been talking about this for so long.

JVN [00:01:03] We have. And now here's the thing. I don't. So that's literally how I reacted the first time I met you on FaceTime when I introduced you and, like, the first two times I saw you in real life. Now we are actual, like, IRL friends, which I think is kind of amazing. I never saw it coming that we would end up being friends. And I'm so honored to be your friend.

ALY RAISMAN [00:01:26] I love being friends with you, I love our FaceTimes. Love our conversations. Love our hangouts in New York.

JVN [00:01:32] You are literally one of my closest phone friends of all time. It's, I feel like you and Michelle Kwan are right there for like, I just, I, I have to pinch myself and my face hurts after I think about you two, because I just can't believe that we, I just idolized you, like, since 2010, it's been a decade since I've been obsessed with you. No, it's true. You are one of the most prolific gymnasts of all time. And I really want to talk about, like, all things gymnastics, but I want to first just hit, one thing you've been Instagramming about lately that I am also obsessed with lately, which is gardening.

ALY RAISMAN [00:02:07] I love gardening. It's so relaxing and it just makes me feel so grateful. I always like the last couple of years. I would say I've been really into gardening. My mom was one that introduced me to it, but especially during this quarantine. It's been something that has just really helped me get through every single day. I just, I love it so much. When did you start?

JVN [00:02:31] Same, during this. Now, do you do your gardening in, like, the ground or do you do it on like a balcony because you live in a city? Like, what's your deal?

ALY RAISMAN [00:02:43] So I do it on a balcony and I have different planters and stuff outside, but I also have stuff indoor. I have, you know, little small pots that I grow inside. I counted the other day. I'm a, like, obsessed. I have like 85 different small pots growing inside with, like, a ton of different seeds. I am literally obsessed. It makes me so happy and my mom and my dad have a garden outside backyard. So I go back home and check theirs out too. I just love it so much.

JVN [00:03:15] When did your mom get you-? Were you little when you, she got you into it, or was it more recent?

ALY RAISMAN [00:03:20] It was more recent in the last couple of years. My mom just got really into it the last couple of years.

JVN [00:03:25] My mom like made me weed her garden once when I was like 9 as a punishment. And I've never gotten over it. So I was, I've had like an aversion to gardening like ever since. But now I'm really into it. One thing I learned about is like Outer Circle behaviors, which is like the behaviors that you do that are like just really life affirming and soul affirming and are just like fun and that you look forward to them. So like air track is one for me, figure skating is one, and gardening would also be one that I would say I've newly added because I just, it reminds me of what you say when you talk about, that it's just so fun and it's just, like, I can't imagine how you put this little seed in the dirt. And then she turns into this literal thing that we eat or look at that's pretty. But my cats eat flowers and barf. So I don't, I can't grow flowers.

ALY RAISMAN [00:04:15] Really?

JVN [00:04:16] Inside.

ALY RAISMAN [00:04:16] I totally agree with you. I think it is such that it's like a miracle. You know, one of my favorite quotes is that you can live every day as if it's a miracle or you can choose to live every day as if it's not a miracle. And I just love finding the, the everyday magic. I think it's so beautiful. And I also think it really relates to everyday life, too, because the day you plant the seed is not the day you get the fruit or the vegetable or the flower. And it's about being patient. And I just think that's super important for, it's helpful for me in my everyday life to remember that. And I'm someone where I'm very type A personality. So sometimes being patient is not something that comes easily to me. And I'm very persistent. And so working on just being patient and practicing gratitude is really one of my favorite things I've learned from gardening, that I'm literally growing everything. I got cucumbers, zucchini, cauliflower, broccoli, flowers, snap peas, green beans, gold beans. I didn't even know that was a thing until recently. Everything, like everything. I was eating strawberries the other day. I took the seeds from the strawberries and I dried them. Now I'm trying to grow them, I am just, I want to have every produce from my garden.

JVN [00:05:31] I just did that to an avocado. I took that thing out, an avocado. I put it in the water. Then I put the tube in. It's literally growing.

ALY RAISMAN [00:05:38] It didn't work when I tried that. No way.

JVN [00:05:39] Yeah. Yes. I'll take a picture. It's amazing. I'm growing, like, the carrots, the peas, the cucumbers, the jalapenos. The cucumbers are really vivacious. They're coming up so fast. And the tomatoes. Obsessed with gardening. Okay, but wait, now I want to talk about this other thing that I'm obsessed with. Do you know what it is?

ALY RAISMAN [00:05:59] Gymnastics maybe.

JVN [00:06:00] You, you and gymnastics.

ALY RAISMAN [00:06:01] Ok.

JVN [00:06:02] So for the people that don't know because maybe, like, some people that are listening, like we're born under a rock and they don't understand, like, the competitive world of gymnastics, they don't understand because, you know, a lot of people just don't know. So here's how it works. And tell me if I'm wrong. But basically, when you start getting into like gymnastics, like when you're a little, little baby girl or boy, it's like, you know, the levels, honey. It's like level 1, level 2, level 3, level 4, all the way up to 10. And then after 10, it's elite. And then like elite is like when you're doing like VISA honey, P&G, the CoverGirl Classic, the like the U.S. Championships, Worlds, Pan Am. That's right. Right?

ALY RAISMAN [00:06:37] Yes, that's right, but most gymnasts will just try to go to level 10 and then after level 10 is the, then you go to the collegiate level. But there's only about I feel, like, around 70 elites in the country. So most gymnasts are not elite gymnasts.

JVN [00:06:56] Work. Yes. Is there a way that you can say to people who don't speak, like, gymnastics terms as easily, like what is like the move on, let's say floor exercise, for instance, that differentiates a level 10 from an elite? Is it like? What is it?

ALY RAISMAN [00:07:11] That's a really good question. So level 10 is still extremely-

JVN [00:07:18] Hard as F.

ALY RAISMAN [00:07:19] Yes. Yes.

JVN [00:07:20] 'Cause you're doing like double tucks.

ALY RAISMAN [00:07:21] Still extremely, extremely hard. Yes, I would say just to clarify, I think, so level 10 is still obviously extremely, extremely difficult. But I think the extra level of going elite is really that level of you want to take it to try to go to the Olympics. And it really requires more training than you normally would do. So I would work out sometimes twice a day, or you have to train harder skills, as you were saying. But I think making that jump from level 10 to elite is a huge commitment, not only for myself, but also for my family and my parents driving me to and from practice all the time. It's kind of like it takes a whole village. And then my coaches would have me do extra hours of training so they would come into the gym. So it's really just like a whole other, you're adding on a whole other thing to your plate. So it's a, it's a really big decision but I think one of the biggest differences would be I think a common tumbling pass would be a double back or in a tough position, which is two flips in a row in the air and a double pike, which is when your

legs are straight, two flips in the air. And I think, you know, some level 10 gymnasts will do the full in or the Arabian.

JVN [00:08:35] They do?

ALY RAISMAN [00:08:36] But I think that-. I think Yes. Yes, some do. Yes. In the, in the collegiate level, you double layout. Yes.

JVN [00:08:43] Girl. Can I tell you this one time, do you remember like, and wait, we have to go back to this. But I just have to, I just have to ask. Wait because you were born in 9-?

ALY RAISMAN [00:08:51] 4. '94.

JVN [00:08:52] '94. Ok. I feel like the year that you were born when you were zero years old or maybe when you were two. I was watching this gymnastics meet because in the mid 90s there were these fierce meet's on NBC that would be like the US versus China versus Russia or be like France, China, U.S., just be like a random three countries like teams, like, just doing a little like practice meet. I don't know if they did that in like your time, but they'd be like on random Saturdays and I'd be like, oh my God, so excited. But I remember the first girl that I saw do an Arabian. I remember the commentators were like, "Ooh, is she going to do it? Is she not going to do it?" And I remember she went for it. And like it was '94, '95, '96. And remember, all the commentators are like, I can't believe she, like, tried it. She, she kind of, she sat it down, but they were just like freaking out that she even went for. I remember, it was like, amazing. I can't believe.

ALY RAISMAN [00:09:39] So she was the first person to ever do it.

JVN [00:09:42] Well, maybe that they had saw. I don't remember if it was like the first person ever. But I just remember that she went for a double Arabian. And she sat it down. And it wasn't nationals and it wasn't Olympics, it was just like at a meet on a weekend. And the commentators were like-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:09:52] Ok.

JVN [00:09:52] They were just like, "Dang, like, I can't believe she went for it." And it was just, yeah, such a cool skill.

ALY RAISMAN [00:09:58] It is, it's so difficult.

JVN [00:10:00] Tell everyone what an Arabian is.

ALY RAISMAN [00:10:01] OK. Yes, that's where we're getting. So. OK. So it's so interesting explaining this. OK. So it is. So you do a roundoff back handspring and then you do a backflip with a half twist. But while you're still in the area, you do a double front out of it.

JVN [00:10:19] Yeah, ok but wait. So for the people that don't know what a round off back handspring is. That's like a cartwheel. But your feet come together in the middle is the round off.

ALY RAISMAN [00:10:27] OK.

JVN [00:10:27] Then you're back handsprings like a back flip with your hands. And then the Arabian is, so you're, like, your face. You're going backwards. And then what happens?

ALY RAISMAN [00:10:35] And then you do a half twist. And then, it's funny, I'm like on the Zoom call that we're on right now, I'm like showing Jonathan how you do it, in my seat. So I have my arms up. So you do a half twist and then you a double front but your legs are in a tuck position. But what makes it so difficult is it's what they call a blind landing. So with, if you're doing any kind of like no twisting, full twisting two, you know, two twisting or double twisting is how they call it. You can see, you can spot the landing. But any time there's a half twist, a one half twist, two and a half twists, there's a blind landing. So it makes it more difficult because you can't spot the floor as easily as you would have been if you weren't doing a half twist.

JVN [00:11:21] So basically, OK. Yes. So basically, what, if I, what I hear you saying is like a lot of, I mean, level 10 is like extremely, extremely hard, super duper challenging. But then to make it from level 10 to even decide to go to elite is, like, it's kind of a family decision. It's like, it's a lot, it's, because it is, it's so highly competitive. And also it's like the college routines versus like the elite routines are like the elite ones last way longer. Like, it's just, like, what you have to, your, you have to be so much stronger. It's like it's just it's crazy, super duper hard.

ALY RAISMAN [00:11:53] The collegiate level is really about the perfect 10. And so their form is just impeccable. And it's all about sticking the landing. Where in elite, it's really about, of course, still trying to be really clean and getting a good execution's score. But they combine the execution score with the difficulty score. So the collegiate level and you know, all the levels, you know, all the way up to level 10 are still out of the perfect 10. But when you get to the elite level, they combine that execution score, which is how well you execute it. And, you know, if your toes are pointed, your knees are straight. All that stuff is out of the 10. But then they add that with the difficulty score, which combines two, maybe, a 15 is a really good score, for example.

JVN [00:12:43] Girl.

ALY RAISMAN [00:12:44] So it's just a different scoring.

JVN [00:12:45] That's literally, I've never heard anyone explain to me like that. And that is so genius. Yeah so all of them are out of 10 except when you get to elite. And then it's why it's like the 14 whatever and the yellow score or the green score because it's like, ah! OK, wait. So let's go back to you. So you're minding your own business in Massachusetts. You are training, honey. And in your book, which is amazing, you talk about how, like, you had to, you just worked so hard, like you're in Massachusetts. And I had, when I learned how to tumble, which I talk a lot about in my book. I had this coach tell me, because I'm like six feet tall. And I was like, I had no core strength. And I would just hurl myself backwards with just, like, a prayer. And she said to me, she was like, she's like, I've never seen someone learn how to like. She was like I've never seen someone with less natural talent learn how to tumble. You get over on sheer determination, is what she said to me. Like, I just had no natural ability. I had to, like, she was like you just work really hard. So you obviously have-

ALY RAISMAN [00:13:46] But that's a good compliment.

JVN [00:13:47] It was, but you have.

ALY RAISMAN [00:13:48] I think.

JVN [00:13:49] It is. But you had major natural ability because you're, like, you know, the first, you and Gabby Douglas were the first American gymnast to ever win back-to-back team gold medals. You like literally were the first. So you obviously had natural talent, but you just talk about how you really had to work. You're the hardest worker around.

ALY RAISMAN [00:14:08] Well so, it's funny because when you just said that about what, you said it was your coach, correct?

JVN [00:14:11] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:14:13] So my coach would say the same thing, though. He always would joke, he would say, you're the most uncoordinated Olympian I've ever seen in my whole entire life, because when I was younger, my worst event was actually floor. And I struggled so much. And I also had a lot of fears in gymnastics too. It was so scary for me. And I don't think people realize how scary it can be because the beam is four inches wide. You know, when you fall, when you slip off the bars and you and you fall on your face, it's really scary to have the courage to go back and do it again. So I had a lot of fears and I also really struggled. It took me a long time to get the skills. You know, some of my teammates would get a skill in a few weeks and it would literally take me three years to get it. So, you know, when I talk about patience, those things were really helpful when I was younger. But it was really difficult for me because it's hard to be in a group with other gymnasts who are getting skills so much quicker than you. And for me, I was so slow that I really had to learn from a young age to kind of go my own path and not compare myself to other people. But that can be really hard.

JVN [00:15:15] So hard.

ALY RAISMAN [00:15:15] When you're young and you don't understand.

JVN [00:15:16] Yes. In my book, I was talking about how, like, because when I first started cheerleading, I couldn't tumble. And then in order to try out for the squad where, like, you can cheer, like for football and basketball, so that I could cheer year round, and like be with my new friends, like all the time. I had to learn how you back handspring. And that's like why, so I didn't learn how to do it until I was like 14,15. And so I can't imagine, like, starting at like 4 or 5 and like that's just so much patience and so much persistence to learn so-. You started at 2?!

ALY RAISMAN [00:15:47] I started at 2, yes.

JVN [00:15:47] But I guess I mean I would have never. So I guess for me I was just comparing myself to you because I'm delusional. But yeah, starting at 2. That's just so much patience to learn. OK. So we're going to take a really quick break and we'll be right back with more Aly Raisman right after the break. Welcome back to "Getting Curious," this Jonathan Van Ness, here with Aly Raisman. So you're in Massachusetts. You're working super duper hard. And, so basically what I wanted to ask is like, what was your first national? Like, your first national, it was your first P&G year? Your first, I've seen on Instagram a bajillion times, like, this clip of you doing your

beam routine from your first nationals'. And it's so cute. And you're so cute, but anyway, you have to tell us all about it. Where were you? What was the year, honey? I'm pretty sure your leos were purple that year.

ALY RAISMAN [00:16:35] OK, so my first junior national championships at the elite level was in 2009. And I believe it was in Dallas, the national championships. I was so, so nervous. The months leading up to it, I was, I was so scared I'd never competed before at that huge level. I was so excited. But also I couldn't believe it was here because as a little girl, I obviously dreamed of competing at that elite level. And so it goes by so quickly when you can't even believe that it's actually there. And so I ended up competing. There's two days of competition. And so the first day of competition went really well. I was in second place, which was a huge shock to me because I didn't expect to do that well, then the next day, I actually fell on my last event on floor. I stuck my first pass, my Arabian. I stuck the Arabian. I was so excited and so pumped up that I went for my second pass and I did the triple twist and I went literally to my back. My feet barely hit the floor because I was so excited. And I just knew that I was, or I didn't know, but I was hoping I was gonna get top three. It's OK, Jonathan. It's ok, it worked, it's all good. It's all a learning experience. You have to fall and make mistakes.

JVN [00:17:49] But I can't believe, that's has to hurts so bad, like when you're doing a triple twist and your feet hit-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:17:55] I know.

JVN [00:17:56] Did you get, did the wind get knocked out of you?

ALY RAISMAN [00:17:58] I had so much, I had so much adrenalin. And you go, I just went right back and kept going. I don't really remember. I'm sure it did. I think I was more kind of in shock of I can't believe I just fell because floor was my best event. And it was such a good learning experience for me because I realized that, you know, before I went, I was, I was really excited and I was like, "Oh my God, this my first Nationals'. And I'm gonna do really well. I'm going to get top three on the podium." And I got so excited that I forgot that you still have to do your job at the competition. Like it doesn't matter how good you are on paper, if you don't perform well, it doesn't matter. And so even with the fall, I was still third, which I was so excited about. But I just, I learned I have to control my nerves a little bit better. And it's interesting because I think in other sports, it's a good thing to get really pumped up and be really excited. But in gymnastics, it's actually not a good thing to be super hyper or, you know, because you want to feel more calm. You just kind of want to feel like it's another day. Otherwise you go flying-.

JVN [00:19:00] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:19:01] Off the equipment.

JVN [00:19:02] So, OK, wait. So that isn't 2010 your first Worlds?

ALY RAISMAN [00:19:06] Yes.

JVN [00:19:06] Yes. Literally the next year after your first year at Junior Nationals, you'll make the World team, which is just like not an easy thing to do.

ALY RAISMAN [00:19:18] It was, it was so interesting because I feel like I was just so focused my whole entire life. And now that I'm out of it, I just. Do you ever look back at a time when you worked really hard and you're just thinking, I don't know how I did it? I just was so focused. And it was just, when I put my mind to something, I wanted to do everything I could to do it. So, yeah, we went to World championships. I was 16 years old. And I was just, it was just so surreal. It was, it was pretty crazy. Yeah. We actually went, we got second in the team. Russia won. And it's crazy. I think that was my only experience of not winning, being a part of USA Gymnastics, which is insane how dominant we were as a gymnastics team, it's just I think I appreciate it so much more that I'm out of it of how difficult that was to do that. But it is, it's so, it's so crazy because at the time we got silver and I felt like it seemed like it was such a disappointment. Now when I look back on like we were in second in the World and that's so exciting. And I have such a different perspective on it now. But it was, it's just interesting to look back and, now.

JVN [00:20:32] So when you do Worlds so that, so people know. Basically when a team goes to Worlds, the first day is like qualifying. So that's like when, isn't it usually, like, four up and then three count? For an event?

ALY RAISMAN [00:20:48] I believe so. So actually, that's the Olympics. So, or, that was the Olympics before they changed it to four people, so I believe there was around, I think there was, six girls in the team at World championships. They've changed it so much.

JVN [00:21:02] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:21:03] Throughout the years and then keep decreasing the amount of gymnasts allowed on the team.

JVN [00:21:07] And I had enough room in my heart as a little 7, 8, 9 year old gay-by to be obsessed with the Magnificent 7. All seven of them. I've got a room.

ALY RAISMAN [00:21:15] Oh, me too.

JVN [00:21:16] Yeah, I mean, come on. Like we all do. Like what? Come on.

ALY RAISMAN [00:21:19] I know I was obsessed with the Magnificent 7 as well.

JVN [00:21:23] Ok, but wait. So the first day of Worlds or Olympics, basically, the point of what I was trying to say is like, so the first day is qualifying and then that's where you qualify for the individual All-Around. And then the team, or the event finals.

ALY RAISMAN [00:21:36] Individual event finals. Yes. So the first day of qualifications is extremely important because if you don't perform well on that day, you might not make any of event finals. And so you could be number one in the World on, let's say, bars. But if you compete in qualifications and you fall on bars or make a big enough mistake that you're not top 8, you have to be top 8 on each event final. You do not advance to the event final. So you have to be top 8 on the event finals or top 24 in the All-Around. However, there's a two-per-country rule, which is also so difficult, because, for example, this happens a lot with the American gymnasts is even if let's say you, the Americans get top 3 in the World, each of them go one, two, three. The third

American gets bumped and cannot perform in the All-Around Final. And they do that because they want to, you know, have more gymnasts from other countries compete in the All-Around final, which I think is awesome. But I also think if you're top three in the World, you should be able to perform in the All-Around.

JVN [00:22:40] Yeah, that's happened to tons of prolific gymnasts. So then in 2010, you get silver in team. Did you do event finals this time?

ALY RAISMAN [00:22:47] I did. So I actually finished qualified third overall, the first day in the All-Around.

JVN [00:22:56] Dang, girl.

ALY RAISMAN [00:22:56] So I advanced to All-Around finals. I was so shocked and I couldn't believe it.

JVN [00:23:01] It's in the Netherlands, right?

ALY RAISMAN [00:23:03] Yes.

JVN [00:23:05] So it's, because I always think about jetlag when you guys travel. And I always just think about like having to film "Queer Eye" like after traveling a lot, which is not tumbling. I kind of have run into that like tumbling on tour. But isn't it hard? I mean, because you're doing such high level stuff. Like, how long do you get there before the competition to make sure you don't get like food poisoning or are just super tired and stuff?

ALY RAISMAN [00:23:26] That's a great question. So the jetlag was so difficult. You know, I remember one year we actually went to Australia and we got off the plane and we have a workout that day. That's really always how it was. And so it was a lighter workout. But I think that the coaches' idea of lighter workout isn't really a light workout. I remember it was, it's brutal because it's also really dangerous. When I was in Australia, you know, even just a couple of days in, you're so jet lagged. And I've had the pleasure of going back to Australia for fun. And even when you're not tumbling and doing anything for work, it's still the jet lag hits you differently every single time. But when you're competing, I remember there was several times where I was like totally wiping out and by wiping out for those you who don't know, it's like you literally have no idea where you are in the air. Your body's so confused, you're so exhausted. I remember I was like falling on my head, you know, just like totally, you know, when you're on the beam, for example, if you're doing a, it's called the front tuck on beam, which is a front flip. You might totally miss the side of the beam because it's only four inches wide, like your body is so off. So that is so difficult. So we get there. It is so difficult. So we get there probably around, you know, maybe like two and a half to three weeks before. But before that, we're at training camp for 9 to 10 days before we leave for World championships or the Olympics. But when I say we're there for like two and a half, it's not two and a half to three weeks before the competition. It's just that's pretty much we're there for the whole time. Like for a few weeks in the foreign country.

JVN [00:25:06] So your first day?

ALY RAISMAN [00:25:06] Like a week before.

JVN [00:25:07] Like a week?

ALY RAISMAN [00:25:08] I think so, yeah. I mean, it kind of depends, but I would say probably around a week because you have qualification, day in between team final, day in between All-Around Final, and then the event finals. So gymnastics is stretched over a long period of time. And if you're someone who makes a lot of the event finals, really, it's really survival of the fittest when it comes down to those moments at the Worlds or the Olympics, because there's so much pressure. That the jetlag, the pressure, let alone the exhaustion of training, is so consuming and so much to handle that it's hard to stay kind of like fresh throughout that process.

JVN [00:25:46] OK. I have one more question. This one's about, like, Pan Am games. Is there ever a time where, like, if they assign you to an event and you're like, "I can't be going all the way there right now and still do Worlds like two months after that? Can you be like, can you send someone else," like, "Mommy's really tired," or do you have to go if, like, they send you to a meet? Or like that, you know, that cute Jesolo one where I really like that signage, at that Jesolo. One event.

ALY RAISMAN [00:26:14] Yeah Yeah. I went to, I went to the Italy competition. I believe I went five times and it's every year in March. So, you know, I, I think I competed at Pan Am's a couple of times and my first international competition was actually in Brazil. When, I think it was 2009. But it's really not one of those things where you can say, I don't think that, I think I'm too tired. It's very much just this is the way that they see the preparation for the Olympics, because everything, even World championships, of course, Worlds is such an honor and so important. But the USA Gymnastics is always thinking about the Olympic Games. That's the one every four years. That's the big one. So competing at the World championships. It's always in the back of their mind, the national staff, of who can handle the pressure for the Olympics. And so even a World championships, let's say, if you compete there and you do really well, they're going to put that in the back of their mind for this person can handle the pressure. So you kind of want to constantly prove yourself to them. But we had training camp around once a month and-

JVN [00:27:26] Year around?

ALY RAISMAN [00:27:26] We called it. Yeah, pretty much. Yeah. We'd have, you know, like December was no training camp. And, you know, after Worlds, we didn't have training camp until January. World championships are usually in October. So we had that little bit of time off. But it's not like we're vacationing. We're still training and preparing for the next thing. The thing about gymnastics that's so difficult is there's really no off season. So even if you don't have a competition for three months, you really do have to start slowly preparing because getting into a full routine shape, like, getting into a floor routine, you don't, I couldn't just walk into a gym now after not doing a floor routine for a couple of years and just do a floor routine. I would probably break every bone in my body. I would never want to do that. I'd be too scared. But to do a floor routine, you have to do tumbling passes separately. Then you have, we would practice tumbling passes on the tumble strip. You know what that is?

JVN [00:28:33] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:28:33] Where it's a little bit, a little bit bouncier and a little bit of a softer landing for your body. And then you do the tumbling passes on the floor separately. Then you add in your, you do your routine just with rounded back handspring layouts for endurance instead of your difficult tumbling passes. So you do that a couple of times and you do that probably for a few weeks to get the endurance going. And then you slowly add in one tumbling pass with the other three passes, rounded back handspring layout. Then you slowly add in the two passes, then the three passes, and then the four, and the fourth tumbling pass is so, so, so difficult that it's a very, very slow progression. And you do that on every event.

JVN [00:29:03] You're always like a round out back handspring double pike girl for your last pass.

ALY RAISMAN [00:29:07] Yes.

JVN [00:29:08] Oh, my God, we got to take a really quick break and then we'll be right back with more Aly Raisman right after this. So welcome back to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. So then, so you're in the Netherlands in 2011, you come back. You're 17. You go to Tokyo. You make the team. You make the World team. You're minding your own business. And then you guys do win gold that year. Yeah, you win the shit out of it in 2011.

ALY RAISMAN [00:29:29] Yes.

JVN [00:29:29] And then did you do All-Around that year too? Or no?

ALY RAISMAN [00:29:32] I did. Wait. Yes. So we actually didn't. So in 2010, though, I finished third the first day. So the first day of qualifications, it doesn't matter if you're number one, if you don't do it on the actual day of the All-Around final or the event final. It doesn't matter. The scores don't cross over.

JVN [00:29:46] Carry over. Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:29:48] Yeah. That's the word I'm looking for. The scores don't carry over. So in 2010, I actually ended up falling on bars and I ended up getting 13th in the All-Around.

JVN [00:29:56] Son of a bitch. It's OK. It's OK. No big deal.

ALY RAISMAN [00:29:59] It's OK. Yeah.

JVN [00:30:00] Yes, not your fault.

ALY RAISMAN [00:30:00] That's OK. It's how you learn.

JVN [00:30:01] I'm just a super fan, I'm sorry, can't help it. I just reacted, I'm sorry.

ALY RAISMAN [00:30:04] It's OK, I was so nervous. It's OK.

JVN [00:30:06] 'Cause you were a baby.

ALY RAISMAN [00:30:08] Yeah. It's so nerve wracking. There's nothing like competing in the All-Around final at a Worlds or at the Olympics.

JVN [00:30:13] Mustafina won that year. In 2010.

ALY RAISMAN [00:30:17] She did. She did. Yes, she did. And Rebecca Bross got, did she, got bronze, I believe.

JVN [00:30:23] Oh, did she?

ALY RAISMAN [00:30:23] Silver or bronze.

JVN [00:30:23] Oh, good for her.

JVN [00:30:24] So you end up getting 13, and then what happened in event finals? I bet you made floor and beam at least.

ALY RAISMAN [00:30:31] I made floor finals. And I remember I got fourth on the floor. Yeah. So this is, this is sort of where it started. I've gotten fourth so many times in my career. I was. But it was also sort of interesting because I didn't expect to really get any individual medals or anything. So to see myself had the potential of getting an All-Around medal is really exciting. And even I was really, really disappointed obviously at the time. And I think when you're younger and you're working really hard, I think my identity was really wrapped up in my results as a gymnast. And so I was obviously so bummed, but I was really hungry to come back and do more for the next year. So Tokyo, made the All-Around final again. And I made beam and floor finals. And I've got fourth on beam, fourth in the All-Around and third on floor.

JVN [00:31:24] But yay medal.

ALY RAISMAN [00:31:24] And I remember-. Yes. I was so excited about the medal, but I was devastated about the All-Around because I fell or messed up again. I don't remember if I fell or I messed up again on bar. So I felt so defeated. And then I went to 2012 Olympics.

JVN [00:31:39] Oh, yes, you did.

ALY RAISMAN [00:31:39] I made a mistake in the All-Around, on beam.

JVN [00:31:46] What was your mistake on beam?

ALY RAISMAN [00:31:47] I did a front pike and I touched the beam.

JVN [00:31:50] Oh, because-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:31:50] Which is almost the same deduction as a fall. But this actually, there's a good part of the story, it gets better. So I ended up tying for third. Gymnastics is the only sport, the only sport where they break the tie. So I saw myself tied for third with Aliya Mustafina, who is a Russian gymnast and they broke the tie. Aliya got the medal. I got bumped to fourth again. I was so, so crushed. Devastated.

JVN [00:32:15] Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't the way that they break the tie, they pick a random event out of the four and whoever got higher on that one event that they pick, isn't that who wins?

ALY RAISMAN [00:32:26] I think that they actually took whoever had the highest scoring, whoever had the highest score, of an individual event. So because she's so good on bar, she got such a high score. Yes.

JVN [00:32:40] Yes.

ALY RAISMAN [00:32:40] So it's OK. Again. But see, I'm telling this story because I want to show that it took me five times, but I finally got my All-Around medal because then in 2015, I didn't even make the All-Around final at the World championships because the first day I messed up in qualification, I had, like, one of the worst meets of my life. And then 2016, I finally got my silver medal in the All-Around. So I wanted to share that because it took me five times and I was, it made it that much sweeter. And I always felt so defeated after every single time. But then I realized that I like to believe everything happens for a reason. And I think the moment I stopped comparing myself to other people and stopped competing with other people and really just focusing on myself and actually just thinking I'm going to do this for myself and just enjoy the competition. That I ended up doing better and I didn't put so much pressure on myself and it ended up working out. So it was just that much more special.

JVN [00:33:37] OK, so that's really, that's amazing. But also, I guess I didn't realize in all of the time that I spent obsessing that really-. So when, speaking about-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:33:45] All the time I spent obsessing.

JVN [00:33:47] But it's like, but it's like when it comes to an individual All-Around medal that, that is true because like 10, 11, 12. And then you took 13, 14 off.

ALY RAISMAN [00:33:56] Yes.

JVN [00:33:56] 15 you did, you didn't qualify for individual and then. OK. Cray, cray. I did not realize that. So now we got the fourths out of the way which ouch. But let's talk about something that's fierce.

ALY RAISMAN [00:34:06] It's OK.

JVN [00:34:07] I feel like I was doing a deep dive of your skills on YouTube a while ago. And I feel like, it was a, you were doing the, the Aly-, the famed Aly pass, which is my all-time favorite tumbling pass ever of any kind.

ALY RAISMAN [00:34:19] Really?

JVN [00:34:20] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:34:21] I'm so honored.

JVN [00:34:21] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:34:22] That's so sweet.

JVN [00:34:23] So it's the most iconic pass. I've never seen someone else do it. So what it is, is it's like, it's like a, I can't remember if it's, like, two steps or if it's just like a punch hurdle. But it's like a, it's like, it's like a roundoff, one and a half, twisting step out, round off, back handspring double Arabian, punch, lay out front.

ALY RAISMAN [00:34:43] Yes.

JVN [00:34:44] So in YouTube, though, I feel like I saw you competing the Aly pass without the punch front for like a year or two. So at what point did you figure out that that was so consistent and so baller that you could put a layout on the front of it? Or end of it?

ALY RAISMAN [00:35:00] That's a great question. So just as I was talking about how when you do the floor routine, you don't just do the floor routine out of the blue, you have to slowly do it. So this pass was something that my coaches and I were working on for years. And it's funny, my coaches, Mihai and Silvie, we all had this idea. And when my coaches would tell some of the other coaches about it that I was trying to do it and I was gonna do it. They would say, you're crazy. That's impossible. She's not going to do it. And so I would slowly. I actually originally did a roundoff half twist, step out into a double pike.

JVN [00:35:37] Oh.

ALY RAISMAN [00:35:37] Before I added in the one and a half twist, just to kind of get that feeling. And then because from a very young age, I was always very, I was always a really good twister on floor. So I did. I actually used to do three and a half twists instead of a triple twist. So I was such a good twister from a young age that that's something they came more natural to me. But. Because I was such a good twister, what happens in gymnastics is sometimes you get a little bit lost in the air. So, so if you're doing a lot of twists and you're doing one flip and three twists, some times doing like one single flip with one twist. I wasn't able to do it. I would twist too much. So if I would try to do a full twist, I would do a double twist or a two and a half and I would get confused in the air. So the round off half twist was because I couldn't really stop myself in the, in the opening my legs to step into the roundoff was a way for me to stop myself from twisting too much. So that's how we figured out the one and a half twist, because if I tried to do a round off back handspring, one half twists without the step out. I think I would do it two and a half. I just couldn't stop myself from twisting. But the step out helps me stop myself from twisting. So then we would do. I did a one and a half step out to double back and then we slowly out of the Arabian. But then for a while I did Arabian, round off back handspring Arabian, punch front separately, and I would do that onto the tumbling strip, which is not the floor. It's a little bit bouncier and the mats are a little bit softer. So it's a little, it's less dangerous when you're trying something like that. And also for any gymnasts that are listening, I don't recommend again trying this out of the blue, I did a lot of drills. So I would, and drills are like what we say in gymnastics of, how do you would, how would you describe a drill? It's like-

JVN [00:37:29] It's like a repeated exercise to get a movement. But a drill's a drill.

ALY RAISMAN [00:37:32] Yes, yes.

JVN [00:37:33] I feel like other athletes would know what that is.

ALY RAISMAN [00:37:34] OK.

JVN [00:37:35] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:37:36] OK. So I would stand on a high block and I would jump off of it. And do punch front, punch front to get the movement of two, like, punching out of something so constantly Mihai, Mihai is brilliant with conditioning and he's so creative. And he was so good at helping me mimic that feeling of like landing a punch front and doing another punch front. And sometimes I would do three punch fronts in a row. And I think the visualization of it is really important to you. But you have to make sure that you're strong enough to be able to do that because it is so difficult and it's so dangerous. So as soon as I got comfortable doing the Arabian, then I would separately do Arabian Punch Front. And then I think we just slowly started trying it. And then we added in the punch layout because Mihai thought and Silvie thought that the layout was more beautiful than the punch front and they were right.

JVN [00:38:29] So, yeah, they sure were, honey. And everyone gagged. So in 2012 the whole thing with All-Around happened. And then the floor-, because floor was before beam right? Or was beam before floor?

ALY RAISMAN [00:38:41] No. It was after. I got fourth on beam. Oh no I didn't.

JVN [00:38:43] Yeah. I know, that's the whole thing.

ALY RAISMAN [00:38:44] Originally yes, yes.

JVN [00:38:44] But wait. Floor was first.

ALY RAISMAN [00:38:47] It was first. No, no, no, no. Floor was second. Beam was first so-.

JVN [00:38:50] But was it the same day or are those different day?

ALY RAISMAN [00:38:52] Same day.

JVN [00:38:53] Oh my fucking, what a day you had, bitch. Oh my God. So you, so you get there, so you get there and wait. So which one was first?

ALY RAISMAN [00:39:02] August 7. Yes. It was a lucky day.

JVN [00:39:03] August 7th, 2012.

ALY RAISMAN [00:39:07] Yes, it was a good day.

JVN [00:39:07] It's August 7th, 2012 in London.

ALY RAISMAN [00:39:08] Yes.

JVN [00:39:09] And beam is first.

ALY RAISMAN [00:39:10] Beam is first. And. I feel like I was at the end. I might have. I think I was last on beam. It's so funny sometimes when I say things I'm, like, the gymnastics fans know it more than me. You probably remember it better than me.

JVN [00:39:27] I think Catalina Ponor, didn't Catalina Ponor come back and like, didn't she win in 2012 on beam?

ALY RAISMAN [00:39:31] No. I tied with her for third place. And they broke the tie and I got the medal.

JVN [00:39:38] Yes.

ALY RAISMAN [00:39:40] So she originally was third and she came back. Catalina Ponor was and has always been one of my absolute favorite gymnasts. She is the 2004 beam champion and floor champion. Olympic champion. She was incredible. Just amazing. I actually had her floor music growing up because she was one of my idols and I loved watching her. And then I ended up competing with her in the beam final and we tied for third. So the All-Around final was just a couple nights before where I had gotten fourth and the tiebreaker didn't go my way. So I was just thinking, oh, my gosh, this is such a bummer. This is brutal. So then Mihai put in the inquiry for my score and I believe it was my full turn that was the problem. They didn't give me credit for it. So an inquiry, they complained about the score. And I believe it was actually one of the first, it either was one of the first times or the first time that the panel had accepted USA Gymnastics in Korea and actually went our way. So what happened was they ended up watching, they replay the video in slow motion and they decided to give me credit for the full turn. And then I ended up getting the higher score. So Catalina ended up getting fourth. I got third, which I which I was super excited with the third place, obviously-.

JVN [00:40:58] I don't-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:40:58] So excited.

JVN [00:40:59] Because I don't remember where you were in the, in the place. I think you were last. But I just remember sobbing when the inquiry came your way. I was so nervous and I was watching it on NBC like. It made me so emo-, like my, my, my heart. I think all of American gymnastic fans hearts were in our. Yes, we love Catalina, but it's not your fault, honey you had to get that bronze. You had to do the inquiry.

ALY RAISMAN [00:41:20] But we both should have got it. But we should book on the bronze medal, you know? I just think we both should have gotten the bronze medal because you both got the same score. And I just think she's amazing.

JVN [00:41:30] No, she is amazing. She really, really is.

ALY RAISMAN [00:41:32] She's amazing. Well, so also, I think that, I appreciate you saying that about wanting me to get the medal. I think, you know, for so long, so many people had watched me get fourth over and over. I had gotten it so many times. It was so exciting that I finally got an individual medal. And I think getting the bronze medal was, it sort of felt like I always say winning the bronze medal. Like when you're at the Olympics and you're not expected to win a gold medal. Any color is so amazing and it's so awesome. And then actually, I had to, we did the medal ceremony and I had to rush and get ready for floor finals.

JVN [00:42:08] Yes. So then that happens. So they did come into floor finals. And you qualified?

ALY RAISMAN [00:42:12] Yes.

JVN [00:42:12] First?

ALY RAISMAN [00:42:14] I did qualify first, yes.

JVN [00:42:15] Because no one was stepping into your Aly pass. I'm sorry.

ALY RAISMAN [00:42:18] Well, so I was favored to win floor. But as I said, doesn't matter how you are on paper. You have to perform it. I remember in the back gym, though, I was, kept landing out of the floor. My punch lay out was landing out of bounds. So if you land out of bounds, it actually you don't get credit for. I wouldn't have gotten credit for the punch front. So. It's not just like stepping out of bounds as a tenth. If you land out of the floor, it's a deduction.

JVN [00:42:44] The whole skill is gone.

ALY RAISMAN [00:42:46] Yes. So I was really, really nervous. And I actually asked Mihai if I could take out the punch layout because I was so nervous and I was just-. You're also just so, I was so emotionally drained and just physically exhausted, all the pressure, everything. And I was still pretty beat up from the All-Around final. I was just so devastated. I was, like, beyond, it, thankfully, we had a couple of days in between the All-Around final and the floor final because I was just not myself. I was so defeated and I felt so guilty because there's two Americans that can be an All-Around final. I felt like I let everyone down, so I was so sad. So thankfully, we had a couple of days to get back, but I still felt like my confidence was a little off. So I was asking my coach if I could take out the punch layout and just do the Arabian. And my coach, Mihai, just said, "You didn't work this hard, literally your whole entire life to take it out." He's like, "if you're going to do it. He was like, you're gonna do it with everything that you have and really go for it." And so he was like, don't choose today to be a chicken. He's like, you have to just go for it and do it. Are you going to cry?

JVN [00:43:54] Yeah. It's totally making me well up.

ALY RAISMAN [00:43:55] Oh my god. Why? Why?

JVN [00:43:55] Just keep going. No, just keep going.

ALY RAISMAN [00:44:00] That's so sweet. So, yeah. I was so nervous. I was really scared. And I he just said, you worked so hard. Go for it. And so I really always had to remember my first step

had to be really short because if I got too excited, I would go way too fast and I would go way too long. The hardest part of the floor passed the first pass when I got it. Was really keeping it in the floor and staying in bounds. So I did it and I stuck my first pass and I knew as soon as I stuck my first pass that everything else was fine. And it just felt very, it felt like I was flying. And it was to this day, I think the best floor routine of my whole entire life. I just, it was the best that I could have done. And so I was so happy. And it just everything kind of just fell into place in that moment. It was amazing.

JVN [00:44:49] And so then you find out that you win. At what point, because I feel like your mom went viral in 2012 for her cute?

ALY RAISMAN [00:44:57] Yes.

JVN [00:44:48] So at what point in the Olympics did you know that your mom went viral for how cute she is when she watches you perform?

ALY RAISMAN [00:43:03] So it was actually the first day of competition, the qualification when I was competing on bars, because that had been my, one of my biggest struggles throughout my career.

JVN [00:45:15] She's like, "Catch the bar. Catch the bar."

ALY RAISMAN [00:45:16] Yes. Both my parents. It's so funny. NBC has been replaying the Olympics. And so we, you know, we've been watching it a little bit. And it's funny watching my parents. I got so much airtime. It's really funny.

JVN [00:45:27] They're so cute.

ALY RAISMAN [00:45:28] My dad loves it. He loves it. My dad, like before, obviously, before the quarantine, you know, my dad goes out. He gets recognized like more than me. It's hilarious. And he like, he lives for. He loves it. It's so funny.

JVN [00:45:40] It's so cute. So when you've finished the routine, that's also I've always said that like whenever I need a good cry, I always watch your individual All-Around floor routine from 2016, but anyway, so that happens. And then you take '13 off and you do "Dancing with the Stars" and that's fierce and fun. And I would talk about that more, but I want to talk more about gymnastics unless you really have to hit "Dancing with the Stars." I really want to talk more about gymnastics. And then '14, you also take off or no you start training again in '14.

ALY RAISMAN [00:46:06] I started training. Yes, in '14. So it took, I did about a year. It took me about a year, I feel like, for Mihai to really take me seriously when I would start going into the gym, he would barely. He would kind of, like, ignore me, but not in the, like he would say hi to me and we would talk a little bit. But then I would have to, like beg for his attention because he wanted to show me that just because I had been to the Olympics, he didn't think that, he didn't want me to feel like I like-

JVN [00:46:37] Like entitled?

ALY RAISMAN [00:46:38] He didn't want me to get in my head. Yes. Like he wanted, he wanted me to know that I still had to work hard. It was kind of like starting over because once you stop gymnastics for a year, you have to re-learned a lot of things. So it took me months and months of just conditioning. He wouldn't even let me go on the bars for about a year because you didn't want me to get injured. And I felt like Mihai and Silvy were really smart about my comeback because we did conditioning just for months and months and months before even starting to do skills. But it took me a year for him to really start to get excited because I feel like he almost didn't believe that I was really serious about my comeback. So I really had to prove it to him.

JVN [00:47:15] And when you say like the level of like gymnasts that go to level 10 vs., you know, elite, and the number of two time Olympic gymnasts is even smaller. I mean, I could think of like Shannon Miller and Dominique Dawes and, and Kerri Struggs all came back after '92 and Amanda Borden with the alternate in '92. And she made the team in '96. And then Dominique Dawes and Amy Chow made it again in 2000, which was fierce. So they were-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:47:45] Insane.

JVN [00:47:46] So Dominique was a three-time Olympian and then which is fierce. And then, there's like Oksana Chusovitina, but she's, like, not American, but she like-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:47:52] Catalina Ponor.

JVN [00:47:52] Yes.

ALY RAISMAN [00:47:53] Aliya Mustafina.

JVN [00:47:53] Yes. Yes, yes. But American gymnasts that made the team twice. It's like Dominique Dawes, Shannon Miller.

ALY RAISMAN [00:48:04] Gabby Douglas.

JVN [00:48:05] Gabby Douglas. You, Amy Chow. Was there anyone in 2000 that came back in '04? Can't remember. 2004 did?

ALY RAISMAN [00:48:15] Tasha Schwikert. Tasha Schwikert was.

JVN [00:48:18] Alternate and she made it because Morgan White broke her foot. Oh, my God, that was so intense. So then in 2015. So 2015, you qualify for Worlds. You make the World team, and, which that's, like, a huge feat in and of itself. And then All-Around you, but then what about, what happened to floor final? You had to make floor final, didn't you?

ALY RAISMAN [00:48:41] I didn't make floor final because the first day of competition I just, we started on floor and I was so nervous and at that time I was just putting so much pressure on myself for the comeback and I was so, I was so obsessed with proving that I was better than I was before, that, there's such a fine line between working hard and putting pressure on yourself and being, working, overworking and being obsessive about it. And I think I just took it a little bit too far so it was a lesson that I learned and I'm glad I learned it before the 2016 Olympics, but I did not make the floor final. I had big mistakes, I think, on every single event. So it was pretty, that

was a tough time for me as well. But it really taught me to focus on myself and not focus on what other people are doing.

JVN [00:49:30] That was a really, that sucks that I well, one, sorry, you had a bad qualifying meet that day. Two, that fucking team was so fucking good that Maggie Nichols was on fire that meet and that Madison Kocian was really good that meet. Whatever, I'm sorry, I just watched it on YouTube like three weeks ago accidentally. It's fresh in my mind. So then 2016 you come back, you really have like the most amazing Olympics. Tell us about it.

ALY RAISMAN [00:49:54] Yes. So. Something just clicks differently for me because leading up to the 2016 Olympics, I just wasn't really myself and normally I was known in the gymnastics' world for being really consistent and a good competitor. But when I was competing, when I came back after the 2012 Olympics, I just didn't feel like I had that same confidence. I almost felt like I forgot how to compete well, and I felt like I wasn't really doing well under pressure. And so I really, the 2015 World was a really good learning experience for me. And I've really learned now that I'm away from the sport, how important it is to make mistakes and to fall, because that's how you learn. That's how you become a better competitor. And I think you need those moments in order to grow, but also in order to appreciate the good times too. And so competing in the 2016 Olympics, I just feel like it clicked in the sense of I just wanted to really, I knew that if I worked really hard and did the best that I could, that had to be enough, no matter the color. And I just stopped obsessing over winning or getting this score, being better than I was in 2012.

And I just focused on doing it for myself and of course, for my teammates and the team final. But something just clicked where I just learned and it's hard to not try to compete against other people when you're, when it's literally a, a scoring system where you are ranked based off of how you compete with other people. But it just something really clicked for me. And I finally got the All-Around Medal. It was amazing. I actually had the same exact order of competition on every single event as I had in 2012. So I went last on beam in 2016 All-Around and 2012 All-Around. So in my head, because I had made a mistake on beam in 2012 and in my head, I was almost thinking, what if this spot is bad luck for me? I have the same exact order. It's hard not to get superstitious when you're so nervous, but I just kind of felt like, you know, I don't know. I think it was the idea of also, you know, competing with Simone where she's really confident and calm and just the fact that we were able to do it together. And I felt like, you know, for me getting, I say winning the silver medal, because that was really the best that I could do. And I was so proud of that. And so to be able to do that with her together was just so cool and so awesome and it was so special. And I started hysterically crying after-.

JVN [00:52:22] I know, it's so good.

ALY RAISMAN [00:52:23] Because it was just so, I was, I took me five times. And just the devastation of feeling like, because when, when I didn't do well in a competition as I got older, it wasn't just me that didn't do well. It was, I was representing the whole entire country. So I felt like this feeling of letting everyone down and that's a really hard feeling to have when you're a teenager. And, and then when I finally did it, I was just so happy. And it was, it was so special and I made it that much sweeter. It made me feel like all those hard times of not getting the medal were worth it because it made it that much more special.

JVN [00:52:59] I do want to do just a really quick lightning gymnastics round 'cause I got so freaked out about, like, chatting about your career that I forgot to ask you like some of the other things. What was your favorite skill ever, like, what's your favorite skill? Here, like on any-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:53:08] My first pass on floor.

JVN [00:53:09] OK. And then what about your favorite vault?

ALY RAISMAN [00:53:13] My favorite vault. I do not like vaults. I would say I would much rather prefer-.

JVN [00:53:17] But your Amanar is so pretty.

ALY RAISMAN [00:53:18] It's so scary, it terrifies me. I would just rather do a Yurchenko layout without any twisting because it's terrifying.

JVN [00:53:27] OK. What about? How did your back handspring layout get so pretty on beam?

ALY RAISMAN [00:53:34] That's so nice. So that's another funny story of when Mihai started telling other coaches I was gonna do it. They said it wasn't possible. So it's funny. Maybe Mihai and I just like proving people wrong. But the back handspring layout. So Mihai would have me do just like routine after routine on the floor in a row. I would have to do ten beam routines in a row on the floor. I was so exhausted, it's so tiring, but he would make me do it to the best that I could do it so that you, you replicate the feeling. This is the secret to being good on beam. You replicate the feeling of doing it on the floor, on the beam. So what makes someone really good on beam is that it doesn't even look like you're doing something on something that's four inches wide. And so I just continued to do it on the floor. And then he created these little he called them benches and they were lower beams, but they were thicker and a little bit more bounce. So Mihai would actually always use the example of the Chinese gymnasts. Their back handspring layouts were absolutely breathtaking and incredible.

And so I would try to watch the other gymnasts that I admired, whether they were some of my teammates or, you know, the Russian gymnasts, the Chinese gymnasts, the Romanian gymnasts. Because, you know, I think also one of the important things I learned from a young age is that it's important to not only be a good sport, but to respect other people that are better than you and learning that of like, I'm not going to be the best at everything and that's totally fine. But I think that's what helped me get better, was that I would watch in awe on their backhand springs on beam, their back handspring layouts the Chinese gymnasts just float. And Mihai and Silvie would always say, "Imagine like someone is taking a picture of you in the air and you want to give them enough time to make sure that they actually can snap the picture." Same thing with doing a leap on the floor or on the beam. You want to be able to take, have a beautiful photo of yourself with a nice 180 split.

JVN [00:55:28] Yeah, we do. Except for most of us can't do it. OK, so you know how when there's gymnastics competitions and the competitors will be like, "OK. Like, you know, Aly needs a 14" or no, that's too low. "Ali needs like a 15.75 to win this."

ALY RAISMAN [00:55:42] That's too high.

JVN [00:55:43] OK. Fine. 15.55 or 15.5 to get on the podium or to win, whatever. Was there a time where like in some major competition and again, I don't want to know who it was and maybe you love the person, whatever, but like where you got your personal best that you did not necessarily think that you could do, or maybe you never even got it and then you fucking won? Or got second or third? Or maybe even been place higher than the person who you loathed? If it wasn't on the podium.

ALY RAISMAN [00:56:06] So just so you know, I am not aware of what scores I need to get. I don't ever watch the scoreboard. And I learned that lesson when I told you about at Nationals when I got so excited and I fell on floor because it just isn't really good for me. It didn't work for me. Everyone's different. Some people like to watch the scoreboard. I personally am not a scoreboard watcher. However, I would say there was a couple of times in my career where I would compete and I would be really surprised with seeing myself high up on the podium or seeing myself on the scoreboard and seeing my name up there. It was really exciting and surreal, I would say there is a lot of moments like that. But I think what makes it, I was so shocked was because I didn't really watch my scores, so I think just in general, though, some of the coolest things are being able to compete with some of my idols like Catalina Ponor. So I actually competed in the Floor final in 2012 with the 2004 Olympic Floor Champion and the 2008 Floor champion. And so that was just so cool because those were my idols. Sandra Izbasa and Catalina Ponor. And so that was just so cool. It's so cool to be able to be alongside some of the women that inspired me to want to go to the Olympics. It's so cool. So I think that's what's really cool. And just trying to, I have to like check myself and play it cool because I have to get ready to compete.

JVN [00:57:35] That is so cool. Except. Yeah. And then in that instance, you love those gymnasts but that's just really cool. I love that so much. So amazing. I did not realize that in '12, the 2004 and '08 floor like Gold medalists were there. What a fierce-

ALY RAISMAN [00:57:48] Yeah, it's so cool.

JVN [00:57:48] Oh my god. When I was in, I used to do this visualization technique where you take like, it's like your super heroes, like it's like your personal Spice Girls, like you visualize them coming in. That's like such a fierce trio, like the three of you, like 2004. And then in that World, Simone would have been 16. Like what fierce, power ladies. I love that.

ALY RAISMAN [00:58:07] Yes. I know. And who, who won in 2000?

JVN [00:58:11] Oh, that was Amanar. Was that Amanar? And. And then that one girl who got her All-Around taken away for the Sudafed.

ALY RAISMAN [00:58:18] Simona Amanar. Oh, I love Simona Amanar.

JVN [00:58:22] Yes, she's fierce.

ALY RAISMAN [00:58:22] Yeah, yeah. She's incredible. Oh, my gosh. I forgot about that the whole drama.

JVN [00:58:27] Yeah. Who was it? Who is it?

ALY RAISMAN [00:58:30] Oh, remember the vault 2000?

JVN [00:58:32] Her last name starts with an R. the girl that won and everyone was like, give her her gold medal back.

ALY RAISMAN [00:58:39] Oh, Andrea Raducan.

JVN [00:58:39] Raducan. Yes. Raducan Yes.

ALY RAISMAN [00:58:40] That's how you pronounce her last name? Did she. Was she the one? And they took it away from her?

JVN [00:58:46] Yes. And it's because. And they, because she didn't have it in her pee for the team and not for the vault. And it was literally, like, a Sudafed. Like it was not a perfor-, she had like allergies. Like it's like some random thing, like, how Elaine like, you know, tested positive for heroin in "Seinfeld" because she was eating poppy seed muffins. It was like that but the Olympics in gymnastics.

ALY RAISMAN [00:59:07] I was-. Let me see how old I was. I was 6 when that happened, so I think I watched it when I got older. I was, like, obsessed with. I want to go watch the 2000 Olympics now.

JVN [00:59:16] We need to and also Lilia Podkopyeva-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:59:17] Let's just watch it on FaceTime together. Oh, that's my, she's my favorite. That's what I was gonna tell you, see I, of course, love the American gymnasts. Love them. But I. My favorite, favorite gymnast was Lilia Podkopyeva as she won the 1996 All-Around Final and floor final.

JVN [00:59:31] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [00:59:32] And just her floor routine, her tumbling passes are so unique. She was so powerful but also so elegant, like a ballerina. She was incredible.

JVN [00:59:39] Well, I will tell you that there's three-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:59:41] I've never met her either. I still haven't met her.

JVN [00:59:43] You got me her. But I will tell you that her and, her and then Svetlana Khorkina. And-.

ALY RAISMAN [00:59:50] Yeah.

JVN [00:59:52] And, and Aliya Mustafina are the three non-American gymnasts who always, like, penetrated my cold heart to non-American gymnast. Aliya is because of her eye makeup. And Svetlana was because of her daring short haircuts. And she loved to wear gel. And Lilia was because of her double front punch because it was so fucking good.

ALY RAISMAN [01:00:08] Lilia was-.

JVN [01:00:10] That double front punch is like nobody's business on floor in '96.

ALY RAISMAN [01:00:13] I know. She looks just like she's floating in the air.

JVN [01:00:18] She could have done a double punch over me and I'm six feet tall.

ALY RAISMAN [01:00:21] I know I want to watch the 2000 Olympics now, because I forgot they had.

JVN [01:00:22] Let's do it on FaceTime.

ALY RAISMAN [01:10:24] So during, yeah, let's do it, so during the 2000 Olympics, for those who don't know, the vault was literally set at the wrong height.

JVN [01:00:33] Two feet too low.

ALY RAISMAN [01:00:35] So a lot of the gymnasts were falling. And so it's so dangerous.

JVN [01:00:37] Yeah.

ALY RAISMAN [01:00:37] So they said they allowed some of the girls to vault again. It was during the All-Around final, right?

JVN [01:00:40] And what happened was Svetlana Khorkina was predicted to win. And she had fallen on vault really hard because it was set too low but she was first to go on in bars, which was her best event and they didn't tell her that she was going to get to redo vault by the time she gotten on bar and then she was so upset, she fell off bars. So then it didn't even really matter that she got to redo vault because yeah. Such, that was a, she's, she's like an epic gymnast that didn't get an All-Around medal out of really bad luck. Just talking about, you know? That's really interesting. OK, so now we're at the part in the podcast where it's like yoga, yogi, like yogini recess, where we really can talk about whatever we want for these last like two minutes.

ALY RAISMAN [01:01:18] OK.

JVN [01:01:20] Slash, I do think obviously because I'm a gymnastics super fan, I love to talk about your gymnastics career but I think and obviously I think so many people know what you have done post gymnastics and what a fierce advocate you've been and how hard core of a fighter you have been. And truth teller and truth seeker, which I so look up to and I just think is absolutely fucking incredible. And I worship you for that, I think is just amazing. But I also think some of the work that you've done that is, you know, not on that front, just personally that you shared more with me, just with, you know, looking back on your career and just, you know, all the love and acceptance that you have found post gymnastics, I think would be really fun to talk about. But you could talk about literally whatever you want.

ALY RAISMAN [01:02:01] Yeah, of course. So, first of all, thank you for the nice compliment. I feel the same way about you. I respect you so much for all the amazing things you stand for and for speaking your truth. And I'm so lucky that we're friends. So thank you. You also give me really good advice. I don't think people realize, like, we call each other and you give you really good advice, which I really appreciate.

JVN [01:02:22] Likewise.

ALY RAISMAN [01:02:22] Thank you. OK. So. I think it's so interesting because as I've talked about before and I talked a little bit about earlier on the podcast, when I was younger, you know, or even a couple of years ago, it's like if I didn't do well in a competition, it kind of felt like it was life or death or like my whole entire identity and self-worth was wrapped up in my results. And it's so interesting because now when I look back at the competitions where I didn't do as well, I just really look back at it as, as it was meant to be. And it was a learning experience. And I really do believe it's helped shape me into who I am. You know, those moments where I was fourth place and I think it really taught me about being humble and recognizing that not everyone is going to like my gymnastics. You know, the judges are not going to always like everything that I do.

And I think it also translates to like in life right now, you know, with being a public figure, it's, like, not everybody is going to like me, but I'm learning. You know, with, I think what's so, was so hard for me about that was that in gymnastics, it's like we are taught that after you finish your routine, you look at the judges for their approval and to see if they like you. So I was taught from a young age to really value what other people thought of me. And so it's been interesting for me to learn that, you know, unfortunately, no matter, I could do as much as I could to please people and not everyone is going to agree with me or like me. And that's OK. But I think what I can control is that being the best version of myself and being kind and just being as honest as I can. And I think that's really what I've learned over the last couple of years, which has been really helpful. But do you know what I mean? Is it hard for you sometimes to realize that you just, not everyone is going to like us and that, that's, we have so many people that we're lucky. I mean, you have so many followers on Instagram, and I have a good amount of followers as well, and we're so lucky. But it would be impossible for everyone to like us. And that's OK.

JVN [01:04:35] Well, me hearing you say that makes me feel like, well, I'm just so obsessed with you that I can't imagine. I don't know. Whoever hasn't liked your gymnastics, I'll go Tonya Harding them right now like I just, that's like the craziest thing I've ever heard.

ALY RAISMAN [01:04:46] Stop it.

JVN [01:04:46] I know. I know that's opposite of what you said. I gotta, it's like I get it. I get it. But it's just if someone--

ALY RAISMAN [01:04:52] It's just I've learned that I-. Go ahead. Sorry.

JVN [01:04:54] Just like I'm obsessed with you. But yes, I love that you said that. And it's true.

ALY RAISMAN [01:04:56] There's more important things in life than being a good athlete. And that's what I've learned. Of course, my gymnastics career is so important to me and I'm so

grateful for all the amazing things that it's taught me and the friendships that I've made from it. And I've met so many incredible people from it, including you. But I think what really matters that I've learned is like winning gold medals. I don't believe it actually makes me happy, you know? Because if, if you're not enjoying the journey in the process of it. Winning a gold medal is not going to fix not being happy and not loving what you do. So I've just really learned now in this other chapter of my life finding things that really make me feel joyful and that I'm really passionate about. And so I just feel like I'm really trying to take and still processing all of that now of what I've learned from my gymnastics career and I'm lucky that I have so much of my life ahead of me, which is really exciting, but I just feel like in a good way, I am, like, overwhelmed with how much I can take from gymnastics and put it into the rest of my life.

JVN [01:06:03] I mean, and I just can't wait to see, I think what you have done post-gymnastics and your advocacy and how you use your platform to just inspire recovery and self-acceptance and love and truth telling, I just think is so amazing, and I hope more people do it. And thank you so much for talking to me. And I love you so much. And I just love you so much, thanks for coming on "Getting Curious."

ALY RAISMAN [01:06:26] I love you too. Thank you so much for having me. Thanks for listening, everyone.

JVN [01:06:31] Yes. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was gymnast and six-time Olympic medalist Aly Raisman.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Emily Bossak, Rae Ellis, Chelsea Jacobson, and Colin Anderson, with associate production by Alex Murfey.