

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Erin Brockovich

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 an iconic environmental activist and consumer advocate, Erin Brockovich, where I ask her: Are You Getting Every Word Of This? Welcome to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. I'm really so excited because we have a guest. I think I can count on, like, one hand how many times I've had someone back to the podcast, you are brilliant, you're a thought leader. You're someone who I've looked up to for years. So welcome back to the podcast, Erin Brockovich. Your new book is out "Superman's Not Coming." And I just cannot wait to talk to you. I think we are, you know, we were talking just a little bit before we started about this election and how we're faring. And as we got into it, I said, "Stop, stop, stop," because I want to keep this, you know, so fresh for the podcast. So I just, thank you for coming. How, how have you been? What's, what's happened since we saw each other last, for you?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:00:57] Oh, well, what's happened since we saw each other last? Well, I definitely have "Superman's Not Coming" out. I'm working on a pilot that ABC picked up for a show. We're, we're getting there. So I don't know how much I can or can't talk about. I'm like everybody else, that just the hard stop that came with Covid. And it's like every day is Groundhog's Day. We were talking earlier about, you know, "Oh my gosh, my brain hurts with all the technology." And I, it's, it's been hard. I, I feel the same frustration everyone does. In my keynotes, I've been saying the past year, "there is a shift coming. There is a shift coming." And it's not like I was saying Covid is coming, but you could feel something happening. And this moment has hit us.

It's interesting that "Superman's Not Coming" is coming out at this time because I think there is a wake-up moment happening that I've been able to see on the ground and in the field for 20 years on environmental issues. And that's been this idea, whether it's been: we bought the illusion. It's been a false sense of security. We had this idea that agencies were there. They would have our back. And I learned a long time ago "Superman's Not Coming" and it would be up to we, the people. And I think we the people are in our wake-up moment. And I find that hopeful.

JVN [00:02:37] And I think it's, to me, and, you know, if anyone hasn't seen "Erin Brockovich" or understand the movie and doesn't understand, you know, kind of what you, well actually, and everyone listening to this will fucking understand that, so I'm literally not going to, we have 40 minutes plus and we're not going to, so, but here's the point. For you, you know, having been in Hinkley and having been on the frontlines of

environmental justice for 20 years, the folks who you've been advocating for and working with, that were the victims of these, you know, environmental injustices over the 20 years, they've been experiencing their own version of not a respiratory pandemic, but they've been experiencing, like, a hard stop in their lives. But the world didn't stop and take notice.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:16] Correct.

JVN [00:03:16] So it's like on a smaller scale, I feel like you were in a, in a very unique position to sound the alarm of saying, "There's a shift coming." And I feel like, you know, I think of themes in a movie. "Erin Brockovich" does, touches me in probably a way that, like, a lot of other movies can't. Like I feel like I'm pretty sure I'm just expecting you and Julia Roberts to bust down Trump's door and say some great line of numbers. You know, about all the numbers of the lives you've had to save and all the numbers of the lies that these people, but it's, that isn't how it works. Like, there isn't going to be probably a major movie moment or someone busts into the White House. Like I want Nancy Pelosi to have that movie moment. I want a fierce line where, you know, but that isn't, it is what you said. It's we the people. But that's hard for us to actually self-actualize that. So in the book "Superman's Not Coming," what does it take? How do we rise up? What, what have we got to do?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:04:11] First of all, you bring up some amazing points. These communities have been experiencing their own micro-spots of where the world stands still. It's the mom that has a child with lead poisoning or the child that has cancer from ingesting hexavalent chromium to the frustration, "How did we get here? I thought somebody was here." Now it is, they take their anger into action. And I will tell you, 99 percent of the time, it's a pissed off mom. Because the issues now affected her backyard, her child, her family, her community, and they find that stick-to-itiveness that we've talked about.

One thing that I think that they learn, that in a big level we're learning now. I'm often reminded of it too. I was shocked that we had this hard stop and I talk about in my keynote addresses that the world is spinning faster and faster and there's less and less time and there's more and more commotion and there's more and more noise in our head and we're just spinning out of control. And it's hard to find motivation. It's hard to find that cause because you're spinning. You can't see it. You can't hear it. You can't feel it. You can't touch it. It's not present. And these communities. And I learned my program, RAM, from working and observing them. They stopped for a moment. It was a self renewal, if you will, where they could just stand still and breathe and observe what was around them and what was important to them. And it brought it back home.

And it's the same message that's important to all of us. Our health, our water, our children, our future, clean air. And I get running like anybody else. And I was fascinated, during this Covid. I was in my backyard, and I'm, like, "Oh my gosh, I don't think I've ever noticed that the hummingbirds have their babies here." The finches are having, there was a whole sex fest happening in my backyard with the finches, the hummingbirds. It was amazing. The love doves. Oh my gosh! And to watch them work together, how they build their nest, one would watch, one would get food, one had come back and watch, and the other got food. The ducks. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, there's a whole world!" And it, it takes you back to what we are all removed from. That is this environment and the importance, every aspect of it has an ecosystem, the bees, the water, the fateful power that man has had to damage that and the egotistical power of man to think that we can just keep on going.

And I almost feel this universe, this planet, boom! Went like that and maybe, we could see and wake up. So these smaller communities, you're right, have experienced it, but this time it's to a huge level where the economies have stopped. We have all this job loss. We've had that self renewal moment to breathe, to watch the sun rise and set. To realize, "Oh my gosh, it's kind of unusually hot," to having some time to do our own research, to feel that cause and to realize we are going to have to do something. And when we come together collectively, you are seeing the power of that. Things can change. We've been the missing equation.

JVN [00:08:16] Mmm. Because, because we have. We've been, like, so busy with this and so busy with that. And so here's the other thing that kind of, that I was thinking about as you were talking about that and that I wanted to ask you about. I feel like we've spent a lot of time in these last six months kind of observing systems that are no longer working for us, whether that is a militarized police force that brutalizes Black and brown people at a much higher rate, also brutalizes impoverished people at a much higher rate. But it's, it's the policing system. It's government. It's an economy that only works from the top one percent. There's so many different systems that don't work.

And I think something that I've kind of been turned on to that I didn't understand is that a lot of times we are part of a system that is designed to make us believe that we are unable to affect it as a whole. So here's an example in this documentary on ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforcement. So basically, they were following some of the people who were, like, doing the raids in 2017 and '18 when they stopped going after people that were offenders or, you know, people that were they were looking for like aggressive or violent crimes, like hardcore stuff, to just like anyone. It was a regulation that they switched in 2017.

And basically they were following some of these, these people that were having to, like, go into homes and, like, separate nonviolent, you know, moms and dads and people that were just, they had crossed illegally, but other than that, there was no crime. And in, in, in their past, they hadn't been going for those types of deportations in homes, separating families. Because of this switch in, in law that, that Sessions and Trump had done. They did start doing that. And basically the thing that kept coming up from human rights observers was is that a lot of times, we-, in America and it's not specific to us, it's everywhere, systems are designed that are so big so that when people take part in the system, they're, like, "Well, I'm just doing my job, like, you know? I feel bad for separating them, but I'm just here doing my job. Like, what am I supposed to do? It has good benefits. Where else am I going to work? Like, it's, I'm just doing my job."

And so that's kind of, it kind of absolves anyone of enough guilt to, like, remove themselves from the situation, really call stuff out. And whether or not, you know, you or anyone else agrees with that, I'm just trying to bring up a point in that this idea that we are all unwittingly or wittingly part of all sorts of different systems that are by nature designed to be so big and so confusing that we can be like, "Well, you know, whether or not I use a filter on my water or whether or not I elected this person-."

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:40] Right.

JVN [00:10:41] Or what-, "It's, it's not really going to make a difference because these systems are too big for me to really, you know, make a difference." And I think that for you, you have been dismantling that idea in real life with people all the time and really being in real life, like, showing how that is actually not the case. So whether it was hexavalent chromium or lead or police brutality, you know, 'cause really those are all unregulated chemicals. I guess, police brutality isn't really something that gets into our water, necessarily, unless there's something I don't know, that hasn't been proven. So.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:11:12] No. You're, you're, I get your point and I so love talking to you for this reason. I'm like, "Yes, we get to have this conversation!" because I'm the first one, you know, at a party, people ask me these questions and by the time I'm done, they're like, "Oh my God, don't invite her again." So I share your enthusiasm. We, it is all related. We have a system that may have been all good and well back when that carried us to a moment as an industrialized nation. But we haven't been dealing with the erosion that's been going on over time within our agencies. And you bring up the system by design can be for us not to find the answers. I have always said it's either failing by design or they're inept. Neither is going to work for the American people. And we-.

It's hard, Jonathan, to want to believe in how we were brought up in this country, that these agencies were there for us. And as we learn that they're not, see I could almost start crying here. It's a real sock in the gut for all of us. It's huge disappointment. We look back on ourselves and go, "My God, why did I not see that?" And, and this is the "Wizard of Oz" moment that, I'm not sure we've talked about before. But I really want to share here because we are all hurting, and I feel it, and we can't lose our hope. "Wizard of Oz" has always fascinated me because I was born and raised in Kansas. I grew up watching the film, "The Wizard of Oz." But the story is about the book that L. Frank Baum wrote, "The Wizard of Oz" before the film. And that book was written at the pre-height of the Industrial Revolution. That changed America, right? When we became an industrialized nation. We're going through another revolution, if you will. And it's been technology. It's been social media. So this has been creeping in on us. This particular moment of us waking up. And he wrote the book as a fairy tale, as a way to teach his children the power of individualism and speaking for oneself in a world that would increasingly start speaking for you. I find that fascinating.

Now, you can Google this, Jonathan. You will love this read. There is an entire political allegory to L. Frank Baum's book. And it has been well studied by many scholars. So Dorothy represents the everyday girl who is on a journey to self discovery, to find herself. And we know in the film the twister comes. And the twister, its interpretation and its, its political allegory is that there's trouble in Washington, DC. Sound familiar? And so when the house lands on the munchkins, that is the angry citizens. They are frustrated. They're not being heard. So we know they're like, "Follow the yellow brick road." Well, the yellow brick road is the gold standard. "Follow the path of money. And when you get to the wizard, he will make it OK." On her journey, she meets the Tin Man, who is a representation of the industrial worker who's lost his heart. Let's talk about some of our industry workers and what has happened to their heart. The scarecrow was a representation of the farmer during that time, and all the banks were buying the land. So therefore they thought they had no brain.

I think that we've clearly seen that play itself out and been underestimated as the people for a very long time. And the Cowardly Lion was a representation of L. Frank Baum's best friend William Jennings Bryan. Who was always running on the populist ticket as a president, but oftentimes didn't have that courage. So there they go on their journey, you know the story, and who comes along but the Wicked Witch and, boom, puts them to sleep in the poppy fields. Is it possible that we were on our journey of self discovery, we lost our courage, we lost our heart, we were convinced that we didn't have a brain, and are we waking up?

And you know at the end of the story, because as they do wake up and they go and pull the curtain back, see they learn there really was no wizard, that it was they along, through their own heart, through their own courage, through their own intelligence and through their own heart, they'd find their way back. I absolutely believe we are in that parallel. And I absolutely believe that we the people will make those corrections. We will look at antiquated laws and antiquated policies and failing infrastructures and this planet that we all share as home. And we will rise up.

JVN [00:16:58] So, wow. Don't mind me. I don't have chills. I'm not also about to cry. Basically the last time our legislature passed new laws that govern, like, personal care products and the ingredients that go in them is, like, 1938. We've been unsuccessful at doing anything since then. And one thing that I've been learning about lately is how the amount of like clean or, like, you know, "clean, green," like, you know, no phthalates, no like no sulfates, nothing that could, could potentially, not only hurt, like, water, but also, like, phthalates have been shown to, like, have a lot of like endocrine disruptors and, like, hormonal disruptors and a lot of these, a lot of these beauty ingredients, there's more of them that are marketed to Black women than to white people. So there's actually a lot of these ingredients that have, like, that cause, like, higher rates of breast cancer and all sorts, like, reproductive issues that are current, and they're higher in America because, like, in the EU, like, it's more stringently controlled and same with Australia and Japan.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:17:57] Yes.

JVN [00:17:58] And so, and so because our personal care products laws were made in 1938 when, like, Black women didn't even have the right to vote, like, we are still being governed off of laws that are like way too old and are actually dangerous.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:18:09] Absolutely.

JVN [00:18:09] And also, a lot of these, these people, or a lot of these institutions, because of the laws, can't even study the ramifications. And some of the risks of a lot of these ingredients. And then, and not just in personal care beauty stuff, like, that doesn't even start us on like the EPA and, like, what gets into our water and what gets into our food and, exactly. And that was one thing where like in the Democratic debates when Marianne Williamson started going off there was like, look. Like, a lot of it, I was, like, "Ooooh, I'm not sure," but a lot, I was, like, "Yes, girl, that sounds about right to me. Like, I feel like some of what you're saying is correct." So but I also think that, you know, because of what we're just saying about the systems, they're designed to frustrate us. They're designed to make us angry and feel powerless and-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:18:53] Right.

JVN [00:18:54] So I guess I'm curious and I want to get into that a little later. But what are some of, I mean, I know about hexavalent chromium 3, 6, and 9 because of "Erin Brockovich," which is who you are.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:05] I know! Our last conversation I was like, yes.

JVN [00:19:08] Yeah. So what are some of the other, what are some, like I mean, there's lead, there's PFOA and there's other common contaminants that I think a lot of us don't know that they are actually currently affecting us or people that we love.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:19] Oh. Oh. So much.

JVN [00:19:21] And. And how can they cause harm to our water systems? How can they cause harm to us? Yeah.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:28] So here's where we're going to start, because I was going to share this with you real quick. So I'm going to give you nine steps, and I'll come back to the first one, because that's where we're going to start, to your point of what you just said. Consider this book, your invitation, to get involved. None of us need a PhD to take action, to be aware and to protect our rights. And that could be your right cosmetics. I, I go in the grocery store and I look, I'm like, "I'm going to put this shit on my face, my body? Ew!" It is a store of chemicals. Now we're going to get to the, the chemical lobbyists control what's going on up there. When we talk about PFOS, which is the largest emerging contaminant in the national water supply today. When I got involved in Hinkley, oh my gosh, you know, the judgment, the labels, the perception, put inside a box. The blond hair with the big boobs with no education, has been divorced, and blah, blah, blah. "Why should we listen to you? You're nothing." And I'm like, "What? I don't think I have to be anything to tell you that that two headed frog and green water is fucked up." And right there, boom.

I want everyone to understand, you don't have to-, I am watching people across this country and in these communities run-, look, we've got 126 new women in Congress. We have the youngest person, 19 years old, sitting on city council in Flint, Michigan. Oh, yes, we can. You need to be a human. You need to know what you see. You feel your experience and to rise up. So this is your invitation. Then we're gonna get into know your power. We the people can make the necessary steps. You have to know yourself, right? You know what? The only person holding you back is you. If we can learn to get the negative noise out of our head, the minute somebody comes at me that way, I'm like, "Ooh, what

are you hiding? Ooh, what do you know?" Don't let them define you. You own that. You do that for yourself. Know who you are.

Then get curious. oh my God. This amazing thing. And this is a moment where you can find your cause, Jonathan, whether it's water, cosmetics. It-, there are so many causes out there that you can get involved and get curious. If you're curious about your water. Get your water quality report. And do, you know, like we all do. In the store, you're reading all these chemicals like half the time you can't even pronounce, get curious about what that is. Look it up.

Or, is separate fact from fiction and/or deception. My dad taught me when I was a child, that man's stumbling block and our biggest downfall will be deceptions. So don't be afraid to go out there and talk to water providers, utility managers. Go to meetings. Go to city council meetings where you can learn fact from fiction. It's amazing when you go down there, there's no one there. Half the time they don't even know that there is a problem, and share these concerns and keep moving forward.

Step five is speak the truth and publicize it. Find allies in your community. Oh my gosh, there is such power in their collective. I talk about logic, which is your common sense. Leverage, that's getting to know your neighbor, getting your community and rallying together. I promise you, I have seen effectively how this works across this country.

Step six is oftentimes a fun one. Put the pressure on and keep that pressure on. Whether you call the representatives, city council woman, show up. Show up again. Call again. Write again. Keep the pressure on. And I'll tell you, Jonathan, this is an amazing place for social media. This new revolution gets us to where we collectively can be. One plus one equals two. Right? But in principle and leverage, one plus one can equal a thousand. Ten thousand. One hundred thousand or more. Those numbers, if we don't show up, is sometimes how they can play the shell game. So put the pressure on, use social media, contact a reporter.

Step seven when you've learned a lot, shield yourself from what you've learned. We can protect ourselves. Even though there's no federal oversight. Because you have knowledge, you now have power. And you will learn more effective ways to safeguard your health, your family, and your community.

Step eight. No more no's. I think we're here. I think we're all done with this. No more no's.

And the last step that I want you to take. We are the hardest on ourself. I want you to celebrate and hug yourself and be damn proud of that courage you found and believing in

yourself again. And speaking out when somebody is probably gonna push back on you. But that's OK, because you will be armed with the tools to know how to diffuse that and keep moving forward. But we need to stop beating ourselves up because we have been told in many ways you're not this, "You're not that, you're not educated enough, you're not from this side of the tracks or, or, or what do you know?" I've heard it. I've been there. I've dealt with it. The label, the judgment, the perception, and put yourself in a box. The only person that's gonna get you out of that box will be yourself and your courage and owning who you are and loving who you are and being proud of who you are as a human.

JVN [00:25:34] Mmm. We'll be right back with more Erin Brockovich after the break. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." This is Jonathan Van Ness. This week we have Erin Brockovich. So we are back from our break. And I am, have my tears dried because that was a, that was a gorgeous moment. Now, here's the thing. I heard Diane von Furstenberg say something very smart, which was: "Knowledge is not facts. Knowledge is context." And that was made, that's always been made very clear to me. I think one way that I saw it be made extremely clear to me most recently is how there's a lot of these, like, really, like, right wing, like, conservative people that are loving to say, like, that Trump isn't transphobic or homophobic because he was the first president that went into office supporting gay marriage, whereas like Obama was not and neither was Biden until 2014.

But I think it's so funny about, like, that, I don't remember him saying he is pro-gay marriage. I would be hard pressed for him to get on Fox News right now and say that. But let's just say that he did and I'll, like, I'll say, like, yes. OK, so let's say he was asked and he said yes. But still, we have a president who has enacted a trans military ban. Still, we have a president who's defunded Planned Parenthood, who is giving seven hundred thousand HIV tests a year to mostly Black and brown underrepresented people who are mostly gay and trans people who really needed the tests, because basically the administration said, like, "If you're going to talk about trans stuff or abortion or queer LGBTQ safe sex practices, like, you can't use Title 10 grant money" and then Planned Parenthood was, like, "We'll go on fundraisers, we're not going to do that to our people. So, like, bye."

So super homophobic policy. Also made very homophobic asylum policy. They're also, like, doing a lot of stuff with, like, State Department passport issuances for like American, half, like a couple where, like, there's an American citizen, like, married to someone who is a foreigner, then not issuing their child passports. So they've just taken part like a lot of, and also, I mean, the transphobic policy in the Housing Urban Development Department is also really insane that they've been, that they've done under Ben Carson. So lots of homophobic policy to go around, lots of transphobic policy to go around. But with this one fact, people can, you know, fact, like someone can twist things around and bury context. And I think that's so often why people, you know, my age and in the millennial generation

just get so frustrated is because we don't really understand what the context is in the systems that we've been born into and find ourselves in. So I kind of want to talk about the EPA.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:28:00] Oh yeah.

JVN [00:28:01] And kind of the backstory of the EPA and how earlier you're talking about when we realize that a lot of these agencies were never really meant to protect us, like some of them were set up to fail and set up to mask, you know?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:28:13] Right.

JVN [00:28:14] Like that sugar isn't so bad, and, like, and how come in the food pyramid, don't you remember when we were little and that said, like, to eat like 15,000 slices of bread every day?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:28:23] So here's where we'll go with the EPA. You know, there are well-meaning and very intelligent and caring people within that agency. But, you know, they have to follow protocol and it's just been hijacked. I can't think of another word. Bit by bit, little underpinnings. The lead and copper rule, which was started back in the 70s. Most people don't know that that lead and copper rule stated you only have to look for lead in water once every four years. And you can average the samples. What? So If you average the samples, you're never gonna find out what's wrong. And you only have to test once in every four years. And if you can average it and you need to have a little, I guess it gets overlooked. So there's been little-, you know, water amazes me. It's the metaphor. And, you know, water just hits a rock and erodes and hits a rock and erodes and hits a rock, and it just starts pulling the layers back and you start seeing what's going on. That's where we're at. In the EPA, the best example I can give you is how the system is ass backwards, is beyond me and how we can't see it and fight like hell to change it. Europe is way better with this than we are. So there is a very dangerous chemical in the environment, PFOA, which was exposed in the book "Exposed" by Rob Bilott, who was the attorney that took Dupont on for 20 years. And Mark Ruffalo played in the film "Dark Waters." And you would know PFOA, which is perfluorooctanoic acid, as teflon.

JVN [00:30:12] Mmm.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:30:13] OK, so one of our biggest emerging contaminants today is PFOS, which is fire-fighting foam. What happened about 30 years ago, decades ago, is 3M created, they took three thousand different chemicals and created a group of families called PFCs. PFOA is in there. PFOS is in there. They notified the EPA. "This chemical is

going to be a problem and getting it out of the environment is probably not gonna be easy, so maybe you should keep an eye on it." So the EPA's policy is "OK. So we'll set a, a guideline." Which is not a maximum contaminant level or a public health goal, it's a guideline. I'm not really sure where, they just pulled that number out of the sky because there was no science that they knew of to even tell you what this would do in the environment.

So they set it at 400 parts per trillion. And so municipalities can run this chemical through their system, up to 400 parts per trillion. Guess what? We all go about our life. EPA commissioned a study. Each study they commissioned for some 40,000 chemicals that are hitting the marketplace, and in the stream of commerce, they can do a study. It costs millions and millions and millions of dollars. Jonathan, science takes time. I think we're seeing science bang up against policies right now, and this whole thing is going to blow open. So guess what happens four or five years ago? Study's complete. EPA gets a phone call. "Houston, we have a problem. This chemical causes twelve different diseases and cancers." "What? What? You knew that it was out there. It took this long. We drank it, we're exposed to it." Oh my gosh.

So now the EPA is like, "Oh, we have to set a new, new, new guidelines, 70 parts per trillion." The municipality in America, some, close to 80 thousand of them is going, "Wait a minute. We don't have the budget to get this out of our water. You told us we could run up to 400 parts per trillion. We can't get it down to 70." Now they've got to notify the consumer. And guess what the consumer does? They email me. Oh my gosh. Thousands and thousands of emails. "Is this why my son has testicular cancer?" "Is this why I lost my wife to kidney cancer?" "Is this why my sister has thyroid cancer?" And on and on and on. And I am thinking, what an ass backwards way to do something. Throw the chemical into the marketplace. Let it get into the rivers and the creeks and the aquifers and firemen exposed to us and all of our industrialized world. Woohoo, we got this Teflon. Put it in there first and let us know down the line. That's bullshit. You know what? Even the FDA requires studies on the upfront. If I'm in the EPA, and you want to put a chemical into the marketplace, you better show me the science first before it ever enters the marketplace. So it's, it's ass backwards. It's the chemical lobbyists that have got control of what's going on up there.

JVN [00:33:44] So let me guess. But, but, so but is it, is it? My step dad always said-

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:33:49] Money, money.

JVN [00:33:50] It always came down to, yeah. So is that why, I mean, how can we-? So, so, so if the EPA was created in the 70s. It sounds like it's never really been-, because I always,

I was always kind of surprised that Nixon established it, because some of the stuff they would say, I was like, "Wow, it sounds like, you know, like an Ed Markey or, like, a more liberal person would say that." But it's, like, they said it, but then behind the scenes, like, they're like, well, let's just make this as, like, toothless and, like, kind of not enforceable and we'll just say, like, guidelines and stuff. Like, is that what I'm hearing? Like, it sounded good, but then behind the scenes, it, like, wasn't really that enforceable and, like, not really that as cool as we thought it was?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:26] Well, we have good regulations and we had good ideas and they didn't get implemented right. They got hijacked and taken over. So oftentimes money does become involved. And a lot of these chemicals, we always want to cheat the system. We always want to do it cheap. And we want to push the can down the line because companies will think, "Oh, we'll deal with that down the line. But in the meantime, it's cheap, effective, we're gonna cheat the system. Let's get away with it." And oftentimes they do because it's something so subtle and each little piece erodes the system further. And I just think it's so deteriorated now that it's going to blow up on us. And we, we, here's the "knowledge is power," and the context of it is, it's hard for us to go, oh my gosh, I even think about that, I'm like, "How did I let that get by me? You know? How did I buy that bullshit?"

You know, you feel mad. And it's been subtle. And it's, it's been a, I feel like a major gaslight on all of us. And we've been so busy thinking or assuming, "No, they wouldn't do that." You know, because we hear conspiracy theories. We don't want to get into that. When I am telling you, for 20 plus years, it ultimately came back to why I wrote the book, is to show you the steps of where this is happening. These are facts. We got about 380 footnotes in there. This is fact. I've seen PG&E do a bought-and-paid-for science. To prove that Chrome 6 by ingestion doesn't cause cancer when it did, and they hijacked a study and rewrote it to say it didn't. And then the agencies without little follow through, don't follow up on that, to look at the science or they think, "Oh, great. So now industry is going to pay for this science. We'll use that." And it, it doesn't work. And so there is a lot of reasons why it fell. Listen, the Republicans, I was raised by a Republican dad in Kansas.

JVN [00:36:44] Same.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:36:45] And he taught me, he was the one that taught me the value of water and air and family and all of that. That party's moved so far off to the right, I don't know what's happened. They need, they can be a part of this conversation. I think the division in politics, especially in environmental issues and how we're running these agencies, it has so far deteriorated. It's gonna be hard to bring them back to the middle to do, they're making the fights about themselves and they've forgotten we the people. But it

will be we the people who strategically will rise up. We will learn. We will uncover those truths and we will stay with it. You know, Jonathan, there's a lot of good regulations out there. Here's the problem. There is no one enforcing it and there's no follow through at all. And so kick the can down the road, kick the can down the road, keep doing it. This pandemic moment, I think, has given all of us more time to have these conversations, more time to read and more time to get involved. It will take we the people.

JVN [00:38:00] Well, can you break down the whole, that timeline of like so we know PFOS, PFOA, the Teflon, the, the fire-fighting chemicals. Because, I mean, I remember like, no-stick pots and pans from like my childhood, and being, like, "This is the coolest thing ever, look, you can make eggs, honey, doesn't stick."

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:38:16] Right.

JVN [00:38:17] You can do all this stuff, doesn't stick. So we're used and all that, all through the 90s. Everyone's thinking it's amazing. Those Reynolds wrap ladies, like, got their Reynolds wrap on the pans, like, "Look how easy this clean up is," and we're just non-stickin' everything all over the place. And then they order the thing in the 90s? The study's ordered in the 90s but it comes back in 2-?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:38:33] Oh. 2000, and make it even worse, in 2015, the EPA, Scott Pruitt, director at the time, hid the study. Hid the study.

JVN [00:38:46] So the report gets released after Trump has won and after Scott Pruitt is the director of the EPA.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:38:52] Right. So it took a good 8 to 10 years on this study. And that's what the EPA does. See, that's what's ass backwards about it. Throw the chemical out there. Then we'll commission a study and then we'll wait for science to catch up and go, "Uh, we have a problem." Think about that.

JVN [00:39:12] Is that because of that failure-? But is that because of the failure of, because the FDA, it's more clear because we're going to ingest that, so yes, that needs to be studied up front, whereas they don't see the dangers of how water and water supply interacts with our ingest-, in our ingestion? Is that why the-, is that why the FDA tests upfront and the EPA is so reactive? Like why are they so-? Like, how can we change the system of the EPA to be proactive with our health and chemical exposure as opposed to reactive to that point-? Because I mean, if you look at our reproductive cancers, autism, miscarriages, all of these in-, heart disease, attack, stroke, I think all of these things are

higher in the U.S. than in other places, so does it all come back to the water? Is that a big piece of it? How can we switch that?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:39:59] So let, one of the examples is in Minnesota. So in the book, you know, we just can't inundate everybody with 40,000 chemicals. We pick the top few that we see in the water, TCE, hexavalent chromium, PFOA, PFOS, adding ammonia. And so TCE, oh gosh. This one upsets me, especially because we talk about the military. One of our biggest polluters, unfortunately, is our Department of Defense. And I'm a military mom. Two kids serving in the United States Army, one touring in Afghanistan and Camp Lejeune in the 80s had a heavily contaminated well with TCE, trichloroethylene. This is a cancer causing compound. And agencies know about this chemical, they've already determined it causes cancer. We know benzene causes cancer, yet it's still rampant in our water because of underreporting, failure to report no follow through on reporting. And Camp Lejeune had a huge outbreak in the housing and children dying in their parents' arms of cancer.

Jerry Ensminger has been the biggest champion of justice on this. And his daughter, Janey, died in his arms and he vowed he would do something about this. So it's the proud, the few, the forgotten. And it has been a battle. We've, we are, we're still in battle. It still hasn't been cleaned up, yet, by the government's own admissions, up to one million returning soldiers and their family from that area could get cancer. What? Whoa. Whoa. We're still in no cleanup. We're still not talking about it. So to go to your point about TCE, in Minnesota, they have a lot of TCE contamination up there. We dealt with it. There's a lot of Superfund sites up there. And the people downstream got impacted. Well, they became Erin Brockovich, because she exists in every single one of us. The moment that it impacts you. And they said this, "We're done." They got their community together. They got their facts together. They got a local reporter. And these local media and journalists can be so helpful to getting the information out and getting these communities seen. And they went at it. Long story short, they never gave up until the governor just this year in the state of Minnesota has banned the use of TCE.

That's a really good start. They're not waiting for some federal oversight who's probably never going to tell you to ban TCE. The state made that decision and it came from the people to local city council to media being involved into keeping that pressure on, that stick-to-itiveness that my mom taught me about. Definition: noun, propensity to follow through in a determined manner. Dogged persistence, born of obligation and stubbornness. Boom. That's all you got to say to me, stubborn is my middle name. I'm determined. I am dogged. I am persistent. And life requires us to have it. We're not born with it. And we have to develop the habit of persevering even when we don't want to. And it would be easier to give up. And as we see more of the TCE and the hexavalent

chromium and the PFOS and the deterioration of the water system now affecting community after community after community after community after community. They're, they're going, "What's going on?" And I look at Hinkley. I look at Hannibal, Missouri, and I share that with you. We can get back to it. We look at Flint.

JVN [00:44:05] What? What about Hannibal? That's right across the street from my hometown. I'm from Quincy, like Hannibal is literally like ten minutes across the river.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:44:08] Oh! You don't know about the ladies of Hannibal? Oh, let me tell you.

JVN [00:44:13] No.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:44:14] OK. So in Hannibal, Missouri, a group of mothers came to me. It always starts with a group of moms. The minute I get the email, I know what they're looking for. Permission, in a way. "Am I on the right track? Do you think this is the right thing to do? Should we say something?" Oh, hell, yeah. A, I'm going to give you permission. You are on the right track. I'll do some vetting myself. Keep going. So they had lead in their water. What happened in Flint was they switched river water. Can't do that. Because every body of water is different. Different P.H. Different. There are no two bodies of water anywhere on the planet that are the same. Is that trippy?

JVN [00:45:00] Yeah.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:45:01] Because I think we think water is water. There is no two bodies of water anywhere on this planet, the same.

JVN [00:45:09] Wow.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:45:10] So in Hannibal, Missouri. They were adding ammonia to the system. Oh, here we go again. We want to take the cheap route. Water 101, organic matter comes in with the water. So a lot of times people are like "Organic matter? You know, ooh, that's a science term. What is that? I don't know. I don't think I can do this." Organic matter is dirt. It's fish shit. It all comes into the municipality and we chlorinate, so we don't have disease outbreaks. Right? We get that. What people don't know is when organic matter meets chlorination, it creates a very toxic compound called trihalomethanes. Which, by the way, is very regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act. And it requires if you can't control your THMs, you have to put on the appropriate filtration. Now, we don't like to do that because we're going to cheat the system and we're

going to go cheap. So we're going to throw ammonia in. So now we're adding another chemical and ammonia and chlorination create a frenzy in the distribution system.

One, our distribution systems are unregulated. Two, our infrastructure is antiquated and I mean we have some 18 million miles of lead pipe, still in this country. So when the water gets corrosive and ammonia and chlorination go at it, several things happen. A, it's caustic and it etches the pipes in the distribution system and it causes lead, iron and manganese to precipitate out. That lead gets delivered to your tap. And you never even know it. It's not one of the those things you can really see or smell, but you'll notice subtle differences in the family or children, just like they did in Flint. And the second problem we have with cheating the system is chlorination, ammonia renders chlorination less effective. So we are seeing Legionnaire outbreak all across this country. Thirdly, it further deteriorates our infrastructure.

So the women of Hannibal, we went out there and we found out about the ammonia. And we educated them. They made it their job day and night. They didn't care if their brain hurt. They were not going to have these leaded issues. So they became a group of, you know, one and then 20 and then 50 and so on. And they educated the town. They went door to door. They had fliers. They'd call us all the time asking questions. They'd write notes on their wall in the middle of the night. These mothers from Hannibal are amazing.

JVN [00:48:07] When was this?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:48:08] Oh my gosh.

JVN [00:48:09] When was this?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:48:10] Well, maybe four years ago because the change just happened this March. So four or five years ago, maybe four. This, these women rose up. Well, one of them wanted to do a whole lot more. So she ran for city council and she won. So they did a referendum and put a vote out to the people who had now been educated. Ammonia in the water. Yes or no? Like, 79 percent voted no. So what they did was they were going to change the law so that they could no longer use ammonia. Then they got into a lawsuit with the state over the issue. And they never let up. And I'm happy to tell you, as of March 2020, they prevailed. They changed the law. They did a referendum, got a law. They've now no longer use ammonia and they now have lead-free water. Imagine, Jonathan, if every municipality and every city council and every community and every state did just that across the board, you would actually affect change. At your own backyard.

JVN [00:49:28] Here's the thing, I feel like we so often, I'm guilty of this too. It's like we see movies, we see these TV shows and like we want that. It's gorgeous. Like, I want to walk into the Oval Office with Olivia Pope and fucking tell 45 that this messed up water thing's gotta end, but it's like in every single story of systematic change in our country's history, I feel like the commonality is local. Like it was so local, whether it was the bus boycotts in the Civil Rights movement of 1950s and 60s, these were local. It wasn't, I mean there was marches on Washington, but it took a long time to get there. It was local boycotts, it was local sit-ins. Gay rights and stuff, a lot of local stuff happened. There was a lot of local protests. It's, like, it's not about getting to this necessary end goal. It's really local. And I think whether it's environmental safety, police reform, reallocating funds within policing, all of those things, it really starts locally. And I even think when it comes to like enforcement of like EPA and other things that are good regulation, but they just don't get enforced. Is there a way we can get more involved to see, like, locally, can we kind of like, in the way, like, adopting the Paris climate accord, could we, like, city-wide be like-? Because I mean right here, between 2004 and '09, the Clean Water Act was violated more than half a million times.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:48] Correct.

JVN [00:50:48] So it's like even with these regulations, we're having violations left and right. But it's, like, if we were more aware-

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:53] Correct.

JVN [00:50:53] And not, if we were more aware, it seems like we would, you know, maybe hold these regulations up to a more stringent standard in our backyards.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:00] Absolutely. And that's why we did "Superman's Not Coming." We can't afford to wait for whatever is coming from the top at the bottom. We got to start at the bottom and move up. And we show you this in the book, the Ladies of Hannibal. You should have seen the moms in Tonganoxie, Kansas, because Foster Farms was coming out and gonna do a big old, huge manufacturing place that they knew was going to contaminate the environment. They got into city council, they never let up and they ran them out on a rail. You are not doing that here. Took no oversight to make that change. It was the people with the city council in a state that cooperatively began to work together to make a change.

A water operator in Poughkeepsie, New York. He amazed us because he paid attention to his consumer. And, you know, oftentimes these municipalities aren't listening to their consumer or paying attention to the people or if they do hear a story. How many times

have I heard, "Oh my God, there's no way your water is yellow, black, brown." I mean, in the book we got an entire collage of water that represents America that you're, like, "What the fuck's going on out there?" So they were going to start using ammonia. Here we go again. Cheating the system. Goin' cheap, causing a lot of problems. So he would turn on the ammonia feed and guess what happened? His phone started ringing off hook. He's like, "What are you doing with the water? You know, our skin is burning. Our eyes are burning. We have rashes." And he got to thinking because he was listening to his people, "What have I done?" He goes, I turn the ammonia feed on, he goes, I'm going to turn it off. Randy turned it off. Guess what happened? The phone stopped ringing. But then the powers that be came in and said, "You got to turn that ammonia feedback on so we can control these THMs." And he did. And the same process happened. He recognized a pattern. And they actually finally got it stopped. No more ammonia. They saw how it corroded and destroyed the system. And they've now spent countless millions of dollars in fixing it. But now this community has safe water.

That was with a water operator who was listening, who was paying attention, who saw a pattern. And that was the consistent consumer calling again, calling again, calling again, calling again. "I'm going to keep calling you again." These changes are happening everywhere. And I think we think home, somehow we have in our mind that we're, we've been so underestimated. Y'all, nothing could be further from the truth. And you start with yourself. And from there, you can start rolling it out and wanting to know, find your cause, what you're going to fight for. We've got social media. You can Twitter it. You can get a momentum going. You can Facebook it. I, you know, everyone likes Tik Tok. Send a message, have a place to join, have a place to collectively get together.

I've seen that happen with the F.D.A. on a medical device gone really bad call Essure, was a form of permanent birth control. But let me tell you from the get go, it didn't work. The device failed. It moved. Women would get pregnant. Amniotic sacs were being broken. Stillborn, fetus death, horrible pain and agony to the women. And I got a phone call from a group of them and they wanted to look at, it was made by Bayer. They knew that there was these problems. They felt that there was not black box warnings. Something was going on and they wanted to sue. And I said, "Well, it's hard because of preemption." So they're like, "Preemption, what's that?" Basically, once they do studies and they get premarket approval. Short of proving fraud, if they're out there, you're just kind of shit out of luck. Talk about a statute of limitations. You're just kind of shit out of luck.

They said, "Oh, hell, no. Hell no." And, you know, justice comes in many forms. And they didn't want other women harmed. They became a voice of 50,000 women. And let me tell you what they did. They funded themselves. They went in and out of D.C. Every, walked up and down every congressional hall, Senate building, FDA meeting, showed up. When that

group got tired and had to come home, they sent out another group. They never stop until Bayer succumbed to that pressure and the fraud started coming out. We could start seeing where things slid through the cracks based on antiquated technology. They were missing the real numbers. The manufacturer figured out how to cheat in reporting. But Bayer finally removed it from the market. And those cases are settling today in a settlement of 1.8 billion dollars. That is the power of a voice and consistency.

JVN [00:56:20] So that's a couple of things I want to reiterate. I think sometimes, it actually so often I get a lot of people saying, you know, "How did you do what I, like how did you do what you did? How did you get through it?" Or whatever, it's, like, if I would have ever stopped or like given up in like all of the times that I wanted to, like, stop and give up and, like, listen to the feelings that I had of like falling off the cliff of my depression or addiction or whatever, like I would, like that was a doggedness and a stick-to-itiveness. Obviously, I had a lot of support and I wasn't alone.

But when I think about how hard I've had to fight to be able to accomplish a lot of what I've wanted to be able to accomplish, it's like, and I also think that a lot of times people say, like, they may interact with me and think, well you're, it just happened for you so overnight, it's like, "I've been trying to do this for 20 fucking years." I'm like, and not, like, I mean, it's your overnight success story and what you think is overnight success, I've actually been working on for decades. And also it's something I hear from these. It's, like, the Hannibal ladies that took four years, your time in Hinkley, that took years and years. A lot of these efforts take years and years and you have to have the stick-to-itiveness and the doggedness. And if you're going to be someone who you get really, really gung ho for it for one month or two months and then you get tired, you gotta, like, up that, up your base, up your people, like. get that support.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:57:31] That support.

JVN [00:57:31] So that when you get tired, you can. It's so important. And so that was, that was one thing. And then I have a couple other things that I want to talk about, and I-, because I literally could talk to you for so long. But I just have a few more questions that-

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:57:40] It's fun.

JVN [00:57:41] I just get so distracted from talking to you.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:57:42] I get the same way.

JVN [00:57:43] So when-. I think one of the problems is that we didn't really get to talk about, is just, like, the way that, like, and this is kind of like a federal versus local, like coming up the mountain sort of a thing. When things happen in a federal way because of the way that our systems are, it's, like, things are slowed down by lawsuits. You know, elections that, like, things change, so, like, different people are calling the shots. And then also the way that that policy interacts with science, and you did kind of go on this, but it's like, it's almost like if the industries are doing the science, they can rig it.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:58:14] Yep.

JVN [00:58:14] And if the government's relying on the industry to do it, they're probably going to do it for cheaper, especially because, you know, a lot of times they're always trying to do it the cheaper way.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:58:21] It's always about the money.

JVN [00:58:22] And because a lot of the times, there, the scientists, even though they can be incredibly like, yes, like, good scientists, they're working off of data that is too old to really show what is going on. Can you kind of explain that piece of like-? Because scientists are working on a delay, and kind of the, how that, that makes it more fraught to, to, to impart change on a more macro scale and why micro scale is probably more effective because it cuts that time shorter, right?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:58:53] Oh, absolutely.

JVN [00:58:54] Of getting the data and the scientists when you can work on a smaller scale.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:58:56] Right. And if we would get that data to science. So this is something interesting. So right before President Obama left office, there, we were redoing the Toxic Substance Control Act, which hadn't had a reform in a long time. And so, you know, it was a drawn out fight. We came to, you know, a fairly decent meeting ground. And one of the things was, he created, is called Trevor's Law, and that is that the government creates a national registry database. Because most people are shocked to find out we don't have one. So states have tried. So, you know, if you get a disease or cancer, that state reports it to the state facility. It really doesn't go anywhere else. And you can't open that up to share, not names, but to share, "We've got 98 brain tumors here," to see if any other states are experiencing it. And we are missing a national registry database. But we also have to allow the people to self-report. And that's where we're finding problems.

So when I got involved in Hinkley, they did a big cancer study and Loma Linda did it. And there was some headline, "Erin Brockovich is wrong. There's no cancer here." First of all, I never started out to find cancer. People were being harmed. It was obvious. And wildlife was being harmed and children were dying. It's like, "OK, something's wrong." But I did call and find out some information about that study. And I said, "So I'm kind of curious. You did a study from the year 1991 to 1996. That is when the plume and the numbers were at their lowest. Why would you not do a study to look during the higher point in time of what people were exposed to?" Never got really any answer, but they didn't. I said, "OK, so you pick a number in the state that you decide, you decide not having the information that it would be 221 people. Yet you found 196 cancers. You're pretty close." But because it was only 99 percent, they wouldn't show that there was an excess of cancer.

They didn't track people's movements or deaths. That's a missing dataset. And a lot of people have moved away and there's latency periods with chemicals so you can drink and be exposed to something for 10 to 12 years before you see an effect. That had moved away, that had written back to me and had cancer. I said, "So what I find interesting is because if you didn't self-report or let people self-report or give them a place to do that, you've missed 96 people from that area during those years of heavy contamination, they have cancer. Add that to 196, I think you exceed 221." So it's again back to that design and we, we don't let people self-report. We should. Social media is helping us do that. You'll see us congregate in, online, and Facebook and they're like, "Oh my gosh, I'm from there. Oh my gosh, I have this problem and we have to implement that." And it's a law and we're not implementing it.

And if we could see the bigger picture, Jonathan, and I don't think we do, when we do, we're going to go, "Oh, hell, Houston, we have a problem." And science, we need science. And I respect that. And I had a conversation with the scientists out in Columbia, Missouri, about ammonia and the people and the health impacts they we're seeing. And he said, well, let's be honest, Erin, you don't have all the data to conclude that this chemical is causing that harm. I'm like, you're right. I don't. But here's what you haven't thought of. You don't have all the data either to conclude that it doesn't. And so we need to work on that with science and for the scientists, it's a numbers game. And if we have a place for people to self-report, if we can get Trevor's Law implemented, we will find those missing numbers that can help science make a better conclusion about what something is doing in the environment and to the public health and welfare.

JVN [01:03:19] So Trevor's Law is basically a law that would allow for people to self-report their own diseases into a database without disclosing like their name, but it discloses like where they lived, how long, so that you can see if there's an environmental connection to

like an outbreak of, like, lung cancers or brain cancers or reproductive cancers or, or just whatever health diseases are going on.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:03:40] Absolutely. You'd see the bigger picture. So I had a community come to me on Sterigenics that was releasing major toxins in Illinois, but there's some other Sterigenic facilities in different states. Well, what's fascinating is for me and I have my community health book that we're building out now to be almost a Waze,. Remember Waze, if you will.

JVN [01:04:01] Yes.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:04:02] Well, you can report and say, "Oh, I've got I'm over here." And it's not about name or number. "I'm over here." Then you might see 80 other people join in there. And what we're seeing is that in three different states, the same company with the same pollution issues and all three populations experiencing the same problems, that information says something. But it doesn't get shared. So we can't see it.

JVN [01:04:34] So this is a good way, so this is like, like an incredible fucking tool that you're creating for this.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:04:41] And Trevor's Law. And Trevor's Law will help identify children's cancer clusters. Trevor is a young boy that spoke in D.C. with me and he had brain cancer. So did his friends from Boise, Idaho. It's kind of unusual to have, you know, five, six, seven, eight kids. Right? All with brain cancer. And he's the only one that made it. So he's vowed to do something about it.

JVN [01:04:04] Wow.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:04:04] And he is Trevor's Law, and that is finding more pediatric clusters. And here's the thing, Jonathan. I don't understand why we're so afraid of the truth. We can look at it and go, yes, we have a problem. But we can also be the solution to it. We can eradicate chemicals. We get more information. Maybe we can find cures. We have to go that way to be sustainable and move forward. We're at that fork in the road. And I just don't understand why so many of our leaders are so terrified of saying the truth. "Yeah, I made a mistake. We need to fix this." "Yeah, I can see this. We have a problem." But they don't want to see it. And then that becomes a bigger problem until it's in their face.

JVN [01:05:52] My theory on that is, is that, like, it's easier to shift quick blame and create really, like, easy solutions versus, like, being nuanced and understanding that these are

layered issues and that it's, people are always going to, like I compare it to Taco Bell and salad, because like I always want the Taco Bell, it's easy and it's fast. But really, I should make myself a fucking salad. And we are so often going for the quick and easy fixes that.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:06:17] Yeah.

JVN [01:06:17] You know, but also I feel like that kind of demonizes Taco Bell, and the only thing that's wrong with Taco Bell, is the fact that they fucking took the Mexican pizza off the menu this year. As if we hadn't been through enough. They fucking took the Mexican-, have you ever eaten Mexican pizza from Taco Bell?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:06:29] No.

JVN [01:06:29] Do you know what it is?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:06:30] Haven't. I-.

JVN [01:06:31] It was, like, crispy and delicious. Just listen for a second before we get into some serious stuff, because you should, it's a flat taco shell with beans and meat on it with another flat taco shell. And then this, like, red salsa and then like a thick layer of cheese and then like tomatoes, onions, lettuce. It's like a flat pizza taco and it's delicious. And they removed it off the menu effective November something or October 3rd, we're all reeling. But anyway. So here's the thing. I feel like so often a lot of times people, they want direction. They want to get involved. They want to help. I also notice that people are often so quick to get discouraged.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:07:08] Yeah.

JVN [01:07:08] And whether it's water safety, advocacy for healthcare, advocacy for environmental justice, racial justice, whatever your cause is, you, if you're someone who's not quite sure. And this is just some of the themes that I'm taking from this time with you, is that, I do feel like we are kind of given this idea that, like, "You know, don't, you don't have to worry about it. Like there's a simpler fix. Someone else is doing it. So you can go do this other thing."

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:07:35] Assume nothing.

JVN [01:07:35] And actually, now, it's like I think we all have, there is so much space now and space cleared for people to get involved.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:07:42] Yes.

JVN [01:07:43] We've had job loss. We've had time slowed down. So now you can think, like, "What do I want to do and how can you get more involved?" I think that's such a, this is just such an interesting time and a hopeful time as much as it is a serious one.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:07:54] I agree. I absolutely agree. And, you know, I share with you real quick, four steps we talk about, logic, that's using your common sense. I think we think logic is this great big PhD thing you have to have. It's just your common sense set of skills. You know, growing up in Kansas with tornadoes, you know, when the sirens went off, I didn't need to call the Weather Channel to find out if it was an F4 or 5. I just knew to get to safety. Follow your common sense. And this is what these moms are doing out there. They know what they see. Don't let someone gaslight you off of and try to tell you what you see isn't real. Bullshit. Hold your ground. Own what you see. Own, own what you know. Leverage, we've talked about that, your community. Loyalty is staying true to your cause, it's that stick-it-itiveness. And lastly, what is our why?

Every single day we get up and go to jobs and, and participate in the rat race. We all want to see our children go off to college and watch them get married and have that first grandchild. And you know what? We love our country and we do, we appreciate our freedom. And yes, we, we love to earn money because we all want to have a home and we love our home. We need to ask ourselves, what's our why? And I'm telling you, it's born out of love. And we've forgotten that. And love is passion. And love is standing up and saying, we can't do this. We love our family. We have to speak up. So common sense. Join your community. Stick with that cause. And remember when you get tired, why you're going to get back into the game, because you love your family, you love yourself, you love your country, you love clean water, you love your neighbor. Kick that ball back up and run.

JVN [01:09:49] So just because, like, we are realizing, like, "Oh my gosh, like all these, like, agencies that are meant to protect us, like probably aren't." And there's probably some corrupt fuckin' like anti-environmentalists in there who's like trying to get us to drink some contaminated bullshit fuckin' water. So because, like, you know, Superman isn't coming, and we will have to save ourselves and we got to, and, you know, impart systematic change, but it takes a really long time, as you were saying, in case we don't have six years to clean up the fucking faucet of water we're drinking all the time. Should I get like a water test? Like should we test our other sinks?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:10:20] Sure.

JVN [01:10:20] And then how do we do that? How can people test their water?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:10:22] Well, that's the best thing to do. In order to know how to filter your water, you got to know what's in it. Right? And that's the get curious moment. So requests from your municipal, lot of, if you don't know who your municipality is. Find out. You can get online just by zip code and find out who they are. You're supposed to be getting a quarterly water report. If you're not, you call them and you get it. I had this just happen with the reporter in Arizona who said, "I got curious. I got my water quality report. I just got it in the mail and I am stunned."

The valent chromium, now hexavalent chromium has got, you know, it is total chrome, not hex chrome. That's another conversation, this state. We still don't have regulations for hexavalent chromium in drinking water. After the film, "Erin Brockovich," after Environmental Working Group has showed that two thirds of America's water supply has it in there. But once she knew, OK, she got curious and she knew she knew what filtration system that she would need to get to better protect herself at the tap. You know, once you take that step, it's addicting and it's powerful. It's like, "Ooh, I want to learn more. I want to do more. I want to protect myself more." And so get curious when it comes to your water. Get your water quality report. Take a look at it. And we have to understand something just because it's deemed within guidelines doesn't mean it's safe. So you take that position and you find out and you take that precaution, protect yourself because they may not be.

JVN [01:12:02] Especially that 400 parts per trillion versus 70 and then getting that after the fact, when you had-, that's some fucking shit. So we really do need to know what's in there so we can make our own choices.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:12:13] Absolutely. And the state of New Jersey went even lower, down to twelve. And the CDC is going to probably come in even lower. Oh my gosh. I don't know why, a poison is a poison is a poison, all day long. I'm not going to get into the argument with you whether it's 70 parts per trillion, or 7 parts per trillion. It's a known cancer-causing compound. It shouldn't be in our water, period. And I'm not drinking it.

JVN [01:12:41] I love that, a boundary, it's set. There's really no stronger way we could end this interview. Erin Brockovich, activist, author. Your new book, "Superman's Not Coming," is out now. I want to talk to you forever and always, I love you so much.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [01:12:56] Well, Jonathan, I love you back and thank you. And I want you to know you're an amazing person. And for everybody out there, we talk about that. And it's so important to me because I see where they've lost that hope. I've been there. I think you've maybe felt there. And I want them to remember to love yourself. And when

you get tired, take a break, cry. Take a rest. Forgive yourself, because you can't go through with tomorrow, but know that you can go on the next day. And we're always looking for the hero. But you're actually the hero. So take a look at yourself in the mirror and the person in the heart and you'll find your way.

JVN [01:13:38] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was environmental activist and consumer advocate Erin Brockovich. She has a new book and podcast, both called "Superman's Not Coming." 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, Chelsea Jacobson, and Colin Anderson.