

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Gabrielle Union

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Gabrielle Union, where I ask her: Do you know how much I love you? Since this is only, like, our second time really spending time together, *Gay Of Thrones* being the first, I'm just really excited to see you, and it's been a long time. Welcome to the show, literally, Gabrielle Union, how are you?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:00:30] I'm so good. I'm so, I don't know. I'm relieved. I'm, I'm happy. I'm excited about this book and the reaction, and as, as people are reading it and we're listening to the Audible and getting the feedback, I'm, I'm kind of, like, energized. So this is good. It's a good time right now.

JVN [00:00:49] Oh, my God, it was so good. Like, congratulations. This book is literally everything. So this is an essay book, which we're obsessed with. It's called "You Got Anything Stronger?" And I love that title. I find myself saying that to my husband about alcoholic beverages a lot, you know, in the pandemic, everything shut down, you were there. How did you go about deciding what you wanted to write about? Did the title just, like, come to you, tell us everything!

GABRIELLE UNION [00:01:19] Anything liquor-related just sort of comes to me, sort of my wheelhouse. So when I, when I was trying to figure out what exactly I wanted to focus on, I kind of went back to the first book "We're Gonna Need More Wine." See the theme? Do you see, there's an overarching theme here. And what I left out of that book, and why. And there were a lot of chapters that I didn't include in that first book because I just wasn't ready to talk about them in any sort of real or impactful way. I was, like, I was fine to put them in the book, but I didn't want to face anyone. I didn't want to do press about certain chapters or face the public, you know, talking about certain things. So that to me was a sign, "Perhaps, bitch, you're not ready." So I left those out for years, go by. My, my daughter is born via gestational carrier. I get a lot more therapy, and I realize I have a lot more to say and I'm ready to say it. I'm healed enough to say it. I have enough perspective to be able to to speak impactfully about some of the, you know, the tougher, you know, things, issues that we all face.

JVN [00:02:26] I think that's beautiful. And I also think that a lot of times when we think about those, like, things that we define as, like, tougher issues to face, it's, like, for us in our lives and in our families, it's, like, this is what our life is. Brene Brown, I was talking to her this one time. God, I'm so full of name drops today. Who am I? [CROSSTALK] But I was, I was working on some stuff, and she was like, "Well, can you talk about your trauma

without becoming your trauma?" And I realized that I was explaining to her about something that was already in my book. And very similarly, I kind of wrote my book, and then I was like, after I wrote it, I was, like, "I thought writing was going to be the hardest part." Hello. New to being a public figure. And then when it came out, I was like, "Oh God, this is really hard, I'm, like, talking about it so much." And maybe I published a book before I was ready to fully talk about aspects of it, who knew? So I think that's so grown. So smart of you to know that that's kind of where you were, and so because you had taken some essays from your previous book, did you find that, like, your writing style had changed or your writing process had changed? Or do you think you found your voice more in this book?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:03:28] Yeah, because I was unafraid. So this book felt like pure liberation, pure freedom. The first book was just laden with fear. You know, it's like fear is sort of dripping off every page because I'm so concerned about how it's going to be received. With this book, I very much lean into "My truth is my truth. And it's not going to change. Just based on somebody's reaction and how you respond to my truth or how you receive my truth is none of my business." So, you know, you kind of get to the point of, like, "I cannot be beholden to outside validation," whether it's good, bad, whether they acknowledge that you even wrote anything at all, or if they love you, you know what I mean? You can't be beholden to that.

So I wanted to be beholden to radical transparency, and talking about issues that are often not talked about, which, then, you know, means that there's, there's a lack of community. For those of us who deal with these things. You're, like, "I'm searching online!" I'm like, "Who else has gone through this?" And it's, like, crickets. I'm like, "OK, hold up. I know I'm not the only one." So in talking about these, you know, these things and writing about these things, you realize how desperate we all are to be seen and understood and to build community, to share resources. But we have to have a conversation first, which means the truth is kind of going to be required to get to the finish line.

JVN [00:04:57] What a beautiful sentiment to be beholden to radical transparency. Chills on my triceps, get out of here. What were you, but don't really, because we're loving you. But what, what were some of those things that you were ready to talk about this time, be vulnerable about this time, that maybe you weren't ready to last time?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:05:16] You know, the, the the depths of despair that that were, that I was walking hand in hand with during my surrogacy and fertility journey. I sort of, I mean, there's no lighthearted way of speaking about multiple miscarriages. But when you add in additional relationship trauma that just broke me and knocked me on my ass, it absolutely impacted my fertility journey and the decision to, to go the surrogacy route. It

was fraught with heartbreak and brokenness and just feeling numb and adrift. And to not be clear about that. Yeah, it just wasn't an option. So this time around, I was healed enough. And I also recognized the importance of all the, all the doors that are opened from being honest about this, you know what I mean?

Even saying something like, you know, "I'll never know if my husband would love me more or respect me more if I would have been able to physically birth our child. I don't know if my daughter would love me more or respect me more if our bond would be closer, if I had physically birthed my child." No one talks about any sort of insecurity like that. It's like, "Oh, we had a rough time, but then God blessed us with our angel, and now everything is great." And it's like, "Ah! I know you guys, we've been crying on the floor together, and you're doing a disservice to your fans or your friends or your family or your listeners or what have you by not really, truly, being honest about the whole journey." And for me, if-, I probably shouldn't have talked about any part of the journey, if I wasn't going to be able to be completely transparent and open about the, the the whole journey.

JVN [00:07:26] That's kind of... wow. Thank you for being so strong and being willing to share it, and being willing to be open about that journey, because I literally can't understand. I don't, I literally can't do it. And wow, I just think you're such a brilliant person. And I also think, because I didn't know any of this about you when we first met, and, true or false, this is kind of hard left. You are someone who processes your trauma by being fucking hilarious. You, because you are one of the funniest people, like, you are really, like, so hilarious. I don't think anyone's ever, like, taken me out at the knees with being so funny. Like, I literally lost my balance trying to do *Game of Thrones* with you because you are so fucking funny. Like, I was not ready. But is that true? I feel like you do process some of your, your pain with humor.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:08:18] I-, yeah. I mean, some of it. Yes, some of it's just not fun. But there's a lot with perspective and time and distance and healing where you can find some of the humor in that. You know, I was telling this story last night at our book stop in Atlanta about this guy I used to date after my, my friend who moderated that book stop told me he was a fuck boy. I'd gotten divorced, and I was like, "This is my Dead Sea Scrolls of dicks I wanted in my life." Like, "Anything, anybody you want to help me zero in on over here?" And he was, like, "Yeah, ninety nine point ninety nine percent of this list. They're like, fuck boys." And I'm like, "Exactly. And I would like that with a side of bacon, please."

And I was talking about this, this time that we were in Mexico, we're eating, and it was all you can eat lobster and margaritas, which is, like, my personal heaven. And so I'm going to fucking town. I'm, I'm inhaling lobster after lobster, margarita after margarita. And he, I look up, and he throws his napkin from his lap over my food and says, "Enough. Enough."

But I was so broken and I had such low self-esteem. I was like, "You're right, you're right." And you just hear the audience like, you know, because I guess people don't think of me as someone who would take that sort of thing. And I certainly was somebody who took that sort of thing, which is funny *now*. Not so funny *then*.

JVN [00:09:53] What is wrong with these fuckers? That reminds me of this time when I went to this Dodgers game and I was inhaling that, like, helmet of the fries, and I was on a date with this guy and I looked up from, like, having my face covered in the fries because I was like, like, eating the fries. And he was, like, "You're embarrassing me." I was dev, and was, like, I went and I took the thing of fries that weren't even halfway done. Eleven fifty for fries was a lot for me then. Threw it away. Didn't even finish. These fuckers I swear to God did not mean to like go in on that story but like wow these fuckers. The nerve.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:10:30] 'Cause those fries are fucking delicious. I'm just thinking about, like, just thinking about it just now, "I got to get to a Dodgers game." I want fries, just fries with those nachos at Dodger Stadium, our next level and the Dodger dogs. So I feel like there's a food thing that we have, you know, between us that we, we like it a lot.

JVN [00:10:51] And I don't know why I live now. I'm veering back on track because sometimes I feel like when I talk about things that are like real, then I have this like part that comes in to be funny because I'm like, "Oh, my God!" And then I'm like, "Okay, let's go back in." So I feel like you said therapy. There was, like, you did a lot of, like, personal work on yourself in order to be ready to share some of these stories. Also, you know, we didn't get to talk about it during *Gay of Thrones*, but what's it, what's it like to have the hottest husband of all time? Like, he's like, you know, that you know, that wasn't really a question that I wrote down here, but I just figured we're being-, like, the hottest. Like, how does it feel to know that, like, you single foot landed that triple axel, like, you did that.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:11:38] Yeah, he's pretty, he's very pretty, and, and I mean, as hot as he is, and literally every morning he gets up, and I'm like, like, "hmmm," like a creep. True story, because sometimes he's, like, "OK, all right."

JVN [00:11:56] I do that to mine, too.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:11:57] No, he's, he's yummy, and he's, you know, done the work and he's gone to therapy and got healed. And, you know, you get to, you know, years down the line, and you're like, "OK, hurt people. Hurt people. Okay. Got it."

JVN [00:12:11] You know, you can tell, you can tell that you all have, like, a, as Stan Tatkin would call it, who invented that, like, PACT therapy, which I'm obsessed with, who we also

had on Getting Curious. This is, like, a secure functioning relationship. Like, you can tell, you can tell.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:12:24] Today, today, yes. And we fought for that and we worked for that. And it's, like, a daily choice to, to, to make sure that we are on point. But he's so much happier now. He is a happy, joyous, glass half full, spilling over even when it's bone dry and there's cobwebs in the glass. He's just happier. And, you know, and there's days where I'm like, "That's a lot of fucking joy, OK?" Who bounces out of bed like Tigger every morning, 6:00 a.m., "I'm going to go work out!" I'm, like, "OK, OK."

JVN [00:13:02] I suffer from that affliction. I don't know why. I don't know why. We're, sometimes, people are just, like, morning is-. Is, like, once eight thirty at night comes around, is he just, like, asleep?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:13:13] Around 10, but that's both of us. But it takes me so long to, like, warm up, I am not a morning person, like, unless there's a lot of money at stake. I just, "Why, why are we starting so early? What is happening at this hour?"

JVN [00:13:29] I just feel so on. It's the coffee, too. Like, I wake up at, like, five thirty and, like, I just, I'm, like: "Coffee." And like I just love coffee so much that it's like, it's like how my dog used to love wet food. Like the vet said she was going to die when she was seven and she because she was so overweight, but she loved her wet food so much, she literally lived to be 12 because she loved. And actually, this is, like, a devastating story about Jenny. But I'll tell you, not that you asked, but my dad is-, my biological dad, is so cheap that when she died, and he took her to, like, go be cremated, like, they charge by the pound. And he said she was 90 pounds, honey, she was, like, 120. So when we got her back and we were, like, sprinkling her, like, as a family, my poor brother, whose dog she was, he, like, undid the little and it was like chunks. Like, I saw metatarsals and stuff. There was like, no, I could see her little, like, puppy foot bones. She was 13, but her little foot bones because I was so cheap, didn't like a really sad story. I don't know why I went there. I don't know if it is true it happened. My dad was just such a nightmare. And Jenny was a lover of foods. And I just love fat dogs, and I don't know. I don't know. I told you that story. I didn't mean to.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:14:35] That is devastating and also, like, diabolically really fucking funny. It's terrible. It's terrible. We just put our dog down, and we had a doggie funeral that, like, all of our friends and family attended, and including all of the vet techs and her vet, and I mean, like, we had a whole thing. There were singers. Like, this is what we do. There was a program. Pink lived to be sixteen. [CROSSTALK] She was, like, we all laid hands on her as she crossed over. And, and we were like, "If there's any, if you didn't have

a chance to say goodbye to someone that has crossed over, send those messages with Pink now." And so then of course, everyone is bawling and, and she just and we had all-, we have five dogs and the other four were assembled, you know, just there watching and being able to have like that closure. But yeah, like we didn't spare any expenses. And I, I mean, yeah, that's one of those things that if you can't, you can't really commit to the full price. The Groupon cremation for your pet is probably not going to get the job done.

JVN [00:15:47] Yeah, my dad, just, this is way before Groupon. This was, like, 2002, three, maybe. Yeah. Tighter than a bark on the tree. My poor dad. God love him. He's got a little better with age. But fuck me sideways. I got to say, losing a pet so sad. I, sometimes I joke, I'm like, "Honey, I'm, like, an HIV positive person who survived abuse and survived drugs. And the two times I lost a cat was, like, the top two most traumatic things that's ever happened to me. Like, and I've been through some shit." Like, that, and they just, they're so sweet, and I just love them so much. And that is how I ended up with 11 animals, because when one passes away, I replace it with two. So it's my Charlotte's Web rule. And now my husband said that we can't do that anymore because we have eleven animals.

Obviously, like, your family and your stepdaughter, like: love. Like, like just, chills, like, I love how you love her and I love how you guys celebrate her as a family. And, like, is there anything that comes up for you that you, like, want to talk about, or that feels good and like just are you just, like, so proud? You just you guys just your family seems just so like that is the world that I want us to live in, like, that's the goal. And you guys, just... She's so celebrated. She's so stunning. I love how you write about her, and her coming to terms with, like, what femininity means for her. Like, is there anything that, like, because, it's, like, how do I want to say it. It's, like, I want this to be the norm, I don't want this to be something that's like something like, yeah, that's like what families do. It's like we just celebrate our gender expression and it's like it's like Tuesday. It's Wednesday. Is there is there, what do you think needs to happen for us to get there? Or, like, not us but what can parents do? That's like a really broad question, but is there anything that just, like, pisses you off as, like, a mommy or you wish that we could do better?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:17:44] I mean, well, yeah-

JVN [00:17:46] That's a whole other podcast.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:17:49] I was like, yeah, that-, there's a lot. But getting out of this notion that your kids have to be near images of you and everything that you've done to be worthy of love, respect, protection, compassion, opportunities, and any deviation from what you did or from being completely assimilated into, you know, whatever, that-, whatever, they just won't make it. And they won't be deserving of making it. Of being, of

being their best, most authentic selves and living out loud without having to constantly shape shift to be something for bigots. But it starts with your home and your home cannot be just as, as evil as the rest of the world. Maybe your home has to be the sanctuary and for, for our house. Do we have a ton of experience with this? No, but. Our child is just her piece is non-negotiable, so we got to catch up and figure it out and our first order of business was anyone that is comes to this house, you need to be with the program. And if you have shit to say, negative, any quips, quotes, quibbles, you can say that shit from across the street because you will no longer be allowed here.

Like, our child's peace is non-negotiable. And if you're, if you're not with it, you're just not going to be a part of our life. And we hate to see you go, but we're just opening up more space for more love and better folks that are more supportive of our family existing as they exist. But we also get a lot from parents who in their minds really feel like they're trying. And they say things like, "I just can't love her like that," or "I just can't love him like that." And we're, like, "Sure you can." But we realize sometimes you have to see it to understand that you can be it, that you don't need all the answers. You don't need to be an encyclopedia for the LGBTQ+ community. You can be like, "You know what, I don't know, but let's find out together. But I love you and I will never leave your side forevermore. And we're going to be in this together," you know. And that's, that's just basic. That's just day one. Right. We, I just wish more people valued our children and we didn't force them to be something that they're just not in calling it protection, controlling your child, their very identity, their very existence is not protecting them. It's controlling them.

And we need to understand that difference. And I, and I get that for, certainly for, for children of, of color are our parents and our parents. We feel like in order to protect our children from white white supremacy and all of these things, historically speaking, going back 400 plus years from when we arrived here, we had to make sure that our kids were fully assimilated and they changed their names and, and they, they were quiet. And the "children are seen, not heard," in all of these things in order to literally keep them with us and not have our children ripped away from us or to keep them alive, to try to make their their, their the road in life as easy as possible. So you forced that assimilation on your kids.

You did whatever you could to to keep them with you and to try to keep them as safe as possible in today's world, what we what we know, what we have language for now is forcing your children to be something for folks that are are so committed to addressing them is child abuse, in my opinion. It is really not that hard to just love your kids and, and commit to not believing that kids are disposable. And when those kids become adults, same rules apply. Not hard, not hard at all. And that doesn't require you to be a MENSA member to, to know that "I can keep loving my child, even if they're not a mirror image of me." And it's OK, and we're all going to be OK.

JVN [00:22:31] I don't know if I've ever cried that hard during a response during Getting Curious the podcast. That was, like, gorgeous, that was, like, the sweetest, most authentic, gorgeous thing anyone's ever said on this. Like, literally. This is, like, it's about, sometimes the vitriol. I just notice a lot of times the vitriol for gender nonconforming, trans people, especially young people. It's, like, you scratch the surface and it's like a hard core, like, religious conservative in some, you know, realm. And then right now, obviously, there's, like, so many states that have, like, so much deeply transphobic, like, really problematic, ever growing in its overreach in scariness and, like, dictating who kids have to be.

I've been thinking about this a lot, it's, like, so many people's, like, religious beliefs have really become, like, inextricably tied into law and and, like, where our opinions come from, just because you're taking the quote out of, like, something that in some random book in the Bible that was, like, taken out of context with, like, a whole bunch of other stuff, like, that ain't it. It's just not. And, and I'm so sick of, like, compromising everybody's safety and peace because like the peace line, wow, it is non-negotiable. What we're sacrificing, like so many peoples like peace and wellbeing and, like, right to live, like, based on somebody else's opinion. It's just, it's so frustrating.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:23:58] You're, you're, you're absolutely correct. And I grew up in a very Catholic household. My mom, you know, every sentence is, like, "Me and Father so-and-so, me and the sisters." My mom, like, teaches CCD, like, she is that, that chick. But she also took us to our first gay pride parade in San Francisco in 1982. And she bought us all buttons that said "Straight but not narrow minded," with a little arrow. And she always said, "I want to raise my girls with a world perspective, not a town perspective. My faith is my faith, but it doesn't mean that you have to be ignorant fools." And that's, that's how my very religious mother raised, raised us and she has, you know, "the Union Kids 2.0." My mom adopted three kids at the age of 60, and she's now 74 with two teens and a pre-teen. And it's the same. And your individual belief system does not have to lead to the oppression of others. It does not have to lead to the tearing down of civil, civil rights. It doesn't have to lead to the demonization of your neighbors and loved ones. It doesn't. It does not. There are other ways to to be, to practice and be to be faithful without leading to oppression.

JVN [00:25:23] This is such a serious topic. But you really laid an information bomb in there. So, so let me get this straight. Your mom adopted three kids, and then those kids got Gabrielle Union as their sister?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:25:43] Sister.

JVN [00:25:44] So. Wow, you're just minding your own business and then, like, that is, like, the coolest story I've ever heard and I would just be remiss if I didn't ask, had they seen Bring It On?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:26:02] Well, my one little sister, my middle little sister, is a cheerleader.

JVN [00:26:06] It's too much! Story's too much! Oh my god!

GABRIELLE UNION [00:26:10] She and one of my best girlfriend's daughters, and, you know, Zaya. They go to-, they are cheerleaders, like, you know, competitive cheerleaders and their coaches, they have coaches at that gym that were in Bring It On. And I was like-

JVN [00:26:26] Oh, I'm going to pass out. I'm gonna pass out.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:26:29] "Uh, so, did you lead with, you know, that I was Isis?"

JVN [00:26:34] The literal main, you are, the one.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:26:37] No. And they didn't. They were, like, "No." And I'm, like, "Why?"

JVN [00:26:41] They didn't name drop you at cheer?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:26:44] No, no.

JVN [00:26:45] Did they not realize how transformative Bring It On is to, like, the American cheer scene?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:26:54] I think they do, and I think they wanted to be more anonymous.

JVN [00:26:58] Not that they asked, but that's just not the time. I mean, when your mom is, like, the queen, it's OK to be, like, "Yeah, I'm going to, I'm going to take this spot right here." And I would really, like, for me, I just really wanted to be a back spot, like, I didn't want to be a base, because I was like, "Oh, my back." But "My mom's Gabrielle Union," I would. But your kids are really just such good people that that probably wasn't their truth. But, like, oh, wow. OK, wait, so can we talk about cheer then. So you have your family and kids. So how is that for you as a cheer parent? You don't want to just go in there and, like-

GABRIELLE UNION [00:27:32] Well, they don't allow us. They don't allow us in there. Parents cannot watch.

JVN [00:27:36] See, that's smart. I would be the worst. I already know that I would be, like, that-, turning up on the news, I, you know, put a little tennis ball under the stair for that head girl that was making my kid the alternate for her. I would be. I would be that-, your, I would be. I, that's why I don't have human kids, because I know I'm not mature enough for it. I'm not. I know I'm not.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:27:56] I'm not a great basketball parent, so I could about imagine, like, me, like, at a, you know, cheer competition. And so this year they'll be, you know, doing their cheer competitions and whatnot. And so I don't know. I don't know.

JVN [00:28:12] So what about the, like, tryouts. Do they have tryouts? Like, are you like them? [CROSSTALK] So they have to do it again. Will you be, like, "Okay, let mommy see. Like, I did some choreography. I like, do this, I've gotten paid to do this before. So let's see the choreography." Or does that not happen.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:28:25] They know they've seen me struggle learning TikTok dances. So I don't think they think I have any ability at all, and they would not be wrong in that.

JVN [00:28:39] OK, I'm sorry that we're going to break into, like, a seven minute, like, interrogation of Bring It On because, like, we didn't have a chance to do this, like, during Gay of Thrones, because we had to shoot something. So does that mean, I feel like I saw you at a lot of, like, I feel like you're doing that choreo when you were shooting that, like, competition scene, when you guys beat the fucking shit out of the Toros, at the fucking end the like? You had to learn that, right?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:29:03] I had to learn that. We had nine days to learn all the routines that you saw the Clovers do in Bring It On, and the Toros had, I think they had, like, three weeks or something like that. But we had less actors, you know, so we had, we only had me and the singing group Blaque. This was their first time acting. And then the rest of our cheerleaders were like, you know, professional or college cheerleaders or whatever. So they just kind of threw us in routines. And of course, the girls from Blaque, they, they just came off tour, so they know how to pick up choreography. Yeah. And I'm still back on step, kick, ball, change, ball, change. That "My baby takes the morning train," was, like, that was kind of my, you know, area of expertise and so me trying to learn all that shit and I'm way older than everyone else.

JVN [00:29:57] I was like, "I don't remember that song from Bring It On." But you're talking about it was, like, from some other class or something. You were, like, in jazz dance.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:30:03] I'm just not the best dancer. So they threw us in there. The girls from Blaque got it right away. And I'm like, "Fuck." And so there's, there's a lot of tight shots in there, you know, out of necessity, because I don't match anybody else.

JVN [00:30:16] Was there anyone from, like, production, who was like, "Yeah, like, you really need to hit these, like, high Vs a little bit harder." Like, "Can we just clean up this, like, five, six, seven, eight, a little bit." Like, "Ah!" it's, like, it's, like, "I'm doing the best I can. Get away from me."

GABRIELLE UNION [00:30:31] Like, no, I mean, I'm a gamer, so, like, when it was time, I'm a gamer. But if somebody were to like when people are, like, "Do it right now," I'm like, "Yeah, no, like, it's gone. It's poof. Gone." Yeah. I mean, I remember the first part, but that's about it. The rest is, like, over.

JVN [00:30:49] So you do remember the first four counts?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:30:53] I think, but it's really, like, but yes, for the most part, it's gone, it's gone.

JVN [00:31:03] So the part when you had to come to the Toros game and then, like, bust them out on copying, "You tried to steal our bit. But you look like shit. Because we're the ones who are down with it." Was that, like, the most fun? Like, was it as fun as it seems like it was? Like, I feel like when I saw it in the theaters, I feel like I literally was the only because I'm, like, I'm from, like, a ninety seven percent, like, white people town. I also went to see that, like, with my whole, like, white girl cheer squad. And when that part happened, like literally the entire theater was like and I was like, "Yes bitch. Yes!" Like I was so team Clovers, like, not to be, like, I was, I really, like, I just intrinsically was like I just I like the uniforms better. Your pep rally routine stole my heart. That pep rally scene is so good. Like, obviously you were there.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:31:53] I was there.

JVN [00:31:54] What was your most fun scene, for you as, like, an actress?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:31:57] The most fun? Oh, well, we had a ball doing the whole thing, but we were, like, you know, we were very, we were a little wild back then. I mean, the funnest thing to shoot was the big competition scene at the end.

JVN [00:32:12] The final scene is so good, because you went to that tent and you're, like, wait, but you it's kind of, like, make a little bit of peace at the end aren't you. Then you're, like, "May the best woman win," and then you guys go in.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:32:25] And, and then at the end, which, I wrote this whole chapter about, like, being very, you know, having a lot of regrets about what I did and didn't do with Isis. I had the ability to, to allow her to be anything. And I chose, you know, to kind of mute her, to sort of muzzle her, and strip her of a, of a bit of her humanity, and the ability to be angry, the ability to be, like, really angry at the harm caused that I, I wanted her to be likable, at the end of the day. I didn't want her to be thought of as a stereotype. And all of these things just like constantly sort of watering her down. So in the end, by the end scene where Kirsten says, you know, "You guys were just better than us," and Isis goes, "We were, huh," like, a fucking questionmark. "You know damn well we were better than you guys."

And what I should have said is, "Yes, when the playing field is truly level and you had to do your own fucking work, you weren't fucking good enough. So take that L and put it in your pipe and fucking smoke it. I'm going to be over here gloating with my trophy and my teammates." But Black girls aren't allowed to be, you know, angry or, or to state facts that are already in evidence. You're not allowed to raise your voice. You're not allowed to be cocky. You're not allowed to have confidence. And all of that just gets stripped away. And what annoys me most is that I did it to myself. I did it to this character. And at the end of the day, there was a meme going around last year, around the 20th anniversary of Bring It On. And it was, like, talking about movie villains. And in one of those memes, it was Isis. And I was like, "That's fucking dark."

She's, she is a villain for wanting to acknowledge and have some accountability for her work being stolen and all of the resources that come when a school wins nationals and all the, the money, and the accolades, and the attention that was erroneously going to the Toros should have been in a marginalized school with a squad that could have absolutely used the dollars and recognition. And she never asked her to renounce those past titles that were achieved in that. [CROSSTALK] They just show up at the meet, they just show up at the game. They don't say they stole. I mean, it's implied. But she doesn't have the opportunity to be openly angry or openly frustrated. She always had to take the high road. And let me tell you about the fucking high road. It sucks. There's a reason why the high road is empty, because you know what? You think you're being classy and above it all.

But what you're really doing is for people who have harmed you, you're sending the message that it wasn't that bad. But, you know, "I'm not even going to respond. I'm not

going to dignify that with an answer or I'm going to rise above it." But are you really rising above it? Because what you're doing is, is your silence, and your passiveness is complicity, is being complicit to the bullshit and the fuckery. So call yourself whatever you want, but you are contributing to the harm of the next person if you don't really show the full scope of the harm caused. And when you strip people of their, their right to be angry or frustrated or sad, you're doing a disservice to yourself and your, and your community. And so I had to apologize to Isis. And she didn't have a last name, nor did any of the Clovers have last names.

JVN [00:36:17] But all the girls on the Toros did?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:36:20] Yes.

JVN [00:36:20] Oh, I hate that story. And the nine days, first three weeks thing? There was, like, literal racism behind it all. And as I was just talking about, it's, like, that movie was, like, when you think. *Is*, not *was*, *is*. It's such a, like, it seems like it's this just, it's kind of like every other thing I loved in the 90s: the Olympics, beauty pageants, Pop Tarts, like, all shit that turns out, like, deeply fucking not that great and really fucking corrupt. And, like, that's usually why I don't know how to take care of myself because, like, I got modeled all this, like, fucked up shit from the media. It was, like, not the fucking tea. I hate that fucking story. Although I would just say this as, like, a, because that was let's think about 2001? 2000. Bring It On.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:37:06] Two thousand.

JVN [00:37:07] Two thousand. So for, like, a ninth grade white kid on, like, you know, my JV squad was, that was an all white squad. But varsity had, like, some fierce fucking Black girls where just, but now I'm thinking, like, what did that movie make, like? But then I also just say for you, like, it's just, it's a really layered movie that, like, as a younger white kid, like, I didn't realize, like, how layered and how multifaceted. But just from me to you as, like, a major fan and, like, I, like, love so much, it was, like, 2000. And I think that, like, be a little bit, like, compassionate with yourself, like, you did-. I mean, society did this to you, like, I'm sure like you are probably, like, led to feel a lot of these things, like, "Oh, I need to water down. Like, let me, you know-"

GABRIELLE UNION [00:37:50] I was so invested in being fully assimilated because they tell you, "In order to achieve the American dream, you have to fully assimilate into-, away from who you are. Anything about you, and what makes you great. We want the opposite." And I mean and I, and I wish it was just a Bring It On thing. Because, you know, last year we were doing all these panels and it was me and, and Kirsten and, and Peyton Reid, our

director and our writer. We were doing all these panels. And this journalist said, "Do you realize that not only did Isis not have a last name, your characters in She's All That, nor Ten Things had last names, but everyone else in those movies had first and last names."

And I was like, "Ah!" And the fact that I just didn't notice, you know, it just lets you know that you can sleepwalk through so much of your life and when you become aware, you can never go back. Or for me, I cannot go back. But, yeah, I spent I just spent a lot of time, like, in in denial about reality and what what it really was and the harm that that that it causes so many communities, you know, and they because they they fully make you believe that if you just do all of these things, you just work hard. "If you just go to this college, if you dress this way. You act this way. You speak this way. Then there's this pot of gold. You know, anything's possible." And you do all those things and you're, like, "Wait, hold on. I got a lump of coal. What happened?"

JVN [00:39:21] Just to be, like, OK, not double arty on that because yes, however, again, like, to a ninth grade, but now I still kind of stand by it as, like, a thirty four year old even though you're, like, "I guess we were," it's almost like you were like, "Yeah. We were." You know, like, a little bit, like, you know you're giving her the heart because like that's what you do. It's like I'm a clover and like I'm like fuck off. And also you do in this movie have some of the most hardcore gorgeous, just like, you know, because even as you said-

GABRIELLE UNION [00:39:56] I was cute. I was cute. We were all very cute.

JVN [00:39:59] But it's more like, you know, but it's like, "Bitch, I have your number, OK?" And some of that stuff that you're saying that you wish that you would have said, I don't know if it's because of like just that I agree with it so much that I feel like you got that through in some ways for like even just the tonality. I feel like people even, like, because I saw, like, in the depths of middle America, like people watch this movie, like in real time. And I feel like at the beginning of that movie, you work like it starts like, "Oh, no." And then by the end, everyone's rooting for you. Everyone's like, so happy.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:40:30] Well, clearly not everybody. There was a meme about her being a villain.

JVN [00:40:35] And like I mean, in 2000. I mean, like, I really, like, watching it, like, in the moment, like, I feel like I can. Yeah. Like I mean, obviously with like our lens now and like realizing that, like, everything we ever liked was, like, really fucked up and problematic and like all sorts of different ways because of, like, capitalism, racism, the patriarchy, like, all of it. Yes. But I'm just saying, you are amazing in that movie. And you did get through elements of that, even in a world that didn't want you to. And I just love you so much. It

literally hurts. I know you have a hard out, but I could honestly, like, interview you, like, once a week for the rest of my life. Could we please have you back on Getting Curious some day? Because I, like, a whole other segment that I can get to, but I, like, have a whole other segment. I love you so much. It actually hurts like I don't know what shocker. But I just respect you so much and I love you so much and just your light and your radiance and everything that you're doing actually, because what are you doing? Working people find you working. Working people get the book working people because you have a gorgeous hair care brand. Honey, if you need your hair care brand, where can people follow you. Where can people support your stuff?

GABRIELLE UNION [00:41:32] Well, I mean, Flawless by Gabrielle Union in partnership with Larry Simms, who's my hair stylist extraordinaire and, you know, celebrity hair stylist to all the girls. Yeah, you can get our, our hair care line at Sally Beauty, Amazon. We're about to be in another big store. That, that announcement will be coming soon. We've got Bitsy's, Bitsy's Brainfood, healthy snacks for kids. That is going to be in Walmart next month. We're super excited about that. And the New York & Company clothing line is back. I was able to, to bring that back once they got out of bankruptcy. And so we're really excited about that.

And just to circle back to it, to put a little button on it, the reason I had to revisit bring it on is because we were talking about doing a sequel and everyone agreed that the sequel that all of the OGs would be a part of would center the Clovers and Isis, and, you know, be written by a Black writer. And for me, in order to go forward, sometimes you have to go back. So in wanting, and us all wanting to make this bring it on sequel that just comes for everyone's necks, it was like, "OK, let's go back and figure out where we had gone wrong." And so, yeah, so it's, like, a nice full circle moment. So hopefully all of this sort of revisiting of past mistakes or choices, decisions, what have you, will lead to a better, more nuanced, even more fierce sequel.

JVN [00:43:02] Obviously I'm, like, white. However, I can do a really great standing back handspring. I also have a really good tuck. I also can do choreography. So, like, if at any of the competitions, if there's, like, you know, some, just, anybody who you need to do some gymnastics in the background. I don't even need a speaking role. I can just stand in the background somewhere. I swear to God, I won't spike the lens. Like, I just, like, I just, I don't even need to be a principal extra, just, like, I will come in any time. Just do right now if I can't sing. What do you need any squad anywhere. Just anywhere would be appropriate. I know we're centering the gorgeous Clovers, I love that story, I could even be, like, "Bring It On 17." You know, "The Toros Return To Being E-List," I don't know. But I just, I just, you know, if you ever need me to come do anything for anything, I'm your

person, I will. Even if you just need to, like, lay on the ground for you to, like, walk over a puddle on your way to set, like, I am your person, OK? I literally am.

GABRIELLE UNION [00:43:58] I-, you-, listen, say less. You had me at hello. You're on the squad.

JVN [00:44:03] Yes! You know, anywhere that's appropriate, you know, obviously I really love you so much. I know you have to go. I will let you go now. Everyone, you can follow Gabrielle on the links that you're listening to this episode on. Thank you so much, oh my god, I love you so much, I don't want this to be over. Okay, love you, bye!

GABRIELLE UNION [00:44:20] Mwah!

JVN [00:44:24] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Gabrielle Union.

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