

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Erin Brockovich

JVN [00:00:03] Welcome to "Getting Curious", I'm Jonathan Van Ness. And every week I sit down for a gorgeous 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by a literal icon, someone who I have looked up to so much for so long and I cannot even believe that I can literally get to meet the real, in the flesh consumer and environmental advocate Erin Brockovich, where we discuss standing up to injustice and addressing the problem of a toxic water. Welcome to "Getting Curious", this is Jonathan Van Ness. I'm-. This is a really big day for me. I am interviewing two icons of my whole life today. You're one.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:00:45] Oh, that's so cool.

JVN [00:00:46] Welcome to the studio, Erin Brockovich.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:00:50] Thank you. Oh, thank you so much. I'm thrilled to be here.

JVN [00:00:52] So, no, thank you so much for coming. So I saw "Eri-", I was introduced to you like so many from "Erin Brockovich", the movie.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:01:01] Yes.

JVN [00:01:01] And I watched it so many times. Like, literally, I've probably seen it over 100 times in my life.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:01:10] You've seen it more than I have.

JVN [00:01:11] And over a 100 times at least. But also, I loved your show, "Worst Case Scenario". I, the one that was on TLC that you hosted about like what to do in the case of like, you had one where there was like.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:01:23] Well, there was "Final Justice".

JVN [00:01:25] Tell me what "Final Justice" was.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:01:27] "Final Justice" came out right after the film. It was about, you know, the women who had tragedies, but they use that to empower themselves and change laws. So like some of our cell phone laws came from a mom whose child was killed because somebody was texting and she went in and changed laws. And so very empowerment series.

JVN [00:01:47] Oh, so one of them must have driven into a lake.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:01:50] Yes, that's right.

JVN [00:01:50] There must have been an episode about someone. Yeah.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:01:52] Yes.

JVN [00:01:53] That's what I saw.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:01:54] So people may have pulled, you know, certain episodes and then showed them on another air, network.

JVN [00:02:00] My exposure to it was like, OK, that's how I get out of a car if it's submerged in a lake, like you have to have the thing in the tool box and you like break out the window.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:02:08] You know, I think about that, too. It's interesting when you're panicked, I'm not sure I would always respond the way I'm supposed to. I'd like to believe that I could, but it's like you've got to get your thoughts together, right?

JVN [00:02:20] Yes, yes.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:02:21] Yes. I'm not sure I could do that under an emergency. I think I can. I've been in emergencies. I surprise myself. But when you envision scenarios like this, like, ooh, I don't know if I could. I'm scared.

JVN [00:02:33] I think it's like you really don't know what you would do until it happens. Which is really so scary. But wait, tell me this. So how similar was the movie to what really happened?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:02:44] Very similar as, well in many regards. Now there's a couple of clients at the end of the day that weren't always happy with how the show was featured, but everybody has their individual experience. But as far as the litigation was concerned, myself, my children, being a single mother, my relationship with Ed, what happened with PG&E.

JVN [00:03:03] With Ed, and he just passed away like last year.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:05] Albert Finney. I know. So Ed was the real character.

JVN [00:03:09] Wait, is the Ed, is the real Ed Masry still alive?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:11] No, he passed away.

JVN [00:03:13] No.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:13] I know.

JVN [00:03:15] Because in the movie he was like, he's like, "I got one bypass and" like uh.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:19] I know he you know, Ed, Ed believed in me.

JVN [00:03:23] Wait. So you really got hit by a fucking asshole flying out of the street.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:26] Oh yes.

JVN [00:03:26] Like a bat out of fucking Hell.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:27] I have a C5 C6 discectomy scar and yeah, I really did. And I really have three kids and.

JVN [00:03:36] Holy shit. Was there a George?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:40] Absolutely.

JVN [00:03:43] Oh my god. He was really hot in the movie.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:46] Well he was, you know, I always say a joke. Had the real George looked anything like the guy in the film I would have never kicked him out. I'm like, you know, I mean. So George was terrific. George passed away, too.

JVN [00:03:56] No, no. I'm sorry.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:03:59] I know, he died of a brain tumor.

JVN [00:03:59] No. Did you guys end up, like did you guys like continue to kind of like cordial? Even though it didn't work out? Like that seemed like where the movie was going at the end.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:04:07] It was. And I loved George and my kids adored George. And George had a glioblastoma and so.

JVN [00:04:15] The tendons one.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:04:17] Yeah. So there was a lot of I don't know, hardships where you couldn't relate to someone or they were sick. And I think. I don't think, you know, agonized forever that I didn't get to have the right goodbye. I wrote a really long letter and burned it and let it all go to the universe. And I remember his funeral and I was outside and I was so torn about so many things and hearing my youngest daughter just wail killed me. Here's a great guy. And he adored the kids and he was there for me in many instances when I needed somebody in my life the most.

JVN [00:04:55] There's just like no road map to like seeing someone go, my stepdad passed away of bladder cancer, but it went to his brain.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:05:02] Metastasized.

JVN [00:05:03] Yes. And so but there's just no roadmap. And so I'm so sorry that you went through that, because I just I don't think we ever know, like, about losing someone in any way. It's just like awful to go through. So I'm sorry that your family went through that.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:05:16] Oh, we did. It's hard. You know, I've lost my mom and my dad, my greatest mentors, Ed. I had I'm gonna really use this word the privilege of holding Ed's hand as he died, holding and walking my mom as she passed on. And my daughter intercepting my dad before I got there by just a few minutes. Because it's harder when you're not. And when you do, there's such a connection with even my mom is like, "Oh, my God, you made it home". And to be a part of that was just beyond truly touching. And it helps, you know, that they made it home safely.

JVN [00:06:00] So how did these like personal losses that you've had, like post the movie, change how you are, like how you come to your job because you're still an advocate?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:06:11] Yes.

JVN [00:06:11] Like, what's going on now?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:06:14] Oh, I don't even know where to start with that.

JVN [00:06:17] Like in terms of advocacy, like, like what's the closest cousin of like PG&E and hexavalent chromium type 6 going on now? Like, who are we like? Who are we getting fucking petitions for?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:06:30] They're everywhere, unfortunately. I think we're unaware because there's lack of information about the true water crisis going on. You know, Hinkley was a microcosm of what's happening throughout the world. The closest that I could relate to right now and the women came to me a year before you knew it. To be what it is. And that's Flint in Michigan. PG&E was a corporation that withheld information that destroyed an environment and took lives. And Flint was the same scenario, different chemical, but it was an agency coverup. And that's just a huge blow because so many of us believe that all these agencies are in play to protect us. And when you find out that they're the ones that absolutely deliberately hid it from us, it's just a smack in the face and it's a wakeup call. So we're working on several hundred other Flint's. We're working on chromium 6 cases, not only in America, but Australia and France and Italy and South America and South Africa. So these-

JVN [00:07:39] Was it same deal like, like companies polluting the groundwater?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:07:43] Absolutely.

JVN [00:07:44] 'Cause what was the company that was in-. How did the hexavalent get made again? It was like in the, in the, what-?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:07:48] In the cooling towers.

JVN [00:07:50] In the cooling towers of what kind of plant?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:07:53] Well, PG&E was a gas compressor plant, and they're all over the country. But hexavalent chromium is being widely used by all kinds of industry. It is a great anti-rust corrosion inhibitor. So think of the airline industry. Think about needing to use hexavalent chromium. So the metal of the planes don't rust and erode due to cold weather and rain. So that's what hexavalent chromium is used for worldwide.

JVN [00:08:20] Does a lot of it like get on the plane in the air and then it gets rained on and then it gets like an our water from like the air? Is like not that much use on the plane? Like, how bad is it? Oh, my God.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:08:28] Well, there's-.

JVN [00:08:29] What about if you eat on the plane and drink on the plane? Does it matter?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:08:32] You're fine.

JVN [00:08:32] OK.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:08:32] You're fine. The exposure would come from application mostly to the employees.

JVN [00:08:36] Oh, my God.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:08:36] And then the bigger issue clearly is what do we do with all the generated hazardous waste we create? And historically the adage was the solution to pollution is dilution. And that's what we've done. And all these years have passed, you'll be scared by the time.

JVN [00:08:52] The solution to delusion-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:08:54] The solution to pollution is dilution.

JVN [00:08:56] So we just got to dilute it up when it gets into the water or-

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:08:59] That's what they think happens. But that's not really what's happening.

JVN [00:09:02] And it doesn't work?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:09:04] No. We have so many problems. I'm going to tell you, so many people will invite me to parties and podcasts and ask me about water. And by the time I'm down, they look around and they're like, "Oh, don't invite her again". Total downer.

JVN [00:09:18] No!

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:09:18] Total downer. It's daunting.

JVN [00:09:21] But so basically post the movie, you like, because like Ed Masry and you like had this gorgeous, like have this gorgeous law firm and you're still just like fighting the good fight.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:09:32] Absolutely.

JVN [00:09:32] And like doing the damn thing. So really the question I was trying to ask and the little baby bit and then I'm probably going, really going to try to not talk about "Erin Brockovich", the movie like for 40 minutes, because I really could. It's I'm trying not to.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:09:44] And it's always weird because I'm in the room.

JVN [00:09:46] Yeah, yeah. It's like it's crazy because you're like it, that's the name in the movie and that's like literally who you are.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:09:49] Are you talking about me? Are you talking about Julia Roberts? What is it we're talking about.

JVN [00:09:50] No, it's you! All of it. But like, how has? Because you've been doing this for some time now. Like you've been in this, you know, you weren't a lawyer and then you became like, are you, are you like, are you like a paralegal now? Or like?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:04] Well, I was never a lawyer.

JVN [00:10:05] Never a lawyer and still aren't?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:08] No.

JVN [00:10:08] No. But are you like a paralegal now or something? Do you have like a cute title?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:10] No.

JVN [00:10:12] You're just a fucking advocate.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:13] Yes.

JVN [00:10:14] Yes.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:14] You know, I don't work with— after Ed passed away, I started working with several—.

JVN [00:10:18] What year was?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:19] 2005.

JVN [00:10:21] So sad.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:24] It was.

JVN [00:10:25] So that happened in 2005, and then you continue doing this?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:29] I did. I work with several other firms. I still consult with the firm in New York, Weitz & Luxenberg. I consult with the firm in Sydney, Australia. All of Australia, Shine Lawyers. I've written several books. My first book was taken from me, "Life's a Struggle, But You Can Win". My fourth book is coming out.

JVN [00:10:48] Ooh.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:10:49] It's truth of America's water supply. I'd like to say I'm pretty comfortable, our title is "Superman's Not Coming".

JVN [00:10:56] Oh, and it's about America's water supply.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:11:00] Yes.

JVN [00:11:01] So how, has your approach to dealing with like people who have been victims of like corporations, like bad water policy, like has your approach to people like I feel like you are always based on the movie, like very compassionate, like empathetic, like is it like how is these personal losses affected, how you approach your job?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:11:21] They've made me stronger. My biggest job when I began my work in Hinkley was not about a lawsuit, was not about the cancers. It was about a suppression of a community and the lack of information left them defenseless to defend what they and we all love most, their health and their family and a good life. And as a kid, I understood that because I'm dyslexic. So I was teased and taunted and bullied and labeled and judged. I never liked to be put in a box so very early. I was figuring out how to punch my way through that. And my mom and dad raised me with understanding the power of stick to it-iveness. My favorite word definition noun propensity to follow through dogged persistence borne of obligation and stubbornness. I'm stubborn. I'm obligated. I'm persistent. My mom taught me that just because others see you as different doesn't mean you're inferior. And my dad and his words of honor and transparency. So when I went to Hinkley, I could see and I could feel. I'm like, this is eerie. This is, I know this feeling. It is suppressive. And the minute I feel suppressed, I pushed back out. And that's what was happening in Hinkley. So it's about empowerment and it's about the idea that so many people in Hinkley, everyone said, "You're not a doctor, not a lawyer, you're not a scientist". I don't think that I have to be any that to be a human and to tell you what I see is wrong. So my entire really career and core of who I am and what I believe is how do I reach these people in this community, get them to join forces and know that whether they're a doctor, lawyer or scientists, don't let that label make you step back and not step forward and fight for your own health and welfare. And I've continued to do that through my lecture circuit. That's been an enormous part of

my work since the film is out there, still spreading that word about how we believe in ourselves again. I think we lost that and for a long time there has been a blanket of what could be a false illusion, a false sense of security. Maybe we got comfortable, maybe we got complacent. But there's disruption with us right now and we're waking up and I really see a cultural change happening in this country and believing in who we are and being able to be ok speaking up and speaking out about issues that we care about.

JVN [00:14:26] And for you, it's really been about like advocating. It started off with like holding PG&E accountable for like this hexavalent chromium, it's like branched out into water. How have you I mean, you've learned so much about like bad stuff that can happen to us. Like what are the things that like, this is like a selfish question. What are the things that you like implemented in your own life, like from all the things that you've learned, like you don't drink water from bottles or something? Or like do you have any stuff that you just don't fuck with from all the stuff that you've learned?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:14:57] Well. Oh, well, my brain hurts usually at the end of the day, understanding-.

JVN [00:15:02] Top three.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:15:03] Chemicals or?

JVN [00:15:04] Things that you do not fuck with based off of the things that you learned about.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:15:08] I don't fuck with the water. I mean, water is life. And the argument when it gets into politics, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what side of the fence you're on. It doesn't matter the color of your skin. It doesn't matter at all. We all need water to sustain our life and the, the idea that we just willy nilly think that the solution to pollution is dilution and to throwing all these pollutants in the water that they're going to dilute and go away is ludicrous because that's not what's happening.

JVN [00:15:38] And they just tested those like shrimp and like a bunch of the shrimp had like arsenic and like cocaine in them in like London.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:15:44] Absolutely. And this, this is problem everywhere.

JVN [00:15:46] So where do you get your water from?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:15:48] Well, I could tell you, I use a reverse osmosis countertop filtration system that I love. It's called "AquaTru". Reverse osmosis is a filtration system. But oh, my gosh, we have to like backup to water 101.

JVN [00:16:03] Ok.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:16:03] All right. So water. Most of our water comes from surface water, which is tributaries, creeks and rivers. And in water is what's called organic matter. So people like, oh, you know, ok, organic matter. This is a scientific term, it's really easy. It's dirt.

JVN [00:16:20] Poop, pee.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:16:23] Poop, pee. That's it.

JVN [00:16:24] From animals and humans, everyone.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:16:25] Well. Absolutely.

JVN [00:16:26] Yep.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:16:26] You know, dear drink water and maybe pee in there, maybe poop. We got dirt. I mean, all these creeks and rivers and tributaries, that's what they run through is the soil. So as it comes into the municipality.

JVN [00:16:38] Oh. No, you're good.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:16:39] Oh, I'm sorry. Did I say something?

JVN [00:16:42] No, no, not at all.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:16:43] Do you want me to stop?

JVN [00:16:44] No, no. We're going to take a quick break. We're gonna go back into Water 101 right after this break. Welcome back to "Getting Curious" with more Erin Brockovich. So were at Water 101, the, the, what was the pee and the poop in the water? The bi-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:17:08] Organic matter.

JVN [00:17:08] Yes. The organic matter in the water. Water 101. I am so in this. They probably just listened to ads of me talking like my cat and British and stuff. So no, we had to go back to water 101.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:17:18] OK. Water has organic matter. So as the water comes into the municipal system, organic matter gets treated with chlorination.

JVN [00:17:30] And when the, the, what place again? When it comes into the?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:17:34] Municipalities.

JVN [00:17:35] Yeah. That's just like a big water plant that every city has?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:17:38] Absolutely. They bring the water in, they're the ones that send it out through a distribution system to service all of us. That's why when we turn on our taps, there's water. So the Safe Drinking Water Act, obviously, we chlorinated water for a whole host of reasons. Because you have bacterial, biological, E.coli. All kinds of outbreaks. So it's necessary to chlorinate the water. When chlorination and organic matter meet. They create a very toxic compound called Trihalomethane, which is heavily regulated by the Safe Drinking Water Act and the EPA. When municipalities can't balance those trihalomethanes, they're supposed to add the appropriate filtration system to do so. Rather, they've decided historically for years that they'd throw ammonia into the system. So now we're adding another chemical. We want less chemicals in water. So the ammonia causes the water to become angry and corrosive and caustic. It also renders.

JVN [00:18:44] And if you don't know what caustic means that means burned, like burny. Like makes you burny.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:18:47] Absolutely. Yeah.

JVN [00:18:48] Yeah. I learned that when I had like hair color developer on a flight once or like my checked bag. And this guy was like, "Do you have caustic stuff in this bag"? And I was like, "Caustic? I don't even know who she is". And his like fingers are burning in there and I was just like, "Wash your hands, it's hair developer. Just throw it away, it's not a big deal".

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:02] It probably had ammonia or something in it.

JVN [00:19:04] It was peroxide or just some 20 volume, calm down, it's not even that strong.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:07] This is why I like Schwarzkopf because I don't do well-.

JVN [00:19:10] Honey, Schwarzkopf has 20 volume. They all do. But anyway. So tell me.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:13] Yes. Well, this is OK. It's the ammonia we're going to talk about. So we'll keep going.

JVN [00:19:17] Ammonia. They put the ammonia in the water.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:19] Well yeah, they add ammonia. And so now we have an angry distribution system. So how does water get from the municipality to your tap?

JVN [00:19:28] Pipe.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:19:29] Millions of miles of pipe underground. By the way, it's unregulated. All kinds of stuff goes on in there that we're not paying any attention to. So when all of our lead pipes become exposed to this corrosive, angry water, it causes the pipes to perforate and get little holes and pin holes and then the lead and iron and manganese precipitate out. So one of the biggest problems is the chloramine use in this country because it's happening everywhere. So we're seeing huge lead contamination. So that's why I kind of backed up when we were talking about Flint. We see lead contamination. We're working on 210 other sites with lead levels, in some instances higher than Flint. So now we're have to start looking at a huge infrastructure crisis in this country that's going to have to be dealt with. It would be trillions of dollars. So how do we fight back against that? And I'm always about information, education and awareness. We have to change policies. Science is finally catching up with policy. All these years, we've been throwing chemicals in there. Latency periods for disease take 20, 30 years in some instances. All of this is just finally colliding. And we're going to have to change policies. We're going to have to fight to change policies. We're going to have to be informed. And we need communities, individuals and communities to begin to rise because we're, we just can't wait anymore for information and the right thing to happen to trickle down from where? You know, and that's why I said "Superman's not coming". So tag, we're it. And I encourage people. It's nice to have a hero, but become the hero.

JVN [00:21:16] Yeah. Be the change you wanna see. But back to this reverse osmosis.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:21:20] Yes. So-.

JVN [00:21:20] So that we don't get these trihexachlorides.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:21:22] I'm so glad you're staying on track because I think I run over here and start another conversation.

JVN [00:21:26] No, I love that story, but I want to know how to keep the water. I want to know how we can at least purify the water if I'm going to drink it.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:21:32] Reverse osmosis is the best filtration. And so it has different chambers and cartridges for each chemical. So you have a lot of varying levels, low levels of different chemicals in your water. So if you have hex chromium, a coconut shell is one of the best filtration. If you have PFOA, which is perfluorooctanoic acid. That's another story. That is the largest emerging contaminant in this country today.

JVN [00:21:54] What was she called?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:21:55] PFOA.

JVN [00:21:59] PFOA.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:00] Perfluorooctanoic acid.

JVN [00:22:00] And what's that?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:04] It's scary.

JVN [00:22:05] Three sentences or less.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:07] Scary shit.

JVN [00:22:09] Because it?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:10] Is known as Teflon.

JVN [00:22:12] Oh.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:13] It's known as C-8. Another one of its sister chemicals, PFOS is known as fire-fighting Foam. All these things that are under every single day like, OK. This, this chemical is the best way for me to explain to you how the whole system works.

JVN [00:22:32] Oh, of reverse osmosis?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:34] Of reverse osmosis, why we need it, chemicals in water and policy.

JVN [00:22:37] Oh. Oh. All the-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:40] Do we need a break before we come back and talk about it?

JVN [00:22:42] No, girl, you're about to hit a grand slam right now. Yeah, and so that's like what's literally on our skillets and what's in like flame-?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:50] Oh. It, it is. It's almost in everything. I think flame retardants and clothes that babies sleep in and, so here's the thing.

JVN [00:22:56] Like soft, soft, touchable fabrics?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:22:58] Well, some of them and it should say flame, you know, flame resistant, flame retardant, so. Like, think of the firemen, all of their gear is got all of this, these chemicals in it, because it, it can retard fires. Think about our massive fires and what they're letting

out in those big planes that are just gettin' doused all over the forest. That's PFOS, it's used by many different companies, is heavily used by the Department of Defense.

JVN [00:23:27] Is there a water safe? Or is there like groundwater safe firefighter flame thing?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:23:33] Well, a lot of you know, Europe's ahead of us in a lot of things about-.

JVN [00:23:38] They are.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:23:38] They are. They really are.

JVN [00:23:40] Ok but, wait. Oh, my God. OK. OK. Focus, Jonathan, if you're ever going to focus, like pull it from your innards right now.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:23:49] Want me to finish PFOA?

JVN [00:23:50] Yes.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:23:51] OK. Manufactured by 3M. So here's how it works. I want everyone to know how it works. And we explain all this in the book. It's hard to explain because people are like [SNORES].

JVN [00:24:03] No, they aren't. We're doing a really good job right now. I'm riveted.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:24:05] To get into the sciences stuff. But so they notify EPA, very early on. This is kind of a bad actor, not a good chemical. Like it's really pervasive in the environment and almost impossible to get rid of. So keep your eye on it. EPA so noted, so they randomly pick a number how they really came to this number for a guide line, I don't know. They said 400 parts per trillion. So you can run this chemical through your municipality up to 400 parts per trillion. What's interesting, though, anything below that they don't have to report.

JVN [00:24:50] And we don't know if that's like safe or not.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:24:52] Correct.

JVN [00:24:52] 'Cause really like, 'cause like everyone's different, like everyone's chemical compositions, like literally how they come into the world are different.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:24:57] Oh absolutely.

JVN [00:24:57] So someone's system could be really affected like by like 50 parts per trillion.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:25:02] Absolutely. Infants, elderly. Dose response for us, you're absolutely correct. So this is this, quote, guideline. So EPA sets out to commission to study this chemical in the environment to conclude whether it does or doesn't cause cancer.

JVN [00:25:18] And when is this? Like in the '80s? '70s.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:25:20] Oh, yeah. I've seen documents from the EPA in Australia to their government in '91, "Keep your eye on this chemical". So they've known and they set a guideline, but they have to A, raise the funds to study a chemical. Each chemical, they study costs millions of

dollars and they can only do a few per year. You know, listen, the EPA is overburdened, understaffed, and in many instances, you know, aren't getting funded.

JVN [00:25:46] Well, and right now, the EPA is currently being run by someone who's, who's families spent their entire professional careers trying to dismantle it. Because, first is was Scott Pruitt, who was terrible and the guy who replaced him is even worse, who is like mom worked for Justice Gorsuch's mom, who actually got a bunch of her staffers fired when she ran the EPA in the '80s under the Reagan administration.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:26:06] Yeah. And-.

JVN [00:26:06] But hopefully that's not the same as like "Worst Case Scenario", which is like the show you didn't fucking host that I thought you did. So like, who knows?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:26:13] Well, they still did.

JVN [00:26:13] You know? But I do think they pulled that little segment and put it on like that show because it was definitely like you talking about this like lady who, like escaped a car that ran into a lake. But anyway.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:26:23] So Scott Pruitt, by the way, was very one that withheld the PFOA study.

JVN [00:26:27] Really?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:26:28] Yes. Because, see, this is where I said science is now catching up with policy and we're going to need to change policy. Policy was designed for something back when it's not applicable or applying to what's going on today. We need to change policies. We're gonna have a big policy shift and a big fight on the PFOA issue. So this chemical now gets studied and these studies take 8, 10, 12, 15, 18 years. So 3 years ago, EPA gets phone call. "Houston, we have a problem." "Well, what would that be?" "Well, this PFOA that you set a guideline at 400 parts per trillion causes testicular cancer and it causes thyroid cancer and it causes kidney cancer and it causes reproductive harm and it causes miscarriages and it causes excessively high cholesterol." "Oh, OK." How ass backwards is it that you throw a poison in the water for 20, 30 years and wait for science to catch up and go, oh, shit, maybe we shouldn't have done that? Maybe we shouldn't be using it. How about you provide the study first, whether it does or does it not cause cancer before you ever put it in to public water supply? Period.

JVN [00:27:47] So that's that chemical?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:27:49] Well, so now we got-.

JVN [00:27:49] The PFOA.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:27:50] That's, we've got a huge problem. So now, the EPA has reduced the level to 70 parts per trillion.

JVN [00:27:58] That's a huge reduction, but that was just three years ago?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:28:01] I know. And many states are dropping it to 12. And the CDC is probably going to come out at 7.

JVN [00:28:07] Holy shit. So my entire life?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:28:11] We all might have been exposed too. Because it's everywhere. So let me tell you. Municipalities are screaming because they're like, we don't have the budgets to put on the filtration to reduce it to that level. And then I get phone calls from communities in, oh, my gosh. Alabama. Philadelphia. Pennsylvania. Vermont. New Hampshire. Virginia. West Virginia. Minnesota. Michigan. Colorado. California. "Is this why my son has testicular cancer"? "Is this why I lost my wife to kidney cancer"? "Is this why I'm on cholesterol medicine"? It's just zooom. I mean, tens and tens and tens and thousands of people. So now we've got a huge problem and a big fight on our hands. Are we going to regulate it? What are we going to bring it down to? How do we begin a cleanup process? And I want us to look at what's happened in Flint and look at what's happened in Hinkley. I want us to talk about it. And look what's happening now. Because if we can't see the problem, we'll never find a solution to it. And this is a moment in time, I believe, for us where we are inherently great. And we have, I don't know, not known the information or didn't want to hear the information or the information was concealed. But moving forward, we've got to find the solution to how we're going at a collective national state, United States, and a global level, protect and preserve the one thing that we all will not be sustained without. And that's water.

JVN [00:29:42] So talk to me about the differences between how the U.S. approaches these sorts of things. And then like Europe, for instance. Because do you think that one of the things that would be, would protect us and that you're advocating for is that tests be done on any addition, at like a national level of groundwater or like a state level of groundwater? Have, like have studies run before that happens? And is that how they do things in Europe or something like?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:30:06] Well, FDA requires that. Think about FDA before some medical device comes on the market. Now we have a lot of potholes over there as well.

JVN [00:30:13] And can we just really quick? FDA is the Food and Drug Administration and then the EPA is Environmental Protection-

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:30:19] Agency.

JVN [00:30:20] Agency.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:30:20] Yeah.

JVN [00:30:21] So do those agencies ever like get together and work together a lot? Because they kind of have an intersection.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:30:27] Well, you think. I would think that they should, but they really don't. But the FDA will require on like a medical device. When you want it to go to Marketplace, you're going to show us first what this can or can't do. With the EPA now with, you've got a huge chemical lobby up there in D.C. and we've got about 80,000 chemicals or more being introduced into the marketplace every year.

JVN [00:30:50] That do what?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:30:51] Eh. PFOA, hexavalent chromium, trichloroethylene, benzene.

JVN [00:30:57] Is it one of those things like that spice, where like the state administration makes the drug illegal so they change a molecule by one and like, you know, it's like the fake weed, like the synthetic weeds. And so there's like a hex available, like 8 and a half and then introduce that as like a new chemical.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:31:11] Well, that's what PFOA is. It's really a part of a PFC group of chemicals that's anywhere between 3 and 8,000 chemicals mixed into one to create the PFC family. That's pretty scary. So when I start seeing two headed frogs in the environment.

JVN [00:31:29] Do you?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:31:30] Oh, absolutely. That's the first thing that pissed me off in Hinkley. Any time you're going to tell me what I see isn't real. I'm going to lose my shit. I'm not kidding. Wait a minute.

JVN [00:31:42] Because there could be some, because like, maybe there's like, like two two-headed frogs in nature, actually, like per million, but used all like 10 and like.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:31:51] Absolutely. And consistently. And cows cover with 500 tumors and trees dying, let alone green water flowing from the wells. It's like, "Oh, Toto, we are not in Kansas anymore". And people saying, "Oh, that's the norm". Real, really? Really that is not the norm.

JVN [00:32:10] So how do you? So what are, in your experience of like, you know, doing things in like France and Germany and Australia and here, like what are things that like other governments do or that we could learn from other governments to get some of the policy changes that could keep us safer?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:32:19] Well, on chemicals, they will take a harder look at them first before they get into the environment. And then when they do find they're in the environment and they are causing a problem, they're removed. They, they no longer use hexavalent chromium over there. You're done. And they tell industries, "Better find us another solution, because on January 1st, I think it was 2017. We're done". It's gone. We're still using it here. They'll address the issue. Glyphosate, a big issue, banned over there, but it's still everywhere here. And this glyphosate is scary. We have literally shit in our own mess kit.

JVN [00:32:56] What's glyphosate?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:32:57] Oh, it's round up.

JVN [00:33:00] Oh.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:33:01] Oh. This is a bad one.

JVN [00:33:02] Oh, Jesus Christ. OK.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:33:03] Break.

JVN [00:33:03] Really quick break. We're going to be back with more Erin Brockovich right after this. Welcome back to, wait, do you need an actual break?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:33:19] No.

JVN [00:33:20] Welcome back to "Getting Curious", this is Jonathan Van Ness. We have Erin Brockovich.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:33:23] Oh my god, you're curious. I could stay here all day.

JVN [00:33:24] Me too. Me too. Ok. So what's glyphosate?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:33:28] Well, glyphosate is-

JVN [00:33:28] Roundup.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:33:29] Yeah, it's roundup. So it's a herbicide. It is a weed killer, a pesticide that they're spraying everywhere at our headwaters, rivers, creeks to tributaries. I don't know how stuff grew. Way back when, you know, without all these weed killers. But it's highly toxic. It's toxic to the water, it's toxic to the ecosystem, the wildlife, the animals, the people. And again, this is something where information gets concealed. They've known for a long time that this happens, but yet it still gets its way into the marketplace. Like I said, the chemical company, these companies are huge lobbyists.

JVN [00:34:07] Well, it's almighty dollar.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:09] Absolutely.

JVN [00:34:09] Like that's why the NRA, because it's like, guess that someone's livelihood. And so, but like it, but that's like what people say. But then it's like, but people are dying. At the expense of your livelihood.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:18] They are. The perfect storm is finally here. I think I've waited my whole life for this to happen. And I think it's finally here. I cannot help myself. I want to share this story. And I've done it before, but I haven't shared it with you. That I think is really relevant. And that's "The Wizard of Oz".

JVN [00:34:35] Mmm.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:35] You've seen the movie, "The Wizard of Oz".

JVN [00:34:37] Yeah, of course.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:37] Do you like it?

JVN [00:34:37] Yeah.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:38] Oh, yeah. He's like, thinking about it.

JVN [00:34:39] Yeah, I do. I love it.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:40] Have you read the book by L. Frank Baum? That is why they-

JVN [00:34:44] No, but I saw "Wicked".

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:45] I love "Wicked".

JVN [00:34:46] Love "Wicked".

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:47] Oh, I was on the edge of my seat.

JVN [00:34:49] Me, too.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:50] And see, I'm from Kansas. I was born and raised in Lawrence.

JVN [00:34:52] You were? My whole family went there for college.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:55] Where? KU?

JVN [00:34:55] My stepdad went there, my brother. Yeah, my stepdad, my brother, my sister.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:34:59] Rock chalk, Jayhawk.

JVN [00:35:00] Yeah. Were you in a sorority?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:35:02] Go, KU. My mom was a Gamma Phi Beta. I went to Kansas State. I was gonna pledge Gamma Phi Beta. But they weren't as much as fun as some of the other sororities. But then I decided not to pledge.

JVN [00:35:15] You're a GDI. You come off as a GDI, which I love. That's a goddamn independent.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:35:19] Well, that's what I ended up doing.

JVN [00:35:20] I love that. Good for you. My sister was a Theta. The Thetas were great.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:35:22] I know them.

JVN [00:35:23] But this is not, we are not going off on a story tangent.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:35:25] But my dad was Sigma Chi. My mom was Gamma Phi and they both went to KU.

JVN [00:35:29] My whole family was like Greeks too. Yeah. My whole family did like the Greek life thing too but I didn't, I was also GDI. So we're similar, I love that.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:35:33] I was just like, yeah, I'm out of here.

JVN [00:35:34] So wait. So what about Europe and Australia? Just so they, they test first more.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:35:38] Well, they they definitely have greater oversight and that doesn't mean that they don't have prob-. I worry about Australia because they tend to follow a little in our footsteps, but not as much as what happens to in Europe. But I really monitor over there what they're doing. And mind you, they've used these chemicals in some instances for years as well. But when they start, I think it is maybe they listen and they start making observations. "Oh, I'm not sure this is right. We need to look into this. Maybe we should monitor this". But when they do have that science, they're done. They're done. We don't just keep using it.

JVN [00:36:12] And then I cut you off about the "Wizard of Oz" analogy which I didn't mean to do, tell me about that.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:36:15] Oh, ok, so L. Frank Baum wrote the book "Wizard of Oz" before the film. He wrote the book in the pre-industrial revolution as a way to teach his children the power of individualism and thinking for oneself in a world that was increasingly beginning to speak for you. Sound familiar?

JVN [00:36:36] Yeah.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:36:37] So, Dorothy, there is a huge political allegory highly studied by our greatest scholars of "The Wizard of Oz" and L. Frank Baum's meaning of each character. Dorothy, she's the every American girl who wanted to right a wrong. So she's headed back home. You know, she's searching for herself and on a journey. And here comes the twister. The twister is a representation of disruption in D.C. So Dorothy gets caught up in the house and flies around and lands on the munchkins. The munchkins are the angry citizens that want her to follow the yellow brick road to the wizard because he's got all the answers. So Dorothy sets out on that journey. And when she meets the Cowardly Lion, his representation is L. Frank Baum's best friend William Bryans Jennings, who is a populist, running for president, known for his fiery rhetoric but lacked courage. Does that sound familiar with a lot of our past politicians? Sorry, but you can see it. And then on their journey, they meet the Scarecrow who had no brain. He was a representation of the American farmer, who all the banks were buying up the land, and that's why they thought the farmer, Scarecrow, had no brain. Look at what's happening with our farmers today and the Monsantos of the world and the glyphosphates and what's happening to them. I mean, so they're again, under duress. It's a very similar pattern. The Tin Man was a representation of industry worker who was losing his heart. And we've seen that happen with many industry workers. Just a heart of steel. I go to work, I make money. It's just closed off. So they become a representation of us, the American people. And look at us today. The American woman who wants to do well, we've got, you know, our farmers, we've got our politicians, we have our workers, our industry workers, our citizens. So on the journey to the yellow brick road, which was the standard, follow the path of money. It was set for the gold standard. That's why it was the yellow brick road.

JVN [00:38:44] Ooh.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:38:44] Dorothy and all of them come into the Wicked Witch who wants to suppress them. I don't want you to know. So she puts them to sleep in the poppy fields. And I look at us today. Have we been in the poppy field asleep? False illusion, comfortability, complacency? Maybe. But as Dorothy and all of them woke up and got to the Wizard, they realized as they pulled the curtain back it was an illusion. And what they learned is the moral of the story that I think we're waking up to right now. They, as the, as the people, we as the people have always had the ability, had the power to find our voice, our courage, our heart, and we do have a brain. And to not let the suppression push us back anymore, because when we become that again, we will find our way home, we collectively can start a process of change. But it's the power of believing that you can. And that's been missing for all this time. And so I see great parallels to the book, "The Wizard of Oz", in what's happening today.

JVN [00:39:58] Well, you have like time and time in your career like come up again, come up against Goliaths and continue to win, as being someone who believes in change and has advocated for change. So what do you say to people that you know, I mean, I think, you know, state legislatures are really important. I think, I've talked about that on this podcast a lot. Obviously-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:40:15] City Council. What's happening right there in your own backyard is so important.

JVN [00:40:20] And state ledge.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:40:21] Absolutely. You're, and I want to share with you again the trickle down thing. It's going to start with you in your backyard, boom and on your way up. Perfect example. These examples would be in my book is Hannibal, Missouri.

JVN [00:40:34] Oh, that's literally across the fucking river where I'm from. Yeah, that's like my hometown is Quincy, Illinois. Like it's directly, yeah.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:40:40] Oh ok. Oh, my gosh, we could talk about problems in Quincy.

JVN [00:40:42] Really?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:40:43] Oh, there's all kinds of stuff.

JVN [00:40:45] What the fuck's going on in Quincy?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:40:48] What the fuck's happening all across America?

JVN [00:40:51] I had well water there in my one house for a long time.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:40:53] Oh my god.

JVN [00:40:54] But it was suppose to be better 'cause sand filtered.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:40:57] You know, we-, talk about well water.

JVN [00:40:58] I literally do self testicle exams once a month. Oh, one a month. Once a mother, fucking month. My shit is symmetrical and smooth. It is symmetrical and smooth.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:41:06] Oh good. And you know what.

JVN [00:41:09] So but what are we gonna do though?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:41:09] You know, this is why it is important to be aware.

JVN [00:41:12] But with elections, but also-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:41:12] Well, I'm going to tell you that real quick.

JVN [00:41:14] But that EPA is really coming up again they're, they're really getting a lot of bad stuff and they're, they're, they're getting a lot of bad regulations through right now.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:41:21] I know.

JVN [00:41:21] What are we gonna do?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:41:22] Well, we're going to keep talking. We're going to become informed, aware, we're gonna be citizens that act in your own backyard like Hannibal, Missouri.

JVN [00:41:29] Yeah. What happened there?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:41:30] Ok, so a group of ladies came to us. They had lead levels higher than Flint. And they were adding ammonia to the system, so we went out there and my water guru, Bob Bowcock, went out, had meetings, we began to inform them and what they started with 1 went to 5 to 15 to 20 to 25 and so on about the use of ammonia. We gave them the tools to go door-to-door, be informed, pass out flyers, and they wanted to do more. So we said, "Run for office". And they're like, "Oh, no, we couldn't do that". We go, "You got city council coming up, run for office". So they did and they won. And so one of the women got on city council. She had

now educated the community. She did a referendum, put it out to vote, yes or no on ammonia. Unanimously "no". They now have lead free water.

JVN [00:42:24] So ammonia, the use of ammonia to treat the bio, the bio what again?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:42:31] Well, what they do is to they use it to help try to control the trihalomethanes.

JVN [00:42:35] Yeah.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:42:35] But what they really do is create a, a distribution system that bacteria loves and it can eat and feed on it a whole lot more.

JVN [00:42:43] 'Cause it just makes it more corrosive and stuff.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:42:44] Yes. And then you get all the lead leaching out into the pipes and that's exactly what happened to them. So the point is individuals, when you believe in yourself and you get involved in your own backyard, and I will tell you over and over and over again how many times I've seen changes because people show up at city council meetings. Have you been to a city council meeting?

JVN [00:43:01] No.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:43:02] Because if you don't, they're only talking to themselves. And I think that we as the people have a responsibility and accountability too. Because believe it or not, sometimes those politicians don't know what's going on out there unless you see it, you know it and you tell them.

JVN [00:43:20] So city councils.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:43:20] So show up.

JVN [00:43:21] City council. And if you live in like your state capital, I mean, you. There is like there's a committee hearing there. There's like things they're like open to the public. But wait. We've been talking for 45 minutes, I could talk to you for the rest of my life, to be honest.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:43:32] Oh, my God. Has it been that long?

JVN [00:43:34] Yes.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:43:34] Look at. Ah, I don't want to go yet.

JVN [00:43:35] But I want to know what this reverse osmosis and shit because what are we going to do with all these chemicals that are already in the water? How do we protect ourselves?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:43:40] Reverse osmosis. We're gonna protect ourselves by using our common sense, which I call logic. We're going to protect ourselves by leveraging our community and using our voices.

JVN [00:43:49] But you said you have a reverse osmosis thing that you use, what is it?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:43:52] I do. So that was coming next.

JVN [00:43:55] Tell me, I'm so sorry.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:43:55] I'm still going to tell you. There's whole household systems that can be expensive. Reverse osmosis is a filtration system that is just your best line of defense. Other ones don't remove as many contaminants. Reverse osmosis can. I like a countertop reverse osmosis system that I use called "AquaTru". My grandbabies drink this water and reverse osmosis, home systems require plumbing. They can be very, very expensive as under sink mounts can't. I'm trying to look for something that's affordable, generally affordable so mothers can have a line of defense and some assurity. Listen, you can't treat what's in the water if you don't know what's in the water. Reverse osmosis gives you the best leeway if you have 12 variables of contaminants at low levels in water that this system will clean so that we can be a little more rest assured at the end of the day. Our child has a safe glass of water or several a day to drink and we as well. So it's going to be very important going forward. And listen, the municipalities are taking on big burdens. Down in Alabama, they moved very quickly on one chemical, one chemical to remove PFOA and spent 50, 60, 70 million dollars and just a few places for one chemical. We have 80,000 plus municipalities in this country. And you brought up a good point called well water. Almost 50 million Americans use well water and it's a system, boom, off the grid. It's not monitored, regulated or anything. Off the grid. That's where I found the chromium 6 in Hinkley, California.

JVN [00:45:40] Oh my god.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:45:41] Well water. So. But not to be afraid, be informed. And be, you can defend yourself and protect yourself by knowing information. And so don't be afraid to look stupid. I've seen people too many times, say, "I don't want to say anything, someone's gonna make fun of me". I don't care if you make fun of me. I want to ask a question and I want to know and I want to understand it. So I use "AquaTru" at home. It's affordable. It's countertop. It works. And I feed it to my grandchildren. I feed it, that's what they drink from, too. Now, listen, it's hard when you're on the road and travel a lot and you travel a lot. Bottled water has been a problem and we've got a lot of problems with plastic. And how do we reduce that? You know, you can fill up your water from "AquaTru", you know, in your container. You can't take it through the airport. And when you're on the other side, there's going to be times that you're going to use bottled water. I always look for glass and there's gonna be issues with glass, but it's recycled a whole lot better. They're trying to be better about the plastics that they're using. I can tell you, know where you're going, what the water supply is like or not. I travel internationally and I will share with you. I've been in a couple of places in Indonesia. I can assure you I can go 16 days without a shower. I'm sorry to say it because I'm not bathing in that water and I've learned to brush my teeth with beer.

JVN [00:47:03] Wow.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:47:03] It works pretty good because a lot of times they just take their tap water and put it in bottled water and they sell it. So use your set of instincts to protect yourself. If water looks funny, smells funny, has a cut, you know, weird, don't drink it. In some instances, we will still need to use bottled water, but we've got to be able to get back to cleaning our water supplies. And if we still have low level issues, have a system in place that will help remove a large amount of the contaminants that will probably be in your water supply.

JVN [00:47:40] And then when does your book come out? You're next book?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:47:42] March.

JVN [00:47:43] March.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:47:43] March.

JVN [00:47:44] And it's, so next March.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:47:46] Yes.

JVN [00:47:46] And it's about like our national kind of water crisis, "Superman Is Not Coming".

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:47:50] No.

JVN [00:47:50] Ok. So love that. Keep your eyes open for that. Ok, so we've been talking for 45 minutes but I have to ask this question really quick, but you have to answer kind of quickly and I'm like dying to know because I'm obsessed with you. Are you on Instagram and Twitter?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:47:59] I am.

JVN [00:48:00] So you-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:48:01] Instagram, I don't Twitter too much.

JVN [00:48:03] But you're into the Gram?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:48:04] I'm starting to, so I'm starting to build that.

JVN [00:48:07] Ok, well, we need to get, I'm going to follow you. You are just such a fucking fire and I'm obsessed with you. I'm obsessed. But so this is the last question. And I say this with like, how did you fucking get like this? You are so smart. Just this, this can, this stick-to-it-ness that you were-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:48:21] It's my upbringing.

JVN [00:48:22] It is amazing. Was this a nature nurture? You were born like, it was a perfect combo. You have. I'm obsessed. Like if I could have even been any more obsessed from the movies, I already was, but like, holy shit. I love that you have only leaned into this and gone harder. Like post-movie. Like you're more in it than ever.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:48:41] Yeah. I've waited my whole career for this moment. We're all waking up. It's become, it's become that movement. And this is what I've always wanted. It is a huge, I can't fix the world's problems. We know that. But I've said a thousand times. Give me your hand and join with me. And collectively, we can do it. It's because it's taken me a long time. I went through a lot after that film. I didn't aspire to be this. I got thrust into a situation where I was like, "What the fuck is happening to me"?

JVN [00:49:10] Yeah, were you obsessed? 5 more minutes, 5 more minutes, please. 5 more minutes, 5 more minutes. Please, please, please.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:49:14] Oh my God.

JVN [00:49:14] Yeah. So was that a hard were you like, "Fuck, man, I don't want to do this". Like, did you have any control over, or like we're selling these rights. It's going, it's happening.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:49:21] Well, I did, but I, I didn't think it would happen, honestly. Somebody comes and buys your rights to do a movie.

JVN [00:49:28] Because it was already done and settled like that settlement had already happened, where the movie leans, leaves off.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:49:32] It was getting close as I got introduced to Jersey films and they wanted to buy the rights. And they told me from the beginning, you know, a lot of times we buy rights, they sit on a shelf and nothing ever gets made. So that's kind of really what I went with. And I was really busy, I wasn't worried about that, doing what I knew to do best, and that was help these people.

JVN [00:49:53] And when someone buys a right, it's probably just like a little like cute paycheck, but probably not as good as a bonus they ended up giving you at the end of the movie.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:49:59] No.

JVN [00:49:59] But it's like-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:49:59] It was nothing near that.

JVN [00:50:00] But it's like better than a kick in the shin, and you're like, "Oh, ok. But they probably won't do anything with it".

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:04] Listen. It was \$70,000 check. And I was a single mom and I'd never seen \$70,000 in my life.

JVN [00:50:12] Well, that's a shit load of money.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:13] Yes, it is.

JVN [00:50:13] Yes. Like Ed gave me this bonus. I always got this paycheck for \$70,000. yes.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:17] I'm like, "Oh, my God. How could this even be happening"?

JVN [00:50:19] And then it closes? And then the settlement happens.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:22] And settlement hap-.

JVN [00:50:23] Then you get your bonus at the end of the movie. But like in real life.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:27] Yeah, that's you know, that's one thing that caught me when we watched the movie for the first time.

JVN [00:50:30] Because it was so moving. I ugly cry so fucking hard every time I see that part. Did you kind of go off on it in real life when you were like, you know, it's about how my work is valued in this goddamn company.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:42] I was, oh my, every day of my life, I miss Ed Masry and my father so much. And Ed and I had that frick and frack routine. It just never ended.

JVN [00:50:51] But the producers that made the movie, did they, like, really come to you in the development of it to be like, "What was your guys's relationship like"?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:50:56] Yes.

JVN [00:50:57] Was there people at the place that, like, we criticize how you dressed and you be like, "Fuck off Krispy Kreme"? Like would you ever say that or something similar right behind their back?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:05] Oh.

JVN [00:51:05] Were they kind of nightmares? They were, because they were just like, "Who is this bitch who was like a client and now like she's coming all up in here thinking"?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:10] Absolutely, and you know what was bothering me? I was being judged by the way I dressed. And that pissed me off. So what-.

JVN [00:51:18] It's not your fault you have good fucking style.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:19] Just because you think I dress this way you think I'm stupid? Well, ha ha ha. It's not true.

JVN [00:51:24] You climb your ass down there in that stiff suit and get the goddamn dead two headed frog in the green water.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:30] They were there. Oh, my gosh.

JVN [00:51:31] But they couldn't have done that in their stiff shoulder pad outfits.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:34] That's why I tell you, don't get boxed in. That's the thing that drives me crazy. And then, you know, the more that happens to people and the more they step back, they step back and they step back. And I, we-.

JVN [00:51:46] But wait, so the producers consulted with you and stuff?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:48] Absolutely. I'll tell you who is amazing. A was Jersey Films. Carla Shamberg, Stacey Cher, Danny DeVito and Steven Soderbergh.

JVN [00:51:56] Danny DeVito. He was an executive producer?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:51:58] He was Jersey Films. He was a partner at Jersey Films.

JVN [00:52:02] Oh, who knew?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:52:03] Yeah.

JVN [00:52:03] And then so you went to the premiere.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:52:03] And Soderbergh is amazing. Oh, my God. When I went to the premiere, I shook so bad, Universal came up to me and said, "If you don't stop shaking, we're going to take you home".

JVN [00:52:12] And did you walk the carpet with Julia?

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:52:14] I-, Julia was out before me. So when I arrived, Steven Soderbergh met me at the car and he walked on my right and kept me to the left and literally my knees were knocking. I was shaking so bad. And as I'm coming down, I can hear all the screaming and all the

lights and all the fanfare and I'm like, I'm telling you, my heart was pounding, I had cotton mouth, I couldn't breathe. I'm like, I'm really scared. And just as we turned the corner to the red carpet, Steven's like, "You're gonna have to get over that". And he gave me a push and he goes, "Now". And it was like, zoom. I was, I'm so happy I didn't pee myself. I was terrified. Terrified.

JVN [00:52:55] I feel like I've only gotten to spend this-. Fine. They're-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:52:59] I'm sorry.

JVN [00:52:59] No.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:53:01] Can I come back?

JVN [00:53:01] Yes. Please.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:53:01] Good.

JVN [00:53:02] This probably actually will have to be a two part. Like we'll probably have to. Yeah. No, like for real. But like it feels, I always heard in the salon that like fame doesn't change you, it makes you more of who you already were. And from this last like hour that I've spent with you having like that unexpected thing happen in, in the movie "Erin Brockovich", like and then just spending that, hearing, like what you been doing since I feel like you like that didn't make you lose yourself. Like it only made you like find yourself even more and like harder and you've continued to like use this platform to spread like your word. And I just think you were such an incredible force of nature.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:53:36] It's been a calling and sometimes I don't always understand why, but I get it, and I'm, I'd never want to be seen as different than anyone else. You know, I'm the person that will break out into song by The Beatles. I am you, you are me, we are all together. And I'm uncomfortable with being put on any kind of pedestal. I'm a human. We all are. And that's what I fight for.

JVN [00:54:02] Me too. And I get that people because I like when people like really like like, you know, really like with a fuse with me on like things that I-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:54:08] You feel uncomfortable sometimes, I do too.

JVN [00:54:10] Yeah, for sure. But, but I think it's important for-.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:54:14] To use the voice to help all.

JVN [00:54:16] Well, not, but you. No. Because you already do that. Like for you to recognize in yourself that you have inspired so much change in people and you've been a source of strength and your story has been a source of strength and can-do-itiveness and stick-to-itiveness.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:54:30] Stick-to-itiveness.

JVN [00:54:31] But that's amazing.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:54:32] Can-do-itiveness, though, write that down. It's a good new one.

JVN [00:54:34] But that is incredible. And thank you so much for being that representation. And you've really blew my mind in this last hour. Like you so far, blew me away from anything I thought I was going, like I just think you're so incredible.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:54:44] Well, I think the same of you. And it has been a joy and a thrill. And I'm a fan. And I don't just say that. And thank you. I hope to come back.

JVN [00:54:53] We're absolutely coming back. And we're. But. My filter just worked. I love you so much. And I'm going to say that right after we're done. But we have to make some important content on the Instagram.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:55:03] I see them over there.

JVN [00:55:03] No, no. I love you so much. That was amazing. And let's make some content for Instagram.

ERIN BROCKOVICH [00:55:06] Thank you. OK.

JVN [00:55:11] You've been listening to "Getting Curious" with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Erin Brockovich. You'll find links to her work and socials in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Follow me on Instagram and Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. It's our new gorgeous social media thing. You should get it together. We love it so much. Follow, follow, follow. Yes, yes, yes. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend, showed them how to subscribe. You know, we're all up on Spotify, we're all up on Apple podcasts. We everywhere. "Getting Curious" is produced by Cody Zigler, Emily Bossa, Julie Carrillo, Rae Ellis and Colin Anderson. Digital Media by Larry Neman and Booking Consulting by Mary O'Hara.