

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness and Munroe Bergdorf

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 Munroe Bergdorf, where I ask her: How are you lighting up the runway for representation? And before we get going, I just wanted to say: thank you so much for listening to Getting Curious! Thank you so much for supporting Getting Curious and our team. We work so hard to bring this show to you week after week and we love doing it, we love you for supporting us. I just never really hop on and say that at the top, so I just wanted to say I thank you, I love you and thank you so much for your support. And this week, we have such an incredible guest, Munroe Bergdorf! Yay!

Welcome to Getting Curious. This is Jonathan Van Ness and we have got such a fucking gorgeous episode for you not to cuss right off the top, but it really is just so gorgeous. And without any further ado, welcome Munroe Bergdorf, who is a model and social activist. If you've been living under several rocks earlier this year, I got to be on her podcast The Way We Are. Today, she's the guest on ours. Honey, how are you, Munroe?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:01:04] I'm so good. How are you?

JVN [00:01:06] Really good. So obviously spoiler's out: you're British. [CROSSTALK] You've got the British accent. It's happening. So first of all, this is going to be coming out in Pride. So Happy Pride!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:01:20] Happy pride, everybody.

JVN [00:01:20] I would say it's been our strongest pride ever on Getting Curious. We've been exploring, like, what queer joy in nature looks like. So we've studied honey, like, queer mycology. Do you know what that is?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:01:33] No!

JVN [00:01:34] It's, like, queer mushrooms. So it turns out, like, mushrooms have, like, like, literally, like, dozens of genders and, like, several ways of reproducing. So they're a little bit queer and, like, cool and, like, shows us, like, a different biological way that like, isn't the way that, you know, we are, which is just so interesting. And we've, we've gotten to explore, like, queer farming and just, like, a lot of cool queer stuff that we're living for. But before we get into that, what are you doing for Pride this year? Like, what are you excited for? What, like, what happened? What are you doing?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:02:01] I'm definitely marching. One hundred percent marching. And I haven't marched for awhile, actually, and I think many of us actually have. But this will be

like the first in-person LGBT Pride that I've been to for a while. I've been to trans pride. I know what I'm doing for trans pride. I'm definitely going to be speaking at trans pride because there's a lot to talk about. There's so much going on in the UK when it comes to trans rights and people trying to take them away, trying to put gates in, you know, in our, in our way, trying to put in some glass ceilings. And so, I mean, I think there's a lot to kind of really summarize and it's really community focused and it's a really great vibe. It's always a great vibe.

JVN [00:02:46] Well, I think that's a really good plan. I think one thing that I, like, I'm all about, like, duality about how, like, two things can be true at once. And I think that, like, for me it's, like, I like to celebrate pride, like, all the time. I think that it's, it is year round, it's an all the time thing. *And also* at the same time, I think that June is, like, a great time for us to, like, have more outreach and be more vocal. And just because it's, like, we can't really get that much attention from the straights and other times, so are the cis-es and the straights from other times they're like, Let's take it while we can get it and try to like expand that world view. But I do think that for us as queer people, it's really important for us to like connect in nature because so many people are like just giving us so much to, like, not feel fulfilled about and not feel ingrained in. So, like, what's your relationship with nature like? Do you get off on, like, some gardening vibes? Do you get off on, like, going to, like, a little park? Is it, like, hard to get into nature vibes in London because it's like the British concrete jungle, darling.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:03:47] It's not too hard to get into nature. And I mean, I've got lots of pets. We've definitely had this conversation. We've both got our own Fab Fives. So that is like my little slice of nature having like my babies. You can probably hear them walking around in the background, but also I live right next to, like, a national park and London's pretty green if you know where to go. Like places like Hampstead Heath, like, Hyde Park, it is very green. But I mean, I grew up in the countryside, so I was surrounded by nature and I didn't really have a lot of friends. So I tended to just kind of be on my own and nature reserves and just like splashing around in like rivers and creeks. And it's really where I found, like, my solace from being bullied or, you know, not feeling like my parents are listening to me. It's just really where I kind of went to escape. So nature has always been an escape for me.

JVN [00:04:45] I love our garden, but in, like, 22 to 30 minute chunks, like, I'm not trying to go out there for like, you know, 5 hours and, like, do the most, like, my husband more. I'm, like, "Can you go, like, build the cage and, like, deal with, like, the really big things?" But, like, little baby tasks.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:04:59] You've got an elaborate garden, honey! I was like—"When do they have the time?"

JVN [00:05:05] It's him, honey! He's British. It's like I feel like these British people, they love these gardens. So he's just out there twiddling around in the garden. So I'll come out and make, like, a little cameo, but it is just such a, like, relaxing thing to be in nature. Will you, like,

go on a hike? Do you like to still go creaking at this point, like, will you be, like, "Oh that sounds fun," or kind of, like, "Been there, done that."

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:05:26] I would definitely say over time I've got more precious, and I'm not necessarily you know, I'm quite high maintenance, so I'm not really looking to, you know, start climbing some mountains and stuff like that. But I used to, so I know that I *can*, and I spent, like, a month in Africa climbing Mount Meru. So, you know, I can do it. And I do like to do it every now and again.

JVN [00:05:51] What? I feel like you can't just, like, breeze over that comment without, like, telling us about it. So, when does this happen, like, Munroe goes to Africa. 20...

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:06:00] 2004.

JVN [00:06:02] 2004! And you climbed a mountain in Africa?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:06:06] Yes.

JVN [00:06:07] Was it scary?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:06:08] Yes, it was! But I was, like, of that age where you don't have much of, like, a fear index. You're not really, you know, completely, like, I was what, 18 years old and I didn't really understand how dangerous it was. But it was, it was very surreal. It was one of the most beautiful trips I've ever taken and just, you know, getting to stand at the top of a mountain, which literally took multiple days, almost a week to get up this mountain. And yeah, I just felt so much satisfaction, but I don't necessarily do extreme nature pursuits anymore. I do like to go to the beach.

JVN [00:06:54] I love the beach. I love the beach!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:06:56] Love the beach! That's kind of like my nature. I love the ocean. And I was just in the south of France, actually, and we kind of did some climbing. My boyfriend lives in the south of France, so I'm out there quite a lot.

JVN [00:07:08] In Nice?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:07:09] In Marseilles.

JVN [00:07:10] I don't even know that word. And it's just gorgeous? Wait, so you haven't seen the Downton Abbey movie yet, have you? The new one. [CROSSTALK] Can I just tell you, there's this whole, like, south of France, like, jaunt that is so cute. In, like, the early 1930s. I'm just saying, you should watch it. We did an episode of some of the cast members from Downton, like, we're a little bit obsessed over here and Getting Curious about the movie just,

I'm not even getting paid for this. I'm just saying it's worth it. It's—, the hair and make up is really good.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:07:37] Thank you for the advice. I'll definitely check it out.

JVN [00:07:39] So I, I also feel like with climbing mountains, like, you kind of just said why I can't get into it because, like, to take seven days to get up to something. It's like, I never want to stay anywhere for more than 20 minutes.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:07:53] It's a lot! I mean, like, in my childhood, I really was very in nature. Like I was part of, like, the scouts and I would go potholing. And, like, now the idea of going through a small crack in the floor and crawling around under the ground and not being able to turn around or turn back and, like, someone behind you and someone in front of you and you're just, like, in a little tunnel. That's like my idea of hell. So I don't really know. I think my parents probably had a big role to play in it. They were like, "Go outside, play outside." And I'm glad that they did it because I've got, you know, I didn't die. And I think it would be much more scary as an adult, and I probably never would have done that. So I think it was good that I was pushed to do it at an early age because now I'm, like, I'm quite fearless, really, as an adult, and I think that those kind of experiences definitely helped me to be as fearless as I am, sometimes.

JVN [00:08:56] It's giving me, like, intrusive thoughts of like, like, Munroe on nature, like gorgeous photoshoots, like, and like it's giving wheat field, like, in, like, the woods. It's giving, like, America's Next Top model, but, like, Britain's Next Top model, but international Next Top Model, you know what I'm saying? Beach, woods, mountain, like, four seasons. I'm—

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:09:13] Just don't put me down any holes in the floor!

JVN [00:08:15] No holes in the floor.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:09:16] That era has passed, darling!

JVN [00:09:19] Although do you remember that one episode of America's Next Top Model when they made them be like the seven deadly sins and pose in the—

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:09:26] In the grave!

JVN [00:09:27] But can I just say, like, the hair and makeup on that episode was like, really good. I'm sorry. Like, it was so good, but it was so fucked up. The one girl that they made do gluttony, they were, like, "Can you, like, sexily eat, like, hamburgers in a grave?" And she was like, "I guess," like, they were really doing the most back then.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:09:42] Didn't her, like, her friend, like, just die?

JVN [00:09:45] It was that episode because one of the girls had just, her friends had just died. But I don't feel like it was the girl who had to play the part of gluttony with, like, burgers and donuts in the grave, like, they were throwing, like, burgers and donuts. It was the early 2000 were at time, like, we didn't even know.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:10:00] It was wild, it was really, really wild. I'm actually writing about this in my book in regards to, like, beauty standards and the idea that everybody had to, you know, strive to be as beautiful as a handful of stereotypes. And I mean, they all were essentially white. They were all cis, they were all straight. The concept of, like, queer beauty or trans beauty or even Black beauty, to an extent, hadn't really, it wasn't taken seriously. And it was there, you know, there was people that were queer but just closeted and beautiful. But still, the people they got, the opportunities, you know, didn't look like, you know, some of the people that are now getting their shine and, you know, rightly so. It's, it was just a really, really weird time.

JVN [00:10:47] God, wait, so part of why we were, like, doing this, like, Pride in Nature series. And it comes up for me a lot and like, in my work and just in my life, I think, and I'm sure that you've dealt with this as well. It's like this idea that, like, transness or gender non-conformity is like a new thing or like a new— And that's been propagated by people like J.K. Rowling saying, "You know, if I had been, like, afforded the opportunity when I was young," it's, like, "Actually J.K., people were trans then. Like, people have always been trans then. It's just like, sorry to hear about it in the seventies, but like, we actually have been here for hundreds of years." And but then this other thing of like that, it's not natural or that like we aren't like. And so that's why we wanted to really explore like queerness and nature because it's a shocker. It turns out there are totally queer animals that are totally like lots of queerness in the animal kingdom all over the place. Like we're super duper, duper as natural as they come. Like, sorry, it's not our fault. I think about ALOK, who's just, like, a genius, iconic thought leader. You know, you know, ALOK, we love ALOK.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:11:44] Yeah!

JVN [00:11:45] On ALOK's Instagram, like, when they'll deal with a troll or just, like, a nasty person. They do these, like, elegant, like, gorgeous, like, love letters to people.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:11:53] They've got the patience of a saint.

JVN [00:11:55] I look up to that! [CROSSTALK] When people come like, that to me, yeah, I'm, like, <<CIRCUS MUSIC STARTS>> "Your mom's ugly. You're a d*mb c*nt. I hope you fucking die young. Walk in front of a bus, Your hair fucking sucks, like, your grandma is ignorant and I hate everybody that ever came from your family and, like, I hope you fucking die." And then I block them. And then I'm, like, "Oh, my God. I'm Chrissy Teigen. Oh, my God." <<CIRCUS MUSIC ENDS>> So, like, what do you do to, you know, what do you do with people that, like,

are, like, just nightmare, like, Marjorie Taylor Greenes? You know who that lady is? Like that Georgian Republican. I know. I'm hoping that maybe in the United Kingdom, you guys, like, didn't have to deal.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:12:32] Unfortunately, I'm aware of who she is. Yeah. I mean, I used to reply to people that, you know, obviously know what they're saying, and they, they don't want to expand their minds. They don't want to actually have a conversation about it. They just want to double down and, you know, essentially get a rise out of you because they, they love the confrontation of it all. They've got no intention of, you know, understanding the other side of what they think. So, you know, I just don't have any time for it, really. I mean, I don't I'm not here for the debate. I'm not here to sit with somebody who doesn't understand the gravity of what they're saying and someone as irresponsible as, you know, some of the people out there that are actively campaigning for people to give birth against that will or, you know, abolish health care for trans kids or, you know, gunning for voter suppression. All of these things are so violent. I'm not going to spend my time, you know, going back and forth with somebody who is actively invested in dehumanization and violence. That is not something that I want to do with my time or my energy.

But I definitely applaud people that do, especially people with large platforms that use that as an educational tool to show other people about how to have these conversations. Because it's a choice for me. You know, I live a life where I have access to privilege, where I don't need to have a lot of the conversations that I would be exposed to if I had less privilege. And I am somewhat of a recluse these days, and that is intentional just because I've had so many of these conversations before and I really am very protective of my peace and who is around me. But a lot of people don't have that option, you know, and I think that ALOK is showing how we can have these conversations, how you can essentially outsmart these people, how, you know, certain phrases such as pro-life are actually redundant because it's not about being pro-life. It's not about, you know, being for the living. It's about forcing people against their will to have a child put into the world that they didn't want, that they weren't ready for. And then that child's going to be affected. And then how do you support that child? Do you support that child if they're gay, do you support that child? If they grow up to be trans, if they're Black? And, you know, it's, like, what is this for?

JVN [00:15:35] But actually in the US it doesn't even fucking matter. Just at the end of May, like half of the Republican House of Representatives like voted against funding this emergency order to, like, get baby formula available. [CROSSTALK] So that doesn't matter if you, like, are going to grow up to be, like, a white straight kid or whatever it is. It's, like, they're, like, "You must have the baby and you're fucked, period, because, like, we're going to make sure that there's no health care, there is no welfare, there's no—" I mean, it's going to disproportionately affect—

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:16:04] We know that is just for the poor, isn't it? Because the rich will find a way and the rich will protect the rich. The rich aren't going to go to jail for having an

abortion. And they will, they will find a way to have it. It's about maintaining poverty so that people are desperate, so that people will work for zero-hour contracts, so that people will work exploitative hours for massive corporations who pay them pittance. It is really about maintaining the status quo. They want more Black babies to harass so that when they become young adults, they can stick them in prison. They want more white babies to maintain white supremacy. It's, it's about maintaining society as it is. And it's honestly disgusting.

JVN [00:16:57] Yeah. I mean, I think, I couldn't agree with you more. But also it's, like, I didn't say this quote, Ashlee Marie Preston did, who I'm obsessed with. But she always says, you know, like, "White supremacy will eat its own young." And even, like, women who vote for, like, anti-trans things, thinking that they're protecting things, it actually ends up hurting people that vote for these measures in the first place. And that's what I'm trying to, like, make people or help people understand is that it's, like, you are not safe from this.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:17:23] The people that vote for it, 100% do, you know, it's a lie, isn't it? It's conservative governments make their voters believe that they're going to have a slice of this power that they're voting for. And it never happens. But because the prejudice that is fostered within that party and the people that follow and vote for it is so strong they will essentially vote against their neighbor, then form a coalition with their neighbor to get what they actually need. It's, it's about divide and conquer. Essentially, if the white working class realized that they've got much more in common with refugees and Black people and immigrants and queer people and disabled people than they do with the superrich, then we would be so much more powerful as a blended community if we of marginalized people all came together and realized that marginalization is marginalization. And if it's not one thing, then it will be in the other. If we all came together and fought together, then we would get so much more done. But because the 1% have divided us and made us against each other and fearful of each other and, you know, thinking that, you know, if I screw so-and-so over, then it will get me up the ladder. And that didn't work for feminism. And it's not going to work ever. You know, all of this, like, you know, TERFism and anti-trans transness in the feminist movement that's not going to get you absolved from the patriarchy. Do, why do you think that the why do you think that, you know, going after trans people is going to empower anybody? It doesn't and it doesn't get us any closer to the goal.

JVN [00:19:24] It reminds me of Stacey Abrams, who we got to interview on Getting Curious, which was, like, such an amazing person to get to chat with. But she said, the phenomenon that you're referring to, it's like when the top 1% makes the system such as that, we're over here fighting for crumbs, but then they are eating this whole cake. So, like, that trans exclusionary radical feminism is about, like, you know, getting cis women to, like, attack trans women. But then it's, like, missing the wider issue of like the real threat to women's sports is actually, like, the rampant underfunding of women's sports, the lack of, like, revenue for professional female athletes that, like, their male counterparts get, except for we just in the US. I know that you guys got football, but like our soccer girls, they got, like, the same payment as the men!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:20:05] Oh, amazing! That's not happening anytime soon over here, let me tell you.

JVN [00:20:09] And they deserve it because, like, they actually, like, women's stuff, like, our women's soccer team actually. Like, you know, they actually when.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:20:15] Shout-out to Megan!

JVN [00:20:16] Yeah, like our boys, like, do not so but it is, that's really cool. But that's what's really the threat to women's sports and like the excellence of women's sports is that it's, like, underfunded, like, they're given less resources.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:20:28] Underregulated as well. The amount of abuse that goes on.

JVN [00:20:31] Sexual abuse, yes! And it's, like, ALOK also says, I identify as non-binary trans but if I had been like, you know, someone who, like, was like wanting to play sports, do you think I'm a threat to gymnastics, honey? Like, I am as mediocre as they come, honey. Just to get a participation ribbon would be, like my, like, my ceiling!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:20:54] I think it's gaggy that they think that just because they're trans means that we're better.

JVN [00:21:03] There are so many, like, not that good athletes that, you know, we just want to, like, play it. It's, like, it's dance team. It's, like, your junior varsity, like, golf team or whatever, like, just let people play.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:21:14] Also, it's not just, you know, pro athletes or, you know, aspiring athletes. It's literally if someone wants to go down to the swimming pool and swim, you know. The, the whole narrative of, you know, gendered not just gendered spaces, but trans exclusionary gendered spaces, that "this is just a space just for 'biological women.'" It stops not only kids participating in sports or adults participating in athletics or, you know, professionally. It's literally affecting people feeling like they can even exercise in certain spaces. And in the UK we are legally allowed to as trans women and or as trans men or non-binary people, to use the spaces that are in line with our gender identity, it is literally protected by the Gender Recognition Act. And we've got the most powerful minister in the country, the Prime Minister, muddying the narrative by prioritizing his personal beliefs that cisgender women should have women only spaces and framing it as if trans women don't already have access to these spaces. I'd just written an article actually for Glamour magazine talking about all of the mistruths and misconceptions about the trans community and about how, you know, all of these things that people are so fearful of us gaining in terms of what that means for cisgender women's rights. We've had for decades and nothing's happened. It's just

being weaponized with intent to not only cause harm to the community, but also to again get votes by conservative voters.

JVN [00:23:06] If anyone is listening to this that is pissed off and maybe you're, like, a cis ally, honey, or maybe you're, like, in the queer community and you're also pissed. I have this, like, gorgeous, like, revenge daydream about what we're talking about, ready? I mean, someone who is, like, got Erin Brockovich, like, data retrieval ability, like, you are going into the archives. Okay. We are researching per year. How many—this isn't, like, that cheerful, but, you know, *Morbid* is my new favorite podcast—so, whatever. We are researching, how many cis women are attacked by men! Men! In these rest stops and bathrooms. And then let's see how many cis women are attacked by trans women in bathrooms. And I have a sneaking suspicion, honey, that it's going to be, like, hundreds to zero.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:23:54] I wrote in this article that, you know, every single community is going to have, you know, somebody that plays into the stereotype that acts in a violent way. But they don't represent the whole community. So, like, we wouldn't say that every single cisgender white woman is a Myra Hindley.

JVN [00:24:16] Who's Myra Hindley? Is she your guys', like—

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:24:17] Oh, god, she's, like, one of the most prolific child killers in the UK.

JVN [00:23:24] Oh, she killed them.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:24:25] She buried children in the Yorkshire moors.

JVN [00:24:29] A lady serial killer?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:24:30] A lady serial killer. But we're not saying that all cisgender white women are lady serial killers. Just like we're not saying that all white cis boys are potential school shooters. Do you know what I mean? I mean, it's because that would be unfair to place that burden on an entire cross-section of society. It's, you know, there's always going to be people that are violent from every single community. But then to take that very small minority and then tar an entire community with that brush is violent. But the real crux of the issue rests on the fact that the UK law says trans women are women. If you legally change your gender in the eyes of you know, you don't change your gender, you just are who you are. But in the eyes of the law, if you change your gender and your paperwork and all that kind of stuff, then you are a woman. And so that's that! But we've got literally the prime minister calling trans women biological men and refusing to use the word transgender women.

JVN [00:25:37] Yes. And remember, we were talking earlier and you were like, you know, we need people to realize kind of, like, like, to help their neighbor. Like they'll vote against their neighbor for, like this, like, slice of imaginary privilege.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:25:51] Mm hmm.

JVN [00:25:52] So that's what I think, you know, folks like ALOK, and myself less eloquently. And I know that you weren't out saying this, too, but it's, like, these type of laws encourage the government to look at everyone's pussy and everyone's fucking actually, everyone's genitals. Their vaginas, they're dingalings, their—all of them and, like, everywhere in between. Honey, you got whatever you got going down there. So what do you want, Boris? What do you want? Fucking in these bathrooms? Do you want an enforcer? Do you want, like, Aunt Lydia from Handmaid's Tale who stands in the front of every men's and women's doorway? And you have to, like, lift up your outfit and show them your—

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:26:30] But it can't be. You can't just, you know, single out someone on suspicion of them being trans because that's literal discrimination.

JVN [00:26:37] But that's what they're literally doing with these bills!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:26:40] That's what they want to do is not actually enforceable.

JVN [00:26:43] But in the U.S., like these, like, anti-trans sports bills, like, so how are we going to enforce that? When a team sport decides that one of those kids on their team they suspect is trans. Who decides that? Are we subpoenaing the birth certificate? Are we taking pictures of genitals? Are we what are we doing? Is the coach, like, who enforces that? We. We're. Really inviting the government to look under the fucking pants of our youth with these bills, with the anti-trans sports bills. Then with these bathroom bills, how do you enforce that? And also it acts like we don't know that intersex people exist. We know that 2% of the population is intersex. So this is, the imaginary enforcement of these boundaries of like men and women is also like does it even reflect nature.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:27:28] No, it doesn't reflect nature at all. You know, and intersexism can take so many different forms, so many different forms. It's again an umbrella term. Just like being trans is an umbrella term. There are so many different ways of being and just to force humanity into two different sections is not only inaccurate or undoable, but also it is cruel because you're not allowing people to understand themselves fully. It's, it is indoctrination in its truest sense.

JVN [00:28:07] So, you know, sometimes I just feel like I fucking hate it here, but it is god damn Pride. And we are going to experience queer joy right now. No, we are. So here's the thing about you that I'm obsessed with. You're a model in not one, but two ways. You are a literal model, like a literal, like, model. And you're also, like, a role model, which we love. You

can talk about the role model things because we're obsessed with role model things but, like, I also do just love life, fashion. And you are—, can I just say everyone, like, not to, like, cause I'm trying to do this new thing where I don't come on to, like, so many of our guests by complimenting them all the time. But, you know, you are like the most breathtaking person. And with this fucking ponytail that you're giving me today, the face that you're serving, what has been like your favorite photoshoot you ever did? Like, what's a favorite thing you've done so far, modeling wise, and what's the thing that you really want to do? And I want to put a caveat on that. Like, if social media, like, didn't exist. Cause you already did Teen Vogue, or it was British Vogue! British Vogue, Teen Vogue.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:29:05] I've done both, I've done both.

JVN [00:29:07] Ah!! Which one is—you couldn't possibly pick a favorite because all the images were so stun?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:29:12] I can't pick a favorite. I mean, I'm British so British Vogue is always, you know. I mean, I love Edward, Edward's like my uncle. So it's, you know, whenever Edward calls, it's always a pleasure. So I'll always say the most important thing and the most exciting thing that you can do in fashion is British Vogue.

JVN [00:29:36] What was it like shooting? Like was it like it was like a three day thing? Like a two day thing. Did you have, like, 18 looks? Like, how did you approve the looks?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:29:44] One day. It was one day. And I shot it with two of my best friends. So it was yeah, it was a really, really special day. And I've done a few things with British Vogue, but yeah, it's always amazing to work with Edward, and I love him. I think he's is incredible what he's done with British Vogue in terms of turning it from something extremely exclusive and white and cis and just quite uninspired. Actually, I think that he really took it into, you know, the present day. He he made it into something that everyone can see themselves within. And, you know, fashion is meant to be for everybody. And he's really created a magazine that reflects the world as it is. And I've got so much, you know, love for Edward. And I was at his wedding. And let me tell you that this was the most incredible wedding night I've ever been to. I'm not going to drop anything because it is not my tea to spill. But like he's just a magical person and his husband is just, Alec is, he's a lovely, lovely human being. They're just the best couple.

JVN [00:31:03] And I mean, it's still like it's still like anything to pieces. Like it's not British Vogue's fault and it's like, really chic. So it's like it's like it's more like inclusive, but it's still like hella chic.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:31:14] It's hella chic! I think it redefines what chic is. And I think chic isn't just, you know, a skinny French girl with pearls and, you know, a cunt blow out. It's, you know, she chic be anything, you know. And when I was growing up, I didn't see chic Black

trans women in the covers of magazines or in the magazine editorial. I didn't see, you know, plus-size women like Paloma [Elsesser] or Precious Lee strutting down the runways. You know, it's, it's a whole new world. And it's amazing because there's going to be so many kids that grow up wanting to be more like Paloma, because that is somebody who represents them in how they are. Rather than telling them who they should be. And I think that that is such a powerful, powerful thing. You know, if I had seen, you know, Black trans women like MJ [Rodriguez], if I had seen Indya [Moore] on screen, I'd seen Dominique [Jackson] on screen. If I had seen all of these amazing trans women and non-binary people completely slaying their industries, I would feel so much less scared about being myself and about, you know, who I will be in the future. I was so scared of myself. I wasn't just scared of the world. I was literally scared of myself. I was like, "Oh my God, I'm not only growing into a young Black man and what other people see that as. I'm not even that." And I don't understand what it means if I don't transition. I don't understand what it means if I do transition, because there's so little representation out there that I just felt very, very lost representation is so, so, so important. And made me very, very proud to be living in this era. And part of this change.

JVN [00:33:19] You, I mean, and you've been, like, a leader of this change. With modeling, though, is there, like, is there, like, a bucket list thing that you haven't done that you still want to do?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:33:26] Oh, I've got loads I want to do. Loads. I've shot for American Vogue once but it was an editorial but I think I really want, like, a big American Vogue moment.

JVN [00:33:38] I want multiple covers! Do you know what I want? Like, not at all. Like her story at all. Like, so this is, like, maybe not the best analogy, but I'm going to go for it anyway. Have you ever seen Gia, like, with Angelina Jolie, like the story of Gia?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:33:49] Yes. Yes. My cat's name is Gia!

JVN [00:33:52] The only part that I want, like, just the one part with, like, that montage of all the covers. Like like but I want that for, like, the duration of your career where it's just like, cover, cover, cover, cover, cover, cover, cover. [HANDS SHUFFLING] is there like a photographer who you're, like, really wanting to work?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:34:08] So I definitely want to work with, with Tim Walker. I'm obsessed with Tim Walker's work and I have been since my teen years. I haven't shot with Nick Knight for a very, very long time. And we did an editorial for another magazine, which is one of my first big editorials in, I think, 2015. So I really want to work with Nick again. What-, I obviously want to do, the Met Gala, does that count as modeling? And yeah, it's something like so the Met Gala. American Vogue, obviously. I would love it in terms of like I mean, I don't necessarily have dreams to work with brands because it's, you know, I kind of think that that's like kind of problematic a little bit. Like I'd rather work with like artists and obviously designers

are artists, but I think when it goes into the branding kind of thing, but I'm obsessed with Donatella Versace and I would love to just do anything. We've done it. I mean, even if I could just go out and collect a coffee, it would be an honor, to be honest.

JVN [00:35:21 That's like what I'm like, "Can I pay Beyoncé to be like a production assistant?" Like, or can I pay to be like the hairdressing assistant. Like, I will. I can even, like, lay over a puddle if you want to, like just straight up like like but you can't do that because you're a literal model like you got like must protect the good side of you can't like I guess you get my face up if you want and but Beyoncé would never walk on you. I knew how. And you're like, she would never do that to you. Whereas, like, I really would, like, pay her to, like, just like, you don't like, I mean, like, I make Beyoncé, like, "I'll do anything for you."

In an essay for the Queer Bible, you write that for parents of trans kids, "It's never really about clothes it's never really about makeup. It's about not understanding and also being afraid of what society's going to think about your child." Hello.

In my first book *Over the Top*, I talked about like when I discovered evening gowns and like just loving them so much and like wanting to be in them. And then the first time my dad walked in on me in an evening gown and it was like being put into, like, a dryer, like, because, like the evening gown got, like, ripped off me so fast. And I was like, I mean, just being shaken all around. It's like you know— And, like, I knew really quick that I had, like, fucked up for him. And so then I had to, like, do it in secret. Like, my auntie would be like, okay, there's 10 minutes if you want to put it on, but then we got to take it off because it's like this thing. So, but that's so true. Like, it wasn't about me and it wasn't about the clothes. It's like what that meant for the family. Like what something like that could mean for our family. And reading that was really. You just really lay bare so much of like what that really what that truth really is. So what is that? What does that acceptance process look like for you and your life? And even, you know, you've been in the public eye now for a while. You and— when you were saying that there just wasn't a representation like. What does that mean to you, that you've navigated this and forge this path and hoping that it can kind of like. Do you feel like that can help some or like it's helping families, like, not have that shame spiral?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:37:26] I do. I think I mean, I do get a lot of messages from trans parents. And actually, I was, um, I was at a little spa with my boyfriend a few months ago, and I was just like, we were just having a dinner and like having a laugh. And I was talking to him about like how stressful it is by kind of being a representative for your community and what comes with that. And then there was a woman that was sat next to me and she just turned to me and she says, "I know I shouldn't do this but I just wanted to say that somebody that I know has a trans kid and all of the work that you're doing has helped her so immensely with understanding her child. So please don't feel like it's all for nothing." And then a few weeks after that, I interviewed a young actress called Yasmin Finney, who's in a new show called *Heartstopper* on Netflix.

JVN [00:38:24] Yeah, of course!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:38:25] Star is just going up and up and up. And she was, she told me that when she was 14, she was watching me on Good Morning Britain debate Piers Morgan. And that was the first time that she saw any representation and somebody that she could see herself. And, and those two things just really stuck with me because I guess it's hard to see the impact of the work that you do because, you know, I just kind of keep myself to myself. I do my work, I hang out with my friends, I see my family, I hang out with my boyfriend. And, you know, I'm pretty— I've had all my party phase and I'm not really out and about anymore, really. So just kind of knowing that I'm having a positive impact to some people in the world is amazing. So I feel proud to be part of that and I feel proud to have been able to do that. And what was the other question?

JVN [00:39:25] Do you feel like some of that work can help to, like, lessen the shame spiral of, like, family?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:39:29] Yeah, I do. Because, you know, if I wrote that because I was thinking about what my coming out experience was like to my family. I came out at 14, and I was so angry at my mom because I thought that she was going to take it better than my dad. I mean, my dad took it not so great. But my mom was really quite bad with it. And looking back, I can tell that is because she was petrified about what being queer meant and the life that she thought that I was going to have because of that. And she was more worried about how other people would treat me than she was about the fact that I was even queer. So when, you know a kid is overtly effeminate and parents are trying to make them not be, I think that sometimes the worry isn't necessarily the fact that they are effeminate. It's how they worry about how the world is going to treat their kids because of that and the attachment to what is feminine. And that goes into makeup, that goes into clothes. So it's not necessarily the fact that there's anything wrong with this. It's the worry and the understanding that we live in a culture that hates queer people and that hates women and anything feminine, you know, is within the bracket.

JVN [00:41:07] And I also think for parents, it's like, you know, I know for my mom, it was like she's like, oh, my God, it means you might burn in the fiery pits of hell. So she started like leaving all these books on my bedside table, like, "Openly Gay, Openly Christian." Like, she was, like, really worried. Like, just, like, how can you, like, but it's, like, for parents of trans youth, of queer youth, specifically trans youth, the world. I think that there is a lot of fear around like, "What does this mean? Like, my kid's going to have such a harder life. What could it mean for the, what could it mean for our family?" But it's, like, because it could be that it's going to be a harder life. That means that you need to be even more of a cheerleader and, like, not make it harder. And so I'm just really lifting you up in your experience. And thank you for the bravery of sharing it and making a road map for other people to look to and inspiration from because it really is hard. And I think when like I always think about like the reason that we don't necessarily see how much like of the good work that we do is because like I compare it

to hairdressing in that like you can do 50,000 really good haircuts, but the second you fuck up, one fringe trim or, like, take someone's hair cut too short or take out too much hair, and they're, like, "Oh my God. Like, I don't like it!" That's what goes on Yelp, that's what you're going to hear about. It's the negative stuff as like the positive stuff. It's like people aren't going to be like. It just doesn't feel as threatening when people are like, "You're helping me," versus like, "Meh, you fucked me up or whatever." So it's like I feel like it just sticks in our minds more some of the negativity. And I'm really glad that you can know how much impact you're making because you are making really good at so much important impact.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:42:35] Thank you so much. Yeah, I think the "what if"s from people who just haven't had the exposure to either, you know, queer youth or trans youth. And the worry, it's really important that they're plugged in and that, you know, that we're all educating ourselves because it's that education that really quiets that voice. You know, when I came out as gay when I was 14, my mom was pretty sure that I was going to, you know, catch HIV and that would be a death sentence. My mom was pretty sure that I was never going to be able to get married or have children, and then I would die alone. Like, all of these things aren't true. And once we educate ourselves on, you know, the way that the world actually is today and the way that, you know, you can live a life and you're going to be much happier if you are not only yourself and being yourself, but if you are encouraged to do so and if you have an effective support system.

So yeah, I'm all about, you know, making people aware of the services that are there to support the trans community and not only the trans community but the people in our lives because we can't do it alone. It's really, really important that we all have support systems that we, you know, have family units. And whether or not that's chosen family or biological family, it's really important that we have people around us that understand what we're going through so that the "what ifs" don't creep in. Because you start to believe that, as an individual as well, you're like, "Oh, well, maybe I am." And then I was petrified after that conversation with my mom about, "Well, what if I'm going to die? What if I'm going to die alone? What if no one's ever going to love me? What if you know I'm going to lose all of my family and then not have any support, and then I'm going to have to, you know, not achieve anything?" And, you know, I mean, it's just, like, a never ending spiral. So, yeah, we can we can stop that from happening. We just need to educate ourselves.

JVN [00:44:36] And you're doing such important work on that. So, I'm gonna have to do, like, a rapid round because I need to hear about what's happening with you. And I know that we only have a few minutes left, but before I do that, two really fast things. One: fuck Piers Morgan, I wanted to ask you more about like what that was like, but I'm not going to go into it because like, just fuck em and we hate it when just him. And I'm so sorry that you had to battle him but I know that you got some good, like, did you get like a good like, fuck you but what you could say and Wake Up Britain?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:44:57] I never like to just say “fuck you.” I'd like to kind of say it with my eyes and see, like, yeah, I kind of feel like, you know, with people like Piers, he just likes to stir the pot and he likes to get a rise out of people. And when you don't give that to him, then you—

JVN [00:45:11] I hate him, I don't want to waste the last 3 minutes on him because I got to talk about your future work. And then also, I think I was just gonna say really fast as I love your activism, I love it so much. I love what you do. And also I just, I think it's, like, my PTSD from watching like America's Next Top model or something. I just, when you said cunt blow dry, I just I just want to see you giving cunt blow dry like all over the place. I just think you are the most stunning fucking person. Like, I mean, inside. Yes. But also, it's like a superficial, like, dumb bitch queen that I am. You're just like, so fucking stunning. And the way that you walk and move, like, I just, I just want to see you continue to, like, obliterate the modeling world. Okay, now, moving into what you're doing. In the queer Bible you also share your love for Paris Is Burning, iconic. Everyone has to watch it. Some of the most important work of, like, cinematic documentary history ever. What other culture do you look for, for inspiration?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:45:58] I think the most amazing thing about the time that we're living in is that we are so that it's so easy to gain access into other people's worlds. Even with TikTok, the amount of different kinds of people that you will literally be exposed to just by scrolling through Tik Tok is like a window into so many different worlds, but I think that we can't allow that to just allow it to be that temporary. I think it's really important to make sure you're diversifying your feed, diversifying your friendship group as well, making sure that the people that you hang around with, the people in your life aren't all of the same experience. I think it's so important to educate yourself on so many different cultures and, you know, keep learning. Learn about history as well. Not just about, you know, the way that things are, learn about where they came from and how we got to this point. Because then you can understand the future as well, because it's in the past and it happens again. So yeah, I'm just all about just expanding my worldview and challenging myself and, you know, also identify my ignorance because we're all ignorant as fuck. You know, it's really important to understand that we, we don't know anything. There's so many different cultures in the world that we've never even heard of. There's still species of animals that we haven't discovered. You know, we think that we know everything. We absolutely don't. So I think that that's a really empowering just way to view the world is that we're all ignorant as fuck.

JVN [00:47:30] And then final question. That's why we're so excited to read your new book. It's coming out next year. Can you give people a preview? What's the inspiration behind the book and do we know when it's coming out yet so that we can like preorder and get all up in there? Must make a bestseller.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:47:44] So it comes out next spring. I'm handing in the final draft in two weeks without, fail. Otherwise I will be killed somewhere over the Atlantic. So yeah, it

comes out in the UK and in America at the same time. So that's why it's probably taking a little longer. And also I wrote the whole book and then I rewrote it because I hated it.

JVN [00:48:10] It happens, it happens to the best of us.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:48:12] I'm so proud of it now that I'm so proud of it. And also in terms of the fashion that you are talking about, we've got two very exciting things that I can't talk about because NDA, but keep an eye out.

JVN [00:48:27] Do they rhyme with buvers. Like... covers? Or like...

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:48:31] Like, not saying, don't, don't please, because I can't say anything.

JVN [00:48:36] Oh, my God! Can you just DM me! I'll never [EXASPERATION] I'm, like, "Blink twice if it's..." Just kidding. Munroe, thank you so much for coming on and for sharing your time with us and your beautiful energy. And just, like, I feel like you've got to follow Munroe if you're not already. We love the Gram. You have, like, varying activity levels on there, but like, I've never regretted for not even one millisecond my follow.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:49:01] What do you mean varying activity levels? Do you mean sometimes I don't use it?

JVN [00:49:05] Yeah! Yeah! [LAUGHTER]

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:49:07] Sorry, I get really bored of social media. Sometimes I just hide. I'm just like, "I'm not doing this for like two weeks."

JVN [00:49:12] I just, like, love everything about your social. I really do. And I always have. Like I always have. I think most people do. I like to be, like, you know, thaw after like, elusive like, a jungle cat, like, leave them wanting more. I get. I love it. But Where do people follow you like to like find all of your new articles like do they just that I follow the or do you put that on Twitter or something?

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:49:31] I have Twitter. The only social media that I've got is Instagram. And I just let everything else just so I didn't like- I deleted all a long time ago. I really don't actually like social media, so I try to live in the present as much as possible. So I just got Instagram's just follow me on Instagram is just @munroebergdorf.

JVN [00:49:47] You were saying, you know, it's hard to tell how much you done when you're on the mountain because you're doing it. You have, like, breathtaking presence [CROSSTALK] like, on camera. Yeah, on camera and in real life. So I just don't don't forget that.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:50:00] I need you in my pocket. Just, like, reminding me, like. Like this, because it's, it's lovely. Thank you.

JVN [00:50:06] I hope you can feel it because it's, like, almost, like, I want to, like, quit my job and become your manager. Like, nothing you need because you're doing really good. But I just like, I want to, like, kick down someone's door for her!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:50:17] I think you're going to be very proud of me in terms of, you know, the next few months.

JVN [00:50:22] Cause you're the face of a new cosmetics company!

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:50:24] Stop it! This, this year has been, like, my rest year because I really burnt out last year. I had a really tough time because I was just, like, working working, work, work, working to put myself in the back burner completely and then burnt out. But, like, next year and in a couple of months there's some things that are very exciting. So yeah, we got a lot to look forward to.

JVN [00:50:50] We will wait, we'll be patient. And I love that you're setting that example because I knew that too. I was like really burned out adjacent, like recently prioritized self-care and, like, actually taking care of myself.

MUNROE BERGDORF [00:50:58] Yeah.

JVN [00:50:59] So maybe you put that energy out in the world. So I love you so much. I know you gotta dash. Thank you so much for giving us your time. We love you so much. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Munroe Bergdorf. You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. You can follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Middle Seat Digital. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.