

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Kristin Surak

JVN // 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. Every time you cross into a country, you have to present your travel documents, honey. We're out here doing it all the time. Maybe it's a passport or a visa. Maybe it's both. Those documents tell a story of where you're from and in some cases, where you're allowed to go. But what if you wanted to rewrite that story? What if you wanted to make like Natasha Bedingfield [singing] staring at the blank space before you? Enter: the golden passport! Today, millionaires and billionaires around the world are buying passports. Those passports give them perks like travel access, business opportunities, and even [gasp!] a way to sneak around with a second family. Ooh, la la! Kristen Surak is Associate Professor of Political Sociology at the London School of Economics. She is the author of *The Golden Passport: Global Mobility for Millionaires*, published by Harvard University Press. Yessss. Kristen, first of all, how are you?

KRISTIN SURAK // Great. Even though the weather's miserable here in London.

JVN // Oh my God, is it giving rainy? My husband, to this day—my husband's British—and he always says “clear blue sky day”! Like he's always so excited if it's a clear blue sky day! Kristin, do people tell you that you look like a celebrity and if so, whom do you know?

KRISTIN SURAK// I'm so much of a nerd they say oh my God you look like Are you watching the biggest show on TV and like

JVN // oh no no no no you're not we're not we're not stepping in the same thing because you are giving me Julia Roberts you're giving me Julia Roberts like and I know you know who Julia Roberts is do not say that you look like Julia Roberts?

KRISTIN SURAK// I've never gotten her really that's a really good one like she's the biggest anyway

JVN // Anyway, Kristin- You having a good day in London? It's rainy.

KRISTIN SURAK// Yeah pretty good and really great now that I'm teleported into your studio.

JVN // I'm so excited to learn about golden passports. Let's get into this. First of all, how do you, like, how do you define citizenship in your work? And like, how would one typically gain citizenship.

KRISTIN SURAK // Well citizenship—a lot of people think about citizenship, say, in terms of, like, identity and rights, and those sorts of things. But really fundamentally, it's just a legal status. Take, for example, Dreamers in the U.S. They grew up in the U.S. their whole life; they identify as American, all of that. But because they don't have that legal status of citizenship, their situation is really precarious. You know, identity can be a part of it, but it doesn't really define it and neither do really, rights. I mean, a lot of people think about citizenship as somehow related to democracy and voting. But, you know, China—biggest country in the world—1.4 billion people or so, none of them have the right to vote; you

know, in national elections for competing parties or whatever, you know. But they still have citizenship. You know, so really fundamentally, what it is is that legal status.

JVN // What's citizenship by investment. And how does it differ from cash for passport exchanges and golden visas?

KRISTIN SURAK // People get these mixed up all the time. Journalists get these mixed up all the time. Other academics I'm talking to get this mixed up all the time! It's, like, "Okay, let's, let's have some clear definitions here." So for me, citizenship by investment is—the country says, "You invest a minimum amount in the country or you donate a minimum of this amount to the government, and we give you, you know, we do some background checks and blah, blah, blah, but you become a citizen." And in the end, then, once you're a citizen, you can apply for a passport. And so a lot of times people say "golden passports" or "citizenship by investment," I kind of treat them interchangeably. Technically, though, you know what? Citizenship isn't the same as a passport. The passport isn't the same as citizenship. When you think about, most U.S. citizens don't even have a passport. You know, it's kind of not—but, but most people agree citizenship by investment want that passport. So, you know, they get called golden passports. It's also, you know, these golden visas, which are just residents. It's a—you know, it's a stamp in a passport, rather than a passport itself. You can't, you know, you can't pass it down through the family or whatever. It's just the right to reside in a country. So that's a little different.

JVN // Oh, but citizenship, you can!

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah! Citizenship is for life—and your children can inherit it.

JVN // Mmmm.

KRISTIN SURAK // These golden passport programs; citizenship by investment: you can go to these government websites and they'll say, "This is what you have to do, this is what you invest, and we make you a citizen."

JVN // So what is the range for citizenship by investment or golden passport? Like, what's the lowest end to the highest end?

KRISTIN SURAK // Right now, Cyprus, Cyprus used to have a program and that was 2.5 million. But you could, you had to buy a house that was at least 500,000 and you had to keep that. But the rest of the investment, the 2 million, you could sell it after three years or five years. So the end cost is actually only about 500,000, plus all the fees or whatever. But that is the general range, like about 100,000 U.S. to about 1 million.

JVN // Is that, like, the main reason a country would want to grant someone a golden passport? Like to get like more rich people in their borders? Or is there, like, other reasons too?

KRISTIN SURAK // People aren't actually going to these countries really that much. Like, you know, one of the most famous cases is Saint Kitts. Saint Kitts is a tiny little island in the eastern Caribbean and you could be like, "Oh, hey, beautiful small tropical island," but there's only 55,000 people there. And you talk to people there, they're like, "Hey, you know, if we want to go do anything with our lives, we get out. There's not much going on here, you know." So wealthy people going for this, you know, citizenship thing, they, you know, they're like, "We don't want to go. We want to go to Biarritz or, you know, whatever."

JVN // Why would a millionaire or billionaire in the U.S. want to get a passport to Saint Kitts and then never buy a house or, like, go there? Is it, like, a tax haven or something?

KRISTIN SURAK // It's been kind of interesting watching the U.S. Case. There's like three types of people who go for it, if they're from the U.S. In the early years you would get U.S. citizens who had lived abroad for a really long time and either they were libertarians and didn't like the idea of paying taxes wherever they were. And U.S. citizens: you have to continue to pay taxes, you know, whether, no matter where you are in the world. It's kind of unique in that. And so they would give up U.S. citizenship, but then they would have to get another citizenship in order to do that, because you can't, like, can't make yourself stateless. It's really hard. That would be one group.

But what happened then over the years, this is, as we're watching, that you started getting these, like, Armageddon Americans, people who love Trump, hated Biden or Obama; loved Biden or Obama, hated Trump and were, like, "I gotta get out of here. I want a Plan B." And I don't know if a lot of them left, maybe some of them, but I think a lot of them are just feeling kind of paranoid, like, what happens when stuff hits the fan. And then what aAnd then COVID hit and then you get more U.S. citizens going, "Oh my God, I've got no idea what's going on here. Love the government. Hate the government. What are my exit options?" And so they would also start looking for possibilities.

And, you know, they're not necessarily, you know, look—some, maybe a couple of handful maybe moved to St. Kitts, but most of them they'll you know they get yYou get 90 days visa-free access so you can become what's known as peripatetic. You just kind of move around the world, 90-day, 90-days, visa-free access wherever you are and stay there.

JVN // OK wait-wait-wait-wait-wait. So they would give up their US citizenship, get the one in Saint Kitts afford you 90 day visa free access to like like tons of other countries basically like that's kind of the Saint Kitts perk?

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, you can totally do that.

JVN // So you just go to Buenos Aires for like three months and then you go to Seoul for three months and if you're just super loaded you could just like rent a little Airbnb and you just go give like Eat Pray Love every three months for the rest of your life and then when you're done with that you just go live on an island.

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, the world is your oyster.

JVN // Wow!

KRISTIN SURAK // You could do that on a US passport too.

JVN // Do the people who moved to Saint Kitts were like they love the government or hate the government people. What's the exit plan then what isn't there like a third type that we didn't get to?

KRISTIN SURAK // Oh, ah, the COVID people.

JVN // That was the third bucket was Covid people.

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, yeah, and what Covid people part of it is worried about Covid but the other thing that happened was for the first time. US citizens suddenly couldn't travel wherever they wanted immediately. Like, They have a really good passport but then during Covid, like for example, You couldn't just get easy access to Europe on the US passport you had a residence permit for particular place, which made a lot of Americans paranoid so kids got you into Europe either but it made a lot of people but if you had golden visa in Portugal, then Portugal would've let you in during those early Covid days when they were otherwise shutting you out and so that also led to a lot of US citizens going Why are these doors closing in my face? I'd like to get them all open and so they started going for like plan b, and c, plan d, plan e and getting a lot of residence and citizenships and other places in the world just because the worlds go - the door slammed in my face what's up with that?

JVN // Wow! So that's, like, but that's, like, really rich people. You gotta have, like, a probably like a million or a half a million per residence and citizenship, right? So you got to be really, like, rolling in the dough to just be doing, like, ABCDE, right?

KRISTIN SURAK // Oh, totally. But you know, citizenship can be as cheap as 100,000.

JVN // Where?

KRISTIN SURAK // Dominica.

JVN // Dominica...where's that?

KRISTIN SURAK // It's in the Caribbean. Another one of those little tiny islands. And, you know, like I think right now Saint Kitts, they just put up the price. It's 250,000 U.S. But you can get it somewhere, you know, you know, for the whole family, for about 200,000 US.

JVN // Damn! For Dominica or for or....

KRISTIN SURAK // Grenada.

JVN // How much is Grenada? Because that's pretty down there!

KRISTIN SURAK // I know a good question. I think it's 220.

JVN // Grenada!

KRISTIN SURAK // You've gotta kind of watch them—because sometimes they have sales.

JVN // And then you don't even have to buy a house?

KRISTIN SURAK // You can all yeah, you can donate to the government and just be done with it, you know, just basically pay a fee.

JVN // What's the coolest stuff that you can do? Like, what's, like, Grenada get you? Or, like, what's, like, what's Portugal get you? Or oh, does Portugal get you, like, an EU, EU access?

KRISTIN SURAK // Okay, well, let's start with Grenada because they also can get you some really interesting things, like—Grenada has visa-free access to the EU. So if you're a citizen of, like, you know, I don't know, Vietnam, probably India, you don't have visa-free access to the EU. You can apply for a Schengen visa and you might get that. You might get that for a year, you might not get that blah, blah, blah, but man, it gets you into the EU for 90 days. What's also super interesting though, is it has an E2 treaty—you know, if you're a nerd—E2 treaty with the U.S. So say you're Chinese and you want to live in the U.S. China doesn't have an E2 treaty with the with the U.S., but Grenada does. So you become a citizen of Grenada and then if you invest in a business in the U.S., 200,000 or so, you can get a residence permit for the U.S.

JVN // Okay, so what about, bBut what about Portugal? How, how does a bitch get—no, tell me, tell me, tell me everything, Kristin.

KRISTIN SURAK // Okay, so Portugal. Well, even better than Portugal, is Malta, like...

JVN // [00:11:22] Oooo yeah! And they have legal weed - How do you go to Malta? I want to go to Malta. Is that my escape plan? Because what about me? I'm not, I'm not *not* a doomsdayer; I live in fucking Texas. I'm scared as shit. Like, I feel like it's going down. Like, how does—Where should I go? Is—Malta? Legal weed!

KRISTIN SURAK // Okay, if you, if you have access to anywhere, like, if it, like, money is not a question, I would say go for Malta. Because....

JVN // How much is it?

KRISTIN SURAK // It's about a million.

JVN // Oh, Jesus. That's a, that's a little, that's a little Olsen money. I'm not quite there yet. Like, I don't know what to do. Like, I don't think I do a milly. That's, like, a lot. But what do you get if you can? If it's aspirational? Like, what do we get if we get into Malta?

KRISTIN SURAK // Imagine yourself: a citizen of Malta. What you get is...

JVN // Legal weed!

KRISTIN SURAK // Legal weed, and even better, let's say legal weed in Amsterdam. Because you're going to be an EU citizen. And being an EU citizen is like being a citizen of 27 countries.

JVN // Oh my God.

KRISTIN SURAK // So you could move, live, do whatever you want all over Europe.

JVN // But not England. Oh, but my husband's British.

KRISTIN SURAK // So am I! I naturalized and I'm, like, "I naturalized right after Brexit." And it's, like, "Oh!" I know it sucks. It sucks.

JVN // So Malta's where it's at because then you become EU. And and but, but not, 'cause it's—what's the deal with Portugal?

KRISTIN SURAK // Portugal's kind of interesting, though, because what happens is you have to, you know, you invest in the country; they just got rid of the real estate option. You can invest in a business. I think they put the price up. It's probably close to 500 now, 500,000 now. You have to go to the country for 14 days in the first two years and after that for seven days, the next several years. And I think after five or six years, then you can apply to become a Portuguese citizen. So it could turn into citizenship. It's not that hard to do the residence, like, I mean, "Oh, hard go spend a week on the Algarve coast, yeah, and go surfing or whatever, and Navarre," yeah.

JVN // But don't get to learn to speak Portuguese and stuff?

KRISTIN SURAK // Nope!

JVN // What about Malta? Is there, like, a citizenship for Malta? You had to learn Maltese or something?

KRISTIN SURAK // You have to show the intent to make Malta your home. So, when you apply for citizenship, you know you invest your money, you have to rent or buy real estate, you donate to the government. And then you have to donate to some charities, you need to join some clubs, and you need to do—you do need to spend a little bit of time there. Maybe if they've got legal weed, you can do it on, like, Planet Nine or whatever. And then, after a year, they make you a citizen. So you have to show the *intent* to make it your home. But whether that is or not, the case in the end, is just, you know, another question they don't bother with.

JVN // Oh, so then once they grant you citizenship, like, you know, you could still be based in the United States or whatever

KRISTIN SURAK // Anywhere, yeah.

JVN // And so and then but then you, but then you have to pay taxes that—oh, no, only Eritrea and the United States. So then you can get your citizenship, but then if you're based somewhere else, then you wouldn't pay income taxes in Malta? Just, like, property or something?

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, if you're not a U.S. citizen, then yeah, if you live there, that's fine. If you're not a U.S. citizen, tax is based on where you are, like, if you're in any country for more than 183 days, then you pay taxes in that country. So if you were to move to, like, Malta, and then, like, all the tax stuff is complicated—and, like, keep some money outside and only bring some money in and then you could probably roll your taxes. But if you're U.S., you're kind of stuck with the IRS.

JVN // So, okay, so how have we seen countries benefit from citizenship by investment programs? Like, what are their complications? What are the successes? And I'm guessing that locals might not like them, but what do locals think about these programs?

KRISTIN SURAK // In some countries—when I went to Saint Kitts, like, people were really proud of the program. They were, like, "Yeah, we invented it. It's our thing." But it was, like,

politics is really heated in that country. It was, like, either they were, like, *really* pro the party in power and hated the opposition, or *really* pro the opposition party hated, you you you know, hated the party in power. So it'd be, like, "Yeah, you know, the previous government was, you know, ran the program into the ground. They were so corrupt. The present government is great. Or the other way around, blah, blah, blah." That was Saint Kitts. It was really interesting. But then I went, I went to Montenegro where, like, everybody I talked to, the first word out of their mouth is—I was, like, "Yeah, so what do you think about citizenship by investment," and they would say, "Oh my God, the government is so corrupt!" Like, "Okay!" Yeah, that was the first thing out of their mouths. And then I went to Vanuatu, like, have you ever heard of Vanuatu?

JVN // Yeah, I have. But where is that? Is that in, like, the Samoan Islands?

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, it's near there. It's in the Pacific. Like, I had never heard of Vanuatu until I started studying this stuff. And then they had the opportunity to go to Vanuatu. And then when I went there and asked locals about it, they were all—first of all, they all thought I was Australian, because that's like, you know, whatever; where white Westerners come from if they're going to Vanuatu. And they would, and they would say, you know, I would be, like, "So what do you think of citizenship by investment," and they would be, like, "We're selling citizenship? Who wants our citizenship? We all want to get out of here. How do I get citizenship in Australia? Get me out of here, marry me. I want to get out." You know, so it would be a range, in terms of what locals thought about this.

JVN // What about, like, Canada, Australia, New Zealand? Like, does Australia do this?

KRISTIN SURAK // It's mega expensive. I can't remember. It's something like 2 million or 5 million or so. If it's one of those things where you just park your money in the country and you get residence. If you, if you go there and say you're going to build a company and if you're wealthy enough, you just pay somebody to build your company for you and don't bother with it, then I think the price might come down a little bit. But yeah, you can totally get business investor stuff for Australia, for New Zealand.

Canada, if you build a business, they'll give you a residence permit. Canada, though, used to have, like, the biggest, like, golden visa, where you just bought real estate. I was traveling around the world going to, like, Hong Kong and Dubai and, you know, whatever, even, you know, Moscow, whatever, before the invasion. London. And I would, like, try to find people who knew the scene, have been there for a long time. And when I would discover them, it was like they were all Canadians.

And not only were they all Canadians; they were all from Montreal. And I was like, "What? What is going on here?" It's because...so Canada had this golden visa program that was really huge, you know, in the 1990s because of Hong Kong; everybody in Hong Kong was, like, "Oh my God, we're going back to China." And so, um sSo they all started going into the Canadian program, a lot of these. But because Quebec has its own kind of, like, situation—because otherwise they would try to break away—it could process applications faster. So like everybody would apply for it through Quebec. So they learned how to do that and they learned how to make money off of that. And then they went to all these different global hubs and sort of, like, spread the trade. So there's like, yeah, Canada's weirdly kind of important in that.

JVN // But then they got rid of it, didn't they? Or do they still do that?

KRISTIN SURAK // No, they got rid of it. Quebec had—so the federal government got rid of it, I think about 2012, but Quebec kept it. Because Quebec has its own little carve out. And now Quebec has it on ice, on ice like it's probably not going to be reopened. Just because, like, Canada's a big country. They don't need something like this. This isn't big numbers. It's not—it's not significant for them.

JVN // And then how did Trump's, like, 2017 immigration ban affect golden passports and did like, what's the status of them now?

KRISTIN SURAK // Well, it's kind of interesting, like, kind of mind blowing when you think about the role of the U.S. in all of this. Like, if you think about citizenship, yeah, shouldn't a country have the right to decide who gets to become a citizen or not? Isn't that, like, definitive of, like, sovereignty and what a state can do?

KRISTIN SURAK // Well, what's kind of nuts in this case is that the U.S. is, like, the big puppet master behind the scenes in a lot of cases. You know, where it's really kind of watching what's going on. It's got a lot of levers that it can use to pressure countries in terms of what they're doing. And so, like, the U.S. can take its own border control policy and impose it on other countries' citizenship policy. So, like, when in 2017, when Trump did the quote unquote "Muslim ban," um basically the Caribbean countries, most, you know, to a large part, as well as Malta, fell in line and they started banning people from those countries as well for applying for citizenship. So the U.S. exclusionary travel policy began to define the citizenship policies of these other places.

JVN // But then didn't, like the Supreme Court, or like wasn't the travel ban unconstitutional, but then they got it ruled constitutional by like adding a few other countries or something? And then what, how did that end up, like did Biden get rid of that? And now there's like no travel ban in place, so like everyone's back in for golden passports?

KRISTIN SURAK // Well, like what the countries do with the golden passport stuff, is they still listen to the U.S. So yeah, Trump got rid of the the... or tried to, it became complicated, out of other countries whatever... "It's not Muslim, it's been diluted because we included you know whatever North Korea." Um, and, And, but in the end there's still a number of countries on different banned lists. What's interesting is, like, countries that are concerned about this as a big revenue maker, try to keep powerful countries, you know, kind of, like, happy to some degree. But countries that aren't, do it anyways. So depending on what their relationship is, depends on their the travel ban list. So, like, Turkey will naturalize Russians. You know, and part of that aAnd Turkey, I think Turkey still naturalizes Iranians, whereas a lot of other countries have stopped. And part of that is because Turkey's, you know—it's kind of interesting because Turkey is, is the number one seller of citizenship these days. It does about half the global approvals. It's kind of mind blowing. Turkey is also the number one host of refugees on the planet. So right now, it's, it's, you know, providing refuge for about 3 to 4 million Syrians. And why is it doing that? Because the EU paid Turkey €6 billion to do it. And so, you know, Turkey is, like, "We're going to naturalize whomever we want, because you know what, don't tell us what to do, because otherwise we're opening up the gates and we've got 3 to 4 million Syrians who might want to go to Europe." And so they play, like, a, You know, so there's, like, this really complicated geopolitical stuff going on behind the scenes in terms of what happens.

JVN // So how does someone go to, like, the UAE? And then what's their program like? Is that like a million and then you get citizenship?



KRISTIN SURAK // Oh, so the UAE, you just opened a residence by investment program, but you're not going to get citizenship. What happens, though, so you get people who live there, they're living there, but their citizenship still matters because either they can't travel in the region or banks won't bank them. So, you know, I was talking to this Iranian business woman, whose family moved there when she was three years old, knows that the UAE is the only country she knows. But the country is never going to naturalize her. And she can't get loans from the bank because the only citizenship she has is for this country she's got no connection to, but the U.S. has sanctions against. And so she was looking at citizenship by investment so that she can simply get a loan from a bank.

JVN // What's the difference between naturalization and citizenship?

KRISTIN SURAK // So 99% of the world has citizenship and most people are just born into it. Naturalization means you become a citizen after birth.

JVN // So when you say that the UAE was never going to naturalize her... unless she did citizenship by investment...is that...no.

KRISTIN SURAK // No. They're never, ever going to do that. So imagine this: She moved to this country when she was three years old. She's been there for the past 40 something years or so.

JVN // So what the fuck's she gonna do?

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah! And so, and on top of that, you know, this is her home. She's got a residence permit. It's no problem being there. But the problem is that banks won't touch people with Iranian passports.

JVN // So what's she going to do? How is she going to get rid of her Iranian one and get a different one?

KRISTIN SURAK // She buys it in Dominica. Because they would still—so very few countries would naturalize Iranians because of U.S. sanctions. But Dominica still would. So I was talking to her and she realized that was her only option. She could buy citizenship in Dominica and then use that. She goes to the bank, it still says place of birth, it still says Tehran or wherever she is born, you know. But the bank would say, "Okay, great, now we can comply with U.S.," you know...

JVN // Well, at least that's nice. She has a way to get it together so that—yay for her, thanks Dominica!

JVN // In 2020, Al Jazeera released the Cyprus papers. It was giving ProPublica. It was giving story of the century, honey. And also, like, Panama Papers or something? Was that the same thing or just, like, the same era? What was the deal with that golden passport corruption scandal in the, in the Cyprus papers?

KRISTIN SURAK // Oh yeah. That's if you haven't watched that video, it's such an amazing video you can watch. So basically a bunch of Al Jazeera reporters went undercover and had, like, secret hidden cameras. And they were going through, they were pretending to represent, like, a Chinese business person with a criminal record. And, you know, they're

talking to a representative to be, like, "How do we get this person through?" They're like, "Can they get the money in Europe? Then you're fine." And in the end, like, the last scene, they're having lunch at the house of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, like the top person in their Senate kind of thing; and the guy and they're like, "Yeah, you know, can we get this guy?" And he's like, "Yeah, no problem. You just invest, you know, rather than 2.5 million, invest 20 million in my friend's real estate project and you're fine." You know, so basically...

JVN // And what, was that in Cyprus?

KRISTIN SURAK // In Cyprus, yeah. And so basically they exposed sort of a dual-track system. Like, you could go through all the hurdles and all the hoops, you know, whatever with the papers, with all the bureaucrats or whatever, background checks—or pay a little bit more and get VIP access straight to the top without all that, where they wouldn't bother with a criminal record or other sorts of tawdry things. So for example, like, the biggest, one of the biggest scams ever, one MDB when, like, this Jho Low, stole several billion from the Malaysian state; he became a citizen of Cyprus, just as the story was breaking. But to make sure that his, his little application got through, he also donated to the Archbishop of the autocephalous Church, who wrote a little letter saying, "You know, he's really great." Since then, the archbishop has given the money back and retracted that because it turned out he's this major, wanted international criminal. And that can be an issue for these programs, too; that they don't do the right background checks, that people kind of pay a little bit extra on the side and they get, you know, somebody through who's not supposed to be doing, getting through, etc.. And so Cyprus, at the end of that, had to shut down their program. And for a while people were, like, "Yeah, we're going to be relaunching this as soon as they can," but they still haven't relaunched it and that government investigation is still going on.

JVN // Oh, about that Cyprus Malaysian situation?

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah and it's corruption.

JVN // What were some of the other other scandals like people like maintaining second families like, like we read a little bit like about husbands putting applications and their wives names like what were some of the other like the tea that came out from the papers?

KRISTIN SURAK // What's the juicy stuff?

JVN // Yeah.

KRISTIN SURAK // So I think so or even not just that, even in the interviews I would do with people, as well. You know, One of the big things about these programs is are they doing good background checks? Like, you know if you are you are you just kind of selling citizenship to people who are looking for a better mobility or whatever are you selling citizenship to criminals who are looking to escape the law for example. And that's why you wanna have pretty good background checks, and those can be be really complicated to do as well. You know so, for example, you've got a person who's got like kind of a complicated situation for whatever reason and maybe you know whatever legal stuff playing in the grave, who knows, depending on the country you might be able to put, say, your wife as the main applicant on the passport - is your wife/ And in many cases it's the wife. And all the background are done on her but not the husband, and then this guy is been doing a lot of

shady stuff still gets through based on the wife, and that can happen or a little things, like say you're dealing with an inheritance situation with a child that you had with a lover in another place, and you don't want like your spouse to know about this, blah blah blah. You know, people can kind of game systems with the passport sometimes it'll be like you know some guy was based in Hong Kong, and this is before 2000, he had a lover in mainland China, and it was really hard for her to travel, so he bought her a passport for another country, so that she could come and visit Hong Kong, kind of on the sly.

JVN // What has this highlighted for you? What are some of the takeaways from these programs that, that you've, that you've taken away and, and have you transposed them on to any other areas that you're, like, "Oh, this is, like, particularly unfair or something?"

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, it's really complicated. Like because that inequality question, it just, I think it's a really interesting place to look at how just how complicated those questions of inequality are. So, you know, like, at the most superficial level, oh yeah, it just looks like the rich who are going, you know, who are paying to play and they can get in, they have a separate VIP track and, you know, blah, blah, blah. But, you know, the reality is that, you know, they're not crowding out—number one, that they don't crowd out other migrants. You know, the number one seller of citizenship is the number one host of refugees in the first place. Immigration policy is usually, like, all over the place and completely incoherent. But it usually is selective, like, countries select who gets to get in.

And usually that's a question of your ancestry or your family. You know, it could be marriage or it's a question of your money. Like, "Have you changed your money into some sort of skill set that we kind of want?" And so countries always screen in some sort of way, which kind of means that, you know, it's never like the people who are really screwed globally, who get the chance to move. They're the ones who are, you know, because countries only allow, like, visa-free access to other countries that are kind of like them, and also kind of rich, especially if the rich countries if they're also rich. you know. So that level is kind of complicated, but, you know, but so you get this difference, you know, in but, you know, of course, these are people who are successful. They're not the worst off in the countries, you know, so there's a lot of inequalities within the countries, but there's a lot of inequalities between countries in terms of, you know, citizenships. And then you get the inequalities between, like, these little tiny micro states and big countries like the U.S; you tell them you can naturalize and you can't naturalize and all that, you know. So I think it's one of those things in looking at, you know, we talk a lot about like globalization and global flows and all of that, but it really highlights the extent to which those borders between countries still matter, and not. And how people find ways of trying to work around those borders.

Or how people find ways of making money off of those borders; because this, you know, the sale of citizenship can be worth a lot of money, too. And so it's, it's one of the things that really kind of highlights: borders still matter and things like, you know, citizenship isn't always just about identity. You know, in this case, it's just about getting the legal rights of the state. It doesn't really affect people's identity at all. And kind of think about how those become two different things. as well. So it's sort of, you know, I think also it's one of those things where it's useful if you have a really good passport, you know, like your listeners, a lot of them, they're going to be U.S. citizens. It's kind of, like, check your passport privilege; because if you've got a really good passport in a pretty safe country, you know, you're pretty lucky and you didn't do anything to get that other than to be born in that place, which had nothing to do with you, you know? So but if you didn't have that sort of fortune,

then you might be looking for alternatives and be more strategic about it. So it's one of those things, it's like, check your passport privilege and kind of, you've gotta be grateful.

JVN // What do you think is next for the golden passport economy? Like, do you think more countries will start to offer them? And also, I mean, I live in Texas. I am fearful about what would happen if Trump wins this next election. And do you think that, like, CBI could be an option for LGBTQIA+ people facing discrimination? But I mean, obviously the caveat in that is, like, rich ones, which kind of pisses me off. Like, I hate that, like, it's just not more accessible to more people.

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah.

JVN // Whether they're queer or not. Anyways, I just wish that migration was; I wish the borders didn't matter so much and I wish that we could help people easier. But, but it's just that they could... or could. How could CBI be an option for LGBTQIA+ people facing discrimination?

KRISTIN SURAK // Unfortunately, for wealthy LGBT, LGBTQIA people, it's not necessarily a silver bullet. Because I think you know, in general, because a lot of the stuff, like, people aren't actually moving to these countries. You know, they want those, the rights that citizenship gets you *outside* of the country: travel access, future possibilities, you know, blah, blah, blah. You know, and I think in general, like LGBTQIA questions, those really deal with, like, kind of where people are; like, what city you're in, what's that local environment, how tolerant is that? And, you know, so it's not even like a country level question. The country level part can be important, especially, like, rights, you know, around marriage and marriage.

JVN // Marriage recognition, kids, yeah...

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, but I think in terms of quality of life, it's much more that local level, which kind of shows how, you know, the ways in which citizenship doesn't necessarily matter. You know, it's really about that local community.

JVN // And then one place that we didn't talk about that, you know, every time I go to the United Kingdom with my husband, like they have a huge foreign like national community, like in the United Kingdom, like what's their CBI program? And like, they have like that whole money laundering thing, like they're going through all sorts of shit.

KRISTIN SURAK // Oh, yeah. So they used to have a golden visa program. So just residents, you needed to invest £2 million—so it wasn't cheap—and you had to spend at least 180 days in the country every year. But they got rid of that about a year ago, in part because, you know, it was, it was pretty small. There were concerns about Russians coming through the program and etc.. So they no longer have that sort of thing. But they did it for a really long time. Small numbers, a couple hundred people did it per year, a couple of hundred applications. But yeah, not massive.

JVN // So my only way to get in there is with my husband now, right?

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah. Well you've got an option, you've got a husband, but you would have to...yeah, you'd have to move here and spend time here. I think, I think they've got a speedier option for spouses. You have to live in the UK for like two or three years and then you get a British passport. But Brexit!

JVN // But then can I be dual citizen?

KRISTIN SURAK // You can be a dual citizen, but unfortunately because of Brexit, you're not going to become an EU citizen.

JVN // Right right right, just British. But then you know, we could do Malta. Okay, so how do we stay in the loop about golden passports like, and also like, what's next for you and your work? Like, do you keep your followers up on the golden passport haps? Like, are you on the Twitter, are you on the Instagram? Where can people follow you? Like what, like what are you doing next?

KRISTIN SURAK // Yeah, so I'm on Twitter and let's see, like, LinkedIn and I need to get, like, a decent website because, you know, I don't know. I usually don't think about that stuff.

JVN // You're a published author, yes!

KRISTIN SURAK // I need to be media-ed.

JVN // You should get on the TikTok so that you can keep people up to date about golden passports. I think there's like a really niche audience there for that. I think you should get into it.

KRISTIN SURAK // And do, and do little videos and stuff? Yeah, because...

JVN // Yeah, like explaining, kind of what we've been talking about. And then every time like a news story comes out, you could use that green screen feature and use the news story and then explain like what that news story is saying.

KRISTIN SURAK // Okay, that's so good. I need to start doing this stuff.

JVN // There's this PR crisis lady on TikTok who's always, like, talking about, like, everybody's PR crises and, like, what she thinks that they should do. But you could do that for like golden passports and just, like, yeah, all of these programs. It'd be interest.

KRISTIN SURAK // You know what my next project is?

JVN // Is...

KRISTIN SURAK // Digital Nomads, because...

JVN // I'd follow it.

KRISTIN SURAK // I know! If you have a research project like mine on golden—you know, whatever, golden passports, it means that you can basically travel to, you know, 20 or 30 countries and call it research. But with digital nomad visas, you can travel to something like 50 or 60 countries and call it research.

JVN // Ooooo! Bali!

KRISTIN SURAK // And so yeah, Bali, Estonia. I know, which I think that's going to be fun, like I haven't been to Estonia before. Mauritius, Costa Rica. So yeah, so next up, Digital Nomads.

JVN // Is that good because you could like basically if like, if you even just like lower cost of living, like if you could just like, you know, this apartment's fucking expensive, it's expensive as shit here. Like I'm going to go to Costa Rica and just like, do something cheaper for like three months at a time and do that just, like, save up money, almost. Like if you did that in a few different countries.

KRISTIN SURAK // Totally.

KRISTIN SURAK // But what's interesting, too, is that countries are trying to compete, too. It's like they want *you*, so they get these digital nomad visas. You know, it's, like, "Come here for a bit and then we let you go again." And so, and then people are looking at countries too, going, "Where do I want to go? We'll go there for a bit. And then I go again." So you get, like, this world of global mobility. It's no longer a world of, like, people in countries; or no longer a world of immigration, like, country A to country B. But you get people in countries kind of competing for each other for short periods of time and then like going away again.

JVN // You know, 2028 L.A., Los Angeles Olympics. Maybe they're adding pickleball onto the menu. Maybe I'm—there's no way I could qualify for gymnastics. I already know that. Like, I just, I don't, I'm not going to get the minimum scores but I feel like potentially table tennis, maybe pickleball. I don't know about speed walking. I, I think I like sitting down too much for it. But let's say I wanted to improve my Olympic odds! Like, where could I— start the process? Like so is, is it Dominica could be—like, if I got citizenship in Dominica, could I represent them in the Olympics? Could I could, could you break me off with them some Saint Kitts? Am I going to be on the Saint Kitts Olympic team?

KRISTIN SURAK // Oh, totally. I mean, I think there was even a couple that maybe it was the U.S. citizens who bought citizenship in order to go to the Olympics. They were, like, "We'll, self-fund our Olympics. We'll just be your, your entrant to, you know, whatever." So gymnastics, gymnastics.

JVN // But the thing, like the thing like gymnastics and figure skating that kind of safeguards those sports from getting some, like, shitty competitor...

KRISTIN SURAK // Oh, you have to qualify?

JVN // Yeah. And you got to, like, have minimum scores. Like, I mean, I'm going to have to skate like a minimum 65 or something, and I don't have any of my triples. That just ain't going to fucking happen in figure skating. And in gymnastics, I mean, I just I'd have to do—because of their sexist asses—I'd have to do the men's sport. So like, I can't fucking do pommel horse or still rings like... and if I was a floor specialist, like, I'm not going to get the minimum entry scores for floor. I really think it's going to have to be archery, pickleball, table tennis. I think, if I really fucking trained and really worked my ass off maybe just fucking maybe, maybe I could.

KRISTIN SURAK // I think if there's no pre-qualifications, if you are that country's representative and you can even....

JVN // How dare you, Kristin! I could do it in fucking table tennis or pickleball... Like I...you haven't seen me! I get very competitive. I think even if there was a qualification, those are the...in archery. Come on, I can fucking do archery. Geena Davis made the Olympics—or trials—in archery. Like I can fucking do this like...goddamnit Kristin [singing] have a little faith in me! I can do it. So where do I—so, so my most, my most affordable option is the Dominica one. Could I bring all my cats and dogs to train? Well, a lot of people train outside their countries anyway.

KRISTIN SURAK // Totally.

JVN // Kristin, thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious and for teaching us so much about all of this. I love your work. I adore you. But I had so much fun learning about this and so much fun meeting you. And thank you so much for sharing your work with us. And you guys, get into it: *The Golden Passport: Global Mobility for Millionaires* is published by Harvard University Press. It's available now.

KRISTIN SURAK // Yep!

JVN // Get into it you guys. Buy it. Get, get into it. Read it all, thank you so much, Kristin, for coming on. We appreciate you so much.

KRISTIN SURAK // Thank you.

JVN // Ah! You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. You can follow us on Instagram at @curiouswithjvn. And can I just say our social work has been so good. We are just slaying over there. So give us that follow. You can catch us on here every Wednesday and make sure to tune in every Monday for alternating episodes of Curious Now and Pretty Curious. Still can't get enough honey? Neither can I! You can subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple Podcasts for commercial free listening. And our subscription only show, Ask JVN //, where we're talking sex, relationships and so much more. Our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our engineer is Nathaniel McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Chris McClure and Allison Weiss with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.

JVN // Didn't Tina Turner, like, she expatriated to Sweden in, like, 1998, I remember was like the year of Michelle's silver medal in Nagano. Okay, wait standby. So Tina did renounce her U.S. citizenship: Queen, Ms. Turner. She did renounce it in 2013; In 2013 she did. But she moved to Switzerland in like '98 or whatever.

KRISTIN SURAK // Exactly. So basically, Tina Turner—when she became Swiss and renounced U.S. citizenship—got treated then by the U.S. government like any other Swiss citizen. You know, so she would have to apply for a visa. And you can probably get a ten year, multi-entry visa pretty easily that way. And that's you know, that could be enough. I mean, I think she, she was, like, in Zurich on the lake and, like, lovin' it.