

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Sami Sage

JVN: Hi, curious people. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome back to Getting Curious, you guys, how are you doing on this beautiful week? We are past the summer equinox. We are getting into full fall vibes. And lately I've been curious about who's going to win this fucking election. We are just in the heat of a presidential election and the memes are coming on strong. Part of what's made Vice President Harris meteoric rise to popularity happen has been due to successful use of meme culture. But can meme marketing actually help us win the presidential election? And does that work for either side? And when it comes to people liking like the economy and liking Donald Trump better for the economy? Do people even know what the economy is or is it just like a way of feeling? Um, into that is Betches! I love Betches. Their content's incredible. Their marketing is incredible. I love the handle that they have on pop culture at large and they have gone from uh meme marketing to politics, news, beauty, fashion, like Betches does it all. So to help us answer all of this, we're bringing in one of the co-founders of Betches, one of the HBIC's of Betches. Sammy Sage. Sammy Sage is the co-founder and chief brand officer of Betches Media. One of the earliest digitally native media and entertainment companies founded and led by women and the most influential female focused humor brand in the market today. Since 2011, the Betches founders have earned spots on the New York Times best seller list and Forbes 30 under 30. And today, Betches offers entertainment information and sense of community to millions of passionate millennial and Gen Z fans. In 2015, Sammy held the creation of the company's award winning news and activism, vertical Betches News. And in 2021 she debuted her award winning daily news podcast the morning announcements recently, Sammy Co-Authored the New York Times best seller Democracy in retrograde ahead of a historic US presidential election alongside her co-founders. Sammy also co-host the weekly pop culture podcast, Betches. Today we're asking, can me marketing win the White House and stick around at the end of the episode or we'll reflect on what we learned and how we answered the question, Sammy, welcome to Getting Curious, how are you?!

SAMI SAGE: Really happy to be here? I am a huge fan going way back. So I'm really flattered and excited to get into a whole, you know, long chat with you.

JVN: So you're minding your own business because I mean, unless you've been living, living under an actual rock, you have interacted with some gorgeous Betches content in your life. I mean, I have, everyone, has, everyone loves Betches. I've had so many positive experiences all up in the Betches universe –

SAMI SAGE: Thank you.

JVN: Um, and I think that because we know, I mean, my TikTok knows that I am going to watch scary videos. I think my Apple news knows that I'm going to because like the headlines that are something scary. Like I read those articles, I stay in those articles so much press really feeds our negativity bias and our sense of fear. And I think that that's part of why things like Betches are so important because we need funny shit. People either want scary stuff or they want funny stuff. And I do think that comedy and news have this like really important ability to like bring people together and bring people closer to information, which is so gorgeous. But how did that start? How did bet? Just start? You were just, it was, it was, it was 2011 that was like the first Obama administration, wasn't it?

SAMI SAGE: Oh yeah.

JVN: Like, how did you do this?

SAMI SAGE: You know it was OK. So this was February 2011, this was like Charlie Sheen winning time, you know, Twitter was blowing up. Um, Donald Trump was blowing up on Twitter.

JVN: I wasn't even on *Game of Thrones* yet. My stepdad was still alive. Like things were really new and baby.

SAMI SAGE: So that was the era people were on Facebook you know, their Instagram I think was being invented but it was not widely used. You know, people were using that lo fi filter if even –

JVN: Uh, yes.

SAMI SAGE: And I started *Betches* as a satirical blog with two of my childhood friends when we were in college. So we didn't, you know, set out to, you know, this wasn't the planned path, but we were really just like, kind of messing around. We thought it was funny, We kept the blog anonymous because we were like, we want to, I thought I was going to go, like, try to be a consultant at Deloitte or something –

JVN: **Laughs**

SAMI SAGE: You know, it was a very different. I had a or, you know, I, I'll be honest, like, did I want to do that? No, but did I see any other real like options from where I was at? The three of us were at Cornell? And that was kind of like, OK, you have to now go recruit for a job or go to law school or something. And it was like, I don't want to do any of these things. Um, but we started this, this blog and we kept it anonymous and we just, it went very viral organically at, in the time when things could just go viral organically, you know, from people putting it on, on each other's Facebook walls. Um, and so we were writing it, it was doing really well. We were not making any money for quite a while, but we did end up getting, you know, recognized by, you know, a book agent who was like, you should turn this into a book. Um, and we kept growing the, we kept growing it. Um And, you know, like long story short is, you know, we ended up getting on Instagram. We were really early on Instagram. Um, we had, you know, we started like an Ecom arm, we started podcasting in 2015, which was really early, you know, in that game. Um, and we really have just, you know, we've expanded into all different types of interest areas. And the one that's relevant to what we're talking about is *Betches News*, uh formerly known as *The Betches' Sup*, which I had sort of spearheaded back in, you know, 2015. It started as a newsletter, then became an Instagram podcast and, you know, built this whole world and the premise that I had originally envisioned was bringing political news and, you know, election news because that was really like, what the timing was to people in a way that is humorous and accessible like a gateway to hard news and like –

JVN: Ooh, I like that. Yeah.

SAMI SAGE: And, and, you know, I grew up watching Jon Stewart reporting on the Iraq war and I've always been very passionate, you know, I like Connor Roy. I was interested in politics at a very young age. Um, and it, it just, it interests me like, I like to know what's going on. I don't know, maybe, like, psychologically, maybe it gives me a sense of control to know,

like, what's, uh, like, OK, like, these are all the things that could happen. Um, and I just have always cared a lot, you know, when I was, even in, when I was, like, in high school. So, you know, kind of growing up on that inspiration of feeling like humor was through h, like, I could just digest things better through humor and it made it exciting and it made, it gave something with a purpose, a bit of joy um and enjoyment. And that was really kind of the uh you know, the, the genesis of it and the mission of it because Betches was so pop culture based and, you know, so, you know, the origins or in satire that was, you know, really, where, how we wanted to build Betches News and make it like a fun place that you could consume difficult, difficult information. And that's really what all of Betches does. You know, that's what we do across dating, across parenting, across dieting. Um, it's a place where you can talk about heavy things with a bit of lightness, vulnerability and authenticity.

JVN: My ADHD is winning again, but there's this lady on TikTok who's a Trump supporter who like always lip syncs with this really intense, like snarl on the right, like she always like, talks like this and like, she has like blonde extensions and I think she's in Wyoming and I'll send her to in DM's, I just, I need someone else to, like, share my pain –

SAMI SAGE: Please.

JVN: Of her haunting my fyp. I, I voiced it. It's better. Now,

SAMI SAGE: Can I tell you, can I tell you something that I'm doing this afternoon?

JVN: Yes!

SAMI SAGE: I'm actually going to my first Trump rally,

JVN: Fuck off! You're taking Kamala up on her advice?

SAMI SAGE: *Laughs* yes, yes, exactly. Well, my friend is a journalist and, you know, there's one on Long Island so it's close. You know, I'm not like traveling, you know. So –

JVN: Are you going to wear a Trump outfit to like blend in and not get hurt or something?

SAMI SAGE: So that, can I tell you? My first thought was like, OK, what do I wear? I was like my first thought was like, OK, I should try to like be inconspicuous but inconspicuous is going to code as millennial liberal woman. So I need to dress like I don't have anything Trumpy. Like I don't own anything –

JVN: I have an idea. I have a pitch. I have a pitch. I have a pitch. I have a pitch.

SAMI SAGE: OK, tell me and then I'll tell you what I was thinking and maybe yours is better.

JVN: I think it's like, jeans, long sleeve white shirt with a red MAGA hat which you are going to need to get from a store. You need to get it from a store. Maybe I'm sure they sell it at Trump Tower. You're going to have to send an Uber like one of those ones that, like, pick up the things for like errands runners –

SAMI SAGE: I'm on Long Island though.

JVN: Right now you are?

SAMI SAGE: Yeah.

JVN: OK. Well, you're gonna have to send you. I don't know. You're, then you, you should be able to find one. They've got to have those little stores over there. Like, that's kind of George Santos territory. Like you're gonna get you and then, and then I think for the hair you got to do a center part, two braids, red lip, definitely a red lip and some sort of like white sneaker. And I think with that you will be, I hate to use, you know, such a great word is undetectable here, but I think you'll be undetectable and over there doing that.

SAMI SAGE: So you're, you're pretty much hitting on what I was thinking minus the hat because I just, I can't, I can't go get a hat but, I'll tell you –

JVN: You're gonna have to get one and put it in your purse queen. I'm scared for you. They're, that's gonna, that is gonna code is liberal cosplay. If you don't have a fucking red hat, they're gonna be like get that fucking rhino out of here, get that rhino ass fucking lib out of here. She's a fucking liar. They're gonna find you! You gotta, you gotta put on glasses and a fucking hat. I am scared for your safety.

SAMI SAGE: **Laughs**

JVN: Um, can meme marketing when the fucking White House, I'm going to omit the fucking for when we do but can meme marketing. Can we I, I, and also I just have to say the comma HQ memes, I'm living the betches memes, hardcore living. And I always have and I always will be –

SAMI SAGE: Thank you.

JVN: But is it, are we going to do it? Is it going to be? Are we going to be OK? That was 18 questions.

SAMI SAGE: OK. So I'll start with your first question. Can meme marketing win the election? Yes, I actually have a theory that the more memeable candidate has been the winner for the past since memes were involved in elections. And I mean, that's even going back to like Obama, I would say is the first time you had memes really even in the ecosystem or you know, tweets, digital content, flat short static text that wasn't delivered via cable news anchor or print column. Um, if you think back the more the more meme'd or memeable candidate has actually been the winner, I do. But I say that with caution because it's not like you just make the memes and it's, and it's, it's set. I think that the memes are actually like a symptom of something deeper with what those winners were hitting on. So the memes aren't what's not necessarily winning you the election, but they are a reflection of what's happening and they also create a permission structure for that, that from what, where I stand, I think does more to just increase overall turnout and enthusiasm. And you know, I'm a really avid follower of the news. And the weeks before Biden was um you know, dropping out of the race, what I found most concerning was not like necessarily the overt discourse. It was that peep, the small anecdotes and data points you got from the campaign trail and volunteers was that it was just super lethargic and that is sometimes more a reflection of anything. Like there's a reason that people talk about crowd size and lawn signs and these like seemingly silly points of data, but they actually, it's not just that they, they're not just silly, you know, maybe ac at certain points, they may be used as like a silly justification for something, but they actually taken in total can really show you something about what's happening.

JVN: Yeah, like show you who's kind of the just has more energy, has more momentum. And you've said this a few times, I feel this too from even just being online for the last as a public

figure for the last, like however long since like 2018, I've had so many different experiences like on these algorithms. And when people first started saying, saying this to me, I'm still on the fence. Well, actually I'm not on the fence about the shadow ban thing. It is true that you might not be shadow ban, you might just be bad at social. But like if I post something that was taken on a professional camera, the metadata suppresses it, it only wants an iPhone, it only wants vertical. It doesn't want, like, there's just so many little things that I've seen like, change like that just change in terms of reach, how things perform, how things act, um how these spaces have grown and changed. And also like, what is incentivized? Like, I think the negativity biases have even been incentivized in here because people, it's just like what, like I talk about this on the podcast a lot. But like two years ago, I did an episode or a year or two ago, I did an episode on Tradwives then last year or this summer, I did an episode on gay Republicans. And that has fun researching that on my regular account has fundamentally changed my algorithms. I see so much Republican stuff now all the time, which also I wrote this down earlier and then I didn't touch back on it and I don't want to get OK, I'm just gonna circle this so I do come back to it. But how has for you in your experience, these algorithms changed over the years? Like what do you see?

SAMI SAGE: Oh my gosh, well, the, the underlying principle is that the rate of change has accelerated so much, like it used to be an algorithm would kind of be stagnant for six months or longer, even a year. And then it started being like, 03 weeks. It's like this, then it's like this. So then it's reels and some of that's like, you know, competition from other platforms. Some of that's the fact that like stories and feed and reels are all different. And DM it's six platform, it's six functions in one, um, you know, especially and shopping and then you have to, it's so it's just the overwhelming gush of content is, has made it very difficult also to your point about if you like search for something, it will then feed you things that it thinks you want. That is problematic. You know, when it is just feeding you that type of political content, even though they say they don't push political content, whatever. Um that also happens with medical stuff. And I think that's actually one of the more dangerous spaces like of all the –

JVN: I got a colonoscopy because my whole TikTok turned into like young people with colon cancer talk –

SAMI SAGE: Yup.

JVN: And not that you shouldn't get a colonoscopy. And I have to say the Propofol was propofoling.

SAMI SAGE: **Laughs**

JVN: I had a great experience like I just can never get over waking up from anesthesia because now I've done it twice and I, I had my first two surgeries and I just, well, the colonoscopy in this my butt one. But I just was like, oh wow, this is so crazy this like anesthesia. But I, I became convinced that I had that I had a colon cancer from colon cancer talk.

SAMI SAGE: So it's, it's like that. And then, but there's also what I call the essential oils to Q and on pipeline, which is like, you know, you know, the not the anti vax gets up in there. And I think that, I think that this is one of the issues that sort of interacts with one of the real issues in that we, that we're dealing with within our medical system, which is just that it's very hard, even if you have the best care, quote unquote to get decent care and to get people to listen to you and to actually, especially as a woman for them to take certain things

seriously. And when, you know, it's impossible to get an appointment, you have to wait forever. And in all that time that people are not getting paid attention to, they're actually scrolling online and they're being fed a mix of scientific and unscientific and questionable and total scams that they're getting fed on social media that they're desperate to solve their problems. Like they're, you're in pain and, you know, people are in pain or they're confused, like they don't know what's wrong with them. And that's the reason why people turn away from science, I think in a lot of cases because they're like, these doctors don't know anything. They're not listening to me. This is clearly an issue and they're telling me I'm fine and then these people online are like, ah, you definitely have an issue and here I'm gonna try to help you solve it and that's how you get people thinking Ivermectin is like the miracle drug.

JVN: Like I saw this video of Trump where he was talking about his um this the, the, the second assassination attempt. And he was saying, you know, like, like saying that this political rhetoric from the left is what has caused this. But then in the same speech, he's saying about Kamala that she's a communist, she's a Marxist. They're gonna come take your guns. They're radical, they're castrating Children. They're, they're enabling kids to have all these things done like they are making like, or I mean, Trump is making is having such intense rhetoric around that these people are gonna like they're making them feel in like threatened by what? It's, it's just so there's that and what do you think about that?

SAMI SAGE: That's all a strategic. That is all strategic. That's part of it. It's part of what? And if you like, OK, if you look in, if you think about like his debate rhetoric and you think about all his rhetoric, listen to his answer on abortion. He starts with everyone wanted Roe versus Wade to be overturned. OK? Then he, then he launches into like, and I didn't, I'm not responsible for Roe vs Wade being overturned, but just these amazing justices did it. They overturned. Roe vs Wade and you, I am going to be a leader on IVF and women should be prosecuted if they have an abortion. OK? He, I just that he can pack 25 crazy things into 90 seconds. And you, the listener, we Kamala Harris or the moderator or the interviewer or whoever is speaking to him, you can't even get to like, actually no one wanted a Roe vs Wade. No, that's true. Fundamentally. But if you're his supporter, you've now internalized 30 times now that everyone wants Roe vs Wade to be overturned because no one could even like, come for that because how can you attack a comment? That's just says everything. And then this is just how demagogues speak. He is, if anything, he is an incredible salesperson and marketer, he's a salesperson who doesn't, for whatever reason, know how to make a profit. But, you know, or at least in the conventional way, um I like to say he's just, he's very good at being a criminal. So you, you can't even like get at what he's saying. And if, if you believe, if you're projecting strong good person and you perceive this, you know, as, as correct and, or you agree with what he wants, you're like, OK, I'm not, I can't pick that apart, you know –

JVN: Yeah.

SAMI SAGE: And I have a question. Do you happen to have, have you, do you have someone on your Tik Tok who comes up named Keegan? His name's Keegan and he talks about like the psychology behind why people vote for different parties?

JVN: No.

SAMI SAGE: OK. You gotta, you gotta Google him. His, his name is Keegan and he, you won't, you won't be able to miss him if you search this. Um, we had him on the American Fever Dream Podcast actually a few, like a few weeks ago. So check out American Fever Dream, you'll see his, uh, you'll see his episode and he basically talks about, it's called like an authoritarian Personality. And it's not like, and it's, it's different than what Donald Trump is. He is the, he is the authoritarian. But there's people who naturally are attracted to that, they feel that they want to be, you know, taken care of, they feel that this will take, will make them safe. And there's like a whole psychological profile that goes along with it. And scientifically, according to, you know what he says in his videos, it's that the amygdala of people who are prone to this type of fear is actually bigger and it's more activated amongst this type of psychological profile. That's more, um, you know, likely to be responsive to something like that. So there's, it's not like you can always reason with it. He's hitting like your primitive lizard brain.

JVN: Yes. That fucking amygdala.

SAMI SAGE: And if you want to know something –

JVN: Tell me.

SAMI SAGE: And if you want to know something, I on the other side have learned that you can actually hit the lizard brain in a positive way and that's what I think humor does. So it's so much harder, uh, you, you have to be like way smarter to come up with funny jokes than you do to be like, I hate immigrants, you know, it's much easier. So, yeah.

JVN: That's so true. That is, yes.

JVN: So when people say that Donald Trump is great on the economy, one thing that also pisses me off that we don't talk about is the relationship between economy and family planning. What all of the research has shown what I learned from Melinda Gates was back in 2019, that the number one ability for women that are living in any place in the world, whether it's a developing nation, first world country, whatever, anywhere in the world is their access to family planning. When a woman can't or a birthing person can have access to family planning and say no, I cannot afford another kid right now or yes, I can't afford a kid right now. This isn't the right time or this is the right time when a woman has access to family planning, her ability to achieve upward economic mobility is so much higher. When they are forced to have kids that take that it impacts for years and years and years and years and years. Like there is an economic price to pay for uh the access to reproductive freedom. And so now in some of our most impoverished states, we have people of, of all different races who are living in poverty, who cannot get access to reproductive health care. And what we know about that is is that it can keep you in generations of poverty and keep you in generations of lack of education, lack of resources, lack of medical care, lack of ability to like parent the kids. And then people say like, oh well, you know, then there's adoption but like what the fuck? Like it's just, it's so like it is just so fucking backward. And so for anyone who's a for who is, has a forced birth position, you are not better for the economy. In fact, you are so much worse for the economy. It's not even funny and people don't even make that comparison. But do you think, how can I, how can we workshop that? How do you do that?

SAMI SAGE: So there's, there's a few things it depends on like, does that person, when people talk about the economy, do you think they even know what they're always necessarily

talking about? the economy, I think for most people is an emotion like it's, you know, obviously there are so like there's, there are stats, but if you're going by stats, the Biden administration has landed the COVID economy like an airplane on a thumb tack. And that is not necessarily the way people feel because prices have gone up, partially because of corporate price gouging because they are making the most profits they've ever made. That is a nuanced conversation to have also Donald Trump called his claims about the economy. Those were all set up from the residuals of the Obama economic policies think about that. And then there are a lot of people who think the stock market and the economy are the same. No, no, really not correlated. Um, the money is so – this is another soap box. I have money is so emotional for people. I'm not the first person to think of it but this, but because someone has written a book about this, but I did think about it separately and then find someone had written a book about this but that, you know, attachment theory in like relationships?

JVN: Yeah, secure, attached, anxiously attached –

SAMI SAGE: Yes.

JVN: Avoidant.

SAMI SAGE: Yes, people have that for money too and for their financial status and the way people and I don't want to say like, oh, people are, you know, wrong about their struggles. I'm not suggesting that. But when you look at the economy, quote unquote and people believe that Republicans part of it's this myth that he's this businessman and that he's Republicans are better for the economy. They're not better for the economy. It is what Bill Clinton said at the, uh, the Democratic National Convention. When you net out the jobs that have been created by Republican and Democratic administrations. Since the, since uh the end of World War, two democratic administrations have created 50 million jobs compared to 1 million jobs net out by Republicans. Republican administrations. They want to cut taxes for the wealthy, the most wealthy people who are so wealthy that like it, but if you're thinking about it, it's not gonna apply to you. You know, if it applies to you. And it's not just about like the tax cuts, it's about the cronyism that comes along with that, the rot that we get in society when the leader, when the executive bids out to his friends federal contracts that affect the roads we drive on and the traffic lights that are built and the hospitals that the –

JVN: Which is literally by the way –

SAMI SAGE: Yeah?

JVN: What happened with Spiro Agnew, who is Nixon's like, if you haven't read or listened to Bagman, we talk about it a lot or like back in the day –

SAMI SAGE: We have similar interests, my friend.

JVN: Yes!

SAMI SAGE: We do.

JVN: I mean, I can, when is he, what's gonna ha – uh, what's gonna, please tell me.

SAMI SAGE: She's doing another um show, then Steven Spielberg acquired the rights to Ultra apparently.

JVN: Oh my God. Ultra is so good.

SAMI SAGE: I, she's just honestly like, I wish I could be as prolific as Rachel Maddow, but I was watching MSNBC live and Laurence O'Donnell was interviewing her and being like, I would, you know, how do you do so much, it makes me look bad. And she was like, well, I reduced myself to a mere husk of a person and you have a life. So, you know –

JVN: That resonates, that resonates.

SAMI SAGE: I guess that's what it takes. I know, but I feel like a husk of a person anyway. So, whatever –

JVN: Same. Same. Um so –

SAMI SAGE: But yeah, there's so many pieces of this that it's like the economy is, the economy is, is really good right now. The stock markets also hit record highs in the recent weeks. So it's like these are emotional statements and also thinking about the implications of what they will do and people criticize Kamala Harris. They like, oh, she's not specific enough on policy and I get that also, her campaign has been like very short, she is part of an administration. So going astray of what they're doing has some of its problems and when she's running against someone like him, I think that looking at her record and how successful she's been in past jobs and the type of leader she is and the way she deliberates and is, listens to many people and experts and thinks about the implications on more than just herself. That to me is the argument for her. But you know, that's really hard to fit on a sign.

JVN: OK. Wait. So for people that are, this is like their first interaction with falling in love with you on the pod. Uh I do want to talk to you about your book and I want to talk to you about your pod.

SAMI SAGE: Yes. So it, it can be confusing. So I have, I'm actually on three podcasts total.

JVN: Yes!

SAMI SAGE: Let me tell you. So The Morning Announcements is my daily news podcasts that comes every morning, it's five minutes and I basically am breaking down all the headlines from that you need to know to have a passable amount of working information to know what's going on. So, and you know, the idea is like, it's in five minutes, I'm making commentary. So, you know, you're kind of hearing like a little bit of my perspective, but I'm also adding context from, you know, previous days or stories that maybe, you know, if this is kind of like a recurring story or there's an update. So it, that comes in five minutes every morning and then you're like, you're good to go for the day. Um, that's Monday through Friday. I'm also on American Fever Dream with a friend of mine V Spehar who you might know is UnderTheDeskNews on TikTok. And we talk about, we do deeper dives where we sort of dive into like the bigger stories. You know, we do a lot on disinformation, disinformation and democracy are kind of my uh my, my pet issues. Um I just, I'm very, very drawn to them. Um, so we talk a lot about like the environment of a America, we called American Fever Dream because it's about how, what a mind fuck it is to be an American. And like all the weird shit that happens. So we bring in like, you know, we don't talk about all the most obvious stories, but we do also speak about things in a more overarching kind of broad way to just so you understand, like the bigger things that are at stake rather than, you know, the, the smaller news stories. And then I'm on the @Batches podcast with my co, my

two co-founders and that's just us shooting the shit on Thursdays talking about pop culture, yeah –

JVN: Uh, I love a triple podcast queen!

SAMI SAGE: Yeah, it's fun. And those are my, I mean, those are my, like, best friends since we were like, young, you know, we've been friends since we were really young and we just like, and we co-founded this business that we've been doing for 13 years together. And it's just like an interesting window into, you know, the three of us and, you know, not a serious conversation really at all.

JVN: We need to let – that one sounds so fun. I love that.

SAMI SAGE: You should come on!

JVN: I would love to anytime please have me!

SAMI SAGE: You should be our fourth chair!

JVN: I would love to be the fourth chair. I'm going to be there for two months this year!

SAMI SAGE: Oh, amazing. OK. So we'll arrange, you'll come to the Betches office, we're redoing our studio and we can do like a whole, we can do a whole day.

JVN: I'd love to. I'm doing like October 14th to like or no, I'm doing like mid October to mid December. So I'm going to be there for a hot minute. I would love, please. I'd love to.

SAMI SAGE: Perfect. Amazing. OK, we, we'll organize that after this.

JVN: OK but I want to hear about Democracy in Retrograde. So how is the, tell me everything about it?

SAMI SAGE: So I'll tell you so, like I said, you know, democracy is kind of like my, my, my pet issue. Um I feel compelled that we should live in a country that represents the interests and desires of, of most Americans and that is working in all of our interests. And that I will say, like I know how much privilege and opportunity I have had as an American. And the more I come to realize that the more I feel like it's, it is incumbent upon me and those of us who have benefited from that to preserve that and not improve it. You know, we've never been a really fully multi multicultural democracy. And I think this is, you know, our really our opportunity to, to turn that um to, to make that the case for the next generation. So I started Democracy in Retrograde. I wrote it with a friend of mine, Emily Amick, aka EmilyInYourPhone, if you know her from social media. She is, she was a former counsel to Chuck Schumer –

JVN: Ooo!

SAMI SAGE: And she's just like super, super experienced in how politics actually works. And so if you follow her online, she gets so many amazing action points for how you can actually like get things done, who you, you know what you should call your senators and your representatives and ask for ways that you can build actual political power outside of like the meme conversations. So she and I teamed up and wrote this book and, you know, I've, you know, I kind of have the like cheeky tone and the, you know, the add the fun brand to it. And she has this like deep experience working in, in government and how those levers are actually pulled to get things done. So we came together and what we did is we wanted to

write something that could really help everyone understand what their place is in our democracy because not everyone wants to run for office, not everyone wants to call people or go canvassing or write postcards. But if you reframe what it means to be an American citizen and what it means to be civically active in your community in a way that's not necessarily political, but also because everything is political. It is actually a form of, of self care that taking your place in, in our society, finding your role, what mission makes sense for you. And that is something we actually help you do through a personality quiz. Uh, that's in the book. It helps you kind of figure out how your interests, your values, what you're good at, how many your resources, how much time you have all intersect. And then we give tons of examples of what you can do. It's also like a workshop, you know, where you do values reflections and you know, you kind of envision like what is the town you would like to live in? Um, you know, what, what motivates you and what we say is that it really should be about a paradigm shift internally and the way you think about yourself and your relationship to the collective, to people we've never met just because we are Americans or, you know, humans. Um, and that is really, you know what it's about. We also, you know, our belief is that, you know, people, there's a lone loneliness epidemic. And what we believe is that when people are more involved in their communities and taking these places with this like outward sense of sense of focus, that that could actually really be a cure to the loneliness epidemic. Um, you know, building deeper relationships where we're looking out for each other. And that is what a, you know, civically engaged society looks like. And of course, voting more than two thirds occasionally.

JVN: Civic engagement as an act of self care, I think is such a beautiful and revolutionary um idea and I love that so fucking much. Um, you guys, so Democracy in Retrograde, get it yesterday. Um I have II I just am so taken with your origin story of Betches. I think working together with friends is amazing. It can also be really sticky. You guys have like achieved so much success. You've built a literal media, uh like Empire of the ages. It's incredible. Do you have any advice for people who are either like new into their entrepreneurial journey or advice on working together? Um advice on keeping optimistic even when things are really hard?

SAMI SAGE: Yeah. Um, so I, I mean, I will tell what I'll say is that you're seeing like the, the result you or at least the present, you know, the present status. There were so many years and phases and times where there was so much stress and worry and will we be able to do it and will we be able, you know, how do I resolve this? And I wanna say like my, my friends and I, we were, we started this when we were 21. So, you know, it was through our, our twenties and you know, I'm sure that is such a formative time when not only is your prefrontal cortex literally solidifying itself, but it is such a, a time and you're figuring out who you are. And you know, these are people who I've known since I was, you know, so young that you look in their eyes and you see your younger self and you can't help but be that person. Um, and so we were really in like a crucible of growth. But I, I say that looking back on like the hardest moments, but at the same time, like finding the like glimmers and appreciating them. It's like, I love that. Like Emily and Jordana are like my best friends, like there's no relationship that can approximate that. And like I think about him, we are so lucky to have this unique experience and nothing is, is, is like this perfect, you know, always elevating, always everything going up and you have to deal with those really hard things. Like, I guess if I would say something, I say one piece of advice, it's that those hard times, those struggles are not meaningless, even if they are a total mess. And it might take 5, 10, 20 sometimes years to, to, to understand why or to like, see why it was OK that, that thing

happened or that you had to struggle with certain issues. It, it will bear fruit even if it's not obvious. And, you know, working with friends can be, can be really hard. I can't say that I wouldn't do it again, but I understand, I wouldn't advise everyone to, like, oh, it'll be fine. Um, I think, you know, it's, it's different if you're kind of like, uh, if you've known each other forever, you start by accident versus if you are setting out to start a business. But the number one most important foundation is trust and trust that you have each other's best interests at heart. And that at the end of the day, that is the one piece that you can always fall back on because, you know, you're gonna disagree, you're gonna have different opinions or priorities or feelings or go through things in your life. But if you can, if you can really know that, like, you love each other and there's, you know, I guess maybe love is a strong thing if you're just like business partners, but that you trust each other and respect each other. That is, is the, is the most important even if it means like you are going to split up as long as you know, an end to something does not have to be bad either.

JVN: Honey, your lips to God's ears. I wish more people knew that story, Sami Sage. I love you so much. Thank you for coming on. Getting Curious. You're the best of all time. This is so amazing and I would love to do Betches anytime you guys want me, I'm there.

SAMI SAGE: Please, this would be –

JVN: I love you so much.

SAMI SAGE: This would be really, really fun. I'm gonna make sure it happens. Thank you so much for having me. It is really an honor. I had the best time.

JVN: I had so much fun! Did you have fun?

SAMI SAGE: More than fun? This has been the best time and really, I'm like this, I could do this for longer to be honest.

JVN: Me too. I love you so much I can't stand it.

SAMI SAGE: Mwah!

JVN: Did we learn the thing? Yes, but here was like my biggest thing that I took away from this, which was that the more meme candidate has won the election in 2016 and 2020. So Internet warriors, I need you to get back out there and like I, I really felt like the and this former president really did not get the legs like it just didn't get the distance that it deserved. Like, so please go, do more with that, go do more with the, he would eat you for lunch, the cats and dogs things, the cats and dogs thing really seemed to have won the memeing of the debate, but it's not too late and we might not have a second debate. So I really need us to go meme up that this former president and would eat you for lunch because those two were good on Kamala, and I just don't think that we've, those have not got the airwaves that we need. So let's go back and do that. Um, but it's like, and I think the other thing that I took from this, that it's like, it's not even only just the more meme able candidate. It's, it's how the memes and it's how the internet translates to energy on the ground. It's like how that translates to what, you know, signs you're gonna put up in your lawn. And that I think is a really important thing. It's the connection between like passion and motivation and that there's not that much passion, you're gonna have less motivation. And I think that what we see from the maga side, they have a lot of passion. They can't necessarily articulate the passion in a way that makes sense, um, because they've been fed so much misinformation but that I think is you wanna have passion so that you have momentum and that's, I think

what is so important. Um, oh I also really thought it was so interesting, like how that, when people think about the economy, it's really a feeling like how much do you feel like you can afford now to this era, you know, pre pandemic or four years ago or in a different administration? It's like people don't really, I think, understand the full economy and I don't even understand the full economy. But I think that people think like, oh is inflation and how expensive things are really an example of how like is that a good marker of the health of an economy? And I just, I don't know if anyone that's not an economist really knows what that is. Um, oh, I also loved civil engagement as an act of self care. I'm really curious about that. Now, how can we make civic engagement and an education, an act of self care? And I'm also curious about the loneliness epidemic, like how is loneliness affecting us? I know that for myself, not being in the salon and not being around people as often as I am when I'm like filming, it's like, I also feel kind of like, am I like a victim of the loneliness epidemic? Like what, how does isolation impact our mental health? And I think that we're seeing that a lot from so many different people. So how does loneliness affect your mental health? Um, oh, I'm really curious how like are shadow bans real like our shadow bans real I mean, I really feel like they are but like how much do the algorithms really know? I feel like it could be a really good episode. Um, and I'm also curious about what the fuck are you guys curious about? Like we need to start doing a thing on social media where we are just like from our last month of episodes. What are y'all curious about now so that we can gauge what y'all are curious about? So we're doing that a little bit more nowadays, but I'm curious about what you guys are curious about. Um OK, so I love you guys so much. How much we love Sami Sage? How much do we love Betches? How much do we wish that we know who's going to win the presidential election right now? Um And can John Tester pull it out in Montana, Jesus Christ? I love you guys so much. Thanks for listening. Have you seen The Substance? I also need to still see it and I love you so much. We'll see you next time on Getting Curious!

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 and follow us on Instagram @CuriouswithJVN. You can catch us here every Wednesday and make sure to tune in every Monday for episodes of Pretty Curious which we love. It's our podcast on all things beauty, get into it! Still can't get enough and you want to get a little spicy with us? 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, or really just whatever is on my mind that week. Our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our editor and engineer is Nathanael McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.