

Partners - Chris & Sarah

Sarah: The first day I met Chris we were shooting a comedy video for a website. And in the video, Chris played my boyfriend. I was playing Zelda, from the video game. And Chris was playing Link.

Chris: If I knew we were going to have such a long relationship, enough to talk about our origin story, I would have *(Sarah laughs)* made sure it was different *(Chris laughs)*.

Sarah: Had not done the short.

Chris: Do you still want us on this podcast? *(Chris and Sarah laugh)*

(“Partners Introduction” by Hrishikesh Hirway)

Sarah: My name is Sarah Schneider, and I'm the co-creator of *The Other Two*.

Chris: And my name is Chris Kelly, and I am the other co-creator of *The Other Two*.

Hrishikesh: Before they created their TV show *The Other Two*, Chris Kelly and Sarah Schneider were the youngest Head Co-Writers in *Saturday Night Live* history. At *SNL*, they won an Emmy for Outstanding Variety Series, and a Peabody for Political Satire. *The Other Two* premiered in 2019, and the second season came out in 2021. Entertainment Weekly described the show as “an endearing family comedy masquerading as a legitimately hilarious pop culture satire.” But even before Chris and Sarah actually met, they knew of each other because they were both cutting their teeth in the comedy world in New York.

Sarah: I knew who Chris was because he was working at *The Onion*, and performed at UCB. This is the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater.

Chris: I know we knew of each other. We have a lot of friends in common, but, like, it was a name I think I'd heard before.

Sarah: Yeah, totally.

Chris: But we really came up on parallel paths.

Sarah: Mm-hm.

Chris: We graduated college at the same time. Sarah, you were at *College Humor*, I was at *The Onion* doing the same thing,

Sarah: Mm-hm.

Chris: And then got hired at SNL around the same time.

Sarah: And we were both born in 1983, three days apart from each other.

Chris: Mm-hm. It's cute.

Sarah: It is cute. We planned that. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)*

Chris: So we were, sort of, kind of, moving in tandem, but didn't really know each other until our brief first kiss on the *(Chris and Sarah laugh)* College Humor video.

Sarah: We did not kiss, did we?

Chris: No, no. The metaphorical kiss.

Sarah: Oh my God! I was like, "No."

Chris: One little peck. Ew! I hope we didn't.

Sarah: No.

Chris: But then I think, probably went our separate ways-ish until I got hired at SNL that fall. And then we were like, "Oh, you, my girlfriend from the internet."

Sarah: You again. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)*

When Chris got hired at SNL, I was like, still the lowest of the low on the totem pole. So when Chris showed up, I was comforted because I, at least, knew who he was. So it was like, that first day of school in college, where you're like, "Oh, that kid's from my high school so at least I know him, he's like my anchor.

Chris: My first day was the first writing night of the first show. And I truly remember thinking, *this is a nightmare. This is, my dream job is a nightmare.* Just 'cause you're so stressed. You're like, "Holy shit. I've tricked everyone in my life into getting to do this. It was literally like, "I'm not going to sit on a couch next to Kristen Wiig and pitch her my shitty little things.

Sarah: Yeah.

Chris: When you get hired, you tend to write with the people that you're hired with, and, or, you tend to write with the people that you are put in an office with.

Sarah: It was sort of, like, speed dating or something, and you never knew what anyone else was up to, and it could turn into a very lonely night because everyone was booked.

Chris: Yeah. So I remember being like, "Find Sarah. I can write with Sarah."

Sarah: And we really clung to each other for goddamn dear life. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)*

Then we did get into a pattern where we were just, like, "This is working. We are on the same wavelength. We like the stuff we write together. We have the same sensibility or things we want to write about," or the same people on the show that we would write a lot for.

Chris: Yeah.

Sarah: So we kept it up.

Chris: We didn't come into the show as a pair, but we eventually became a pair. Like we eventually became like, "Oh, Chris and Sarah." And then, at the end of our first year, Kate McKinnon got hired and I had known her from UCB. And then in our second year, Aidy Bryant got hired, and then the four of us codified around each other. When Kate and Aidy came, I think it really did change things for all four of us, really, because they were new and they needed someone to write with, we found two actresses that we were like, "Oh, we just, you are so funny. You can make everything we write better." It was the four of us that wrote together all the time.

Sarah: We really were there all the time, and you felt like you were, sort of, in this, in the shit together in a way that did bond us.

Chris: You know when you're a first, second year there, it's a lot of crying and frustration and, like, wondering if you're doing well or if you're going to get fired...

Sarah: Yeah.

Chris: So you really just see each other at your best and your worst, you know what I mean? Like, at your absolute stinkiest, smelliest, *(Sarah laughs)* at your most stressed. You're literally, like, paying your bills in front of each other and like *(Chris laughs)* putting on deodorant because you didn't get to go home that night. So you're watching each other, like, clean and bathe and *(Chris laughs)* do your finances.

Sarah: We had an ongoing tally on the wall of our office of “Who Farted First?” Each writing night. Who was the first one to fart? And we would write their name on the wall.

Chris: That’s disgusting. I mean, you definitely get closer. I mean what don't we know about each other?

Sarah: Yeah.

Chris: Because you just, your whole life is in those offices.

Sarah: After our third season, we got promoted to Writing Supervisors, which was, like, the next step on the way to Head Writer. You work with newer writers and help guide what they're working on, and you hear pitches from them.

Chris: Mm-hm.

Sarah: It's just like a little bit stepped up responsibility.

Chris: Seasons three and four, we always talk about that being like our golden time at the show 'cause it was so simple; we could just write music videos with our friends, and we could write what we thought was funny. But we had been at the show for a while, and we were the Writing Supervisors for awhile, and had been getting a lot of stuff on. And all of a sudden, you're in more meetings than you're not in. And the more advanced you get at the show, the more power you have at the show, the more responsibility of the show. You have to think of, not just what you want to write, but what you *should* write to help the show. Plus we were writing a lot of political stuff and it was, the one year we were Head Writer, was the 2016 election.

Sarah: And we had to be so on top of the news cycle, which was, like, daily devastation (*Sarah laughs*). And so it was just, not only trying to find the humor in every day, but, like, I never would have told my younger self that, “You're going to be a writer at SNL, and part of that is you're going to have to know who Betsy DeVos is, (*Sarah laughs*) who's the Secretary of Education. And you have to know everything that she does in Tweets every day.”

Chris: It was great, and it was fun, and it was one of the times of our lives. Like to be in it and be like, "I know this is one of the experiences that I will have in my life, is being head writer this year." But it was also fucking non-stop and hard and awful, and good - it was all the things. And so it wasn't one moment of, "Now you're Head Writer," but that year was one good, hard year. (*Chris and Sarah laugh*) And then we left.

Sarah: One good, hard year. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)*

So at SNL there's a sort of culture of, like, in your off weeks, you could be thinking about what else you might want to write *(Sarah laughs)*. And, like, in the summers, sometimes people go work on other projects. So we were sort of like, "Oh, we should think about what might be next. Let's start talking about it." We both knew we wanted to write something narrative as just like a challenge.

Chris: We kicked around ideas for a TV show for a long time. And then I think we just kept coming back to the idea that, for *The Other Two*, which is, these two siblings in their late twenties, early thirties, who are trying to make it in their life, and it's not quite working out how they thought it would. And then their little brother becomes famous overnight without hardly even trying. We really wanted to tell grounded stories, we wanted to write characters that were based on ourselves and had experienced things we've experienced in our lives, like: dating, career, relationships, family. But then we also really like writing silly, stupid stuff. So it kind of let us have our cake and eat it, too. It just felt like the most vivid world. We were like, "Oh, we can go a lot of places with this idea."

Sarah: We didn't explicitly talk about basing Brooke and Cary, who are the leads of our show, on us. It's mostly the way that they interact with each other. The things they talk about, the way they speak to each other is, that's sort of how Chris and I talk.

Chris: Yeah.

Sarah: We wrote the pilot while we were at *SNL*, and it was totally a different experience to pitch the show.

Chris: I mean, every step of it. I think the whole season one was like, brand new. People say, like "*SNL*'s the hardest place you'll ever work and so everything else will feel easy," but I have found *The Other Two* to be, there aren't even words to describe how much harder it is than *SNL*, to me. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)* But yeah, you're really spoiled by the infrastructure of *SNL*. It's a well-oiled machine, so you get to write something and see the most talented people in the world bring it to life immediately.

Sarah: Yeah.

Chris: You know, write something and it's on TV in three days to...

Sarah: It's on the TV in three years.

Chris: Yeah. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)*

Sarah: I think working in a different space together, we, sort of, have had to like, reinvent how we communicate. I think we're still figuring out how to communicate in this form because...

Chris: Mm-hm

Sarah: With narrative stuff, and working in this longer form space, we have a lot more time to sit in our decisions, and question ourselves.

Chris: And so now we're making the show together. And we're in charge of doing all the hiring, and we're in charge of figuring it out, and like, there is no infrastructure, we have to build the infrastructure. So it's, kind of, like you think of yourself as just a writer. Like, Sarah's like, "I like to write silly stuff." Like I want to be a writer, and you're like, "That's so cool! You get to be the boss of everyone and create all this." And you're like, "Oh, I don't. What?"

Sarah: I don't want to do that stuff. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)*

Chris: Also I lived in LA and she lived in New York. So it was always, she was coming here to write the show or I was going there to shoot. And so it was always, one of us was always not in our home at the end of the day. And then COVID hit. It's been like, layer, upon layer, upon layer of difficulty, you know what I mean? And then just, two friends at the center still trying to like, write the sillies *(Sarah laughs)*.

Sarah: We are united and so even when things are really hard, I really don't necessarily feel that it's us against each other. I think it's like, this is hard together.

Chris: The most fight that I can remember is we'll have a pissy exchange then go to bed and then the next morning we don't talk about it, it's fine. It's fine *(Sarah laughs)*. Again, you know, it can be that, you know?

Sarah: But I do remember early-ish on, maybe like, the second or third season, we got into a fight in the control room *(Chris laughs)* at SNL. I don't remember exactly what it was. Maybe about the shot? But we disagreed, and Chris left the control room. And I like, yelled out after him. And then the next time I saw him, he was like, "Okay, so what are you gonna do to with the part next?" And I was like, "I don't know. I think..." and we, it was just, we had, we had totally moved past it. And I think if someone that you're not friends with, you then are like, that's the end. *(Chris laughs)* But I remember being able to get over it very quickly and that continues to, sort of, be how we interact to this day.

Chris: It's usually one person really having a problem, and the other one being like, "You are responding in a way that's enough for two people, so I don't need to respond

anymore. So I'm going to be the anchor right now." But in general, it's usually like me being very anxious or panicky about something in the writing, or this isn't tracking, and her being the, like, steady hand being like, "It's fine. I see everything you're saying, I totally get it. You're not wrong, but we can solve it, we always do."

Sarah: He's talking about how anxious he is, but I feel in general, one of the reasons that I've been working with him for 10 years, even though he's an absolute nightmare (*Chris laughs*), is the level of attention to detail and wanting something to be great elevates everything that we do together. So he's always often the one being like, "I don't know about this."

And I'm sitting back being like, "God damn it. Like, can we just do this?"

And Chris will be like, "It just doesn't feel right."

And it'll take us a day, a week, a month to figure it out, but then there's no arguing between the two versions. One *is* better. So you can't really fault the guy for that.

Chris: But then writing wise, yeah, I guess you are sillier, maybe?

Sarah: Yeah, I think so.

Chris: Right? Which is good. Yeah, Yeah.

Sarah: And Chris is, like, so good at dramatic, and so good at writing, like, a scene where five people talk to each other. He just, like, knows how to write people talking in a way that feels so authentic. He's so good.

I think so many people are talented and so good, and I've loved working with everyone I've worked with, but there are so few that the Venn diagrams of what we think are funny, and the way we like to work, and our Venn diagrams are so close to being a circle.

Chris: There are days where I won't like something or days where you won't like something, but if the other one is like, "Trust me..."

Sarah: Mm-hm.

Chris: "This is good and this is fine. I like this," it will calm the other one down. And I think there's very few people in the world where I feel that way about them.

Sarah: Mm-hm. (*Sarah laughs*)

Chris: Maybe zero. *(Chris and Sarah laugh)* So it's, there is, like, a trust there, you know what I mean?

Sarah: Yeah.

I don't know if you know this, Chris, but you, this is dating us, posted on, like, your blog, like, "Things I'm Liking Right Now".

Chris: *(Chris laughs)* Oh, God!

Sarah: And one of the things was this web series that I had worked on called, "Full Benefits" for *College Humor*.

Chris: Aw! That's nice.

Sarah: And it was like a list of like, five things, and one was that. And I just always think about that because I thought Chris was so good at doing his own thing. And then for him to be like, "I like this thing that you're doing." And sometimes now, even, when I'm like, "Chris doesn't like what I'm writing or adding to this," I'll be like, "But he liked me back then." And we've lasted now for so long. I just feel like it's rooted in, like, a real...

Chris: Mm-hm.

Sarah: Sensibility connection that was before we even knew each other.

Chris: Yeah.

Sarah: And I think that that's telling.

Chris: I don't think there's like a moment that you notice you're best friends, it's just, our lives are so intertwined. It does feel like a combination of best friend slash sibling, slash, it's so silly because we're also, like, *business* partners, which is such a bizarre thing that *is* true, but feels fake. You know what I mean? To have, like, a company together *(Sarah laughs)*. I know her family, she knows my family,

Sarah: Mm-hm.

Chris: We have relationships with each other's significant others outside of each other. Yeah, it's just so enmeshed.

Sarah: I genuinely feel like I do my best work when it's with him. I feel like he elevates me. And you only have so many days in your life, and you want to make sure you're making something that you feel in your soul is like, worth the days.

Chris: (*Chris laughs*) Yeah.

Sarah: That was gorgeous, and if that doesn't make it in, I'm suing (*Chris and Sarah laugh*).

(*"Partners Introduction" by Hrishikesh Hirway*)

Hrishikesh: Chris Kelly and Sarah Schneider are partners. *The Other Two* is on HBOMax, and it'll be coming back for a third season. And Chris and Sarah have a brand new show coming out on HBO. You can follow them on Instagram @chriskellyinstagram and @sarahschneider.

Partners is made by me, Hrishikesh Hirway. I produced and edited this episode, and made the music. Maureen Hoban is my co-producer. And Chloe Parker and Casey Deal are the production assistants. *Partners* is a Mailchimp podcast, made in partnership with Radiotopia. Find out more at mailchimp.com/presents, and at radiotopia.fm. Thanks for listening.