

## Partners Transcript: Aline & Rachel

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Rachel: She saw me naked and peeing a lot.

Aline: Yeah.

Aline: My name is Aline Brosh McKenna and I'm the co-creator of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

Rachel: My name is Rachel Bloom and I am the other co-creator of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

Hrishikesh: *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* was a genre-bending TV show—part comedy, part drama, part musical, that aired for four seasons on the CW, from 2015 to 2019. It was a show that challenged and subverted the familiar tropes of romantic comedies. And along the way, it won a Critics Choice Award, a Golden Globe Award, and four Emmys, including some for the star of the show, Rachel Bloom, who co-created it with Aline Brosh McKenna. When it comes to romantic comedies, Aline Brosh McKenna is a master of the form, having written the screenplays for *27 Dresses* and *The Devil Wears Prada*, among others. But before Rachel and Aline got to deconstructing romantic comedies, they had a meet-cute of their own, thanks to the website Jezebel. Here's Aline.

Aline: I was in my old office, which is on the Hanson Lot and I was procrastinating. And at the time I used to read Jezebel pretty regularly, and I saw a little piece on - Rachel had a new video out. I didn't know who she was. I clicked on the video, it was animated, and I was very taken with the writing. I thought the writing and the jokes were great. So I started poking around and I realized, "Oh my God, the woman who wrote this, sang this. And the woman who wrote this and sang this is beautiful and hilarious." And I said, "This woman is so talented. I just want to meet her."

Rachel: I had meanwhile been writing on various TV shows and releasing music videos all the time. I was just in this place of, I know I like doing musical comedy. I'd had two separate musical shows that I'd pitched rejected just by everyone I'd pitched them to. And I said, "Well, maybe it's not a mainstream thing, but I'm still going to try really hard." And so I got an email from my reps saying, "Aline Brosh McKenna," you know, because when you read her name, it's confusing what's happening. But I knew the meeting was a big deal because my agents called me and I could tell the nervousness in their voice. They were like, "So, uh, Aline Brosh McKenna wants to meet with you, and we just- we wanted you to know

what her credits are. And yeah, this is, uh - just be yourself, be yourself, but this is a big one. This is a big one, but be yourself." And I'd learned that for me to do well in meetings, I had to trick myself to think they weren't a big deal. And I'd also been very disheartened by all the rejections that I'd gotten from my other shows. And so I just thought, "This'll be another thing that...It will be a nice meeting that goes nowhere."

Aline: So I - I get, like, a really strong gut reaction to people when I meet them. And I remember going to the meeting and thinking, "I don't have a particular agenda for this meeting." And I remember walking in and seeing her and my impression was that she was petite and she had this little curly bob and that she was dressed like a writer. I mean, I didn't know if Rachel was going to show up and be "va va voom," which she's very capable of doing, but at first glance I was like, "Oh, this is - she's my people. She's - she's a writer."

Rachel: I thought she was very chill for someone who'd written *The Devil Wears Prada*. So that was very encouraging and very relaxing, but also very overwhelming to have someone who was like, "You're great." Especially cause I'd- I'd been feeling very insecure, so it was very surprising for Aline to come at that time.

Aline: We started talking and I remember talking to her about the videos of hers that I loved. And I had had an idea to do, possibly, a movie called *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* about a crazy ex-girlfriend for a long time, many years. And I - I just all of a sudden went, "Oh, you know what? I bet she would like this idea." And so I pitched it to her and 15 minutes after we met, we were working on *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

Rachel: It just became a brainstorming session.

Aline: And then by the time the meeting was over, we were out in the parking lot and I was saying to her, "Well, this is what we'll do. We'll develop a pitch and we'll take it here," and I think Rachel was sort of bowled over that we had gone so quickly from, like, a meeting with no agenda to my coming up with a list of places to pitch.

Rachel: It was really intense right away because Aline, in creating the character, which is very much a hybrid of who she and I are, these intense emotional conversations started right away.

Aline: We were talking about our romantic life, our sexual life, our family life, our friend history. So it was very - they were very personal conversations kind of always...

Rachel: Mm hm.

Aline: Always.

Rachel: We're both very emotional people and we like writing emotionally. We like writing what feels vulnerable and scary, and what's a truth about life that we haven't seen written down before that we want to write about. So I think that that is inherently incredibly intimate and personal. So it was originally a network show, and I remember them saying, "Well, you know, Rachel might not get the lead in the show if you're developing a show for her if it's a network..."

Aline: (OVERLAP) Well, they - So they actually said that to me.

Rachel: Uh huh.

Aline: And that felt also more threatening. Like, somebody said to me, "You know, we love the idea for the show. We love Rachel, but if it's at a big network, she might not be able to be in it. So you should write a supporting part for her in case (LAUGHS) she doesn't get the lead."

Rachel: And I had just been in a situation where I had auditioned for another show that happened to be musical, that the part was written for me and then I was too old. There is nothing worse than auditioning for a role written for you and not getting it, especially when you're young and already kind of insecure, the whole experience is terrible.

Aline: Rachel came over and we were sitting across from each other and I said, "If we sell it to a big network, you'll make a lot more money." Rachel was spending all her money on her work. "However, if we sell it to cable or to a smaller place, you're going to make way less money, but we can ensure that you star in it. And so I leave it up to you." I said, "My preference would be to do it with you starring and make less money." And I remember Rachel said, "I don't care about the money cause I don't have any money." And I was like, "I don't care about the money cause I don't need the money," and I remember we reached up in high five and was like, "What a great collision of two people who happened to be in a point in their life where they don't care."

Rachel: We both, very, very early on, had gotten to the point where, with this project, we weren't trying to please any masters, we didn't give a fuck.

Aline: We were pitching the show at this point, and we were waiting to hear. We came out of some meeting and Rachel said, "Why are you doing this for me? Why are you being so nice to me? Why are you supporting me?"

Rachel: I could count on really, like, one finger, the number of women that I'd met, and especially women who were older and had more experience, who wanted to support me and build me up in those ways. And I think that Aline was very protective of me at the start.

Aline: Because people did that for me when I was young, and it's a pleasure to do it for someone else. It's much funner to be on the side of helping someone because it's very hard to attract mentors. It's not hard to mentor people. There are so many smart, talented, amazing people that need assistance. And, you know, taking on someone to mentor professionally really does mean taking them on to protect personally, because young people are not treated very well. So I found that I really enjoyed using whatever status I had accumulated in the business for Rachel. I think I was more comfortable using my clout for her than I had ever been doing that for myself. So I was like insanely overprotective of Rachel, especially in the beginning and making sure she got a good deal financially, that people paid her on time, and it was sort of like a Sci-Fi movie where you go back and do it for yourself. And so, before we made the pilot, we were, like, good buddies. And then we made the pilot and we got to be even closer. But I remember Rachel and I had to shift - because it was just the two of us for a very long time. We wrote the pilot together. We wrote two more episodes together. We made the pilot together, we worked together for two years before we got into a writer's room.

Rachel: Yeah.

Aline: It was just me and Rachel. And I remember especially the first season, we had had so much fun working together and hanging out and having lunch and being girlfriends, and then when we would shoot the show, I would never see her. I would always be in the writers' room and she would always be on set, and we were never together.

Rachel: I mean, I was really only a full writer on the show for the first - when you and I would meet before the season, and then for the first two, three weeks, and then I would become an actor who read outlines. And then when I wasn't doing that, I was writing songs.

Aline: There was tons and tons of stuff coming out of the writers' room that Rachel could not process because she was shooting. I actually missed her terribly. I would try and grab her when she was changing, or when she was peeing, or - (OVERLAP)

Rachel: She saw me naked and peeing a lot.

Aline: Yeah. But my partner needs to know what we're doing. So at the end of a shooting day, I wanted Rachel for an hour to say, "Oh, this is what the room did today and we decide..." cause she would come in and I'd be like, "Oh, we're not doing that storyline. We're doing this storyline. We need to do this." And then I would want to walk her through why we had changed it...

Rachel: Ugh.

Aline: And I'm looking at somebody (LAUGHS) who's just as tired as a human can be, trying to listen to someone babblingly recreate 10 hours of writing room conversation.

Rachel: Right, right.

Aline: I mean, that's --

Rachel: It's so rough. I was filming all the time. I mean, there's just only so much - you know, we were writing the show at the same time we were filming and the same time we were editing. So there were certain calls that naturally Aline would make that I wouldn't be there for.

Aline: And so, giving up some of her authority to the writer's room, which was necessary because of our process...

Rachel: Mm.

Aline: And so there was a point at which, you know, she was saying to me, "Well, you have the final decision and that's very hard for me." But I did have to have that because that's what a showrunner is and does and there was no way to do it any other way.

Rachel: I wanted to be in the room all the time and I fundamentally couldn't be. And it was hard because I really still wanted to fancy us, like, and we were, but like, co-creators. But the fact is I wasn't the co-showrunner because, I - even if I wanted to, I literally couldn't be.

Aline: There was a point where I said to her, "I know how hard it is for you to have this old lady's boot on your neck, but it's also very hard for me to have to run everything by you."

Rachel: Navigating the natural power dynamic of working with someone who has a lot more experience and both of you are used to working alone and understanding that when someone - getting an idea rejected was not...

Aline: ... personal.

Rachel: ... from Aline, a sign of disrespect. Because Aline is - Aline's more of a cat and I'm more of a dog. (ALINE LAUGHS) Like, I'm very like, you're a little more efficient in your listening. Like if there's an idea that I'm not really vibing with, I'll be like, "Huh, okay." Like, I'll kind of service it a little more, and you're much more of the like, "No." Uh - There are going to be moments where I walk in the writer's room and suddenly Josh is a DJ (ALINE LAUGHS) and I'm like...

Both: "What?" (RACHEL LAUGHS)

Aline: Yeah.

Rachel: "We have to film this tomorrow. He's a DJ." It's like, "Okay, I trust you."

Aline: One thing I really think is important for people to understand is, you know, women are conditioned to agree and be agreeable and to see relationships that contain disagreeing to be not functional and not healthy. And Rachel and I agree in a way that's almost, like psychic, you know, that's very soulmatesy, but we also disagree a ton and we always have. And that's partly because we come from different backgrounds, we come from different family backgrounds, we're different ages, we have different approaches to things, we're different people. And so we had to learn how to productively disagree. So really early on, we would have a disagreement and then we would talk about, like "Hey, how can we be more productive? How can we communicate better?" And we did that always. We stayed engaged with each other so even when we were disagreeing or getting on each other's nerves, we were always locked arm in arm together. One of the reasons Rachel and I are so close and we so loved working together is that, one of us would say, "Okay, right now you're confusing me. Right now, I'm frustrated. Right now, I feel like you're not listening to me. You know, right now, I need a snack. I need a cookie, or let's just go to the beach and forget about this. Like, right now I need a break." I have to say, like, one of the things that Rachel...I think it was when you got the Critics' Award the first year, when you thanked me, you said...

Rachel (Critics' Choice Awards): I share this, as always, with Aline Brosh McKenna. Aline Brosh McKenna! You have made me a better writer, a better person, and someday, I will see *27 Dresses*, I promise....

Aline: You said, "You made me a better person." And that really has been the great, wonderful joy of this process for me, is that I learned so much from Rachel about how to listen.

Rachel: I mean, that's the thing is the show has never been just a job. You know, from moment one, it was never just like, "Let's talk about the show separate from our personal lives," it was always incredibly personal. So it's hard to differentiate what conversations with Aline are work-related and which ones aren't, because I think the two necessarily dovetail.

Aline: By the time we were at the finale, we had been through so much. And, you know, if you think about it from 2013 to 2019 when we wrapped, Rachel and I had been working together pretty much continuously for six years, people who had never met before. And so we had to build all of our personal relationship, our professional relationship and our process. We built the boat at sea.

Rachel: Hm.

Aline: I respect Rachel creatively as much or more than anyone I've ever worked with. She is uniquely gifted.

Rachel: I feel like Aline's just, like showering me with credit and I will take it, (LAUGHS) and obviously, she was a fantastic show runner and really kept the ship like a ship. Not even, like, afloat but made the ship a ship.

Aline: I felt emotional about saying goodbye to a lot of the people on the show because I thought, "Well, it's unlikely our paths will cross again." But, you know, Rachel and I are at the point now where, like, she sang at my son's Bar Mitzvah, we talk on the phone constantly. We're always - we're still really together and close. We just don't make the show anymore. It sort of feels like part of the 50 years Rachel and I are going to know each other, like, for six of them we did a show together. But I felt like I never plan to say goodbye to Rachel Bloom.

Rachel: And in fact when we came - we just came to this podcast, we had just come from our first meeting together about something else.

Aline: Yeah, look, I'm - I'm looking forward to what the future holds for both of us. And so...I don't know. When you're friends with somebody, it always feels like a joint venture.

Hrishikesh: Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna are partners. All four seasons of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* are available to watch online. And you can follow Rachel and Aline on Twitter, at @racheldoesstuff and @alinebmckenna. Partners is made by me, Hrishikesh Hirway. I produced, edited, and made the music for the show. With editing help from Maureen Hoban, and production assistance from Olivia Wood.

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