

Partners: Tegan & Sara

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Sara: I'm Sara.

Tegan: And I'm Tegan.

Hrishikesh: Tegan Quin and Sara Quin are identical twin sisters. Their Grammy-nominated band, Tegan and Sara, has been their shared project for over 20 years, since they were in high school. They've made nine albums, they sang the theme to the Lego Movie, and they wrote a joint memoir that came out in 2019. Their lives have been so intertwined with each other, that their relationship relies on being able to find some individual space, too. They've been together since birth, and their togetherness is ingrained in their first memories. Here's Tegan's...

Tegan: I can see Sarah and I, and we're laying on the carpet, in front of a TV. It's an old television and I know we're in this townhouse that we lived in very briefly when we were sort of maybe three years old. And Sarah and I are just sort of laying together on the carpet watching the television. It is the earliest I can remember being alive.

Sara: A lot of my earliest memories I don't necessarily see Tegan but I know she's in the memory. I don't know really how else to articulate that.

Tegan: She hasn't forgotten that I was there, it's unnecessary for her to even say it.

Sara: Yeah. And I think that's probably common of siblings that are born really close together. Obviously we're twins. So many of our significant firsts were with one another. I mean and we also habitually did everything together. We were fed at the same time we were put to bed at the same time. We slept in the same room at least until we were about three years old. I can go back into my memory and I can sense a weight of knowing that Tegan was there.

Tegan: We always knew we were different. But probably when we switched schools around seven or eight years old. That's when I started to really realize that there was something unique about our relationship and I think that's when I started to think about being a twin.

Sara: Sometimes people said weird things to us or touched us. Kids used to follow us home from school. Those were the times that I remember feeling I don't to be this. There were times where we used it to our advantage. Oh, we just started in a new school. Well, how does it feel to show up at a new school on your own? Horrible. How does it feel to show up with someone who looks exactly like you? We were like rock stars every time we would switch schools, every time we switched neighborhoods, every time we went to the mall. But I'm of the twin community so I can say this I find twins who play up their twinness and they're sort of lack of individuality really disturbing. What I sort of like enjoy and seek within my relationship with Tegan is a sense of uniqueness and identity. And I think, you know, there's just nothing to sort of set you apart. And so you start to look for physical objects and ideas and hobbies and as we got older those things evolved. It stopped being about like, I always pick on Tegan because she was really into clowns and I was like, "I'm not gonna get into that, you know, I'm gonna really let Tegan have some space" to say yeah, yeah, we share the same face, but she's into clowns. I don't care about clowns at all.

Tegan: As we got older music was probably the place where we observed a lot of respect for the others, we had a lot of crossover artists. I loved Smashing Pumpkins, but Sarah *loved* Smashing Pumpkin's.

Sara: Yeah, Tegan would have never opened our Spin magazine and found a picture of Billy Corgan and put it up in her room I was like, no, that's mine.

Tegan: No that was for Sarah. I would have just collected that for her. And she knew to make sure that all the Courtney Love and Nirvana stuff came to me. So I think there was a mutual respect for the other's passion. But then tons of crossover stuff. We both took piano, we both took karate, both joined the basketball team at school. My mom basically believed in that sort of mentality, you should do a sport and you should do a language or an instrument. So she gave us the option and we said we wanted to do piano.

Sara: Once a year, we were allowed to select I don't know a popular song on radio. And those were the only times that I remember being deeply engaged in piano lessons was when I was going to learn the *Ghostbusters* theme, and that was also the only time I remember being interested in what was going on in Tegan's lesson because it sort of thrilled me adjacently almost as if I was having the experience of learning whatever Tegan was learning.

Tegan: But there was something just incredibly lame about piano. We weren't proud of the fact that we were playing piano, but we did love being musical, we loved music, we were obsessive about music. When Sara and I were in junior high or

middle school, we had a pretend band. None of us played instruments or anything, well we played piano, but we didn't actually have a band.

Sara: There was no music. It was just like, "We're a band!" We had song titles and branding and a logo. We were into all that--

Tegan: What was that Corduroy?

Sara: Or, no that was a different band his band was called Cough. But we just started writing song titles we didn't actually even have the songs we just made song titles.

Tegan: So finding the guitar felt really exciting.

Sara: One day after school we were hanging out with friends in the basement of our house we get rooting around in the storage unit and we pull out an acoustic guitar and we take turns fussing around with it. We can't do much with it, put it back in the case, put it back into the furnace room, and over the next handful of weeks we secretly both individually go downstairs, pull the guitar out, bring it up to our bedrooms and start fooling around with writing songs and at some point discover okay, Tegan's also writing songs. Okay, Sara's writing songs. Okay, let's play them for each other.

Tegan: And I think what was shocking about Sarah and I finding the guitar was how quickly we turned that into a thing. Not just a hobby but a passion. It was clear that both of us had been really taking notes on all the music we loved. And it was sort of like Oh, I can do this. I can figure this out. I'll figure out the shapes they're making. Okay, I just put my fingers here. And we broke a string almost immediately. We broke the D string. So we wrote the first 10 songs that we ever wrote on just those two big strings.

Sara: And then almost immediately it was, let's start recording.

Music Clip: [Hello, I'm Right Here demo] *Right now, I feel so winded / And someday, we'll be ending*

Sara: I already could hear the differences. Tegan always sort of had songs that were more, at least in the beginning, she always had songs that were really to me dark. They always had really crazy names and they always were quite abstract. And I didn't always understand the words that she was singing or the things that she was saying but that sort of fit with her cause she was listening to darker music and she was listening to more angsty stuff and I could tell that I was doing something different. I guess in some ways having a recorded version of what she

was doing also allowed me to understand it more. And so I could absorb what she was doing and then I could sometimes I would think, “Oh that was a really cool idea.” And then I would try some version of that in my own song.

Tegan: And I think we really quickly started calling it a band.

Sara: We entered a battle of the bands in grade 12 held at the college and university campuses in the city of Calgary. And we were entered into the semifinal, we won the semifinal. Then we played the final, we won the final and almost overnight we were established. We did CBC interviews, the biggest radio stations in the country were covering us. We were quickly...

Tegan: We were like Billie Eilish but 1990s...

Sara: Way smaller, but yeah, we were still in high school. We were still juggling our final semester of grade 12 and it was during those weeks that record labels started to call our house and show interest. We finished high school, we gigged around town and then we eventually signed a demo deal on our 18th birthday.

Tegan: And we sort of carried the weight evenly. One of us tour managed the other set up merch, you know, shared the set list duties. That sort of stuff, we kind of just divided up the jobs to get it done. And I think it was during that two year period that was very stressful without management, traveling the world, no credit cards, figuring it out. We're not even 20 years old and at that point it was like “Oh, crap we have a lot of stuff to do and so we started to divide and conquer if you will. So I became much more, like I took all the calls with the lawyer, all the calls with the record company and Sara became more of the creative force, you know, like in helping to design the website and the merchandise and the album artwork. And oddly it really worked and it really satisfied both of us. I liked going into the record company and playing bad cop. I liked going in and deciphering budgets and pushing back on things. And Sara had the patience that art takes and I don't have and it's kind of stuck over the last 18 years.

Sara: When we got into junior high I remember Tegan was more confident around, like we went to a school where there was a lot of bullying and there was a lot of “I'm gonna kick your ass after school” and sometimes that stuff was directed at us. And so I would just be like, “This is terrifying” and Tegan was just “All right we've got to protect ourselves,” so she would just come up against these people she would take a run at one of them or throw a punch and run and I would just be like “I guess we're just dealing with this,” to you and she'd be like “Bring it on!!” She would just puff herself up, you know, and make herself big. I still am learning that behavior from Tegan. I'm like, “We got a bad review,” and Tegan's like, “Fuck those people!” She really has this like whatever attitude about whatever is thrown

in our direction and we sort of balance each other. You know I think there's also something about that bravado that Tegan had when we were adolescents that really works well in business. I think there's a very short period of time in which you are given face time with the president of the label for example. And I don't necessarily excel at sitting down and having an intellectual creative conversation in what is going to essentially amount to about four minutes where I feel like Tegan could just come in and sort of rifle off a bunch of thoughts, feelings, I mean I've seen her do it as recently as a few months ago. She saw the new president of our record label and she's just like "Tom, how you doing? We're making our best record of our lives." You know and he's just like "Oh, best record of your lives, great!" And I'm just sort of like left there with my mouth agape. Obviously, the record label president is not a bully, but like as Tegan once faced down our bullies in adolescence she's willing to sort of take on the important figures in our career and sort of say like I'm gonna make myself big even if Sara's going to make herself small. I don't even know if it's so much about patience that I have with creative things, but I am deeply invested in the creative process because it allows me to be vulnerable and insecure, which is like what I am. That is exactly why I'm still doing this 20 years later. The business I don't really get to feel very like me when I'm in those spaces.

Tegan: I think that there is a parallel here between our relationship as adolescents, our relationship as songwriters, and our relationship as business people and that is is that we compliment each other. And I think that there are certain things that are my strengths and and there are certain things that are Sara's strengths and we allow each other the room to do that. I do not feel competitive with Sara about what she's good at. I'm just thrilled she's good at it. There was a time in 2007 that destabilized the whole structure of what we had built and I just remember us butting heads a lot. We moved labels, we were extremely busy and we were taking on way too much and Sara had right at the start of the record cycle was going through the end of a huge relationship and it destabilized us and like everything's changing, everything's starting again. And there were definitely a few moments on that record cycle that at the time we kept very private where we wrote internal memos to our entire team saying, this is likely going to end.

Sara: We don't publicly talk about it because they're not even interesting things. They're just moments where I think we just, as human beings, we physically took on too much.

Tegan: I think we are both kickass when it comes to the business or personal but when you light both on fire we sometimes start to, we tend to fray a little bit.

Sara: I think if we'd had other siblings, it would have probably been easier too. We would've had somebody to bounce off of a little bit. Tegan and I were sort of in

this like feedback loop of reflection all the time. It was just hard to map us I guess in this weird way. I just, I think if we had another sibling it would have sort of been easier for us not to always be relying on one another.

Tegan: So we hit a point multiple times in our career where we were very fatigued—

Sara: I mean, fatigue sounds like something that happens when you walk really quickly after eating a big lunch. Like, I'm talking about profound, deep drainage.

Tegan: All right, we were profoundly exhausted by what we were doing and for different reasons but some of that exhaustion created tension in us because it was, I just want to do what I want on my terms and we can't do that. We're not allowed to do that. We can't. That's impolite. It's also unfair to the other. We're in this together. We're partners. So when we get into the business of what we're doing and we have to make hundreds of decisions a week. We have to collaborate on what the schedule is going to be like, what the live show is going to be like. There was so much tension in Sarah and I because we have to make hundreds of decisions.

Sara: I always think that our fights are ultimately just communication breakdowns. Like arguing over tiny details and suddenly you've gone from what a conversation that seems like surface and detail oriented to "For nine years you haven't done--". You're just like, Oh my God, how did this disintegrate so quickly? And I think those fundamental injuries, those things that we've been holding onto since we were little kids. I mean those are the things that throw you into a total tailspin when you're having an argument about are you going to take that radio show or are you going to do that interview? And then suddenly you're screaming about, well you don't listen to me and you've never listened to me. And then they become much bigger.

Tegan: There was someone who worked for us who wrote us a Jerry Maguire level manifesto during that time that was like, remember the most important thing is that you are sisters and you love each other and you have created something amazing. Fuck the business and fuck all this. If that's what's eroding you right now, get out of it. But don't forget that what you're doing is so special. And I think we needed to be reminded of that. And we got through it you know like you go to therapy, you get some time off, and you come back to the plate. It's hard. There's a lot of stuff we have to share. I listen to other people that I meet, talking about their siblings, and they have such a respectful distance. They love them and admire them from a distance. I really, like, appreciate how much love and care that they have for their siblings, but they have such an identity outside of their sibling. And no matter how many miles are between Sarah and I are how different our haircuts might be or how many new friends we make. Starting with our physical body, and our faces, there are so many crossovers to our identity

and even within ourselves as adults, there's just, I think of what Sarah might want, how this will affect her in almost everything I do. I have to make concessions about where we're going to have Christmas and what hotel we're going to stay at and who's gonna get this next question, jeez that's a really interesting questions but I just spoke, and we have to do that all telepathically basically you know and

Sara: Telepathic lines are down most of the time

Tegan: Yeah, they are, It's exhausting so there is something absolutely incredible about the harmony that Sara and I are allowed, are able to keep going at most times in our life. I think one thing that I know now is when I start to sense that kind of energy coming into what we're doing, I tend to take a step back and try to remember that great advice we got halfway through our career, which is like the most important thing is that we are family and what we're creating is really special and there's just no decision and there's no part of our work that's more important than that.

Hrishikesh: Tegan Quin and Sara Quin are partners. Their memoir, *High School*, is out now, and the audiobook version includes some of those very early recordings of their songs. You can follow them on instagram and twitter @teganandsara.

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