Elisa: Jamie Varon is an entrepreneur, graphic and web designer, writer, app developer, author, traveler, curator, course creator—seriously, she's a woman of so many talents, one feels intimidated just trying to read her bio, let alone keep up. In 2009, when personal branding is at the height of being personal branding, she launched the website Twitter Should Hire Me to make a big splash on the scene. She's been splashing all over the place since then: starting the hugely popular and successful Shatterboxx web design boutique; traveling to and then living in Paris and Rome; being bold enough to try her hand at any pursuit or passion she'd wanted.

She moved to LA last year to become a Hollywood screenwriting superstar, only to discover she really just wanted to be a writer who was able to state her own truth. Wrangling a fabulous position as the West Coast Producer of Thought Catalog, writing and publishing two books in 2014 filled with personal essays and hilarious stories—all while rocking the characteristic sass and wit that garnered an audience that has followed her around the world and back again.

Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today, Jamie. Is there anything I missed out there?

Jamie: I think you got everything. Wow! It's funny to hear it all laid out like that.

Elisa: It's kind of a little bit of walk down memory lane of everything that you've done over the past half-decade of your life.

Jamie: Yeah. Whoa. I forgot about a couple of things in there, so thanks for inviting me.

Elisa: Sure thing! Going back to the beginning of all that—because as we noted in the introduction, like way back in 2009, is when you were kind of starting to make the splashes as we talk about with the super fun site that you created, Twitter Should Hire Me. How did you get the idea for doing something like that?

Jamie: So what happened was, I graduated college and I had no idea what I was going to do. It was not even matter of, "I don't have any interests." It was like, clearly, I have too many interests. But I couldn't even focus on anything, so I just took a job for six months as an office assistant in my college's town and sort of like putzed away for a while and did nothing. And then, I decided. I was like, "Okay, I'm ready to take a job." And I found this job in San Francisco at, like, a startup—and it was terrible. It was not like the fun, Ping-Pong table startup. It was the "work until you're dead" kind of startup, with like no perks at all. It was pretty awful and I quit after two weeks.
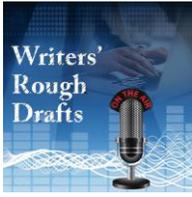
I tell that story because that, to me, was the turning point in my life. Because I remember talking to my mom—I will never forget this—and she was like, "Jamie, why do you wanna quit? You have to have a job." Really, she was not trying to deter me, but she was like, "Don't you wanna have something lined up?" And I was living at home and I was really grateful that I was able to do that. And I just said to her, I was like, "If I allow myself to stay at this job, I will be admitting to myself that I can't do better." That was like the decision for me. I was like, "I have to…" Early on in my career, when I'm twenty two or something, I have to say to myself, "I want something more out of my life." And that just kind of, like, set me off to… I tried a bunch of different things. I was blogging, I was doing all this stuff.

You know, Twitter was not big back in 2009. It's not what it is now. And I thought, "This is the company that is on the forefront of completely blowing up." I tried to… I delivered cookies to their office. I tried to really get in there. And then I just decided, I got to do something big. Twitter is the creative company; I can't just send a resume. So I had this idea—I think it was something like seven p.m. one night—and I was just like, this has become my signature style where I get an idea, and I just like, execute it right away. And I executed it right away. I stayed up until six a.m. creating the website, designing and doing everything. I sent out one tweet. And the next day when I woke up—well, the same day when I woke up because it was six a.m. —I saw that it like—for Twitter at that time—it went viral. Everyone that was on Twitter basically saw it.

And what really happened when I look back… I didn't get hired by them because I really didn't have the experience. I had no experience of doing anything. I just graduated college. They didn't even have a position. At that point, Twitter was looking for engineers, because they weren't looking for branding or marketing or anything. But then I started it—Shatterboxx because the way I started Shatterboxx was someone called me, and they were like, "Do you design websites?" And I said, "No."

Elisa: "I may have just designed one, but that's beside the point."

Jamie: Right. And I was like, "No. I don't do that." And she's like, "Well, if I pay you $150, will you do it?" And I was like, "You're going to pay me?! Okay!" And so it was one of those things where I just kind of like, pivoted into it because it just like fell into my lap. Like, Shatterboxx—the name—was for a social media blog. Because people were like, "You're kind of like internet famous, you got to capitalize on that." And I was like, "I don't know how! What do I do?" And people were like, "Write about how to be famous on social media." And I was like, "I don't know what I did." So, I took that out and just made Shatterboxx my company website. And soon enough, after a month, I was getting like a thousand or two thousand dollars for a website. So I was like, "Well, this is lucrative. Might as well do this." And then it ended up being like, a really incredible thing. I was doing that. I have that company for over five years.

Elisa: That's so interesting because Shatterboxx—of course for people who don't know listening to this, Jamie and I have known each other since 2009. I was around for the Twitter Should Hire Me days, and Shatterboxx grew to be quite a successful, very time-consuming company and you still managed to write regularly, to travel—to do all sorts of other stuff. How?

Jamie: Honestly, it just didn't feel like work. To me, designing was like finger painting when I was young. It's just fun. I've just always been like really kind of headstrong to a fault, where—when I started Shatterboxx, I said to myself, I was like, "I'm not going to work with anybody unless they want a Shatterboxx style. I don't wanna deal with people who just want me to do Photoshop for them."

I think you can get really excited about money and like, forget money doesn't feel that great when you're miserable. So I created a very distinct style, to the point where without my even trying, like, a couple of years into doing Shatterboxx, it was being used as verb. People were like, "I want you to Shatterboxx my site." Like, "I've been Shatterboxxed." And I was like, "That's so funny." But that's what I set out to do. That was my initial intention was to not make my business into a verb, but have my style be why people came to me.

And because of that intention—which I was very clear about—everything else kind of fell into place. And I guess if I'm looking back, I can see how that's like, when you have a really important guiding principle, all your decisions fall under that. So when someone came to me and they were like, "Will you just tweak a template?" I would say, "No, I don't do that." And so I kind of like, curated what I wanted. And so for that, doing Shatterboxx wasn't that time consuming because I was really just creating like, fun art for people who wanted websites. It never felt like… I mean, sometimes it felt like work. I can't say it always didn't. And then doing some of the other stuff, I don't know, I guess I'm good with managing my time.

I don't know. I'm such a procrastinator. I look back, and I don't know how the hell I did all that. I'm sure I'll feel that way a year from now when I look back at this time too. Like I don't know what I do. I feel like I'm panicked all the time trying to get shit done. And then I look back and I'm like, "Wow, I did a lot! How did I do that?" I'm in, like, self-doubt all the time. It's not that I just believe in myself so incredibly that I'm like, "Oh, it's so effortless." It's hard all the time. I don't know what I do.

Elisa: I think that's something that a lot of people maybe don't understand about people who do create a lot of their income and lives around these creative pursuits—that it isn't all stuff that, as you said, just effortlessly comes to people. It's stuff that you have to work really hard at, and do much of the work like, right up to a deadline crying.

Jamie: One of the things I actually think that I really got good at was Shatterboxx. And I probably need to get better with my writing is when it wasn't coming—like when could not create, when I just felt like I had no ideas—I didn't really get down on myself. I would just leave. And I mean, I know that I have the luxury of being able to do that because I have my own business. But I wouldn't just sit around clicking on Facebook or anything, because I really trusted that it would come. I guess I don't have that with my writing, and I just have a realization, so this is interesting. I don't have that same trust with my writing, and so I do—I click around on Twitter. I click around on Facebook. And I make myself crazy until I realize, "Oh my god, I've been sitting here for four hours and I haven't been writing."

But with design, I trust that in a day or two, it will come. I'll get it and I'll do it in hour. Sometimes I'll spend weeks—or maybe not even that long—but a week, not being able to come up with a design concept. And then right when it comes, it's like, it's so effortless. And I think what I stopped doing was beating myself up about the in-between time. Because I think, like, in a creative profession, we forget that not creating is part of it too. Your brain is like, constantly kind of like, percolating. And you need to just let that happen. And that's really hard to do if you're sitting at your computer being like, "Do this work. Do this work. Do this work. Do this work." Like, it's impossible. Nothing gets in. So that, to me, is like one of the biggest things. And then another thing about like, self-doubt—I guess, to me, the desire to create and put stuff out into the world is more important than my self-doubt. I have both going on at the same time. I doubt pretty much everything that I do.
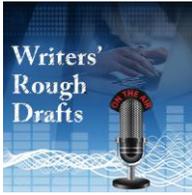
Elisa: Which is so baffling to me because… you cover that really well, because you do come across as someone who is so passionately believing in everything that she puts out and everything that she does.

Jamie: Yeah. It's funny, I actually wrote a post about this the other day, of like struggles of people who have so much self-doubt, but people don't think that they have any. I was like, "This is my struggle so bad." It's like, "I have so much self-doubt but I think I just also have this desire to not let it swallow me." I think one of the biggest things is I'm very self-aware. I'll know when my self-doubt is just killing me. And I'll be like, I have to do just do something. And I always feel better if I have self-doubt about my writing. Like, if I write even just 200 words. If I write a tweet. If I write anything, I feel better. And so I just, like, have to push through it. It's much harder to do than just, like, saying it.

It also, like, has comforted me to find out that people I really admire and respect have self-doubt too. It's one of those things that people never talk about, but we all feel. If you're not feeling self-doubt, then I don't know that you're really putting something out there that matters to you. You're playing it safe. I don't have self-doubt when I do stuff that I just, like, inherently know people are going to like—granted, that doesn't happen very often because I don't really like to pander—but that's the kind of thing where I'll just be like, "Oh well, whatever."

To me now, it's become like—my self-doubt is a marker that I'm doing something big. I'm like, "Oh, great. Yes! This means it's important. This means I have to push through it." Because that, to me, is like—that's when I'm really getting to the heart of something that I am afraid to say that needs to be said. And it's funny: that just comes in so many forms. I'll have self-doubt about something that I put on Instagram. Like, it's all sorts of things. And then I'll be like, "No, this is important. This needs to be out there for some reason," even if that reason is just to show me that, like, my self-doubt is not going to stop me. I'd be really sad if I woke up one day and was like, "Wow, I didn't do all those things just because I was like, worried that I wasn't good enough." I'd be sad about that.

Elisa: So a lot of those times that you were talking about self-doubt—you alluded to it a couple of times and I know a lot of other people that end up in this—the best way to avoid kind of self-doubt and that terror of hitting the "publish" button is to avoid all of the work and all of the publishing and everything as long as you possibly can. You mentioned that there are some times that you just have to shut your brain off and just walk away from the work for a little while. What are some of the things you do to like, shut down from constantly thinking on that stuff?

Jamie: Well, that's one of the big things. I also will read a book. I mean, I'm not as disciplined as I think. There are many, many days—especially now that my job is to write—there are many days where I just sit there stewing in it. And I'm just like, "All I'm doing is a bunch of self-loathing. Well, here we are!" Because it's sometimes really hard to get perspective. Sometimes that self-doubt or that ego or whatever it is sounds really true. They are just like, "You know what, you suck!" And I'm like, "I think you are right. Today, I think you are right."

And sometimes I think like I'm just doing it. Other times, I'm like, "Okay, I need to go take a walk. I need to watch something. I'll just put something mindless on. I'll cook—which just really helps me to clear my mind." I have a few friends who we all love to just do like, "Let's word vomit about our life and see what's going on." And I'll talk to people and find out something about myself. What's really important is,

when that starts to happen, is one, treat yourself with incredible kindness; and two, tell the world about what's going on. Tell someone. Like, "I feel like all my work sucks!"

That actually, like, alleviates a lot of things, because the fear is, "Oh, my god. All my work sucks." But then, there's also the shame of, "Oh, my god. All my work sucks and I feel ashamed that I think that." And then the shame leads you to like, not tell anybody. And so then, it's like this big secret and it becomes built up. It's just not worth it because everybody is feeling same thing. We're all feeling that, so why are we trying to keep it in? It's pointless because we could all share and be like, "Oh, great. We're not alone!"

Elisa: And that is the worst part of it. When I was talking to Mark Manson, we were joking about how in every word processing document—almost every one that exists—you have that stupid cursor that sits there and blinks at you and like mocks you every half second being like, "You- don't- know- what- you- are- talking- a- bout-" And it drives you crazy if you don't get out and like, get out of your own head and be able to talk to other people about it. Because otherwise, you're just stuck.

Jamie: Oh, you get so stuck. But another thing that I've found is: if I let myself off the hook too much, and I give too much air to those doubts, that also kills me. Sometimes, I have to ask myself, "Okay, is this something that really needs to be talked about?" Or, "Can I just write something? Just write it. Just write something." And a lot of times, just doing the work and pushing myself to do the work, there's plenty of things that I write that I'm like, "I am never going to publish that. That is terrible!" Which is hard to do, considering my job is to publish pretty much every day, and like, these things don't go through like, rounds and rounds of edits—just like, click publish. That's the nature of online publishing. But there are some times where I have to stop giving into myself.

Because that becomes addictive, to be like, "Oh, well, I'm figuring things out and I'm figuring myself out." A lot of times, it's like, "Okay, I know you exist. I know that I doubt myself, but I have to just do it. I have to just push through." Because if I go like, a week without writing or something, like I get kind of rusty. And so I have to just push myself to do it because that's another thing, I can get a little wallowy. A little wallowy about it, like, "Oh, woe is me." Another thing I've been thinking a lot about is I do this thing where I have a "fantasy me" in my head—and she's effortless. She writes, like, perfectly, and she just sits down at the same time, every day, and never gets distracted. And she just publishes and the comments are just like, "I love you!" And this fantasy girl is amazing. She never feels bad about herself. She never lets herself get down. She's wearing white all the time for some reason.

Elisa: Because she can wear white all the time because she's fantasy.

Jamie: [20:19 She doesn't spill anything because she has boobs?] She can just effortlessly do everything. And I hold myself up to this fantasy person. I realized this actually yesterday. Just yesterday, I was like, "Wow, I'm an asshole myself because I think that person exists somewhere." And I'll say, "Oh, if I was writing for this website, it will be better because it's not those kind of comments, or blah, blah, blah." And it was like—anything that I can think of to make my current situation not the ideal situation, and my perfect situation is somewhere out there is what I'll do. And then I'll be like, "Shut up. That's not true! Do the work right now. Be now, right now." And like, "I'm making up excuses." And when I realized that yesterday, I was like, "Whoa, I'm holding myself hostage to this fantasy person that is not real." Like, that's never going to exist. Like I'm never going to be that effortless. I'm always going to not wear white
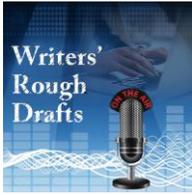
because I spill shit on my chest! Like it's always going to happen. Like that, to me, is going to stick out of my mind that my fantasy person wears all white.

Elisa: I'm pretty sure it's going to stick on everyone's minds now.

Jamie: Like, "Oh, my god. The fact that my fantasy person wears white is like—"

Elisa: That's indicative of many, many things.

Jamie: That is true! That's like one of my sighs, like, "Ugh! I can never be her!"

Elisa: Well, I'm going to give you a chance to be a little like her and go with a little bit of effortlessness here. We are going to move on to a fun little game that I like to play with folks. Super easy. Over the next two minutes, I'm going to ask you a series of either/or questions and I want you to answer with the first thing that pops into your mind. And we're going to try and get through as many as we can and get a little sneak peek into the secret thoughts of your writer's mind. Are you feeling ready?

Jamie: I'm ready. I'm nervous.

Elisa: All right, let's go. Pen or pencil?

Jamie: Pencil.

Elisa: Mac or PC?

Jamie: Mac.

Elisa: Coffee or tea?

Jamie: Coffee.

Elisa: Night or morning?

Jamie: Night.

Elisa: Good writing or correct writing?

Jamie: Good writing.

Elisa: Noise or silence?
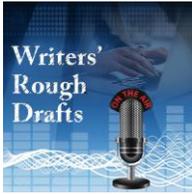
Jamie: Noise.

Elisa: Righty or lefty?

Jamie: Lefty.

Elisa: Weird or typical?

Jamie: Weird.

Elisa: School or no school?

Jamie: School.

Elisa: Outside or inside?

Jamie: Outside.

Elisa: Clean or messy?

Jamie: Clean.

Elisa: Teacher or student?

Jamie: Teacher.

Elisa: Town or city?

Jamie: City.

Elisa: Trains or planes?

Jamie: Planes.

Elisa: Skiing or surfing?

Jamie: Skiing.

Elisa: Fantasy or reality?

Jamie: Reality.

Elisa: Love or money?

Jamie: Love!

Elisa: Introvert or extrovert?

Jamie: Introvert?

Elisa: Good content or good marketing?

Jamie: Content.

Elisa: Smile or game face?

Jamie: Smile.

Elisa: Call or text?
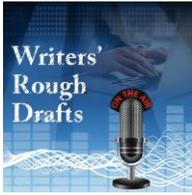
Jamie: Text.

Elisa: Money or fame?

Jamie: Fame.

Elisa: Be older than you are now, or be younger than you are now?

Jamie: Older.

Elisa: Think before you talk or talk before you think?

Jamie: Talk before you think.

Elisa: Have a dragon or be a dragon?

Jamie: Be a dragon.

Elisa: Bestselling book or million-dollar business?

Jamie: Both!

Elisa: What is one site that you are loving right now?

Jamie: [?? 24:25]

Elisa: Boom! And perfect timing.

Jamie: Whoa!

Elisa: You made it almost all the way through, congratulations. I told you, effortless, and you're almost the fantasy all-in-white girl from that.

Jamie: Almost.

Elisa: Well, I mean, you know, maybe you were pretending to be her while you're answering, I don't know, I'm not inside your head, but hopefully we gave you at least a mini second of it.

Jamie: No, I saw it. I was surprised by a couple of things.

Elisa: It's funny when you have kind of a gut reaction just answer one or the other. You're like, "Boom! I had no idea that's what I was going to say."

Jamie: Yeah, definitely. That's a fun game.

Elisa: Well, thank you so much for taking the time to join me today, Jamie. Where can folks find your writing and business and other books and stuff online?

Jamie: Right now, the best place to find me would be thoughtcatalog.com. I'm on the front page, so you could just find me there. And then Facebook: facebook.com/jamievaron. That would be great. Twitter is awesome. Pretty much, I'm the most prolific on those three places.

Elisa: Perfect. And do you have any parting thoughts? Any kind of further wisdom or ideas about writing and business that you think people should know?

Jamie: I would say: through everything, treat yourself with a lot of kindness and care. And whenever you feel like you're alone and you're the only one that feels that way, seriously, sign on to the internet and see that you're not. Because pretty much everything you're feeling, other people are feeling too—and it's really comforting to know that.

Elisa: So, so true! Well, thank you very much.

Jamie: Thank you!
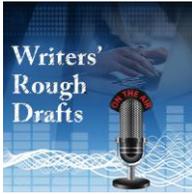
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[Outtake]

Elisa: You're still an artist and a free spirit, and just go where the wind shall take you, et cetera, et cetera.

Jamie: Yeah!