



A Reasons to be Cheerful project

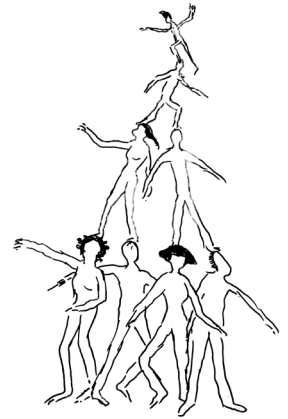
## Bridging Divides: Ava Brennan and Mark Robinson (Sages & Seekers)

*A young BLM activist and a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement connect across a lifetime of struggle.*

**Ava Brennan:** I met Mark through this online program that kind of is all about bridging intergenerational gaps.

**Mark Robinson:** Basically you just talk, you get to know each other, and the thing that's really magical about it is you find out that even with age difference and gender and race and ethnicity, we all have a whole lot in common — more in common than we don't.

**Scott Shigeoka:** Ava, I know that you consider yourself a part of the Black Lives Matter movement. And then Mark, you've been a part of this movement since the civil rights movement, if I'm not mistaken, and the groups that were out when you were younger maybe would look different than what you're seeing today. It sounds like today you're seeing a much more broad coalition of people. Is that right?



**MR:** When you think about it, you look at the crowd and you look at the people that are at these protests — there's no one's specific population that's there. It's represented by men, women, Black, white, Latino, Asian, gay and lesbian. It's just, everyone's there. And the ages vary. You have young teenagers, and then you have those in their twenties, in your thirties and even older. So that, to me, I think it's what makes it encouraging. What scares me about it is, what happens when the momentum drops off? When people have to go back to work, when people have to make a living?



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**SS:** Ava, what's coming up for you as you hear these kinds of stories from Mark, all the time when you're getting connected through Sages and Seekers? What are you learning or what's your experience of being able to have this connective opportunity with Mark?

**AB:** Yeah, so basically when Mark actually brought up the topic of, Black Lives Matter and all the protests. Until I've just been avoiding, kind of political topics with any Sages, just out of the fear of it's going to be conflicting.

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And I just am not, I'm not person who likes conflict in any way. And so he asked me and he asked me what I thought of it and what I thought of what would have been going on. And so I just answered him honestly: I supported it and different thoughts I had on the different aspects of it. And he just sat there and listened very quietly, and then he just kind of gave me all my words back and explained his experience with it in his past, and it was so informational and just a conversation I've never had with anyone who's out of my age group before. So that was definitely a conversation that my brain was like, 'Wow' and just little light bulbs and fireworks everywhere. So yeah.



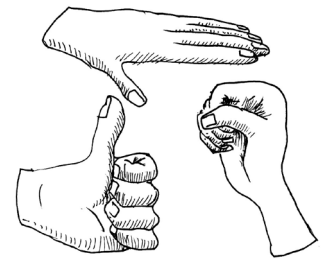
Photos Courtesy of Ava Brennan

**SS:** And I'm sure it's two-directional, too, right? Like you in your own right, Ava, are an incredible activist and you create, you're funneling, \$10,000 through your fundraising efforts to organizations like the Trevor Project. Can you talk about what you'd been able to do as well?

**AB:** I do a bake sale every year called the Rainbow Bake Sale and all the proceeds go to the Trevor Project. I've done ones for Planned Parenthood and Mary's List for immigration, Moms Demand Gun Sense.

**SS:** That's beautiful. I think the amount of work and issues that you're connected to is such a testament to you and how engaged and involved you are. And I'm wondering for you, Mark, what are you learning or what what's coming up for you as you hear about all of the things that Ava's doing for her community, for the people that she loves, what are you gaining from this experience of connecting across the generations in this way?

**MR:** That's a really good question. The number one thing I've gained in this relationship with Ava is it helps me not become cynical about young people today. Okay, man, if you listen to a lot of older people, if you listened to the media, the way they depict young people, it's just like similar, Ava said very clearly that she was a little apprehensive because she didn't know she's going to come in and have some older person lecture to her and preach to her and have a whole different opinion and finding and getting to talking to someone and didn't have that, that helped her become more open with me. And I think that was helpful for me as well, but she's giving me a sense of hope and a sense of — that's all I can say, it's hope. We're going to be okay.



**SS:** One of the things I heard you say, Mark, is that Sages and Seekers saved your life in a way. Could you talk a little bit about that?

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**MR:** That's probably a little dramatic, but yeah I did say that. You know, you've got these different parts of your life that you go through. And you don't always plan for them. I don't think I emotionally planned for retirement. I just thought I was going to roll into it and it was going to be okay. So I had to remake myself in a sense. I had to remake a community for myself. I had to, I started going to Pilates classes, I started playing golf more often, met some guys on the golf course. But it still wasn't enough. So I needed to do something. I needed to do something to make me feel like I still mattered. And Sages and Seekers helped me meet that goal and meet that. And it has helped me considerably.



**SS:** Why is it important for us to connect across the generation like you two are?

**MR:** If you think about the two groups of people in our society that people just take for granted, are young people and seniors. And it's like when you become a senior, all of a sudden your power is gone and then on the other side of the coin, you got people not really giving the young people any credit that they can't even vote. They don't have any power, they don't have any money, all of those types of things. And I think so the reason these two generations worked so well in talking with each other is because in some same strange sort of way, they are very being oppressed in a very similar way.

**AB:** Just the idea of separating these two generations, like, you're not useful right now cause you're out of date or you're you haven't yet hit your date of, I don't know, like when cheese ages and it's ready to be eaten. That kind of thing I guess.

**SS:** At least once a week I hear, "Yeah. Okay, Boomer," used in a negative way towards older folks and at least once a week, I also hear, an entitlement towards young people thrown at them or us. And so I'm just curious, what do you hope for the future of our country, regarding this generational divide?

**AB:** Take it away, Mark.

**MR:** You go first, please.



Photo courtesy of Ava Brennan



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**AB:** Okay. That's I guess a big question, but, my hope is that Mark and I stay besties. As I prep for college, I'd love for him to read over my PI personal insight questions and my essays.

And then I guess my bigger hope for the world, and just us as people. Everyone I know who's an activist of some sort has such a drive and I just, I know they're going to do great things and I just hope that the world is ready to let them do it, right. Ready to, not stand to the side, but work together. And I think that this is one of those points, like how Mark said that different generations are bridging together to do BLM or various other movements. And that's what I'd like. That's my hope: that it becomes less about what generation you are or where you're from or what you look like, and more about, we have a common goal of helping this group or helping this idea.

**SS:** That's beautiful. What about for you Mark?

**MR:** First of all, I'm extremely flattered that she wants me to help her with all that stuff. And of course, I will do whatever you need.



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I think maybe I might even call you every now and then, if that's as okay.

As far as the world is concerned, Jesus, or our country. I just want people to get out and vote. Okay. Whoever hears this, go vote. Go vote for your congressman. Go vote for your senators. Go vote for your local people. Get the people in office that are gonna represent you and take care of you.

You know, when the Civil Rights Movement fought and fought and fought to get the right to vote, and died and got bombed, little girls getting killed in churches for the right to vote the right to stand

up and have their voice heard at the ballot box. We can't forget that. No one Black, white, rich, or poor. We can't forget that. That's the most important thing that I want to see change for our country.