



## Attack of the Tampons!

When Andy and Sophie met at a coding camp, they decided to make a video game together. Their final project? Tampon Run — a video game where you shoot tampons at your enemies.

**Andy Gonzales:** It was very much, like, very discreet and it would happen in the girls' bathrooms only. In, like, whispers and hushes...it wasn't really, like...I guess, something that we talked about 'cause, I guess, I kind of got my period early in the wave of all the girls that got their periods too. So maybe I was a pioneer in that sense as well, but... [Laughs.]

**Narration:** This is Feeling My Flo, a podcast where we see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I'm Kamilah Kashanie...my pronouns are she and her.

**Andy:** My name's Andy Gonzales. I am 21 and...I currently go to school in the University of North Carolina, but I'm originally from New York City.

**Narration:** Andy's pronouns are she and her. She talked to our producer, Mia, about what periods were like for her when she was growing up. Andy still remembers a time in seventh grade.

**Andy:** Someone, like, exclaimed, they're like, 'Oh my God!' There was just this, like, empty circle of people because they had...this tampon that was fully wrapped, just, like, lying on the floor. And I went up to them and I was like, 'Oh, like, it's just a tampon, guys.'

And they're like, 'No, no, we can't touch that. That's, like, gross.' And so...I think it was, like, one of the first experiences of me realizing that, like, I guess a lot of people hadn't...really understood what a clean tampon was, what a dirty tampon was, and how normal it would be for, like, a clean tampon to be lying around.

**Narration:** Andy realized early on that people weren't really comfortable talking about periods. It was something that would stick with her into high school.

When she was sixteen, Andy signed up for a girls' summer coding camp to learn computer science skills. The first day of camp, Andy met someone.

**Andy:** I saw Sophie and I remember she had really cool socks on...probably the jellyfish ones.

**Sophie Houser:** Hi, I'm Sophie Houser. I'm 22 and I go by she, her, hers..

**Narration:** Sophie was 17 at the time.

Mia interviewed Sophie and Andy separately. They live in different cities now. But what was clear from both of them...is that camp was the beginning of an amazing friendship.

**Sophie:** There were a lot of moments that summer where we really, it was like, 'Oh, this person's a really good partner. Like, a really good collaborator and a good friend.'

**Narration:** The girls in camp were assigned to make something from scratch. They had to code it. Which means they had to learn a computer language to create software, an app, a website...or a game.

Andy had always loved video games.

**Andy:** When I was a kid, I would play all kinds of games, now in hindsight, very poorly. But a lot of it were Nintendo games, which I think were easy for my parents to get their heads around in terms of, like, content and friendliness. So Mario Party, Super Smash Brothers Melee, I think at the time, that was the one that was out. [Laughs.] Um, Mario Kart.

**Narration:** So Andy and Sophie teamed up to make a game.

**Andy:** So I originally actually wanted to make a game that was targeted towards the sexism in the gaming industry...I think the idea was that it would, like, highlight all these tropes of women that you see in games, like Princess Peach, for example. For the most part in, like, all the Super Mario games...she does not play a significant role other than the person that must be saved by Mario.

**Sophie:** And so we started brainstorming and then I said, kind of at first just as a joke, like, 'What if we make a game where a girl throws tampons?' Like, we laughed about it because that is a funny concept. But then we actually started to talk about it seriously and, kind of about how we both felt uncomfortable around our periods. At the time I was, you know, doing the old trick of...uh, you shove a tampon up your sleeve when you go to the bathroom.

**Narration:** A girl throwing tampons. This was the seed of an idea that would develop into an entire game.

So...why tampons? Andy and Sophie had noticed that blood and violence were super common in all the movies and TV shows they'd watched.

**Andy:** But when it comes to something as natural and nonviolent as, um, periods and menstruation, people really tend to get...like, grossed out and they shy away from it. And so that's sort of where Tampon Run...emerged from.

**Narration:** Picture a red box...big white letters spell out the words 'Tampon Run.' You press shift on your keyboard.

'Instructions: Hit all the enemies with your tampons. Don't let them pass you. They'll confiscate your tampons. Collect tampon boxes for more tampons. Don't run out of tampons or it's GAME OVER.'

**Andy:** Once you've acquainted yourself with the controls, you start the game and you just see a girl running on the left hand of the screen. She's got, um, her hair down. I think she has a pink bow in her hair, and she's wearing a pink dress. And she's running. You see these people run across the screen, um, towards her and in order to defend yourself, you start off with five tampons.

So when you throw a tampon and it hits one of your enemies, they disappear and...you improve your score. But when you run out of tampons, luckily there are floating tampon boxes in the sky. They're blue and yellow and they blink. And as they come across towards you and the screen, you have to jump in order to get them.

**Narration:** That jump? That was the hardest part of the game to code from scratch. Here's Sophie.

**Sophie:** I remember coming in the day I was supposed to do it...being like, 'Oh yeah...it's going to be done by lunch. It's not a big deal. Like, this little character just has to go up and back down, like, what's the big deal? And for hours, I would press the up key and this little character, like, would not go up and back down. And it was so frustrating.

**Narration:** Sophie was new to coding. She thought about asking for help, but she knew she wanted to get this done on her own. That day, she spent eight hours trying to figure it out.

**Sophie:** I remember being on my bike, biking home and kind of having this aha! moment where I realized that she had been doing it the whole time. I just hadn't been able to see it. So, you know, a computer is...works very quickly when you give it the right instructions. And so she had been jumping the whole time and I came in the next morning and I remember, like, I made some quick fixes and, like, watched this tiny character jump. And it was such a satisfying feeling. I felt so accomplished and, like, very powerful.

**Narration:** In just 10 days, Tampon Run was born.

**Sophie:** At the time, and even now, I mean, I'm, I'm proud that we got to build something from nothing. That's always a really incredible feeling when you start with just an idea and you start with, uh, especially in coding, you start with just a blank white screen basically.

And then to build it up slowly and slowly and you know, then you have the street view and then you have the girl running and then you have the girl jumping and then she's throwing tampons. And then at the end you have a full working game that you can actually play yourself and you can interact with...that really made me feel proud and still makes me feel proud

**Narration:** When Andy and Sophie finished camp, they thought their work was done. They went back to school...Sophie was starting her senior year of high school.

**Sophie:** It was a really normal first day of school. And then after school I went to my friend's house to play Mario Kart. And I remember I was there. I wasn't checking my phone at all. And, uh, then I got a call from my mom and...she was, she was frantic and she was like, 'Have you seen the news? Have you checked your phone? Like, have you checked your email? Like, you're trending, you're going viral.'

And obviously that's a very strange call to get from your mom, not what you expect while you're playing Mario Kart. And I went home immediately and spent the next few days...just, like, I didn't go to school, sitting at my dining room table, just dealing with interviews and watching all of these emails pour in and having these articles written about us.

**Andy:** We were named by Teen Vogue as one of the top teens who changed the world in 2014. We won a Webby Award and a Tribeca Disruptive Innovation Award.

**Announcer:** Congratulations!

**Andy and Sophie:** Thank you.

**Announcer:** So what are you guys doing next?

**Sophie:** Looking forward to graduating from high school, so.

**Andy:** June.

**Narration:** Tampon Run blew up on the Internet...and people were playing it all across the country. Actually, I was one of those people!

Tampon Run fans were sending emails to Andy and Sophie about what a difference the game had made. One story really stuck with them.

**Andy:** There was a middle school teacher in Berkeley, California who emailed us saying that it had sort of become viral in her school and a lot of her kids were opting to not go outside for recess and instead play Tampon Run, um, at the computer lab during lunch.

And she told us this story about how, like, a fifth grade girl was watching a bunch of, like, eighth grade boys play Tampon Run. And she goes, 'Eww, that's gross.' And a bunch of, like, these eighth grade kids go like...and boys specifically...were like, 'No, like, Tampon Run is, like, just here to combat the menstrual taboo and this is what the menstrual taboo is.'

**Narration:** At the same time, Andy and Sophie were getting invited to big tech conferences to give speeches. They gave a TED talk. And in 2017, they wrote about their experiences in a book called Girl Code.

In the years since, Sophie and Andy went to college. They both studied computer science. They're creating new projects and new games. But they haven't forgotten how creating Tampon Run changed their lives.

**Andy:** I think with Tampon Run, it's easy to see the game and go, 'Gross,' and walk away and it's easy to not necessarily have a deeper conversation with yourself or people around you, but...I think Tampon Run is important...because of the menstrual taboo and because of activism, advocacy for women in gaming, but also women in tech and this idea of, like, creating safe spaces for women to collaborate and create because amazing things can come out of that. I never would have expected it to bring me, like, this far.

**Sophie:** There are so many mediums you can use to express yourself and every medium comes with its own pluses and minuses. But what Tampon Run showed me was that coding, it has this incredible power that you can make something from your room in New York. You can be 17 years old, and then you can put it online and in days, people from around the world, you know, there's no cap on how many can view it and can feel something about it and can share it. And that's really the incredible power of technology and the incredible power of using it as a medium to say things and to share knowledge.

**Narration:** Feeling My Flo wants to help you start important conversations at critical moments...like when you're working hard to beat your best score in Tampon Run!

If you want to play the game...it's at [tamponrun.com](http://tamponrun.com). You can read more about Andy and Sophie in their book, Girl Code...at [girlcodethebook.com](http://girlcodethebook.com).

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This episode was produced by Mia Warren. She's our executive producer. It was mixed by Carolina Rodriguez. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. I'm Kamilah Kashanie.

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