

Wonderful! 145: Cracker Barrel Potions

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hello, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: This is Wonderful. This is the podcast, Wonderful. If you were trying to listen to a different podcast, like uh... I don't know, S-Town? Weird. Why would somebody be listening—it's 2020.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But anyway, you've clicked on the wrong thing. This one's about things that me and my wife, Rachel... we really like. Things that we're into. Things that are good.

Rachel: Things that... you might be into, also.

Griffin: Probably not.

Rachel: And maybe you don't know it yet.

Griffin: No. Rachel and I are into some pretty hip, like, obscure shit. Sometimes we talk about—one time, Rachel talked about like, rye bread. Like, who's into rye bread? Nobody.

Rachel: I believe you're thinking of pumpernickel.

Griffin: Oh, damn it!!

Rachel: Which is pretty—I mean, that’s a pretty obscure bread.

Griffin: That’s even deeper than rye, I would argue.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Uh, sorry that we’re late. It’s been, uh, I mean... [sighs] It’s weird. It’s not like there’s been one thing this week. It’s not like, “Oh no, I dropped my computer in the toilet again.” It’s just life—life, man. Life happened, I guess.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. Nobody cares. [laughs]

Griffin: No one cares, I guess. Do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: Um, I'm gonna say... the seasoning that is found on an everything bagel.

Griffin: Oh. You mean everything, then?

Rachel: Yeah. I guess everything. That’s my small wonder.

Griffin: Just all of it? What is that? Let me see how much—poppy seeds, sesame seeds... what else is on there?

Rachel: Salt.

Griffin: Saaalt!

Rachel: You know you got the onion garlic situation.

Griffin: Oh, god! Yeah!

Rachel: Oh, that’s wonderful.

Griffin: Little bit of... furikake on there.

Rachel: Oh yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: Little... little... [laughs] There's all kinds of fun stuff.

Rachel: Some chili flake.

Griffin: Uh, and, some... arsenic. And uh, and there's light bulbs. It's everything! It shouldn't be. Some of that stuff—you shouldn't keep eating those until they can be more specific about it.

Rachel: Yeah. Probably is kind of risky. What's your small wonder?

Griffin: The heating pad that we have. I've hurt my back. And I find that there's a lot of things that, when you have an ache or a pain on your body, which I am wont to do... lot of different ways to try and address that. Pastes, salves, unguents. creams. Uh, but the only thing that gets in there and seems to get the damn job done... is the heating pad.

Rachel: I have to constantly remind Griffin that this is a thing.

Griffin: Yeah, it's true.

Rachel: This is a thing that we've had for a very long time now.

Griffin: Everyone has one.

Rachel: And Griffin keeps using these stick-on patches...

Griffin: Useless.

Rachel: Like a fool.

Griffin: Like a dumb-dumb. They don't do nothin'.

Rachel: And I say, "Y'know, we have something that plugs into the wall that is much hotter."

Griffin: Yeah. I need it right now. I'm still in a tremendous amount of discomfort. It sucks. I was telling Rachel yesterday, I don't like feeling like a 150 year old man. Which I always do when I hurt—

Rachel: Particularly because you can't identify...

Griffin: I didn't do anything!! It's not like I just helped my friend move! As far as I can tell, like, I put my creamer in my coffee, and I started going up the stairs. And I took one step up the stairs and was like, "Nope!!"

Anyway, uh, I go first this week. I have two food things. I was prepping the second thing, and I realized like, when I was almost done with it, like, "Oh damn, that's another food thing." Uh, so I guess I'll just go ahead and start out with maple syrup, which is so interesting, maple syrup, because... it's one of the few things that I have brought to the show – one of the few foodstuffs I can think of – where when you need it, when you want it...

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh?

Griffin: Like, you gotta have it, and the absence of it in that moment is so painful, and so, like... just soul-crushing, and meal-ruining. Like, if you make pancakes, and it's like, "Hey everybody, it's pancake Sunday. I have a bunch of different types of pancakes. Now let's pour that good, golden brown, juice on it. That sugar juice. Let's pour that right on it." And you don't have it, it's like... well, what's the fucking point?

But, on the inverse, as soon as you have consumed it on a breakfast meal... you don't—the smell of it makes you wanna yartz.

Rachel: [laughs] When I met Griffin, he was existing in an economy where maple syrup was something that one needed... four to five bottles of at any time.

Griffin: Well, this is a—I knew bringing this would bring upon me even more derision.

Rachel: I can't. It's just so comical.

Griffin: Every time I went to the grocery store, I would have to ask the question, "Do we need maple syrup?" And it's not even that we were eating a ton of it. It's just, the idea of not having it when you need it... right? Am I the only one that's like—

Rachel: [laughing] No, it's fair. Like—

Griffin: Ooh, I feel a tightness. I feel a tightness in my chest and my gut.

Rachel: If I were to sit down with a waffle or a pancake, there is no substitution that would scratch that itch.

Griffin: And I've had to! Oh god, we've all been there, where you take some honey. And you put a little food coloring in it, and maybe water it down a little bit, and you're like, "I made syrup!" Or you go out to a tree, and you just start hitting it and hitting it and hitting it and hoping the good juice will come out, but it doesn't work that way.

It works almost that way. I've done some research into maple syrup, and uh, learned a lot. But it's—I love it. I love it so much, except for when I don't want it, and then I smell it, and it's like, "What is that smell?" And it's kind of a curse, because when you're eating the food with the maple syrup on it, you're like, "Fuck yeah, this is amazing. This is so sweet. Why am I not eating this all the time?"

But then, even if you don't like, get it all over yourself, the aroma kind of... lingers, I feel like.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I can always tell when a person has just eaten syrupy breakfast foods.

Rachel: I mean, it is sticky. Just... at its core, and that stickiness keeps it around, for sure.

Griffin: I guess so. I've always enjoyed maple syrup. I've always been a big fan of it. We used to go... I mean, my family used to go on a lot of road trips. We were a family of five, and y'know, we went to the same like, three beaches my entire childhood. So we took road trips... just constantly. Like a couple a year.

And we would always hit the Cracker Barrel, and I would always get those little glass bottles of syrup that they had at Cracker Barrel. Partially because I liked the syrup, but also because, hey, free glass bottle. That was always so seductive to me. 'Cause then I could pretend that they were little potions or whatever.

Rachel: Ohh, that's nice.

Griffin: That is really, really nice. And I just—I've always enjoyed it. Unsurprisingly, come from tree. Come from tree. It comes from a few different types of trees. Uh, and of course, Quebec is the largest producer of syrup in the world. Do you want to guess what percentage of the world's maple syrup Quebec pro—not Canada. Just Quebec produces. What percentage?

Rachel: Uhhh... 79.

Griffin: 70% of the world's maple syrup comes from Quebec. And I like that a lot. I mean, it all comes from sort of the northeastern, uh, North American sort of region. Uh, the definition of maple syrup is also usually like, very restrictive. There are very, like, tight guidelines that I'll go into here in a little bit, that Canada and the—and America, what the USDA, the Food and Drug Administration or whatever, have like, gotten together across country collabo on like, determining what maple syrup is. What grade it can be.

Rachel: Yeah. Y'know, I feel like around these parts, you hear about Vermont a lot when it comes to maple syrup.

Griffin: Oh, yeah. Vermont—I mean, Vermont's big in the game. Uh, but in order for something to be called maple syrup, obviously, it has to be almost entirely made from maple sap. From maple trees. And there's a few different maple, like, tree specimens that you can get that good syrup from.

There's other types of syrups. Like, you can get, uh, walnut tree syrup. You can get palm tree syrup. But I don't know what those taste like. They may be very, very good. Maple sap has like, an extremely high sugar concentrate compared to other saps, and so, that is why it gets the flavor that it has.

Uh, and also, there's like, various... I didn't write down the exact kinds, but there's different types of maple trees, and certain ones have like, certain production schedules that can change the flavor of them. Uh, and... that is—that is where you get the sort of different, mm... [smacks lips] The different notes. The different, uh... the different tones. This one has a rich, tobacco-y scent.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Indigenous communities in northeastern North America were the first to make maple syrup and maple sugar, and though like, the process has become obviously much more industrialized since then, like... it hasn't actually changed all that much.

The basics are, you tap a maple tree, and the maple tree's gotta be between 30 and 40 years old in order to start like, producing that good sap. But once it is making that sap, it can produce a lot of it. It can make, what is it... up to 12 liters per day.

Rachel: Wow!

Griffin: That's like, a juicy boy. When you tap one of them juicy boys, and it just like, comes gooshing out. It's like, wow, this is a juicy boy. And they can—they can keep making that good syrup until they're well over 100 years old. So once you get a good tree, once you get that investment, you're on

the roller coaster, baby. For a good 60, 70 years of delicious maple syrup production.

Rachel: That's incredible.

Griffin: Uh, you get the sap, right? And you boil it down without adding anything. No chemicals, nothing else goes into the process, because it is an extremely finicky process, maple syrup production. You boil it down, and you have to concentrate it down, like... pretty dramatically, depending on the season and the type of tree that you get it from.

Uh, you are boiling it down from a 20 to one, to a 50 to one ratio. So 50 parts of the sap that you get, you concentrate down to one part, and that is the maple syrup.

Rachel: Ohh!

Griffin: And there's not really a whole lot else to it than that. You have to filter it out to get the sugar sand. There's like, a chemical term for it, but this like, gritty substance in the syrup. You have to like, filter it to get that out. But then, that's basically syrup. That's basically it.

Uh, you have to be so careful though, because if you boil it too much, or at too high of heat, or just like, you get some part of the preparation process wrong, it crystalizes. And in like, the flash of a second, like, it's ruined. If you don't reduce it enough, it can be super liquidy. And if it's too liquidy, obviously, the consistency and texture is wrong. But also, it will spoil very, very, very fast, because of the liquid that's in it.

Rachel: Ohh!

Griffin: There's also like, the same things... I don't know if you've ever like, been involved in any sort of like, beer or home brewing process before. But it's like, very, like, Breaking Bad, like... there's a lot of different points of failure along the way that can happen because, uh, y'know, you're messing with fermentation. You're using a lot of different sort of metallic equipment

that can sort of impart a metallic taste into the beer or whatever it is that you're making if you do it the wrong way.

The same is true of syrup. In this case, like, you don't want it to ferment. Any sort of—like, the smallest sort of micro-organic flaw in the syrup that introduces fermentation into the process is just like, that... that batch is skooked. That batch is no good.

Rachel: That makes sense, 'cause syrup lasts forever. Syrup is one of those things that you can like, keep for like, a year, and it is fine.

Griffin: Exactly, yeah. And also like, if you get the sap from a tree at the wrong part in the life cycle to get the sap from it – for instance, if the tree has started to bud, then it's like...

Rachel: Whoa.

Griffin: It puts a weird stink on the flavor that is not necessarily pleasant. Uh, so like, it is an extremely finicky process. And the way that they grade it sort of reflects that.

There are three grades of maple syrup. Again, America and Canada, boom. Got together and said, "Let's make this shit top tier." Grade A is the best you can get. That's got the golden color and delicate taste, amber color and rich taste, a dark color and robust taste, or a very dark color and a strong taste. Any of those can be grade A.

Any difference in the color, the taste, not being compatible, the texture being off in some way, then it gets bumped down to processing grade. I don't know what that means.

Rachel: Ooh.

Griffin: I think it means like, we're gonna send you back to the lab. Or we can use you as a cooking ingredient in certain other things. It's like a cooking wine. The grade below that? Substandard. Get that—get that shit outta—I wouldn't put substandard syrup on my worst enemy's waffles.

Rachel: This makes me want to look at those like, Mrs. Butterworth situations to see kind of like... where they're—where they're scoring at, y'know?

Griffin: I mean, if it's being sold in the US, it's grade A. If it's being sold in the US or Canada, like, most of the like, uh... like, commercially available products? That's grade A. They're not gonna sell—they're not gonna sell you grade B, substandard...

Rachel: I just wonder like, if there's... y'know, it's kind of like cheese food. If there is like, maple syrup, but instead, it's called like... like... tree... drink. And that way, they get around the like, the scoring.

Griffin: Ohh, that's fun. Maybe. Tree drink.

Rachel: Y'know, if you look closely at your off brand syrup...

Griffin: Yeah. Cover your French toast in tree drink.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Also, the terminology for like, uh, the manufacturing farms, where uh, syrup is made is very good. I had heard the term, I think probably from Riverdale. Sugar shack. That's where the actual boiling takes place, and it's a building with like, a specific sort of arched roof design to like, lower condensation or whatever.

Rachel: Oh, that's nice.

Griffin: Uh, maple farms are called sugar bushes. And that's very strong to me. That's very powerful.

Rachel: Oh, that's adorable.

Griffin: Uh, yeah. That's it. I've been craving pancakes lately, and it's got me like... we have—joking aside, we have syrup in this house right now, right? If I needed it?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, we should do breakfast for dinner. We should do a little brinner.

Griffin: Ooh! A little Yule brinner in the house!

Rachel: It's been a while.

Griffin: Henry would lose it for that. That would be so good.

Rachel: I think so.

Griffin: Let's do that.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Not tonight, though.

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: It's spaghetti night.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] Thursday nights are spaghetti night, and you know this!

Rachel: Can I share my first thing?

Griffin: You can.

Rachel: It relates a little bit to your little glass bottle.

Griffin: Oh, fantastic!

Rachel: Uh, in that my first thing is sea glass.

Griffin: Sea glass! Yeah!

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Sea glass is really cool. We have some.

Rachel: I—yeah. I did not really, uh, have any exposure to this in the wild. I mean, I have not been to a lot of beaches. This is probably not too uncommon for people that grow up in the Midwest. Like, my summers were not big beach trips, typically, 'cause you could not get there in a car very easily.

Griffin: What'd you do, Silver Dollar City most of the time?

Rachel: I mean, yeah, Lake of the Ozarks was kind of the closest...

Griffin: Oof! Love it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Lot of Q-Zar, lot of lakes.

Rachel: Lot of lakes.

Griffin: Lot of lakes!

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Lot of saltwater taffy, I'm guessing.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Oh yeah.

Rachel: 100%. Um, but it was when we went to Hong Kong...

Griffin: Yesss.

Rachel: That we went to the beach, and there was just tons of sea glass. And I thought, like, "Oh, here it is."

Griffin: We found it.

Rachel: This is the stuff.

Griffin: It's on this one beach in Hong Kong.

Rachel: I'd never like, seen it outside of, y'know, like, little... little hobby shops. Y'know?

Griffin: It's weird seeing glass in the wild that's different colors, that's not from broken bigger things, huh?

Rachel: [laughs] Well, and I think for a long time, I thought it was like... I thought it was like a kind of shell. I didn't realize that it was just actually glass from glass bottles. I thought it was like, y'know, a colloquial name for some kind of sea creature. [laughs]

Griffin: Wait, is it glass from glass bottles?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Sea glass is just broken glass from glass bottles?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's not like glass that got formed somehow, like, under the pressure—

Rachel: No!

Griffin: I thought it was like, sand...

Rachel: Okay, good, it's not just me. No, it's litter.

Griffin: Oh!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's a bummer!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I thought it was like a nice thing, but it's just trash!

Rachel: It's just trash.

Griffin: Okay...

Rachel: But I mean, it's gorgeous.

Griffin: No, it's not, it's trash, so when I find little brown shards of sea glass, that's just like, somebody's fuckin' Miller Lite bottle that they just like, smashed against the side of their boat...

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: In the... [laughing] The bay of Hong Kong?

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: That's a bummer!

Rachel: Yeah, so here—so here's the thing with sea glass. So it takes 20 to 40 years to make. Sometimes as much as 100 years. Because what happens is, the weathering process in the water is what frosts it. And this is specifically, uh, salt water. There's also something called beach glass, which is fresh water.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: But when you talk about sea glass, you're talking about salt water. Uh, and that's how you get the kind of the smooth edges, and the frosted color. Um, and it—it kind of rounds. Y'know, just generally.

Griffin: Right, so you don't cut your feet on somebody's old Natty Lite bottles.

Rachel: The most common colors are green, brown, white, and clear, which is mostly from beer, juice, and soft drink bottles. And then just like, y'know, windows and glasses.

Griffin: Sure. [laughs]

Rachel: Yeah. There is—I've never been there, obviously. My first sea glass exposure I mentioned was in Hong Kong. But there is a um, a beach called Glass Beach in Fort Bragg, California, that was once a trash dump, and so it has a bunch of broken bottles on the beach. But you are not allowed to remove any glass from Glass Beach.

Griffin: Well, then it would just be called Beach.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I think that's a good policy.

Rachel: Um, a lot of these colors are becoming more and more rare, because as you know, like, you don't see as many glass bottles as you used to in the like, 1950s and '60s.

Griffin: Sure. I guess there's no like, great sea aluminum that everybody's talking about.

Rachel: Or plastic, for example.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: Um, so there are a lot of like, ways to kind of date the glass, based on the color, because of whether or not it was made. So for example, there is a specific kind of green that comes from the early to mid-1900s that was found in Coca Cola, Dr. Pepper, and RC Cola bottles.

Griffin: Huh.

Rachel: And then, there's even more rare colors, like gray and pink, which often come from like, Great Depression era plates.

Griffin: Whoa!

Rachel: You'll find yellow from like, 1930s Vaseline containers, and red from old Schlitz bottles. So, that's what I thought was kind of cool. This idea, like, you're walking along the beach, and you're seeing these different colors, and you can kind of date how old it is based on the color.

Griffin: Yeah, that is interesting. I'm thinking of like, Ale-8. Aren't those green bottles? In Ale-8? Do you know what Ale-8 is?

Rachel: I don't know what you're saying.

Griffin: Oh, okay. Never mind.

Rachel: Is that a type of beverage?

Griffin: It's like a—yeah, it's a beverage, I believe, in the American south. Uh, the Carolinas, I believe, has Ale-8. Uh, and... it's fine. [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's fine.

Rachel: That's like their slogan? [laughing]

Griffin: I think it's in the—it may or may not be in like... it's definitely in the Cheerwine genre. It may be the same, like, manufacturer.

Rachel: Okay. Um, you'll see other colors like cornflower blue, which are from milk of magnesia bottles and Vicks vapor rub, and aqua from Ball mason jars. Um, so there's... y'know, all the different colors kind of attach it to a different bottle and different time period.

Griffin: So we break the glass and throw it in the ocean... or into a river that dumps into the ocean...

Rachel: And 40 years later...

Griffin: And the ocean like, glazes it and softens it so it's not dangerous anymore, and then spits it back up on the beach. Like, "Don't do it again."

Rachel: And you can obviously—I mean, just, y'know, there are rock tumblers, for example. Like, you can do this outside of the ocean, which is probably a lot of what you're seeing in your craft stores.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: But uh, but yeah! So what we did when we went to Hong Kong is, I scooped a little bit of this and brought it home with us, and it's just kind of neat to have this little souvenir.

Griffin: Yeah. And you did your part to, I guess, clean...

Rachel: Clean, yeah!

Griffin: ... the environment.

Rachel: Yeah. But don't do that at Glass Beach.

Griffin: Don't do that at Glass Beach.

Rachel: They want to keep it there.

Griffin: They like it there. It's their favorite glass.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yeah.

[ad break stinger plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Do we have jumbotrons?

Rachel: We do!

Griffin: Exquisite!

Rachel: Uh, this first one is for Future Becca, from Past Becca. "Hey, Future Becca. I know the first half of 2020 has been rough. But guess what? You're 25 now! And it's time to dust yourself off and kick some ass. Hopefully, by now, you've written a good chunk of your novel and you're working hard to get into grad school. But no matter what, I'm proud of you. Give Fitzroy a kiss for me. Love, Past Becca."

Griffin: Now, is that referencing, uh, a... it is, uh, egomaniacal for me to assume that's talking about the character I play on Adventure Zone now.

Rachel: Oh, do you think it's based on uh, Fitzroy Stephenson, the famous attorney? Or uh...

Griffin: There have been other Fitzroys!

Rachel: Fitzroy Juleson, the... jeweler? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. I love his stuff, man. Necklace. Bracelet. So good. Uh, here's one that is for Amanda. It's from Dustin, who says, "Happy second anniversary! Thanks for being the best wife and introducing me to the wonders like Survivor, Disney running videos, and McElroy podcasts. You inspire me every day to be the best person I can be. Also, thanks for letting me adopt the first cat we tried fostering. Sorry I wouldn't let you wait for one with a human face."

I mean, we're all waiting on that, huh? We're all just... hopin' and prayin'.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Um, hey, you think they're makin' Survivor right now?

Rachel: Oh man...

Griffin: You can't quarantine harder than Survivor, I feel like.

Rachel: On a remote island. Yeah.

Griffin: Y'know what I mean? Like, they can't do the like... they probably can't go to like, the Ponderosa.

Rachel: What if everything is Survivor in the future? Like Top Chef also just happens to be a bunch of people on an island.

Griffin: It's just also Survivor. Right.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But then they don't—if it's Top Chef, they probably don't have the reward challenge where they go to the Outback Steak House, sort of like, victory lounge. 'Cause that seems below them in some ways.

[Maximum Fun advertisement plays]

Griffin: I wanna talk about my second thing. It's another food thing, and I'm very excited about it. It's the one... we were downstairs earlier today, and I was like, "I don't have my second thing." And you're like, "Yeah, it can be tough sometimes." And I was like, "Oh, now I have it." Because I—

Rachel: Bolt of lightning.

Griffin: Powerful bolt of lightning. It is the communal seafood boil. It is my favorite... like a crawfish boil or shrimp boil.

Rachel: How did this come to you this morning?

Griffin: Yeah, I don't know. It's not like we were—it's not like we—I opened up the cabinet and a bunch of Old Bay fell out and like, went all over my face.

Rachel: I thought it was something you had specifically seen in the fridge when you opened it.

Griffin: No. We don't have shrimp. We do not have, uh, corn. We do not have crab. We do not have crawfish. We do not have any of the constituent ingredients typically found in a seafood boil. Um... but man, there are very few sort of social eating events that excite me more than the communal seafood boil. And also, probably, there are few that would be more irresponsible in the current sort of, uh, global quarantine climate that we all find ourselves in, so it's really harkening back to a better, uh, simpler time.

And I've only been party to... maybe like a dozen? Maybe fewer than a dozen...

Rachel: Yeah, I was gonna ask you about that, because my only exposure to this came when I moved to Texas.

Griffin: Texas, we do it, right? Anywhere—the Gulf Coast region is known for it, but really, most coastal regions of the United States have some sort of variation of the seafood boil. Uh, typically, like, the protein involved differs based on where you live and what the time of year is, and y'know, what the traditional seafood boil ingredient is.

Uh, a lot of mine came from Mr. Tommy Smirl, who is an academic of the low country boil, which is typically the genre of boil that you get in South Carolina, Georgia, the low country. Y'know. The low country?

But uh, yeah. We've done it a few times here in Texas, using various things. And I've been to one in New Orleans that was like, a proper crawfish boil that was like, the best, like, genuinely quite spicy, uh, crawfish. It was at a friend of a friend's house, where like, I didn't really know anybody.

And that is the ideal situation to find yourself at a crawfish boil, because it's like a nice... you kind of have to let your guard down, and it's—there is a weird, mutually agreed upon suspension of dining etiquette that happens at a crawfish boil. But also, like, I am gonna eat like, a weird jackal man, and I don't necessarily want to do that in front of people who are going to see me the next day. Y'know what I mean?

Rachel: Yeah. No, that's a good point. I have difficulty, as you know, with the messy food.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: Because it is hard for me to enjoy the experience while my hands just get grosser and grosser.

Griffin: Oh yeah.

Rachel: But I will say that this is an example that, um, I'm okay with.

Griffin: Yeah. It's—you kind of have to be, or else, why are you here? You shouldn't have come to this.

Rachel: It's also like—it's not physically possible to really do it with a knife and fork, y'know? Like, the detail work required...

Griffin: Well, no. It's... one of the like, components of a seafood boil is that there are no utensils. Like, maybe if you're doing crab, you can do some crackin' things. But I've—you know me, I don't need those.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: My hands are crab crackers. I can turn my thumbs into a powerful seafood destroying fulcrum. Uh, but yeah. So, again, like, the recipe differs based on where you live. In Louisiana, it is an old, old, old Cajun cooking tradition, uh, where crawfish, more often than not, is customary. And particularly in the spring, this is where like, crawfish boils really pop off, because crawfish are plentiful, and like, dirt cheap.

In like, really, really productive seasons, it can range anywhere from like, 99 cents to a buck 50 a pound for crawfish. And so, that's why, uh, y'know, colleges in New Orleans and Louisiana will do like, huge campus-wide crawfish boils, where they will bring in just metric tons of them for—

Rachel: Oh, I didn't know that!

Griffin: Yeah. It's like a big, like, graduation post-finals thing at a few different colleges down there.

Rachel: Well... probably not anymore.

Griffin: Probably not these days. Probably not right now. But one day, we'll get on back there. Uh, and y'know, in the northeast, you see a lot more shrimp and crab. And y'know, different sort of ingredients.

Low country boil, it is very customary to use, like, red potatoes, and little onions, and sausage... but sausage can or cannot be in, y'know, a crawfish boil in Louisiana. You get a little bit more variety there. But typically, you do get the pre-made sort of packet of boil seasonings, which is just this like, witch's brew of different things.

You get Old Bay, of course. Cayenne, hot sauce, lemons, bay leaf... does anyone really know what bay leaf does? I've used bay leaf in so many ingredients now, and you put it in, and it's like, "This is—now, this'll impart the good bay leaf flavor."

Rachel: Yeah, it's always for soaking. And then I had heard that you're like, not supposed to eat it. And so, it feels like a—like a dangerous seasoning.

Griffin: Ooh, maybe that's what it is. It's like a superstitious thing. Well, you gotta put the bay leaf in. But don't eat it.

Uh, then there's like, certain technique things that uh, again, differ from like, tradition to tradition. There's a hot debate, I didn't realize, about like, stewing the crawfish in salt water to like, purge the impurities before you cook them. Some people think it's an essentially part of the process. Some people think that is sacrilege, because those impurities is... [smacks lips] That's where the flavor is, baby.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And then, yeah. When it's done cooking, you boil it for a while, you have to add the ingredients in a very specific order, or else you'll make everybody *very* sick. Uh, you dump it right out onto a big table lined with newspaper, and people just fucking go to town on it. That's the best part.

Rachel: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Griffin: I love eating just shit off a table. That's so good. And also, you can read your stories. You can read the funnies. You can do a little Sudoku. You can do a little Sudoku beneath your lemon mess that you've made, and that's very, very strong to me.

Uh, and... I don't know. There's just something really... you don't eat food like this in any other circumstance, and just all the tradition to it... there's a boil master, usually, who is like... y'know, there's the idea of the grill master, but the boil master is just like, almost like a conductor. Like a sausage conductor. They're like a... they're like a spices conductor, 'cause they have to let the things in at the right time, because you're not doing a ton of stuff to it. Really, that's the most important part of the cooking process. Uh, and I just like it. It really is ritualistic in a way that is so intriguing to me.

Um, and... yeah. I don't have a whole lot else to say. I found this um... uh, there's a writer on Creole and Cajun cooking. His name is Howard Mitcham, and he had this anecdote that I found on the Wikipedia page about seafood boils, where he wrote about how like, they used to do shrimp boils and crab boils back in the day. Back in the like, the '60s.

Uh, he wrote, uh... "At our last big party, we boiled 400 pounds of shrimp and 400 fat crabs for 200 guests, and we drank eight 30 gallon kegs of beer. For music, we had Kid Thomas and his Algiers Stompers, the famous old gut-bucket jazz group from Preservation Hall, and the Olympia Funeral Marching Band." Pretty rad party so far.

Uh, their technique was to use new 30-gallon galvanized garbage cans, filled one third full of water, and brought to boil with seasonings. The shrimp were divided into 25 pound batches, and stuffed into new pillowcases and tied off. 25 pounds of shrimp took about 25 minutes to cook. One batch came out, and the next went in. How's your fuckin' party, Howard? It sounds pretty good. It sounds like I'd like to be at it right now.

Rachel: That is incredible.

Griffin: We are so f—we haven't, y'know, had a small potluck dinner for two friends here at our house in, y'know, seven months or whatever now.

Uh, the idea of going to a party with 200 guests and like, listening to jazz music while gouging on 800 pounds of seafood? Oh, god!

Rachel: Incredible.

Griffin: I would do anything. What's your second thing?

Rachel: My second thing is the American hip hop duo, The Cool Kids.

Griffin: Had not heard of The Cool Kids.

Rachel: Yeah. Y'know, that's probably not too surprising. They've only released two studio albums.

Griffin: Are they Chicago based? Are they a Chicago outfit?

Rachel: Uh, yes. Yes, primarily.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: So um, the members... one of them is from Michigan, the other is from Illinois, but they kind of got their start in Chicago.

Griffin: Their—one of the music videos you sent me was like, extremely, extremely Chicago. Mostly because it featured, prominently, a man in a Rahm Emanuel mask doing terrible things.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, this is a group I became familiar with because of their 2008 EP, The Bake Sale. But they really... they really came up in Chicago. Their kind of origin story is so delightful. I was in Chicago from like, 2004 to 2007, and that's kind of right when they were getting their start, and I just loved their origin story so much. Um, they met through MySpace. [laughs]

Griffin: Aw, yeah!

Rachel: Uh, the members are Antoine “Sir Michael Rocks” Reed, and Evan “Chuck English” Ingersoll. And what happened was um, uh... Reed found Ingersoll’s beat on MySpace and wanted to talk about using it, and they ended up meeting in 2005 and recording for two hours as a result. They both had kind of similar inspiration. They were really interested in this kind of golden age of hip-hop. This like, LL Cool J time period.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Which, for some context, when this EP came out that I loved, The Bake Sale, in 2008, kind of topping the charts back then was like, Flo Rida, Lil Wayne, and TI.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So they were kind of... recalling a time period that was starting to lose relevance in the mainstream.

Griffin: Yes, of course.

Rachel: [laughs] Um, and the—part of the reason I liked them so much is that—is because of that, like, LL Cool J time period. Like, they are really interested in this idea of like, you just rap about stuff that you like. It’s about who you are as an artist. It’s not like, what’s cool in the time.

Griffin: Yeah, no. I mean, one of the songs that you sent me that I believe is from that very album is talking about playing Street Fighter on their Sega Genesis.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, so, uh... their first performance after they had started working together, uh, was at Town Hall Pub in Chicago.

Griffin: Oh!

Rachel: Did you ever go there, on Halstead?

Griffin: Oh yeah, of course!

Rachel: I used to live in that Lakeview area, and I saw like, improv shows, and like, weird little tiny indie rock bands there. And so, it was just kind of funny to have that as context. Like, anybody could play there. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: Um, but when they were there, they happened to meet Diplo.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: Who offered to release a mix tape of their unreleased tracks, which kind of is how they got started.

Griffin: Is the mid-aughts when Justin Timberlake... [sighs] God, I'm like, misremembering all of this. But I feel like, didn't he like, acquire MySpace or something like that, and try to like, make it now like, an independent music artists, like...

Rachel: That was the tail end of MySpace for sure.

Griffin: ... thing? Yeah.

Rachel: I remember there was like, "We're gonna breathe energy into this!" But it did not... did not work.

Griffin: Okay. Yeah, I guess not.

Rachel: Um, so, I wanted to... I wanted to play a song from the 2008 EP. But first, I wanted to give just an example of some lyrics. So this is... not a song I'm gonna play, but the song is called 88. And it's about them just kind of ridin' around on like, suped up bicycles. [laughs]

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Uh, and just to give you an example of kind of the lyricism that's just like, so incredible. So just a reminder, I am not a hip-hop artist myself.

Griffin: No, you're not.

Rachel: So I am not gonna do justice to this. But just to give you a sense of kind of the flow of it.

"Ride past shorty light-skinned with no melanin
Shirt look like somebody stuffed two melons in
Had to stop, so I could preach like Reverend
I grip on the handbrake and say, "Waddup?"
I skip on the handshakes, I'm straight, what else?
I got two pegs on the back
And you got two legs under your skirt - so hop, we head."

Griffin: Ooh!

Rachel: [laughs] That's so fresh!

Griffin: That is really good. That was like a miniature poetry corner.

Rachel: Yeah, I couldn't help it. Um, the song I want to play that gives kind of a sense that Griffin referenced is called A Little Bit Cooler.

[‘A Little Bit Cooler’ by The Cool Kids plays]

Rachel: So yeah, so this is just them rapping about, y'know, like Griffin said, like... Sega Genesis and Star Wars, and um... kind of speaking to who they are. And they said they were really inspired by uh, Lupe Fiasco.

Griffin: Okay, yeah!

Rachel: Who they said—I've read this interview with them. And they said, uh, they were inspired by him 'cause he was, quote, "a black dude who wore glasses, had a song about skateboarding, and was into anime films."

Griffin: Yeah! Where is Lupe Fiasco? What's his—what's his thing now? Is he still doing it?

Rachel: I don't know. I don't know.

Griffin: God, I liked—

Rachel: There was just this explosion in Chicago, like around the time that like, Kanye West and Chance the Rapper were coming up. Uh, that... a lot of those artists – like, for example, The Cool Kids – went on this huge hiatus. So, their first full length album didn't come out 'til 2011. Uh, and it was called When Fish Ride Bicycles.

And a lot of that was because they associated themselves with a label that made it very difficult for them to put content out.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: So they became this kind of huge phenomenon. That 2008 EP was supposed to be right before the release of this album, but then, it ended up taking, y'know, three years for it to come out. But meanwhile, they inspired a lot of artists like Chance the Rapper. And... uh, in between the Fish Ride Bicycles album that came out in 2011, there was six years... where they just did some solo stuff, and they said a lot of that reason was that they could not get together and put out content without having to pay a bunch of people through their label.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And so, they just started doing a lot of solo stuff. So, uh, English was working with some guys from TV on the Radio, and then, uh... y'know, they were just doing a lot of—a lot of solo work. And then, that was finally in 2017 was when their second album came out, which was Special Edition Grand Master Deluxe.

So one of them was living in LA, and one of them was in Chicago. And so, they were putting this album together basically across the country together.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But they still have a lot... y'know, a lot of creative juice there. And so, I wanted to play something off of their most recent album that came out in 2017. The song is Checkout.

[‘Checkout’ by The Cool Kids plays]

Rachel: And this is the one that Griffin...

Griffin: The aforementioned Rahm Emanuel diss track. For a second, I thought it was, um... Rowan Atkinson. I thought it was supposed to—I thought the mask that is featured in this music video was Mr. Bean, which would've been a weird like, “Why are these two gentlemen so critical of Mr. Bean?” But it’s, um... it is Chicago mayor, Rahm Emanuel.

Rachel: Um, the lyricism is so great. The music is just really... it just feels really fresh every time I hear it. Um, and I would recommend checking it out. I mean, when you hear that artists like Chance the Rapper were inspired by The Cool Kids, like, oh. Yeah. No, I get it.

Griffin: Yeah. Um, do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: So do I. Nelly says, “Something I find wonderful is the pan flip whenever I am sautéing veggies or making something bigger, like fresh toast or grilled cheese. Sending my food—” I think maybe French toast. “... or grilled cheese. Sending my food flying through the air with a simple flick of the wrist and catching it back in the pan never fails to make me feel like a master chef. The fact that I don’t have to clean a spoon or spatula is an added bonus.” Oh, the pan flip! Love the pan flip.

Rachel: I need to like, practice this in a low stakes environment. 'Cause I feel like I only am trying it in a situation where, if the meal ends up on the counter, I'll be very disappointed.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, I... I love it. I love a good pan flip, for this very reason. But also because like, there are certain types of flat foods that, when you're pan frying them and you want to get a good cook on both sides of them, going through and individually like, making sure each piece gets turned around is such a pain in the ass. And it's so much easier to just flip that shit in the pan. Oh!

Rachel: French toast is a good idea, right? 'Cause nobody just makes one piece of French toast. I feel like you could really... you could do some work.

Griffin: It's so big. It's so big, you really gotta use some leverage to get such a big boy flipped over. I'm talkin' about little pieces of beef. Anyway. Here's a... Curtis says, "I've always found water beds especially wonderful. I'm not even sure if people make them anymore, but laying on one of these things was a pretty whimsical experience as a child."

Rachel: Gosh, do you have water bed memories?

Griffin: No. I feel like I had a family member...

Rachel: I had one friend.

Griffin: I had like, an aunt who had like, water beds that... I think I've maybe slept on them fewer than like, five times or something like that.

Rachel: Oh yeah, even less for me.

Griffin: Not good. Not a good sleeping experience.

Rachel: Not a particularly supportive experience.

Griffin: No. A loud experience, too. A lot of gooshing and wooshing. Uh, it is whimsical. It is fun. I'll give you that. But also like, water gets funky. Like, pretty fast.

Rachel: Yeah... I'm not entirely sure how it worked? Uh, y'know, like, how... did you have to change the water? How did the water not leak? I assume, eventually, it would leak.

Griffin: It's just, when you hear about mattresses these days, it's usually like, "We got together with top rocket scientists to create this nano-weave..."

Rachel: Right?

Griffin: To me, the water bed feels like they didn't consult any sort of scientific community. It was just like, somebody was blowing up water balloons with their kid, and they were like, "Hey, what if we made this big? And you slept on it!" Like, would that be comfortable? "Who gives a shit! Let's do it!"

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Uh, hey, thank you for listening. Thank you to everybody who came out to support us in the MaxFunDrive. The turnout was absolutely amazing, and completely blew us away.

Rachel: Yeah! It was... we were not anticipating much, because it is a very difficult time to project anything into the future. So the fact that people are like, "Yes, I will give a monthly donation." I was like, hey, good for you!

Griffin: So amazing. Um, and thank you to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description. And thank you to Max Fun for having us on the network. Go to MaximumFun.org, check out all the great shows there. Shows like Round Springfield, and...

Rachel: Heat Rocks.

Griffin: Heat Rocks! And so many more. MaximumFun.org. And... I think that's it, huh?

Rachel: What position do you find most comfortable now, with your back?

Griffin: The position I'm in right now is sort of a very, very dense question mark that I've sort of turned my body... [laughs] It doesn't feel very good to be sitting right now. Um... so... I'm gonna stop the podcast right now, and...

Rachel: Lay flat on the ground?

Griffin: Just lay fuckin' flat, man. That'll be good. And we could maybe... we could do a little light as a feather, stiff as a board.

Rachel: Ooh! Just me?

Griffin: Ooh! Little craft!

Rachel: Should I get Henry in here too?

Griffin: Yeah, get Henry in here. Let's get crafty.

Rachel: [laughs]

[theme music plays]

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