Welcome to the Judge John Hodgman podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. We're in chambers this week! Clearing the docket. And joining me from the great city of Brooklyn, New York, is... the man they call the—the King of Brooklyn.

[John laughs.]


Brooklyn has no king! Brooklyn needs no king.

We are in Kings County, though, for those county nerds out there, for you. Kings County! Need to know. You need to know! You need to know what county you're in when you are registering to vote, and when you are voting! So...

There are definitely types of nerds who still know every state capital.

Yeah! That's me.

Do you think that there are county seat nerds? Do you think that some state capital nerds, who learn their state capitals in fifth grade or whatever—

Yeah. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

—then move on to learn all the county seats? Like, does Ken Jennings know all the county seats?

I don't know that Ken Jennings could name all of the county seats of every county in the United States. Not even Ken Jennings, necessarily, could do that. And that's why I'm gonna devote what is left of my brain to knowing it.

However, I am going to—I'm gonna retain a piece of my brain. The piece that is always firing, uh, on—on all cylinder. For the recording of the Judge John Hodgman podcast. And I'm not gonna use the part of my brain that is devoted to my love for the actor Alan Ruck. We were having some great—I'm sure our guest is gonna get this reference. We were having some great bants. Some great bants before the—

[Someone laughs quietly.]

—some great banter before the, uh—

Yeah, we were Ruckin’ it up. There's no doubt about it.

We were just bouncing off each other, Love Island UK–style.

And I can—and one of the things that came up is Alan Ruck, and what an incredible actor he is. Going back to—you know, whether it’s Ferris Bueller's Day Off, America's greatest mythologizing of a high school sociopath, or Spin City, or as that one guy in the Star Trek movie, or Succession. Incredibly talented actor. Criminally
underused. But maybe he's doing—maybe he's living his best life.
Anyway, here's to Ruck.

00:02:08 Jesse Host I'll introduce our guest on the program, John. We do have, uh, a charming, delightful, august guest. A major podcasting celebrity. Internationally.

00:02:18 John Host Yes. Internationally? Oh.

00:02:20 Jesse Host Yes, that's right, internationally. She's one of the hosts of Answer Me This!, perhaps the UK's most legendary comedy podcast. Probably its most legendary comedy and question-answering podcast.

00:02:31 John Host Mm-hm!

00:02:32 Jesse Host She's the host of The Allusionist! A podcast about the English language, and she is the host of Veronica Mars Investigations, which is about Veronica Mars, which is a television show, uh, that's fun. It's a fun show, John.

00:02:49 John Host Yeah.

00:02:50 Jesse Host I don't know if you ever watched Veronica Mars. It's a very fun show. Uh, Helen Zaltzman!

00:02:54 Helen Zaltzman Guest Hello!

00:02:55 John Host Does it have Alan Ruck in it?

00:02:56 Jesse Host No, but it does have Steve Guttenberg. And he does a great job.

00:02:59 Helen Guest It has a lot of Steve Guttenberg. It has a lot of people in it who then became very famous. Like, there's a one-episode Jessica Chastain appearance.

00:03:06 John Host Mm-hm.

00:03:07 Helen Guest There's one episode of Aaron Paul.

00:03:08 John Host Mm!

00:03:09 Helen Guest One Paul Rudd episode.

00:03:10 John Host [Laughs quietly.] Finally, Paul Rudd got famous.

[Helen laughs.]

00:03:15 Helen Guest Got his big break.


00:03:25 Jesse Host Let's shine a light on Ruck.

00:03:26 John Host That's right.

00:03:27 Jesse Host It's Ruck's time now.

00:03:28 John Host Hey, wait, did we introduce our guest?!

00:03:31 Jesse Host Yeah, Helen Zaltzman.

00:03:32 John Host Helen Zaltzman!

00:03:33 Jesse Host Helen Zaltzman is our guest.
Here I am! Hi!

What a pleasure to have Helen here.

It's great to see you! And by "see you" I mean see you, because, you know, now we are recording this using a—a little technology I invented, called Zoom. ...Um, I didn't—

Congratulations.

Yeah, I know, right?

Mm.

No, some foreign government did it. I don't know. Anyway, it's a—

[Jesse laughs.]

It's a little facial, uh, data-capturing device called Zoom. And even though I'm giving my face away to this foreign government, I get to see you, Helen, over there in Brighton, England. Which is where you are now. And Jesse over there in Los Angeles. And both of you are wearing incredible tops! Incredible shirts.

Helen, you have birds? Or—are those birds or grasshoppers on your shirt?

I—i'd never thought of them as grasshoppers before, but... now my mind is open to a whole different possibility. I think they're meant to be parakeets.

[John makes an appreciative "pshoo" sound.]

On little branches. And Jesse's looks like when you stick your fingers in your eyeballs, and then it starts coming up with all these psychedelic shapes.

[John and Jesse laugh quietly.]

Yeah!

That's a compliment, by the way.

I'm doing eighties Banana Republic over here. I'm all about safari vests.

[laughs.] You know, you mentioned in our pre-show bants, Jesse, that that was an early vintage Banana Republic shirt, and I felt you very keenly. That was my—my store to go to. When I dreamed, as a young man, of buying a pith helmet. I would go over—

Yeah, colonialism is bad. I think we can stipulate that colonialism is bad. However, uh, one thing which it wrought, the colonialism clothing theme park known as 1980s Banana Republic...

Yeah. They had a Jeep going through the window! Come on!

Yeah.

But that shirt I never would have pegged for a vintage B-Rep, because it's—as Helen points out, it's got a psychedelic air to it. It—you look like a member of The Lovin' Spoonful.

Thank you, thank you.
Uh, Helen, on your podcast *Answer Me This!*, you answer a lot of questions, along with your co-host Olly Mann.

Helen: Mm-hm. So many.

Jesse: And I listen to every episode. It has been my quarantine comfort show.

Helen: I have been listening to both new and old episodes of *Answer Me This!* as I drive my youngest son around, hoping that he’ll fall asleep in the back of the minivan. And I wonder, are you prepared to deliver not just answers, but now, on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast, justice?

Helen: Oh, I feel like I've been training for this for the 13 and a half years of *Answer Me This!*

[John and Jesse laugh.]

Finally my legal duties are coming upon me. Thrilled! I've got my scythe. My, uh, hat, my wig, judge's wig.

Jesse: Yes! [Stifles laughter.] Wait. I knew that judges in the UK wore wigs. They—they hold scythes? Do they do fieldwork in between—[laughs]—do—threshing?

Helen: I just thought—[laughs]—I just thought to add to the atmosphere, I should also bring a scythe.

John: Sure.

Helen: ‘Cause I couldn't get a guillotine into the Airbnb I live in.

[John laughs.]

Right.

Helen: But it's not just judges that wear the wigs! It's everyone in a criminal case. Like, the people that go and fetch the jury from the deliberation room have to wear, like, the full wig and bat cape. All of the lawyers. It's amazing. I think if you're in the jury, you're not supposed to come in wearing that style of wig. But I—I would be interested to try, just to see what happens.

Jesse: Like, you're wondering if possibly some jurors might just, on a day-to-day basis in their regular life, wear those curly, white, powdered—[laughs]—long, uh, 18th century-style wigs. And they walk in—

Helen: Yeah! Yeah. Like a mullet of very tight curls.

Jesse: Like, maybe the juror is like, Grace Jones or something. Someone who has the—[laughs]—has the self-possession to pull off such a thing in their day-to-day attire.

[Helen laughs. John makes another appreciative "pshoo" sound.]

And they—

Helen: Well, what if that was just your regular hair? Then what are you supposed to do?
Yeah! Yeah, what if you have powdery, white, tightly curled hair naturally?

Yeah, talk about setting it and forgetting it.

You’d have to do some serious setting to lock that down. [Stifles laughter.]

Well, let's get into the justice. Here's something from Serj. He says:

"A contractor recently did some work on our house, and left a huge mess. Including destroying a large part of our front flower bed. We cleaned it up ourselves, but I sent an email to the contractor saying I was really unhappy with how they left things.

My wife thinks this was inappropriate, because there's nothing they can actually do about it. I think they should know I'm angry with how things were left, so that they can try and do better in the future. Who's right?"

Helen, let me ask you, first of all, is the term "contractor" familiar to you in, uh, in England? Builder, basically.

Well, I've educated myself in the vocabularies of other nations, John, to prepare for this moment.

Oh, that's right. You're the host of a major language podcast. I apologize.

I do apologize.

And, you know, as a child I loved to read about American building regulations and so forth.

[Laughing] Yeah.

[Laughing] I mean, who didn't?

You're famous for it.

You're code-crazy. Up to Code! That's gonna be your new podcast about American building.
Yeah. Yeah.

John Host

Yeah. Little bit too on-the-nose. Helen, have you ever written a letter of complaint?

Helen Guest

It takes a lot for me to do that, because I'm essentially a coward.

John Host

Mm-hm.

Helen Guest

So I may have thought some pretty strong thoughts of complaint, without transmitting them to the world. But I think in Serj's case, he's not unjustified! I think both he and his wife are kind of right, in that the damage is irreversible, but if there is... you know, monetary damage to the flower bed that the contractors could recompense them for, or to come and fix it, or would you not trust them to fix it after the damage they've already done?

[Pause.]

It depends on his motivation. Did he want something, uh, palpable, or did he just need his feelings to be vented?

John Host

I'm gonna treat this guy as a hostile witness. 'Cause I think you put your finger on something there, Helen. What is the intent?

Now, I'm going to give Serj credit for not writing to Yelp. Which is my—as I've mentioned many times, Yelp is my favorite collection of short stories narrated by highly unreliable narrators.

[Jesse or Helen laughs quietly.]

I could just go down that hole for—and just marvel at people's self-deception.

Jesse Host

And as I've often added: "racist, parking-obsessed" unreliable narrators.

John Host


Uh, he's—he did not—Serj did not try to go into a public forum to try to hurt this person's business. And yet I do feel that he is somewhat of an unreliable narrator, because when he says, "I think they should know that I'm angry with how things were left so that they can try and do better in the future," I do not believe that for a second. I do not believe that he wants them to improve.

Helen Guest

Mm.

John Host

I think that he—he should have just said, "I want them to know that I'm angry!" Period. Don't you think? Do you believe him, Helen, when he says that he genuinely wants them to improve?

Helen Guest

Ummm... I mean, that's really out of Serj's hands.

John Host

Yeah!

Helen Guest

I certainly don't think that was the primary motivation.

John Host

Well, and also I think that it is highly—[laughs]—highly doubtful that it will promote improvement! Jesse Thorn, have you ever received a letter of complaint?

Jesse Host

[Bursts out laughing.] I'm a podcaster, John!
And when someone writes a letter of complaint, how does it make you feel?

Sad. Bad! Mad.

"Desire to improve" come into the—into the constellation of your feelings?

Desire to quit the business!

If the complaint is phrased as constructive criticism, where they are educating me, then I do tend to take it on board. But if it's just them trying to prove they're better than me, then... I think, "You know what? I'm gonna get worse, just out of spite."

Yeah. I think there is a way to frame a letter of complaint, uh, that is respectful, that maybe, as Helen so quaintly and Englishly said...

They take it on board. But it is a tough thing. That said, you know, I don't think it's unreasonable for Serj to write to them and say, "Hey, listen. Uh, you made a giant mess in my yard. Please don't do that in the future, if we work together."

Yeah!

I also think it's possible that, you know, depending on the size of the team that was working on this project, what kind of work it was, whether it was just an individual person, um, it may be that the person that they hired, who's in charge of, you know, sales and customer service, uh, in the outfit, might not know that someone who's in charge of something else—

Yeah.

—is doing something counter to those goals.

Absolutely!

So there is the possibility that they might—he might actually be letting somebody know, "Hey, listen. This guy you sent really made a giant mess."

Yeah!

In all those contexts, including directly contracting the person who did it, I—I don't feel uncomfortable with him saying, "Hey, please don't make a mess in the future." And I don't think that the only reason that you would do that would be to seek recompense. I think it's... worth saying to somebody, [stifling laughter] "Please don't make a mess at my house."

Yes.

Just think of future flowerbeds. Spare them this fate.
Yeah. You may not know, but a flowerbed in the United States is, um, a place where we plant flowers.

Yeah.

I think you would call it a flower trolley.

Thank you.

Or a... lorry?

A lorry.

Yeah.

Flower sofa?

Yeah. There you go.

Mm-hm.

Sofa or couch? What do you say?

In England they're called pants.

[John snorts. Helen stifles laughter.]

But sincerely, Helen, sofa or couch?

I'd say sofa, John.

Sofa. Yeah, me too.

I'm so sorry.

Thank you for settling something. In my own marriage. Alright, anyway.

[Laughs.] What, were you arguing over whether Helen Zaltzman says sofa or couch?

Yes.

[John laughs.] Yes, that's why we asked you to be on. [Laughs.] That's precisely right.

[Helen chuckles.]

[Calling off-mic] Honey! I won!

I'm really sorry to come between you in this matter. It's very important.

That's okay. That's alright. We've got a lot more things to settle, too.

So here's what I'm gonna say about this guy. Serj? Write your letter. Consumers? Write your letter. Sometimes you do—you need to express anger. Because you're just upset. And sometimes you need to give feedback to a company or a service provider, so that they don't make the mistake again in the future. Rarely do these two moods intersect effectively.

That is to say, if you are sincere, Serj, that you want to help them try
to do better in the future, as you say, then you must express that without anger! If you are sincere that you want them to know that you are angry, then do not try to fool us with your, uh, pat on the back saying you just want them to do better. You just want to vent your anger.

Because when you vent your anger to another person—I mean, and you express yourself angrily—which is the only reason I could imagine you used the word "angry" in this letter, Serj—it, uh, people tend to go, "Uh, no thank you." [Laughs.] People tend to, say, close a window shade, tear up a letter, turn around, walk away, lock the door.

If you really want them to do better in the future and alert them to some problems that maybe the company wants to know about for all the reasons that Jesse articulated, then you have to really just take a deep breath and, you know, do what I did when I had to let the waiter know that this is not an acceptable Cobb salad. [Laughs.]

And I—[laughs]—and I hated it. I hated complaining to the waiter. But a Cobb salad is important. And if you had seen the gross green ring around this withered, half hardboiled egg's yolk... you, too, would be angry. And I had to explain to my family members, "I need to talk to the waiter, not because I'm angry, but because all people do in restaurants is take pictures of the food and post it! And this is going to hurt their business. If you serve this Cobb salad to somebody else again."

00:16:03 John Host

And I—as you do when you need to express, "Something went wrong with your business," you have to say, "I'm not angry. And I don't know who's to blame. But you might want to know that this was not really acceptable." And... then tip your waiter 1000% at that point. 'Cause it's not the waiter's fault. You know what I'm saying?

Anyway. Don't just post stuff on Yelp, 'cause that's just hurtful. Write your letters. Express your anger, or express your constructive criticism in a de-angrified way.

00:16:35 Sound Effect Sound Effect [Three gavel bangs.]

00:16:37 John Host

And also, the other thing you need to do—when you hard-boil an egg, you need to immediately plunge it into ice water after you take it out of the hot water, or else it's gonna form that gross green ring around the yolk! Did you know that, Helen?

00:16:49 Helen Guest

I did. I've spent my entire life trying to eliminate the green ring, John, and I will never stop trying.

00:16:53 John Host

Yeah. Now what I do is I just—I've had that printed on a calling card. And I just leave it behind in every restaurant I go to. They love me.

00:17:01 Jesse Host [Laughs quietly.] And it also explains why you give that one-cent tip.

00:17:06 John Host [Laughs quietly.] Here—"You want a tip? Here's a tip! Plunge your hard-boiled eggs into ice water, dummies!"

[Jesse laughs.]

"Hodgman out!" [Stifles laughter.] "Come on, Alan Ruck, we're taking our custom elsewhere." [Sighs.] What a dream that would be, to be eating a Cobb salad with Alan Ruck! Alright.
What if Alan Ruck likes a very, very hardboiled egg with the green ring?

It's—it's not—

What if that's his style of egg?

It's not about the hard—it's not about the hard—Alan—you know what? Alan Ruck would understand. Helen, it's not about the hardness. It's about the oxidization that is stopped when you put it into the ice water bath. You can cook that egg for as long as you want. Just plunge it in a ice water bath! And keep that yolk un-green!


Sarah says:

"Every year, a good friend and I set a fiction-reading challenge organized around a different set of parameters. He has started listening to audiobooks while working on other projects. This goes against the spirit of our competition, and the goal of re-investing in reading. I don't have any problem with audiobooks, generally."

Sounds like you do.

"And if he wants to listen to them beyond the scope of our arrangement, that's his business. But him listening to a book while he solders electronics, mows the lawn, or cooks dinner, doesn't compare to the single-minded focus and unique pleasures of reading.

He doesn't wanna give up our tradition or the competition. So I am asking Judge Hodgman to adhere to the original terms of our arrangement."

Helen, you should know that these people write us all the time. These people have been coming at the Judge John Hodgman podcast for a decade, trying to say that listening to an audiobook is not the same thing as reading a book.

That is... very... harsh of the people that read via audio for all sorts of good reasons.

Yeah. Oh, it's—I mean—

Don't wanna discredit their audio reading experiences!

Right! It's not merely snobby, it is also ableist.

Yeah!

And it is a longstanding precedent of this podcast that they are absolutely equivalent experiences. And not—one is not better than the other. Remember, everybody! All fiction began as spoken word!

[Exasperated sigh.] Helen—

Whoooa.

I don't like to listen to audiobooks. You know why? I get distracted.

Yeah, same.
John Host

But that doesn't mean they're bad!

Helen Guest

No. If anything, Sarah should admire her friend for returning to the Homeric tradition of books in this way. But also, as adulthood advances, I find my time to read a book becomes more and more reduced. And so perhaps Sarah's friend cannot devote all the hours singly to reading.

John Host

Yeah!

Helen Guest

And if he doesn't multitask whilst listening to the books, then that's it for this rather charming tradition!

John Host

How are his electronics gonna get soldered...

Helen Guest

Right!

John Host

...if he's doing everything Sarah's way?

Helen Guest

Is he supposed to not eat dinner?

John Host

Is he supposed to have an un-mown lawn? No.

Jesse Host

Is he supposed to be alone with his thoughts?

[John laughs quietly.]

Helen Guest

Ugh!

John Host

I just—you know, this is the newest and most novel way of getting—of expressing this snobbery. 'Cause Sarah right now is listening to this, going, "But I wrote right here! 'I don't have any problem with audiobooks generally'!" And what did you say, Helen?

Helen Guest

Stop lying to yourself, Sarah!

John Host

That's right! You're trying to make it all about the spirit of the competition. When reading books should never be competition! [Stifles laughter.] I mean, who needs that in their lives?

Jesse Host

Kids at the library in summer who are trying to get free baseball tickets!

John Host

Alright, that's fair.

[Helen laughs.]

That's fair. If you're trying to shock-train an army of young people into a love of lifelong reading, bribery with baseball tickets is one way to do it. But if you're actually—

Jesse Host

It worked for me, John! I have a lifelong love of baseball tickets! Is that what you said?

John Host

Lifelong love of reading baseball tickets. [Stifles laughter.]

Jesse Host

Yeah. [Laughs.]

John Host

Maybe let's say... this time last year? When we all had a lot more mental capacity for paying attention to... book-reading competitions, this would have been an acceptable debate. But in a year where all we're trying to do is—[laughs]—all we're trying to do is solder our electronics and listen to our, you know, N.K. Jemisin or whatever, and just not think about everything for a moment, yeesh. Maybe not have a book competition this year. Maybe just console yourself with books however you want.
I have a good book recommendation that I found very consoling. Consolatory? (Cun-SOL-a-tor-ee.) Consolatory. (KAHN-sol-a-tor-ee.)

[Stammering] Conciliatory.

Constabulary.

Constellation-ary. Consta—

Constabulary.

Look. I don't have a language podcast, so I don't know.

Our friend—[laughs]. Our friend Elliott Kalan from The Flop House, I—I showed up at his front door, just in a terrible emotional state, begging for him to loan me a book that would distract me purely and not upset me at all, and be delightful the entire time I read it. And, uh, he loaned me a movie book called The Studio by John Gregory Dunne.

It is a narrative. It is a narrative nonfiction about a year at 20th Century Fox in Hollywood. 1967-1968.

Yeah.

As they make the ultimately—uh, the—what ultimately became the semi-boondoggle Doctor Dolittle, along with the monstrous surprise success Planet of the Apes, and a number of other films. And it's full of, like, Gene Kelly trying to make a Tom Swift movie, and, uh—you know, Tom Swift and His Flying Lab?

The movie that you most associate with legendary screen dancer Gene Kelly?

That's right.

Obscure turn-of-the-century children's adventure fiction.

Exactly. And it is a—it is a hoot, this book. It's called The Studio. John Gregory Dunne. If you're looking for a distraction, you could hardly read a more pleasant book, and amusing, and it is also like, genuinely fascinating and insightful about the ways that movie studios operated in the very last crumbling days of big studios.

Anyway! Book rec!


Constabulary.

Ca...

[Laughs.] Um—

In England they call it a lift.

[Laughs.] We call them bobbies.
[John snorts.]

Jesse Host Yeah. [Laughs.]

Helen Guest I don’t know how cheering it would be, but I recently read the novel *Silver Sparrow*, by Tayari Jones, which I thought was amazing.

John Host Oh, yeah!

Helen Guest It’s a strong recommend. It’s beautiful.

John Host And did you read it Sarah-style? That is to say, uh, with your nose in a book? Or did you listen to it while soldering electronics?

Helen Guest Uh, well, I’ve tried reading while soldering, and created many fires.

John Host Ah.

Helen Guest And many highly flammable electronics. So I just did it book-wise. But that’s because I’m listening to stuff all the time for work.

John Host Right.

Helen Guest And so listening to things for fun is not really a thing I do. Not—not to be a traitor to Sarah’s friend!

John Host No. No, everyone has their own way of learning! Some people get it through the ears, some people get it through the eyes.

Helen Guest Yes.

John Host You don’t need to have a book fight to be friends.

Helen Guest Some people through the nose! Just—

John Host Yeah!

Helen Guest Just the smell.

John Host Oh, yeah. [Laughs.] You ever—

Jesse Host Yeah.

John Host Do you—[laughs]—do you ever enjoy an olfactory book? [Laughs.]

John Host Mm-hm.

John Host It’s the same experience.

Helen Guest Dogs do.

Jesse Host I love wafted learning.

John Host Yeah, you smell the words, rather than see them. You can only do it if you have synesthesia, but it’s worth it.

[Helen laughs.]

Thank you for that recommendation, Helen. I—say the name of the—I know Tayari Jones. Say the name of the book again?

Helen Guest It’s called *Silver Sparrow*.

John Host *Silver Sparrow*. I will put it down.

Jesse Host Let’s take a quick break. More items on the docket coming up in just a minute on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[Three gavel bangs.]

Promo Clip Music: Gentle, upbeat piano music.
Helen Hong: Hey, J. Keith.

J. Keith van Straaten: Hey, Helen! Hey, you’ve got another true/false quiz for me?

Helen: Yep! Our trivia podcast Go Fact Yourself used to be in front of a live audience.

J. Keith: True! Turns out that’s not so safe anymore.

Helen: Correct! Next. Unfortunately this means we can no longer record the show.

J. Keith: False! The show still comes out every first and third Friday of the month.

Helen: Correct! Finally, we still have great celebrity guests answering trivia about things they love on every episode of Go Fact Yourself.

J. Keith: Definitely true.

Helen: And for bonus points, name some of them.

J. Keith: Recently we’ve had, uh, Ophira Eisenberg, plus tons of surprise experts like Yeardley Smith and Suzanne Somers.

Helen: Perfect score!

J. Keith: Woohoo!

Helen: You can hear Go Fact Yourself every first and third Friday of the month, with all the great guests and trivia that we’ve always had. And if you don’t listen, well then, you can go fact yourself!

J. Keith: That’s the name of our podcast!

Helen: Correct!

J. Keith: Woohoo!

[Music finishes.]

Biz Ellis: Hi! I’m Biz.

Theresa Thorn: And I’m Theresa.

Biz: And we host One Bad Mother, a comedy podcast about parenting.

Theresa: Whether you are a parent or just know kids exist in the world, join us each week as we honestly share what it’s like to be a parent.
Biz: These are really hard questions!

Theresa: They are really hard questions!

Biz: [Voice getting louder and more agitated] I don't have any answers for that!

Theresa: I don't either!

Biz: [Yelling] Sack of garbage!

Theresa: I know!

Biz: [Yelling in frustration] Ahhh! Ughhh! [Laughs wildly.] Ahhhh! The end of the show will just be five minutes of Biz—

[Theresa giggles.]

Biz: —and Theresa crying and screaming until the outro is played. So join us each week as we judge less, laugh more, and remind you that you are doing a great job.

Theresa: Find us on MaximumFun.org, on Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts!

[Music stops.]

---

"During the pandemic, I've been sitting down to urinate, which I feel minimizes the necessity to wash my hands. I make zero contact with anything, and use my elbow to flush. I do this out of a not-so-irrational fear that as the second wave of COVID is mounting, supplies like soap may become dangerously scarce again. If I only have to wash on a one-to-three ratio, that will conserve our soap.

Naturally, my wife thinks this is counterproductive, as we've been taught since childhood to wash your hands every time. Typically, I agree, but these are drastic times, and I earnestly feel I'm on to something here. To be clear, this only applies to going number one. I'm simply trying to figure out the most efficient method—"

[Stifles laughter.] Well, there you go.

"—the most efficient method to maximize our yield in case, you know, the world starts to really fall apart. I guess if that should happen, this is all a moot point."

Has he considered stockpiling soap?

Has he considered... no longer urinating?
Ingenious. He’s just perpetuating his own problem.

Yeah, I—I’m not sure that this guy has really exhausted the full potential list of crackpot schemes to avoid doing a simple thing that we not only know from common sense works, that we are actually asked to do by all of humanity. To help stop the spread of this disease. Dude. Knock it off with the scheme.

You know, you’re not gonna save soap—I don’t think he would stockpile soap, Helen. ‘Cause I think—I think what he thinks he’s doing is reducing his soap consumption so that in some post-apocalyptic wasteland future, there will be a little soap left over that he didn’t use for humanity. But it’s like—I think you’re more of a hero by keeping your hands clean, rather than using less soap and describing, in public, how you sit down to pee. Like, that doesn’t make you a hero! Just wash your hands.

How true do we think the zero contact is? Because... if he is sitting down on an open toilet, not touching the seat, and flushing with his elbow, the toilet is still open. And therefore the vapors of his urine...

...are transmitted six feet! It's a—

Yes.

It’s a droplet-transmitting contraption. But if he’s—

Yes!

He might be moving the toilet seat with his knee.

Could be.

Like a—like a soccer player warming up.

I don't know what that looks like.

Like Hacky Sack–style. I imagine this whole thing being Hacky Sack–style.

[Snorts.] I think Helen points out—the—I mean, the urine vapor argument is very compelling! Not merely ‘cause—

He’s either touching the toilet, or he’s got the urine vapors!

Either way, I would suggest a hand wash! It's fairly straightforward.

You’re absolutely right! As you pointed out, Helen, it is a droplet-spread disease. You are putting yourself in closer con—like, the urine is connecting with the surface of the water. It is being agitated, and you’re closer to it than ever, sir!

I have to say this, John, though.

Go ahead.

One thing that I’m with this guy on is during the pandemic, sitting down to pee. I don’t do it for scheme reasons. I don’t have an
efficiency scheme here.

00:30:33 John Host Right.

00:30:34 Jesse Host I just don't have the emotional strength to stand and urinate at the same time.

00:30:37 John Host [Laughs.] Yeah! Exactly. I mean, look—

00:30:39 Jesse Host [Stifling laughter] That's where I'm at. I just go in the bathroom and collapse.

00:30:43 John Host It's a great opportunity—I'm not against the method. Although I agree with Helen that I think that its sanitary benefits are arguable at best. But take any opportunity to sit in a closed room to stare into the middle distance for a while. Absolutely.

00:31:03 Jesse Host Yeah. That's the key here.

00:31:04 John Host Maybe pop in your earbuds and listen to an audiobook. Maybe an audiobook called, uh, The King of Dragons, by Carol Fenner.

[Helen laughs quietly.]

Narrated by Alan Ruck.

[Stifling laughter] Please, spare yourself.

00:31:18 Helen Guest What about if he's showering, he soaps less then? That's a far bigger area of his body. You know, people get very over-excited on Twitter about whether you wash your legs or not. Has he considered washing less of his legs, perhaps, for conservation reasons?

00:31:32 John Host Oh! People are getting over-excited on Twitter about something? Hm!

00:31:38 Helen Guest I hesitate to raise it. Because I know that it's very important for some.

00:31:43 John Host This topic about washing your legs, though, I have to say, is one that I've not—[stifles laughter]. The—it's the one Twitter fight I've not encountered.

00:31:50 Helen Guest [Stifling laughter] Please, spare yourself.

00:31:53 John Host People are arguing that you shouldn't bother washing your legs?

00:31:56 Helen Guest Or that you definitely should. You could get around it by just washing one leg, I suppose, and pleasing everybody.

[John and Jesse laugh.]

00:32:03 John Host Compromise position. Wash one leg. Avoid the urine vapors.

00:32:10 Jesse Host Mike says:

"Every morning, I take my dog Bella out on a walk through our neighborhood. At the end of my street is a cemetery. Sometimes I'll walk through it with her. But I've recently been wondering, is it disrespectful to those people there to take my dog walking through? I always have poop bags and clean up after her if she goes to the bathroom while there. We always walk along the road, not through the gravestones. Attached are cute photos of our dog."

It's a beautiful dog. Looks like a great friend dog.
Yeah. A—what's—a great friend dog?

[John and Jesse stifle laughter.]

Great friend dog. Friend dog is a type of dog. That's like a dog that's big enough to give, uh, like a—like a real hug to.

And maybe it's not, like—it's not, like, distinctively adorable, in a—you know what I mean? It's not—it, like—it's—all dogs are cute.

It's top quality is that it looks like it would be a great and loyal friend. Like, a lot of golden retrievers are really great friend dogs.

That's right.

'Cause you'd think—you—you see it and you think, "Aw. I could really hug that."

I could hug—I could hug that, and get all of the stuff that is caught in that dog's fur on my body. For sure.

Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

Helen, do you have a pet?

I don't, John, because I live an itinerant lifestyle, and it feels unfair not to provide a stable background. But I used to have—I grew up with dogs. I'm just trying to remember our cemetery policy.

Well, first of all, all dogs go to Heaven. That's established.

Yeah.

I think, though, because it was the eighties and nineties, in Britain, people just left all the poop on the ground.

You can see that as a metaphor if you want. But it was also a literal truth. But I think, uh, if I were to be dead in a graveyard, I would be quite happy that a dog was using it for whatever ends they had in mind.

Alright. So... Mike? First of all, just mark this down. Helen is in the prime of her life, a happy, healthy individual. This is not gonna help, probably, your dog Bella. Uhhh, but in the future, um, when the three of us are all dead, you have Helen's permission to poop on her grave.

Yep!

Your dog. Your dog. You don't want Mike to poop on your grave, right?
I think that would... create further questions that would derail the immediate concern.

Right. Bella, or your future dog, may poop on Helen Zaltzman's grave. Make a pilgrimage. Jesse?

Yeah.

Can Mike's dog poop on your grave? Yea or nay.

Yeah, no, that's fine with me. I don't even know if I'll have a grave.

Right.

Burial at sea. That's what I say. Once a sailor, always a sailor.

Yep. Good point. In which case, Mike, bring Bella to the ocean.

Yeah.

And have her poop—take her poop and throw it in the ocean, in honor of Jesse Thorn. That's—

You know what I'd love to see? Someone Tweeted me yesterday that their pandemic hobby is imagining themselves building mini–electric boats.

Oh!

Which, he sent me a picture of this beautiful boat. And I thought this was like a—like a pond boat, like you would sail in Central Park.

Yeah.

In—in an E.B. White novel.

Yeah.

But it wasn't. It's a boat a person sits in. They're like, six or eight feet long.

Uh-huh? Tiny.

Which is like, just the size—it's like a, uh, Shriner car.

Yeah.

But it's a boat.

Yeah.

That really works.

Yeah. [Stifles laughter.]

Now it's all I want in the world.

Jesse, I happen to know a place where you can get four of them. But you can—

Oh?!

You can only buy them as a group.

[Jesse laughs.]

They're for sale at Dream Boat Harbor. Google "Dream Boat Harbor." It's run by our friends up their in Brooklin, Maine, Off Center Harbor. Great organization promoting the love and craft of building and going in wooden boats.

Not going—not pooping in. Get—take it easy, Bella the dog. Don't poop in this boat.

[Helen laughs.]

Getting into it and using it. Sailing and/or motoring it.

But they only come in a multipack?

The seller will only sell them all together, and I think that there are four of them, and they—they're about as long as Bella the dog. Like...

You would have such fun. We would have such fun together! All three of—look. There are four of us here right now! Helen, Jesse, me, and producer Jennifer Marmor. We're all getting little boats!

[Sighs.] Thank god.

I love this outcome.

Yeah. That's good. Now, as for me, I don't—I don't know how I will be buried. But if I were interred in the ground, keep your dog away from my gravesite. I don't want your dog's poop.

Yeah.

People have different preferences! And since they do, I think it's better to err on the side of "Don't poop on graves." Now you say, Mike, that you only walk through the roads in the cemetery, not over the graves, which I think is appropriate. I've done—I don't know if you guys have done, but I've done quite a bit of cemetery walking during the pandemic, as a way to get outside. Particularly Green-Wood Cemetery, which is going to be less crowded than a lot of the parks, where young people just love to run and breathe on each other.

The Green-Wood Cemetery is a beautiful, old, historic cemetery in Brooklyn that is absolutely gorgeous to walk through, and wildly depopulated. But in the early part of the pandemic, there was a real problem. Because people were flocking to it with their dogs, and their Frisbees, and playing Frisbees and having their dogs poop! And dogs are not allowed in that cemetery!

Mike, call the cemetery. Find out. Is it Green-Wood Cemetery? 'Cause I'm gonna tell you, dogs are not allowed there. Is it a different cemetery? I mean, if it's a historic cemetery and there's no office, then I would err on the side of, "It's okay to bring your dog through, but try to keep the poop to a minimum." But if it's a cemetery that is active and has an office, you call them and find out what their policy is.

[Three gavel bangs.]

Bella's pretty cute.

Let's take a break. When we come back, we'll hear a case about anonymous notes.
Judge Hodgman, we're taking a break from clearing the docket. Let's talk about what we've got going on. John, what have you got going on, outside of our program?

Well, Jesse, as this podcast is released, it is September the 2nd, 2020. And that means September the 3rd is tomorrow, and that means... the final episode, the season finale, of my show with David Rees that shall forever go unnamed on this podcast due to family standards and practices, premieres tomorrow night, Thursday night, ten PM, on the TV show Cake on the FXX network. And if you miss it, check it and all of the previous episodes of this unnamed TV show over on Hulu. Very easy way to get to it. Just go to Bit.ly/dicktown. Don't know why they used that particular phrase.

To link to our show. Strange. All small letters.

All one word. Bit.ly/dicktown. Jesse, it's been such a thrill to share the show with all the Judge John Hodgman listeners. The feedback that we've gotten has really been fantastic. We really, really, really hope to be able to make more of them. And the only way that that's ever in a million years gonna happen is if people, you know, check it out and like it and talk about it! Maybe Tweet to @FXX. But mostly just, you know, watch it on TV, watch it on Hulu. I think you'll enjoy it!

If you get up on Saturday morning and watch it like a Saturday morning cartoon, you can eat some sugar cereal. Be—done, the whole thing, the whole season, this Saturday. Uh, within an hour and a half.

This episode is called—it's the finale. After the very sad ending of the episode that preceded it, "The Mystery of the Impossible Car," now we have at last, triumph. John Hunchman and David Purefoy, co-creator David Rees, go have dinner with my fictional dad, Stephen Tobolowsky, in Richardsville's most famous, new, subway-tile–walled, Edison-bulbed–lit restaurant, The President's Physician, and stumble across a mystery involving the great Heather Lawless and the equally sublime and great pair of Paul F Tompkins and Janie Haddad Tompkins.

It's called "The Mystery of the President's Physician." It's our season finale, tomorrow night at ten PM on Cake, which is a TV show on FXX. Thereafter on Hulu, at Bit.ly/dicktown. Thanks for visiting Richardsville with us. Jesse, what's going on with you?

This is the final week of the Put This On Shop summer sale. So if you wanna get something special for yourself—I know as I have been sitting in quarantine and becoming more and more anxious, I got obsessed with the possibility of buying this giant ceramic peanut from the estate of Penny Marshal.

If you're looking for your own giant ceramic peanut, um, or—I don't
think I have any giant ceramic peanuts. I do have—do you know what a vesta case is, John?

It's like a—in—before there were waterproof matches, you had to keep your matches dry. And so you would put them in a little box, called a vesta case. And I have a silver vesta case in the shape of a peanut, [stifles laughter] in the Put This On Shop. That and many other items, you can buy for 40% off with the code “Summer Sale.” And all our fine jewelry is also on sale for 25% off, all the gold and stuff, with the code "Fine Summer." So you can find it online at PutThisOnShop.com. Lots of beautiful things for your home, for your person, and to cover your, uh, naked shame. All online at PutThisOnShop.com.

No one bid against Jesse on this giant ceramic peanut, y'all! It's an amazing work of art.

[Laughing] No, focus on the peanut-related material in the Put This On Shop, at PutThisOnShop.com. Yeah, that's how you help Jesse Thorn. Alright.

Those will bring you comfort in these dark times.

Let's get back to the docket.

[Three gavel bangs.]

Welcome back to the Judge John Hodgman podcast. We're clearing the docket this week. Here's something from a listener about anonymous notes. He says:

"My wife and I received an anonymous note in our mailbox complaining about our fireworks. The writer also claims one of us rolled through a stop sign.

Admittedly, we set off a single firework at nine PM, Monday, July 13th, and it would not be out of the realm of possibility that we could have rolled through a stop sign. So I plead no contest. In our defense, the firework I chose on the aforementioned date was the quite modest fountain style.

I've been greatly harmed by anonymous complaints in the past, as a minister in a small town. We were effectively run out of this town because of a small group of disgruntled anonymous parishioners. The pain of that experience brings up a lot of fear and anxiety when it happens now in a new context."

[John whistles.]

"I'm exceedingly kind and compassionate." Not to mention modest. I added the last sentence.

"If I were approached in person, I would apologize and change my behavior. But when receiving an anonymous note, I become irate and irrational. How should I respond? I've attached photos of the note, and of the firework we set off for evidence.
Sincerely,
Embarrassed and Annoyed in New Hampshire."

Helen Guest
Hmmm.

Jesse Host
Do you like the irony that this is an anonymous note?

Helen Guest
[Laughs quietly.] Maybe they don't wanna make themselves even more of a target.

John Host
There are many levels of cowardice here. Uhhh, Helen, do you have the note, the anonymous note that was left for them right here in front of you?

Helen Guest
Yes. I'm just trying to read. The handwriting leans backwards, which I think some graphologists would see as a danger sign. Depending on contraindications. The note says:

"Neighbor,

Is it the 4th of July? No, it's the 13th— Triple underlined. —of July.
FIREWORKS ARE DONE." Capitals, underlined.

Brackets: "(And illegal.)"

Jesse Host
Fireworks, ya burnt.

Helen Guest
"I was walking by your house with my dog when you let off your lame fireworks."

I wouldn't use the word "lame."

"My dog freaked out and jerked forward to run away, and effectively threw out my back! I probably won't be able to pick up my daughter for the next two weeks. THANKS.

Given you're new to the neighborhood, maybe try and be courteous! Particularly if you want the same from your fellow neighbors. While you're at it, stop rolling through stop signs, too! You clearly didn't see the kids on their bikes last week.

RESPECT YOUR NEIGHBORS!" Capitals, underlined, exclamation point.

John Host
Thank you very much! That was a wonderful performance, by the way.

Helen Guest
Thank you. I trained.

John Host
And I'm glad we were able to re-traumatize our anonymous listener together in this way. While also—!

Helen Guest
Mm.

John Host
—revealing the awfulness of this letter, which is designed to hurt, not to help. Speaking of complaints that are designed to hurt, vs. trying to help.

Helen Guest
Yeah. You can't un-throw this back by writing this letter.

John Host
No.

Jesse Host
Effectively.
00:45:39 John Host Yeah. But I mean—and as wonderfully as you read it, I hope you will not be offended. If we are able to get Alan Ruck to read it, we're gonna put that in. Instead.

00:45:48 Helen Guest I concede to Ruck. It's fine.

00:45:49 John Host Alright. Thank you.

00:45:51 Helen Guest As I did for Ferris Bueller. I was right to be recast.

00:45:54 John Host [Cracks up.]

Leave all of this in. Uh, yeah. Have either of you ever received an anonymous note from a neighbor?

00:46:02 Jesse Host I never have, but, uh, to be honest, I'm known for being exceedingly kind and compassionate.

00:46:08 John Host [Laughs.] That's true. Fair enough.

00:46:10 Helen Guest When I lived in a building with 21 other apartments, we received a note about a loud party we hadn't had.

00:46:16 John Host Mm-hm?

00:46:18 Helen Guest That they—which I felt offended by, 'cause I also didn't know who had had it, so I couldn't forward the note.

00:46:23 John Host Right. Right.

[Jesse laughs quietly.]

00:46:23 Helen Guest We'd had zero parties.

00:46:26 John Host You know, if you're writing a letter to your contractor, or builder, or flower bed lorry designer, you are at least signing your name. Even if you are venting anger.

00:46:36 Helen Guest Yeah.

00:46:37 John Host An anonymous note is not only, I think, intrinsically cowardly and threatening, but also the—the opposite of neighborly! You know, the point of reaching out to a neighbor, even if it's to convey something that's critical or difficult to talk about, is that you're trying to maintain a neighborly relationship!

00:47:00 Helen Guest Yeah. It feels like with this note, it must be by somebody who lives very close by, and so the recipient—how would they feel comfortable in their home? Being watched all the time by these people, none of whom they can trust.

00:47:14 John Host Yeah! And—

00:47:15 Helen Guest Just in case.

00:47:16 John Host And by the way, anonymous letter-writer. We're onto you, Helen Zaltzman's already identified you have a—a backward-leaning handwriting. Let's just—

00:47:26 Helen Guest It's some very strange kerning, as well.

00:47:27 John Host Yeah! Strange kerning! Thank you! Finally, someone notices the kerning.

[Helen laughs quietly.]

00:47:32 Jesse Host Yeah.
But I mean, it's just a matter of time. And we know you live nearby. We know you have a dog and a daughter.

Yeah, we know you can't pick up your daughter, effectively.

Yeah, you effectively can't pick up your daughter.

What if the daughter's in her twenties?

[John laughs.]

They don't offer that information.

That's true!

What if they already couldn't pick her up anymore?

Comfortably my favorite part of this anonymous note, by a wide margin, is that they thought, "What were the consequences of the dog jumping forward? [Sighs.] Well, it was uncomfortable for me. I could say I threw out my back, but that wouldn't be true. Um... And I'm nothing if not honest."

It's true.

"So, um... I'm gonna say it effectively threw out my back."

[Jesse and John laugh.]

And the other thing that we know—we know that they live in New Hampshire, and we know that the anonymous letter-writer, the anonymous neighbor with the dog, has a limited knowledge of New Hampshire state or county law. 'Cause fireworks are totally legal in New Hampshire! It's like, "Light fireworks or die!" is on their— is on their license plate!

Everything's legal in New Hampshire.

That's right!

They don't even have to wear seatbelts, do they?

I don't know. I don't know anymore. All I know is that—[laughs]—when you drive across the border from Vermont into New Hampshire, you know it's happening. Because in Vermont, you're on these wonderful, beautifully even, luxuriously funded state roads. And then you cross into New Hampshire, and it's just like you fall off a cliff into a canyon of potholes.

There's just a sign that says, "Residents must know karate."

[John cracks up.]

The sad thing is, if this person had made this non-anonymous, then they might have received an apology for their... back.

Yeah!

And other injuries, physical and emotional. But the way they've done it, they're not gonna be fulfilled by this, either. It's a very bitter act.

If you're writing a letter of complaint, as we have established, you can either express anger, or you can express constructive criticism. This is a letter that expresses anger, and because it is unsigned, it is
intimidating and scary.

Now, I could see a situation where you would want to express even constructive criticism to a neighbor, uhh, where you might fear reprisal of some kind. And if that were... case—that’s an extenuating circumstance, in which a letter might be unsigned. But don’t give all these clues about who you are, and who your dog is!

That said, I have some critique for the other anonymous letter-writer, as well. One, fireworks drive dogs up a tree. We know that better—now better than ever, because there was just this rash of nightly fireworks in most urban cities for mysterious reasons, and people with dogs—their dogs really suffer. You know?

Two, if you live part-time in a state where fireworks are legal, such as, let’s say, Maine... Augusta is the state capital. Particularly if you’re in Hancock County, noise travels, and fireworks get shot off... uh, you should let your neighbors know that you’re gonna do it. If you’re gonna fire off more than one.

In this case, a fountain firework, pro—one fountain firework, I think you probably could get away with on your own property, without getting pre-approval from your neighbors. But that just leads to my other critique of you, anonymous listener! Whom I love in my heart, but still. Fountain fireworks are the worst. Why would you waste a—time, money, and neighborly good will on a fountain firework to begin with?

Now, I am deeply sorry that you were run out of town by anonymous accusations. That—that was a turn in this letter that I did not expect. [Stifles laughter.] That was a big, dramatic, novelistic turn. And I am—and I’m very sorry that happened, and I can appreciate why an anonymous letter would traumatize you. But all the more reason that you should know that writing an anonymous letter itself is bad! Stand behind your words! Whether you’re writing to a podcast, or whether you’re talking to your neighbors. Especially if you’re talking to your neighbors! You have to live near each other.

I think that there’s nothing you can do. This letter succeeded in its purpose of making you feel awful. You have to tear it up, put it behind you. Please stop at stop signs! That’s probably a good idea. Even in New Hampshire, that’s highly recommended. But try to put this past you, and keep an eye out on your neighbors. See if you can figure out who it is.

Finally, we have heard from a listener named Amelia, who has a dispute with her parents. Here’s what she says:

"Dear Judge Hodgman,

My name is Amelia. I am nine years old. We listen to your show a lot, and congratulations on your Webby Award."

Thank you!

Thank you, Amelia. That’s very kind of you.
Thank you very much.

"During COVID-19, my parents are bickering a lot over meaningless things, because we're cooped up together. Here's one example of a meaningless thing:

My dad wants sliced pickles for putting on hamburgers, but my mom says the sliced pickles taste different. Also, she says buying whole pickles is better, because you can slice them or spear them. My dad says—"

This is my favorite part of this whole thing.

"My dad says he 'just wants normal pickles that normal people eat.'" [Laughs.]

Ugh! Ughhh.

Thank you for providing the direct quote there, Amelia.

They've got such different life goals, her mum and dad.

[Laughing] I know.

"They also bicker about my dad's water schemes." [Laughs.] In case you were wondering if Dad was the practical one. "He freezes water and puts it in insulated cups."

I'm not sure what that means.

"Also, Mom uses the word 'task' instead of 'chore.'"

[John laughs.]

"Please tell—" [Laughs.] You know, that's when it becomes an omnibus complaint here.

Right.

[John and Jesse laugh.]

"Please tell my parents to stop bickering about meaningless things."

Helen, do you say task or chore?

Sometimes both!

[John makes a sound of disgust.]

I feel like they're words that can both belong in the lexicon. I don't understand the grievance there. But—

Hang on. Hang on—hang on a second, Helen. Hang on a second. I have to talk to my wife. [Calling off-mic] Kath? She says both task and chore!

[John makes a sound of disgust.]

[Calling off-mic] Neither of us win!

[Back on-mic] Damn it, Helen...

Ah!
Helen: I’m sorry to come between you.

John: Darn it, Helen, I thought—I thought I was gonna get a twofer today. Alright...

[Laughs quietly.] We could, uh—if there’s a third one, then that could be the important tie-breaker.

Alright! What does Helen Zaltzman feel about sliced pickles vs. whole pickles?

Well, I feel a lot of things. One is, "Can this household not keep two jars of pickles?"

One for the normal people, and one for the whole pickle people.

Who want the variety, rather than just single-use pickle. Also...

Some advice from my mother about marriage is to choose your battles.

You know. If you’re gonna kill each other, make it about something really worthwhile, not the pickle slices. And she has tolerated, uh, an unhappy marriage for 50 years!

Sage advice from Helen Zaltzman. I’m gonna say this! I do not normalize one form of pickle over another. A sliced pickle vs. a whole pickle is like an audiobook vs. a book. Equivalent experiences. But there is reason to have preference. Because you can’t buy a whole pickle and slice it in the way those sliced pickles come, with the ridges! Sliced pickles sometimes have little ridges in them! That’s a difference.

What, are you talking about pickle chips?

Yeah.

I think we’re talking about sandwich slices. But you would have to have extraordinary knife skills to generate at-home sandwich sliced pickles. That’s cut flat the long way.

Mm-hm. Oh, I see what you’re saying. Yeah.

That would either generate a huge amount of waste, or just be extraordinary difficult to do at home, even with a very sharp chef knife. [Stifling laughter] Uh, or a mandolin or whatever.

I think Helen Zaltzman is right. Pick your battles. Pickles, not worth it. Keep two jars. Freezing ice in insulated cu—I’m not sure even what’s going on there. It sounds like they’re just making ice cubes.

Don't normalize pickles. They're equivalent pickle experiences that
are different, and you need to honor them. And be like Helen, use "task" or "chore" interchangeably. Doesn't matter!

But the point is, Mom and Dad... you're hurting your daughter! Amelia's nine years old. She doesn't wanna listen to you bicker. Knock it off! Sit all—sit down together, the three of you, and enjoy an Alan Ruck movie.

00:56:47 Sound Effect Sound Effect

[Three gavel bangs.]

00:56:50 John Host

I didn't even know that Alan Ruck was on ten episodes of a reboot of The Exorcist in 2016. That's—that's my evening sorted out.

00:57:00 Helen Guest

Helen, thank you so much for being here!

00:57:00 Helen Guest

Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you for letting me help you save lives.

[Jesse laughs quietly.]

00:57:05 Jesse Host

I'm gonna repeat my recommendation of Helen's work. Answer Me This!, which I was introduced to many years ago when I had dinner with Helen in London, England, in a very nice Indian restaurant. And I—she said, "Oh, I have a podcast, too," and I said to myself, "Oh, no..."

00:57:26 Helen Guest

"Ugh."

00:57:27 Jesse Host

"Oh, God."

[Helen laughs.]

Uh, I have been a loyal listener of Answer Me This! for many years. It's a wonderful show. Helen's co-host Olly does a great job as well. I think we can all agree, not as good as Helen.

[Jesse gasps, Helen laughs.]

But a great job nonetheless. [Laughs.] Olly's really great. I've had lunch with him as well. And it's a show where they answer all kinds of questions, from general knowledge, interesting information, to etiquette, to advice. And it's always a hoot, and I always learn something when I listen.

00:58:00 Helen Guest

Oh, thank you!

00:58:01 Jesse Host

And The Allusionist is her show about the unusual contours of language, especially the English language, and that is also a hoot. If you wanna learn the history of bras through a lexicographal—fical—

[Helen laughs quietly.]

—uh, lenses, then I recommend The Allusionist.

[Helen laughs.]

And Veronica Mars Investigations. What can I say? Veronica Mars, it's a fun show created by a guy named Rob Thomas, who's not that Rob Thomas. A different Rob Thomas.

[Helen chuckles.]
There's room for more than one Rob Thomas in this life. Two jars of pickles is fine.

Sliced and whole.

There's the light rock Rob Thomas, and then there is the super nice Rob Thomas who one time was on a live Sound of Young America in Los Angeles. I'm talking about ten—Veronica Mars was still on TV when it happened. It was 10, 12 years ago. And he said, "Hey, listen. I can't make the early call. I'm gonna be just on time. I've been in the Little Brother—the Big Brothers Big Sisters program for the last 15 years, and I'm going to my little brother's high school graduation."

[Stifles laughter.]

Awww!

"He's going to college next year." [Laughs.]

And I said, "Yes. That is a great reason for you to be just on time for my live show you're doing out of the kindness of your heart at a 40-seat theater in Santa Monica." [Laughs.]

Um—

So Rob Thomas, nice man.

Rob Thomas, nice man. Sliced or whole. You gotta love a Rob.

Our docket is now clear. That's it for another episode of Judge John Hodgman. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. You can follow us on Twitter at @JesseThorn and @hodgman. We're on Instagram at @judgejohnhodgman. Make sure to hashtag your Judge John Hodgman Tweets #JJHo, and check out the Maximum Fun subreddit at MaximumFun.Reddit.com to discuss this episode.

Submit your cases at MaximumFun.org/jjho, or email hodgman@maximumfun.org. We'll talk to you next time on the Judge John Hodgman podcast.