

## Wonderful! 148: Gak Chat

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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:** Life finds a way, doesn't it?

**Rachel:** That's true.

**Griffin:** Viva finds a way, doesn't it, sometimes?

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Sometimes you have a week where it's just the stars don't really align? The stars are scattered hither and yon, but you still find time to do a podcast recording, doncha?

**Rachel:** You know, you have to.

**Griffin:** You have to. You can't depend on astrology all the time when scheduling your podcast recordings.

**Rachel:** And the people are counting on us.

**Griffin:** The people need it. They don't care if you're—

**Rachel:** It's a Pisces moon.

**Griffin:** If it's a Pisces moon, if Aquarius is in retrograde, get the— get out of here, you gotta do your show, don't you?

**Rachel:** Mm hmm.

**Griffin:** Now, there's a loophole, cause they don't say how long the show has to be.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** So, we could knock out a tenner, which is what we in the business call a ten-minute-long episode. But we won't do that to you. Listen, thank you all for waiting on us for this late episode. I feel like we've been a little tardy lately and, you know, shit's getting a little wild over here. Shit's getting a little out of control. But you know, it's outta control everywhere. We're here, we're gonna talk about things that we like.

**Rachel:** We're fine. Don't worry about us, Griffin maybe made you worry about us, don't worry about us, we're fine.

**Griffin:** No, no. I mean, I got a headache. And I want the people to... pray?

**Rachel:** Okay, worry about Griffin's headache.

**Griffin:** Pray for that. And we're gonna talk about stuff we like. Things we're into. Do you have any small wonders please?

**Rachel:** I would like to talk about my snack of late, which really takes me back to my youth. And that is a cup of butterscotch pudding with some cool whip on top.

**Griffin:** You have been eating this nightly.

**Rachel:** [laughs] It's my evening treat.

**Griffin:** It's your evening come-down cocktail that you've been imbibing, eating every single night.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah, I recommend it. I don't know what it is exactly about it that I am enjoying so much, but it is cool, it is a cool treat, and it makes me feel like I'm just a comfortable, happy ten-year old.

**Griffin:** It makes me feel that way too, watching you eat it, I feel like I'm back in the school lunch room being very jealous of a dessert that somebody else is eating.

**Rachel:** [laughs] What is your small wonder?

**Griffin:** Lovecraft Country on HBO.

**Rachel:** Yeah...

**Griffin:** This show's like, wicked right up my alley. It dabbles in a lot of sort of Lovecraftian, cosmic horror stuff while also—

**Rachel:** It is spooky.

**Griffin:** It's very spooky, but it also sort of reckons with the inherent, like, oftentimes explicit racism of HP Lovecraft and his work. It, like, really gets into it in the first episode in some very explicit ways, but it also tackles, it tackles Lovecraftian cosmic horror through the lens of mid-century segregation and Jim Crow, like, laws and it blends those two concepts into something that is so powerful and so terrifying, and also because it is based on sort of an anthology, short-story anthology, like, book, the episodes are just out there, man. Like, the first two episodes are like, "Wow, I know what this show's about." And then the second episode ends and you're like, "Oh wait, I have no fucking idea what this show's about." And then the third episode is something completely different.

**Rachel:** Yeah, the second episode I was like, "Wow, well they resolved that, I don't know what the rest of the show is about." And then the third episode a whole new adventure.

**Griffin:** Yeah. It's got Jurnee Smollett in it, who was in Friday Light Nights, and in that third episode she puts on like, an absolutely staggering, like it's all I've been talking about to our friends, like, you have to watch this show just to watch Jurnee Smollett, like, tear the fucking house down in the third episode.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It's really good. But it also might not be everybody's cup of tea, because it's also horrific and gory and, uh, yeah. Wild, man.

**Rachel:** But it's good.

**Griffin:** It's good. What's your first big thing, though?

**Rachel:** My first thing. Dust off your beret.

**Griffin:** Oh my God, are we going back?

**Rachel:** It's the poetry corner.

**Griffin:** [sharp blowing sounds] That's me dusting the beret.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Wow.

**Griffin:** It's really big. It's like a Gallagher prop. And I'm also dusting it off against a big snare drum. So. I'm not gonna do the song.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Okay. That's fine.

**Griffin:** I have this headache. I don't know if you heard.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** It's the talk of the town.

**Rachel:** That's fine. The poet I wanna talk about this week is Ada Limón. She is a poet currently practicing, living in Lexington, Kentucky. And I have only recently become familiar with her.

**Griffin:** How so— how have you done so? Are you on the circuit? Are you on the poetry subreddit?

**Rachel:** Well, let me be honest with you. So, um, I have talked about pretty much all of my favorite poets at this point on this show.

**Griffin:** Interesting.

**Rachel:** So occasionally I just have to dip in and see who is out there doing good work today that I didn't know about. And this is one of those.

**Griffin:** Okay. I'm glad. You're expanding your horizons and therefore expanding mine dramatically, and our listeners'. Love it.

**Rachel:** Mm hmm. She is a poet, received her MFA from NYU in 2001, and she has written, what is it... five, five collections of poems. The most recent one called *The Carrying*, that came out in 2018.

**Griffin:** Okay. So this is hot off the presses.

**Rachel:** Yeah. She is, I mean, she is out there today and she's not that much older than me either. She is a young poet, I will say confidently.

**Griffin:** Wow!

**Rachel:** [laughs] Um, and I just found her, her voice is very clear, part of the reason I found her is I was looking for more poets like Billy Collins, which I have brought to this show. Just like, I am telling you a story that is heartfelt and

beautifully written, and it is accessible to all. So, I wanted to share the poem that I read recently that I really liked, called The Raincoat.

**Griffin:** Alright.

**Rachel:** And this is from her most recent collection, The Carrying.

The Raincoat

“When the doctor suggested surgery  
and a brace for all my youngest years,  
my parents scrambled to take me  
to massage therapy, deep tissue work,  
osteopathy, and soon my crooked spine  
unspooled a bit, I could breathe again,  
and move more in a body unclouded  
by pain. My mom would tell me to sing  
songs to her the whole forty-five minute  
drive to Middle Two Rock Road and forty-  
five minutes back from physical therapy.  
She’d say, even my voice sounded unfettered  
by my spine afterward. So I sang and sang,  
because I thought she liked it. I never  
asked her what she gave up to drive me,  
or how her day was before this chore. Today,  
at her age, I was driving myself home from yet  
another spine appointment, singing along  
to some maudlin but solid song on the radio,  
and I saw a mom take her raincoat off  
and give it to her young daughter when  
a storm took over the afternoon. My god,  
I thought, my whole life I’ve been under her  
raincoat thinking it was somehow a marvel—”

[stops to breathe, overcome with emotion]

“My god,  
I thought, my whole life I’ve been under her  
raincoat thinking it was somehow a marvel  
that I never got wet.”

**Griffin:** That’s really good.

**Rachel:** I mean, you know I love a good last line.

**Griffin:** I know you do.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I also know you're quite susceptible to parental, uh, poems about being a parent and having parent. Being as you are one now.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I don't, like— I've talked about it on this show, like, um, I am not somebody, I think, that built my whole life around having children.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Rachel:** And I always feel a little uncomfortable when people present themselves as, like, "this is the best thing I've ever done".

**Griffin:** Yeah, I know.

**Rachel:** You know, "My life is all about this, 100%, this is who I am, I was born to do this." You know, that kind of talk has always made me uncomfortable because I've always had, you know, a lot of ambitions for myself.

**Griffin:** Right, of course.

**Rachel:** Um... but I think, you know, the experience of parenting has made me look back at my experience of being a child more, too. And I just found that, like, such a powerful... a powerful way of phrasing that. This idea that there is so much that exists within your own parent's life when you're a child that you know nothing about.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** And then when you become a parent yourself, it's something that you think about a lot more. And the phrasing of that at the end, just like, just really struck me.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Um... and I just, I feel like her approach to writing, if you read more of her poems, is very similar to Billy Collins in that, like, I am just telling you a story and then I am revealing to you as it revealed to me, like, what the significance of this story is. And I read this interview that she gave in Columbia Journal. Somebody had asked her, like, you know, how do you write? What is the most important thing about writing? What are skills that you need to develop? And she said, "Your writing wants you to widen your gaze and see the world fully. Your writing wants you to be tender and vulnerable to the world. That's hard to do if self-care isn't involved."

She is very much one of those writers that's like, hey, there are times when I don't feel like writing and so I don't write. You know, I don't have a certain

process or a scheduled way to do it that I really hold myself to. It's just about tenacity. It's just about going back and doing it and trying to take care of yourself, and recognize that the truly good poems are the ones, for her, when she really is available to it.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Which is something that I had a lot of trouble with and continue to have trouble with after I finished, you know, my creative writing program of just like, "How do I do this now that it's just for me?"

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** You know?

**Griffin:** I also really, like, the conversation, I feel, has really ignited this year of, separating, like, romanticizing suffering and its place in art.

**Rachel:** Yeah, uh huh.

**Griffin:** Because I feel like when stay-at-home orders started to happen back in, what? Like late March or so. And I remember like, there were like a handful of people trying to start this conversation, like, "Think of the art that's gonna come out of this year."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And, like, the other 99.9% of the population of Earth was like, "Shut the fuck up. Like, that is not the thing to be thinking about right now. Like, that is not what this is about."

**Rachel:** And I think it's just a lot of people get their start in creative work in like, from a place of isolation. You know, when you're like a teenager, you're like, "I'm gonna go write in my journal," or, "I'm gonna go write a song. I'm feeling terrible and this is gonna be my outlet." As an adult that just doesn't seem to work as well.

**Griffin:** No. Nah, not quite. That was really good.

**Rachel:** Thank you.

**Griffin:** That was a very good poem. Thanks for bringing it.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** I've been dreading now, actually. My first topic. Both of mine are fairly lightweight this week, I'll be honest.

**Rachel:** Okay. My second one's lightweight.

**Griffin:** Okay, cool. Well, my first one is RC Cars.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** I could've— there's a probably a lot of people out there who when I said "RC" were wondering if I was gonna talk about RC Cola.

**Rachel:** Yeah...

**Griffin:** I could do RC Cola. I'm from Appalachia. Like, we drank RC Cola there in large amounts. Was that a thing where you grew up? RC Cola?

**Rachel:** Uh, it was a thing when I would go to my grandparents' house in small-town Illinois. They always would have it in their fridge they had in the garage.

**Griffin:** Oh, okay. See, like, every vending machine in Huntington, I feel like, had RC Cola and its derivatives in it. I still like an RC Cola. I'll go to restaurants sometimes and it'll be like, "Coke or Pepsi?" I'll be like, "RC Cola."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** This restaurant that has Coke and Pepsi, by the way, does not exist. Anyway, RC Cars, RC Cars. I was confused. RC is interchangeably used with Remote Controlled and Radio Controlled, but technically it's like a Venn diagram where Remote Controlled vehicles or objects can use, you know, infrared or whatever, there's all kinds of different, like, sort of ways of transmitting a signal, but Radio Controlled Cars is like, sort of the standard of RC Cars, especially when you started getting into the high end of the RC Car world.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Like, RC Cars are the only type of toy that when I see Henry playing with it I get, like, jealous and I'm like, "I wanna be—"

**Rachel:** I know, what is it? I remember one time I went and saw my cousins playing with an RC Car and I thought, like, "I have to have one of those."

**Griffin:** "I want that." Yeah. He got one for Christmas from one of his uncles. You know, Justin and Travis? I don't know why I just said, "one of his uncles".

**Rachel:** It was Travis.

**Griffin:** It was Travis and it was like a tumbling, sort of, wagon that can just kinda like roll all around and no matter which way it lands, it goes. And he was like paying with it and I was like, "I want that."



**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** “I’m 33, I want that. I wanna play with that.” And I think there’s just something so alluring about it. Mostly because, like, we didn’t have RC Cars really, growing up, because there were three of us, meaning we all three need our own RC Car. And that’s too many RC Cars to have in one house. Like, it’s a definite hazard at that point. And as I, like, became an adult, I feel like Remote Control Car technology got, like, so much better and so much faster and cooler and, like, I wasn’t able to take part in it. So now, when I see a good RC Car, I’m like, “Damn, that looks like fun.” And I guess the logical extension of this is drones. Like, I think that’s probably why drones are such a thing is because there’s a lot of, like, adult drone enthusiasts who didn’t get their RC Car fix as a kid and now the RC Cars can fly and take pictures and shit.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Griffin:** And I’m like, lukewarm on drones, except for drone racing, which I still think is hot as Hell, and I’ll watch, like, videos of drone racing—

**Rachel:** I didn’t know that was a thing.

**Griffin:** Oh my God, it’s like these little tiny drones and they go at like, 80 miles as hour. Like, they just zip and you have to fly them through a factory in first-person view. It’s like, wild. But anyway, RC Cars. There are separate, sort of, tiers of accessibility. There’s really two tiers of RC Cars when you’re talking about a Radio Controlled automobile. There’s toy grade cars, which is, you know, what it says on the tin. And then there are hobbyist grade cars. Toy cars are, you know, things you would get at Target or Walmart or whatever on a shelf for a kid. They cap out at like 5 miles an hour on the low end, but like, a really beefy toy grade RC Car will go up to like 15 miles an hour, which is still pretty fast, I feel like.

**Rachel:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Griffin:** Like, an RC Car going 15 runs into your ankle, like that’s your day, I feel like, at that point.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** But to give you an idea of this distinction between toy grade and hobby grade. Hobby grade cars usually come in these kits. They are dramatically more expensive than a toy grade car, and they are also dramatically faster. The most, sort of like, commonly accessible— I mean, you could find an outlier of what’s the fastest land speed RC Car from somebody who, like, you know, strapped a rocket or whatever onto their shit, but there is a kit called the XO-1 from a company called Traxxas that apparently is big in the hobbyist RC scene. It costs 1,100 US dollars, American, and it is capable of going up to 100 miles an hour.

**Rachel:** Oh my God.

**Griffin:** That's very fast.

**Rachel:** Yes!

**Griffin:** That's quite fast. One of those runs into your ankle, it's goodbye, ankle.

**Rachel:** Yeah, that is faster than I am allowed to drive, as a person in the world.

**Griffin:** Yeah, in my big car with gasoline in it and stuff.

**Rachel:** In my big car, yeah.

**Griffin:** Apparently, some cars are powered by gas. Not in the same sort of combustion engine way that our cars are powered by gas, but electric cars cap out at like, a certain amount of torque and so a nitro-powered car can get pretty freaking fast as things go.

**Rachel:** That's insane to me.

**Griffin:** That scares me, that. I don't know that I would be comfortable driving a thing that fast, but like, this hobbyist scene is so huge and it has been for a while. The first RC Cars were invented in 1966. The first one was a miniature gas-powered Ferrari. And while, like, the, you know, technology of the engine and everything has changed in the same way that car technology has advanced throughout the years, the way, like, the receiver setup is essentially the same. Like, you use a radio transmitter controller with the throttle and steering mechanism on it, and then there's a receiver in the car and that's it.

This big scene has been around for basically as long as the cars have been around. RC Car Action Magazine is still in circulation after 35 years in print. Like, there's still a lot of people that are very, very into RC Cars. I just think it's kind of magical to control something remotely. We have a... we have a little, uh, like R2 unit that we got from the Star Wars park at Disneyworld last time we went, that Henry put together. And I love playing with that thing. Partially because, like, I think it's kinda cool to make something move around remotely, but also because when I'm feeling like a lazy dad I can kind of just like make the robot move around for me. And that's cool and it's fun to chase the child around with the little robot and make intimidating sounds with it.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Not to scare him. But to play with him. Yeah. RC Cars are cool.

**Rachel:** They are cool.

**Griffin:** They are cool, aren't they?

**Rachel:** Always.

**Griffin:** They're always so cool! You know what else is cool? Advertisements. Can I steal you away?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Okay.

[ad break]

**Griffin:** We have jumbotrons!

**Rachel:** Oh, good!

**Griffin:** Aw, come here little jumbotron, don't be scared. I have some feed for you. I'll hold it in my hand, little jumbotron. Don't be scared. I'll brush your soft plumage. Do you wanna read the first one?

**Rachel:** [laughs] Sure. This message is for Lon, it is from Linnie. "My dearest Lon, you and our four kitties make my life so full. I'm so happy that we're actually legally wives. You roast the best coffee, make that good popcorn and always do the laundry. You're the best writer and I can't wait to read your book someday. Until then, I look forward to D&D, stargazing, and always being silly. Love, Linnie."

**Griffin:** Gotta know this good popcorn recipe. Gotta know it. I don't know that I've ever eaten homemade popcorn that wasn't, like, out of a bag or something, where I was like, "Whoa, what did you do to this popcorn?" where the answer Wasn't just like, "I put it in the... put it in the microwave."

**Rachel:** Yeah. We have dabbled in the purchase of gourmet popcorn, but have never made it ourselves.

**Griffin:** Of course. It was a wedding favor. It was the wedding favor at our wedding. Well, of course, we got married in Austin, Texas, so we legally had to involve mason jars.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** In some way. But we filled those mason jars up with good-ass— what was it? Cornucopia? Is that the name of the company?

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It was dill— we gave out dill pickle and... what was the other flavor?

**Rachel:** I'm not gonna remember.

**Griffin:** I will remember. It was something smokey. It was like a smokey cheddar, I wanna say? I think it was like smoked cheddar and dill pickle popcorn. It was so fucking good. And also, like, we had 30 jars of it left over and so we ate that popcorn for months.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Little tiny jars.

**Griffin:** In our little, tiny— one jar at a time. It was very wasteful. I don't remember what we ended up doing with the empty mason jars.

**Rachel:** I mean, we saved some and then we recycled others. It's not really a story.

**Griffin:** I guess not. Here is another one. This one is for Celeste and it's from Zachay, who says, "To my sweetest blep and the most badass lady scientist. By now we've spent more than half our marriage stuck at home, so there's no one else I'd rather be with. I love you so much and so do the cats, even when you lovingly call them horrible names that I don't wanna pay Griffin and Rachel to repeat. All our love, Zachay, Squeakums and Doy." God, now I wanna know about these names. Do you think it's something like... and I don't wanna be rude or say bad words or anything, but do you think it's something like... Lil' Stinker?

**Rachel:** Or Jerk?

**Griffin:** Lil' Jerk? "Hey, you— hey, you... dink."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "Get back here."

**Rachel:** Griffin, I hate when you use that kinda language.

**Griffin:** I'm so sorry. Yeah. Now we're gonna get the explicit tag on iTunes.

[ad break]

**Griffin:** Hey, what's your second thing? I hear it's very lightweight and silly.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Well, I gave you a little hint.

**Griffin:** Uh oh.

**Rachel:** At this last night, because it came up. We were playing a game and the question was, "What is something that Rachel thinks that younger people don't appreciate?"

**Griffin:** Oh my gosh. You're going there.

**Rachel:** I'm talking about the rise and fall of the belly button ring.

**Griffin:** Wh— okay. Sometimes it's important to lay out the context of how we appreciate the things we talk about on this show. Because sometimes it's like— when I talk about, like, gak. I'm 33 years old. I'm not slinging gak.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh huh.

**Griffin:** Now. But I appreciated gak back in the day.

**Rachel:** Uh huh.

**Griffin:** Are you saying that when you see a belly button ring out on the street now, you're like, "Oh, choice." Or are you saying it is wonderful that the belly button ring was a phenomenon for a bit.

**Rachel:** I think it was wonderful, for me, that it was a phenomenon. It was interesting, like... to be a teen right in the time period where that was huge and to feel like it was a thing that everybody had an opinion on. Of like, whether or not they were going to get one. And the teens that were able to get one with their parents', like, consent at a young age and then the people like me who waited until they turned 18 and then immediately went and got it because it was my signpost.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Literally every... everybody I went to high school— like, every girl that I went to high school with got belly button rings, I feel like.

**Rachel:** Uh huh.

**Griffin:** Like, I'm trying to think back. Most of the girls I dated, like, had belly button rings.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Seriously, everybody. I'm thinking about it now and it's like the Da Vinci Code.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Like, all of these pieces are falling into place into my mind, like holy shit. Everyone had one of these. And now, no one's got one. Well, we shouldn't say no

one. There's probably listeners of our show who still got their belly button rings, but like, yeah. It was wildly ubiquitous.

**Rachel:** I don't think the teens are doing it. I don't think they're racing out to do it the way that we all did.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** I actually, it was funny— [laughs] When I wrote for the school newspaper, I wrote a whole piece on, like, censorship. And part of what I wrote about was this girl on the cheerleading team who got a belly button ring and got kicked off because they weren't allowed.

**Griffin:** What? BS!

**Rachel:** I know. I, like, interviewed her. And then my journalism teacher was so excited about my piece of journalism he made me submit it to this competition. It was not selected.

**Griffin:** Aw, beans.

**Rachel:** [laughs] I imagine there were people facing larger issues than somebody getting kicked off a team for a belly button ring. But what was interesting was when I was doing the research on it, just to kind of see the evolution of it. So, it was actually something that was present in the 1970s. There was a store that kind of became the premiere piercing business called The Gauntlet that started in somebody's house in West Hollywood, and it was part of this 1970s gay leather movement. And it was started by Jim Ward, and it's considered the first business of its type in the United States. And so, it became this body modification scene that was largely associated with the gay leather movement in California.

**Griffin:** That's wild, I had no idea.

**Rachel:** Uh huh. So then they opened up shops in New York and Seattle, and apparently there's even one in Paris, that kind of started the whole business. They opened a mail-order business for piercing jewelry and they coined terms like barbell and circular barbell and captive bead ring. Like, all of that came from that store.

**Griffin:** Was this specifically a belly button piercing shop?

**Rachel:** No.

**Griffin:** It was just a piercing...

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Because I guess... prior to that I guess folks were just doing it at home? Like, if you were getting your ears pierced you would do it—

**Rachel:** People would, like, go to doctor's office to get their ears pierced.

**Griffin:** What the he— I guess it's a safer environment to do it than at home, but that's wild. That's a wild idea to me.

**Rachel:** Yeah. In—

**Griffin:** I guess it used to cost 15 cents to go to the doctor, so you could just, like, show up and for like a buck-fifty get a bunch of shit done.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah. Yeah. [laughs] It was interesting to read that research, because I'd never really thought about, like, the origins of piercing. I mean, obviously there is a rich history that goes well before.

**Griffin:** Of course.

**Rachel:** But kind of as we know it today, this idea that you would walk into a store and pick out your jewelry and get it done there in the store.

**Griffin:** I'm dying over here right now because I can't remember the name of the shop that was like at every mall that—

**Rachel:** Oh, Claire's?

**Griffin:** Claire's, okay, thank you. Holy shit.

**Rachel:** And they just did ear piercing.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** And it was done by people that were not necessarily trained in the art of piercing.

**Griffin:** So where did you go to get your belly button pierced?

**Rachel:** It was a place in St Louis. Uh... I don't remember what it was called. I think it was in the central west end. But I went with my friend who had already had hers pierced and I was very nervous and it hurt very badly.

**Griffin:** I bet. Yeah.

**Rachel:** And, you know, here's the thing: I came home, had not told my parents.

**Griffin:** What?

**Rachel:** But I had the bottle of the antiseptic, like, soap or whatever in my medicine cabinet. And so my mom came to me and was like, “What did you get pierced?” [laughs]

**Griffin:** Wow, how rebellious, hon.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** So, I cannot think about belly button piercing without thinking about Justin’s horrifying story of when he—

**Rachel:** [laughs] Oh yeah, when he forced somebody—

**Griffin:** Well, he didn’t force somebody, but like, as a special birthday surprise he blindfolded his girlfriend and drove her to the local, somewhat reputable, pawn shop in town to get her belly button pierced.

**Rachel:** Pawn shop?

**Griffin:** I’m pretty sure it was a pawn shop, yeah.

**Rachel:** That also did piercing?

**Griffin:** I mean, it was a like a second-hand music... they mostly sold, like, second-hand music instruments and stuff.

**Rachel:** Wow.

**Griffin:** Yeah, bud.

**Rachel:** So, the phenomenon that we are talking about where a bunch of women would go get their belly button pierced, a lot of articles I read traced it back very specifically to the Aerosmith video where Alicia Silverstone gets her belly button pierced.

**Griffin:** That was bracing for me. The idea of the country watching an Aerosmith vid—

**Rachel:** Do you know the video I’m talking about?

**Griffin:** Yes?

**Rachel:** The 1993 video for Cryin’

**Griffin:** Is Liv Tyler also in that one?



**Rachel:** Oh, man...

**Griffin:** There's one that Liv Tyler is in, that—

**Rachel:** I don't think so, no.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** I think that's a different one. I think that's Crazy.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** I think Cryin' is the one where Alicia Silverstone is a rebellious teen who to show her rebellious spirit, goes to get her belly button pierced.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Apparently, they used a stand-in in the video. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Oh, a prop button?

**Rachel:** But after that, that was when, like, Britney Spears, Janet Jackson...

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Christina... whose name I can't remember, her last name I can't remember—

**Griffin:** Aguilera?

**Rachel:** Aguilera, sorry.

**Griffin:** Are you kidd— really?

**Rachel:** I'm sorry. And Shakira, yeah.

**Griffin:** Well, you commonly call her Xtina still, to this day.

**Rachel:** I do. And that was what I wanted to say.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Britney's 2001 I'm a Slave for You performance at the VMAs with the snake?

**Griffin:** Very prominent, yeah.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Mm hmm. And some of it, I think, was the fashion at the time. There was a lot of, like, low-waisted jeans, so there was a lot more—

**Griffin:** And high-bottomed shirts, I think is what they called them.

**Rachel:** [laughs] There's a lot of opportunity to show off the belly button. But I read a lot of articles that talked about how, you know, this movement that started in the, kind of, the gay leather movement suddenly became this thing that teen girls were doing.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And it became a very gendered piercing, which is really strange, because there aren't a lot of gendered piercings out there.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And—

**Griffin:** Well, I mean, it's not inherently gendered.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It's just like, what the fad was.

**Rachel:** It was just what the fad was, yeah. And I think in the same articles I read, so I read an article on Vice and one on Racked, and they talked about how this idea of the belly button ring, around the same time of the lower back tattoo, are now kind of regarded dismissively as, like, a fad of young girls. You know, that for whatever reason is not as prominent today.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** And so, it's just kind of an interesting, interesting movement. I mean, there are lots of trends that come and go, but to have one where you are, like, modifying your body, like, become so prominent and then become less prominent is kind of fascinating to me.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Yeah, I mean that's what you do when you roll the dice.

**Rachel:** [laughs] That's true.

**Griffin:** Getting a hole. I don't have a hole, um...

**Rachel:** Now the teens, they just dab.

**Griffin:** Now they just dab. It's less permanent.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Less invasive.

**Griffin:** Unless you are filmed doing it for your television show.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And then people think it's like, your whole life is dabbing. Do you wanna know my second thing?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** I'm very excited about my second thing. It's one of those things that I was sure I'd talked about before. It is peripheral-based rhythm games, which is to say, a Guitar Hero or a Rock Band.

**Rachel:** Oh....

**Griffin:** I know, right?

**Rachel:** Gosh, how have you not talked about this?

**Griffin:** It's wild. It's like, uh, much like the belly button ring, it was a fad. It was a fairly long and successful fad, but it is for sure gone by the wayside at this point. It has long since gone by the wayside. And I loved it so much. It was like my very, very favorite type of game when these games were around. It was super huge. So, brief history, I mean, rhythm games were a thing for a while, like, you know, on console, or the first sort of, like, big arcade smash hit that I can think of was DDR. Dance Dance Revolution. You ever play? You ever dabble in DDR? Have you ever played it?

**Rachel:** No.

**Griffin:** See, I played it at an arcade while I was, like, on some family trip and I was like, "I gotta have this". So, I bought a DDR dance pad for my house and would play it and would have, like, friends over to play it. It was like a big deal for me, being able to say like, "Yeah, you could come over to my house and play Dance Dance Revolution if you want. I know you're too scared to do it at the mall and let other people see you, so why don't you come on over?"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** In Japan, there was this very successful arcade game called Beat Mania, which was essentially kinda like how Guitar Hero looks where you have notes coming at you, like, on a track and you have to— all it was was buttons that you press, like, these colorful buttons that you press in time with the music. It spawned this entire label of music games called Bemani, and in 1999, Bemani released two games in Japanese arcades which were Guitar Freaks and Drum

Mania, which were essentially Guitar Hero, like you used a guitar controller to play notes and the drumming part of Rock Band, like, there was a rubber drumkit that you would play drum notes on as they came at you on a track.

So, in 2005 an American developer called Harmonix, who also made— man, holy shit. Harmonix has provided me with literally thousands of hours of good times. They made Dance Central and that weird Fantasia Kinect game that I absolutely adore. But their first game was Guitar Hero, which was like, super inspired by Guitar Freaks, only it used licensed western rock music instead of just sort of like Japanese pop. And at that point, like, the rhythm game genre was like, kaput. There was Dance Dance Revolution in arcades, but like, it wasn't this huge crossover hit that people were buying dance mats and playing at their house. But when Guitar Hero came out, it like, absolutely exploded. Like, it singlehandedly, like, injected all of this life into the genre.

The first game earned over a billion dollars. Like, and partially that's because the game cost something like 90 bucks, because you had to get, like, the guitar controller or something with it. And then a few years later, they released Rock Band, which was essentially Guitar Hero but with drums and bass and singing in it. And that also earned well over a billion dollars. These games were huge. And I don't think I really recog— I was in the industry at this point, I was working at Joystiq when these games came out. I don't think I recognized just how successful they were. This was like when the Wii came out, which I don't know how much you knew about the Wii, but the Wii, like, brought in all these new people playing video games.

**Rachel:** Oh, yeah.

**Griffin:** I'm curious, like, from your perspective, from like the outside. Because you weren't, like, big into games or anything like that.

**Rachel:** No.

**Griffin:** But like, this era, 2007, 2008, when the Wii was like, really taking off and all of these, like, casual games on iPhone and rhythm games were coming out and bringing a bunch of people in, were you, like, seeing that happen from the outside? Did you notice an uptick in, like, your friends talking about and playing games and stuff?

**Rachel:** Yes. It was always like, I know somebody who knows somebody that has one of these. And I would, you know, if I happened to be at their house, I would play it once and I would think, "Oh, this is cool." But I didn't have any, like direct link to it.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And I do remember being kinda surprised, particularly with the Wii, that it seemed like it was older people that were excited about bowling in their own house.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And I was like, "This is unusual for games." Especially, like, brand-new technology.

**Griffin:** I think Wii Sports is the number one— well, it came with the Wii, but it was like the number one videogame owned by people in the history of mankind.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Griffin:** But these— but rhythm games were, like, bringing a ton of people in, so it was this, like, hugely exciting era of, you know, expanding gaming demographics in a major way, and a bunch of developers wanted to get on board with that so, like, overnight... in 2008, which is like the zenith of this genre, rhythm games made up 18% of all video games being made. Which is a lot. Which is so much.

**Rachel:** The equipment was so substantial, too. That's what kind of blew me away when I first saw it. I was like, "Oh, this isn't just like a handheld controller."

**Griffin:** Rock Band came with a guitar, a drum set and a microphone and just assumed that you had another guitar that you could play bass on. And I wanna say it was around 200 bucks. So, it was like the price of a video game console, kind of.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** But, like, good lord, I had the best time in college playing these games. Sort of like the way that I was an evangelist, I feel like, for DDR, Guitar Hero came out my freshman year of college. In my first semester of college. And I am not a person who is very good at, like, meeting new people and striking up a conversation or forging any kind of, like, relationship or making plans with new friends of whatever. But Guitar Hero was kind of like— everybody was talking about it and I had it, so I could be like— and I had a bunch of people, just like, that I'd talk about the game with and be like, "Do you wanna come over and play it?" and I made a lot of friends in my freshman year of college because of that.

Even more so when Rock Band came out, because Rock Band wasn't just like, "Hey, come check out this guitar that you can play with music," it was like, "Hey, I'm having a party now," with all of these different songs. We had a radio show that I played the game— that me and my buddies played the game for, for like, one of our last episodes that we did for our college radio show. And I got in a little bit of trouble because I was doing Sabotage by Beastie Boys and I was

singing and I said “fuckin”. I forgot to mute that particular word. Which they don’t like that word on the radio. So, this was like a huge thing for me. Like, I played it constantly. I played it by myself. I got pretty good at drumming on Rock Band drums.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** But overnight, like, it blew up. In a bad way. Like a bomb blows up and then isn’t there anymore?

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** 2008 was the zenith, right, and games sold over one and half billion bucks in 2008, or these rhythm games did. And then in 2009 that number was halved. It was down to like 750,000. For the entire, like, genre. And then there were these huge games, Harmonix made this game called Beatles Rock Band, which I don’t know if I’ve ever shown you, is remarkable because it’s, like, all Beatles music, and that’s cool, but they also stylistically recreate the trajectory of The Beatles’ whole career.

**Rachel:** Oh... yeah.

**Griffin:** So you watch them go from, you know, Hard Days Night all the way through, like Sgt. Pepper and, like, some of the trippier songs you go on these weird dream sequence trips. But like, you follow them all the way to the rooftop concert and there’s these, like, really gorgeous cutscenes bridging every— it is an incredible game. Best game they ever made. And it sold, like, half of its expected units. So at that point, like, people kind of had all the stuff that they wanted from this genre and they weren’t really that interested in it anymore. Also, you know, after 2008 there was a bit of a recession, so people weren’t as willing to pay \$200 for a drum controller anymore. So, by the time, like, 2013 rolled around, the whole genre that, again, was making up for a fifth of all video games released, was more or less kaput. And that’s kind of that.

I just, like, I really harbor a deep affection for these games, partially because, like, they were really fun and they were a refreshing change of pace from, like, other games that were being released at the time. Like, I was kinda done with first-person shooters and stuff like that. But they also, like, allowed me to meet new people and have parties and make friends. But also, the first Guitar Hero game and really, that whole series, enlightened me to a lot of classic rock that, like, I didn’t know shit about because I thought the music my dad likes sucks shit.

**Rachel:** Yeah. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Like, I remember playing a song with my friends, like, when one of the Guitar Hero games came out and I was like, "This slaps! Who is this?" and they were like, "Oh, this is Steely Dan." And I was like, "What?!"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "No way!" Uh, yeah, it was an eye-opening experience. But like, there's a lot of classic rock music that I only know about because of Guitar Hero, because I just did not care about it or listen to it before then.

**Rachel:** That's fascinating.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Great games. I still— maybe it'll come back. Probably not. Maybe.

**Rachel:** We still have it in the garage if it does. [laughs]

**Griffin:** We still do have my Rock Band set in the garage. I would be blown away if that still works. Do you wanna know what our friends at home are talking about?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Okay, I only pulled one submission from our friends at home, cause it's a very powerful one.

**Rachel:** Okay.

**Griffin:** It was sent in by Marina, who says, "This wonderful website lets you mash up popular songs from 2007 and I cannot stop laughing. I didn't know this at first, so when I accidentally mashed 99 Problems with Hey There Delilah, my third eye was opened and I truly ascended. I hope you get as much joy out of this as I have. Thank you to whoever bestowed this gift unto the universe." I'm gonna see if I can get it working on my phone— oh, it does work on a phone, hold on.

**Rachel:** What is this website?

**Griffin:** It is called TheMagiciPod.com. All one word, The MagiciPod.com. Let me see if I can put 99 Problems on Hey There Delilah.

[Vocal from 99 Problems by Jay-Z over guitar from Hey There Delilah by Plain White T's plays]

**Rachel:** So, it just takes the music of one and puts the lyrics of the other over it?

**Griffin:** Uh, it does more than that. It actually blends the two together. Let me see if there's another... let's see what we can put Country Grammar on, oh, Sugar We're Going Down Swinging by Fall Out Boy.

[mash-up of Country Grammar by Nelly and Sugar We're Going Down Swinging by Fall Out Boy plays]

**Rachel:** That's delightful. Wow.

**Griffin:** So good. That's TheMagiciPod.com. Thank you Marina, I'm going to spend my whole day doing this now. 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 Maximum Fun for having us on the network.

**Rachel:** Yeah, thank you Maximum Fun. If you are interested in finding some new, great podcasts, I would encourage you to go to MaximumFun.org and check out all of the great shows on that... website and/or—

**Griffin:** [laughs] Click on the web address.

**Rachel:** And/or the network...

**Griffin:** When you're surfin' the World Wide Web...

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Yeah. Also, hey, register to vote. Go to Vote.gov. And support Black Lives Matter. We'll have links to that and how you can give to help out folks, like, for instance, with the Milwaukee Freedom Fund, who is supporting protestors in Kenosha, and, you know, all over, cause there's lots of folks who could use some help right now. Well, we've come to the end of another show. Time to mop— time to get out the broom and mop to clean up the mess we made? Doing the show?

**Rachel:** What kinda show...

**Griffin:** Do we do? Well, people don't know this, they only hear our voices, they don't see all the wacky, zany prop comedy that we do.

**Rachel:** At the beginning of every show, I put a flag in a pile of gak and Griffin has to find it before we finish recording.

**Griffin:** Lotta gak talk this ep.

**Rachel:** Yeah. What's the harm?

**Griffin:** Lotta gak chat.



[theme music plays]

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