

Still Buffering 211: Crazy Ex-Girlfriend (2015-2019)

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[theme music plays]

Raleigh: Hello, and welcome to *Still Buffering*, a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Uh, I understand from Twitter that I am supposed to as for a vibe check now? Is that what I saw?

Raleigh: Oh no. [laughs] Yes.

Sydnee: Uh, tweeted by you?

Raleigh: I made—okay. So, I don't know if this has happened to you while in your *Animal Crossing* games. Welcome to another episode about *Animal Crossing*. Um...

Sydnee: It's not really.

Raleigh: It's, not but...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: I wish. Um, we—[laughs] one of my villagers said, "I feel like my catchphrase is getting pretty stale. Do you have a suggestion for a new one?"

And immediately thought, "I want... this rhinoceros to ask me for a vibe check every time we speak." So I made her catchphrase "Vibe check?" And

then something happened, and it has been passed among all of my villagers, so now every single villager on my island, whenever I'm talking to them, ends their phrase with, "Vibe check?"

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: And it is very good! [laughs]

Taylor: That's pretty cute.

Sydnee: What does that—does that just mean, like, "How are you?"

Raleigh: How are your vibes? Vibe check.

Sydnee: I've never heard that.

Raleigh: It's a... oh.

Sydnee: [bursts into laughter]

Raleigh: It's a cool thing.

Taylor: It's a cool—oh, that's—well, there you go.

Raleigh: [laughs] No, I, um—

Sydnee: It's a cool thing?

Raleigh: I—I mean, I have mostly seen it used as a joke and heard it used as a joke among my friends. Like, "Whoa, dude, your vibes are really off."

Or, like, "How you—how you vibin' tonight? How are you vibes tonight? Today? Vibe check? Are you good? You bad?"

Sydnee: Okay.

Raleigh: Whatever. I—I've never heard anyone in my day-to-day life use it unironically.

Sydnee: Hmm.

Raleigh: Um, but I just enjoy the thought of all my tiny animal villagers asking me for a vibe check every time they speak to me.

Sydnee: Uh, well, that makes sense. See, I didn't know that. The closest I come to being in touch with today's culture are the life hack videos that Charlie keeps making me watch.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Today, she drew all over my face with these face paint crayons I got her, to try to make—to help me look sick, so that we could skip school. 'Cause that was a li—

Taylor: Was that something she learned from a video?!

Sydnee: Yes. There was a life hack video—

Raleigh: [bursts into laughter]

Sydnee: —on how to make it look—[laughs quietly] How to, like, make circles under your eyes, basically, so that you look kind of sick, so that your parents will let you stay home from school.

Taylor: That's not a very good life hack for her to know.

Raleigh: It's not.

Sydnee: No—well, I mean—

Taylor: That's not really a life hack. That's just a lie. [laughs]

Raleigh: You're also—yeah. It also doesn't work very well. Yeah, when you're in preschool and your Zoom class is, you know, from home...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: ... your Zoom class.

Sydnee: Also, when you're using face paint crayons, it doesn't look like you're sick. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Cooper—Cooper drew all over her face with red crayons, and then she looked like a zombie, sort of.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: So...

Raleigh: Did—I will say, though, Mom came home today after seeing them and had some purple and red on her eyes and some pink on her face, and the minute I first saw her I said, "Oh no, Mom, what's wrong?" 'Cause it looked like just... she had a rash on her face, and—and—

Sydnee: That was the goal! That's what they were doing!

Raleigh: —two black eyes, I don't know.

Sydnee: That was the whole game.

Raleigh: So, I mean, maybe they did it... right. Maybe.

Sydnee: I don't know. That—that's what they were—that's what they were working on. That was—uh, the other life hack she really enjoys is, uh, she saw if you get, um, Mc—I think it was McDonald's specific, like, one of the little chicken nugget holders? The little containers of chicken nuggets? You open it up, put your chicken nuggets in one side, your fries on the other, and then put it over the straw in your fountain drink.

So, like, the straw's in the middle, and it holds, like, a little table for your chicken nuggets and french fries, and you can drink your drink through the straw, so you can hold all of it in one hand, and then walk around and eat chicken nuggets and french fries and drink your soda all over the house, instead of at the table, where Mommy asked you to. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Hmm... that seems like it was intended for driving. Right?

Sydnee: Uh, I don't know—I don't—maybe? I don't know what it was intended for, but all I know is that, since she's five, it just resulted in chicken nuggets and french fries, like—

Rileigh: All over the house.

Sydnee: Yes, and a Hansel and Gretel style trail behind her, so...

Rileigh: Now, this reminds me of that great episode of *Drake and Josh* where—

Sydnee: [laughs] Obviously.

Rileigh: —Megan creates the perfect movie theater bucket that has a little... pocket at the bottom for your drink, and then separation, popcorn goes on top. So, they're in the same bucket, but you have a straw that goes all the way down to the bottom to drink your drink.

Sydnee: Uh-huh?

Rileigh: And then, two little pockets on either side for your snacks. And my question is, why has no movie theater adopted this great—[holding back laughter] this great plan yet?

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: 'Cause then you're just carrying one bucket! You're not carrying, like, "Oh, I got a bag of popcorn over here and I've got a big drink, and then I got my—my Sour Patch Kids under my arm." No! In one bucket with a

straw that goes all the way through to the bottom, that has your Diet Coke in it and your buttered popcorn on top that you can still eat—

Taylor: That's not—no.

Raleigh: —with your mouth, and your Sour Patch Kids safely in their own little pocket on the side.

Taylor: That sounds really convoluted. You know if you get a lot of stuff, they'll just give you that little box, you know? You ever see the box?

Sydnee: Yeah, the tray. You just—yeah.

Raleigh: I have never gotten a box at a movie theater.

Taylor: Have you asked?

Sydnee: They give you the little—

Raleigh: I didn't know they—

Sydnee: —cardboard—it's, like, a tray box thing with all the things in it.

Raleigh: Are you talking about the kids' one?

Sydnee: No, they have 'em for grownups.

Raleigh: They have 'em for grownups?!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: Because every time at the movie theater, I see these kids stroll into the theater with their cool little dinosaur boxes with a little serving size of popcorn and their slushie and their candy, and I'm like, "Well, this is great! I want one! But I'm... an adult!"

Taylor: I mean, I think there's, like, a kids' tray that's specifically probably with the dinosaurs, but usually just—if you just have enough stuff, they'll give you one as an adult, or just if you ask.

Raleigh: Wow.

Sydnee: I think—

Taylor: I don't want my soda heated up through popcorn... stuff. That's a—you drink through the popcorn. You get hot soda.

Sydnee: I think it—what it seems is that your generation, uh—you kids today have never gone to Candy HQ, loaded up some plastic bags with cheaper candy, filled your backpack with 'em, and stuck 'em into the movie theater instead of buying snacks, and it shows.

Raleigh: Oh, Sydnee. You haven't seen the TikToks—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: —of hacks to sneak snacks into the movie theater. Because the most popular one now is to get a giant half of a styrofoam ball that is hollow and fill it with snacks, [holding back laughter] and then tape it under your stomach to make it look like you're pregnant so you can take it off—

Sydnee: Okay.

Raleigh: —and have a big bowl full of snacks when you get in the movie theater!

Sydnee: I actually did see that, um, Troom Troom video. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yes! [laughs]

Taylor: I think that they just don't pat you down, so why not just use your pockets? I don't know. I don't wanna... question this.

Raleigh: Yeah. No, you can make it very obvious, at least here in Huntington, West Virginia, and they won't say anything. Because I went to a movie with a friend who straight up just stuck a bunch of bags of candy under his shirt to make it very bulky, and he didn't have a jacket on, and he just kept his arms over his shirt, and they didn't say anything. [laughs]

Sydnee: [snorts]

Taylor: My—my friends and I went to a movie, and my friend had just filled her purse with candy, and they asked to look at her purse, and she opened it, and there was all this candy. And the lady said, "Are you gonna eat that in the theater?" And we all said, "No?" And she's like, "Okay!" [laughs] And we went in the theater!

Raleigh: [laughs] Oh, man...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: That's for later! [laughs]

Sydnee: This is the real secret, kids – they don't care.

Raleigh: They don't care!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: Do you all remember—

Sydnee: They don't care!

Raleigh: —we also did this—we—the three of us did this at a Broadway show once. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: We did?

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: We went and saw *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*. After we had been to—

Sydnee: It was so good.

Raleigh: —Dylan's Candy Bar.

Taylor: Oh yeah, we—

Sydnee: Ohh!

Raleigh: And we had giant big plastic bags full of candy, and we just stuck them in, like, our shopping bags or our purses... and ate them throughout the Broadway show! [laughs]

Sydnee: We're classy.

Taylor: Yeah...

Raleigh: At *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*. We were in the fly zone, and had many Spider-Mans running by us. [laughs]

Sydnee: I loved it. I loved that show! I loved it.

Taylor: That was a good show.

Sydnee: It was!

Raleigh: It was a good show.

Sydnee: I—I has so much fun. It was a good show.

Raleigh: Um, I wanna talk about another good show.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Please do.

Rileigh: And that's *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. The show.

Sydnee: Yes.

Rileigh: Um, which is a TV show created by and starring Rachel Bloom, who I thoroughly enjoy. Um, it started back in October of 2015, and it ran for four seasons up until last spring, in April of 2019.

And basically, it is a kind of satirical, musical, comedy TV show about Rebecca Bunch, who was a super successful, wealthy, New York attorney, who, uh, is also kind of miserable in her life, and meets her old high school ex-boyfriend from summer camp, Josh, in New York, and he says he's moving back to West Covina, California.

And she decides, all at once, spontaneously, to also move to West Covina, California, to pursue Josh. And hijinks ensue from there.

Um, I... go ahead?

Sydnee: No, please continue.

Rileigh: Do you have any initial thoughts? Okay.

Sydnee: And then I will tell you what I'm thinking.

Rileigh: Okay. Um, I didn't watch the show when it was on TV, and I actually read afterwards that it was extremely low rated while it was on TV. It was one of the lowest rated TV shows to ever continue for four seasons in the same network.

Sydnee: Hm!

Rileigh: CW kept it the whole time, and it was highly, uh, raved by critics, but regular audiences did not enjoy it.

Um, I didn't watch it until it was on Netflix, about a year ago, and I binged all of it in about a week, and it quickly became one of my favorites.

Sydnee: We—Justin and I, uh, when it first came out, watched one or two episodes?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Way back when it first came out. And, uh, I have to say, it—it just—it didn't do it for me at the time, or collectively it didn't. I don't remember, but we—we kind of abandoned it.

So it was really wild to check back in with it and see what that show became. [laughs] Like—

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: —it was very—like, when I was reading, like, about the whole big—

Raleigh: Took some turns.

Sydnee: —yes! It—I was like, "Okay. Well, this definitely changed."

Raleigh: Yeah. Um, Tey, what did you think? I'm interested to hear what you all thought.

Taylor: Well, so... I will say—I did enjoy it. I got through about half of—of the available—what is it? You said four seasons?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Yeah. So I watched, uh, about all of the first two. And, uh, I intend to finish it. I really like it. I will say, and I'm sure we can go more into this, and I wonder if I'm alone in this... it makes me feel a little manic watching it?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, there's something about—I think that too often in media, the character of, like, a cr—like, crazy girl is always just, "Well, she's crazy." And is not given a lot of depth or a lot of development beyond that.

And so, to see that kind of like, that's the focus of the show, and, like, it's a real person and that's really a lot of pain and struggle. It's like—it's really—I think it's really—I think it's really good that that exists, but it's also really hard to watch, as somebody that also gets that label a lot. It's like, "Oh, God..." Just the—the commiseration is intense. [laughs]

Raleigh: Sure, yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, I should also say, we'll probably have spoilers.

Raleigh: Yeah, definitely.

Sydnee: Okay, definitely.

Raleigh: Um, yes.

Sydnee: There will be spoilers.

Raleigh: I—one of the things I think is best about the show is the very ending of the whole series. We'll get to that later, but yes. We will be talking about that. So if you want to watch this show, maybe... don't listen yet?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: I don't know. Um, but yeah. I think that's kind of the best part for me about the whole show is what you were touching on, Teylor, is that you have Rebecca as your main character who you want to like, because she is your protagonist, kind of. And, um, you know, you're rooting for her to get with Josh, or Greg, or Nathaniel, or whoever she's getting with at whatever time you want her to succeed.

But she also has a lot of flaws and is, like, shown to be this not perfect person, and is shown to be, like, "Well, people call her crazy, and no one is crazy. But these are her struggles, and this is why people see her that way, but this is also why she has those struggles."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: And this is like, you know, if offhandedly call someone your crazy ex-girlfriend, for whatever reason, maybe this is what... you know.

Sydnee: Sure.

Raleigh: These are the events that led to someone having mental struggles, or having a breakdown that causes them to move from New York and quit their job to West Covina, California. Um, but yeah.

It goes a lot in depth into her mental health, and shows the ugly sides, and doesn't, I think, romanticize it or make it look desirable in any way, which I think is kind of common, especially in teen TV shows now, is you see characters that have mental illness, whether it's depression, anxiety—and it becomes, like, a trendy thing almost in the TV show, and then among, um, pop culture.

Sydnee: That was something, um—I think that's really important. I always admired that in the show *Homeland*.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Very different show.

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs] Very different.

Sydnee: Very different show. [laughs] Slightly different plot. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, but I always thought they did that well with, uh, Claire Danes' character in that... at first, you may be tempted to think that her mental illness gives her these, like, special powers of perception. And, like, it's almost like a positive, but then the more you get into it, it's not romanticized.

You see all of the things she struggles with and how hard it is for her to separate reality from fiction. And, I mean, like, you—you really get into that, warts and all kind of thing, and I think that that's—that was nice to see.

Raleigh: Yeah. You get a lot of that, uh, separation from reality, I think, in the music in this show? Which is a lot more obvious. You have characters breaking out into song, and sometimes in a meta way, and sometimes in a way that they are aware they are breaking out into song, but also sometimes it's just like, "Yeah, they're... breaking out into song." But never in a serious way. It's always just, you know, satirical... musical commentary on the situation.

Taylor: Well, and she, uh... Rachel Bloom has—has, uh, what is she—uh, been diagnosed as borderline personality disorder?

Raleigh: Yes.

Taylor: So she has personal experience with the way that she's, uh, showing her character, and I think that that obviously comes through in how sensitive it is, and how honest it is of a portrayal, which I think is cool.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I didn't know that. That—that's really interesting, too. And that's, um—there are, I think, different diagnoses that are—that carry different stigma with them, and I think that that's especially important to do with something like borderline personality disorder, which carries, I would say, some pretty negative stigma alongside it.

I mean, not to say that mental illness in and of itself still isn't stigmatized by our society, but some diagnoses I think are viewed as more negative than others, and that is, I would say, definitely among them.

Raleigh: Yeah. And, uh, it's been a while since I've watched the show as a whole, but I think that's also what Rebecca is diagnosed with in the show, uh, eventually, is borderline personality disorder. Um, which is interesting to see, because you see all these people in her life that are, like, encouraging her to... go to therapy, or take medicine, or whatever people are—doctors are telling her to do to, um, help her.

And you see her personal struggle with not wanting to accept her own diagnosis, and kind of fighting against, like, what she thinks that says about her, or if she thinks that means that she is, like, failing as a person. But then you see her accept that towards the end of the show, and work on it.

And, um, spoilers – the end of the series is basically, "I need to work on myself. I need to not focus on my relationships with other people that have been unstable because of a mental illness I have and these struggles I have, so I'm gonna take a year and not date anybody, and work on myself, and make myself better."

Sydnee: Does she, uh—I know that she goes to therapy.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: In the show. Does she go back on medications? Is that part of the plot?

Raleigh: Yes. If I remember correctly, by the end of the show, I think.

Sydnee: 'Cause I believe, in the first episode, one of the points is she gets rid of all her meds, right?

Raleigh: Yes. She has medication for depression and anxiety, I believe is what it says, and she flushes 'em all down the toilet. Um, when she is living in New York, before she moves.

Sydnee: I was wondering if that would—'cause I haven't watched the whole series, and I was wondering if that would resolve itself, 'cause I always get frustrated when I see that.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: That concept. Like, "I know what I need to do. I'm just gonna make this massive change and my life. [laughs quietly] Um, move across the country, change jobs, change everything about my life, and magically everything will be better, and I won't need these medications for medical conditions anymore."

Taylor: Right.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: Which... you see that trope with mental illness, and you would never see somebody saying, "I'm gonna follow my ex-boyfriend to West Covina, California, and so I'm flushing my insulin and my anti-hypertensives down the toilet."

Raleigh: [laughs] Sure.

Sydnee: [laughs] "In order to do so, 'cause I won't need them anymore!"

You would never see that, because we would agree that's ridiculous, and it—it's similarly ridiculous, you know, in that case.

Taylor: It's funny, I just, uh—I just rewatched *Garden State*, which, uh, I had good memories of, uh, but it—it—that's a other—a whole other thing. Um, but I—

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: It starts on that same—like, it—that same idea, where the character comes back to his hometown and stops taking his meds. And then it's like, "Now he can feel things, and he's learning to feel!" And then it's like, "I want to feel!"

It's like, "Yeah, but you maybe needed some of those?" And that's—like, that's the movie, is he decides to stay off medication because he needs to feel things. Like, "Well..." [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that's such a—that's such a negative—one, it insinuates that everybody who requires medication for mental illness just isn't, like, trying hard enough in some way?

Raleigh: They're choosing to be on them, or *think* they need them? Yeah.

Sydnee: Exactly, that they could just make changes, and then... poof, they wouldn't need them anymore, which is so negative. And it's also really dangerous.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Um, because it further stigmatizes and then encourages, like, that fear that a lot—I know a lot of patients have of, "If I go on this medication, will it change me? If I go on this medication, will I not be able to feel?" All those fears.

It kind of reinforces that idea, uh, that, "Yeah, yeah you will. And then someday you'll meet Natalie Portman and you'll stop taking your meds, and [laughs] life will be beautiful again."

Raleigh: Yeah. I think that's what—one of the things about the show that I think it does so well, is you see her do that, and you don't then see her after have this great life that's like, "Oh, everything's so much better! And, you know, I'm not succumbing to the pressures of a successful career, and I flushed all these medications down the toilet that I don't need, and doctors thought I needed."

Like, no! You see her—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Doctors.

Raleigh: —make this—this decision that objectively is probably a very bad one.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Because this is her following a guy she has not seen since high school, that she dated for a summer at a summer camp. Um, and quitting her job.

But she moves there, and then goes through situations, and is not a healthy person. Is not, like, a great, "I'm feeling things! Life is beautiful!" person. Like, she has a lot of struggles, and she is not able to really, like, focus on making herself the healthiest version of herself and improving her relationships until she realizes that, "Oh, wait. Maybe I did need to... worry about my mental health, and maybe I did need to be on medication. Maybe, you know, I did need to do all these things to take care of myself, and it wasn't just... the situation I was living in. It wasn't following Josh to West Covina." All those things. Which I think is nice.

Taylor: And it also does a good job of showing the—the secondary characters, that they also have their own emotional struggles that they have to come to terms with or get over, right?

I thought the side narratives of everybody else as just as interesting and just as well thought out as far as, like, you know—none of the—the—the love interests were really... they weren't really likable? They were all kind of people that there were reasons that they were just... awful? But—

Raleigh: Not great people, yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. Really the whole cast is made up of kind of not great people, with maybe the exception of Darryl, maybe. [laughs]

Raleigh: Oh, I love Darryl.

Sydney: [laughs]

Taylor: I'm trying to think if he did anything deeply problematic. I don't know. Maybe not. [laughs]

Raleigh: But it's—it's also such a diverse cast of people. I mean, like, you have your main female protagonist, does not fit that stereotypical Hollywood

standard of, like, "This is what a woman should look like or be like," or whatever, which I thoroughly enjoy.

And then you have, her neighbor is a woman of color, you have her boss, Darryl, ends up being bisexual and comes out as bisexual, who then ends up dating one of Josh's friends, who is gay. And you just—you have this, like, rotating cast of characters that are all just, like, a diverse, realistic group of people that are not like *Friends*, from *Friends*, that are all beautiful and white and straight.

Sydnee: It's—uh, when I was—I was reading about what I hadn't seen yet of the show, just so I had a good idea of the whole show. Is that character called White Josh on the show?

Raleigh: [through laughter] Yes.

Sydnee: Okay. [laughs] That's what—I was trying to clarify, like... that's kind of—I mean... I get it. That's funny. [laughs]

Raleigh: Josh that she follows to West Covina is, uh, not white. I actually don't know his specific... nationality.

Sydnee: But he's Josh.

Raleigh: He's Josh, and then his friend who is white is also named Josh, and he is White Josh, yes. It's very good.

Sydnee: Yeah. I wondered if that continued. Um, I wanna—I wanna talk a little bit about—you mentioned that it was not, um, loved by audiences necessarily. Well, not—I get not enough to maintain further seasons, but it was critically acclaimed. And I want to kind of get into why we think that might be true?

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: If you have ideas. But before we do that...

Raleigh: Let's check the group message.

--

Sydnee: Uh, I wanna tell you both about StoryWorth this week. Uh, right now, you know, not everybody is being able to spend time with their family members. Um, though esp—you know, if they're—if they're not ones that you live with immediately, and you're trying to connect as best you can. Uh, but it's... there's not good way to say, "Tell me stories from days of yore."
[laughs quietly]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, I guess you could just say that to somebody on the phone or on FaceTime, but it would be a weird thing to say.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, and it would be nice if there was a way to get those—those cool stories and that history, uh, from your relatives of what their life was like, and how they feel about things. Uh, without having to awkwardly ask over Zoom during some sort of meeting.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: If you have family meetings. Perhaps you do.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, and StoryWorth solves that problem for you by, every week, they will email whichever family member you've chosen a different story prompt, a question that you have never thought to ask them before, or didn't know exactly how to ask. Something like, "What have been some of your life's greatest surprises?" Or, "What's one of the riskiest things you've ever done?"

Just to, you know, kind of get them thinking about some moment in their life that maybe they just never really thought to share with you, and this prompt will, uh—will get them to think about it, and they'll put down their answers,

and then after a year, StoryWorth will compile every answered question and photo you choose to include into a beautiful keepsake book that your family can treasure forever.

So you can have a whole collection of all these—all these interesting little tidbits about your loved ones life that, um, you didn't even know to ask. So, uh, if our listeners would like to check out StoryWorth, what should they do?

Raleigh: Uh, you should get started right away without the need for shipping by going to storyworth.com/stillbuffering. You'll get \$10 off your first purchase. That's storyworth.com/stillbuffering for \$10 off. This is a gift you can give to your mom or mother—motherly figure this Mother's Day that is a meaningful gift by StoryWorth.

Sydnee: That's a great idea.

Raleigh: Yeah. Storyworth.com/stillbuffering, get \$10 off.

Sydnee: We also have a Jumbotron!

Taylor: Yes.

Raleigh: Boop boop boop!

Taylor: Uh, alright. This, uh—this Jumbotron is, uh, from Past Salem and it's for Future Salem, which I guess is Current Salem. Uh, 'cause uh, you made it here. To now.

Sydnee: You're in the future!

Raleigh: This is the future!

Taylor: [laughs] Alright.

Raleigh: But also, it's the past, because we'll be releasing this episode after we recorded it.

Sydnee: Oh...

Raleigh: Hmm... time.

Sydnee: Time is an illusion.

Taylor: This is gonna create a tear in the space time continuum.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Oh no.

Taylor: This Jumbotron, Salem. This—this is what did it.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Uh, alright. And Past Salem writes, "Congrats on four months living on your own without a mental breakdown, and a happy golden birthday, even though it'll be spent inside with self-isolating. Make sure to cuddle Winona Ryder, the cat, and do not spend more money, because this is your birthday present to yourself. Keep existing at 23 and play some *Animal Crossing*."

Sydnee: Aww...

Raleigh: Wow.

Sydnee: Salem, definitely play some *Animal Crossing*.

Raleigh: Yes! And cuddle your cat that's named Winona Ryder! That is the best name [through laughter] I've ever heard for a cat!

Sydnee: That's a good name for a cat. You made it, Salem. Happy birthday, whenever. Belated, or soon, or..

Raleigh: Current, future?

Sydnee: —current, future.

Raleigh: Unclear.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Raleigh: Happy birthday.

Sydnee: We—the—[laughs quietly] We've created a paradox that's destroyed time, so...

Raleigh: There is no time anymore.

Taylor: That's a cool birthday present! [laughs]

Sydnee: That's probably the best possible outcome. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs] That's a good birthday present, for sure!

Taylor: Have your own time paradox!

Sydnee: I think The Doctor did that one, so you're in good company.

Raleigh: Yeah!

Taylor: [laughs]

--

Sydnee: Uh, so I wanted—I wanted to get into—you mentioned that it wasn't—and I saw that, that, like, even though critics seemed to really love it... like, it got tons of praise. And I think in large part for some of the stuff we've already talked about for—for how well, uh, it handled the issue of mental illness, and then talking about it openly. Just handling it at all, you know, which a lot of shows shy away from.

Um, but it—it wasn't—I think, like, the Nielsen ratings were pretty low.

Raleigh: Yeah. I mean, if you look at, like, Rotten Tomatoes, the first three seasons got somewhere between a 95 and a 100% rating. So, like, professional TV critics loved it, but—[laughs quietly] But—

Sydnee: [in a pompous sounding voice] “Professional...”

Raleigh: "Professional TV critics..." But when you look at people watching it, they did not, and it was the lowest watched and rated show on the CW for most of its seasons. Um, and I—to me, watching it now, I don't know if it was maybe because... it's just not the kind of thing you saw talked about a lot on TV. It didn't fit that standard pattern of things you watched. It was kind of uncomfortable and cringy at times—but not in, like, a badly produced way. Just in, like, the content is not always the most comfortable to talk about.

It's not the kind of TV show, sometimes, that you can just, like, turn your brain off and have on in the background. It also requires you to, like, care about the characters, and think about them, and understand these complex situations and relationships they have with each other, which I think is probably why it's so highly acclaimed by critics, is because it is so complex. Um, but not something that you can just casually watch. You kind of have to keep with it.

Sydnee: Do you think it was the patriarchy? [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Definitely.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: You know what? If I'm ever unsure about something, that's always my answer. 'Twas the patriarchy.

Sydnee: I mean, always, I guess.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: But—no, I was curious, because I think that I have—I have argued before that I think... I think that female characters—I should say, non-male characters...

Raleigh: Sure.

Sydnee: If you're not male, you generally are not allowed to have as many angles as a character, and certainly not as many unattractive or messy bits as male characters are.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that, even though we can—we can watch a show—which I did, like *Mad Men*, for many seasons, and accept simultaneously that Don Draper is a creep and a bad guy, but also he has reasons, he has a story... but also, he's so cool and creative.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: And, like, you can have all those feelings for him, and that's normal and acceptable, and he will be the star of the show and carry the show. Also, Jon Hamm is great. But this is a whole other issue. [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: My point is, I don't think non-male characters are given that kind of, uh, latitude, typically, and that audiences have very low tolerances for that.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: That is—that is a theory I have.

Raleigh: I agree with that.

Taylor: Well, and I think specifically that the whole crazy angle, I think that that's—you know, that's usually a word that you put on a person or a character to just kind of dismiss anything beyond that. Like, it's a—it's a dehumanizing word. Once you're crazy, everything else in your emotional landscape doesn't matter. You're just crazy.

And so, I think that that's just something that it's almost—it's a way of—of controlling people and diminishing people, that the—the show confrontationally says, "Yeah, we're gonna lead with that, but now we're gonna show you everything else that goes on with her, and all of her justifiable reasons for having the issues she has." And that's—yeah, I don't—

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: That's something that people aren't used to.

Raleigh: I mean, even labeling her as an ex-girlfriend in the title is making so she is, like, a past function in someone else's life, not her own person. And on top of that, she is also crazy. So it's just, like, two dehumanizing, impersonal labels put on her as a person. So you hear the title, and you probably think, like, "Oh, this is about some dude's probably crazy ex-girlfriend and how he deals with her."

But no, it's—this is how you see her as a person, but this is who a person actually is.

Sydnee: That's—that's tough. I wonder if they had trouble just overcoming that, the unfortunate, like societal connotation with that title of the show alone.

Raleigh: Sure.

Sydnee: Because that—and—and the fact that, like, she does, at least on early on, kind of seem like your stereotypical, quote unquote, "crazy ex-girlfriend."

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like—and I'm talking about the movie trope, not actual human beings. But, like, typically in media, that is the character who, like, the—our protagonist, who's almost always a dude, has to, like, get through. [laughs quietly] And has to continue to contend while she, like, shows up and buys you a gun rack for your car, even though you don't own a gun.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Like, you have to—[laughs quietly]

Raleigh: He has to get away from her, and then find a girl who's perfect.

Sydnee: Then he finds the good girl, right? Like, the crazy ex-girlfriend is the one that you—you have to—it's the phase you go through on your way to that perfect, beautiful girl who never says anything the least bit upsetting, who is simultaneously, like, funny and brilliant and gorgeous, and can play whatever instrument is the coolest at this moment in history. And, you know, casually models on the side, but just for fun 'cause, you know, she's all yours, and all that stuff. Like, that's—the crazy ex-girlfriend is who you meet on the way to that girl.

Raleigh: Yeah. And you—you see her ex-boyfriend, Josh, with that girl, that you think is that girl at first when she moves out to West Covina, 'cause he's engaged to, um... [pauses]

Taylor: Valencia.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Valencia?

Raleigh: Yes, Valencia. I was gonna say, I'm completely blanking on her name. And you think she is, like, this—oh, she's kind of mean to the ex-girlfriend 'cause she's like, "I have him now, and I'm a model and I'm beautiful and I'm perfect," and all these things.

And then, again, a spoiler for the end of the show – they don't end up together, and Valencia ends up with a woman. And it is just, like, this whole series of character development for all of the characters where they all realize these things about themselves, that either they weren't mentally

healthy and they needed to work on themselves, they weren't happy in their relationships, they needed to look at their relationships or their careers and just...

It's not just one character who is this, like, perfect central character that is just being influenced by all these—either bad people or good people to get to a happy ending. It is a group of characters that are all pretty flawed, but all trying to, like, figure themselves out amongst each other.

Taylor: And, you know, I'm really glad that it did give a lot of—that it gave attention to Valencia's character, like, down the road. Because from the start, I was a little bit like, "I don't know. I hate that this character.." Like, I get that it's a funny turnaround on the trope. But, like, "Oh, she's such a mean girl." And she's like—no, this—this random woman just showed up in her life and tried to explode her—her, you know, relationship. Like—

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: That's a sympathetic character that's written in a very mean way, so I was very glad that they turned that back around. 'Cause I think you're right, and I think that really gets to the core.

It's like, so often, there's sort of a weird overlap of very simplistic morality in these sort of situations. These are bad people, these are good people, and these things make you bad, and these things make you good. And you're right, it's like, everybody has the ability to be both, and they're kind of written showing both sides of that, and that's refreshing.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydney: Do you think—do you think it suffered from, uh, what they discuss in the song that Josh Groban sings? [pauses] About the movie song?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm?

Sydney: Do you think that the show suffers a bit from that? Like, in that song, I watched that part where he's—which is great. Josh Groban is great, the song is great, everything about it was great.

Uh, but the idea that, like... life isn't a movie, it's just a series of things that happen, and if you ever went to a movie that was actually like real life, at the end you'd be like, "What the heck did I watch? What was that?" [laughs]

Raleigh: That's honestly—

Sydnee: Do you think that it suffers a bit from the idea that, like... some of the things they're talking about aren't as dramatic, 'cause they're more true?

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And—and sometimes, when something feels really true, it's hard for us to recognize it as a show or a movie or whatever, or a book, because we're like, "Well, that's just like li—I mean, like, that wasn't exciting!" 'Cause, like, most of the time, life isn't. Life isn't very exciting. It's just that. I don't know. It's a good song. [laughs]

Raleigh: It doesn't give you, like, a—like, a perfect escape from the real world, because it is similar to the real world. I think you're right. I think that's probably part of it, is that you're watching real people in real situations.

You're not watching, like... it's not like you're watching *Friends* or *The OC* or *Outer Banks* that's, like, a perfect group of people living this crazy, wild, great life you wish you had, and you can just pretend like you're one of them for a second. Like... it's kind of the opposite.

Taylor: That's so true. I mean, when you see yourself in a character, I think it's a—you know, it's a form of escapism. To see them get a win kind of feels like, "Maybe I could get a win."

But, you know, when you see them just have to, "Well, you gotta learn some hard lessons and spend some time on yourself." It's like, "I know! But what if everything just worked out?" [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: And I feel like—and this is skipping to the end, but I feel you see that a lot in the ending, when she ends the last season with three men, who you've seen her date throughout the season, that all want to date her again, and all are competing for her to choose them.

And you go all the way up until the very end of the very last episode and, I mean, it probably leaves the audience, like I was—like, I had a favorite, and I was like, "Aw man, I need her to pick this guy, 'cause he's the best for her, and not this guy, 'cause he's the worst!"

And it wasn't about her picking a guy. It wasn't about her choosing which relationship was great, because if you look at her relationships with all of them, all of them were unhealthy and flawed and unstable at times, some more than others.

And it wasn't about which guy is going to fix her and make her happy, and be perfect for her. It was about, like, how can I be that way on my own? And then find someone who does not create more problems, as some of these men have.

Sydnee: Did you all have favorites? 'Cause I—I didn't watch enough, I feel like, to make an informed pick. And so my early favorite was, uh, Greg. Uh, but I'm a sucker for a bartender, so...

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: Teylor, you probably don't share that.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I bet in your line of work you've met one too many. [laughs]

Teylor: Yeah, I *hated* Greg. Um, I thought—

Raleigh: Oh, man!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. I, uh—well, it's just—'cause he—oh, go—he was so mean to her up front. And it's like, "Ha ha ha, I'm mean to you. That's my whole thing." And it was just kind of like, "Ehh... "

And I didn't like Josh, either. I was just kind of like—I don't know. Like... neither of these dudes are very good. Um, I feel like that, like—you know, kind of like you were saying, they all got... a bit more development.

I thought that the way they handled Greg with—'cause they show him through the first season, like, drinking heavily. And it's just kind of a—like, "Oh yeah, that's what he's doing." And then they come out like, "Oh no, he's going to Alcoholics Anonymous."

Like, I felt like that was very good, because too often, that is, like, a character trait, you know? In, like, "Oh yeah, you know, he's the sarcastic guy."

Sydnee: "Oh, he drinks."

Taylor: "He's always drinkin' scotch." Like, no, it's an actual problem, and they're gonna confront that. So I do think—I learned that—I learned to like Greg... through—by the time where I'm at in the second season. Like, I think he's okay. But, uh... you know. I don't know.

Raleigh: I, uh... I also liked Greg at first. Which, fun fact, I don't know if you all knew this, but Greg is also the voice of Prince Hans in *Frozen*.

Sydnee: Which—which Greg? The first Greg?

Raleigh: The first Greg.

Sydnee: Okay.

Raleigh: The first Greg is the voice of Prince Hans in *Frozen*. The second Greg—Greg leaves for a little bit, comes back in the fourth season, and is a different actor.

Sydnee: I heard that. Is it—is it jarring?

Raleigh: Skylar—Skylar Astin. They—well, they make a joke about it, about him looking different. Like, he shows up out of nowhere and Rebecca's like, "No, that's not him. I don't even recognize him. What are you talking about?" And everyone else is like, "No, obviously, that's Greg! What are you talking about?"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Oh, okay.

Raleigh: Um, but—

Sydnee: I don't know if it was like second Becky on *Roseanne* or something. [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs] Yeah. No, they—it's one of those jokes that they joke about—or they make a point of pointing out the actor changing. Um, who also was a Broadway actor, and in all the *Pitch Perfect* movies, second Greg was.

Sydnee: Ah.

Raleigh: Um, but there's a third love interest that enters the show later on, who is a lawyer named Nathaniel who works with Rebecca. And he was my favorite, and I feel—I feel bad saying I have a favorite, 'cause obviously that's not the point of the show, isn't to have a favorite love interest. It's not like rooting for Rachel and Ross to be together, you know? It's different.

But, um... he also is a very complex character, who is this lawyer who's always living up to his father's expectations, and his father buys out the law firm and is super strict and harsh, and he's supposed to be this perfect, smart, no-emotions kinda guy.

And then you see him, like, oh, wait, no! He has all these emotions pent up, and he wasn't allowed to express any of them, because his father was all about, like, stereotypes of toxic masculinity, and now he doesn't really know how to express emotions, so now he needs to go talk to people and learn how to be a person that can express emotions, but also still be... the person that he was before, just in, like, a... healthier way.

So he's another—you know, you have all three of these love interests also. You see them at first as, like, "Man, this really attractive guy that really likes Rebecca!" But then it's like, "Oh no, all of them... have stuff going on."
[laughs]

Sydnee: So he makes—he takes, like, a Spike turn.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Okay.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [through laughter] I—I like how you're finding ways to understand this through other media. "Oh, like *Wayne's World*! Oh, like *Buffy*!" [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: He's Spike, yeah!

Sydnee: This is how I relate to the world. It's all through '90s media.
[laughs]

Taylor: It's funny that you compare it to Ross and Rachel, though, because it—you put the same sort of lens over *Friends*, it's like, well, you know, really Ross and Rachel were not healthy people that were terrible for each other, and probably should have not—should have spent some time working on

themselves and, you know, being a little bit less self-centered. But, you know, you gotta end the sitcom with happy couples. It's what you have to do.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Uh... yeah, Phoebe still won that one. She got Paul Rudd, so...

Raleigh: Oh, definitely. That's all the show was missing was Paul Rudd.
[laughs]

Sydnee: There we go. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: That's all any show is missing.

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's true, that's true. What show wouldn't be better with the addition of Paul Rudd?

Taylor: A little Paul Rudd.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Um... [laughs] The—the music, uh—I watched just some clips of music from throughout it, just to kind of get a feel for it. It was very—uh, it was good. It was charming, a lot of it. It was funny and tongue-in-cheek and I like all that, that's my sense of humor.

I—I really enjoyed that. It was well done, well performed. Um, the, uh—I had wondered initially, like, were audiences not in for a musical? Is that a little weird? But I feel like... once *Glee* existed for so long, don't—don't audiences like that? Don't—

Raleigh: Well, and also, this is like—

Sydnee: I love musicals! Don't all you other people now?! [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah! And this was a much more, I think, tolerable version of the *Glee* musical type style show.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: For adults. Because it's self-aware musical comedy.

Sydnee: Sure.

Raleigh: And it's not just, like, "Listen to us sing really well." Like, it—the songs are jokes, and they're not supposed to be great pop songs, and they're catchy and they're funny. It—

Sydnee: Some of 'em are good pop songs, though.

Raleigh: Well, yeah. But, um, that—that's one of my... I think maybe my favorite part of just the way the show is constructed and the story line is the music, because you—you see by the end that it it's because Rebecca has always been intrigued by songwriting, and because of this mental illness she has, she tends to, like, fluctuate between living in, like, reality, and not being able to live in reality, so she writes all these songs, and now she is quitting her job as a lawyer by the end to pursue songwriting full time, because that's what she wants to do and it's what she's always felt passionate about.

Um... but I mean, if you think about the sheer number of songs that were written for this show, that was four seasons and about 20 episodes a season, usually around three to four songs an episode... that's a lot of songs.

Sydnee: That is a lot of songs.

Raleigh: And they were all written by Rachel Bloom, and, uh, Adam Schlesinger, who sadly just passed away from coronavirus, just within the last few weeks. Um, which is so unfortunate and so sad, but they did—

Sydnee: He was super talented.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: He did so much—we talked about *Josie and the Pussycats* recently. He did so much good stuff.

Raleigh: They did so much work together.

Sydnee: "That Thing You Do."

Raleigh: Yeah, so much great music. Um, which sometimes I will just, like, turn on soundtracks from various seasons of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* to listen to, 'cause they're very good. Um... yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: They do a good job of connecting it to the story that makes sense, but also not making it so there is a reason for them bursting out into song every time, like a *Glee*, for example.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Which is reminding me now that I want to make you all watch, rewatch—or make you all rewatch *Glee*.

Sydnee: Oh, nooo!

Taylor: Oh, nooo!

Raleigh: To talk about *Glee*. [laughs]

Sydnee: No, nooo!

Raleigh: Because I recently rewatched it, and there are some... problems.

Sydnee: Yeah?! You think?!

Raleigh: That I did not recognize when I was eight. [laughs]

Taylor: Ooh...

Sydnee: Uh-huh.

Raleigh: Um...

Sydnee: Oh, no...

Raleigh: But a much less problematic show is *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. And if you have not watched it, it is all on Netflix. I highly recommend it. It's... not the most, like, simple, easy, mindless escape into TV, but it certainly is meaningful and well-written and well-constructed, and, um... also has a lot of good songs, so.

Sydnee: Well, good. Well, thank you for sharing.

Raleigh: Thank you all for watching. I'm glad you all enjoyed it, and uh, I'm probably gonna rewatch it again now after talking about it. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] Wow.

Sydnee: Uh, speaking of rewatching...

Raleigh: Yes?

Sydnee: I want you both to rewatch something for next week that I have watched—I have—the number... does not exist. The limit—

Raleigh: The limit does not exist.

Sydnee: The limit does not exist. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: It's not *Mean Girls*, though.

Taylor: It's not *Mean Girls*.

Sydnee: No, it's not—man! That would've been perfect, wow!

Raleigh: I know, that would've been! [laughs] Man.

Sydnee: No. Uh, I'm sure we'll get to that. But I was gonna suggest *The Princess Bride*.

Raleigh: Ooh!

Sydnee: Because—

Taylor: Oh, that's a good one.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: It—when it comes to things that were formative to me, there are few things that rival *The Princess Bride*. And I think it would be weird to make you both watch *MASH* for this show, so...

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Um... or read *The Hot Zone*. So, the—the movie *The Princess Bride*, it's—I think it's available on Disney+ now, if you've got that. Um, if you're like me, you own several copies anyway. Just to be on the safe side, you never know. In case your streaming services are down, you have to have it on—

Raleigh: An emergency copy.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: DVD and VHS, whatever else you need. [laughs quietly] And, uh, I will probably sprinkle some facts from the book in there. Um, but I will not require you to read the book, 'cause it's in a week, so...

Raleigh: Thank you, professor. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: So, we'll—we'll focus mainly on the movie. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Awesome. Well, I'm excited.

Sydnee: Yes. I'm gonna make Charlie watch it.

Raleigh: Oh, good.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think—I think other than the ROUSs, I think we're ready.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: We'll just cover our eyes together.

Raleigh: Yeah. Sometimes I cover my eyes for that part as well. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Pretty scary.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's intense. Uh, I know so many facts about the filming of that scene! [laughs]

Raleigh: Oh, man! I can't wait! [laughs]

Taylor: This is gonna be good. [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, well, thank you both. And thank you listeners. I hope you're all doing well. Hang in there. Uh, we're—we're gonna get through this. Um, keep staying home as much as you can, and staying safe, and washing your hands, and wearing your masks when you're out in public, and all those good things.

And, uh, reaching out and connecting with other people through social distancing-approved methods. Um, stay connected.

And, uh, thank you to Maximum Fun, the network that hosts our show and a lot of wonderful podcasts you would enjoy. You should go to MaximumFun.org and check out all those shows.

You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org if you have thoughts or suggestions or things you think we should discuss, whatever. It works now, so please feel free.

Taylor: Yes!

Sydnee: And you can tweet at us @stillbuff. And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

Raleigh: This has been your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Raleigh: I am still buffering...

Sydnee and Taylor: And I... am... too.

Raleigh: Got it right this week.

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: [snorts] That was one of our worst.

Raleigh: Yeah... [laughs] I'm getting back to it.

[theme music plays]

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[futuristic music plays]

Speaker One: Strange planets, curious technology, and a fantastic vision of the distant future. Featuring Martin Starr.

Martin: So we're going on day 14. Shuttle still hasn't come.

Speaker One: Aparna Nancherla.

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Echo: Can you disconnect me or not?

Speaker One: Hari Kondabolu.

Hari: I'm staying.

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