

Still Buffering 244: Strong Bad

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[theme music plays]

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: This is a special day!

Rileigh: It is a special day!

Taylor: Eh...

Sydnee: [laughs] Okay, well that—

Rileigh: [laughs] Okay.

Sydnee: —that was not the same energy that we were bringing to this day. You should be the most excited, Tey!

Taylor: It feels weird to be, like, super psyched for your own birthday. Like... you know.

Sydnee: I don't know. Rileigh gets pretty excited for her own birthday.

Rileigh: This year I am pumped for my birthday! [laughs]

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: Well, you have a significant birthday this year. You're turning 21.

Rileigh: Yeah, I am.

Sydnee: You all both have significant birthdays! Well, I mean, no.

Raleigh: Yeah!

Sydnee: Can I— can we— maybe you don't want me to tell everybody how old you are.

Taylor: Oh, I— I don't care. I'm 30— I'm turning 35 today. I'm old. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Well, now you're old enough to run for President.

Sydnee: There you go.

Taylor: Yeah. So, finally, my true dream can come to fruition: to be President of the United States. A job which I will say, I might be more qualified for than the current President. [laughs] So I don't know!

Sydnee: I think that— I think that is absolutely, 100% true, yes. Um, the question on everybody's mind is, who are you picking for your VP? Is it me or Raleigh?

Taylor: Oh. Can I have two? Let's just go with two.

Sydnee: Nope. It's— and it's really—

Raleigh: [simultaneously] Well, I think—

Sydnee: —gonna reflect who your favorite sister is.

Raleigh: No, no. I know I'm the favorite.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: But I think it would have to be you, because I'd also have to be 35.

Sydnee: I know.

Raleigh: So Tey would have to wait, like, 14 whole years.

Sydnee: You don't wanna wait that long.

Taylor: Hmm, yeah. How about you guys just do it? I don't wanna do it. [laughs]

Raleigh: What about AOC? [laughs]

Taylor: Both of you would be good. You guys do it with AOC. Just, you know, you can make me the... General of, um... Cartoons! [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs] My first act on my first day in office is to create the, um, Department of Cartoonery.

Taylor: Yes, there you go. There— well, that is—

Raleigh: That makes sense.

Sydney: That's— and this is— this is inspired by *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, I assume? But instead of— we're not a monarchy. This is just a military title.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: It's not the King of Cartoons.

Taylor: No.

Raleigh: General.

Sydney: There will be the General of Cartoons.

Taylor: I just want to be able to command a small army of— I don't know what I'm going for. Cartoons? Cartoonists? Animators. I don't know who I'm allowed to recruit. It's— it's—

Raleigh: All of the above.

Taylor: Okay. [laughs]

Sydney: Okay.

Taylor: An army of cartoonists would be a highly ineffective army. Everybody would just be, like, off in a corner emoting. It would not work.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Smell really bad.

Sydnee: You know, I'll— honestly, I'll take it.

Raleigh: Yeah, I would take that right now.

Taylor: Hm. Well, alright, good, good. My title is secured.

Sydnee: Let's be honest. Charlie is gonna be President.

Taylor: [laughs] She's—

Raleigh: That's true.

Sydnee: She's most—

Raleigh: Charlie's going to overthrow the government, uh, at some point, before she's even, like, 25, I think.

Taylor: I don't— is it gonna be Charlie or is it gonna be Cooper? I don't know. Or are they gonna be locked in some sort of sibling, like, blood feud for— for ruler of the country?

Sydnee: Cooper will be— you know how, like, it's good— everything I know about politics I learned from *West Wing*. That's not true, but—[laughs quietly]

Raleigh: That's good! [laughs quietly] That's a good start.

Sydnee: Let's— let's pretend that that's true. No, but, like, you know how you need, like, the President who's the face— who, like, can be diplomatic and say the right thing and, like, nod and smile sometimes, but then, like, you have the Chief of Staff behind them who's, like, secretly pulling all the strings and, like, can enforce stuff.

Rileigh: So like in *Veep*.

[pause]

Taylor: You need a— are you insinuating that Cooper will be the ruthless puppeteer of Charlie?

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah.

Taylor: Okay. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Good. Good. [laughs]

Sydnee: Cooper's the one who, like, calls the staff in and is like, "[angrily] What is wrong with you people?! You're making my sister look bad! I'm gonna fire all of you! You're ruined! You'll never work in this town again!"

That's Cooper.

Rileigh: I wanna hear Cooper say "You'll never work in this town again" right now! [laughs]

Taylor: It's so easy to picture in my mind's eye, too. Like those are words that are meant to come out of her mouth at some point.

Rileigh: Yes. [laughs]

Sydnee: Today she decided she wanted to try to roll off the bed and I kept telling her, "No, honey, that'll hurt."

And she looked at me right before and she said, "It's okay. Don't try this at home."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And I went, "No! You are at home!"

Raleigh: [simultaneously] You are at home!

Sydnee: "And you can't try it."

Raleigh: And you are trying it.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Where did you learn that? [laughs quietly] "Don't try this at home."

Raleigh: [laughs] YouTube.

Taylor: I was gonna say, YouTube, yeah.

Sydnee: We have limited YouTube now. We've had to—[laughs quietly] we try to stick to, like, ABC Mouse.

Raleigh: Does that YouTube Kids not have as good of a filter as they claim to?

Sydnee: No!

Raleigh: Yeah, that makes sense. That checks.

Sydnee: No! Um, there are a lot of things that aren't technically profanity that get through on YouTube Kids.

Raleigh: Hmm, I don't wanna know what's not technically [through laughter] profanity.

Sydnee: And, like, there's a lot of adult content that if you put cartoons there, apparently it's fine now.

Taylor: Yeah, I could believe that.

Raleigh: Well, I mean, I grew up watching *Family Guy*. That's pretty much the same thing, right? [holding back laughter] It's adult content that you put cartoons there, so it's fine?

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, it really is.

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Yes, and I don't think you can really put this back in the box. I think that, you know, the— the exposure has happened. [laughs]

Sydnee: I just don't know why there is such an obsession with taking dolls and creating, um, like, pregnant bellies on them out of Play-Doh, and then removing babies, because that seems to be a big trend of YouTube. And, like, I'm all for learning the miracle of life, but it's really weird when it's, like, Moana.

Rileigh: Hmm.

Sydnee: You know? It just adds this other, like, "What is this video?"

Taylor: Well...

Sydnee: I have— I have, like, anatomically correct wooden dolls that I walk through.

Rileigh: Yeah you do. I—

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs]

Rileigh: —I came here this morning and Cooper just had the lower half of a small wooden doll, but it was just the inside organ part. And she was just coming up to me holding the legs upside down going, "What is this? What is this?"

And I said, "I— what— what do *you* think it is?"

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: She said— she pointed to the intestines, I believe, and said, "A brain."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: And I said, "Yes it is!" [laughs]

Sydnee: She knows— she knows the word— we've been over all the real words if you want her to say them for you.

Rileigh: Oh, I know you have been over all of the real words, for all of the body parts!

Sydnee: Yep, we have.

Taylor: Well.

Sydnee: Um, so Tey, what do you— what is your birthday wish? Before we get started, what is your—

Taylor: Oh, wow. Um...

Rileigh: [laughs] Okay.

Sydnee: Do you wanna think about it?

Taylor: I don't think I have a birthday wish. My birthdays have been— like, I— I have kind of a thing with birthdays. Like, they've never been good days for me. Like, I've worked on them almost exclusively for most of my adult life. Like, I spent them all very much alone through, like, college. And I think birthdays were always nervous affairs, because I never had a lot of friends, and you know the birthday day is the day that you realize "I don't have enough friends for a party."

I don't really care any other day of the year, but I think when I was younger it mattered to me. And then as I got older, I found that I could just work on my birthday, and then it solved all the problems, 'cause I could be around people, so I wasn't alone, but I was also, like, serving a purpose, so [laughs] I could kind of be distracted. Uh, and, uh, yeah. And since— now I don't have a job, so I just— just am here. [laughs]

Sydnee: We're celebrating you virtually.

Rileigh: Yeah!

Taylor: Well, I appreciate it. But yeah, I don't know. My birthday wish is that this day will end in 24 hours. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, that's certain. You'll get that wish! [laughs]

Raleigh: You will get that one.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Maybe even sooner. [laughs] Um—

Sydnee: Um—

Raleigh: —I mean, we taught mom how to use Goldbelly, so you're almost certainly going to be getting some amount of vegan food. [laughs]

Sydnee: You will be showered with gifts. [laughs]

Taylor: Yes, I have already—[laughs] I— she didn't want me to miss out on what it's like to be home for a special occasion, because we had a conversation about my dinner tonight at 9 AM today. [laughs]

Raleigh: Oh no. [laughs]

Taylor: Which is how, like— when we're on vacation together, like, down at the beach, every day starts off with a conversation prompted by mom about we're having for dinner tonight, so that was nice.

Sydnee: I mean, she's already talking about, assuming we can go to the beach this summer, fingers crossed— yeah.

Raleigh: She's already talking about what we're gonna be doing for dinner [through laughter] while we're at the beach.

Sydnee: Come on vaccine.

Taylor: [laughs] We gotta eat those dinners!

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, so what are we talking about today? Other than your birthday.

Taylor: Hm... oh, right. We are talking about, uh—

Raleigh: [laughs loudly]

Sydnee: [laughs loudly]

Taylor: I was like, "I don't know, man. I'm just along for the ride." It's my week! Ooh. Uh—[laughs] we are talking about *Homestar Runner*. Uh, that's the topic I brought to the table. *Homestar Runner* was a website. Uh, it— the history on it is, like, it actually was birthed in, like— the idea for *Homestar Runner* was birthed during, like, '96.

Um, but the website started producing content in 2000, and was largely done by two brothers, the Chapman brothers, who did— it just, like— there was a center character, who was Homestar Runner. And there were all these other characters around him that just kind of had goofy sort of surrealist humor interactions.

Uh, the thing that I was introduced to first were *Strong Bad Emails*. Strong Bad was sort of like... kind of the villain, but they never— there was no real drama there, but he would answer people's actual emails in, like, funny ways, and that was the first thing that I ever saw, just by word of mouth. Like a, you know, a friend in high school told me about it. Uh, and then from there I kind of investigated the rest of the— the *Homestar Runner* family.

Sydnee: Uh, do you— did you watch a ton of this, like, back in the day, or was it something you have caught up with over time?

Taylor: Uh, I think I probably— I exhausted the catalog that existed back in, like, high school. And then I kind of forgot about it, like, in college. I think I just, you know, stopped checking in on it every day. Um, or once a week. I think the emails updated once a week. I think it was Mondays?

Um, and then I would look and see what else was on the site but, uh, I don't— I kind of fell off with it, and I just assumed that it had stopped happening at some point, only to see that they've pretty— they've kept up with it even now. Like, it's still kind of active. Like, they still create occasional content. So, it was cool to see how much new stuff had happened over the last decade that I had missed out on.

Sydnee: Yeah, that's really true. And it was something that, um— you know, it's weird to think about. When it was popular, when I was younger, it was something

that I didn't really watch, [holding back laughter] because I didn't know how to access most things.

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: On the internet. [laughs]

Sydnee: Um, the internet was kind of a mystery to me. I am— I am of a generation— you know, Tey, the gap between our ages seems to make such a difference when it comes to how easily and quickly, uh, you are able to adopt that kind of technology.

Uh, when it was popular, I remember my friends pulling it up and, like, rushing to their computer screen at their house, like, the big family giant computer to, like, look at it with them. Um, because I didn't really know how to get to it at home, and I didn't know where people found these cool things, and it seemed like this cool, mysterious thing that other people knew about and quoted, and occasionally I would see at someone's house, but I didn't know how to find it, 'cause for me the internet was just AOL Messenger, and I didn't know— once you got, like, out of the AOL chat rooms and Messenger, I didn't know how to get to— like, where is internet? Like, where are— how do you get to sites?

It was real—[laughs] I know this sounds wild but, like, it was all very mysterious to me. So it was this— it had this whole air of, like, "Whoa. You can find *Homestar Runner*." [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: "You're so cool." [laughs]

Taylor: But that is true, 'cause there was an era where the internet existed, but it's not like— there wasn't Google. Like, it's not— they were not born at the same time. So there were search engines. You had, like, Ask Jeeves. I remember that. Um—

Sydnee: I remember Ask Jeeves.

Taylor: Yeah. But, like—

Sydnee: Dogpile.

Taylor: Yeah. But you kind of had to know where you were going, and you would just—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] Raleigh.

Sydnee: [laughs] Ri— Raleigh's face! [laughs]

Taylor: They were pretty good— I think— Raleigh— I don't know. Maybe—I don't know if you've existed in a world without Google, but we did. [laughs] Uh—

Raleigh: Have I?

Sydnee: Yahoo. I mean, you could— Yahoo still exists.

Taylor: Yahoo, yeah.

Raleigh: Uh-huh. That was my first email.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That was everyone's first email, I think.

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: I think mom still has a Yahoo address.

Raleigh: Yeah, she does.

Sydnee: [laughs] Dad doesn't even have that! He just has one at work. [laughs]

Taylor: He has a Gmail that he is so hesitant to use for some reason. He's like, "I don't know."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: "It's there, but... " [laughs]

Raleigh: So he uses mine. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] He does!

Sydnee: He—[laughs] instead he uses the work email, which as he has told me before, you can only get at work, so...

Raleigh: Right? [laughs]

Taylor: Right?

Sydnee: [through laughter] You can only check it at work. You can't check it on your home computer.

Raleigh: Sydnee, when I showed him—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: —that you could get your work email on your phone... that changed his life!

Taylor: I don't know. I think maybe he— maybe he's just like— it's just like a... a good— a good rule to follow. If all of your internet and your email is just at work, then you can really check out. I don't know. That sounds kinda nice.

But yeah, the— the early days of the kind of... the internet were— were wild. I think it was really exciting. You'd hear about a new site, and, I mean, *Homestar Runner* was one of the better, more professionally made Flash animation-based websites. 'Cause that's what— it was based in Flash. Flash was really kind of new at the time. A lot of people were using it to make content.

Um, and the cartoons were really well illustrated. They were just— you know, they were funny, but they were clearly scripted. But there was a whole realm of, like, just weird... stuff, that you would just, like— it was like a treasure hunt for, like, the new weird thing on the internet. You know, you didn't have YouTube that you could just go and go down a hole. You had to go to specific things. Like, there was *Homestar Runner*. There was, like, uh— I remember— what was the one? Um... what was it— oh, gosh. Uh... was it Bom— Bombo.com? What was it?

Sydnee: Oh, I think I know what you're talking about.

Taylor: Sorry. Uh... oh, what was that?

Sydnee: It really is true, though. Like, if you didn't know— I mean, because a lot of my interaction with these things that were so funny, like *Salad Fingers*, was you.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I mean, you— you showed me stuff, um, because I just— I wouldn't have known where to find it, and again, it seemed like this big mystery that some people had cracked, and I just was on the outside of. Uh, it's weird to me, too, that the animation holds up so well, because it was so long ago, but I was showing it to Charlie and Cooper in preparation for this episode, and they were just, I mean... like, it turned 'em into little zombies.

They were just, like, glued to the screen, watching this. Uh, and it's— you know, that is a big— that's a task for kids today, who are used to seeing so many different— like, "I can see any kind of animation I want any time. I can—" you know, computer, TV, whatever, streaming.

And they were really into it. They thought it was funny. They like the animation. It was really engaging.

Taylor: Uh, yeah. Like, there was this one site that, uh— it was Zombo.com?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm?

Taylor: And it literally— I remember hearing about it that it was so funny, and you went there and it was just this soothing voice saying, "Zombocom. You're at... Zombocom. This is Zombocom." While, like, a little graphic just pinged around on the screen.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Taylor: And that was it! But we loved it! Like, we would go there repeatedly to, like, [through laughter] look at Zombocom! [laughs] It was like— these were the early days of memes, where you had to hand carry them to each other. [laughs] Like, perhaps via pigeon. [laughs]

Sydnee: No, it's really true. And you know what's interesting is that when you think about, like, the stuff— so the internet felt new to everybody, and the ways in which we would use it and interact with it were still kind of— like, that was being developed.

We were really beginning that whole concept. And what came from that was a lot of really weird, brand-new, creative but also, um, kind of surrealist stuff, you know? Just— it felt that way because it was a medium people weren't, like, used to. And so the medium felt surreal, the stuff on it felt surreal, and I feel like that that has had echoes for, like, a lot of the entertainment that is being created by people of our generation today.

Like, when I look at some of the cartoons that my kids watch, I can feel the echoes of that sort of, like, weird non sequitur kind of, "What? What?" [laughs] Like, it's still there, and maybe that's why I like so many of my kids' cartoons now are 'cause it's like, "Oh yeah, this is sort of like that weird stuff we used to watch."

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And it is— 'cause I think that, you know, it's very— it's funny, but it's very much that absurdist humor, it's that surrealist humor. It's rather victimless humor. Um, and I think that was the thing that appealed to a lot of people, because there was definitely the— yeah, there was mainstream content that had to go through networks, you know, pre-internet.

Everything was coming down from, you know, the big companies. And on the internet, you just had a free for all of just creators— if you could make it and post it, and get word of mouth going for you, you could— you could be seen, and it did create, I think, a different kind of humor. A sort of humor counterculture. [laughs]

That was really— that absolutely— I mean, and it, you know, makes sense. Like, the— the Chapman brothers, I think one of them— Matt, I think? Worked on, like, *Gravity*— I think maybe they both did, but they worked on, like, *Gravity Falls* and, like, a lot of, like, cartoon network stuff, these people went on to be a part of.

And that makes sense too, because you look at stuff like *Homestar Runner* or like *Salad Fingers*, and then you look at, like, Adult Swim and the kind of absurdist humor there, and they make sense. But it's fun to see something, a style of humor that started in the wilds of the internet, and went mainstream.

Sydnee: It really did. And I will say, too, I was lucky enough to meet Matt on the JoCo Cruise a couple years ago.

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: Yeah, he was there as a performer, and he is very nice, I am happy to report. We spent a long time talking about school, like, kids and school, and... very mundane stuff. Not really—[laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Not really related to internet cartoons, but, uh—

Raleigh: Boring old people stuff.

Sydnee: Boring old people stuff. But he's super nice.

Taylor: But I think— it's funny, I was reading their story. Like, it reminded me a lot— there were a lot of parallels to them and, like, the McElroy brothers and your family, because they did make that decision when they had— they were married and they had kids.

Like, as much as we love making internet cartoons, we need to do other stuff, because we have families now, and they've prioritized their families, and I think that's— you know, now that they've kind of got older children and they're living closer together, they're able to commit more to *Homestar Runner*, but that they made that choice was very in line with what you all do as far as, you know, your business decisions.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm, I think that's true. And I think— I think the connection of their work then with, like, the Cartoon Network stuff of today, it makes a ton of sense when I think about how engaged Charlie and Cooper were with— when I showed them this stuff in preparation for this episode when I was showing them, like, *Homestar Runner*, and *Strong Bad*, and *Teen Girl Squad*, and all that stuff. They were totally into it. Like, they loved it.

Raleigh: I can picture Charlie being very into *Teen Girl Squad*.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Oh, she loved it. Um, Cooper really liked when they were puppets. You know sometimes they would be puppets?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That was Cooper's thing. Like, there was one where a little girl was dressed as a pumpkin.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: And she—[laughs] and she's talking to *Homestar Runner*, and she keeps kicking him and punching him. She loved that.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: That sounds about right.

Sydnee: Yeah. We watched that one, like, 20 times. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, and that— that kind of, like— like, who knows what's coming next, like, sketch vibe that *Homestar Runner* had was— was, like, also something that I think a lot of mainstream stuff has as a quality now, but, like, that was one of the— that's kind of the blueprint for it, where— and it just came from what the brothers were experimenting with. Like, "We're gonna try different mediums. We're gonna introduce different characters. If a character's successful, we're gonna run with it. You know, if a gag's successful, we're gonna run with it."

Like, the whole, like— and it created a whole, like, kind of, like, other universe. I remember when, like, the Trogdor board game, they started making videos about that and I'm like, "I don't know if it's real or not. I actually don't know if this is a thing I can buy."

They had, like, a Kickstarter for it and actually financed it, but it was like— it doesn't matter. It's— they've made a board game that they are now making videos with that are funny. In their universe, it's real. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] And I don't know how to buy things on the internet anyway, so.

Taylor: Right. [laughs]

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: I was about to say, you know, this was still in the days of, like, sending somebody your credit card in an email. [through laughter] Like—

Rileigh: [through laughter] Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's the year 2000. We don't know how to do any of this.

Taylor: [through laughter] No.

Sydnee: Um, I wanna hear— we have not yet heard what Rileigh thinks.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: 'Cause this was your first exposure to this stuff, right?

Rileigh: Yes. Yes.

Sydnee: Okay. But before we do that...

Rileigh: Let's check the group message. So, I don't know about you all, but every year at the start of a new year, I like to try some new things. I don't know if you all have been trying anything new, either my siblings or anyone listening at home. So far this year, I've tried a lot more yoga, uh, some Pilates, some of those at-home workouts you can do that are just kind of— just, you know, just relaxing, just to kind of move your body.

Sydnee: Yogalates?

Rileigh: Yogalates. Uh, if you're like me and you just kind of have been, you know, sitting in bed watching Netflix all day, every day. Sometimes just taking 20 minutes to move around is nice. That's what I've been doing. Um, but when you take up a new hobby, it's even better when you have amazing audio that makes that experience better.

I know when I'm working out, doing yogalates, any sort of activity without another person with me, having music in my headphones is crucial or else I just refuse. I will not do it. Um, so that is why I have been enjoying Raycon's earbuds.

Uh, whether it's following along to directions in the kitchen, if you're listening to an audio book while you're learning to knit or crochet, or maybe cross stitch, powering through a new workout with a pumped-up playlist in your ear—I know my pumped-up playlist has a lot of Taylor Swift— um, [holding back laughter] pair of Raycons can make any activity easier!

Sydnee: [simultaneously] That's sort of pumped-down. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Now, not old Taylor Swift.

Sydnee: Oh, okay, okay.

Raleigh: Old Taylor Swift pumps up.

Sydnee: Okay.

Raleigh: [laughs] Um, Raycons wireless earbuds start at half the price of other premium audio brands, and they come in a range of stylish colors with a comfortable in-ear fit for a discreet look. Which, you know, if maybe you're— eventually you can go out in public, go back to the gym, you got those sleek, discreet Raycon earbuds goin' on. Match your gym fit, maybe. Um, so I know I've really been enjoying Raycon earbuds. Taylor, if our listeners want to check them out, what should they do?

Taylor: Well, Raycon's offering 15% off all their products for our listeners. And here's what you gotta do to get it. Go to buyraycon.com/buffering. That's it. You'll get 15% off of your entire Raycon order, so feel free to grab a pair and a spare! That's 15% off at buyraycon.com/buffering. One more time, that's buyraycon.com/buffering.

Sydnee: So, Raleigh.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm?

Sydnee: What did you think? 'Cause— well, actually I should say, your first interaction with *Homestar Runner* or Strong Bad would've been Candlenights.

Raleigh: Candlenights, yes.

Sydnee: That had to have been confusing for you—

Raleigh: Very confusing.

Sydnee: —when all of us were like, "OMG!" [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: "Strong Bad?!" And everyone in my replies on Twitter was like, "Strong Bad's gonna be there? Hold up!" [laughs] Um, yeah. That was a confusing first experience for me. And I will say, I was also surprised at the animation, because I had no idea what to expect. When they were in Candlesnights it was puppets, so, like, I didn't— I didn't know what kind of thing to expect, and when I knew it was animation from, you know, like, the 2— the early 2000s I was like, "I don't know what this is gonna— I have no idea."

Um, I was surprised and impressed, because it looked just like any other, I feel like, online cartoon you'd watch now. Um, and I also decided— I looked it up on Google and I said, "I know it'll be on YouTube, but I know this website still exists. I wanna go to the website, because that's where, like, it all was at first. So I can watch it on YouTube later, but I want to get the full experience."

The website looks like— and I would assume intentionally, it has not changed since its inception. Like, the layout and the style and everything. So when I went on to this website I was like, "Wha... "

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: "This is... [through laughter] what is going on here?" Just, like, the layout and the fonts and the—

Sydnee: Oh yeah. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah. All of it. [laughs]

Sydnee: I just went to YouTube to get all the videos. I haven't looked in a while. [laughs]

Rileigh: Um, it was an experience. Uh, but I really enjoyed it. I— you know, I watched just some *Homestar Runner*, but then on YouTube, on their YouTube channel they have, like, a whole playlist of *Teen Girl Squad* and *Strong Bad Emails*, and both of those were, like, I mean, 45 seconds to a minute, so I just turned on, like, 15 of each of them and just watched a bunch of both, in addition to just *Homestar Runner*.

But I really liked it. I found myself, like, laughing out loud to some of it, and it felt very much like, um, there were these internet cartoons called ASDF movies that came out when I was in middle school that were on YouTube that were one of the first, uh, YouTube comics and cartoons that came out.

And they were very similar to, like, *Teen Girl Squad*. Very, like, simple animation. Um, and very short. But I remember watching those with friends and laughing at those, and it felt very much like that. It felt very much like something I would've watched with friends growing up and, like, waited for the next one to come out and, um— and it would've been, like, a bonding experience—

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: —with— with my friends. It felt very much like that. Uh, but I really enjoyed it. I had no idea what to expect, and it certainly wasn't what I ended up watching, but I really enjoyed it.

Sydnee: And, uh, it's funny. I wonder if, uh— Taylor, I don't know if you thought this. It was one of those things, too, where, like, I would watch it, and *Homestar Runner* I liked, but *Strong Bad* was really what always got me.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, that was— like, the *Strong Bad Email* thing I used to just love. Um, and I wonder if everybody fell into one of those two categories. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, I think that by and large *Strong Bad* was the most popular bit on the website. Like, the stuff that really took off— I mean, it was all popular, but the stuff that really took off were, like, *Strong Bad Emails*, and then *Teen Girl Squad*, which is a spin-off of *Strong Bad Emails*. And, like, *Trogdor*. Like, that particular—[laughs] like, bit was just, you know, that was, like, how you knew

who your people were is you make some reference to Trogdor and it's like, "Ah, yes." [laughs] "Trogdor!" [laughs] Like, "Big, beefy arm!"

That was just— I don't know. But yeah, so I think most people fell into the camp of, like, *Homestar Runner* as a whole is good, but Strong Bad's the really good good. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that persisted. It's funny to think about, like— like, in my friend group in college, one of the guy's whole thing was that he would do these *Homestar Runner* impressions. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Oh, man!

Sydnee: [through laughter] That everybody used to love! And we'd be, like, hanging out, maybe there was drinking, I don't know, who can say. But, like, "Oh, do your *Homestar Runner* impression, buddy!"

And, like, that was the evening.

Raleigh: Oh my God.

[all laugh]

Taylor: Well, and I mean, [unintelligible]— but the voices are so good. Like, they come up with—

Sydnee: They are.

Taylor: —like, I think, you know, they did a lot of the voices themselves. I think, like, Marzipan was one of the few people that they brought in and that was, like, one of the creator's wives I believe, girlfriend at the time, who they eventually married.

Uh, but, like, it just— it's a— you know, the humor that can be found in just someone doing a kind of funny voice. [laughs] Like, it— like, that's it. It doesn't— it's not, like, any— any deeper than that. It's just like, "Here's a character that

looks funny, and they sound funny, and they're gonna say some funny words, and that's the— that's the joke." And I love it! [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah. I will say, when I first turned on *Teen Girl Squad*, I literally had no idea, like, what was gonna—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: —what it was gonna be. I was like, "Well, this sounds like something I should watch." Um, and just saw the playlist and turned on the very first one. I had to stop and pause it just after, like, the little theme intro bit where they introduce 'em each by name.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: And I just started laughing so hard, and had to start it over from the beginning because I was like, "That can't... that can't— what are their names again?"

Sydnee: "So and So."

Raleigh: "Say it a—" [laughs] "The— The Ugly One."

Sydnee: [simultaneously] "The Ugly One." [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs] "The Cheerleader." [laughs] I was just— it was so good!

Taylor: And it's so— like, the humor in that is so random. Just, like, the ways— 'cause the thing is it's *Teen Girl Squad*, but they die in every episode. Like, there's always [through laughter] a violent way that they're killed! Like that one panel that always sticks in my head is it goes, "Arrowed." [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: And just stuff like— and these— again, I feel like this humor— when I think about maybe, like, all of us as a collective, like, our family and then the stuff that we enjoy, in one of the *Teen Girl Squads* we were watching, The Cheerleader wants to go see if the quarterback wants to maybe date her. And she goes up—

Rileigh: "Do you wanna maybe date?" Uh-huh.

Sydnee: —and goes, "Hello, quarter man."

Rileigh: [laughs loudly]

Sydnee: And it was just like—

[all laugh]

Sydnee: It just killed me! Like, "Quarter man." I don't know why! [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] Well, and then when they spin off and they have the four Gregs. [laughs] It's like, "D&D Greg, Japanese culture Greg." [laughs] And he just says random— like, he just says, like, "Akihabara! Otaku!" [laughs]

[all laugh]

Taylor: [through laughter] It's so good! [sighs]

Sydnee: It is so good. Uh, it reminds me a little of, um... uh... uh, *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Um, that which was not the same— I mean, it wasn't internet. It was TV. So, I guess different in that sense, but I guess same, like, era-wise. Uh, you know, would've been all around the same time. 'Cause I remember watching it— I remember watching *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* with Justin, except not *with* Justin, because it was on in the evenings and I was only, like, 13, so I wasn't allowed to hang out with my boyfriend.

Rileigh: Right.

Sydnee: In person that late. That would've been— I was too little. So, like, we were on landlines. Like, I literally remember having a corded phone cradled under my chin.

Rileigh: Oh my gosh.

Sydnee: I know. Uh, while I watched... *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* on TV, 'cause that was the time it came on! So, like— and we turned it on at the same time, and then talked about it while we watched it on our landlines. It was of a time. But it reminds me of, like, a similar sense of humor. Like, sort of weird, bizarre, um, not really— not plot-driven. You know, not necessarily.

Like, "I don't know where we're going with anything." But again, that thing you commented on, Teylor, it's not, um... so much of comedy, so much of humor, there's a subset of people who think it has to be built on making someone the punchline of the joke.

Teylor: Right.

Sydnee: And so much of this stuff that we enjoyed was— like, it just completely rejected that concept. No it doesn't. It could just be funny. It could just inherently... be funny. We could still be telling a truth, but it doesn't have to be a mean truth. It can just be an observation that is funny. [laughs quietly] Like Jerry Seinfeld. [laughs]

Teylor: [laughs] Well, I— but yeah, well—

Raleigh: Well...

Sydnee: I'm kidding. I'm kidding with that comparison. [laughs] It's not like Jerry Seinfeld.

Teylor: But I do think— 'cause I think, you know, you hear so much, like, rhetoric these days of, like, "Ugh, like, woke culture killed comedy! Comedy's not funny anymore!" And it's like, but the concept of humor that doesn't have to punch down is not new.

Uh, and it's always been there, and I think it's— it's the— it's that opportunity for people that maybe have been the punchline to make the joke, creates better— er, I don't wanna say creates better content, but I think that's what we're seeing, are people making content that are also, you know, trying to purposely undo that, like, painful comedy association that some people embrace.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, I think when you've been the punchline, you know that it hurts, and so you try to make different sort of work.

[pause]

Sydnee: Yeah, no, I think— I think that's true, and I think it's a really nice comment, though, that, like, what we're saying with that is not that if you've been the punchline of a joke, you wanna make comedy that makes the— like, that hits back. Like, "Okay, well, now *you're* the punchline of the joke."

Um, it's a whole other thing. Which I may— which maybe, like, distinguishes it a little from something that I also loved, and we've talked about on the show before, but maybe doesn't always succeed in that, which is something like *Daria*, which definitely does punch back, in many ways. At, like, the quote, unquote "jocks," or, you know, popular girls or whatever.

Like, it very much does, like, "Oh yeah? Well, here's some biting sarcasm to make you feel stupid" kind of thing. Which, again, I have said openly I do enjoy sometimes. [laughs quietly] It's hard not to.

Uh, it's funny. It— you know, we all like *Daria*. But there is something about this that I— I can enjoy with more of an open heart, and I feel really, like, fine with my kids engaging with, because it's the kind of thing that's just, like— it also lets you be silly. You know? Enjoy funny voices. Uh, one of the other things, Taylor, you've talked about before is that at the time, there was the website Rathergood.

Taylor: Oh, yes! I love Rathergood.

Sydnee: I just like— I like these funny looking weird creatures that you have created.

Raleigh: Is that the one you just showed me?

Sydnee: Yeah, I showed—

Raleigh: Okay.

Taylor: [simultaneously] "[weird voice] We love the moon!" [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah, okay.

[all laugh]

Rileigh: While we were about to record Sydnee was like, "Hold on. Have you seen this?" And then just pulled it up. [laughs] And I was like, "That's a weird thing to be greeted with. No, I have not seen this."

Taylor: Ohh. That—

Sydnee: Rileigh was like, "Why does that look familiar?"

And I'm like, "Oh. Because of this." I had to show her the Quizno's commercial. [laughs]

Rileigh: Yeah. And I was like, "Oh, okay." [laughs]

Taylor: No— and that— well, and Rathergood was such, like— it was just... like, the spoon guard bit where it was just this, you know, like, cheesy Flash, like, poorly resolution GIF just, like, combination of, like, "Spoon guard!" Which was a product that they never quite explained what it was. They were like, "It's good for this! It's good for that!"

And then the second bit was, "Spoon guard will— you know, is bad for your health! It will murder you!" Never told you what it was. But it was just— the combination of just, like, the weird imagery and the funny voices, you didn't know what was gonna happen, and it was just joy. Like, you just didn't have any other reaction than, "I love this."

Or, like, I mean, in the same vein, like, do you remember all of the— the, um, You're The Man Now Dogs?

Sydnee: [through laughter] Yeah.

Taylor: Like, that was a whole— a whole, like... just collection of websites that were just, like, single Flash pages with, like, a repeating phrase from some bit of media and, like, goofy graphics, and that was it. That was the page. You couldn't interact with anything. You couldn't click on anything. It was just, like—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Like, I remember one that had, like, little fish heads on it, like, rolling around. And it just said "[singing] Fish heads, fish heads, roly-polly fish heads." That was it, and I loved it. Or like the hamster dance!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: The hamster dance! [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs loudly] Oh no, not the hamster dance!

Taylor: [laughs] Where just, like— that one just, like, came back into my head after wherever I buried it. Oh my God, yeah! Which was just like a same deal. Just, like, a Flash page with cute little hamsters in, like, repeated animation dancing, and people loved it. [laughs]

Sydnee: Which will exist forever in greeting card form, I think is the only place you can find it now. Yeah, you know what I'm talking about?

Raleigh: [simultaneously] Ohh, okay. Now I know what we're talking about.

Sydnee: The— it— it's— you will still find cards that sing, "And it's the hamster dance." I don't know why that. I don't—[laughs] and I can't even imagine who you're giving it to who's like, "Aw, yeah!"

Taylor: "Hamster da—" [laughs]

Raleigh: "The hamster dance."

Taylor: I would love to get a hamster dance card! If you haven't bought me a birthday gift yet, uh...

Sydnee: Hey.

Taylor: But that— yeah. I mean, it was just— and it was like you... you'd— you know, you'd hunt something down or you'd hear about something word of mouth, and you just would find just this weird, in the wilds of the not-quite-understood internet, here is this weird little bastion of absurdity that just felt like just— it was both a private goofy, silly moment, but something that you were somehow sharing with people.

That was also a new feeling, you know? Like, we hadn't had that kind of connection before. And of all the things for us to forge our connection over, this was the kind of media that caught on first. I think is something— you know, for as cynical as I think we all feel, I think it says something kind of beautiful at our core that that was, you know, some of the first content that we joined together over was just this simple, fun Flash animation.

Sydnee: And, you know, the thing is, when we announced that Strong Bad was gonna be on Candelights there was such, like, a huge response to that. Like, of all the things, of all the people... [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Yep.

Sydnee: Not us. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: No, not us! [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] But Strong Bad. Um, people were just so excited, and I think, like, some of that speaks to the age of a lot of our listeners. Like, there is a certain, like, segment of our demographic who latched onto that and loved it and, like, still does to this day, and rightly so. It's great. Um, but it's one of those things that I wish could, like— you have to f— I wish it could be— it could rise to the top now.

There's so much noise that it's hard for something that that's good, and pure, and funny, and quality, um, to rise to the top naturally. Like, it— like, it was easier to do back in the day when there just wasn't that much stuff out there. But it's so good. I mean, and I was really amazed. Like, if that's what my kids wanna watch on YouTube, I'm okay with that.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Way better than the other stuff. Way better than, like, opening 35 LOL dolls.

Raleigh: Or the stuff that's not technically profanity.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, but— but it's— yeah, it's— it still holds up. I mean, I was still sitting there laughing. It didn't— it didn't feel old to me. It still felt fresh. It's weird how that's true, but I think that's because it helped build— it's weird. You could almost, like, write parallel histories of, like, where comedy went from stuff like *Homestar Runner* and *Strong Bad* and, like, *South Park*. Which, you know, that was an internet thing.

Raleigh: Was it?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: I didn't know that.

Sydnee: Yeah, *South Park* just start— I think the first one was where Santa Claus fought Jesus, right?

Taylor: Oh, was that— see, I don't— I was never a fan of *South Park*, I'll be honest. So I never really— I don't know the lore. [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs] Its origin story.

Sydnee: I believe that was the original one was the two of them fight— but I mean, either way it was an internet thing, and then it got picked up for TV 'cause it was so popular. Which takes a very different path, because *South Park* isn't about punching up or down, just punching in every direction at all times, as much as you can. [laughs] Um, which is a different take on comedy. [laughs]

Raleigh: Uh, well I read that, uh, the, um, Chapman brothers? Is that the—

Taylor: Yes. The brothers Chap. [laughs]

Raleigh: The brothers Chap. They were offered to do TV, and they didn't. Is that right?

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Raleigh: I thought I'd seen that somewhere.

Taylor: With *Homestar Runner*, they had several offers and they turned them all down. Well, I think—

Sydnee: Which does— which does allow for it stay the kind of pure thing we've been talking about, as opposed to, like, *South Park*, which... it's really mean.

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: [snorts quietly]

Sydnee: I'm not gonna sit here and, like, throw a ton of shade at *South Park*, it just... it got mean for me.

Raleigh: It hurt Sydnee's feelings.

Sydnee: I got soft— I've gotten softer in my old age, and I'm just not... I don't know. Maybe when I was, like, a cynical teenager, but I'm kind of... I'm too soft. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, it's weird. It's like when you're young and you actually don't have reasons to be cynical, there's something very alluring about cynicism. But then when you're old and you actually have to work actively to have hope, uh, media that's purposefully cynical just feels exhausting. And like, that's fine if that's your thing, but for me personally I don't like to engage with cynical media.

Sydnee: Me neither.

Taylor: I have enough cynicism that I have to fight back within me. [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Uh, but yeah. I mean, it's, uh... it just was such a wild west [through laughter] of the internet, that was just full of so many weird things being made by weird people. And that freedom to do whatever was really— we'd never seen that. We'd only seen content that came from the top down, you know? Like, this was content that we were lifting up ourselves and giving focus to.

Sydnee: If you haven't checked out *Homestar Runner* or Strong Bad or, uh, *Teen Girl Squad* or any of that, or the other stuff we've mentioned like *Salad Fingers* and Rathergood, you really should.

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: It's quite good. It's quite funny. It holds up.

Taylor: *Salad Fingers* is very scary, I will say that. [laughs]

Raleigh: It is. It is.

Sydnee: I did not show that to the girls.

Raleigh: That's good.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: They did, um— they were a little creeped out by— what were they— what did they call them on Rathergood? The little things, um—

Taylor: Sponge monkeys? Sponge monkeys.

Sydnee: Yes. They were a little creeped out by them. Like, their cute song overcame that to some extent, but they were still a little, like, "What am I looking at?"

Raleigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Well, they have all— they have the series of cat videos that I find quite enjoyable, of cats. Just, like, low-res cats dancing. There's, like, the gay bar cat was one of the ones that I loved. [laughs] Like, just moving in two different directions, and it's just a cat, and it's, "[singing] I want a ticket to a gay bar!" [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, Taylor, I'm really glad you brought this topic, 'cause this was a fun thing to talk about.

Taylor: Oh yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: And I don't think I would've watched it otherwise.

Taylor: No, and it's— and it's also, like, you don't need to watch every element of *Homestar Runner* to get it. Like, there's lots of different stuff for lots of different people. You don't— there's no, like, overarching plot you need to understand. You can just check in with an email and it's funny on its own.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Alright, Raleigh. What is next?

Raleigh: Okay. Um, so next is the first thing in my life as an adult that I have realized I don't understand, and it is a teen thing. It is, um, a young Gen Z thing. It is TikTok.

Sydnee: Oh my goodness.

Taylor: Oh, wow.

Raleigh: I'm part of it. I can't stop watching TikToks. But I still don't get so much of it. I feel like I'm just on the end of that age range where I'm like, I— I have it. I think some things are funny. But I don't get it. So I wanna talk about it.

Sydnee: I think that'll be good, 'cause I am on it, but I still am only starting to understand what I am doing there, what it is.

Raleigh: I think Charlie understands it more than I do, which is a little concerning.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: She does not have TikTok of her own, but she has seen mine and Justin's TikToks. Oh, I've never made one. I just... got on there so I could figure out what all the... hubbub was all about. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: [holding back laughter] Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Well, I—

Sydnee: Taylor, you are— you are totally unaware of TikTok.

Taylor: I mean, I— I s—

Sydnee: I mean, you know it exists. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. And, like, I see people— I see when people share them to, like, their Instagram stories or, like, Twitter. I have seen [hesitantly] TikToks. [laughs] But no, I do not have it, so I will have to have it, for at least the length of time between now and we record. I will download it for research purposes only.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: Alright. We'll be prepared.

Raleigh: I'm very excited, yes.

Sydnee: We can each discuss our favorite TikTok.

Raleigh: Yes.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Well, thank you, Taylor. This was a great thing to discuss. Thank you, listeners. I hope if you haven't checked out *Homestar Runner* you will. It's all out there for you to enjoy, and it's fantastic. Um, and thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to Maximumfun.org. There are podcasts there, and you would like some.

Raleigh: [through laughter] There are podcasts there!

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: There are podcasts there. And you're listening to this one, so maybe you'd like another one. Uh, and you can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, and you can tweet at us @stillbuff. And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind," and...

Sydnee and Rileigh: Happy birthday!

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: To Taylor.

Rileigh: To Taylor.

Taylor: I panicked for a minute when you started to say something together, 'cause I was like, "Wait, no! It's not the— the sync up part yet! We're not saying—"

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: "Oh, okay."

Rileigh: Now Sydnee and I say it together!

Sydnee: Ha, ha, ha.

Taylor: It would be weird if I joined in on that. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Taylor. "Happy bir— what?"

Rileigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] It's like when you tell the server to enjoy their meal as well, and you're like, "Oh no! I have to get up and leave now!"

[theme music plays in the background]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs] This has been your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Rileigh Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Rileigh: I am still buffering...

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

Sydnee and Rileigh: [singing] Happy birthday to you—

Taylor: Aww.

Sydnee and Rileigh: [singing] Happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Taylor—

Taylor: [simultaneously] Trogdor!

[all laugh]

Sydnee and Rileigh: [holding back laughter] [singing] Happy birthday to you!

Taylor: Thank you. [laughs]

Sydnee: You're welcome.

[theme music ends]

[music plays]

Justin: Hi, everybody! My name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: We're both doctors, and—

Sydnee: Nope! Just me.

Justin: Okay, well, Sydnee's a doctor, and I'm a medical enthusiast—

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: —and we create *Sawbones*: a marital tour of misguided medicine.

Sydnee: Every week, I dig through the annals of medical history to bring you the wildest, grossest, sometimes dumbest tales of ways we've tried to treat people throughout history.

Justin: And lately, we do a lot of modern fake medicine... because everything's a disaster. But it's slightly less of a disaster every Friday, right here on Maximumfun.org as we bring you *Sawbones*: a marital tour of misguided medicine. And remember:

Sydnee: Don't drill a hole in your head.

[music and advertisement end]

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