

Still Buffering 296: "My Girl"

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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 Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Well, we're back.

Raleigh: We're back.

Taylor: Oops!

Sydnee: I'm sor— oops! Sorry.

Raleigh: Oops. We done did it.

Taylor: Oops! No *Still Buffering*. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Actually, we done did not do it.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: No, we did not do it, um, and that was my fault.

Raleigh: Well—

Taylor: Well, not your fault. That's...

Raleigh: You were sick.

Sydnee: Yes, I got sick. Um—

Rileigh: Which I would just like to say, for all of you that don't know Sydnee personally, it takes a lot for Sydnee to be sick enough that she does not continue to work and do everything and insist that she's fine. So that is any testament to how bad Sydnee was feeling.

Sydnee: I— I actually— I did a whole episode. It inspired me to do a whole episode of Sawbones about this this week, where I talk about— I'm not trying to plug my other podcast, I'm just—

Rileigh: Yeah, whatever.

Taylor: Wow.

Sydnee: No, I'm just—[laughs quietly] I'm just saying.

Rileigh: We're not even a minute in.

Sydnee: I think— I think part of it is my medical training has hammered this into me, but yes, I typically never call in sick, or I just keep working no matter how sick I am, so... um, I was—

Taylor: You know, I was gonna say— oh, go ahead, sorry.

Sydnee: I was just gonna say, I was very sick.

Taylor: Well, I— 'cause I feel the same way that it has been, uh, instructed in the food service industry to me that, like, if you're sick you don't call out, and I can't think of two worse industries to have people [laughs]—

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Right?

Taylor: —unwilling to not be sick in.

Sydnee: Right? It really is. And that— I will say, I did stay home and didn't go do the volunteer work I usually do because I was worried at first that I had COVID. I did test negative. Justin and I both did. We had similar things, except I had it worse, which again, that made me feel bad too, 'cause usually I give Justin

a hard time 'cause I'm like, "What? Are you gonna take the day off and lay in bed? Not me!"

But, like, then...

Rileigh: You did.

Sydnee: I'm— I— I was sicker. He was better faster.

Taylor: You got a cold with a side of karma. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I—[sighs]

Rileigh: Yeah, that's what you got.

Sydnee: I actually spent a day in be— I actually did lay in bed for a day and, like, watch episodes of *Mad Men*...

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: ... and eat soup.

Taylor: That sounds nice!

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: It was! I mean, it wa— except the more I try to relax the more anxiety I feel, because I'm relaxing.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: The only way I feel relaxed is if I'm working. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: See, you know—

Sydnee: I'm deeply broken.

Rileigh: Yeah. I've realized this since COVID and since going back to in person school. Like, teachers pretty much— and I'm lucky enough I have good ones, but all the other ones, like, will only accept an excused absence if you have a— and

you say you're sick— if you have a positive COVID test. And I feel like everyone's forgotten that, like, other diseases exist, and you still shouldn't want me to come and give other people, like, I don't know, a cold, or the flu or something. Like, obviously you are so sick, but you tested negative for COVID. Like—

Sydnee: And I did. I tried to come.

Raleigh: Yeah!

Sydnee: I called— I called the director of Harmony House, where I volunteer, and I was like, "Hey, I tested negative for COVID so I was thinking I'd come?"

And she was like, "We don't want whatever you have."

Raleigh: Yeah!

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Like, no, don't go give— whatever you're carrying that you sound like that, don't go give it people, please."

And I was like, "Oh, that's an excellent point."

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] So, and it's the kind of thing where, like, as a doctor, I would've told somebody who felt like me, sounded like me, like, "No, don't go to— don't go to work."

Raleigh: Don't go anywhere.

Sydnee: "Don't go anywhere." I don't know. I tested negative. I'm—there's still a little part of my brain that's going, "I don't know, man... I don't know."

Taylor: Maybe you gotta— maybe you made a new variant within you.

Raleigh: Hmmm.

Sydnee: Oh, man. I'm so—[sighs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I'm sorry. But I didn't go anywhere! Nobody got it. The kids are fine.

Taylor: It's a super secret— it's a super hidden secret variant that you designed.

Raleigh: Stealth COVID.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I saw that come out, that stealth COVID, and I was like, "[gasps loudly]." I fell for— and usually I'm so good about that. I saw that headline and I was like, "Justin!"

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Stealth COVID!"

Raleigh: Oh...

Taylor: Was it an Onion article or something?

Sydnee: No, it was real!

Taylor: Oh!

Raleigh: That was a thing?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Oh, I just said that, like... like we were talking about, like, super— super secret COVID.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] No, that's what they're calling it!

Raleigh: I was like, "Oh yeah, stealth COVID." Oh, I didn't see that.

Sydnee: There was this article about stealth COVID— stealth Omicron, I think they were calling it— that couldn't be detected on tests, and I think what they were actually trying to say is that it is a— it is a variant of Omicron that doesn't

test as Omicron, but it still, like, shows up as COVID. But it's harder to tease out if it is Omicron.

Taylor: Okay.

Raleigh: Stealth Omicron.

Sydnee: Yes. And so I don't think they actually meant, like, a PCR wouldn't pick it up.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't know.

Sydnee: But when I saw it I fell for that. I— I did it. I did the thing I tell people not to do. I fell for the headline.

Raleigh: [gasps]

Sydnee: I know.

Raleigh: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Uh, it's— it's evolving. It's dis— it's creating camouflage now. It's like, "[high-pitched] Nope! Don't mind me! I'm just a big white blood cell. Woot doot doo."

Raleigh: "Doop-a-doop-a-doo."

Sydnee: It would— it would make sense. With the way I felt, I would— it would totally make sense.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: So, thank you, vaccines, for keeping me alive. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: You were sick.

Sydnee: I was. Um, the kids are fine. I keep trying to reassure everybody. The kids are fine.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: 'Cause you'd think, like, man, if the adults were that bowled over—they're not even sick.

Raleigh: I'm fine too.

Sydnee: That was the main concern.

Raleigh: [wheezes]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah, always.

Raleigh: [laughs] Well, I was around you right before you started feeling that bad.

Sydnee: That's true.

Raleigh: So, you know. But I'm fine.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: So, yeah.

Sydnee: So, don't worry everybody. Raleigh's fine.

Raleigh: Don't worry, I'm fine.

Taylor: I'm fine, too.

Raleigh: I'm healthy.

Sydnee: Don't worry, everybody.

Raleigh: And Taylor's fine.

Sydnee: Taylor's fine.

Rileigh: We're all fine. Since— since the last time we did an episode, I, um, I got into law school.

Sydnee: Yay!

Taylor: Yeah!

Rileigh: I wanna share that with everyone. I know we all knew that, but... put out into the universe.

Sydnee: There you go.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Congratulations.

Rileigh: Thank you.

Sydnee: To your top choice law school.

Rileigh: Yes. My top choice law school.

Sydnee: That's fantastic.

Rileigh: So...

Sydnee: So...

Rileigh: Exciting.

Sydnee: Well... good. I can start committing crimes soon.

Rileigh: [laughs] Well, no, hold on.

Taylor: Were we supposed to wait?

Rileigh: Well, also I won't be a—

Sydnee: Yes, Taylor, we're supposed to wait until Rileigh can bail us out!

Taylor: Oh.

Raleigh: I won't be a real lawyer for another three years, so not too soon.

Sydnee: Oh.

Raleigh: Unless, like, I pull one of those fake *Legally Blonde* moments and I go to the courtroom like—

Sydnee: I was gonna say, like Elle Woods!

Raleigh: "I am a first year law student, but I can defend you in court!"

Taylor: You mean I just have to make sure no one finds the evidence for three years. Alright.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: I love— I always loved that, 'cause I always imagine, like, the corollary in med school. Like, "I am a first year medical student. I have never touched a human, and I've only read about them in books. I am ready to do surgery."
[laughs quietly]

Raleigh: I always think that's so funny when I talk to people. I have a few close friends that are second year med students and I always think it's so funny when I'm like, "You are in your second year of med school. You read and study more than anyone I know, and you have not spent a second of that [through laughter] in an actual hospital." That's wild!

Sydnee: It— yeah, I mean, it's really not till your third year. That's when you start doing your rotations out in the world. We try to get 'em, like, a little bit of, like, standardized patient experience the first two years, but it's all... like, you go in a room with somebody who has a script, so it doesn't feel...

Raleigh: It's not like a real patient.

Sydnee: It doesn't feel the same.

Raleigh: Yeah. Yeah, that's crazy. And we get lawyers—

Sydnee: Yeah. Now, we let 'em come, like, hang out with us, but it's not the same.

Rileigh: Lawyers just get it all in three years. In and out. You're a lawyer. That's it.

Taylor: I don't have any— they let you draw comics in comic book school on the first day.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Wow! [laughs]

Taylor: That's... there's one positive. There's the one.

Rileigh: That's hands-on from day one.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah. Real comics. All the comics.

Rileigh: I mean, I could never—

Sydnee: [laughs] That's the endorsement to go to art school over law school or med school.

Rileigh: Yeah. I could never draw a comic ever, so, you know.

Sydnee: Get marketable skills faster. Go to art school.

Taylor: Well, uh, marketable, that's...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Ehh, let's back up there. That's, uh... [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh...

Rileigh: Hmm. How... do we... segue into what we're talking about.

Sydnee: I'm sorry that I made you watch *My Girl*.

Rileigh: Okay. Well, that's...

Taylor: What were you thinking, Sydnee? We're how many years into a pandemic? I was gonna say three. Has it been? I don't know. Now's—

Rileigh: Basically.

Taylor: Might as well watch *My Girl*.

Sydnee: I also didn't realize, like, that I was going to have this near-death experience.

Rileigh: [laughs] Oh my gosh.

Sydnee: I didn't really. I tell you, when I thought I had COVID and I was thinking, like, "If I had not been vaccinated..." Anyway. I did have a moment there of, like, facing one's own mortality.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Anyway, thank you, vaccines. But, uh, I... I am sorry.

Rileigh: You made us watch *My Girl*.

Sydnee: *My Girl* is so sad.

Rileigh: Although, okay. [laughs] Can I just say, the fact that it's— 'cause, I mean, we're gonna spoil this movie. It came out in 1991.

Sydnee: Yeah. It came out in 1991, and if you haven't seen it, we are going to tell you what happens.

Taylor: You had time.

Rileigh: Yeah. It's now— now been over 30 years. Um, it's the fact that it's bees? That— if it were anything just a little bit sadder, it wouldn't feel silly. But the fact that it's bees feels a little bit silly.

Sydnee: It's gruesome!

Rileigh: But it's bees!

Sydnee: It's horrific!

Rileigh: [squeaks]

Taylor: I mean... for some people, bees are no joke!

Rileigh: Well, I know, I know, I know.

Sydnee: It's anaphylaxis!

Rileigh: Yes. It's just... I don't know. That part's always like—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Okay, what's—

Rileigh: —you're gonna have this tragic death, and it's bees? Like, I thought about, like, *Bridge to Terabithia*. Like, that messes you up, and she's just trying to get to their tree house, and she slips off their little rope swing. This is... bees? [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, I think— I think what's wild about it is, like, it's hard to imagine something like this getting made today.

Rileigh: Yes. I think maybe that's why. 'Cause this is the first time I've watched it that I remember watching it.

Sydnee: Can you imagine that, like— "Here's the pitch. It's a coming of age story. We have this young woman. Her name's Vada Sultenfuss."

"Interesting, okay, alright."

"Her dad, like, is trying to raise her. Like, her mom died shortly after she was born. It's very sad. She's struggling with that. She's kind of a hypochondriac. All this stuff. New woman comes into the picture, new mom, Shelly, whatever. She's struggling with this, and her friend, and her poetry and whatever."

And people are like, "Hmm, interesting, interesting, love this."

Coming of age, but it's a girl, and usually coming of age stories are always about little boys. So, like, okay, okay, yeah, yeah, I like it, like it.

"And then her best friend gets stung to death by bees."

"What?!"

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: "What?!" [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: "Why?!"

Raleigh: I think you're right. Obviously it is very tragic and it's very sad, and it is not silly. I think what I more so meant is this— I have seen this before, in the sense that I have the vague memory of seeing these scenes before, but this is the first time I've watched it in my recent memory. So I'm watching it in the context of 2022 thinking, "This movie would not exist today."

Sydnee: It's— it would be hard to sell something where a child dies in such a gruesome way.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that's not, like— I mean, like, there's still this little coda at the end of the film where, like, "I'm getting better, and I'm moving on, and my life is okay."

And, like, that's wild.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: That— that was the— like, I— I don't think I've seen this movie in at least a decade. So in my memory I was like, yeah, I think the movie is about her coping with the death of this young friend, and that's kind of the thing that she has to overcome. And then like, no, no, no. That happens, like, we're three fourths of the way through the movie when that happens. And it is just sort of like, "Ohh... but now what have we learned?" [wheezy laughter]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's really it. And, like, we even have to see— I mean, I cannot tell you, as a parent, as I realize, like, oh, we see his mom. Like, there's a scene where she sees his mom after he's died! And it's like, what is this movie?! I... it would not get made today. And that's not me saying that I hate it. Like, there are still— there are so many moments—

Raleigh: Obviously you don't hate it. You made us watch it!

Sydnee: Well, there are so many moments in it that are, like, sweet and funny, and, you know, it's very of a time, and it is very much like there are things about it that I can relate to. Not— I wasn't a little girl in that time period, but you know what I mean. Like, growing up kind of stuff. Like, there's a lot that's relatable, up until this gruesome death scene.

Raleigh: I mean, it's got Macaulay Culkin, star of *They Left Him Alone*. So...
[laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Obviously it's gonna be a hit.

Sydnee: And he's so adorable!

Raleigh: He is.

Sydnee: He's just... [sighs]

Raleigh: He is.

Sydnee: It's heartbreaking!

Taylor: He's a little man.

Raleigh: The tiniest.

Sydnee: And Anna Chlumsky is just...

Raleigh: Who I didn't— I— again, I saw this movie so long ago that I saw her in *Veep*, and then watching this again I was like, "Wait a minute. That's the girl from *Veep*!"

And then I realized, well, no, she's in *Veep* and she's the girl from *My Girl*. But, like... yeah.

Sydnee: Isn't she amazing?

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: She's so compelling to watch. Even as a little kid, what a great actor. Just, like, so much going on, I mean, really complex scenes.

Raleigh: Did you really relate to that character when you were growing up watching this movie?

Sydnee: Very strongly.

Raleigh: I knew it.

Sydnee: Very strongly.

Raleigh: I knew it. It's one of those characters that I was watching like, "Hmm, I know why Sydnee likes this movie."

Sydnee: Very morbid.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Writes poetry.

Raleigh: Like, a— a little bit of Lydia Deetz. A little bit, in the sense that, like, doesn't her dad work at, like, a funeral... home or something?

Sydnee: Does Lydia's?

Raleigh: Not Lydia's. I mean in *My Girl*.

Sydnee: No, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Rileigh: Yeah. So, like—

Sydnee: I mean, their home is a funeral home.

Rileigh: Yes. Yes.

Sydnee: So yeah.

Rileigh: So... like, the—

Sydnee: I was gonna say, like, "Not in the movie *Beetlejuice*."

Rileigh: No. Not *Beetlejuice*.

Sydnee: Um, yeah. I mean, there was a lot of it like that. I think part of it was just this idea of this self-narration. Like, she was— the character, the main character, Vada, is constantly narrating the story, and in a sense narrating her own life, and she sees it as this sort of, like, arc that it is taking, and that... I don't know. That I connected with very strongly.

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like... and then she writes, like, sad poems. Well, at the end they're sad. In the beginning they're just about ice cream.

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: Mm-hmm. [laughs] But then she experiences death firsthand. Which again, the direction that movie takes... a pretty stark turn.

Sydnee: It really is.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, I really like, uh— I think Dan Aykroyd is very funny in it. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Um, I think Jamie Lee Curtis...

Taylor: Yeah!

Raleigh: I didn't know she was in this movie.

Sydnee: Right?

Taylor: I totally forgot that.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: She's got a really cool style. She's got a cool mobile home.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I love her camper. I'm very jealous of her camper. She's super hot in this movie, too.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I'm just saying!

Raleigh: I didn't know you had a thing for Jamie Lee Curtis.

Sydnee: I didn't know I did either!

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I realized— I didn't remember it was her. I just remembering thinking, "Oh yeah, in *My Girl* her dad falls in love with this really beautiful woman who does makeup." And then it was like, "Oh my God, it's Jamie Lee Curtis."

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: In my mind was this, like, paragon of beauty of style, in my child mind.

Raleigh: Well...

Sydnee: Which is weird, too, considering that the movie's set in the 70's, and so it's like, Gogo Boots and blue eye shadow, which was not...

Rileigh: You were not alive.

Sydnee: No.

Rileigh: No.

Sydnee: And that was not, like, the style.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: In the 90's, you know? In 1991, when I would've watched this movie.

Taylor: No, but it kind of reminded me of, like, mom. [laughs] So I felt like it made sense.

Rileigh: Hm, yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, I mean...

Rileigh: Yeah, I can see that.

Sydnee: She says "You can never wear too much blue eye shadow." With mom it was too much blush, but...

Rileigh: Yeah, same vibes. Um, can I ask why this movie? Means—

Taylor: Ooh.

Rileigh: —I— I was gonna end the question there. Um, but I guess, like, why—

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: —was... why it was important... to you.

Sydnee: Um... I think in my head— it's weird, because I hadn't seen it in such a long time, because I think had— I watched it a lot more when I was younger, and then at some point I got old enough to go...

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Wow, this is depressing." 'Cause I think as a little kid it doesn't hit you, how depre— I mean, it must not have, I guess, 'cause I watched it repeatedly. And I was so, like— I mean, it was sad, but in sad in a "Oh, but, you know, growing up is hard... " way. [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Which doesn't make any sense.

Taylor: Were you just waiting for, like, the mass bee casualties that must happen to every young friend group? Like, "Oh, you know. It's just part of life."

Sydnee: It's really wild, because a tragedy like that would define a community for decades.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And it's just kind of taken in stride? I don't know. Which maybe that is part of, like— I mean, that's part of the childhood experience, I guess. I maybe it's true to the main— to our narrator in that way. When you're that age, like, really terrible things happen... but then we expect you to go to school.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: The next Monday. You know what I mean?

Rileigh: That's true.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Rileigh: That's true.

Sydnee: But that is not why I connected to it. [laughs quietly] I didn't— it was nothing like that.

Rileigh: You didn't experience a bee casualty.

Sydnee: Um, I think part of it is that I— I identified with Vada a lot. I felt like she was, um, prickly, and difficult. Like, the only friend she has is Thomas J, and I

felt like, "Yeah, I get that. I'm, like... prickly. I'm difficult. I don't have a lot of friends."

I'm— I was— I was a very morbid kid. I mean... [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: [through laughter] I was watching Teylor listen to you say all this.

Sydnee: What— what— what are you thinking, Teylor?

Teylor: Oh, no, no, just...

Raleigh: I can't speak to your childhood.

Teylor: It's just— oh, it's like, okay, well, you know. Uh... yeah? [laughs] I think that there's a, uh... you know that sort of, like, precociousness that the character has that you definitely had where it's like, "You're a tiny person. You know this, right? Like, you don't need to be this serious about life." [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah. Yeah.

Sydnee: I mean, I definitely had that. Like... I was a very serious child. [laughs quietly] Um, even before I started, like, wearing a black beret and going by Lenore.

Raleigh: Lenore. Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Um, that was very much part of my personality, and I felt like I saw a little bit of myself in this character, um, who was very serious and a little dark and had trouble connecting with other kids her own age... and would sometimes— like, it also, like, sort of reigned in this idea that sometimes kids talk in ways that are too mature for their age, and we, like, take it in stride.

Raleigh: Which I think if would've watched, like, a decade ago, I would've thought, "That's not realistic. Kids don't talk that way."

But now that I know your kids, like, yeah. Sometimes Charlie just says things and I'm like, "You... you don't— you're not old enough to know how to talk like that." Not even, like, bad things. Just, like, how are you putting words together like that that I don't even use in my sentences? Like, you're seven!

Sydnee: It's— yeah.

Taylor: Well, and I mean, a lot of— early on in the movie, you know, there's this... this repeated thing where, like you said, she's hypochondriac, but she goes to the doctor because she thinks she's— she's dying from something. She just diagnoses herself a lot. And, I mean, you get, by the end of the movie, that this is kind of tied to her mother unexpectedly dying. But that idea that, like, kids are— just because it's a kid doesn't mean they aren't dealing with big, scary thoughts, and that kind of felt like— if this was— this— once again, this movie wouldn't be made today, because the parents would immediately be like, "Oh, we need a child psychiatrist. [through laughter] Like, we need— this child needs to talk to somebody about their fear of death."

And instead it's just like, "Oh, that wacky little Vada, just runnin' to the doctor's office." [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I definitely think you're right there, in that part of why that movie had to be set when it was is the idea that Dan Aykroyd is this totally clueless father who's like, "I don't know." You know? I mean, her mother died when she was really little, but, like, she was super close to her grandma, who now has... such severe— I guess dementia is what that was a depiction of, although at times she appears catatonic.

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But, like, has such severe dementia that she is not able to, like, communicate with her at all. And, you know, she's just not been herself.

And it's like...

Raleigh: Well, yeah!

Sydnee: Yeah!

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: You know? And he's like, "I'm— I'm sure she'll snap out— I'm hoping she'll snap out of it."

And at first Jamie Lee Curtis is like, "Yeah. I'm sure she will."

And it's like, why? Why are you sure? Why?!

Rileigh: What reason do you have to think this? [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Which, I mean, I guess was— because at the time, the idea that you would've sought that sort of help, especially for a kid, it just wasn't— it wasn't done.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Like that. Um... so you're right. I mean, by today's standards, Vada needed to... needed therapy. She needed, you know, help. She was struggling. She'd gone through trauma, and then she goes through the trauma of her grandmother sort of being lost, even though she's still alive, and then she goes through the trauma of losing her best friend.

Taylor: Well, and that's— it's an interesting movie, also, because obviously it's not made— it's made in the 90's, so also not a time period where we would have... like, open discussion about, like, the importance of therapy and stuff, 'cause it kind of feels like in the movie, the message is she gets over her fear of death by confronting it by having this friend of hers die, and now she's better.

Sydnee: Yes.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Now she's hanging out with girls her age and wearing dresses. It's like, what is the message here? [laughs]

Sydnee: I always wondered about that part of it. I hadn't really thought about it until I watched it again this time, that she's always in, like, jeans and a t-shirt until she's hanging out with the little girl at the end. And that's the first time we see her in a dress. And I always wanted to, like— are we supposed to be celebrating—[laughs quietly]

Taylor: Like, right? It's—

Sydnee: Am I supposed to be happy?

Raleigh: Like at the end of *Grease* when Sandy puts on the leather— the leather body suit and we're like, "Am I supposed to want this?"

Sydnee: [crosstalk] "Oh, phew. She's in a dress. It's gonna be okay."

Raleigh: Yeah, I will say, up until that... that point, so most of the movie, I do think for a movie made in 1991, it gives a lot of, um... complexity, I guess, to a young female character. I feel like she gets more than a lot of very maybe more stereotypical young female characters of the 90's that were more about... hmm, being pretty and being feminine and being— you know. You know what I mean. Like, she has a lot more going on, I guess, than what I would have expected from a female character in that time.

Sydnee: I think that if that movie was made just a few years later, you would see a slightly different spin on the ending. I really think that, like, it was still coming off a time period where we thought of children as, like, "Yeah, they go through these experiences but, like, it doesn't really leave any marks on them," so to speak. You know? Like, as long as— as long as they're o— as long as they're still breathing at the other end of it they're gonna be fine. Kids are resilient. They'll bounce back. It'll be fine. And it was before we had this really good understanding of how that sort of experience would change a kid. And I think if you move forward just a few years into the 90's and remake the ending of that movie, what you would see is, "Yes, I am still alive, and yes, I am determined to try to make the best of my life, but I carry this... you know, this trauma, this sorrow, this... you know, sadness. I will carry this with me." I think you would've seen that. I just don't think that we knew how to do that, or thought kids did that at that point. Which, I mean, would've been an even sadder movie, I guess. [wheezes]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Uh... well, I think this kind of— this idea that to get over something, something else big needs to happen, I feel like is something hopefully we're moving past in storytelling. Where, you know, that's just how she is, and then she has to confront death in a horrible way, and then you move on. Like, there's a point where it's like, "Well, no. Like—" that's a lot of coming of age stories, you

know? Something big and traumatic has to happen, or eventful has to happen, and then you can change. Whereas it's the reality that, you know— like, no. It's just work that goes into it, and... you know, trying to confront your issues, and you aren't just waiting for this big thing to come in and change your life and make you grow up or make you take the next step, that sometimes it's just a series of little steps or you need, you know, guidance and intervention along the way.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't know. It's interesting.

Raleigh: I was trying to figure out what it was about it that— that made it seem so unrealistic to me in the sense that, like, comparing it to more recent movies I have watched that are made now, and I think it's exactly that. In that, like, a lot of coming of age movies you see now, especially ones that more so frequently now center around young women, it's not this big thing happens in their life and they have to work through it. Or, like, something big happens and then we have to watch them have this other big experience to get past it, like in this movie, like you said.

Um, it's more so just, like, how big life is just living life as a young person. And, like, how important small things are, and how much they matter, and how much they affect you. Like, I was thinking of, like, um, *Booksmart* and *The Edge of Seventeen*. Like, two coming of age movies that are about young women that don't have, like, big tragedies or big emotional moments, but are about just, like, being young, and how that's, like, [laughs quietly] work enough, is being a teenager, being a young person, having to figure out how to get through all that.

Sydney: It is really weird, too, because I will say, even with— in that sort of, like... those kinds of movies that used to be made about the— it's usually they're like the mythical, like, night that changes it all, or moment that changes it all. The thing that happens that makes it, like, clear for you, shows you your path, changes everything. Like, there is that sort of, like, thing, especially as you move into, like, teenage years. There are those movies about that— that— that magical moment in those years that changed it all for you, and this movie still kind of stands out, because it's not... I mean, it's just, like, a really sad, tragic... there it is.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know. It's almost a little more like something like *The Virgin Suicides*, except *The Virgin Suicides* knows what it is, whereas *My Girl* ends with the song "My Girl." [laughs quietly] And, like, two adorable little girls riding away on bicycles, you know? Which is, like... I don't know. The dissonance there is hard.

Rileigh: I honestly think if this movie would've been made today, it would've been— a lot of things would've been different. But I think the main thing that would've been different is you could have Vada as a character that has had the things happen to her in her life that have happened up until the point where, like, we meet her, and you don't need Thomas J. to die this tragic death. Like, you can just have all the other things happen and follow her life, and all these other things that are happening, and that is... that is enough, now, for a plot. You don't also need this awful death [laughs] right at the end.

Taylor: 'Cause it does still follow a bit of a cliché story line of, like, a hero— heroic, like, you know, saving of her. Where, like, oh, now she's on the right path because a... a young man sacrificed for her. Which is— it's— you know, it's a farce of that idea, but it's still there.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I just can't— I cannot believe— I mean, it really— in our lifetime, there was a movie made, and it was okay that poor little Macaulay Culkin was laying in a coffin with bee stings on his little face, and that was in a movie!

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like... that is *wild* to me! A— as I watched it I was like, "How is this— how— and I— how little must I have been that I watched it the first time?!"

Taylor: And the— I mean... that Vada's, like— gets— like, it ultimately is a positive thing for her, just really... like, how does that... how is that how that works out? [laughs] How is that just not another thing that she's afraid of, or she carries tremendous guilt over because he was trying to get her mood ring back?

It's like, "Oh, great, and now my mood ring's back, and now it's blue. Huh." [through laughter] Like...

Sydnee: It— it's so—

Raleigh: [through laughter] That really is a w— a wild— a wild plot point.

Sydnee: It's so— because the— I mean, like, the scene where she yells, "Where are his glasses?" has been, like, burned into, you know, my brain... since the moment I saw it. Right?

Raleigh: Yeah. Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, you say that, "Where are his glasses?" And I'm instantly like, "[gasps] Aw!"

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: "[pained groan] No, don't! Not *My Girl!* Certainly not *My Girl!*" Justin wouldn't watch it with me.

Raleigh: Really? [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: He didn't even want it on any TV. I put it on. Um, he was like, "Please don't." He was like, "Don't you need to reorganize your closet? Didn't you tell me you needed to do that?"

And I was like, "Yeah, I really needed to." 'Cause, like, I just couldn't find the clothes I wanted and everything was messed up and— he was like, "Let me put it on a computer."

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: "And, uh... you can just sit right there in your closet, have a beer, watch *My Girl*, organize your closet? It'll be great! Have some—"

Taylor: "[high-pitched] Go drink a beer in your closet with this sad movie!"
[laughs]

Raleigh: In your closet.

Sydnee: Have— have some you time. Have some you time with *My Girl*. And I went and did that!

Raleigh: [wheezes]

Sydnee: And I was like, "This is awful. I hate this."

Raleigh: The best part is that you picked it!

Sydnee: I know.

Raleigh: Like—

Sydnee: It really— I mean, when I was—

Raleigh: No one made you do this. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: It was such an important movie to me—

Raleigh: I know.

Sydnee: —when I was younger! It was really— and I don't know— for the life of me, I can't imagine a little— I mean, a little preteen me watching this and being like, "Gotta see that again."

Taylor: Well, you saw yourself in the main character. I think that's always something that makes something stick... with a person.

Sydnee: Yeah, yeah. I mean, that's definitely true. And that— and I also think, like, the way that we used to watch movies made these experiences different, because I— I don't know for sure. My— my assumption is that we probably rented *My Girl* from the movie store after it was— I know we didn't see it in the theater. So it was probably at Cummings Renter Center. Which was the local video store we went to before Blockbuster came to town...

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: ... and then left. And we probably went to Cummings Renter Center and they had, like, two copies of it, 'cause that's all they'd ever get of new releases, and we waited our turn until it was in stock, and we rented *My Girl* and watched it. And, like, I probably watched it that one time, and it was probably years before I got to see it again, because it wouldn't have been easy to access. Isn't that weird to think about?

Rileigh: That's really weird to think about.

Sydnee: I would have been hard for me to see it again... for years. And so it left this gigantic impression on me, and then I built this whole mythology around it that was only loosely based on what was actually in it. 'Cause I only remembered a handful of, like, other than that— the bee scene and the funeral scene... [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: The bee scene.

Taylor: [simultaneously] The bee scene.

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I remembered her reading the poems. I remembered the "Flesh, all in a mesh." Because I remembered seeing that scene as a kid and being like, "[gasps] [whispering] I think they're talking about sex!"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I remembered that. I remembered, um, uh... the "Don't come back for five to seven days." 'Cause mom and dad got a huge kick out of that line, and I remember not getting it at the time.

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Like, "Why did she just say that? Why— why is everybody laughing?" I still remember that. Um, but I— it probably was that. It was probably I saw it, it meant the world to me 'cause I was like, "That little girl's like me! I'm like that... little girl—" that's so— that's so disturbing.

Rileigh: "That's so me!"

Sydnee: "I connect to that little girl!" And then I didn't see it again for years.

Rileigh: Yeah. I also was thinking about— 'cause I know at some point I've seen this, 'cause there were a few scenes, mostly the funeral scene, that I remembered in enough detail that I thought that I have seen this whole movie. But if my memory of it is that distant, that means it's one of those movies that at

some point you, Sydnee, said "You haven't seen this? Oh, you've gotta see this." 'Cause there are many of those. And turned it on and showed it to me when I— I mean, it had to have been long enough ago that my memory of it is that bad, that I was probably also a tiny preteen me and you were an adult saying, like, "Yeah! This is good. You should see this."

Sydnee: "What this movie where Macaulay Culkin gets stung to death by bees."

Raleigh: Yeah. And I know— I know for a fact that was before I ever saw *Home Alone* too because it was, like, a long time in my life before I saw *Home Alone*. And I know when I watched that movie for the first time I was like, "I can't look at you, Macaulay Culkin! [laughs] I can't. I saw what the bees did to you. It's too much."

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: It's too sad.

Raleigh: It's too sad! Where are your glasses?

Sydnee: Is— is it just me, or is the scene where— 'cause I've never thought of, like— I have nothing against Dan Aykroyd but I've never thought, like, "That is the coolest dude." You know? When I think about Dan Aykroyd I don't, like— I think a lot of— like, he's funny. He's— he's kind of— he's kind of weird in a fun way. You know? But, like, I've never thought, like, cool.

Um, when he punches the ex-husband in the stomach, is he not so cool?

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Man, what a cool scene for Dan Aykroyd. How did they— how did they think, like, "I know who we need for this cool scene." [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: But he— but, I mean, he pulls it off.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: He's very cool. In that moment, I found myself, like, just for a second, attracted to Dan Aykroyd. Like, "What just happened?" [wheezes]

Rileigh: I was worried that's where you were going the first time, and I was glad that you weren't, and then you did again.

Taylor: Then you came back.

Sydnee: Ju— just for, like, a split second I was like, "Alright, Dan Aykroyd! Alright!"

Rileigh: Does Justin know this? [laughs]

Sydnee: He'd get it. [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, I think I can see that, actually. Well, I mean, but that— 'cause there's also the relationship between Dan Aykroyd's character and his brother.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: It was one of those kind of— when they were talking about the brother, when Vada's, you know, overlaid dialogue explains him, like, who is this movie for? Because it talks about him— he comes back from what, Vietnam, right?

Sydnee: Korea.

Taylor: Oh, Korea.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: And he's got a plate in his head. And, like—

Sydnee: Uh-huh.

Taylor: —there's a sort of, like, touch of sort of just, you know, this brief, tragic story about the brother that's just sort of there in the background and, like, you know, it's like, this is an adult movie for adults. Like, this is something that an adult could understand. [laughs]

Sydnee: There— well, in that scene at the dinner table, I do think that— and maybe that was also what I connected to, 'cause you have Harry and his brother talking about something. And then you have the grandma with dementia singing at the top of her lungs a song over them while they're talking. And Vada is laying on the ground pretending to be dead. And that's when Shelly walks into the room and— Jamie Lee Curtis— and finds all this. And there was something about that that felt like our family. I don't know why.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like... this feels like something— like a scene out of our house at some point. I don't know— I don't know why.

Rileigh: Well, the whole plot line with the brother very much felt for me like, this is for the dads.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: I was like, this is for dad. Dad was watching this with Sydnee at some point. This is for him. This is for the dads.

Sydnee: *Oh. You know* Tommy Smirl loves this movie!

Taylor: Oh, absolutely! It's got everything he wants in a movie. There's the— there's—

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: —daughters that he can be sad about. There's horrific death. [laughs]

Rileigh: There is Dan Aykroyd. [laughs]

Sydnee: Da— Dan Aykroyd and his brother making dad jokes.

Taylor: Yep.

Rileigh: Um, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: There's— there's some light period humor that he can get uncomfortable about. [laughs]

Raleigh: When I told mom and dad this is what we were watching this week, I swear there was a moment I saw dad tear up just thinking about—[laughs] thinking about the movie. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Which, I mean, I get it.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: He's a very emotional man.

Sydnee: I think mom loved it too. This was not for kids.

Raleigh: No.

Sydnee: This is what I'm really— this is not a movie for kids. Not for kids.

Raleigh: Macaulay Culkin really had to go through, like, a rebranding after that. Like, "Don't worry. I am a child star for children. I know my last movie I didn't seem like it. Don't worry." 'Cause *Home Alone* was after this, right?

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah.

Raleigh: It was— yeah. Okay, yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. But, I mean, I'm surprised. I would've— after Anna Chlumsky's performance in that, I would've cast her in anything ever.

Raleigh: That's what I was surprised about is—

Sydnee: I mean, she's still great.

Raleigh: Yeah. 'Cause I saw her in *Veep*, and I mean, I'm not completely versed in all of the TV and movies from, you know, the 90's, um, but other than *My Girl* and *My Girl 2*, did she have a lot of other big...

Taylor: She did other things.

Raleigh: ... things she was in? I assume she did other things, but I didn't know—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] I know she was in other things.

Raleigh: —if that was, like, her moment was *My Girl*.

Sydnee: Clumsky, not Chlumsky.

Raleigh: Gosh, Sydnee.

Sydnee: I'm saying her name wrong. I don't— I don't know! Uh, I don't know what else, um... I guess she was in *Uncle Buck*.

Raleigh: Really?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Huh.

Sydnee: Uh... I don't— I don't recognize a lot of these movies.

Raleigh: That's wild, because I definitely think— and, I mean, obviously Macaulay Culkin did fine [laughs quietly] after this movie. But I think between the two of them, I mean, it's definitely her character and her acting that makes the...

Sydnee: She's fantastic.

Raleigh: ... makes the movie. Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. She's super compelling to watch. Um... even as a little kid, which is— I mean, which makes sense when you see her on *Veep*. She's amazing.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, yeah. I don't know. That was all I knew her from, and then she sort of... I don't know. I didn't see her other movies. But anyway, I'm sorry that I made you both watch *My Girl*.

Raleigh: It's okay.

Taylor: [laughs quietly] No, I mean, this is— it's a movie that you cared about. That's... that's good enough reason to watch it. And, I mean, it is charming. There's a lot of— there's a lot of cute scenes in it. There's a lot of good acting. I like the actors that are in it. It's just, you know, a horrible bee death.

Raleigh: [snorts]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] If you could just take that out. I'm hoping that people realize by now that you can't just throw kid deaths into movies haphazardly like that.

Raleigh: I know you're saying this because you watched *Hereditary* and it upset you so deeply.

Sydnee: 20 minutes in!

Raleigh: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Taylor: I mean...

Sydnee: And I turned it off.

Raleigh: I knew that's exactly what you were thinking about.

Sydnee: And I went downstairs sobbing hysterically and looked at Justin and said, "I— you won't— I watched this— you can't— I'm gonna— ahh!"

I was just falling apart! You can't just put that stuff in movies!

Taylor: Okay, well, I mean... we're not— we're not talking about *Hereditary*, but that— there's more service to the plot that that scene does.

Raleigh: Yes.

Taylor: It's not just a random death. I think that what we're talking about here in *My Girl* is a rare example of a fridging situation, which is commonly happens to supporting women in—

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: —media. Where, you know, a girl dies and then it drives the man on to be a better version of himself or to change. It's just— it's the same impetus, and it's bad no matter what the gender design is. [laughs] Like, just don't kill characters off to make somebody else a better person. Because you know what happens in real life? Not that! [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: No.

Raleigh: Not that, yeah.

Sydnee: [sighs heavily] Poor little Thomas J.

Taylor: Right?

Raleigh: Poor Thomas J. And then they left him alone!

[pause]

Sydnee: Oh. Yes. Then they left him alone.

Raleigh: That's what Sydnee's kids have called *Home Alone* for always is *They Left Him Alone*.

Taylor: [quietly] *They Left Him Alone*.

Sydnee: Yeah, *They Left Him Alone*.

Raleigh: Which is a good plot summary.

Sydnee: They're— they're really horrified by that. They're— like, every time we talk about they're just like, "I can't— I mean, they— they leave him there alone."

Raleigh: Never show them *My Girl*.

Sydnee: Like, they look at us like, "Why is this okay? Why is it funny?"

Raleigh: Never show them *My Girl*.

Sydnee: It's horrible! Anyway. Thank you both. Thank you for humoring me.

Raleigh: Well...

Taylor: I had the— I had to read the plot summary of *My Girl 2*, 'cause I was like, "Wait. I know she gets another boyf— does he— does the boyfriend in the second movie die too? Is that the theme of these movies?"

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's a Black Widow situation.

Taylor: [laughs] She meets a boy, he dies, and she grows. That's what happens! That's now what happens in the second one.

Raleigh: It doesn't. Okay.

Sydnee: Yes. Nobody dies.

Raleigh: I was making sure, 'cause I did not watch the second one and didn't know a second one existed until I came in here and sat down to record.

Sydnee: Are tar pits part of it?

Taylor: I— okay. I'm not just— I... see, this is funny, 'cause they must be. Because I have this memory. I'm like, "No, I think in the second one she gets a boyfriend and he dies in a tar pit!" [through laughter] But he doesn't! He doesn't!

Sydnee: But tar pits are part of it.

Raleigh: But are they part of it?

Taylor: They are part of it!

Sydnee: Tar pits are part of it. I—

Taylor: I think he almost falls in a tar pit and then she freaks out because she remembers that... she lost a friend to bees? I don't know. I— I'm—

Sydnee: [wheezy laughter]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Because she realizes she's in *My Girl 2* and that she lost a boy in *My Girl 1* and... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: It's not just— not just that your boyfriends are gonna die, but they're gonna die in the most bizarre ways. Tar pit! Drown in a tar pit.

Sydnee: I swear to you, tar pits are part of it.

Taylor: No, I think— I— like, I thought I made that up until you said that and I'm like, "No, there is." I think there is a threat of death by tar pit in *My Girl 2*.

Raleigh: I typed in *My Girl 2* and the first thing that came up was *My Girl 2* tar pit scene.

Taylor: Okay.

Raleigh: So... uh... yeah. Yeah, it has to be that.

Sydnee: Yeah, because she's— she's in Los Angeles staying with her uncle.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: So there are tar pits there. Anyway. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: I think it's funny when—

Taylor: Wait, I like how that's how you explained why it made sense. "Oh yeah, she's in Los Angeles. Well known for its tar pits."

Sydnee: [laughs] That's the first thing you think of when you—[laughs] [through laughter] you think of LA!

Rileigh: I...

Taylor: [sighs]

Sydnee: Tar pits.

Taylor: Tar pits!

Rileigh: I just love that on the IMDB page if you look it says that the reason Macaulay Culkin's not in it is because he was too busy with his other projects at the time. It's like, well, no.

Sydnee: No.

Rileigh: No, IMDB. [laughs]

Taylor: Uh... [laughs]

Sydnee: Nah. No, no, no, no, no.

Rileigh: There is a very, very good reason why he was not in it. [laughs]

Sydnee: Although that would've been a wild twist if in *My Girl 2* he didn't actually die.

Rileigh: "I'm back!"

Sydnee: [laughs] And Dan Aykroyd is in jail for being, like, the worst undertaker ever, and... [laughs]

Rileigh: Oh man. Sydnee's rewritten version of *My Girl 2*.

Sydnee: I— okay.

Taylor: I don't want this conspiracy theory.

Sydnee: We have to go. I have to go write my fanfiction. Teylor, what's next?
[laughs]

Raleigh: [simultaneously] What's next?

Teylor: Uh, well, I, you know, uh— I thought, uh, we haven't done music in a few weeks, so I wanted to pick a band from my youth. Um, and there was just that announced When We Were Young festival that everybody's been talking about.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Teylor: So I don't— I don't know when a more appropriate week to talk about My Chemical Romance is gonna be.

Sydnee: Alright, perfect!

Teylor: So we're gonna— we're gonna do it.

Raleigh: Perfect.

Teylor: I'm gonna make y'all listen to so—[laughs] some My Chem.

Raleigh: I'm very excited.

Sydnee: Hey, listen. I made you guys watch *My Girl*, so—

Raleigh: Yeah. Nothing is as bad as that.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Teylor: Alright. We'll see. [laughs]

Sydnee: Alright. My Chemical Romance.

Raleigh: Alright.

Sydnee: Uh, well, thank you both. Thank you, listeners, and I'm sorry if as a result of this podcast you have watched *My Girl* again.

Rileigh: [wheezes]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, or for the first time. I'm— oof.

Rileigh: As if we didn't tell p— tell people to. [laughs]

Sydnee: I'm really sorry. [laughs] If you didn't know what was coming, um... I apologize for that. [laughs quietly] Thank you. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows there. You should, uh— you can tweet us if you want, @stillbuff. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

[theme music plays in the background]

Rileigh: 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: [singing] My girl, my girl. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: [singing] Talking about... bees.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: If you have a serious bee allergy. We are not making light of that.

Rileigh: No.

Sydnee: Oh no.

Rileigh: No.

Sydnee: No, that's true. Absolutely not. [laughs quietly]

[theme music ends]

[audience cheers]

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