

Still Buffering 355: Little Miss Sunshine

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[theme music plays]

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: The cats won't stop peeing on Cooper's bed.

Taylor: Oh, they're trying to establish dominance.

Raleigh: Does that say something about Cooper?

Sydnee: It's sometimes our bed but most consistently it's Cooper's. And it's never Charlie's. Never, never once have they peed on Charlie's.

Raleigh: Do they know they can't assert dominance over her? [laughs]

Taylor: I think they do not see Charlie as a threat.

[all laugh]

Sydnee: We were talking about, like, Cooper can seem hard on the outside but she actually is very sweet. She's squishy on the inside. And then Charlie came walking in the room and said "Now, Charlie is squishy through and through."

Taylor: [laughs] She's squishy.

Sydnee: She's squishy through and through. She seems sweet. She is sweet. She's sweet. [laughs]

Raleigh: The other night she Facetimed me to show me something in her room, and then walked the phone—it was on your phone, Syd, so I thought you were Facetiming me, which was very odd, and then it was Charlie. Um, and she

propped it up in her bathroom to talk to me more, and then just started brushing her teeth while I just sat there watching her. And then she just walked out of the room.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: And I was like "What the— Charlie? Hello?"

And she walked back in, like, two full minutes later and was like, "Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot you were there."

Like, what? You— you called me! [laughs]

Taylor: She's done that to me where she'll just, like— she'll start with a question or a conversation, and then just gets bored with me but doesn't hang up. Just, like, puts the phone down on a table and goes back to eating. And it's like, "What are you doing, kid?"

Raleigh: You're just staring at the ceiling.

Taylor: Yep.

Raleigh: Yep.

Sydnee: Yeah. We're working on our attention span.

Taylor: That's alright.

Sydnee: No, the mornings are rough because... they both— like, Charlie, every morning I wake her up, and before her eyes are even open I'm like, "Hey, honey. How'd you sleep?"

And every morning, "Fantastic."

Raleigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: And then she opens her eyes and springs out of bed in her little silky pajamas and is like, "I'm ready to start the day."

Like, and she goes to her mirror. She starts brushing her teeth and singing into the mirror. And it was— now, I will say, it was Taylor Swift consistently for a while.

Rileigh: Oh no, has something changed?

Sydnee: Now it's Hamilton all the time.

Rileigh: Oh man.

Sydnee: All— and not just Hamilton. She specifically is trying to find all the songs that were cut out of Hamilton. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: The original Hamilton.

Sydnee: So we listen to Congratulations over and over and over again. [laughs]

Rileigh: That's a great song. All kids go through that phase at some point in their life where they evolve from Taylor Swift into Hamilton. At some point she'll come back around. I did. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: So she's in there just, like, wailing along with Hamilton. And then Cooper, it takes me, like, a full 20 minutes to drag her out of bed 'cause she's furious that she's awake. She's furious that it's morning. She's furious that, like, once again she has to be— like, someone is stopping her from sleeping.

Rileigh: There is a day once again.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And I finally get her to go, like, get out of bed and brush her teeth, and she's standing there at the mirror, and every morning now it's the same thing. "Alexa. Play Weird Al Yankovich."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Every morning!

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: And we have blaring in one bedroom Weird Al, and blaring in the other bedroom Hamilton all morning. [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, I don't think— what did you— these are such your and Justin's children, just in that sentence right there. Like, what did you expect? [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] And she made— she prefers any of his polka stuff. So it's primarily polka Weird Al that is blasting from her bedroom. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: That sounds accurate.

Raleigh: I just like imagining her angry while she's listening to it.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Angry that she's awake, frown on her face, listening to Weird Al.

Sydnee: Oh, it takes her a while. Like, it does cheer her up, but it takes a bit, so she is. Like, at first she's just standing there in front of the mirror furiously brushing her teeth while polka music from Weird Al plays. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: She's gonna love caffeine when she gets to discover that. It's gonna change her life. I was that way.

Taylor: Aren't you glad you got interesting ones, Syd?

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Isn't it great that your kids are just little weirdos? Could you imagine if they were just, like... boring? [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I know. I really do. I appreciate that. I never know what they're gonna do or say. I never know— like, the reports from their teachers are always positive, but they're not just like... "They did well today."

Like, it's always something. They did something strange. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: It's always odd. But, like, not bad. They don't get in trouble. I don't think they are disruptive, but they do odd things. No, I love that.

Taylor: Yeah. It feels like you got lucky there. It'd be such a— "Aww, man. I got a dud. It just— it follows the rules. It doesn't say anything funny. It watches cartoons. Bummer."

Sydnee: [laughs] No, they— I do, I feel incredibly lucky. They are very interesting and I value that highly. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: That's an important—

Taylor: You got Kid TV 24/7.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I do. [laughs] Um, no. And Cooper kind of now has this ongoing battle with the cats. Because it was just Amelia who peed on her bed, and then we caught Olive on the— 'cause she still has a Nest camera, which we probably can get rid of now. That's leftover from baby days. We caught— like, it was Olive once. But it was, like, Amelia had peed on it right before. And then Olive came and peed in the same spot.

Taylor: Well... I mean, you've got—

Sydnee: [crosstalk]

Taylor: Go ahead.

Sydnee: Oh, I was gonna say I assume that's the dominant thing.

Taylor: That's what I was gonna say is actually, like, all jokes aside, uh, for whatever reason the cat peed for the first time, now it could just be the other cat trying to get its smell in the spot that smells like the other cat. And, uh, and then the other cat's gonna keep peeing there because it just smells like its pee. Like, cats will pee where they've peed before. Once they get in their mind "This is a pee spot," it's really hard. You've literally got to, like, throw out the mattress and get anything that smells like it out of there. 'Cause if they can pick up on any of

that scent they'll just... cat brain. Like, "Oh, I peed here once. I can pee here again, right?" And they keep doing it.

Rileigh: I think you've gotta tell Cooper that she's just gotta accept she lives in a pee spot.

Taylor: [laughs] Or that.

Rileigh: It's a naturally occurring pee spot that she happens to live in.

Taylor: [laughs] It's like a Hellmouth in Buffy. That's a pee spot. [laughs]

Sydnee: They underestimate Cooper, though, 'cause Cooper will go pee in their spot. Like, that's the kind of kid Cooper is. Cooper wouldn't, like, ever hurt the cats or anything, but she'd be like, "Okay, fine. If this is how you are I'm gonna go pee on your cat bed."

Rileigh: Did... did she?

[pause]

Sydnee: I mean, she didn't, as far as I know, but...

Taylor: [laughs] You weren't sure!

Sydnee: Well, I can— I mean, I can see her doing that.

Rileigh: Yeah. See, this is why I have guinea pigs. To assert dominance over each other they shake their butts.

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: There's no peeing anywhere. They just shake their butts at each other. It's very fun.

Sydnee: Yeah, but there's those little pellets everywhere of poop.

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: And they're dry and they don't stink. You just scoop 'em up. It's great.

Sydnee: I— I— I am not in any way arguing that's worse, 'cause smelly poop of course is worse. But there is something disturbing about it. It is weird.

Rileigh: I agree. No, I agree. It's not, um... it does make me question what's really going on in there, but yeah.

Sydnee: Dad said the other day— he was talking about— Mom wants a dog and he was talking about how we were not— they were not getting a dog. He's never clear— and he said "I will never clean up an animal's poop. Never."

And I said, "That is not true. I saw you pick up guinea pig poop."

Rileigh: [laughs] I have trained Dad to like one animal.

Taylor: You know, I feel like— but they've got that nice big yard. I don't know. I think they could have a dog.

Sydnee: Mom really wants a dog.

Taylor: Mom should have a dog.

Sydnee: We could win Mothers Day and lose Fathers Day forever.

Rileigh: I was gonna say, that'd be an eternal loss of Fathers Day.

Sydnee: In the same moment.

Taylor: But the thing is, even when they had a— a cat for a while, like... Dad never wants the pet, but Dad always likes the pet. That always happens.

Rileigh: [simultaneously] And the pet always likes Dad.

Taylor: Yeah, the pet always likes Dad. So you get the dog, Dad'll be angry about it first, and then Dad will love the dog. It will happen.

Rileigh: But he'll begrudgingly love it. He'll act like he doesn't, but he will.

Sydnee: I mean, part of why, though— I figured this out. Part of why the cats like him so much is 'cause cats like being ignored.

Taylor: [laughs quietly] Have you met my cat?

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Well—

Taylor: That's not always the case. [laughs]

Sydnee: I was reading about this. That, like, if you keep trying to pet a cat they will, like, reject you. But if you just sit there quietly they will come to you. 'Cause it's like, "Why are you not interested in me?" You have to play hard to get with cats.

Raleigh: You gotta be aloof.

Taylor: Yeah, I don't know about that. Jack comes up to anybody that enters my apartment like "Hello, hi, I'm here. You want to see me. I'm sure you're here to see me. Hello, hi. Hi."

[all laugh]

Sydnee: Well, Olive does that too, honestly.

Raleigh: That's what Sydnee has Charlie and Cooper for. That's what they do.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] They do.

Taylor: That's true.

Raleigh: They rush the door like "What do you have for me? Are you here for me? Hello! You're here for me."

Sydnee: "Hi! I have slime. Do you wanna see it? Here it is. I'll make some for you."

Raleigh: [simultaneously] "I'll put it right in your hands."

Sydnee: "Here. Touch it. Do you like that?"

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Is it so satisfying? [laughs]"

Rileigh: It's gonna be too sticky! You're gonna get it stuck on your hands, but that's how we like it. Um, speaking of... your... children...

Sydnee: Oh yeah.

Rileigh: Um... there's... other... I don't know. I don't know where I was going with that.

Taylor: We're talking about Little Miss Sunshine, which has a little kid that kind of reminds me of Charlie in it.

Rileigh: So much of Charlie. Oh my gosh. I guess I hadn't watched it since she's been alive, but oh my gosh.

Sydnee: It is a lot like Charlie.

Taylor: So, uh... um... if you haven't watched Little Miss Sunshine... I guess I feel like just because of some of the context in this movie we should say up front, like, a trigger warning, yeah?

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: There's some heavy stuff. There's some death. Just, you know, if anything, if you're not in the mood for a bumner there might be some bummers in this episode. [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, they talk about death, but there's also talk about suicidality and, you know, suicide attempts. Yeah, I think that's important to get out there.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: There's your fair warning.

Sydnee: Back in 2006 they didn't tell us that stuff ahead of time.

Taylor: No, no.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: And it's— I mean, I guess— it's funny. Wikipedia calls it a tragicomedy, which I don't think is a term if heard before. [wheezes] But I guess that's accurately describes it. That is it.

Sydnee: I guess dark comedy is probably what we were more commonly... right?

Taylor: Well, but I guess— I feel like dark comedy and tragicomedy carry very different intent.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Dark comedy's like "We're gonna make edgy jokes and, like, dark humor." Tragicomedy is like, "Oh, there are elements of this movie that are just..."

Raleigh: Just sad.

Taylor: [through laughter] "Tragi— tragic. Just said. Just heavy. But then it's funny in some places!" Yeah, the plot in short is that a family is on a road trip for a little girl to be in a beauty pageant, the little girl in the family, but it's a lot more than just that. [laughs]

Raleigh: So much happens on this road trip.

Sydnee: Well, and then so much is going on individually with each character that is playing out throughout the course of the... you know, through the road trip.

Raleigh: Yeah. 'Cause you've got Mom and Dad and Grandpa, who is Dad's dad, right?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Yes.

Rileigh: And then the mom's brother, Steve Carrell, who is joining them. And then the two kids, the older brother who's a teenager, and then the little girl who's seven, I think is what they say.

Sydnee: And my recollection is— Teylor, you can correct me if I'm wrong— is that this was— when this came out, I feel like part of the big deal was seeing Steve Carrell in a role like that, because he had been the funny guy right up until that.

Teylor: This was 2006, so yeah, I feel like that was a big... which I don't know why that specific, like, idea always gets me. Like when the known comedian plays a serious role. Those are always my favorite movies. Like, you know, Robin Williams, Jim Carrey, Steve Carrell, they've all done that where they've made the turn to a serious film, and they're so good!

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Rileigh: Well, I'm curious, 'cause I just looked, 'cause I hadn't really thought about it. This was 2006, and the first episode of the American Office came out in March of 2005. But they probably filmed this movie around the same time as that would've just been airing, right? So he had already done it, but then America had just seen him for a full year be Michael Scott. And then this comes out.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, and he had been on—

Rileigh: That's a shift.

Sydnee: —uh, what, The Daily Show before that, right?

Teylor: Yeah. Yeah, that was for, like, six years before that.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, that was my, like— 'cause that's how old I am. Like, Steve Carrell for me was like, "Oh yeah, from The Daily Show. Like, he's so funny. He's hilarious."

Rileigh: See, The Office is my reference point for him.

Sydnee: Yes. Well, and then, I mean, obviously The Office was bigger than his part on The Daily Show. But, like, that was my initial impression. And he—

Taylor: Well, and he—

Sydnee: Oh, go ahead.

Taylor: Oh, I was gonna say Anchorman came out in 2004.

Raleigh: Oh, that's right, he was in those.

Sydnee: Oh, Anchorman, yes.

Taylor: Yeah. 40 Year Old Virgin was 2005.

Raleigh: Oh!

Taylor: So he definitely had a slew of, like, comedic roles before this.

Raleigh: You're right. I forgot he was in that.

Sydnee: Oh, 40 Year Old Virgin was that early. Gosh.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, well, but you know what's kind of nice about it— and as someone who I guess we work in the comedy space... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Is this comedy? Uh... is this tragicomedy? [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I guess— I guess that's what—

Raleigh: Tragicomedy.

Taylor: [through laughter] I think we found our genre.

Sydnee: I guess that's sort of where we are.

Taylor: Right?

Sydnee: I think it's nice—

Taylor: Sometimes it's funny. Sometimes it's really sad. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, yeah. Um, but it's a good reminder that, like, even though we sort of value, like, drama more than comedy generally; like, we think that there is something more elite about drama, uh, to be a good comedic actor is very difficult.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: And it's a good reminder that, like, the same thing that we take for granted, like, oh, Steve Carrell is so funny, as if that's an easy thing. Right? Like, "Well, anybody can be fu—" no, no, no. We know not anybody can be funny, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Have we—[laughs quietly] have you seen conservatives try to be funny?

Taylor: Yeah...

Raleigh: It's just inc— they're— it's incap— like, they're incapable of it.

Sydnee: [laughs] Have you seen when they try to do, like, a right wing Daily Show, how that plays out? [laughs quietly] So not anybody can be funny. And it's a good reminder that, like, those same talents and skills are what make them also good dramatic actors. But it shouldn't surprise is. Although it always does. It always surprises me when I see them and I'm like, "Oh my gosh. He's so good! It makes me so sad!" [laughs]

Raleigh: I will say, though, in this movie, because it is part comedy, there are moments of his character that did make me laugh, that are funny. I mean, obviously not in the same funny way that, like, The Office is funny. But, I mean, even just, like, his run— 'cause obviously they have to run every time they hop in the van— his run that he does to hop in the van I swear is in, like, multiple episodes of The Office that I've seen, and that's just how he runs, and it's just an inherently funny way to run and I can't describe why. But obviously them having to run to jump in the van is funny every time, because that's... ridiculous. But, um... yeah.

Sydnee: Well, it's a nice reminder— and I think that this is one of the— I mean, at least what I took away, right? Everybody interacts with a piece of art differently, but one of the themes that I take away from it is that, like, we— kind of there's this essential absurdity in the human condition. We take things so seriously, and when we put them, especially in a film, we can show someone's tragedy, whatever their arc is that is tragic. Like, it can seem like the biggest, most important, gigantic thing in the world, but then when you sort of zoom out, like, it's all kind of— we're just these animals, and it's all kind of weird, and ridiculous, and strange, and silly, and goofy, and absurd at times. And I appreciate that, 'cause that is something I connect with to, like, put life in perspective for me. Like, sometimes it's just ridiculous, and it's okay to say, like, "I am so overwhelmingly sad right now the I'm going to laugh, because it's all so— it's so ridiculous and random that we arrived here, and that we're here, and that we get to do this." And I don't know, there's something positive in there, in all of that.

Taylor: Well, and there's a framing on this movie of, like, winning and losing. I mean, obviously it's set around this beauty pageant, but also the father— Richard? Is that his name?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: He is, like, a motivational speaker. He's got one of those, like, systems that he's trying to sell, like, his ten points to success and, like, how to be a winner in life. And that's such, like... I think that that winning and losing mindset is a very common, like, mindset, and it really robs the joy out of life. When everything— you've gotta achieve something in life. That's the point of life, right? You have to win at life! You've got—

It's like, hey. Nobody wins. That's kind of the whole thing. Not to be... not to be dark, but nobody gets out alive, you know. And that's all you really can do is enjoy the ride, because, you know, no win will really give you immortality.
[laughs]

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Which I think is probably why at the end of it— spoilers, I guess. This movie came out, you know, almost 20 years ago, so. Um, but that's why you don't see the end of the pageant. You don't see who wins. She just— I mean, you know she doesn't, but you don't see how it turns out.

Sydnee: You assume.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] Is banned from all beauty pageants in the state of California.

Raleigh: One thing I noticed, though, was— and I don't— in 2006 I was somewhat aware of the world, but obviously not adultly aware of the world.

Taylor: [quietly] Adultly.

Raleigh: Steve Carrell's character, whose name I'm forgetting— Frank?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yes.

Raleigh: Um, he is gay.

Taylor: Yes.

Raleigh: And it is just something they mention offhandedly, because he's talking about, you know, "I... " trigger warning again. He's there with them because he had attempted suicide, so he's living with his sister. And he's talking about what made him sad, 'cause Olive keeps asking, you know, "Why did you want to do that?" She's trying to figure out what that means.

And he mentions being in love with one of his grad students, and says "him." And Olive has a moment of like, "Oh, it was a boy? Okay, anyways, tell me more."

And that's really it. Like, there's no other weird stereotypical early-2000's jokes about him being gay. Um, I don't know. I was surprised by that, that that's just, like, a part of his character that they talk about maybe once, and then that's just... they move on.

Taylor: Well, it's sweet, 'cause she says "Well, that's silly." And he says "It was silly." [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] I think it's interesting that— I noticed this when he runs into his ex there in the convenience store, his ex had a popped collar. And I found myself thinking, like, I feel like that was such a fratty look back then. Surely a fashionable young gay man would not have been rocking such a fratty look. [laughs quietly] I found myself perseverating on that for a while. "Why is his collar popped? Is he a classic 80's bad boy?"

Rileigh: That's what I was thinking. 'Cause then he hops in, like, the convertible old-style car, right? With the other guy that he was with.

Taylor: Yeah. Maybe they were just using film language to communicate, "This guy's a tool."

Rileigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, maybe that was what that was, yeah. I do not associate that with someone being gay. I associate that with, like... I don't know. Like, "No, I don't want to go to your party. No, I will not accept that red solo cup from you. No way, no way."

[all laugh]

Taylor: I did notice that same thing. That the kind of— it's there, and it's clear that it's not like— you know, there's no glowing moment of acceptance where the whole family goes "And we think that's great that you're gay." Like, no.

But it is treated with the— honestly I felt the same thing about the element of his, you know, his attempted suicide. Where there's— I found it, I don't know, refreshing that it was just, like... it wasn't given this high drama, like, "Oh, no. Like, we've gotta revel in the sadness of this." But it was an element in the movie that was just part of his character. It also wasn't all of his character, it was just part of it. And that felt very... for the time, I feel like that's— even now I feel like we have a hard time with that. Like... if a character has experienced that, that's their entire story. Well, it's not. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, and we also, I think they— in the conversation they have at the table, the same one where they talk about Frank being gay, they talk about Olive is trying to find out, why did he do this? Like, trying to understand it. And with Richard— who, like, I think we're supposed to understand, the worldview, the

outlook on life that, whether or not he really believes it, he's trying to sell, he's trying to market, he's trying to package for people, and he is try— I think he's trying to make himself believe, um, that— so that worldview I think we're supposed to accept is not a healthy one, not a positive one, not one that is productive. He's the one who keeps trying to limit the conversation. "No, we don't talk about this. We can't talk about this. We can't— like, these are— this was bad. We never address it. Everybody be quiet."

And I think that it's— the way that they portray it is, like, the other people around the table are trying to say, "Let's incorporate this into, like, this is part of life, these feelings, this—" you know? Like, they're all— they don't have it figured out, but they're trying to incorporate all these things into what it means to be human. And I think that contrast shows you how the movie's treating it, you know? That's like a, "This is how we're gonna handle this. We're not going to be like Richard, who's saying this is— no. No, no, no, no. Never— this is bad, scary, never mention it." You know?

Raleigh: Well, and I will say, before I— before Charlie was older and she became, like, a whole person, I would have thought that the way Olive is just, like, okay with this conversation but just wants to know why— like, she doesn't— it doesn't freak her out and it doesn't make her sad. She just, like, is curious.

I would've thought that was so unrealistic, and would've thought like, "Oh, a kid wouldn't just ask."

But that's so— that's so realistic to what, like, an actual— I mean, Charlie would do that. It doesn't— kids want to have actual conversations. They just want to know why things happen. They are just, like, you know, "Oh no, that's sad. I'm gonna cry. I'm a seven-year-old girl."

Like, no, they want to know. You just have to explain it to them in a way that they understand. Um, which I think is very cool.

Sydnee: Yeah. They're having these big emotions, and we don't recognize that kids have those. Like, as a society we don't always accept that, like, kids have big, giant emotions just like we do, and they don't always have all the language to understand them, and then they certainly don't know all the ways that you learn to kind of deal with those, healthy or unhealthy, you know? Like, they don't have all of that yet. And so not talking to them about that is a way of making them feel like "I need to hide these things. I need to feel shame about these things."

And I think it— you know, it's nice to see a movie that sort of opens up that like, "No, we— kids have all this going on inside them, and they can be part of that."

And of course you think a— you're thoughtful about the way you present those things. You know, I mean, you have to be careful. But kids will ask anything.

I mean, it's very— I will tell you, as a parent—

Raleigh: Anything.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] It is very intimidating to know that, like, kids will ask the most... I don't even want to say— it's not inappropriate. It's just un... nuanced, unsocialized, you know what I mean?

Raleigh: Unfiltered.

Sydnee: Yes. Questions. And you have a real opportunity when they're young to answer them in ways that will keep them open and thoughtful and all them to continue to grow and express those things, and that is such a... oof. It's a heavy charge.

Raleigh: Yeah. I also just love Abigail Breslin. She just does such a good job, because she makes such a good— that character just is... both accurate to how a child can sometimes be, like, a lot, and all the adults in the room— like when she's running around at the beginning saying like, "I won! I won! I won!"

And all the adults in the room are, like, not saying that they're annoyed by it or that, like, it's frustrating that this is still happening, but you can tell just from the look of their faces, like, "Oh God. Okay."

Like... she is both that, but also so endearing, and so herself. It's very refreshing.

Taylor: I saw— I don't— TikTok fed me a clip from the TV show *Scream Queens* the other day. I was like, "Oh my gosh! That's her!"

Like, and I knew that, but I forgot that she— she grew up, [through laughter] because this was 2006.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Very talented young actress.

Raleigh: She's kept doing stuff, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah, she's been in a lot of things.

Sydnee: Yeah. She's very good, she's very funny. She does remind me of Charlie a lot.

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: Especially her outfits.

Taylor: Oh yeah.

Sydnee: She's very authentically herself, and I love that.

Taylor: Well, and I feel like there's this element in the movie where it's like, she's such, like, a bright, like, uninhibited light, and you have all of these adults around her that have kind of been beaten into submission by life. And, like, for as harsh as some of these characters are to each other, I think there's this desire to, like, "But we've gotta keep her— like, what happened to us can't happen to her," which is a feeling that I think we can all relate to.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: It is. When they— oh my gosh. When they realize we're gonna have to drive to this pageant, and we're all gonna have to get in this bus together and drive, when they work all that out. And thinking, like, "Oh, man. I understand that feeling of like, "[sighs] This is— no, kid. Really? This is what you— like, this is the thing you want. This. And this is how much we're gonna have to do to make it happen."

But at the same time, I also will do anything if it will bring you this much joy and keep you feeling good about existence. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I will do anything.

Rileigh: Well, and there's no question. Like, they don't ever say "Let's just not do it." Like, the parents argue over how they're gonna get there and what money they can spend on getting there and being there and everything, but there's never a "Well, let's just not do it" moment. Like, they know they're going to. And even by the end of it, when you get to the pageant you've got Steve Carrell and her brother, whose name I also can't remember— Dwayne?

Sydnee: Dwayne.

Rileigh: Like, they both the entire time have been very disinterested, don't wanna be there, you know, vibes that they don't necessarily fit with the rest of the family. But by the end of it, they're both— you know, Steve Carrell's the first one to rush in and make sure she can register. Like, sprinting into the pageant to make sure she gets there in time.

Taylor: [through laughter] That scene where he's running.

Rileigh: I know. [laughs] But I mean, they both are— by the end of it, they are all— they are for her. Um, and I think you see that in the grandpa from the beginning. Like, he has a lot going on and he is not, like, the brightest, sunniest person. But he does everything to, like, keep her... how she is, and as happy as she is, and keep her, you know, the person that she is. Which I had forgotten that— again, spoiler alert— he dies.

Taylor: Yeah!

Rileigh: I guess it's been a very long time since I've seen this movie. But when that happened I was like, "No, that can't be right. We're, like, an hour in! He can't be dead. We haven't gotten there yet!" [laughs]

Taylor: 'Cause he—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] I think—

Taylor: Oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: Oh, go ahead.

Taylor: Well, I was saying, 'cause his backstory is he was kicked out of his, what, his nursing home, right? For snorting heroin? [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Yeah, snorting heroin. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: For snorting heroin.

Taylor: Yeah. And then, I mean, I guess he's gotta— he's an addict. He's got an active drug problem, which is what takes his life.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah, that does hit harder now, I think, than, I don't know. I feel like there was just a time where we used to play around with stuff so much in movies and TV that feels heavier now, and maybe that's me. Maybe that's 'cause I'm old. Um, that hit harder. But I also think it's part of, like— the movie, as much as they talk about things are very real and true and raw and shared human experiences, there is a surreal element to just the whole thing. Like, the whole— like, how would this collection of things ever come together in this moment for this journey with these people who have all gone through these things? Like, you know? Like, the brother— Dwayne finding out that he's not gonna be a fighter pilot on this trip. That's the moment that he finds out. You know what I mean? Like...

Raleigh: As soon as Frank says "Oh, that means you're colorblind. That means you can't fly a jet if you're colorblind."

I was like, "Why would— this is not the time or place. Why would you tell him this right now? Why is this the moment?" [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah. I think they— some of 'em are, like, so exaggerated kind of, um, like, things that happen, you know.

Taylor: I think there's sort of an— I don't know. Like, an allegory. Like, a bit of a con— con— condensing the idea of, like, literally the journey we all take in life to, like, realize what actually matters. And, like, everybody's on that same journey in this, you know— they're both physically on a trip, but it's also representing that journey that we all go on. So it's not really about "Oh no, I'm colorblind. I can't be a fighter pilot." You know. Or "Oh no, I'm not the world's number one scholar

anymore," or whatever. It's more about, like— and again, it comes back to that winning and losing thing. 'Cause the Dad character is kind of a big jerk through a lot of the movie. And you see that he's trying. Like, he believes in his own success and, you know, 'Oh, I gotta— I'm gonna make this happen."

And I think when his father passes away, there's a shift in his character where he understands what losing really is. It's inevitable, but it's not what he quantifies as losing. That's just life.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah. And I think that that's a really good way to put it, I think, that they're all on this sort of trip, and the only one who stays consistent the entire time is Olive.

'Cause she— like, when you're a kid you know what matters. You don't worry about all these other external things, what people think, you know, what people perceive you as. You just, like, know that you love your family and you know what makes you happy, and you're gonna be yourself and do what you want to do.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, that's— it's funny, 'cause they are on a family road trip. I mean, obviously bad stuff happens. But, like, she is the only one who would seem to understand, like, there could be an inherent joy in that, you know?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm. She gets left behind, and she doesn't— she doesn't get upset. She just stands there and waits for them to come back for her.

Taylor: That scene made me so sad.

Raleigh: I know! [laughs]

Taylor: All I could think of was Charlie. [laughs]

Raleigh: Standing there outside the gas station just waiting.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. That would be Charlie. And not mad at anyone.

Raleigh: Yeah. Go ahead.

Taylor: I was gonna say, even, like, the image of the— the van that they're in, they have to run, they have to push to get it to start. And, like, that as kind of a metaphor of, like, you know, that... none of us can get going alone. We need other people. Like, I think that's very clear [laughs] in the film.

Sydney: Yeah. Yes. [laughs]

Raleigh: I also love that it just continues falling apart the more they go on. Like, the door falls off when they get there, and the horn gets stuck, and it's honking the entire time they're driving. Like...

[all laugh]

Raleigh: I don't know how it's still on the road. I was gonna say, I was surprised— and I shouldn't be, because this was 2006, which I guess is probably about the time that shows like *Toddlers and Tiaras*— you know, that probably is not too far from when that started airing. Um, that that's how they portrayed the pageant. Because in my mind, I was like, "Oh. She... doesn't seem like those girls from *Toddlers and Tiaras*."

This girl doesn't. So this must be, like, some other, like, maybe older sense of pageant where they're not all, like, the flippers and the spray tans and, I don't know, maybe it's less of that kind of thing.

Um, but no, they get there and it is absolutely that. It looks like girls straight out of *Toddlers and Tiaras*. Like, it's 1000% accurate. Um, and she— which I think is interesting that they don't like her dance she does, and they tell her she needs to get off the stage, because it's the one her grandpa choreographed and she, like, you know, starts slowly taking off her outer layer of clothes to Superfreak.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Um, none of it is more, like, inappropriate for a child than all the rest of the things that the rest of those girls are doing. Like, the costumes they're wearing and, like, the dances they're doing and everything. Like, none of it that Olive is doing is more... inappropriate, I guess, or upsetting, but it's just not what they're used to, so they just, you know, they want her off the stage. They don't want Superfreak on their stage anymore. [laughs quietly]

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: No, that's true, and I think that's— yeah, I agree that that's for a reason. Like, you see— I mean, to me it's more obscene, these young girls that are, you know, I mean, they're wearing these skimpy outfits and they've got these full faces of makeup on, and all this hair. And, like, you know, it's— that feels more inappropriate than a girl who has learned some... funky dance moves from her grandfather, you know. And she's so innocent in it. Like, she doesn't think there's anything wrong with it. Like, it's fine.

Raleigh: No.

Sydnee: Yeah, it is— I think that's an intentional choice, 'cause it really is interesting that— I perceive a lot of that sort of, like... I mean, this— you know, coming from my personal standpoint having two daughters, I would not want to get them involved in the sort of beauty pageant where they would be expected to have fake teeth and fake hair and a ton of makeup, and made intentionally to look older than they are. I feel like that's very— that's problematic from my standpoint, is trying to make your— you know, I have an eight-year-old and a five-year-old. I don't need them to look like they're 20. Like, why would I do that? And there's something upsetting to me about that.

And I think that they are very intentionally juxtaposing, like, "But we do this, but it's all agreed upon. We're all on the same page with this and we're all fine with it, and whatever anybody thinks about it, we've all decided this is okay." But yet here she is. She's literally doing a striptease.

Raleigh: [laughs] Which at least— she is clothed. Like, she does have the costume under it.

Sydnee: And there is nothing adult about it. Even though it is. I mean, I know when I say that it sounds like— how could it be a striptease that's not adult? It isn't, though! It's like she's a little kid. She's very clearly a child. There is nothing about it that seems like that this child understands any messaging or is intentionally trying to send any sort of messaging. Unlike the way that a lot of those beauty pageants look, which is like, why does that five-year-old look like she's 18? Like, why— why is this happening?

So I don't know. But she gets kicked out, and of course the other kids don't. I do think that's intentional.

Taylor: Yeah.

Rleigh: Well, and I think you notice the dad is the only one out there watching at first, watching all these other girls go before Olive. 'Cause the mom's back there with her and the brother and Frank are out, not wanting to be a part of that. But he's the only one watching, and he's the one who was all big on winning. And I think as you watch him watch all these other girls he realizes, like, "I don't want my daughter to win if this is what she's winning in."

Like, not everything is worth being the best at. Not everything is worth having everyone vote you as the best or the winner. Some spaces you don't need to be, you know, the winner in. It's okay to not be the best everywhere, and this is one of those spaces.

'Cause you can see him, like, looking around, like, "Why is everyone cheering for all these girls? Like, what is— this is awful!" [laughs] And they all say the same thing. They all rush back and tell the mom, "Don't let her go out there and do her talent. She's gonna get made fun of. She's gonna get hurt. Don't let her do it."

Sydney: I mean, that's a— that's very relatable to me in the sense that, like, it... we've already sort of said this. Like, Charlie and Cooper, I am very proud of who they are. They're very confident and brave, and not afraid to be exactly themselves, you know? And that is such a great thing, but in school or a pageant, or depending on what you're doing, you know? In certain areas of society, as a kid that can be a hard road. It's a little easier sometimes to assimilate. Um... and I think as a parent I have had moments where I'm sending my child into the world thinking, like, "I don't want you to change because who you are is so great, but I also know there's a chance somebody's gonna look at that shirt that you made yourself that you've decided to wear today," or whatever, you know, "And somebody might make fun of you for it, and I can't stop it, and I can't blunt the hurt you might feel when that happens. But I also am never gonna tell you not to."

That's a hard line— I mean, I— that's a hard line to walk, you know? I understand that impulse. Like, "Let's just get her out of here. Let's just get her out of here. This is gonna be hard and we can't watch her go through that."

But they choose the better path, which is, let's just get in it with her.

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: Just so great. And I don't— I— I don't know if I believe that grown adults would yell at a seven-year-old girl "You suck." [laughs quietly] Like, they might not like it. They might not clap for it. But they start audibly heckling her. Not other kids. Other kids would do that. But, like, adults. Which is why everyone jumps up there with her. Which, I mean, I guess is a good way to get them up there, because there are adults telling her she sucks, so... they bring the adults up there with her to be with her.

Sydnee: I was gonna say I agree with you, and then I thought, "Well, sports." You see that in competitive sports.

Raleigh: That's true.

Sydnee: And isn't this the same? I mean, a pageant— like, the way that some of— not all pageants maybe inherently but, like, this kind of pageant.

Raleigh: That's a good point, yeah. That's very true.

Sydnee: It's the same, right?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Sports. [laughs]

Raleigh: Sports.

Sydnee: Well, for the people who participate in it, for those parents, like, isn't it— aren't they going at it with the same sort of... aggressiveness? [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Or whatever. I don't know.

Raleigh: Um, here's my one question, though. Can we get Steve Carrell some other clothes? 'Cause he has the one outfit that he wears the entire time, and we were seeing them for at least over three days, right? Like, the day they find out about the pageant, and the next day they leave, but then they stay in a hotel overnight, and then they drive there the next day.

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: [crosstalk]

Taylor: Oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: Well, it has to be intentional.

Raleigh: That's what I figured. Like, they want him to look like that the entire time and, you know, he has to keep wearing his bandages, so. And Olive asks about those too. But the whole time I was like, he looks like he's, like, at some... like, retreat, or spa.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, I mean, he's wearing all white. And you're right, he does wear his bandages the whole time. It's interesting, though, because I think a point that— I mean, I... [pause] having— the fact that his introduction is he just had a suicide attempt, I feel like keeping him in that— it sort of sets him off from everybody. It's like, this is what he would've missed. Everything that happened here, these moments with his family, he would've not been here for. And I feel like having him in all white with those bandages on, it almost is like a, like, a kind of a ghostly image. It's like his final outfit, the outfit he would've died in. I don't know.

Raleigh: Yeah, yeah.

Taylor: 'Cause I feel like that was something that I thought through the whole movie is like, that must be how his character is meant to view everything going on here, is this is everything that he would've missed had he been successful in his attempt.

Sydnee: I think that's a really smart read on it. I think that makes a lot of sense.

Raleigh: Yeah, I hadn't thought about it that way, but yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: That does make a lot of sense.

Sydnee: It's also— it also could just— I mean, like... this is pragmatic, but also representative of this place where he is in his life. It might be all he has at this moment, because he's staying at his sister's house. He may not have had an opportunity to get back to his place yet and get any other clothes. You know what I mean? And, like, he's kind of been stripped down to the bare essentials.

Rileigh: Right. Yeah. Well.

Sydnee: Well.

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: This movie made me cry, but I was glad we got to watch it. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: I really— I love this movie. It's... I think it's just— yeah. I mean, to me it's just such a meditation on what matters in life. And it's not— as you get caught in the winning and losing game. Again, we're all losers. We all lose. There was something that crossed my path, a little parable recently that kind of I think goes in line with this, and that's— do you the— the... the glass is already broken? Do you know what that references, the phrase?

Rileigh: Mm-mm.

Taylor: It's like an old Buddhist teaching where a student asks the master, like, "How can you handle— how can you have peace in a world of impermanence, knowing that everything ends?"

And the master holds up a glass that he happens to like and he says, "I like this glass. It holds my water well and it reflects the sunlight beautifully. But I know one day, maybe the wind, maybe my elbow, it'll fall over and break. And in that sense, the glass is already broken. So I will enjoy every moment I have with it."

I think, you know, that's kind of like... unfortunately, that's the truth of the world. But that's what makes it beautiful.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Just— the glass is already broken.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I mean, not me. I'm gonna live forever.

Taylor: No you're not. [laughs] You're absolutely not.

Sydnee: [laughs] I— I decided that, that I just won't.

Taylor: Okay. Well...

Sydnee: So, you know. [laughs]

Taylor: It's a world of impermanence, except for Sydnee. Sydnee is everlasting. The everlasting Sydnee.

Sydnee: [laughs] I just have a lot to do and I decided I won't have time for that, so. [laughs]

Raleigh: Sydnee eternal.

Taylor: Okay. [laughs] The eternal Sydnee of the spotless mind.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Has anyone ever just refused? I'm gonna try it. [laughs]

Taylor: No, you can't do that.

Sydnee: Well, Taylor, I really appreciate—

Raleigh: [simultaneously] Thank you, Tey. Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I appreciate that you had us watch this, 'cause it is. It did make me cry. It is sad, but I guess tragicomedy is the best thing, 'cause it made me laugh more than it made me cry, and I enjoyed it overall. Again. I mean, I'd seen it before, but it'd been a while.

Taylor: Thank you for watching this tragicomedy with me. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Uh, Raleigh, what's next?

Raleigh: Yes. So, I realized we had not talked about what a lot of people deem as the, like, quote, unquote "Friends of the modern era" that I personally love. We've not talked about New Girl. And I have seen it multiple times all the way through. It's my comfort show. So I thought we could talk about that.

Sydnee: Alright.

Taylor: Sounds good.

Sydnee: That sounds good.

Raleigh: Alright.

Sydnee: Tey, you'll get to enjoy it for the first time.

Taylor: Yeah, first time.

Sydnee: I'll rewatch some episodes.

Raleigh: I won't make you watch all of it. There's kind of a lot.

Taylor: Okay. Give me some special episodes you like to watch. I'll start from the beginning. But...

Raleigh: Get some True American in there, some Thanksgivings in there, it'll be good.

Taylor: Alright, cool.

Sydnee: Well, thank you both. Um, thank you listeners. If you haven't seen Little Miss Sunshine, as we kind of talked about, there's definitely some themes that are heavy, and you kind of need to be in a mental space where you're ready for those things, but if you are, it's a great movie. I don't remember where I found it.

Taylor: I think I had to pay to rent it, but.

Raleigh: Um, it's on HBO Max too.

Sydnee: Oh. Well, that's good to know.

Raleigh: That's where I found it last night.

Taylor: Wish I'd known that. [laughs]

Sydnee: I know! That's what I just thought! Like, I also rented like, I wish I would've known. [laughs]

Raleigh: Hey, you just gotta search it up.

Taylor: I'll—

Raleigh: You gotta search it on google and it shows you in the little circles where you can watch it.

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: Now, if you're a person of my age, you probably have it on DVD, 'cause I do.

Taylor: That's true, that's true. [laughs]

Raleigh: [simultaneously] You do?

Sydnee: I do have it on DVD. I just didn't— our DVD player— we only have one left and it's in one room and I would've had to switch rooms and go find it, and it wasn't that expensive to rent so I was like, [sighs] I am not gonna go hook up the DV— and Justin's out of town so, like, what am I gonna do? Hook up a DVD player on my own? No. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Well, toss on HBO Max for anyone that doesn't wanna go through that.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: There you go. And it has a great soundtrack.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: Yes, that's true. Um, you should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the other great shows there on our network that you would love. You can email

us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. You can tweet at us @stillbuff. And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Raleigh: I am still buffering...

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

[theme music plays]

[chord]

Sydnee: If I show that to Charlie and Cooper they will want to mimic the dance, and I don't know how...

Raleigh: They would.

Taylor: I don't think that this movie is quite... I mean... it seems like a lot for little hearts and minds. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, we'll wait till they're older.

Raleigh: [simultaneously] They're so small.

Sydnee: We'll hold off on this one.

Sydnee: Alright.

Alexis: Are you tired of being picked on for only wanting to talk about your cat at parties?

Ella: Do you feel as though your friends don't understand the depth of love you have for your guinea pig?

Alexis: When you look around a room of people, do you wonder if they know sloths only have to eat one leaf a month?

Ella: Have you ever dumped someone for saying they're just not an animal person?

Alexis: Us too.

Ella: She's Alexis B. Preston.

Alexis: She's Ella McLeod.

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Alexis: Tune in to Comfort Creatures every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[music and ad end]

[chord]

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