

Still Buffering 385: "Barbie" (2023)

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[theme music plays]

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Well, uh, we're finally melting, here. I don't know about you all.

Rileigh: Yep.

Taylor: Oh, that's good. You've been frozen for what, a solid week now?

Sydnee: I think a century. [laughs quietly] Infinity, perhaps. Um, we got to the point where the kids were just kind of mad. Like, they didn't know why they were mad because they're little kids. So they didn't know that it's like, that you've just been in the house too long. Like, this happens. You get to a point where you're just like, "I don't wanna be here anymore!"

Taylor: Cabin fever?

Sydnee: Yes. Yes. So we've returned back to our lives, as it were.

Rileigh: Yeah. They, uh—

Sydnee: Have you all thawed? Are you all all melted?

Rileigh: Well, you know, we only got about an inch and a half to start with, I think maybe two total by the end of last week. Um, but apparently that's more snow than DC has gotten in, like, years, so we all kind of shut down and freaked out.

Um, but yesterday it got up to 40 degrees, so we're all all melted now. They had left the snow kind of just everywhere, and there was ice everywhere. They don't salt things here, so. Now it's gone.

Sydnee: Well, is that a political statement?

Rileigh: I don't know! I'm fortunate enough that I live around a lot of hotels, so the hotels salt outside near their sidewalks. Um, so my walk to school is about half safe. And then once you get to school, obviously they've salted the sidewalks, like, within the school. But the streets here, they don't salt them. I don't know why. But I... they've just been covered in ice until all of it has melted naturally. It's crazy.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Just, uh—well, it's the natural approach. Just let nature... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: I guess so.

Sydnee: We'll just let Earth take care of it. I guess that's the way.

Taylor: Is it the—

Rileigh: [simultaneously] What about you all, Tey?

Taylor: I mean, we had... it wasn't too bad. I guess New York is a little bit more accustomed to the weather, so everything gets pre-salted before the weather happens, so it melts pretty fast. The roads, anyway.

I do think it's interesting that—I mean, I think this is true in a lot of places, but it's very much enforced in New York that the sidewalk is—whatever building is on that patch of sidewalk, it's their responsibility to take care of the sidewalk. So you get the fun, um, opportunity to, if you have a stretch of snow or ice on the sidewalk, glare at whatever business is located on it, 'cause they have not done their civic duty and protected you.

So, you know. And it'll be—like, you'll have, like, a few, like, feet that are good. And then, like, eight feet or 15 feet that are gross, because this one restaurant didn't salt or shovel.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's good to look for rage opportunities throughout your day.
[laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. You need places to release it.

Raleigh: I had a similar experience, except I was walking through, like, a neighborhood, and there was just this very clear, delineated patch that was all melted and scooped and clear, and then everything else was horrible. Um, and I was sitting there thinking, like, this is... this—how did this happen so fast?

It was after, like, the first day of snowfall. Everything was clear in front of this one little row house. And then I looked, and there's a big, uh, black, like, SUV car sitting out front with two men in it. And that's how you know where someone important lives in DC, apparently, is when it snows if everything gets melted off and you've got a big black fancy car sitting out front.

Sydnee: Hmm. [crosstalk] all gone.

Raleigh: There's some politician living there.

Sydnee: See, I feel like—and, I mean, you know, you all lived here, so you would—you would probably weigh in on this. I feel like that West Virginia has tricked us into thinking, like, it's a mark of how tough and resourceful and, like, self-sufficient you can be.

If it's like, "Heh, nobody comes and salts my road. Nobody plows my road. I had to get out on my own. Do you know what I crawled out of? We haven't had electricity for three days! It's okay, I can get by!"

And we're all like, "Yeah, that's right. That's a great attitude to have."

And it's a good trick, because our failing infrastructure has become, like, a point of pride for all of us.

[all laugh]

Sydnee: And, like, the government did a good job, because I feel that sometimes. Like, "It's okay. They didn't plow my hill. I don't need you to!"

And it's like, well, no. I actually do, and I pay tax dollars for that, and what are you guys doing if you're not doing this?! [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah, I can remember that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. That's the—

Raleigh: Is Justin not getting out there in his new truck and plowing the...

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Plowing the hill?

Sydnee: Uh, no joke, he was very discouraged by—it's really expensive to buy a plow to put on the front of your truck is what we learned. He totally was researching that. Like, "Forget this, I'm just buying a plow. I'm gonna attach it to the front of my truck, and I'm gonna plow the hill myself."

And then we started looking up plows and I was like, "Holy crap!"

I don't know why I didn't think it would be. It just feels like it's a big piece of curved metal. Like, how expensive [through laughter] could they be?

Raleigh: I mean, it's a piece of professional equipment.

Taylor: Is there not, like, a... I don't know. I guess you don't need [laughs] a plow license. But it feels like something that not everyone should be able to purchase and just put on their car without some sort of test? A plow exam? You shouldn't just be able to do that. That feels dangerous.

Sydnee: I guarantee—no, I agree with you 100%. I guarantee it's state by state, and I guarantee in West Virginia they're like, "Whatever! You can get your own plow!" [laughs]

Taylor: You wanna—you wanna have a plow, have a plow. Freedom!

Sydnee: God and the Bible and America and Ronald Reagan and Jesus said I could have a snow plow. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Country Roads.

Sydnee: By God.

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Somebody did. No. I, uh—if they were not so expensive, we would have a snow plow on the front of Justin's truck, but I don't know. Maybe that'll be his big—his birthday, Father's Day, Christmas present for the entire year is I will buy him a plow to put on the front of his truck. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, but then you're the guy with the plow. You're gonna be the first person everyone calls whenever they need a plow.

Sydnee: Then you're gonna be Mister Plow.

Taylor: Mister Plow! I don't know about—

Sydnee: From the Simpsons. Don't you remember?

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: "[singing] That name again is Mr. Plow."

He sings the song. He becomes Mr. Plow. He gets a plow truck and Homer becomes Mr. Plow, and... anyway. Never mind.

Taylor: Oh, wow.

Rileigh: You know, I love Justin. I don't think I can imagine him being the guy that lives at the top of the hill that everybody calls when they need the hill plowed.

Taylor: Yeah, he doesn't have that, that...

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Plow energy, I don't think.

Sydnee: Big plow energy.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: No.

Raleigh: I feel like it'd make him very nervous, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: That's a lot of responsibility.

Sydnee: It does feel like something you should have to know how to do, because when you push the snow off the road...

Raleigh: Where does it go?

Sydnee: It can't go forward indefinitely, right? [laughs] Like, it has to go to a side at some point. And where—how do you now where to—like, how—I mean, I guess you know not to block a driveway. Well, you know you shouldn't. But what if you don't know how to stop that from happening?

Raleigh: I just imagine him driving in a straight line down the hill, just pushing it all down to the bottom and blocking everyone in. [laughs]

Taylor: [simultaneously] Just building a wall.

Sydnee: A giant snow wall at the bottom of the hill that we can't get past.

Taylor: Well, at least now there's one big obstacle instead of, you know, several feet of obstacle.

Sydnee: Uh, no. I mean, I wouldn't have thought he was a truck guy, though, so.

Taylor: Yeah, this is the first I'm hearing of the truck. Is it, like, a truck truck?

Sydnee: Yeah, it's a pickup truck.

Taylor: Huh.

Sydnee: I know. He has wanted it since he started woodworking. And I kept saying, like, "Let's see if you still want it in another six months. Let's see if you still—like, you don't really want a truck. It's just a—this is—" you know. But the woodworking hobby has stayed, and theater last year is what cemented it for him. That was when he finally decided, like, "I have gotta get a truck. We haul too much stuff if we're gonna do outdoor theater."

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: So it was—it was time. His other car was worn out. We needed something new, and... now he has a truck. I still drive a Subaru. Don't worry.

Taylor: Alright.

Raleigh: A big Subaru.

Sydnee: I will always drive a Subaru. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: You'll never stop me.

Taylor: Truck husband and Subaru wife. That's a couple.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] That's arrangement has worked for a lot of people throughout history. [laughs]

Taylor: That's true.

Raleigh: [laughs] That's an extension of bi wife energy.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: The Subaru wife with a truck husband.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Um, well, I feel like—I know we've been starting talking about our topic way later in the episodes lately, but I feel like this topic is big enough that we should start talking about it sooner.

Taylor: I...

Rileigh: Yes.

Sydnee: There's my very smooth transition.

Taylor: [crosstalk] On board with that. Yeah.

Sydnee: Into... into Taylor's pick for this week.

Taylor: Yeah. And, you know, it's a little—it's not really—it's something all of us could've brought to the table, because it's the Barbie movie, but Barbie has been around for forever. Since the dawn of time, according to—

Rileigh: Barbie is eternal.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] The dawn of civilization, at least. But more specifically, 1959. But, uh...

Sydnee: It does feel that way.

Taylor: Yeah. [crosstalk]

Sydnee: That Barbie's been around forever. Yeah. Um, I will say, just off the bat, I really—and I know that this—I feel like anything that is as big of a cultural phenomenon as the Barbie movie was—and, I mean, this is true for lots of other things too—is, like, there's gonna be so much discourse about it that no matter what you say, there's gonna be somebody to disagree.

Like, "Well, actually... "

I just—I will just preface with, I really enjoyed this movie. I really liked it. I found it very funny and moving, and I saw it twice. Like, in theaters, which isn't something I normally would do, you know.

So, like, I don't know. I'm just throwing that out there. I really like this movie. I understand that there are lots of, um, fair criticisms, but I really liked it.

Taylor: Yeah. Same. I, um—I think—there is some good criticism that's been leveraged at it, although I do kind of find some of it ironic. Because, like, it's like, well, this movie can't do everything. That's kind of one of the tenets of the movie, right? Is that women are expected to do everything and fix everything and be everything. It's like, this movie was—it is not that. It's a movie about a plastic doll.

And, you know, like, a very specific concept. But I loved it. I thought it was well done. I thought it was funny. I thought it was beautiful. I loved the visuals. I loved the costuming.

Raleigh: Yeah, me too. I now have seen it three times. I saw it twice when it came out, and then I watched it streaming to rewatch it and prepare to talk about it today.

And I was gonna say the exact same thing, Tey. I was gonna say I think, you know, we expect... female-led, female-directed, female-written movies to do all of the things for women, and that's just not—I mean, Oppenheimer came out at the same time and we're not like, "This is the movie that needs to have all of the commentary and all of the historical, you know, context and all of that for this entire time period and for all of these people."

Um, we don't say that. I'll be real, I didn't watch Oppenheimer. I can't say anything else about it other than I think I kind of know it was about a bomb. Um, right?

Taylor: [snorts]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Or, like, a guy that made it? So...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: So there's that.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: I haven't seen it. I probably will never see it. Um, but I... but I—movies can't do everything! That's why you see a movie like this and you say, "Okay. Yes. This is a good starting point for this kind of conversation and this kind of film to be made. Now, let's encourage more movies that talk about these kinds of issues that are female-written, that are female-led, that, you know, bring voices to those who haven't had them before. Don't expect all of it out of the one that's been made.

Taylor: It's funny, 'cause that's the one reason that I did not want to watch and have not watched *Oppenheimer*, is because so many people that were—that suffered at the hands of the bomb had said, "Hey, this kind of glorifies the whole production of, you know, weapons of war, and doesn't really interact at all with the people that suffered from it. That should be part of this story."

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I wondered if that was the case. I mean, I haven't seen it either, but I wondered if the movie, like—does it—I don't know. I wonder if it critically approaches that. You know?

Taylor: Apparently it doesn't, and I wasn't that interested in seeing it anyway, but I saw lots of people speaking out about that and asking for, you know, like—petitioning to, like, have something included that nods to the fact. Like, "Oh, right, and we killed and destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives."

Uh, so I don't know. I guess, you know, if we're gonna criticize the plastic doll for not fixing feminism [wheezes] or—or making all women equal around the world, then maybe we can ask the bomb movie to talk about what the bomb does.

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: But I feel—and I feel like... like, the movie doesn't pretend to. Because, I mean, I think there are a lot of ways you can read it. But very—I think on a very surface level, the Kens are treated in *Barbieland* the way women are treated in real life, generally.

I know there's lots more nuance to it. But if you put that sort of lens on parts of it, at the end they talk about, like, you know, maybe the Kens someday could have

as many seats in our representative body as women hold in our representative body in the real world.

Like, the joke is, we're not there. The joke is still, like, we didn't fix it. Things aren't better. This movie didn't solve all the problems. The Kens are still... I don't know, marginalized? [laughs] I don't know. Like, I feel dumb saying that. But you know what I—I mean, like, if you look at it as a corollary to that, it's not fixed.

And that is a recognition that, like, things are in no way fixed. And I don't think there is—seriously, is there anyone out here who thought, like, "Feminism did it. We won."

Raleigh: "It's fixed."

Sydnee: [laughs] "We fixed it, and the Barbie Movie is just a triumph of like, remember when things were bad, and now everything's great." Like, is there really anybody who was confused about that? [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, and I don't know if—I mean... I don't think that's what the movie was attempting to do at all. Like, I think it was trying to tell one story about the process that—I think it's a specific process that in the world we've constructed for women this is what—you know. Women going from object to subject of their own life.

Which is not even [unintelligible]. Everybody does that to a certain extent. But I think because women are introduced into a world where they are constantly treated like an object, constantly just a thing to be seen and used, to not, like, think for themselves or exist, like, that's the path, right? She goes from object to subject. That's—there's a lot of commentary in that. But, like, that's—it's just telling one story about one Barbie. [laughs]

Sydnee: And it really, like—I mean, I think that you can broadly apply that to women in general. But what it talks about the best is the representation of women in media. That specific piece of it. Because there are lots of women who would argue, and are very vocal about it on social media, that like, "I already get to do everything I want. I feel like there's no need for feminism because I feel personally that I am completely liberated," and whatever.

And that's... I mean, there's problems there. But whatever. Like, that's fine for you. [laughs quietly] Whatever. I don't need to—I think there are issues.

But, like, that's not the... I think that they most eloquently showed that in media representations, generally speaking, women are usually only allowed to be a certain number of things. They are usually presented only in certain ways, and they are rarely given the opportunity to mold that narrative and craft what that looks like and fully realize that for everyone, and kind of put that out there as, these are options for you in the cultural zeitgeist, the way that men have always had... so many options of how to be. So many different versions of how they can be cool, or bad, or good, or funny, or nuanced, or... anything, you know?

You can be so many things as a man, and in media as a woman that scope has always been pretty narrow. And I think that's what the movie talks about the best is that our cultural idea of a woman, as opposed to, like, what every single, you know, female-presenting person in the country's experience has been. Does that make sense?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, 'cause it's—again, it's like, men can just exist. Women have to serve a purpose, and you have to pick your purpose, and there's only so many purposes you can serve. You know, pick your box and stay in it, quite literally in the movie. But, you know, it's like, I always think about it in terms of, like—like the broken toaster.

Like, if you have a toaster in your house, what does it do? It toasts your bread, right? And no matter how many years it toasts your bread for, when it breaks, you don't keep it around because, like, it has other things to offer, you know? It has a job. That's what it does. You get rid of it when it doesn't do its job anymore.

Because a toaster is a functional object. It's not an existence. Now, I say this and I'm thinking—I'm sad for toasters.

Sydnee: Yeah, this is making me think of the Brave Little Toaster.

Raleigh: Yeah!

Taylor: But that's... that's the difference, is that, you know, like, do you have—are you inherently—do you have inherent worth by just existing? Or does your worth come from the job you serve to other people, the thing that you can be to somebody else?

And I think that that's—again, like, a different way that no matter how many rights or how freely you live as a woman, you enter into a world where your worth comes from the object you can be to different people. And, you know, it changes throughout your life, but it's never just you on your own, breathing.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And I mean, I think that it's so—I mean, I think it's so skillfully done. When you, like... when they make the—when they have the line about, like, Barbie has a great day every day. Ken only has a good day when Barbie looks at him.

That is—that was the reality, is the reality, for, I mean, like, women. You just flip it. Like... men get to have whatever—and it's not even necessarily a great day. They get to have whatever day they're gonna have every day.

Women exist in proximity to them. And, you know, orbiting them as some function in their life, and that's it. And in this it was Ken.

Taylor: Yeah.

Rleigh: Yeah. And I think—I don't know why. People seem surprised that that was the message that the Barbie movie ended up giving. That, like, it wasn't some fluffy pink, like, you know, adventure, um, without much deeper meaning.

For some reason, that's what people expected, I think, a lot of people. And then went in and got what they ended up leaving saying was, like, feminist propaganda. And, like, yeah, sure. That's, I mean, yeah.

Um, but... we've talked about this before when we talked about some of the earlier Barbie movies that were animated and came out when I was young. Um, Barbie the toy has always been... Barbie is a teacher, is an astronaut, is a lawyer, is a mom, is a vet, is a doctor. Like, is President. And Ken is Ken. That has always been Barbie the toy. Ken is an accessory for your Barbie. You don't need a Ken. Um, you need a Barbie if you're gonna play with Barbies. You don't need a Ken.

And Barbie's the one who's gonna come with all the different accessory packs to be all the different jobs and, you know, have the beautiful dream house and the pink cars and all that.

Um, so really, I don't know why people seem upset that that's the message we get from the Barbie movie. It's like, well, that's what the toy has always—the toy

has always been this subliminal message of like, no, Barbie's the one who gets the job and the title and the importance, and Ken is her accessory. Don't tell people that this is commentary, but that's what it is. Like, that's what it's always been!

Sydnee: It's—well, it's really strange, because, like—and I mean, I think a lot of people who saw it as, like, this dangerous [laughs quietly] feminist propaganda are, like, the kind of far right weirdos who are outraged by everything. The same people who call Joe Biden a socialist.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Right? Like... where, like, those of us who maybe actually identify with socialism would say, like, "What?" [laughs]

So I think, like, it's funny that a movie like this could get that kind of outrage when I don't think anything that it's saying about the experience of being a woman is necessarily earth shattering. And I'm not saying that to demean the movie. I think it's pretty—like, I wasn't watching it going, "Oh my gosh. I've never thought about it this way."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] You know? I was watching it going, "Yep. That's what it's like."

Now, I do think that there are probably men who watched it and thought, "Man."

Raleigh: "What?!" [laughs]

Sydnee: "That... that seems rough. Like, I guess I hadn't thought about it that way." I do think that happened. I do think men—there were men who watched it and went, "Huh. We do expect women to constantly be pleasing us and thankful for everything, and constantly be all these contradictory things, but also be so happy about it, to make us feel good."

And, I mean, I do think that maybe that happened. But it wasn't like... it wasn't the most radical feminist thing you could e—I mean, certainly by no stretch.

But it's weird 'cause it got flack from the right for being, like, this radical feminist thing that I didn't really feel. I mean, I don't think it's radical. I think it's pretty common sense stuff.

And then it got—and then I think the other thing is there were people who expected it to be a send up of very specifically the, like, physical ideal that Barbie the toy, you know, set for young girls.

I think there were people who wanted more of that. Like, "Well, that's all well and good that Barbie can be an astronaut. But why does she have to look like that to be an astronaut?"

I mean, I think that there are people who have that relationship with Barbie who couldn't get past that when they saw the movie. Like, that's all well and good. But it's still the gorgeous Margot Robbie. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Well, but I—

Sydnee: Which I don't personally have a problem with. I'm not voicing that. But—sorry, Tey. Go ahead.

Taylor: Well, no. I was saying that I feel like, you know... I mean, again, I would say it's just funny 'cause, you know, just as much as we're allowed to pick apart women's bodies in media—not even just—not fictional women, like, real women, like, sell magazines. Like, "Look who got fat! Look who got wrinkles! Look who got old!"

Like, that's a whole—

Sydnee: "Look who has Ozempic face."

Taylor: —whole genre of magazine sales, which is just wild to me. 'Cause it doesn't happen in the same ferocity to men, of course. But, um, you know, I think that picking apart this movie, the—we're talking about it on a media podcast so I guess we're doing the same thing. But the amount of expectations and the desire to find fault in it and find the way it didn't do the thing it was supposed to do just feels very on the nose for something that's addressing how hard it is to be a woman in this world.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: It—

Taylor: But—

Sydnee: Go ahead.

Taylor: I was gonna say, but it did—I mean, it shows that yeah, Margot Robbie's the Barbie, but then there's all these other Barbies that look like everybody. It didn't make some big speech about "See? Look. Barbie can be anybody."

'Cause it's a visual medium that showed that. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Well, and it—I mean, to be fair, Barbie—and I know the original Barbie didn't do that, yes. The original Barbie was, you know, a blonde, white doll with... I don't know if her boobs were ever particularly big. That joke made—that the comedian made about Barbie having big boobs, that still is very, like, troubling to me, 'cause I don't know that they were ever—it was never the point.

But anyway, she was a—

Raleigh: She was very thin.

Sydnee: Thin, yes. A slim doll. But Barbie definitely has evolved over time. And they have offered lots of different, um, ethnicities and races, and they have Barbies with disabilities, and they have Barbies of different body sizes now. And, like, I definitely think they've tried to show that. Um, so I don't know what—you know? I mean, yes, that was what Barbie looked like originally. And if you wanna level criticism at the fact that probably—I don't know—my guess would be that Barbies with that original slim figure that the original Barbie had probably still outsell other body types of Barbie, probably statistically. I bet if you looked at the sales.

And if you want to leverage criticism at that, that's not aimed at the doll. That's aimed at our culture. That's aimed at an entire society that tells us this is what you should want to play with, because this is what you should want to look like. And that is not the fault of any one item, you know? Or movie, or magazine, or model. That's everything around us, you know? It's really easy to make the doll the problem when the problem is so much bigger.

Taylor: Yeah.

Rleigh: Yeah. And I mean, again, I'm just speaking for myself and my experience, but as someone who played with Barbies, I mean, a lot growing up, I don't know if I ever had the conscious thought when I was sitting there playing with my Barbies, like, "Oh, I don't look like this doll." You know what I mean?

Like, I don't know if I ever had the thought that I should feel bad because I do not look like this doll I am playing with. I always had a lot more going on with my Barbies. They had, you know, extensive story lines. They had complex relationships. They had jobs. They had responsibilities. Like, there was drama.

Sydney: [laughs quietly]

Rleigh: Um, I was creating worlds and canons down there in that dream house. But you know what I mean? Like, I don't know if—and yes, I can recognize now that, I mean, that probably had some sort of, like, subliminal effect on me. Um, and probably does for a lot of people. But I don't know if it was ever that outright that people say it was. That, like, little girls see Barbies and think "That's what I should be."

Like, I don't know if that was ever the message that came across in my playing with a doll.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, you know, like, are they... like, the setup of the opening of the film where they talk about how before little girls just had dolls to, like, "I am a mother. This is my baby doll."

And this is—a Barbie operates more as a vehicle for dreaming what kind of adult you could be. That's kind of how it functions. And, I mean, that's the form that that concept took. [laughs] Yeah. I don't think it's benign, necessarily, the way that she looks. But I do agree that I—my dolls were a mix of, like, I had, like, an Anastasia doll that I really liked, just because, I don't know, she looked different. She had fun hair. Like, it was just—I just wanted lots of different, like, dolls. Then you had more for your narrative.

Sydney: Right.

Rleigh: I had a weird Barbie, too. Everybody had a weird Barbie.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah.

Taylor: I think all of my Barbies were weird Barbies. [laughs]

Sydnee: I was gonna say. Like, I did stuff to a lot of—like makeup and hair. Especially hair, like haircuts and things. Um, I always hated when they would come with, like, their hair already styled with little things in it. Like, I had to take all those out right away. And both Charlie and Cooper do that, by the way. As soon as they get a doll they need to take all the hair things out. Which I'm like, "Ah, I recognize that."

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: I remember unpacking Barbies for them once and, like, they each had—like, it was a pack of two Barbies, and one was like a purple outfit with, like, these accessories, and the other one was a pink one with these accessories, and they were wearing, like, bathing suits, and they had flip flops and all this stuff.

And I was, like, unpacking it, getting all the plastic out, thinking "This is so fun. I'm gonna put their little accessories on them and they're gonna have their coordinating outfits with their matching fanny packs, and shoes, and shawls, and all this."

And I give them to them all prepped and I've sat there and I've organized their outfits so well, and they both immediately just start tearing everything off of them. [laughs] Just like, "No, why would you do this? It comes like this for a reason!"

Sydnee: They do, and they love to put makeup on 'em. And, um, they were trying to figure out how to get—it was marker, and they were trying to figure out how to get it off.

And I stupidly suggested, um... 'cause we tried a makeup wipe and that didn't work. And we had an alcohol swab.

Raleigh: Oh no.

Sydnee: Don't do that. Don't do that.

Raleigh: It takes their face off.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It takes their face off! It takes their face off! And if you wanna talk—that's not a weird Barbie. That's like a, "Okay, we're getting rid of this. I can't have this cursed item in our house." [laughs]

Taylor: That's trauma Barbie.

Raleigh: [through laughter] That's trauma Barbie.

Sydnee: Yeah. I—we did it one time. We learned our lesson. I've never done it since.

Taylor: I remember learning that lesson by myself when I had—it wasn't a Barbie. Do you remember that horrifying doll I had, Sydnee, Christina Blessing?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I was given this doll that prayed, Raleigh.

Raleigh: Oh no!

Taylor: Hand had Velcro, and it had Velcro on the back of its legs and its butt so it could kneel and pray.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Taylor: And, uh... I don't—

Sydnee: [crosstalk] doll.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. This was my doll. Um, and I... took some of Mom's makeup, which I was not supposed to do, and put it on Christina Blessing. And then I didn't want to get in trouble, so I tried to take it off with nail polish remover.

Sydnee: Ooh.

Taylor: And I took half of Christina Blessing's face off. And I... [sighs] if I was destined for the path of sin, there I go! [laughs] Just... I just—I have just

removed the—this is a—this is a godly creation, and I have just blinded it, and now I have... oh, god.

Rileigh: Is this it?

Taylor: Oh, god. [through laughter] I gotta get outta here! I can't look at Christina Blessing.

Rileigh: That's horrifying. [wheezes]

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: You should've just told Mom and Dad, like, "I don't know. I just woke up and it looked like this."

Taylor: [through laughter] Just her eyes. Yeah, what do you think this means? Better pray on it.

Sydnee: I—you know, I never remember, like... I mean, yes, Barbie looks the way Barbie looks. But for me it was always about the clothes. So I think when people talk about, like, Barbie as a celebration of capitalism, well, first of all it's a product.

Taylor: Sure, yeah.

Sydnee: I mean, like—

Rileigh: Yes, it is. [laughs]

Sydnee: It's something that you buy with money. And, like, it comes with other things that you might also want to buy with money. Like, I don't know what you want. Like, yeah, okay. Um, but—like, for me it was more about the outfits. I never—I wanted to look like Barbie in the sense that—I wanted to look like Totally Hair Barbie. Because she had that awesome dress, that awesome, like, 80's, neon pink stretched, like, spandex dress. And I wanted that dress, and I wanted crimped hair. Like, those are the things I remember looking at Barbie and thinking, like, "Ooh, that dress is so cool. I wish I had that dress."

Um, I always wanted Barbies different hairstyles. I don't... I don't know. I don't remember thinking, like, "And also I wish I was thin like Barbie."

I mean, for me it was always—it was so much more about, like, the kids around me, comparing myself to other girls my age, you know? I mean, that was the biggest pressure on me was looking at—going to a slumber party and thinking, like, "I have to wear this baggy t-shirt because I don't look like those girls around me."

Like, those were the moments that I feel like impacted me way more than a Barbie. I don't know. I mean, that... that was my life experience, and everybody's is different. But I was not needing—I did not need this movie to critically talk about the damage that Barbie doll did to all of our collective psyches when it comes to body size. I don't know.

I was not looking for it to do that for me, but maybe other people felt like it was important to them.

Rleigh: Well, I mean, if you're looking at it critically and logically, it was made partially by Mattel. I don't know how hard Mattel's gonna go on, like, "We did, you know, decades of trauma to young girls who now, you know, have warped and dangerous ideas of beauty."

You know what I mean? Like, they'll go a little bit. But they're not gonna go that hard.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, that's—yeah. At the end of the day, this movie sold lots and lots of product. [laughs quietly] 'Cause it's—

Rleigh: It sold a lot of Barbies!

Taylor: Yeah. It's what they—I'm sure that they—you know. Even if, like, it was trying to do good, it's because good tested as profitable. Which, I'm sorry, it's—you know. That's just... that's—that is a capitalism. They did a capitalism.

Rleigh: They did a capitalism.

Sydney: They did—yeah, they did a capitalism. I—well, and it's—I mean, I don't know. Maybe I have more sympathy for it because I feel like I work within a system that is inherently immoral. Like, for my day job, that's what I do. The system I work in is bad, and hurts people, and is not just, and isn't fair.

But I do not—

Taylor: Well, don't go too hard on yourself, Syd. You're a doctor. I mean, I—
[wheezes] I'm a bartender. There's no jokes about that.

Sydnee: Well, but the healthcare system—

Taylor: You at least have some... try to do good.

Sydnee: Well, but I mean, I think, like, any criticism somebody wants to levy at our healthcare system I think is fair. Like, I sign on to that. But then I still feel like I can do some good within that system, or else why would I do it still, right? I must, inherently. And so I think it's hard to, like... if you take a wide lens at the Barbie movie, I mean, yes, it's—they're selling a product. Everyone's beautiful. It's Hollywood.

You know? I mean, like, what do you want me to—you know, yes, of course. But it could still say something that is meaningful and impactful. It can still be enjoyable.

I mean, 'cause that's the other thing. It didn't just, like, make statements that made me choke up a little bit. I mean, 'cause it did.

It also made me laugh. It was also really funny, and clever! And the way that they show, like, that they're dolls, the way that they float down from their houses and don't take stairs, the way that they get into the car, the way they talk to each other, just the dolls interact, sounds like kids talking through a doll. It doesn't sound like real dialogue sometimes, and I think it's because it's like they're being played with. And so they talk—you know what I mean?

Raleigh: Like when Ken says "I thought I'd come over."

And she says, "Why?"

And he says, "We're boyfriend and girlfriend?"

And she says, "To do what?"

And he says, "I actually don't know."

Like, that's kids playing with a Barbie and a Ken.

Sydnee: Right. I felt that way. Like, that they talk to each other. Like, sometimes the dialogue felt really weird, and I think it's because, like, well, imagine that two, you know, eight-year-olds are making the two Barbies talk to each other. This is the kind of weird stuff that kids say.

Like, "Your arm's all better now. I fixed it."

Like, it took ten seconds. I mean, I don't know. I thought all that was really funny, and clever, and insightful. And obviously the, um—the Ken, I'm Just Ken song is just... the whole number is—it's just great. It's just great.

Rileigh: Ken walking away and saying "Sublime" after Barbie agrees to be his long distance, low commitment, long term casual girlfriend... that is one of the funniest things in film in recent history for me. Every time I see it it makes me laugh out loud, and I don't know if that's ever gonna stop. It's just so good! It's just so good.

Sydnee: It's hilarious.

Taylor: Yeah. All of the praise that—a lot of—and, I mean, we've joked about it. But, like, Ken's getting so much praise for this movie, and that's against the whole point of the movie. But it's like, that's not Ken. That's Ryan Gosling being hilarious.

Rileigh: That's Ryan Gosling, yeah.

Sydnee: Oh, I mean, he's so funny. I mean, the whole—I mean, and his arc is important because it's also part of what we're supposed to understand about the real world, and reality, and who Ken is in the real world.

Taylor: Well, and I think... you know, when I was rewatching it I was trying—'cause it's not—it's not a one-to-one, like, the Ken—the Kens are like women in the real world, because, I mean, not to be brutal, but they're not abused. They're not—they're not in danger. They're just not... the Barbie's just aren't interested in centering their lives around them.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: But, like, there is a subtle—this movie's not trying to take on the problems with modern masculinity. But there is a bit of it in that—you know, what she says to him at the end. Like, "It's not about, like, the things that you have. Like, it's—" you know.

That men—men define themselves by what they possess. Women define themselves by who possesses them.

And that's—you know. They kind of look at the other side of it a little bit. It's not the focus of the film, but I do think that's included, which is nice. That's it's not just—"Who's your girlfriend? What's your job? How expensive was your watch? How expensive was your car? These are the things that make you a man."

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah. You have to have a horse, 'cause it's a man extender.

Taylor: [laughs] Exactly.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: Oh... when he says he lost interest when he realized patriarchy wasn't about horses.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Man. Oh, it's good. Um, I also—I really appreciate as a, you know, 23 year old woman living on my own, I realized as I was rewatching the Barbie movie, I looked around my apartment and I said "I have created my own Barbie dream house." Everything you sit on in this house is pink. There is nothing in this apartment that is not pink that you can sit on."

And she has that conversation with him when he says he wants to move in and, like, bring his stuff before it becomes a Mojo Dojo Casa House. She says, "No, this is Barbie's Dream House, not Ken's Dream House."

But, I mean, in a real sense, like, having your own space that is as safe and as comfortable and as feminine as whatever as you want it to be, um, I mean, that's what a Barbie Dream House is, and was when I was playing with it when I

was, like, six. And that is now—[laughs quietly] that is now my apartment is my own little personal Barbie Dream House.

And, you know, knowing that you can have that space to yourself and you don't have to compromise it or, like, make space for someone else. It can just be yours.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Is a Barbie Dream House not but a room of one's own?

Rileigh: Oh no! [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: No, I mean, it's true.

Rileigh: You're right. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, I mean, look. Greta Gerwig I think was putting a lot of philosophy in here that didn't have to come to the front of the movie, but it's in the background. Like, I don't know. To me the whole, like, the path that Barbie takes—have either of you ever read John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*?

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Mm-mm.

Taylor: The passage where they talk about how women look at themselves—like, men can be subjects in their life. One set of eyes looking forward, right? Women have two sets of eyes. They go forward in life, but they're also constantly aware of how people are perceiving them. So they're always looking back at themselves.

And part—the book is about art, and part of that is explaining why women aren't masters, basically. Like, why women can't—not can't make great art, but this is one of the hurdles to women making great art is that they can never be purely a subject in their own life because they are always—just as much as the world is always objectifying them, they are always objectifying themselves.

It's not, "I'm a doctor. It's "This is what I look like when I'm a doctor," you know.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: "This is what I look like when I'm doctoring."

And that is a constant inhibitor of women's true expression. And, I mean, I refuse to believe that that book wasn't at least thumbed through a little bit for this. The whole when she says at the end, like, "I want to be the one that does the dreaming."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I mean, that's the line that got me. But, like, it's not—there are smart ideas here.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, no. I know exactly—That got me, too. That was exactly—I—that was one of the first things I said after we left the movie was that that's what it's about. Like, I want to get to tell the story for once. I want to be the one to decide what could happen, what is possible, what can we think of? And I do feel like there is that limitation. Like, we're not given that opportunity very often. And if we are it's such a narrow definition of like, "Well, here's what it can be, though."

I mean, even with this—and I think that's really impressive. Like, she was given that opportunity with Barbie. 'Cause, like, girls, Barbie, Barbie, it's girls. Like... you can see where that came from. And then she did all this with it. Like, fine. You're gonna give me this opportunity with Barbie? Guess what I'm gonna do with it?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Which is really cool.

Taylor: And I think, you know—I don't know. I mean, it's a story—[laughs quietly] it's a transformation story. It's a story about becoming. About, you know, becoming your own self, allowing yourself agency. And that's... it's... in the lens of feminism, I think that that's an important lesson, but I just think anybody can watch that and enjoy that, and consider "What am I doing that I am, you know—who do I think I have to be for the world, and who am I just on my own?"

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I will say that—and there was an acknowledgment that their poor pregnant Midge...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Was still left out. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Oh, Midge.

Taylor: Oh. And Alan.

Sydnee: We still have a long way to go.

Rileigh: And Alan.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: For when—yeah, for when people are pregnant or when guys are like Alan. We've still got a way to go. But—[laughs] we'll get there. [laughs]

Um, well, I... Taylor, I'm really glad you wanted us to talk about the Barbie movie, 'cause I did.

Rileigh: I love the Barbie movie.

Sydnee: I did too.

Rileigh: I'll just say it.

Sydnee: We all loved it in this house. We all watched it. Justin learned some lessons. I cried.

Taylor: Did he?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. He said he did.

Rileigh: Is Justin an Alan?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: He is. Dad cried.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. He sat there sobbing watching the movie. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, Dad—Dad cries at most things.

Raleigh: [simultaneously] A lot.

Sydnee: Dad cries at a lot of things. But yeah. No, I'm glad that you brought it for us to talk about, 'cause I was excited to.

Taylor: Oh, for sure.

Raleigh: And it's on, uh, HBO Max?

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: Yes? Max?

Sydnee: Uh, Raleigh.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: What's next?

Raleigh: Um, well, I thought we could talk about some music next. I realized I saw a lot of people in concert last year and I haven't made you all talk about all their music.

Um, so I thought we could talk about Maisie Peters, and specifically her album The Good Witch.

Sydnee: Sounds good. Maisie Peters. I have not heard of her, so I'm excited to check it out.

Raleigh: Alright.

Sydnee: Don't—that's not a slam. I don't know what's happening in the world of... especially music.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: I never—yeah.

Sydnee: I know what's happening in the world, but not of music. Like, I never know what's happening with music. I'm so... square.

Raleigh: I've seen your playlists. I know.

Taylor: Yeah. It's on Apple Music. We don't even need to look at the songs.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. It is. Well, thank you both. Um, I can't imagine anyone out there hasn't seen—either seen the Barbie movie, or if you haven't you've probably made the decision that you're not gonna, so.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I feel—I feel like everybody's had that option by now. Um, thank you, listeners. You should go to MaximumFun.org, check out all the great shows there. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, 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.

Rileigh: I am still buffering...

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

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: That Billie Eilish song still should've won.

Teylor: I was just thinking about that. We didn't even mention the great Billie Eilish song.

Rileigh: [crosstalk] Such a good song.

Sydnee: I know. Such a good song. Makes me cry.

Teylor: The whole soundtrack is great, but yeah, it's the best part.

Sydnee: It is.

Griffin: From the twisted minds that brought you *The Adventure Zone: Balance*, and *Amnesty*, and *Graduation*, and *Ethersea*, and *Steeplechase*, and *Outre Space*, and all the other ones, the McElroy brothers and Dad are proud to reveal a bold vision for the future of actual play podcasting.

It's, um... it's called *The Adventure Zone Versus Dracula*?

[music plays]

Justin: Yeah, we're gonna kill Dracula's ass.

Travis: Well, we're gonna attempt—we haven't recorded all of it yet. We will attempt to kill Dracula's ass.

Justin: *The Adventure Zone Versus Dracula*.

Griffin: Yes. A season I will be running using the D&D 5th Edition rule set, and there's two episodes out for you to listen to right now! We hope you will join us. Same bat time, same bat channel, for more fun.

Clint: Bats. I see what you did there.

[chord]

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