

Still Buffering 421: Night B****

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[theme music plays]

Sydnee: Hello and welcome to Still Buffering: a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, I feel like this is—okay. Let me say this. This is a comedy show, for the most part. Right? This is—we're probably filed—we're filed under comedy—this is a comedy show. [laughs quietly] We're trying to be lighthearted and funny. But I feel like it is okay for us to, before we get started, maybe just a little check-in. Like, how are you doing?

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: It feels ridiculous to not say, like, how you doin'?

Taylor: You gonna ask me that question on a recording? You think that's—you think that's...

Sydnee: Well, I think in light of the way the United States of America, such as it is, is going... it's at least fair—it feels like, uh, I'm in... I don't—disingenuous to not say, like, how you—and as a way for, like, listeners, take a second and, like, check in with yourself. Like... how are you doin'?

Taylor: Yeah. Um, not... doing... well. How are you doing?

Sydnee: I mean, sa—same. Same. I don't wanna... this is—this is gonna be—this is gonna be kind of the theme for a while. Not well, but also trying to recognize that I am not the most harmed or in danger, and so trying to balance not feeling good with also feeling determined to... fight. I don't know. What is that feeling? What do you call that?

Taylor: Um... I—resolute? I don't know.

Sydnee: Resolute is good. Resolute but, like... sadly re—[laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Is sad a part of resolute? Is that baked in to resolute?

Taylor: I guess yes. It feels like—'cause there's also a bit of just sort of, like, surrender, I feel like, inherent in that. Like, yeah, this is how it's gonna be. I've moved past sad. I was sad for, uh, a we—I don't know. After I found out I'm not a person anymore and my passport might be seized from me if I try to... leave the country? Get on an airplane? I realized that—I'm like, that's just what I use as my form of ID. So... I don't know how... how much ground I can have with that.

Sydnee: Well, is that—I don't know what the ramifications of the executive order that made everyone a woman.

Taylor: Well, that—I mean, I don't think that—I think that they will change the wording on that. Um... it was very silly. And, like, everybody was having so much fun laughing at it. I'm like, it is funny, but I—what they're saying is... just erased the existence of trans people in America. So... a silly little goof that they don't know science, but we knew they didn't know science, because, you know. It's [crosstalk].

Sydnee: Obviously they don't know science.

Taylor: Yeah. "It's a biological truth." Like, yeah, okay. Uh, but I've moved beyond. I can't be sad anymore. Um, I think I'll be mad forever. I think I've entered perma-anger.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But that's okay. That's not... you know.

Sydnee: Oh, it is—

Taylor: I don't care if it's not okay. [laughs] I don't care! I don't care!

Sydnee: There is a way—I don't know if I've said this on the show before. But I remember getting angry and then not getting un-angry.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: At some point. And then, like, I don't—I don't wanna say that there was a dip in the last four years where, like, I wasn't angry anymore. I was maybe less on guard. Do you know what I mean?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like, I didn't wake up every morning with that sort of, like, panicked, like, "Now what?" feeling that has now returned to my chest.

Um, but we—there was a point where a reporter from the Wall Street Journal had come to Huntington to do a story on something. This happens sometimes. Like, reporters from big, big papers come here to do stories on our—on our little town, and our big problems.

And—and we were talking about sort of my politics in relation to where I live, and how obviously—I think maybe it's not shocking to our listeners that maybe my politics don't align with the place that I currently reside.

And, uh, she asked me, like, how are you not just angry all the time?

And I said, "Why do you think I'm not angry?" [laughs quietly] "Like, what do you mean? Like, I don't—I refuse to accept the premise of your question. Of course I'm angry. That's the secret. You just have to be the Hulk. You have to be angry all the time."

That's...

Taylor: I feel like it's probably, like... bad from, like, a... what is the—somatic standpoint?

Sydnee: It is. There's a whole cortisol thing that I know is bad. Like, I know it is.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: And we know this. Now, listen. Cortisol is getting a lot of buzz on TikTok. And let me say, there are some—there's some truths out there and then there's a lot of other stuff about cortisol that tells me people don't know what cortisol is. But... [laughs quietly] but, uh, it is not good for your body, for your physical self. Obviously for your mental health. I mean, that goes without saying. But it's not good for your physical body to live in a state of prolonged anger, stress, anxiety, panic.

I mean, it feels common sense to say it, but it is borne out through, you know, medical studies.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I mean, that's what—I mean, as somebody that is—has bad anxiety, uh, I don't know what this is where... 'cause we kind of experienced it during COVID. Where when things actually are as bad as you're constantly, endlessly afraid they are, there's a weird comfort in it. It's like, oh, the rest of you live in a relatively relaxed state of existence, so when stuff hits the fan it's like, "Oh no! What do we do?!"

But me, I am always anxious, and assuming the worst thing possible is gonna happen. And so when it does, it's like—it's like, I ascend to a higher vibration of like, "Ah, yes. Now you live in my world." [laughs] And I am at peace, in a weird way.

Sydney: I understand that. I have likened that to, um, the way that when there is some sort of medical emergency where I work, for me I am at my best. It's like, I feel like time slows down. I feel like everything around me is in slow motion in that moment, because this is where I function. My—if my brain is packed with stimulus and with the need to, like, solve problem, answer question, fix, move, do, that—if that is all happening at once, I am calmer, because that's how I am programmed to function.

Taylor: Completely different level of stakes, but I guess that is also why I, uh, work in the restaurant industry. [laughs] 'Cause it's also an environment of constant, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, it's about finding a place that suits you. That suits the way your brain functions, and what you enjoy, too. I mean, that's the other thing. What you like to do.

Taylor: Well, it's what you're programmed to do. If you're constantly anxious and looking out for what could possibly go wrong, you're very, very good at taking care of people.

Sydnee: There you go. There you go. But—and I think, you know, right now this is what I've said to a lot of my friends, who again, I want to fully recognize, in many ways I am privileged that will protect me from being the direct target of harm.

And so it then is my responsibility to use that privilege to help others who are less so. And I have had a lot of friends who feel more vulnerable—and are. They feel that way 'cause they are. Who are, I think, in shock from everything that's happened so fast. And I think it is really important—I said this several times, and then I saw Pete Buttigieg say it in an interview, and he said something very similar and I thought, "Oh, I must be right. If Pete Buttigieg just said it... " [laughs]

Taylor: You're on that Pete wavelength. [laughs]

Sydnee: He said something that, I mean—he didn't steal it from me 'cause—

Taylor: He's a smart guy.

Sydnee: —he doesn't know who I am. So I'm not taking credit. [laughs] I'm not taking credit. I'm just saying I had said it, and then I heard him say basically the same thing and I was like, "Excellent. Okay. I must be right."

Um, they want us to be shocked. That's the point. This is... remember shock and awe? Remember how that was a thing militarily? This is the same thing. They want to paralyze us with fear, and panic, and we are so scared that we can't do anything and we become immobile. And then they can do the next stuff. We have to move past the shock. We have—I mean, I'm not saying we can't feel that. Of course we're angry, we're sad, we're scared. Of course.

But we've gotta find a way to get through that to action. Next.

Taylor: I agree. Um... it's—I guess it's that with all of the—the shock, yes, it's meant to kind of immobilize us. But it's also—it's meant to distract us from probably way worse things that are happening at, like, a more boring, like, policy level. And that's the part—like, it's not just like, they would—yes, the cruelty is the point, a lot of times, with these people. But also it's like, it wouldn't just be that. It wouldn't just be, "Yeah, we're gonna... you know, make a bunch of messed up declarations that can be easily overturned in court just to upset people."

It's like, why do you want people upset? Why do you want people outraged? Because you're gonna do a bunch of other stuff that will be permanent, that will hurt us, and that's the thing. It's like, yes, I agree with you. But there's also legitimate, like, stuff that—you know. I mean, the ramifications—and again, this is not doom and gloom. The ramifications of what is happening in this country will be... a longstanding... set of... bummers. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: And I—I do—

Taylor: Bad things.

Sydnee: I do believe—I agree with you, 100%. And I—I in no way want to undermine that, or like—I am not one of those people saying "It's not gonna be that bad."

I wasn't one of those people saying "It's not gonna be that bad." I do believe that someday—I think that—this is how I keep framing it. The harms that are being done are real, and awful, and will take a long time to undo. But when I think about it that way, I do believe they will be undone someday. I do believe... you know, that the arc of history bends towards justice. I believe that.

But we're not there. That's not where we are. That's not the part we're in.

Taylor: I believe that too, but I don't think it's a natural occurrence.

Sydnee: Yes. Yes.

Taylor: I hope that a lot of us, a lot of people that, you know... spent, I don't know, the last four years trying to have perfect politics and, you know, trying to, like, root out all the ones that weren't perfect enough from any sort of liberal agenda will recognize that in order for justice to swing back our way, we actually have to do the work, and a big part of the work is having a functional coalition of people that all want—we don't all have to want the same things. We just don't want... we just all have to want a general freedom for each other.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: You know?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I think that's—I hope that—I don't want anyone to learn a hard lesson. I certainly don't want to. But I'm being made to, and everybody—it's not about what you want. It's what's gonna happen. So I hope we learn the right things from this. And I hope we keep each other safe.

Sydnee: I know. It's hard, because the—I agree with you, Tey. Because I think the whole—there's been a lot of, you know, bring up what's on TikTok, which is back again... [laughs quietly] a lot—

Taylor: That's right, that happened since we talked. It went away, and then it was back, but it's not back... the same.

Sydnee: But it's—and it might not be back permanently.

Taylor: Yeah. But sorry, you were saying. [laughs]

Sydnee: But also there's—well, also there's RedNote. Just saying that that's out there.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: RedNote exists. Um, but anyway, there was this whole—before and after TikTok went away for whatever, 12 hours or whatever it was? I don't know.

Taylor: It was really... [crosstalk] You could've just slept through it. I could've slept through it.

Sydnee: Yeah. There is a possibility that you went to sleep and woke up and TikTok was still there and you never knew what happened. Probably not. That was—it was actually a weird... well, you may have. Who knows.

The eff around and find out trend on TikTok...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's hard for me to get excited about that, because the people who I would feel good about that happening too aren't going to. Because they were sitting in the front row at the inauguration. That's the problem. Those are the people who want to... eff around and find out. Not... not the people who live down the street from me. Not literally down the street from me, I don't mean. I'm not pointing at anybody in particular. I just mean I live in a part of the country where those people that you are excited to watch that happen to, I know those people, and I can't tell—and I'm saying you—I'm not telling anybody how to feel. I'm not gonna police anybody's reactions, emotions. Everybody has a right to feel the way they feel.

I personally can't empathize with that. Personally.

Taylor: No, I agree. I mean, I don't—

Sydnee: You're talking about Elon, you're talking about Bezos, sure, sure, yeah. But... not, you know.

Taylor: Well, look. I mean... a lot of—I do—I do see people in, uh, in cult 45 that the way that they're speaking, it's just abhorrently evil. And then I think that there are a lot of people that genuinely were just—they were lied to over and over and over again. Their lives were hard already. They were

struggling already. They were told there were reasons that they're struggling, and they believed them, because they wanted a way out.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And I don't think I get to take a moral high ground for not believing the lies, because they weren't told to me. I was not the demographic the lies were directed at.

Sydnee: No. And, you know, we also live in a country that has been systematically under-educated for decades, that has been lied to about our own history for decades.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know, well, longer than decades. But, I mean, this is where—you know, people who are desperate and fighting over the little scraps that they've been thrown are not going to be their best selves. And that is where we are. Um, and it's—you know. I have not necessarily experienced that kind of—especially when it comes to economic hardship, like, you know, in my life I didn't grow up wondering where my next meal was gonna come from. So I don't know. It's... but again, this is not me saying that people shouldn't—you feel the way you want to feel. Everybody should feel the way they want to feel.

Taylor: Well, I think that's—yeah. I think any—[wheeze-laughs] absolutely, the last thing we need to worry—the last thing you need to worry about is policing your feelings to be agreeable right now.

Sydnee: No. No. Feel as angry at whoever, and feel angry at everybody who voted for him. Feel angry at the people who stood their in all their stupid red white and blue stuff at the capitol in the cold and were shocked that he moved everything indoors with the billionaires and locked them out. Be angry at 'em. I'm angry at 'em! I'm angry. Do I want them all... to be harmed, is a different question. No. But... if you're angry, I don't blame you. And was I happy to see him standing out in the cold? Maybe. Yeah. I mean, what did you—this is what you got! You voted for an oligarch, and he doesn't

want you in there, 'cause he never liked you. 'Cause he tricked you into voting for him.

Taylor: Well.

Sydnee: It's what you get! I mean...

Taylor: [sighs]

Sydnee: I... but I do think that our best bet is... I think a lot of us feel powerless. But honestly, the kind of work that needs to be done is not the kind of work that people in Washington even know how to do. Even the people who you politically align with. Senators and congresspeople are so... insulated from the rest of the world anymore, especially here, where they just serve for all eternity, and become rich, and have no idea what's happening. The people best suited to do the work that needs to be done are us, people in our communities who care, who believe in mutual aid, who believe in taking care of our neighbors, who understand that sometimes your ally is not perfect, but they are your ally in this fight and so you will stand with them.

I mean, that's the kind of work that we do every day in the, you know, some of the groups and communities that I'm involved with here. And we are the best suited for this moment. Take, you know, take some solace and feel power in that.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: And Pete Buttigieg agreed, so it must be right.

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs] Yeah, yeah. Good ol' Pete.

Sydnee: Well, don't you ever—Tey, do you ever feel like you say something and you think, like, "I think that's right. That sounded wise. That sounded like a good thing."

And then later you're like, "Man. I hope that was... I hope that was right."

And then if you hear somebody who's really smart say it you'll go, "Oh, good." [laughs] "Oh, good."

Taylor: I don't know. I think... I probably should think that way. But sometimes I just say things and I'm like, "Yep. I said that." And then I just move on. [wheeze-laughs] Must be right, 'cause I said it!

Sydney: That was—that was a very—a very—some very masculine energy you just brought in that statement. [laughs]

Taylor: Mm. I rare—I do not claim to be the boy-est boy, but you know what? [laughs]

Sydney: That was a very manly statement. "I said it. It must be right." [laughs]

Taylor: Well, you know, I don't think I used to feel that way, and I don't think it's the testosterone that did that. I think that's just where I'm at. Where I'm at psychologically these days. When you see idiots in power, you're like, man. I have beaten myself up my whole life for not being smart enough, good enough, right enough... and then these total, total, just big... just—just—just... but—just idiots, just stupid, awful, horrible people, are controlling my life. I'm gonna have a little bit more confidence in myself and my opinions. 'Cause these guys are dead wrong. And they've got all the power in the world.

Sydney: It really—the sooner—I think it—but I think you bring up a great point, Tey. The sooner you can get on board with, if you are someone who is technically a grownup... [laughs quietly] like, the world is telling you you're a grownup, and you're inside thinking, "Am I? Am I a grownup now? Is that—like, I get to be the—I get to be the one that makes these decisions?"

Look around the room. The metaphorical room, not your literal room. And look at the other people who get to make decisions and are in charge.

Taylor: [simultaneously] I'd just be looking at my cat. He doesn't get to make decisions.

Sydnee: [laughs] The—the—the room of the nation. And think about the other people who are the grownups who are making the decisions. Yeah, you get to! I mean, look at those people. Look at the people who are making decisions now! Of course you're qualified! Of course you are!

Taylor: Would you not get up on stage and do a Nazi salute? Okay, you're better.

Sydnee: You're overqualified.

Taylor: I don't care what else, what other problems you have. [laughs] What other issues you're dealing with. You're better... at human-ing.

Sydnee: Yes. No, we... yes. It's not that complicated to... be kind, and think of others.

Taylor: Mm-mm.

Sydnee: It's not that hard.

Taylor: It's—well, that's—but I think that's the problem. It's small work.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And it's not glorious work. It's small, important work that you do every day. And that's what's in front of us.

Sydnee: Which is supposed to be the work of government, by the way. Not...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, glorious work was for monarchies, and we kind of had a whole war about that.

Taylor: I don't—yeah, we forgot that. Somebody didn't get those tickets to Hamilton!

Sydnee: I know. Come on!

Taylor: They made it streaming and everything!

Sydnee: It's on Disney Plus!

Taylor: You can just go watch it! History is hard. Just—there. It's redux.

Sydnee: Yeah. I'll let my—my 10-year-old could sing it all to you. She has it all memorized. Um, Taylor, that's not what we're talking about. [laughs quietly] We're talking about a movie whose title I can't say.

Taylor: Night B.

Sydnee: Because we don't... Night B. We don't curse on this podcast. But to be fair, they are talking about it as the term that can be used for a female dog I think is why—it's like a double... meaning, double entendre kind of thing.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: So. But I still don't think we can say it on the podcast, 'cause then it's still just a curse word.

Taylor: No. We won't say it.

Sydnee: Uh, so... I had not—so this was a book before it was a movie. And usually, like, I'm pretty good about reading the book first, but I didn't know that. I watched the movie not knowing it was a book. Now I have the book and I'm excited to read it. But I so enjoyed—this just came out, late 2024. I don't know exactly when. And I had seen previews for it—on TikTok—and Amy Adams plays the lead character, who has just given... well, not just given birth, but has recently had a child, her first child, and gave up her job as an artist, and is staying at home to take care of her child, and she's struggling with that life change. And then also starts turning into a dog at night.

Taylor: Sums it up.

Sydnee: Yeah. Which is like, I think, both metaphorical, and then somewhat literal. I mean, like, it's depicted literally, even if it is metaphorical.

Taylor: Yeah. I felt like the movie had that sort of operate pretty cleanly. It's like, it could just entirely be symbolic.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Right? Like, I don't...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Except for the dead animals. I don't—I don't know about that.
[wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: I didn't know what to make with the—yeah. There's definitely—so she—like, the... she starts turning into a dog. [laughs quietly] At night. And at first she's just kind of running. But then she's, like, leading a pack of dogs. And then they're, like, killing other animals. And then she maybe kills the cat.

Taylor: That seemed to actually have happened. I thought that was gonna be, like, a fantasy, but it seemed to have happened.

Sydnee: Uh-huh. And then she is, like, in the shower completely covered in dirt.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So—

Taylor: So this is just what happens when you are a mom, right? I will never be a mom. Um, but as somebody who has mommed, you just—you go through the dog phase? Is that... did you do that?

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: Did you turn into a dog? Is that why you like this?

Sydnee: Okay. I did not turn into a dog. But... [laughs quietly] but what the—

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] So, I would like to say that I think it is really refreshing to see a movie like this that is made about an experience that I've had. I have given birth and I have raised chil—I am raising children. I'm actively raising them. And I also may—you know, I didn't quit my job, but I definitely cut way back and made major modifications to my work schedule in order to accommodate raising children.

And that story—I mean, I'm sure there are lots of movies where stories like that are told, right? But I think that I often feel like when a story like that—or another, you know, something else that I can relate to is told, it's not in a way that I feel like anybody who thinks like me or feels like me is in the writers' room, or behind the camera. You know what I mean? Like, I know you're telling a story that's sort of like mine. Like, it looks like mine, but it doesn't feel like mine.

There were moments in this movie that felt so... I felt so seen. I felt so... exposed. It was almost hard to watch at times. And I mean that in a good way. I mean, I really enjoyed it. I'm not ready to go back and watch it again right away, because I felt so, like, raw watching it play out like that. But I think it really speaks to the importance of making sure that we have a lot of different people writing these stories and making these stories and bringing these stories to life.

Because then you get... you know, I am not the core demographic that is advertised to. I am not who you make movies for, if you wanna make big blockbuster hits. But you make a movie like this, and everybody who has been through that experience, like I have, feels... I mean, so passionately connected to it, because oh my gosh, I saw myself.

I just want to make that pitch to start with.

Taylor: [laughs quietly] It... it kind of—I don't know. Maybe this is just... like, there were elements that sort of felt—you watched The Babadook, right?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Just the sheer terror of... raising a child? [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, the sheer—like, [unintelligible]—you just have a... you are under the control of something that is completely unpredictable. And that that—as somebody that, you know, we've talked about this, you know, privately. I love your kids. I love that people have kids. I don't want kids. So movies that show you the relative horror of having a small person control you are pretty terrifying to me. And that kind of—there were elements of the Babadook. Like, ah, yeah. Maybe it's just also like sons. I don't know. [laughs]

Sydnee: It's—there is, um... it is hard to describe, like, especially those early years when they don't know how to do anything. They don't know how to sleep. They don't know how to eat. They don't know how to... I mean, obviously they poop on themselves. Like, they don't know how to do anything. So you're responsible for everything. And even—and the sleep thing. [sighs] Man, that can feel so intense.

So those early years, they really—yes, kids dominate your entire existence. They dominate your whole brain. But at the same time, they are the most important thing to you. They are an extension of you. And I don't mean that in some ego way. I mean like, you are an extension of my physical self now that is out in the world, away from me at times. And if you are harmed, I cannot survive.

Taylor: Mmm.

Sydnee: Because this is what you mean to me. You are so... intrinsic to my survival now. Like, my love for you, my need for you, my connection for you, my... my job is to care for you, and it is all I want to do. And if something were to happen to you, I think I would wither and die. And then you just

know that forever. Then you just hold that thought. [laughs] Like, I can't control you, and some day you'll walk out the door without me. But also, if anything happens to you, I will die. And that is how you feel... for the rest of your existence.

And you realize that pretty quickly. Like, it happens so fast. And then it's horrifying. You know? Because simultaneously you do everything, you're exhausted, you want a second for yourself. But more than anything, you just want your child to be happy and loved and safe. But also, you're exhausted. I mean, it's... it is terrifying. It is scary. Like, the fact that people make horror movies about it is not shocking. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: 'Cause it's terrifying! [pause] [laughs quietly] I will say that while I did not turn into a dog, there is something very primal and... it's just biology, that can happen to you after you've had a child, that just makes you feel like... I remember thinking a lot, "I am an animal. I am an animal."

Like, I mean, I know that. I'm a scientist. I know I'm an animal. I learned that in school.

Taylor: We all are.

Sydney: Yeah. We're animals. We are mammals. I know this. I became acutely aware of the fact that I was an animal after I gave birth. I thought about it a lot. I thought about it while I was nursing my children. I thought about the fact that this is what animals do. This is how I feed my child as an animal.

I'm not saying everybody has to do this. This is not me passing some judgment on breastfeeding.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: I'm just saying my personal experience. This is what I felt. I felt like an animal as I was, like, desperately watching my child sleep, terrified that they would—'cause in the early days, like, you watch their chest move

while they sleep because you're afraid they're gonna stop breathing. You do that sometimes. Like, you just lay there, staring at them. Terrified.

What's that?! You feel like an animal! Like, "This is my progeny. This is so important. I must devote all my energy to it."

And after a while, you lose your personhood, because you're an animal now. And I think that's what this movie is talking about, is how—it comes back. Like, I have mine back. I don't feel that way anymore. [laughs quietly] I mean, it's there. That, you know, that bit of me will always be inside. But I got Sydnee back at some point. And it was wild to watch that play out for Amy Adams' character on the screen. Like, she literally lost her whole human self, became an animal, and then got back and was a human again, and creating art and, you know, could have that too. But that animal is still there. The dog is inside her now. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] You got that dog in you, is what you're saying.

Sydnee: Yes! Yeah! I mean, you don't lose the dog. Like, maybe you can—the dog doesn't control you anymore, but the dog doesn't go away.

[pause]

Taylor: You know, I, um... I love hearing your perspective on it, because it's—I mean, this is—I think this is—and it is absolutely a movie made for... people that have gone through childbirth. Um, and there were elements that I just—I loved it. I thought it was fascinating. Um, but then there was, like, an element of like... specifically because she was an artist, and then she comes back at art in the end, and then there's sort of like the childless New Yorkers—let's be real, that's what they were...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That are kind of painted with, like, one brushstroke. Like, oh, they're vapid and they don't know anything, and they don't know real art because they've never made a baby. And that part kind of made me go like, "Well, now, wait a second."

Sydnee: That's fair. I think that's a fair criticism.

Taylor: But I think it's... like, I don't think it has to sit as a criticism. I think that's just my perspective on it. And, like, you know, for me as, like, a creative person, I think that the reason we're all here is to create. What you choose to create... doesn't matter. And I don't think that there is—you know, we often... man. I was, uh—I was—there's a knitter that I follow, somebody who knits, who was talking about how, like, anything a woman does is viewed as a craft, but when a man does it it's art.

Sydnee: I've seen that. I've seen that. Yes.

Taylor: And, you know, we talk about this. Or like, a poor person's art is called craft, or folk, or outsider. You know, a person of color's art is called folk, or outsider, or craft. It's only a very specific people that get risen to art. But I think we all have the need to create inside of us. And I think it's just... it's not that there's a hierarchy of what you create. It's that creation is an essential part of us, whether you paint or whether you have children. It's all divine.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And that the act of creation is divine.

Sydnee: And it is—I mean, I think it's true that... the—sorry. I'm plugging in my computer 'cause it was about to die.

Taylor: Oh, okay. [laughs] I was like, "What's going on?"

Sydnee: [distantly] Huh? No, I got a plug right down here. Thank you, love. [pause] Okay. Did I get it in time? Yes. Okay.

Taylor: You're still there.

Sydnee: Sorry. I'm still here. My computer was just about to die. I had to get a charger right away. Um, but I think it's fair. Like, I did think in that moment that everybody was kind of, like... at the table when she goes out to dinner with her friends who don't have kids—or well, no, the one does

have a child, but it sounds like... she's working full time, so they have more, you know—they have decided to go the nanny route, which is all legitimate and fine. Um, but when everybody kind of doesn't know what to say to her, or how to—like, they have no—it's like "We don't have anything to ask you about. All you're doing is... momming."

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: I think from her per—I think we're supposed to see that from her perspective. It does feel that way. Like, and part of it is all self-induced. I felt, when I—for a while when I was mainly just staying at home taking care of my kids, and not working as much, I felt this inadequacy around other people, and I assumed that everyone was judging me, and that nobody would wanna know anything, and that if I shared anything about my kids they were all thinking, like, "Ugh. Stupid. Ugh. Boring. Ugh! Not interesting."

I think a lot of that was her putting that out there. Because, like, most people aren't like that, right? Like, most people are not like, "Well, you're not doing anything interesting. You're just a mom."

Nobody would say that.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: I'm sure there are people who have—you know. So, I think it was through her eyes, she painted her friends that way, but they're not really like that. That's not really—you know. [pause] Yeah. But I can see—there's definitely more, I think, bias for that perspective in the movie, like, as somebody who's had children.

Taylor: Well, and again, I don't... I had that thought and then it was like, well, as you said, there really aren't movies made from this perspective. You know, usually you get the opposite side where, "Oh, everybody just wants to have kids and have a family and I'm different and unique," and that's the—that's your protagonist. And so it's rare we get the flip side of it. But also I don't think it's a comment on, like, the only real way a woman can make art is having babies. It's more of like, creation is divine. And it also requires struggle and sacrifice.

Sydnee: Yes. All of it does. And I think that—I think that is also is an important reminder that while... you know, giving birth was a transformative experience for me, of course. I mean, how could it not be? I think it is for anybody who's—well, I don't wanna say for anybody. For most of us who've had kids. I'm sure for some people it's different. Everybody's different. Um, and it did change the way I thought about myself. And for a while it made me not think about myself. And I think maybe that's a really important takeaway. Like, yes, it's great. I love my kids. I would go back and do it all over again a million times, as hard as it was, to get my children.

But... I would tell other people who are embarking on the journey of parenthood, you will stop thinking about you, and eventually it will come to a point where you are not a thing anymore. You are not... an entity unto yourself. Be careful. Because I... I feel like there's a possibility that there are people who don't get that back. That... society does tell us, like, "Hey. You should be happy you're—"

Especially as a woman. Like, "You're a mom. Be happy. You're doing the most important thing on earth."

Sure. You know, you're raising children. That's—yes. I mean, this is all valid. But "Just be happy in that. Never ask for more. Never question. Be thankful. This is the most important thing, and just doing it is enough."

And for a lot of us, you can really lose your entire humanity in that.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And I think, like, for me getting back to a point where I could be mom and be Sydnee was really vital. And especially—like, not just to my own happiness. Not just to the fact that I am a much more whole, happy, fulfilled human now. But to my kids, who wanna know me! They don't just want this... you know, warm, soft thing that hugs them and gives them food forever.

Like, yeah, when you're a baby that's all you want. But then you want, like, this—I am a person who lives in their house, who tells them things and

listens to them and asks them questions and plays games with them and introduces them to things, and then they introduce me to things, and I share things about me and they share things about them, and we're learning about each other and growing together, because we're different people, and that's beneficial to them.

Taylor: Well, but I... I think that surrender of self—I mean, that's why I don't—I don't think we have to draw a line between, like—I think this was such a well—I mean, it's a well-written book that translates into a well-written movie. Having her be an artist and also a mother... there's something that we talk about a lot in creator spaces, like, the flow state. Where you kind of forget you exist. You're just creating. You disappear into the thing that you're making.

And I think that that is, you know—what you're talking about is that. And we don't... it's not about, like, what's better. It's this is all... this is what happens when you make something beautiful. You kind of dissolve for a while into the act of creation. And then it's important that you find yourself at the end. It's important that you separate yourself from the work at some point. But it is part of the process.

Sydnee: Yeah. And it is the same thing. And I do think there is...

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: Sorry. My cat just attacked me. She's trying to climb me.

Taylor: [laughs] It was a great face you just made.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] She scratched me. It's okay. I know you didn't mean to. You were just trying to climb me.

Um, there is a time where I think, like, disappearing into, uh... I hate to use the word "motherhood" because it's such a—it sounds like it's such a gendered thing. It can happen, you know, regardless of your gender, where you just disappear into the raising of your newborn, right?

Taylor: I will not speak for every trans dude in the world, but I would say from my perspective motherhood is a concept, and I think that's fine to say that. [laughs]

Sydnee: Okay. Well, I don't wanna—I try to stay away from any—you know. I mean, I understand not only women have children. I do think the person who actually gives birth has a separate experience from if they do have a partner, what that partner has. Which is well-observed in the film.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Like, the husband does not get it. He eventually gets it. But initially he doesn't get it. And... man. When he says "Happiness is a choice." Phew.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Ugh. Watching this movie with Justin...

Taylor: Were you just constantly just side-eyeing?

Sydnee: There were so many moments where, like, the husband would say something that you know, like, "No!" And I would hear, like, a physical reaction from Justin like, "Oh!" Like, "No! Stop!"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Like he wanted to, like, reach in and go, "Shh! Don't! Don't, man! Don't! You're making it worse!"

I mean, you can just tell. Like, in the—I mean, there are so many things he said that just... he just didn't get it. And I mean, I think that it is hard to under—I imagine. I don't know. I was on the other side of it. I was the one who was going through the transformation. But like, I went from being this— I wasn't—you know, I wasn't an artist, but I was a professional who get dressed every morning, and wore business clothes, and went to work, and took care of people and like, made complex medical decisions, and led teams,

and taught students. And I did all this stuff, and I had it together, and I... you know, whatever.

And now—and I gave birth, and I came home, and I'm like, sitting on the couch all day, every day, wearing the same pants for maybe, like, five days in a row. Wearing these, like... huge shirts so that I don't have to take anything off to breastfeed, so I can just sort of yank these collars down. [laughs quietly] You know? I'm like, half naked all the time. My hair's dirty. My skin is a mess. I'm, like, surrounded by food and drink containers that I'm in various stages of eating, or are decomposing 'cause I've already eaten. I have the remote, my phone, and a charger, 'cause I'm not moving from the couch, 'cause the kid's cluster feeding again.

I have nothing to tell you about, because this is all I've done all day. Like, what am I gonna tell you about? The Simpsons marathon is on? You want me to tell you about the Simpsons?

Like, everything about me that was interesting or fun or cool or whatever was just gone. And then I... I don't know. I just became this whole other thing for a while. It does feel like becoming a dog!

I mean, I don't—or an animal. I mean, it does! It feels like you transform into something else. I would've thought some other sort of nonhuman primate, just because genetically more similar. But that's just me.

Taylor: I mean, it's a primal act. Creation is a primal act. It's not highbrow or lowbrow. It's—it's encoded in our DNA. However you choose to go about it. So I think that is...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, I don't... I don't know. I mean, I think that it—you know, I made that comment about, like, oh, the dumb artists in New York. It's like, no, but I think I know those people, too, as having never had kids I would say, yeah, those people suck. Like, they probably have nothing interesting to say with their work. They probably... creation is primal. However you choose to go about it.

Sydnee: There are people on both ends of that. And I think, like—so her initial reluctance to engage with the mom group? Understood. It is hard to believe that, like—when she says, like, "Just because we all had kids, why does that mean we have to be friends?"

I have said those words before. Just because our kid's in the same class, why do we have to hang out, you know?

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Like, I have said this. Why does that all the sudden make us—like, how do I know we have anything in common? And then her sort of, like, coming to the understanding that like, oh, wait, we all share this really transformative, vital experience. It's at least something we can talk about. Maybe we're not gonna be best friends forever, but like, this is a shared—this is a bond that matters. Um, there are, just like there are artists who would say, like, "Well, you have nothing interesting to contribute. You just have kids."

There are also moms who would say, "I can't believe you would want anything other than being a mom."

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: And that can feel just as alienating. I mean, and I experienced all of it. As a mom who was still trying to be a doctor and matter in that world and at home, I experienced both ends of that. People who looked at me and said, "How could you want anything other than that perfect little human? How could you?"

And people who were like, 'Why are you staying at home? You're a doctor. Take yourself seriously. Hire some help and go to work.'

Like, I got both of it. And none of it's right, right? It's all just like, what works for you. None of it is intrinsically right or wrong. It's like, what works best for you and your kids? Okay, do that. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well.

[pause]

Sydnee: But I don't know. It was, uh—it was definitely a very... it was—like I said, it was a raw experience to watch it. 'Cause I can't think of a movie that has ever captured that time so well. And I mean, she—from the jump, the opening monologue in the grocery store, I just was like, [gasps] I know! I'll never—I had that thought. "I'll never be smart again." Like, my—'cause your brain works differently for a while. It doesn't work the same.

Taylor: It's funny. I mean, hearing you relate to that and seeing you from the outside, in which, I mean... I'm sure it's—obviously it's different from in your head. But just as that you've always been an incredibly capable, incredibly intelligent person to me. You know, the fact that you can have kids alongside of that is just like, yeah, of course. I couldn't do it, but Sydnee can. Of course. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Aww. I think—no. Tey, I will say this. Obviously everybody—I have no... I am not one of those people that says, like, "Everyone should have kids." I know there's a lot of that on TikTok. Like, "Everybody says you should have kids."

I think have kids if you want 'em, don't if you don't. I have absolutely no opinion on whether or not someone else should have children.

Um, I will say that if your stance—and I have said this to people who are like, "I want to, but I'm scared. I don't know if I can do it."

No one ever knows if they can do it. Nobody ever walks into it thinking "I know I can handle this," or "I'm good at th—" or if you do, oh man. You are in for the rudest of awakenings. Go in humble. It's like medicine. I always tell students when they start their residency. Assume you know nothing. Ask questions about everything. You should constantly be worried about killing people.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And you will be a—well, I mean, and you will be a great doctor if you do those things.

Taylor: I worry about that every day and I'm not even a doctor so, you know, that's fine.

Sydnee: [laughs] And I mean, that's—that is how you should go into parenthood. Assume you know nothing. Ask questions about everything. [through laughter] And you should constantly be afraid—

No. Not about killing—but seriously! Like, oh, it's scary. It is scary. And if you're scared, that's normal. I don't know. If I can... muddle my way through.

Taylor: I think you've done better than muddle. [laughs] I think.

Sydnee: My—I will say—and see, that—and there's the flip side of it. My kids are fantastic, which makes it sound like I think I'm this great parent. But it's—now it's entirely separate from me. They're old enough that I look at them and I think, "Oh. I'm so lucky to know these incredible humans." And I take absolutely no credit for it. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Hm.

Sydnee: I don't know. I don't know how that flip—how that switch flips, but it does. At some point you look and you're like, "They're two—there's these people in my house." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] These small people.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't know them that well, but I'm trying to.

Sydnee: They do weird things every day, and I don't see it coming. Cooper started playing the piano yesterday, and I swear to you it sounded like she accidentally—she doesn't play the—she's, like, learning. She's getting lessons, so she doesn't really know how to play much yet. She knows how to

play, like, hot cross buns. But she accidentally started playing, like, part of the Twin Peaks theme.

Taylor: Ooh

Sydnee: It wasn't that, but that's what started to happen, was something very like that. Like the—the chords she was hitting, I was like... how—what is in—whoa. Whoa! What is in you? Like, I'm so excited to see what's inside! I don't know what's in you, but ooh! How is this what naturally comes out when you sit at a piano? Ohh! [laughs]

Taylor: Channeling David Lynch's ghost. [laughs]

Sydnee: It was very exciting! Both Justin and I were just sitting there staring at her like, "Are we—do you hear—yes! That... what?!" Which I thought would be a great segue.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: But anyway, I think if—even if you haven't had kids, don't wanna have kids, have no interest in that, it is a fascinating—it's got a little bit of body horror. I know you like the body horror. It's got a little bit of that.

Taylor: Yeah. There's some gross moments.

Sydnee: There's some gro—there definitely are some gross moments.

Taylor: The hair in the back really did it for me.

Sydnee: I have never had a hair grow out of my back like that, certainly. But the idea of finding something on your body that you think needs, like, popped... and then sterilizing a needle at him, like, and then popping it yourself?

Taylor: [stage whisper] You're a doctor! You know you're not supposed to do that!

Sydnee: ... I'm not saying that anyone else should.

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: I'm saying it was relatable.

Taylor: Ugh!

Sydnee: I... anyway. Um, I think it would be—I think it's a great movie. Thank you for watching it, Tey. I know—

Taylor: No, I really enjoyed it.

Sydnee: Well, thank you. Alright. So, what are we—I was cluing what we were talking about next.

Taylor: Uh, yeah. Well, obviously David Lynch passed about a week and a half ago. And I thought it would be a good time to watch some of his—his filmography. Uh, obviously watching the entirety of Twin Peaks in a week is a lot. But we could watch Fire Walk with Me. Which, you know, we've both watched Twin Peaks.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: So that's... good going in. But we'll specifically focus on that movie, and then maybe talk about some of his stuff around it.

Sydnee: That sounds great. I would love to.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, thank you, listeners. Um, thank you, Maximum Fum—Fun. Not Fum. That's...

Taylor: Fum. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Fum. Maximum Fun. You should check out Maximumfun.org for a lot of great shows you would enjoy. You can email us at

stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

Taylor: This has been Still Buffering, your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: I didn't—at first I thought, should I say Night Witch? But that feels like it might be a different movie.

Taylor: It's a good title for a different movie.

Sydnee: Yeah. That wouldn't have anything to do with motherhood or dogs, though.

Taylor: No, I think that would absolutely. It's like Hecate, right?

Sydnee: Ohh.

Taylor: Motherhood. Dogs.

Sydnee: Yeah. Okay. Alright. We'll make that movie. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs] Alright!

[music plays]

Jeremy: Hey, everybody I'm Jeremy.

Oscar: I'm Oscar.

Dmitri: I'm Dmitri.

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Oscar: Ooh, I wanna be one!

Jeremy: You already are. It's that easy.

Oscar: Oh, okay. Cool.

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