

Still Buffering: "No Reservations"

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[theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind" by Nouvellas 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: Well, Tey, do we need to—should we update any of the TikTok drama that we've covered? I don't know.

Taylor: [titters] Sure.

Sydnee: Do we have a responsibility, before we get into the meat and potatoes—or no, I'm sorry. Not meat and potatoes, potatoes and vegetables. This is your episode. I shouldn't be talking about meat.

Taylor: Potatoes are a vegetable, you covered vegetable. I mean, that was fine.

Sydnee: [chuckles] Well, I didn't mean to throw meat in there like that.

Taylor: Meat and/or potatoes.

Sydnee: What meat substitute would you like for the—to represent the bulk of your episode?

Taylor: I mean, I don't think—I think it would be disrespectful to talk about meat substitutes in an episode that centers around Anthony Bourdain. So meat and potatoes is just fine.

Sydnee: Ah, okay. [chuckles] I didn't know if there was—if we had a responsibility. I don't know that any TikTok drama got resolved. I was intrigued by the Bama Rush process, but then when it came to like what

house everybody got into, I lost interest in that whole TikTok thing very quickly.

Taylor: Yeah.... I don't know what any of that means.

Sydnee: Yeah. So I don't... I don't want to say I don't care, because that sounds really mean. I don't—I just don't—like I am not interested in where you ended up, because I have no context for that. I don't know what any of those things mean. Everyone seemed excited, so, good for you. I don't... [chuckles]

Taylor: [chuckles] Your dowry is secure.

Sydnee: Yeah, I guess, I don't... I don't know. They were all in a collection of Greek letters. [titters] That's—

Taylor: I saw that there was a recall on cucumbers. They have... what was it, maybe salmonella?

Sydnee: [gasps]

Taylor: Something. Something bad. And it made me worry about all these people that are out there eating whole cucumbers every day, because of Cucumber Boy. So...

Sydnee: What if—okay, I doubt that this is true. Actually, I'm gonna go ahead and say that my theory right now that I'm about to propose is definitely wrong.

Taylor: You're going to propose something that's definitely false, but—

Sydnee: It's definitely false.

Taylor: Okay, great, go. [chuckles]

Sydnee: [laughs] What if the TikToks about eating a cucumber a day increase demand for cucumbers at a rate that they couldn't continue to

like—the safeguards on cucumber production got loose, right? Because they had to like get the cucumbers—

Taylor: They over-produced the cucumbers?

Sydnee: Yeah, like they had to get the cucumbers out to the people. It's like, they're growing them, obviously you can't make that any faster than it is. But then there's a process of like the picking and the cleaning and the... I don't know, packaging, and then the shipping, right? Maybe that got rushed because of the increased demand, because of these TikToks. And that resulted in salmonella in the cucumbers.

Taylor: I mean, it sounds plausible, despite the fact that it's definitely not true.

Sydnee: I'm certain that's wrong. I'm certain I'm wrong.

Taylor: It was salmonella, and they were recalled in 31 states.

Sydnee: Was West Virginia one of them?

Taylor: No, I just checked. But New York is, so...

Sydnee: Oh, well...

Taylor: I don't know, I don't think... I don't think it's the—I get like the wrapped... like the, what are they? The English cucumbers.

Sydnee: Mm-hm...

Taylor: I'll double check it, though.

Sydnee: The individually wrapped ones?

Taylor: Yeah, like the big, long ones that are wrapped in plastic. They're like the—they have no seeds.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Those are good. We always use those for the restaurant too, so I don't know.

Sydnee: I love the baby ones.

Taylor: Oh, the baby ones are good!

Sydnee: They're really good, and they're perfect for—Cooper loves cucumbers. And so like, I can get one of those out and chop up the whole thing and put some of it in her snack and some of it in her lunch. And she's very happy because she eats a whole cucumber day, but it's just a baby cucumber. So...

Taylor: Those are good.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Well, I—you know, if you're staying away from cucumbers because of the salmonella outbreak, Cucumber Boy has been followed up by Whole Head of Lettuce Man. I don't know if this guy's crossed your FYP yet?

Sydnee: No?

Taylor: He's this guy, I think he works in like, I don't know, some sort of like... he's got like a big truck, I think he like hauls like—you know, not like a garbage man, but like the people that pick up stuff that you're getting rid of, you know?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like specific stuff, like a junk hauler truck. I think that's what he does? I might be wrong. But he brings a whole head of lettuce and just will like squirt dressing on it, and then like tear off pieces of a chicken breast and put it on top, and then just take a big bite out. And then... I don't... He got—he's done enough of these that Gordon Ramsay responded to one. Watched him make a whole—eat a whole head of lettuce. [laughs]

Sydnee: And was he like, "Good job?"

Taylor: I don't—I think he was just sort of perplexed. It was a lot of just like, "What are you doing? What is this? Oh, no!"

Sydnee: What are we talking here? Is it like iceberg?

Taylor: Yeah, like a big, round iceberg lettuce. And he just has a different condiment and some sort of topping sometimes. Like there was one where he just dolloped some hummus and then a single pita chip, and would just big bite, big crunch. I think people like it for the crunch?

Sydnee: Oh, is this kind of like mukbang adjacent?

Taylor: I mean, I feel like it's a very wholesome mukbang, because it's just like some dude eating a head of lettuce.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: Like, that's it.

Sydnee: Do you want to—we talked a lot about last week, about how like there are people working in Kamala's social media department there who are like following all the trends and trying to like pick up on 'em and make things current. Can you imagine a meeting where they're trying to explain like, it's just a guy eating a head of lettuce. To like a bunch of like political operatives who've like spent their whole lives doing this kind of stuff, and they're like, "Now, what is it?"

"It's just a guy, he eats a whole head of like iceberg lettuce."

Taylor: "So Tim, what we want you to do... is take this lettuce—"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [chuckles] "And just eat it."

Sydnee: Oh, you know what though? If he turned it into one of those Minnesota salads that aren't salads?

Taylor: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: Like the Minnesota Midwest mom. The mom that—the mom on—she makes salads?

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: She makes salads. Minnesota salads that aren't salads is her thing. Like, because they're not—when I think of a salad—[chuckles]

Taylor: You see vegetables.

Sydnee: I think of something that's very vegetable-forward.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yes, there are other things in there. Sure, I like a salad with lots of things. I like a salad with a lot of stuff in it, . But like, it's foundationally a vegetable dish with stuff. My understanding is that in Minnesota, and perhaps other parts of the Midwest, a salad is something else.

Taylor: It could be anything.

Sydnee: Yes, and it—like it has a lot of... mayonnaise or some sort of creamy-based substance in it.

Taylor: Yeah. I mean, we have salads like that? You understand that? Like, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah, but like I still don't think when I—I mean, I guess like potato salad, of course, and macaroni salad. Yeah, I know there are salads like that, but I don't—when I say salad, I don't mean that. Like when I use the word—I would specifically clarify like, oh, I'm talking about potato salad. You know? Like I'm talking about a cream-based salad. [chuckles]

Taylor: Saying like, "I want to go get a salad," you're not going to sit down with a pint of potato salad?

Sydnee: [chuckles] No!

Taylor: All right.

Sydnee: I would say, I would like to—I would—I can't see a reality where I'm just like, "I just need to eat a pint of potato salad right now." Maybe? I don't know.

Taylor: In reality, it's not *that* hard to conceive.

Sydnee: Yeah, I mean—

Taylor: Maybe not for you.

Sydnee: It can be good. It depends on the pickle. Like you gotta really get the pickle-forward flavor in there.

Taylor: Mm-hm. Okay, interesting.

Sydnee: I like the pickle in there.

Taylor: Huh.

Sydnee: In a potato salad. But... and then I guess there are fruit. But fruit salad is a different salad. And like frozen salads, like remember the pink frozen salad?

Taylor: Oh, yeah, that was just like sherbet with weird stuff in it.

Sydnee: Yeah, but they called that a salad.

Taylor: Yeah... Salad is a very loosely applicable term. Many things can be salads.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: If they try. If they want to be.

Sydnee: If you want—if you want that bad enough for you.

Taylor: See, I like—I make myself, I call them slop bowls, but I guess they are salad. Because I am always too busy, but I try to like eat somewhat responsibly. So my bodega sells like little like ready-made things. It'll be like, like a three-bean salad or like, like a cucumber-tomato salad. They'll have usually like a quinoa thing. And I'll just buy like three or four of these random things and put them together in a bowl. So it's like everything you'd put on a lettuce-y salad, but no lettuce, no wasted space. Just a bunch of stuff together.

Sydnee: I will say, I am a fan of replacing lettuce sometimes with another vegetable. Like I will chop up a bunch of like cucumber or cauliflower or broccoli or something like that, celery, I'll throw that in there. Like different mixes of these things as like the base, instead of lettuce. And then sometimes if my herb garden is doing really well, I'll pick a bunch of leaves of different herbs and throw those in there too.

Taylor: Yeah, love an herby salad.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't mind a really bold flavor. [chuckles]

Taylor: See, that's what I just I don't—I don't wanna—I don't want anything that's nonsense. I like iceberg for the crunch, but it's kind of—it brings nothing to the table outside of that.

Sydnee: I'm more of like a spring mix.

Taylor: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: Or I could do a romaine. I could do a romaine.

Taylor: I like an arugula. I like a little peppery arugula.

Sydnee: Ooh. I think I may have told you before, I accidentally grew tons of arugula in my flower bed this year. It is not my garden, it was growing in my flower bed, and it just spread all over. And I let it happen.

Taylor: [laughs] Just let it happen.

Sydnee: I just let it.

Taylor: Let it go, man! Arugula, do your thing!

Sydnee: It was delicious! I ate arugula on everything for a while. And then it did eventually flower, and the flowers are these little dainty white flowers. They were pretty. You know.

Taylor: Can you eat them?

Sydnee: Hm... you know, I don't know? I was only eating, of course, the leaves, but... maybe? I don't know. You know what? That's something I learned on TikTok. If you see something and you think you might be able to eat it, but you're not sure, don't.

Taylor: Don't. Yeah, Alicia Silverstone.

[group chuckle]

Sydnee: I don't—okay, I don't know if anybody saw that drama where she found something growing in someone's yard.

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: And she was it looked like walking a street and—

Taylor: I believe she was in London?

Sydnee: She said England?

Taylor: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: Which, well, that's what I would have guessed. I don't know why London. Because it's, you know, the capital. But like, she just—

Taylor: She's in the city.

Sydnee: I think she just said England, didn't she?

Taylor: Maybe she did. But definitely like it looked like a city.

Sydnee: It looked—yeah, city. It looked like a city.

Taylor: You're not out in the in the country, where maybe something growing would be edible.

Sydnee: Right. It was like behind a fence, but like the branches of this plant were extending out into the street through the fence. And it had these little... fruits on it. And she picked one and ate it, and then asked TikTok as she was eating it, "What is this?" Which like, ask before. Ask before.

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: But it turned out it was a Jerusalem cherry. Which is in, it's in the capsacin, capsicum family. So it's pepper adjacent.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Which she did describe it as peppery, because it is pepper adjacent.

Taylor: But it will—it will not kill you. A lot of people are freaking out because people figured out what it was and then immediately said, "Oh, no, it's poisonous!" And then other people said, "Well, no, it will give you a tummy ache if you eat too many of them. And you should not eat them, they're not good for you, but they won't kill you."

Sydnee: But she freaked people out because she posted that TikTok and then a bunch of people were like, "No, don't!" And then she didn't respond for a while and didn't post any more TikToks. And everybody was like, "Is she okay?"

Taylor: I hope she was just having a little fun with us. Like, "You know what I'm gonna do to the world at large?" [chuckles]

Sydnee: She did eventually post something that said, "I am totally fine." And then she said, "I didn't swallow it."

Taylor: Oh, okay. Just took a bite, spit it out. I mean, I think if you're dealing with like actual poison, that's not how it works.

Sydnee: No. I will say this is a good rule, because I—so in West Virginia, you can, if you know what you're looking for, there's stuff that grows that you can eat, right? Like you can forage. We got a lot of—we're, what, the third most forested state in the country? I saw a map of that recently. I think the third most forested. I think Maine's like number one and—I don't remember. It's up in New England were the other two I think. Anyway—

Taylor: There's a lot of trees up there.

Sydnee: There's a lot of trees up there. But we got a lot of trees here! We're like the third. And you can forage and find stuff. But don't do that unless you know.

Taylor: Yeah... I follow, what's that one? The one TikTokker, Alexis... what's her name? I sent you her video because she was—

Sydnee: Yeah, she's a great—

Taylor: The one that debunked the Jerusalem cherry and said it wasn't that dangerous.

Sydnee: She's a great forager.

Taylor: And she's very clear about how dangerous things can be and what you should look for. But also at the end of the day, like you know, if you're not sure, don't. Just don't.

Sydnee: Mm-mm, don't. Don't! Especially like in West Virginia where there's a ton of mushrooms out there. If you don't know, do not eat a mushroom.

Taylor: No...

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

Taylor: There's a lot of this—I've heard multiple horror stories at this point of like, there's a decorative... I guess it's like a cabbage, that is planted in a lot of New York City, in like flower beds. In the—like in the city. And people will occasionally take it and eat it. And you do not want to grow—like there are large patches of New York City where there is so much poisonous stuff in the soil that you could grow anything in that and you can't eat it. It would—anything would be dangerous to eat from that soil. [chuckles]

Sydnee: That's a really good point, even if the product—even if the item itself is not poisonous, it leeches. All plants leech stuff from the soil they grow in. And so this is why you will find like certain levels of metals and things in different items, because like it's just getting in there while the plant is growing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's where all those metals and tampons probably came from.

Taylor: From...

Sydnee: From the soil. They're just leaching heavy metals through soil into the cotton fibers. And then—

Taylor: Oh...

Sydnee: You know, they're plant-based products, and then you... Anyway, the processing it—anyway, the point is, yeah, unless you know what something is, don't eat it. [chuckles]

Taylor: Know where it's grown and what it is, and then put it in your mouth.

Sydnee: Yeah... No, this is all very adjacent to what we're talking about today.

Taylor: That's true, actually. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah, so I—

Sydnee: That was your cue. [laughs]

Taylor: I was following up on it, I got it. You know, we're kind of going back and forth now with our... not new format, our more open format between current and past. But this is a past influence episode. Specifically, I think one of my biggest influences in like my life, for better or worse, honestly, and that's the work of Anthony Bourdain. I specifically talked about No Reservations, but I've read his books. I'm also a fan of Parts Unknown, which I think we watched a bit of in preparation as well. I don't know, amazing world-traveling man, chef... human.

Sydnee: Mm-hm. Yeah, absolutely. I don't think I've ever read the books, but I had been a No Reservations fan for a long time. And watched some of Parts Unknown, absolutely, and always enjoyed it. It was very much like, I feel like he was sort of one of the original like cool TV chef, kind of like that persona. Like the bad boy TV chef thing, you know? Like it made cooking and being a chef and all that very cool. Like that was sort of the origin of that.

Taylor: Definitely. And I don't think anybody ever did it quite the same as he did.

Sydnee: Mm-mm.

Taylor: The first, I actually—so I remember this was back in college, that I started watching New Reservations. And then that was also when I got my first restaurant job. Because I got my first restaurant job in the city so I could stay here between semesters. Because I was all on loans and scholarship, so I didn't have money in the summer. [chuckles]

So I went to work at a bar, and I—the bartender was reading *Kitchen Confidential* behind the bar. And I'm like, "Wait, I know that guy! I watch his show." And he was like, "Well, you gotta read this book." So I read the book and that just, you know, very much changed my view on, you know, just my job. I mean, I feel like it's normal for people to feel like if you're working in the service industry—it's changed now. I think in the last couple of decades, it's changed.

But definitely back then it's like, "Oh, you work at a restaurant?" You know, "You're a server? Your waiter?" Like that's not respectable. And like, the—just as much as his travel impacted me, I think that just how proud he was of the work he was a part of, and how much he talked about it with like pride and respect, meant a lot to me. To be like, yeah, I do work in a restaurant. And it's hard work. It's honest work. It's important work. [titters]

Sydnee: It was a—I mean, I will say that I think that—because there are a lot of—and I've always been a fan of like both cooking shows and travel shows. So, shows that combine food and travel, like, great. So I've watched a lot of 'em. But I do think it was—he represented a different attitude about the importance of food. Not just like if you go to this part of France, you can eat this great, delicious food.

There it is, I sat at a nice table, I was served some nice food. Eat this delicious food in this country at this restaurant, bye. Like, I feel like a lot of it had been presented kind of like that. As opposed to, this is how it connects to this culture, to these people. This is why this food is from here and is like this, and why that's meaningful and important. Outside of 'it's good' and 'this is fun' and 'this is cool.' You know what I mean? Like, there's something else that he's tapping into that a lot of cooking shows and travel shows at that point weren't really talking about.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and I remember before *No Reservations*, I watched a lot of—do you remember Samantha Brown?

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: I mean, it was a great travel show, but it was always—it was that. It was like this amazing restaurant. She was always on like a yacht or a luxury

liner. It was so expensive and extravagant, and it was really cool. But like... there was no part of me that ever thought, yeah, I could do that one day. Absolutely not. Like that is for a different class of people. I will never have those experiences. I think because Bourdain was, I mean, I think not only was he willing, I think he was always more excited and usually more responsive to like street food.

Like local fare. Like he wanted to talk to the cooks, to the people that make it. He wanted to eat what the locals ate. And like that made it feel like, oh, well, I mean, you know... Like, if I—or you know, a street hot dog is something to be respected. And like you know, a street cart meal is something to be respected. Like, I can afford that. I can go to another country and eat, you know, cheap food. [chuckles] I can figure that out.

Sydnee: Well, it's really, it's an interesting way of like... so, I think you could look at food or like a meal experience as like just one big ladder. And like, there's somewhere on Earth where you can eat the best possible meal that any human could consume. And then everything is a step down from that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Or you could say like, well, there are a lot of people making street hot dogs. But there are people who are making them in a way that is better. And like, where they care about it and they put time and effort into it. And so, this is the best of that that you can get somewhere. Or this is the one that is made in the way that reflects something important, something that's been passed down. Like, there's a way to appreciate things for what they are, as opposed to like... you know, like this is the best food, this is the mediocre food, this is the worst food. Done. And I think that that's... I think that was kind of revolutionary. I don't think we had thought about food that way.

Taylor: I remember he was asked once like, "Who do you think is the best cook in the world right now?" And his answer was, "I don't know, probably like a grandma in her kitchen," I think he said in Mexico. Like that's probably where the best food is right now, and we'll never eat it. But you know...

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, because it's weird to think about. I mean... And there's so much when it comes to culture that we tend to put in this like who makes the superior whatever? And it's like, well, no, it's just all—it's all different and it depends on your tastes and what you connect with. And like there are some meals that I like because I have memories and nostalgia and experiences connected to them. And someone else would eat it and be like, "Well, I mean, that's fine." And I mean like okay, like potato soup.

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah.

Sydnee: Every time I—if you make potato soup really well, and not the baked potato soup thing with bacon and cheese and all that. That's not what I'm talking about. This is another thing. If you make a really good potato soup, I will eat that and feel like I'm having one of the best food experiences that I could possibly have. But that's because I have a lot of stuff connected to it. And then he took that kind of concept and then looked into different parts of the world, different cultures, to talk about that. You know?

Taylor: Well, I mean, specifically, I know what you're like—the best potato soup in the world to me will always be the potato soup that our grandmother made.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: And that is, you know, that can never be duplicated. Because that was a time and a place. Had a very specific bowls. [chuckles] Like...

Sydnee: And it's, you know, it's funny, I made potato soup very recently. And I used broth to boil the vegetables and potatoes before I pureed it all. And instead of just water—and it gave it way more flavor, right? Like it was a much more flavorful soup, it was very rich, and I like that. I'm not gonna make it that way again, I'm gonna go back to the other way.

[group chuckle]

Taylor: Because that was correct.

Sydnee: Right? Well like, it was good. I like what I made, it was good. And maybe like just if somebody was judging the two next to each other, they would say, "Well, this is a more flavorful bowl of soup here." It has, you know, it's got more going on. But it wasn't right. Like as I ate it I thought, eh, this isn't the same. I'm not having the same experience from this food.

Taylor: There's something about mawmaw's—it just tasted like warm and black pepper. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That's it.

Sydnee: Oh, there's butter in there.

Taylor: Warm butter and black pepper, I guess that's it. That's the combo.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Well, but I think that goes into—I mean, you know, I've now made restaurants my career. You know, that was kind of like in college, working in a restaurant and then going to school. And like sitting through critiques and like very high-minded discussions about art, blah, blah, blah. It was really... this is such a weird parallel, but have you ever seen the movie Cocktail with Tom Cruise? It's a very silly movie about bartending.

Sydnee: I've never watched the whole movie, no. It has been on in my presence, I'm familiar like with the vibe. But I don't know the—I don't know the whole story.

Taylor: There's a bit where he's in school, but also bartending. And you can see that he's just so like, "This is the—I'm in the real world. School feels a little silly right now." And I'm sure that lots of people have had that experience when you're working a real job, but you're also then going into a space that is very like theoretical and... Like, it's hard. I would find myself like in, you know, like going to work and seeing like chefs do their thing and bartenders do their thing. Because at the time, I was just serving and like bussing tables. I was very low on the totem pole.

But the difference of like seeing things actually made, versus just these long conversations about how things are made, I'm like, I don't want to—I don't know if I get this world anymore. I want to be part of the actionable world. And I mean, you know, that's what I've been doing. But I think a big part of that is what I think the other—what Bourdain was actually talking about. Which I don't really think was about food or drinks, I think it was about what I call the secret third thing in service. Which is why we go out to eat, actually.

Because anyone could make meals or order them into their house, probably save some money or be more comfortable. You know, anybody can crack a cocktail book these days, buy good ingredients and make a drink for themselves. If you're going out, you're going out for something else, and that is a human connection, a human experience. There is something I would say divine about having somebody cook for you or make something for you and put it in front of you to nourish you and take care of you. That is an important feeling. That's a way we connect to each other.

Sydnee: I think you're—I think you're so right. And I've always been fascinated by—and I mean, I probably learned about this concept from shows like *No Reservations*. I know that in... like, I don't know that I can say that broadly like in American culture. I know that certainly in parts of the country that are like where I am, where I am from, where I grew up, where I still live, the idea of cooking at home is a really like valued concept. Like, "This is a home-cooked meal." Like, "I cooked it."

And even more so like you know, "I garden, I grew this, and I cooked it here. And we ate here and I cooked it here." And there's a lot of value in the idea of cooking for yourself. I think it's a very—like it's part of our individualism. That like self-sufficiency even that's baked into the American ideal is like, "I can do this for myself." I think we missed something with that. And I've always been fascinated by cultures where going out to eat is the norm. Because there are a lot of places where you just don't cook at home for yourself every night. You wouldn't do that. You would go out to eat a lot more.

Like it's normal to go out to eat frequently. And it's not a luxury, it is exactly what you're saying. It's about community, it's about being with other people, it's about being part of something. And I think there's something really beautiful and fascinating that we miss a lot when we're like... And part of it is like the need for it. It's expensive to go out to eat here. You have to cook at home because it's cheaper. But man, wouldn't it be nice if we could all go commune when we eat on a regular basis? Wouldn't our neighborhoods and our communities and our societies be nicer?

Taylor: Well, I mean, you know, in New York, it's so—like people don't just eat out for a special occasion. People eat out—sometimes you're eating out, you know, more nights of the week than you're eating at home. And I think because it's such—like the city is so demanding and it's so fast-paced, and all of us worked so freakin' hard just to keep our head above water, that like I know what—I know the look in someone's eyes when they walk into the bar and they're not—they don't—they're not really here for drink or food.

They're here because they need to sit down and have somebody take care of them. Because we're all so lacking in that. And like it sucks that we have to monetize it, but then I mean I guess that's, you know, you're paying for what you're getting. You know... It's funny, I forget what episode it was, but I was watching some No Reservations. And he referred to, he said bartenders are modern day priests. Which was interesting, because I've said before that I think a good bar is what church should be, and a bad bar is what church already is. Dangerous for women and children.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: [chuckles] Generally an unpleasant money grab.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But there is something divine about... you know, it's a communion, it's—I'm gonna listen to your problems, I'm gonna make sure... I'm gonna make sure you're safe, but I'm gonna make sure you're as messed up as you want to be. I'm gonna make you eat some French fries at some point. You're gonna leave here feeling better and lighter than when you came in.

Sydnee: It's, you know, for restaurants, it's funny—not bars so much, but for restaurants. That's something that when you have kids, like you find yourself missing that. Because going to a restaurant with kids is just not—it's not the same.

Taylor: [chuckles] Well...

Sydnee: You might be taken care of, but you're also taking care of someone.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: And depending on the mood of your children, it can be whatever it is. But that also is why as parents now, if we take our children to a restaurant that does literally anything to indicate like, "Oh, we like having your kids here too. They're also customers and we value them." Oh, man, I will do—like I will become a faithful, you know, evangelical for that restaurant for the rest of my life. I will tell everyone to go there. I will go there on a regular basis. I will tip big.

Just to like—because it is—it is something you miss when you—especially when you have little kids, being able to go out to a restaurant and enjoy that experience. And so a place that like, I don't know, you got some food that you know kids will eat, and maybe bring some crayons to the table? Oh, you've won me.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: You've got a cup that isn't glass that you can give my kid. It doesn't even have to have cartoon characters on it. Just please, not a glass!

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It really, it means—I feel like I want to cry sometimes when that happens. Like, "Oh, thank you. Thank you!" I can eat too here and it's so nice!

Taylor: Well, that's—it's funny, because I've worked in places where they've had worse attitudes towards parents with kids. And it's always bothered me, but I think specifically since you've had your kids, it's something that I pay more attention to. Because you know, I—it's just, it's so easy to just not be—[chuckles] Don't be a jerk. Like just make sure people feel welcome. Again, that's—I take my job very seriously. I think in spite of people that look at the work that people like me do and are like, "Oh, you must—I don't know, failed out of school or have no skills to offer, because this is what you do with your life."

It's like, no, I provide a very important service. And my service is to make people feel taken care of. And that's everybody. That's parents with kids, that's people that can buy my most expensive bottle of champagne, that's people that go out of their way to ask what's the cheapest thing on the menu. It doesn't matter, it's—you know, obviously, at some point it is a—it's a business. I've got to sell things. But also like, we can't forget what our real job is.

Sydnee: Well, but I mean if you think about it, if you look at like all the different jobs that exist now. And like how long have all these things been around as like a reflection of how absolutely necessary we as a species have decided that they are. Places that cook and serve you food are pretty ancient. [titters] You know? Like the concept of going somewhere for a meal or for a drink, it's pretty old idea. And if—I mean, I don't know a better reflection of value than this has been necessary to humankind since almost its origin.

Taylor: Well, I mean, we understand that food and drink is entwined with the origin of civilization itself, you know.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: That's why we all—at some point we're like, "Hey, I won't kill you if you don't kill me, and we can grow this stuff." Either the agreement was because we can make really delicious like bread. Some historians say no, it was probably beer. It's probably—

Sydnee: Beer.

Taylor: We—

Sydnee: Beer.

Taylor: "If we can work together and not kill each other, we can grow this thing that messes us up wonderfully. So let's do that. Let's shake hands."
[chuckles] Boom, civilization.

Sydnee: And let's all be nice to the usually woman with the magic beer stick.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That you can you can stir—

Taylor: But then if the beer goes bad, we're gonna—

Sydnee: That makes it beer.

Taylor: Burn her on the stake. So that's not as good, but—[chuckles]

Sydnee: Well, that—but for a while.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I enjoyed—you had us watch—I watched the No Reservations episode in Osaka, which was an early season. I want to say it was like season two.

Taylor: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: And then I watched the one in Tokyo that was season four. Did I watch the right two?

Taylor: Yeah, I think—yeah. I watched, there's a Tokyo episode—is also on Parts Unknown.

Sydnee: I watched the No Reservations Tokyo.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah, I love—

Sydnee: Where there's like the flower arranging part and... yeah.

Taylor: But the Osaka one where they talk about, what is it? Kuidaore? He says it kind of funny. But the concept of eating oneself to death, but that emerged from the merchant class not having anywhere to spend their money, so they just eat and drink.

[group chuckle]

Taylor: I love that philosophy. I think that's the best way to live your life.
[chuckles] Like...

Sydnee: I like that he drew the line at the clown. "I will not take my picture with the clown, I don't like clowns."

Taylor: That's funny, I—

Sydnee: I thought that was funny.

Taylor: I forgot that he talked about the clown in that episode, because last time I was—well, this was two trips ago when I was in Osaka, I went with a fellow bartender. And I have a tattoo of the running man, The Glico guy that's in Osaka. And my friend got a tattoo of the clown. [chuckles] He's got a really good ankle piece of that clown, but... it's a really—

Sydnee: The food that they're eating there looks incredible.

Taylor: Oh, Osaka is such a great place to eat.

Sydnee: I love street food.

Taylor: And I mean, I—I mean, I remember being, you know, what was I, the—my first trip abroad was when I—the year I graduated, I had like \$8,000 left in loan money. Wasn't real money. And I went abroad, and it was because of, you know, Bourdain. Because I don't know, I felt like, okay, I can go eat street food. I can go eat cheap food. I can figure things out. I can sleep in hostels. Like, you know, there's a part in kitchen—I think it's in Kitchen Confidential, where he's talking about his first trip to Tokyo.

And he's talking about like going out the door and seeing a Starbucks, and going to the Starbucks and then feeling like an absolute fraud. And like, "What am I doing?" [chuckles] So then he leaves the Starbucks and he like just finds what—like turns down an alley and finds whatever counter is full. And it's a ramen shop, and he has ramen for breakfast. And he's like, "Okay, this is the way." [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah, yeah. Well and I mean, I definitely absorbed that. I know in the travels that I have done in my life, it was always very important to me like, no, we're not having Starbucks. No, we're not eating at McDonald's. You know, like this is—we're gonna—what does this place have to—what is unique about here? I want to know that. I don't want to go all over the world and have the same experience I could have in Huntington.

Taylor: Well, and that goes back to what you were saying about how it's not about this is the best, and this is you know, the second best. It's that every place has something unique and important to offer. But I mean, I guess that gets into like I think the deep humanism that runs through all of his work. Where I think it wasn't just every place, it wasn't just every dish. I think at the end of the day, Bourdain was telling us that every person has something unique and important to offer.

Sydnee: I definitely think that's true. We also—well, before I get into the West Virginia episode, I had a question about the Tokyo episode. Was that... I was thinking about the year, that would have been, what, 2006 or something? I don't know. I was looking at the season and the year that might have been. Morimoto is in the Tokyo episode quite a bit, like they eat soba together, and then he goes back and eats something else with him

later. Like he's in it quite a bit. Was that before he was like a TV chef present all his own? Or was this like our introduction to Morimoto?

Taylor: I think that would have overlapped with the Japanese Iron Chef?

Sydnee: Was that—well, and I wonder though, then maybe I'm just thinking from the American perspective. When did the Japanese Iron Chef become so well known here in the States? You know what I mean?

Taylor: We definitely watched that. If not... Why do I feel like I watched that like as far back as high school?

Sydnee: I mean, we definitely could have. Yeah?

Taylor: I know we watched it a lot together, and I feel like that wouldn't have been when I was in college.

Sydnee: Well, then I guess the question is, how many people like us were watching the Japanese Iron Chef in high school?

Taylor: [laughs] I don't know, but we certainly were.

Sydnee: I mean, yeah! I love that show.

Taylor: I was obsessed with it.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I mean, I was very familiar with Morimoto before he was on the American Iron Chef. And I think more people and... whatever. And he had a beer and everything, but...

Taylor: [chuckles] I would have... I don't know. I don't know.

Sydnee: It made me wonder about that.

Taylor: I don't know about the dates. I would think that was part of the appeal of having him on the show. Was that at least, you know, that was in the early days I think of—ah, I hate the word foodie, but I think that sort of foodie culture that Food Network spawned. I think that you know, enough of us existed at the time that they would have known Morimoto.

Sydnee: The soba they eat looks so good.

Taylor: Ah, that—there were lots of, it's—I think that it's cool that just re-watching some of those episodes gave me notes for my upcoming trip. To like, you know what, I've never had fresh pulled soba. I need to find a place that does that. The one where he goes to... is it Hokkaido, where he talks about Ainu people? It's one of the... it was basically like an indigenous culture that was colonized by mainland Japan. And a lot of their culture was erased.

And he, you know, meets with people, Ainu people, eats their cuisine. So it got me looking around like, is there an Ainu cuisine that will be around where I'm going to be staying? And I found like there's a prominent Ainu restaurant, not only is it in Tokyo, but it's in the neighborhood that I'm staying in. Like a five minute walk from where I'm going to be staying.

Sydnee: Oh, nice!

Taylor: So, you know, it's cool. Like, oh, like this episode is, you know, whatever, 12 years old. But from Bourdain, I just got a tip for something I'm gonna seek out. You know, on the trip.

Sydnee: That's really cool. That's really cool. Yeah, I think what you're talking about, finding like the humanity in everyone, is really prominent. We also watched the West Virginia episode of Parts Unknown.

Taylor: Ah, I love that episode.

Sydnee: That was—that episode was also done... I mean, it was... was it before or after the election? The Trump-Hillary election.

Taylor: Was that...

Sydnee: It was right around then. Because it's very much present, like they talk about it directly. But that undercurrent in the episode is there.

Taylor: Yeah, because they're talking about Trump in the episode.

Sydnee: Mm-hm. Yeah, well, he's trying to figure out why would any of you support this millionaire from New York who uses a gold toilet? I mean—

Taylor: Well, and I like how he's frank, but he's not disrespectful in that conversation.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: Like he is honestly trying to understand where they're coming from.

Sydnee: I think we were talk—Justin was watching it with me, and we were talking about he has a conversation with a guy in a bar at one point. He's like a vet, he's a veteran, and he... I forget the whole story. But he's having a conversation with him about just that, like, why Trump? Like, he could not be more removed from your life experiences. You know, he has nothing in common with anyone here. There's no way he understands West Virginians. There's no way.

And the conversation that they have, it is if people on the left side of the political spectrum, if we want to understand why a state like West Virginia, where we so clearly suffer under conservative Republican policies, and especially economic policies, like we so clearly suffer at the hands of those on the right.

Why do so many people here keep voting that way? I think watching that conversation could be really helpful. Because what it comes down to is who's honest with us, how people talk to us and about us. And a lot of people on the left don't fundamentally... I don't want to say they don't like who we are here. But I don't think they've taken any time to know or understand what's happening in parts of like Appalachia. I just don't think they've ever taken the time to look.

Taylor: Well, and I think there's a lot of assumption and there's a lot of dismissal.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: I mean, I think a lot of people in red states have talked about this. That like when people in blue states just say, "Well, that won't affect us." It's like, but do you not think that there are people that—even somebody that might have a different system of beliefs, I fully believe deserves happiness and protections. And like if you're somebody that feels—it's the same thing on both sides. You know, if we feel like this side doesn't care about us, we don't care what happens to them. If that side feels like we don't care about them, they're not going to care what happens to us.

We have to—for all the talk of like emotional labor, which I think is real, it's hard to have these conversations. And if you're not in a place to have them, I respect that. But somebody has to do it. Because we're not going to get anywhere just ignoring each other's concerns and trying to be better. Like, oh, we're louder than you, so we win. Like, the way we really move forward is by having these conversations, understanding people. Maybe you rub off a little on them, maybe they rub off a little on you, but you find some middle ground.

Sydnee: And it's, you know, like to understand the history of our—of like a place like West Virginia as our—everything of value has been extracted from our state since its beginnings. Since before its beginnings. And taken by people who don't live here, and profited off of by people who don't live here. I mean, that is the history of West Virginia, and it continues to be so. You know, they talk about—man, I love when they talk about ramps.

Taylor: Yeah. [chuckles]

Sydnee: And how like ramps that are sold at great expense in somewhere like New York City are picked here in West Virginia. And probably the guy who picked 'em made like two bucks.

Taylor: As an aside. There was a place that—it closed down, it was in my neighborhood. And they prided themselves on—they bought an old barn from Kentucky and they salvaged the wood to build their restaurant. It was an Appalachian style restaurant.

Sydnee: Oh my god...

Taylor: \$30 ramps. \$30 plate of ramps. And of course, the guy ended up—like he closed down and it turned out the guy stole all this money from his partners and like fled. It was some rich boy playing chef. But anyway...
[chuckles]

Sydnee: I'm gonna, next year in my garden, instead of my wide variety—although mostly zucchini this year, I grew so many zucchinis. I'm just gonna grow nothing but ramps next year. And become a ramp millionaire.

Taylor: Right? Like, I don't know. If you charge right for 'em, I guess, but...

Sydnee: Invest all the money back in West Virginia though. I'm gonna send 'em to you, Tey.

Taylor: Yeah, I'll send the money right back. [chuckles] A pipeline.

Sydnee: No, this is a great business plan. I'm gonna grow 'em here in West Virginia, I'm gonna send 'em to you. You get a cut. You get a cut of these. Okay? You're in on this business.

Taylor: I get a cut of the ramps? The ramp shuffle.

Sydnee: Yeah, you get a cut of the ramp business. You're gonna sell 'em there for New York prices, but we're going to give some of the money back to West Virginia, where the ramps are from. This is a great ramp—

Taylor: I'm in on this.

Sydnee: This is also very West Virginia, some sort of like, "I got a scheme."

[group chuckle]

Sydnee: I got a scheme, I got something. Don't worry, I got something cooking. You don't need to know the details. We don't need to talk about it right now. I got something going on.

Taylor: All right, we'll figure it out.

Sydney: I feel like there... there's a vibe of that. They're talk—he's talking to that guy about he makes cider.

Taylor: Yeah?

Sydney: And he makes this apple and... I forget, there's something else in it. Elderberry cider.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: And he's like, "They're all West Virginia apples?" And he's like, "Yeah." And he's like, "Well, is that... isn't that expensive to do?" And he's like, "It can and it can't be."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: And it's like... it feels like he's up to something. Which, that is—that is the—that's the West Virginia vibe. Everybody—we—I don't know, might be up to something.

Taylor: [chuckles] Just a lot of space, a lot of... a lot of dark collars. Who knows what's going on there?

[group chuckle]

Sydney: Maybe so. Maybe so. I don't know. Anyway... [chuckles]

Taylor: Well and I think, you know, there is that kind of difference between No Reservations and Parts Unknown. Where I think Parts Unknown really is Bourdain doing more what he always wanted to do. Because it focuses so much more on the people than the cuisine. And he's always sitting down to a good meal, but like—I love that, but like you never get—I don't think there's a single episode where he eats something at somebody's table or in another country where he's like, "Oh, that's bad." Like he's talked about it in like memoirs. Like, "What was the worst thing you ever ate?" And he'd be like, "Well, okay, honestly, it was like this smoked rectum." It's literally, that's what he talks about, eating like a—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But he was like, "But I would never say that in front of the people that presented it to me. Because they don't have, you know, it was like a country that did not have a lot to offer. And this is what—the people made me this food, and I ate it."

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: And you know, I—it was about the food, but the food was just the vehicle for the connecting to the people. You know, for learning about what they do, like learning about who they are.

Sydnee: Which is, I mean, it's such a nice—it is a different idea of food. There are messages we get—gosh, we get so many messages about food in our society because it's tied to, you know, aesthetic, beauty and weight, and all these other things, all these messages we get. And some people are like, they treat food like it's just you have to eat, it's fuel, whatever. Put something in to, you know, get your proteins and your macros or whatever. And that's it. And it doesn't matter. And then there are people who do treat food as like, it is something that is so elite and like there's a right way to do it, and only certain people can have access to it. And there was an elitism around especially like good food for a long time.

Taylor: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: And I think this is a different idea that probably is a lot more pervasive now. If you look at a show like, did you ever watch Somebody Feed Phil?

Taylor: I never watched that.

Sydnee: That was a really—I mean, now he does not have the food expertise that Anthony Bourdain had, and he certainly isn't as cool.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: But it's the same idea of like, I want to go appreciate people and the food they make and the experience that it is. And it's all about showing love through food and community through food and connection through food. I mean, that's very much all he's doing, is like going and he's thrilled to meet people, learn about them, share their food. That's it. And I think it's in the spirit. It's not cool.

Taylor: [titters]

Sydnee: But it's in that spirit.

Taylor: Well, that's—I mean, that's how it should be. You know, it's funny because it comes full circle back to like my opinions on art, when I became so disenchanted with it. Is because I felt like so much of the art world, and I think this continues to be true, is kind of BS. It's like, you do something, if you have enough money and you have enough connected to your name, you put up something incomprehensible. And everybody's too confounded by it to say it's bad, so they go, "Oh, it must be good." And then it's laundered for, I don't know, millions of dollars. That's how the art world works.

There's an honesty in food, where if you give somebody a raw chicken breast and a cup of vinegar and say it's a deconstructed coq au vin, they're gonna say, "No, I can't eat this." You know, reality comes into play when you have to—when it has to nourish you. If it doesn't nourish you, it's not good. And that's—now, you know, I kind of just do art for me these days. But that's where my value system comes from. Like, does this nourish? Does this feed? Is there applicable presence to what I'm doing? And that's how I approach when I'm designing menus for the bar, and that's how I approach when I'm working on a painting.

Sydnee: You know, that's—it's really interesting, Tey, because I've always thought like, I don't know, I have no expertise in art. I don't know what art is or isn't. And so I try very hard not to have strong opinions on that, because I'm coming from a place of, you know, ignorance on it. But I've always thought, to me, the art that I personally enjoy is art that communicates or connects me with—maybe it's the artist, maybe it's an idea, maybe it's a place. But like that connection, that communication that

can exist in art is really what makes something art to me, personally. And food is very similar.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: If I eat something and I feel connected to the person who made it or the place it came from, or whatever it is, that to me is like a good meal.

Taylor: Well, and I think that goes back to the start of our conversation. I know our grandmother loved us, but if I had to describe what the experience of our grandmother's love, warm butter, a little bit of pepper. [chortles]

Sydnee: Yeah. She would agree with that note. She would absolutely agree with that. Well, no, she's a contrarian. She wouldn't want to agree with—

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Deep down, she would agree with it.

Taylor: I have a drink named after her on my menu right now, it's called the Scrappy Pat, and it's like a tomato, honey, Strega. It's very earthy, very rich. It comes in this tiny little glass. It has cracked pepper on the top of it. And I always wait 'til people say—and it's been really popular, I'm surprised, because it's a bit of a weirdo, but it's sold fantastically. So I wait 'til somebody says they like it and I'm like, "Now I'm going to tell you it's named after my grandmother, who's passed away." I won't tell you that until I know you like it. [chuckles] Because that would be awkward for both of us.

Sydnee: That would be—well, that would be a way to make sure they like it.

Taylor: Right? Like I could sell it that way. Like, "Yeah, here you go. I hope you like it. It's named after my dead grandmother."

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: I don't do that. It makes me, again, and that—again, it's almost that spiritual—not religious, but spiritual. It's like, this is my way of showing

love back. And every time someone goes, "Oh, I love this drink," like, yeah, you would have loved the lady.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, thank you, Tey. I'm really glad, it was fun to watch No Reservations and Parts Unknown again. It's been so long since I've watched those shows. And I enjoy—I don't remember all the stuff, so it's like new again.

Taylor: Well, you know, for the longest time—I mean, I watched all of it when he was making it. And then for the longest time, obviously, because of his passing, I couldn't watch it. It made me too sad. And this is really the first time that I've gone back. And I've been bingeing it the last couple days. And I don't—you know, whatever the—I mean, the details of his passing are obviously tragic. But all I can be is deeply thankful for just how much he gave us, how much he impacted my life. And now that I'm rewatching it all, it's just like reopening a treasure chest. Like, ah, there's just so much here to learn from, to be excited about, to be inspired by.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, I really enjoyed it.

Taylor: Thank you for taking the time. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Of course, of course. I think next week, it's—there's a lot going on in astrology TikTok?

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: And I feel like we have a lot to talk about. You and I are apparently entering our villain era, is what astrology TikTok has told me.

Taylor: Yeah... Which I feel like for both of us means we might, I don't know, ever so often say, "I don't have time for that specifically right now, but I'll do it for you later." [chuckles] But we'll see, maybe the stars say something else.

Sydnee: We'll see. But we'll, yeah, we will dive into astrology TikTok next week.

Taylor: All right.

Sydnee: All right. Well, thank you. Thank you, listeners. If you've never watched any of Anthony Bourdain's shows, like... ah, they're so good. And you can—I mean it—he went everywhere. So if there's just like a city you love or you're gonna visit or whatever, you can probably find it in there.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And learn about it through his eyes. But thank you listeners. Thank you, Maximum Fun. You should go to maximumfun.org and listen to all the great shows there. And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind. This has been Still Buffering, a cross generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

[theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind" by Nouvellas plays]

Taylor: I am still buffering.

Sydnee: I am still buffering... Wait, what did we do last time?

Taylor: I think I said the first part and you said the second part? Or maybe reverse that? I don't know...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Let's try it again!

Sydnee: Okay... go.

Taylor: All right. I am still buffering.

Sydnee: And I am too.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: We're gonna have to work on that one.

Taylor: Good enough.

Sydnee: We could do better.

Taylor: Yeah, probably.

[group chuckle]

[break]

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[break]

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