

Still Buffering 423: Degrassi

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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: Uh, Taylor, I'm gonna endeavor not to snifle.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Very—

Taylor: You got some sniffles in you. You're gonna try to keep 'em to yourself.

Sydnee: Yeah. I'm gonna keep them to myself. Or, like, turn very far away from the mic. That's my goal.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: Well, it's okay if one sneaks through. You've warned the audience. Sniffles—sniffle trigger warning.

Sydnee: [laughs] I will work very hard not to. It's just a cold. I don't think it's anything—it just feels like a cold, you know. It's nothing serious. I got my flu shot. I don't have the flu, I do not think. It's not COVID. But anyway.

Uh, Tey, I saw a very interesting...

[phone rings]

... I wanna say drama. But like, not in a serious way. There's, like, actual stuff happening in the world, so this—it feels weird to call this, like, a drama.

So I'm using drama in that way that we use for social media, where it's like, "Why was this a thing?" But it was. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: Okay. I stumbled into this... story line—I don't know how else to describe these things that happen on TikTok, where like, all the sudden, like, you're watching somebody talk about something and you're like, "What are you talking about? What is the incident? What video are you referencing?"

And then you have to start digging back to try to find... where was the original, and what happened here?

Apparently there was a mom who had a birthday party for her child... at Build-A-Bear. Have you heard of the Build-A-Bear fiasco?

Taylor: I saw... I—okay. I did not engage fully in it. My understanding was that she had a birthday party for her child at Build-A-Bear, and she had them all make bears, but then she made them, all the children, give the bears to her child?

Sydney: So she—yes. She had this birthday party at Build-A-Bear. She told all the parents, "I have paid for, like, a \$35 bear." Like, I think that's, like, a base, like, whatever. If you wanna add accessories or whatever, feel free to... you know, pay for your own bear.

But, like, all the kids have a \$35 credit to make a bear. Very nice.

Also a good idea for a party. Never thought about that. We don't have a Build-A-Bear locally so I couldn't do that. But like, cool idea. My kids would like that too.

So they make the bears, and then they all go back to her house for cake and ice cream, at which point she asks all of the children to hand over the bears to her child, because that was the point all along. And a lot of people are upset about it, and took to the internet about it. And so she took to the internet to defend herself and say, like, "What were you—what do you think

it was for? Like, it was my kid's birthday. Of course I'm gonna have you give the bears back."

And I was enjoying the various perspectives. Because, can I just say, I think it would be wild to ask a child to make a bear and then give it... to another kid. Like, it's wild for the children. Like, the whole thing.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: For the chil—from the kids' perspective, that had to have been the weirdest party. "I made a bear, and then that mom took it from me." [laughs]

Taylor: I—okay. So, one, I did not know that the mother paid for all the bears ahead of time.

Sydnee: She did.

Taylor: And I feel like that—

Sydnee: She paid, like, the base bear rate for every—at least according to her. Now, I have not seen any—I mean, this is all just what I'm hearing them say about it, so you know.

Taylor: I was under the impression that these children all paid for their own bears and then she was like, "Give my child your bears."

Um, the fact that she paid for them... I feel like this is just a communication issue. I think that if she had said to all of the other kids' parents, like, "Hey, here's what I'm gonna do. They're all gonna make a bear. I'm gonna pay for it. And then they're gonna give 'em. So they're gonna make a bear for my child."

Like, I think a kid could get in on that. Like, okay. The goal is to make a bear that you think your friend will like. 'Cause you're gonna give them.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: 'Cause it also gets them out of giving a gift, right? Like, oh, I don't have to buy you a present. I'm getting you this bear.

Sydnee: Which I wonder if that's—see, this was a key question I had that was never answered. Okay. One, I will say, some of the parents apparently did put extra money into the bears, like, of their own volition to do—'cause, like, if you've ever been to a Build-A-Bear, you pay, like, a flat rate for, like, the bear. And that's just like—and there aren't just bears at Build-A-Bear anymore. There are all kinds of creatures.

Taylor: That just gives you a naked bear.

Sydnee: Yeah. That just gets you a naked—or, like, you know, there's a Mothman at Build-A-Bear now. Yeah.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: So you can make all kinds of different stuffies. Anyway, that just stuffs it, and like, you get a heart. Like, you get to pick a heart out of a bin of hearts and put the heart in your bear.

Taylor: [simultaneously] Creepy.

Sydnee: And then you watch it stuff. That is all that buys you. And then if you want, like, an outfit, or a hat, or like—there's a little talk box that you can record something on and put it in it. There's scents that will make your bear smell like something. There's a ton of accessories that they upsell you on.

So I imagine there probably were a decent number of parents who, like, their kid said "Mom, can I please have a dress, or overalls, or some—" you know, something for my bear.

So I think that was part of it. I wonder how many of the parents put in extra money. And then my other question is, was it communicated directly ahead of time, "Don't bring a present"? 'Cause if you bought a present, and then also were expected to hand over your bear, I think that would feel worse.

Taylor: Yeah. That—well, and I don't—I also, as a parent—and I feel like you would obviously [laughs] be a better authority on this than I. But I would just assume from the outside that you—why would you want, like, a dozen new stuffies in your house all at once?

Sydnee: Okay. This, to me, is one of the wildest parts of it. Um, so she does say, "We collect bears."

Okay. So that's there. But when I first heard this story, I—that is all I could think is... [sighs] I hate to say this because, like, I know that a lot of people in my children's lives who love them have given them stuffies. And so I don't wanna sit here and say, like, "My kids don't like stuffies." Because at the moment, they do. And they ask for them. Like, Charlie will ask for Squishmallows.

We don't do anything with the Squishmallows. Once we get them, they just sit there.

Taylor: I mean, I feel like there's a natural accumulation of stuffies that happens when you have children.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: The idea of inviting, like, a—a whole bunch of 'em all at once feels... I don't know. I mean, I guess they collect them. There you go. That's the answer.

Sydnee: We have had, like, rules before for, like, holidays.

Taylor: I remember Christmases where I was told, "This is a no-stuffie holiday."

Sydnee: Well, because we just—we have, like—I have two gigantic plastic tubs full of stuffies upstairs. Those are the stuffies that have been relegated from the bedrooms to the playroom. Because... we have so many stuffies. And sometimes they'll, like, dive into the big tubs of stuffies, so I guess they're used in that way. But I cannot imagine wanting my child to receive...

I mean, I don't know how many bears. I don't know how many kids attended. But let's say a dozen, a dozen new stuffies.

Taylor: Just all at once.

Sydnee: Yeah. And then—and if the kids weren't told, like, "It's for your friend," then they probably made the bear for themselves. Who is this for? Was it for the mom? Do you think that this is just 'cause the mom collects Build-A-Bears?

Taylor: Who brought this drama to the internet? One of the parents of the children?

Sydnee: You know, I didn't see any of the parents' videos, so it could be that the parents all complained and this mom brought it to the internet for, like, final verdict.

Taylor: Ohh. She was trying to get—nah, you never want to do that.
[laughs]

Sydnee: Like, "You won't believe... " I think sometimes people don't realize that what they're asking is one of the "Am I the A-hole" questions.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But they don't realize that they're asking that.

Taylor: Well, and it's like, there's nuance here. But once it's on the internet, it's gonna get flattened down to a tiny point, and everyone's just gonna be like, "Oh, you're that [wheezes] mom that wanted 12 Build-A-Bears for your child."

Sydnee: Right. Don't... don't... don't tell the internet. [laughs quietly] Don't tell—there's just some things. Like...

Taylor: Just keep it—I mean, that's like—I don't know. Uh, I think a similar level of dramatic on TikTok, I was following the—the vintage heart cake drama. Did you catch any of that?

Sydnee: Vintage heart cake?

Taylor: So, Wal-Mart has a heart-shaped cake that they were selling for, like, \$25 for Valentine's Day. I mean, I'm sure they just sell it in general. It's a new thing that they offer. And apparently this style of cake has become popular, because home bakers do it a lot. And so a lot of home bakers came on the internet to say, "Yeah, you can buy that \$25 cake. We charge, like, 60 or 70 or 80 bucks for it. But, like, you know, ours is... ours is better." Like, whatever. I don't know.

Sydnee: Is it the kind—when you say "vintage," is it... 'cause I've seen where people can take a round cake and you cut it in the right way to turn it into a heart. Or is this... is that why it's vintage? Or is it just like a heart-shaped pan was used to make a cake?

Taylor: I mean, I think both happen. I think the heart-shaped pan is more common. I do see people do the cut. Like, I saw somebody do that in a video to explain why their cakes are the price they are. Like, "Look at this craftsmanship of... cutting part of the circle off."

And the thing is, I'm on the side of the bakers in that I think it's, you know, it's important that people understand that, like, if you're a home baker, you're probably going to a place like Wal-Mart to buy your raw materials, and Wal-Mart sets that price on those raw materials. And so they can have the raw materials cost X dollars, but then they can get the full return on the actual cost in their own bakery. So if they're selling that cake for \$25, that tells me that the cost that they pay for their eggs and their flour and their butter and everything is significantly lower than that. Because it's Wal-Mart, they're gonna make a profit.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: But then they can also do that to undercut the home baker. So it's not just like, yeah, I mean, if you don't have a lot of money to spend you should still be able to have nice things. Uh, you just shouldn't have made this an argument for the internet to consider. Because, you know, now it

gets flattened down to the tiny dot of "Arrogant home bakers don't want poor people to have nice things." [wheeze-laughs]

It's like, well, I don't think that's... [laughs] that is how it comes across. I don't think that's what you meant.

Sydnee: No, but it does—well, and that's a—so, like... this is—okay. This is—you're hitting on something, though, that is so, like, vitally missing in our conversations nationwide, and is part of what landed us in this terrible place. Is that...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... I know a lot of people who shop at Wal-Mart. And who buy cakes at Wal-Mart, or who, you know, whatever. Who, like, Wal-Mart is their go-to. And they're not doing it as a political action, certainly. They're doing it because it's cheaper than the only other grocery store nearby, which is Kroger. That's it. I mean, like, now there is—there is a, uh... there's a Dollar General, but they don't have all the groceries you need.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: But my point is, there are a lot of people who are just doing what they can to get by, and who maybe work such long hours that home baking a cake is not necessarily within their... that's not something they're gonna be able to achieve. And... I feel like there's gotta be space for that. The economic impact that makes people make choices that they make, that have nothing to do with, like, their values, or if they like the Wal-Mart cake better than a home-baked cake or whatever. It has to do with... it's, you know, it's my kid's birthday. They need a cake. I just got off one shift and I got another shift in two hours. This is what I can do right now.

Taylor: Oh, absolutely. Well, and that's the thing. I think that there is a bigger conversation here that is, like, yeah, these big companies, they set the prices. They're the reason that you can't afford eggs. And they drive out all the local business. And then, you know, that's—that's why monopolies are bad.

But at the end of the day, if you're just like, I am one person buying one cake for my kid, yeah, who cares? Like, the people that can take the hit maybe should take the hit.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: The people that can afford to support local businesses should. And, like, at the end of the day, we are hurtling towards a... a company store from coast to coast where, you know, we can only shop at giant corporate entities, because nobody else can compete against them.

But that one—that one cake is not gonna—it's not gonna shift that tide. I just—like, all the responses of people like, "Well, I'm gonna go out and buy *three* \$25 cakes just to... shove it to the home bakers!"

And I'm like, well, now, wait a second. We're not saying, like, "We're on the side of good ol', just, simple, simple values Wal-Mart. We're on the—the—[wheezes] the poor—the poor little guy in this fight: Wal-Mart."

Sydnee: Wal-Mart.

Taylor: Yeah. Like, come on! Like, yeah. I'm glad that those bakers in that bakery are paid well. Apparently they are, and that's good, they should be. Um, but let's just have some... some nuance.

But there's no nuance. It's TikTok.

Sydnee: There is no nuance on TikTok. And that's—to judge somebody's buying, like, actions in a capitalist society, and to put value judgments on, like, what they do to feed themselves and their family, or try to scrape out a little bit of joy. [laughs quietly] I mean, we just can't. You just can't make a value judgment on somebody based on that action. It's just not—you know? It's too—

Taylor: The—yeah.

Sydnee: —complex.

Taylor: The fact that a giant corporation can undersell us that much means that hey, they're upcharging you a whole butt ton for that flour and eggs and butter.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Because it doesn't cost them that much. That's the bigger takeaway.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: [laughs] You're being—[laughs] you're being wrung out by corporate entities. They're never your friend!

Sydnee: No. No. That's—I mean, that's the take-home, but that's gonna take a giant collective action.

Taylor: Exactly.

Sydnee: To combat. And, like, someone trying to, you know—somebody going into debt so they can buy a more expensive cake... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: No, don't do that. Yeah. That's—exactly.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: [through laughter] That's...

Sydnee: That doesn't help you, and it doesn't help the... the cause? I don't know.

Taylor: I mean, it's, you know, it's just... individual action can make us feel good. I don't wanna be a pessimist, but I don't know how much it does. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah. No, and I mean, I do think that there's an impetus on those of us who can, like... you know. There's a local bakery that we, as often as I'm buying things from bakeries, that is where we buy things from. I will generally choose that over, like, a Wal-Mart or a Kroger cake. Although

Justin really loves the Kroger frosting, Kroger whippie. So he's really partial to that frosting. I know that's Kroger, which is a whole other political statement to—I don't know what political—

Taylor: I don't know! I don't—yeah, I don't know where that falls. [laughs]

Sydnee: I—there are all those charts people share. And I'm like, I don't—

Taylor: Uh, it's just—if you're doing a consumerism, you're doing a consumerism. Just do whatever consumerism works for you.

Sydnee: Well, and I mean, it's tough, too. 'Cause, like, again, I live in West Virginia where, like, there a lot of communities that all they've got is a Dollar General.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Do you—I mean, and a gas station. Like, so do they not buy food? I don't know. Also, also, could I just say, like, since people listen to our show, there was a ton of flooding in Southern West Virginia.

Taylor: [simultaneously] Do they?

Sydnee: Yes, they do.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: And I feel like it hasn't really gotten a lot of national media attention. But, like, McDowell County was hit so hard by the historic flooding event that we had earlier this week.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, whole towns were wiped out. Very similar to, you know, what North Carolina experienced in parts of—now, it's also in parts of Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia. Like, there are other places that got hit hard. But like, southern West Virginia has been hit hard by everything that's ever happened in this country. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Jesus.

Sydnee: And the people there, you know, they go through a lot on a daily basis. And, like, communities like Welch and Williamson were just... I mean, the flooding was really devastating. Just...

Taylor: Sorry to hear that.

Sydnee: There are a lot of—and there are a lot of, like—you can find, um, people raising money and trying to send aid. I don't know. Our governor won't declare a state of emergency, for reasons I don't understand. But anyway, something to draw attention to, because...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: West Virginia usually gets forgotten. [laughs quietly] Unless you're making jokes. And then you remember us right away.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'm sorry to hear that.

Sydnee: Um, let's—I will not belabor that. I just feel like—I feel like if I have a platform—

Taylor: [simultaneously] No, no, that's—

Sydnee: —to call attention to it, I should say, "Hey."

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: "There was devastating flooding in... "

Taylor: There you go. You know what you don't need? You don't need that \$70 or that \$25 cake.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You could donate to somebody in need.

Sydnee: Yeah. People in southern West Virginia are needing, like... blankets.

Taylor: Or donate a cake to somebody in need, I don't know. Or—blankets are better. Blankets are better than cake.

Sydnee: A lot of 'em, the flooding wiped out their furnaces, so they don't have heat. And right now in West Virginia, it's... like, what is it outside right now? 19 degrees.

Taylor: Yeah. It's...

Sydnee: We've had temperatures in—

Taylor: It's a cold one.

Sydnee: Yeah, in the teens all week. So. Um... well, Tey, we're supposed to talk about Degrassi.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: It goes there.

Taylor: It goes there. I forgot, um... how... I mean, I understand why we loved this show so much, because I put it on. I just like, "I'll just start back at the beginning. Obviously we watched it all, but I'll just start back at the beginning and just watch."

And I just went in, like, a four-day, like, just Degrassi binge. Just as much as I could. 'Cause they're just so—they're the perfect length episode.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, the 22, 25 minute mark, you know? That's exactly how much time my brain wants to focus on a story line. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. And they sometimes manage to get two or three story lines going in those, so.

Taylor: Oh, you knew you were in for something when it said "Part 1." "Uh-oh." [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It's gonna get real real.

Sydnee: It was really interesting. So when we're talking about Degrassi, we're talking about Degrassi: The Next Generation.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, there had already been, what? Degrassi Junior High and Degrassi High, which were series from the '80s that, um, they were then, like, reviving with Degrassi: The Next Generation. We, as Americans, [laughs quietly] had no familiarity with the original Degrassi.

As I as reading, like, the history of Degrassi, there was a lot of concern over The Next Generation that, like, it wouldn't be as, like, intense. And, like, the original Degrassis were known for dealing with, like, real teen issues and, like, going there.

And there was this worry, like, "Well, will they be able to tell those stories with this Next Generation?"

And it was interesting 'cause there was, like, a lot of tension around those first episodes. And obviously we would not have any expec—we didn't know what any of it was. [laughs]

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: As Americans we were like, "Oh, what's this? Why are those adults named Spike and Snake?" [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I remember thinking that a lot! Like, "Why is that mom named Spike?"

Taylor: They never really explained the nicknames.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: They're cool!

Sydnee: No. I mean, if you watched the original Degrassi series, I think you would know that and you'd be like, "Oh, it's Spike, all grown up!"

'Cause she had, like, a teen pregnancy, and now she's all grown up. And... you know, here's Emma. And like, you would get all that. Except we didn't know that context. So I remember thinking, like, "It's kind of rad that the mom's named Spike."

Taylor: Well, it's cool to see, like, how much you can just kind of nod and go, "Oh, okay. Sure." Like, just from a narrative standpoint. Like, yeah. 'Cause there was all that—with Joey and everybody, like, there was clearly... if you knew, you knew. But then if you didn't know, it was fine. You could still watch the show. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah. There were, I mean—it's funny, because... what years was this on? 2001? Is that right?

Taylor: That sounds right. I know I was... I remember watching it thinking everybody was so much—I mean, I think—I felt like they were younger than me when I was watching it even back then. But these—most of the cast was exactly my age when we were watching it.

Sydnee: Well, they did—they tried to cast it—that was one of the things I was reading. Which I should say, preface, if you've never seen Degrassi, it is really just the story of a bunch of teenagers in a school in... where are they? Toronto?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: And... yeah. And they, uh—and it's just like, teen story lines. Except the thing about Degrassi is that unlike American shows I would say, like *Saved by the Bell* would be a good corollary—in *Saved by the Bell*, for those of you who have watched it, you know. The stakes are rarely very high. Every once in a while they would do, like, a "very special," quote—you know, I'm doing air quotes—"very special episode," where they would deal with, like, somebody drove drunk and wrecked Lisa's dad's car or whatever. Or like, you know, Jessie Spano famously taking caffeine pills.

But generously—generally, they didn't do story lines that were intense. Degrassi was supposed to be different in that one, they would handle actual teen issues. Scary stuff that teens were really dealing with.

And then two, in that *Next Gen*, they wanted to cast people who were aged appropriately for their characters. Which sounds like, why not? But if you think about, like, *Dawson's Creek* was on at the same time...

Taylor: Oh yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: You know? You can see why that would also be kind of like a big deal. Or like the OC, you know? Like, these were not teenagers. These are actual teenagers.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And there is a bit of a magic in that, because they look like teens, they sound like teens. They're probably experiencing the same kinds of emotions that their characters are. 'Cause it is the—you know, there's a... it's tumultuous, those adolescent years, when everything is changing. And so there is something... I don't know, more realistic about being able to portray it with actual kids.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: But then you have the sticky part, which is "We're gonna put these kids in some really kind of intense situations."

Taylor: Well, I don't know if there's, like... they're intense situations, but they are things that real teenagers encounter. And I feel like the nice thing about Degrassi is that it deals with these situations in a very... it's not—they're dramatic, but it's not over-dramatized, you know? It's like, this is... it's kind of a how-to. It's like, if this is happening in your life, here is a good way to go about dealing with it, you know.

Sydnee: Well, and it... no, I think it's really true. And I think, like, they don't... there are a lot of understanding, cool parents on it, and teachers. But there don't—they don't always solve the kids problems. 'Cause that could be an easy default is like, if you just talk to the adults, everything will be okay. And that's not always true on Degrassi.

There are times where the parents step in and are helpful, and I think that's reflective of real life. There are a lot of times where, like, you know—and I don't have teenagers yet, so I don't have a lot of this drama to deal with. But there are a lot of times where if my kids will just tell me what's going on, I can probably help 'em troubleshoot. Right?

But then there are other times where, like, I don't know. Probably mom interfering isn't the best thing. And so there are other ways that kids need to learn to handle things on their own that—I don't know. I think you're right. I think Degrassi does kind of give you a road map.

I wish the episode where, like, Emma's engaging in an online... conversation...? With who she thinks is a guy her age... like, that would've been really helpful for me when I did that as a teenager. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: Now, granted, I never met up with this... adult, as it turned out, in person. And I did at some point go to mom and say, "Mom, is this weird that this, you know—this fellow teen I've been chatting with on AOL... [laughs quietly] who we've been discussing the Princess Bride, is asking me for, like, pictures of myself. Like, is—"

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: Right. And, like, I didn't know. And I mean, this was, like... this was pre-Degrassi.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I could've used that kind of info, Saved by the Bell. Although... I don't know. That was not a Saved by the Bell thing.

Taylor: No, absolutely. Well, and I mean... god, the amount of, like—and that's part of, like, having them cast appropriately, age-wise. Like, the episodes where... there are episodes where, like, one of the cast, like JT has, like, a crush on a teacher. There are also episodes about, like, teachers being inappropriate with students. And you know, when you've got those, like, 25-year-old actors playing these roles it's like, "Oh no, this tension. Oh no, it's wrong, but what about it?"

But when they're like little children it's like, "Oh no, this is... this is disturbing. Like... this is... awful."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And it's—to see that and, like, see kids put in those situations, in a narrative sense, like... I don't know. It is—it is useful. All kids should watch Degrassi. Everything you need to know. Just watch Degrassi. You'll learn how to deal with pressure of drugs and sex, and drunkenness, and... [wheeze-laughs] I don't know. Graffiti.

Sydnee: STDs.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I mean... it's really true. And I mean, that—okay. The idea of, like, a student and a teacher having an inappropriate relationship, that's such a good point to make specifically, Tey. Because on Dawson's Creek—which is a show that I... I still enjoy, and I especially, you know, love Joshua Jackson's character Pacey. However... however... looking back... a, like, central plot line in the beginning of Dawson's Creek is Pacey, who at the time is... 15, I wanna say?

Taylor: Yikes.

Sydney: I think 15. Having a physical relationship with a teacher. And it is not handled in the—certainly in the way that we would handle that now. I mean, it is never portrayed as him being—I mean, there—obviously the teacher suffers consequences. Like, I'm not saying like, "Everybody's happy with it."

But the idea that this is a child being, like, abused is not... discussed.

Taylor: I think that happens a lot in—I don't know. The difference of American versus Canadian... [laughs] cinema. Like, there's a lot of those horny American teen comedies where there will be a plot line that is like, "Oh, the hot teacher. Who's gonna hook up with the hot teacher?"

And it's like, well, you're... you're a child. So if it happens, that's bad. But it's all a bunch of adults. Why are we stuck on this story point? [laughs] It's... it's always bad.

Sydney: Right! Which is—it is bad. And, like, I do think there's a gender thing that happens there too. Because if it's a hot male teacher and a bunch of teenage girls, we don't tend to go there. Although, I mean, certainly movies have. But that's not as common.

But if it's a hot female teacher and a bunch of teenage boys, then we're all supposed to be fine with it. And it's all bad! [laughs quietly] But yeah. But I do think, like, that is a difference. And it—part of it is, are you casting people who look like the age they're playing?

Because it's a lot easier to try to get away with those sorts of things if the people who are in the show are actually adults, you know?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and that's, like—especially now, rewatching this at my big age, like, these are... these aren't just, like, these are kids. These are *kids*. Like, they don't even look like my concept of a teenager. They look like little tiny children. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yes. They do look like little tiny children.

Taylor: And they're goin' through it! [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I remember watching the series and identifying very strongly with Emma.

Taylor: Of course.

Sydnee: For her activism.

Taylor: You would.

Sydnee: Yeah. Emma was, like, the environmentalist character who was always taking up some cause. Although she really disappointed me when she took on GMOs in the cafeteria.

Taylor: I watched that episode recently and I was like, "You know what? I feel like this is... maybe this is a little propaganda. I feel like I've heard Sydnee rail about how GMOs are not dangerous."

And—well, I guess that counterpoint is made, though. See, that's why the show's good. Ellie gives you the counterpoint of like... in third world countries, like, this is how we can have food... like, made sustainably. So, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think—no. I think—but I think, like, Degraasi did that well, of showing—having those kind—man. And that is such a complex conversation that adults often don't understand it. [laughs quietly] Um... and I think there's also a little bit of, like, as I got older, and especially now I can look back on a character like Emma and recognize a little bit of that, like... [sighs]

Sometimes if you're an activist, you can get so singularly focused on whatever you've decided the cause is, that you lose track of how it fits into the bigger picture of human rights, and social justice, and wanting the right thing, wanting the best for everybody, wanting equity. I do think that. And I think that's especially, uh, a crime committed by white people.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: And so, you know, as a... a young white woman of privilege, you know, to get so singularly focused on a cause that you forget that, like, the thing you're fighting against feeds a huge chunk of the world—I mean, that's a very—that's a really complex, nuanced conversation to have with teenagers.

Taylor: And they—yeah. I mean, but they always manage to handle things in, like... I don't know. You got both sides of that, even if it—it's funny to think of like, what was going on in the writer's room? Where like, "Okay. Well, who are we going to give the counterpoint to? [through laughter] That will say it in a natural way?" Like... "Let's make sure both sides of this argument are represented so kids can think for themselves." Which is powerful.

Sydney: Yeah. It is really powerful. I, uh—did you make it all the way to the school shooting episode?

Taylor: Uh, I didn't get on my rewatch, but I remember that from back in the day.

Sydney: 'Cause I feel like that... it's... [sighs] it is wild to me that that episode happened.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I feel like you almost couldn't do that now. I feel like if you did it now, you would have to put so many warnings leading up to it... I mean, it would be so controversial to portray it. And then it would be so, uh, difficult for so many—I don't know that I could watch that now.

Taylor: It's strange, though, that you would say that. And, I mean, I understand why you would say that. But back when that aired, it was not such a regular occurrence. Like, if we're talking about things that teens in school regularly have to deal with, let's be real, I mean, at least in this country, school shootings are—I'd put them in the top ten! That's—gun violence in schools is a massive problem. I... I don't...

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: It's a regular—if you want to make a show about the things that teens regularly have to worry about in their lives, that's one of 'em.

Sydnee: I mean... Charlie had a nightmare the other night about a school shooting.

Taylor: Oh, baby.

Sydnee: She's ten, you know? I mean, that... and that is because it is something that is discussed in schools regularly, because they have drills where they talk about what to do, because... we had part of we were raising funds for with the school carnival, or one of our—I don't know, one of the fundraisers was like, bulletproof glass on the doors at the entrance way.

Taylor: Jesus.

Sydnee: I mean, you know. So, like—and that's not just this school. That's a lot of schools are going through that kind of thing. And so it would be very important to talk about now. But it's hard for me to imagine a show... like, what show that is on—and I don't know what teen shows are on currently. But, like, if you think of the Disney Channel shows and stuff, obviously they're not gonna go there. Or the Nick shows, even? Who's gonna go there at that le—you know, with that level of intensity? I—maybe Euphoria?
[laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah.

Sydnee: They talk a lot about drugs, right?

Taylor: I think they went beyond the—the pale. I don't think—I think there—[laughs] there may be... some gun violence on that show would just be par for the course.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I mean, that's—I mean, it—'cause, like, I don't know if I could rewatch that now, because it's such a—I have such a visceral reaction to the idea, to the concept. It would be hard for me to engage with media that portrayed it. Um... I think it was pretty revolutionary that they were willing to talk about that.

Taylor: Oh, absolutely. Well, and I think there's something kind of insidious—and again, I agree with you. But there's something insidious about the fact that it would not be portrayed now.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: Like, I think that there's a... there's a certain amount of acceptance there that's troubling.

Sydnee: It is. It is. And I mean, I think it's like, it's so scary we don't want to talk about it. But also because we don't talk about it, nobody's doing anything about it.

And when I say that, I don't mean to dismiss. I know there are activists out there and lobbyists who are trying to fight the gun lobby, and to this day. I mean, I know that. I've worked with Moms Demand Action and stuff. I totally understand that exists.

But as a nation, we are not doing anything about it. Right? Like, as a... no. I mean, we're just not.

Taylor: We have moved it into sort of... "Who knows why it happens? It's a force of nature" mindset. You know?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And that's the thing. Like, in that episode of Degrassi, you see why the school shooter feels he needs to do this. That's not justifying it. It's just giving an understanding of why these things happen.

And that's not really... if your statement on the whole situation is just, "Well, it happens. Who knows?" Like, you don't—understanding isn't useful, because you've just accepted it. And I don't know, I think that that's where that is coming from. Like, yeah, we couldn't engage with that media now because the only way we've learned to grapple with it as a nation is, "It just happens. Oops."

Sydnee: Well, and I don't even know how we would begin to portray, like... I had forgotten that prior to—Rick is the character who commits the—the school shooting, who does it. And he's bullied.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But also, he's violent before that. 'Cause I had forgotten. He... and I didn't watch this episode in the rewatch, but he shoves Terry and puts her in, like, a coma, right?

Taylor: Oh yeah.

Sydnee: Doesn't he—like, they're dating. And part of her story line is like, she has a lot of body image issues and is insecure about her body. And he's kind of like a controlling boyfriend to her. And then he pushes her and she, like, falls and hits her head on something? Isn't that part of that story line?

Taylor: [simultaneously] I forgot about that, yeah.

Sydnee: I don't remember what happens—what resolves. But she's, like, in a coma or something. So, like, we have this, like, character who, like, commits this act of violence. But then also he's really bullied. But... there's a lot of complexity to this character. It's not just... evil guy.

Taylor: Well, that's...

Sydnee: But it's also not just helpless bullied guy who has no other option. You know what I mean? I mean, it's a... I don't even know how we would be able to talk about that anymore.

Taylor: I mean, which sucks, because I think that would amount to an accurate portrayal of... the people that perpetrate these things.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: You know, there's usually—people find excuses for both why they do the things they do, and also have reasons for why they do the things they do. And it's never clean. It's never good guy or bad guy. And that is, you know, the unfortunate truth of—of real life villains. Not all of 'em. You should never be a billionaire. But, uh... [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] I think—but I think it's really impressive. Degrassi did a good job of—I was thinking, it has these intense story lines we're talking about. But then it would have, like, a story line where it's like, Manny is dressing sexy now. And... you can see her thong over her pants, and everybody freaks out. And... [laughs] like, that's a story line too. And I don't know! I think it's kind of—it was good at, like, balancing actual scary stuff teens go through with, like, the stuff that isn't scary, but as a teenager, like... how—how can I dress to express myself? But then how other people will start to see me, or talk about me, and how do I balance that?

Those sorts of struggles, which feel like... *everything* when you're a teenager. You know? And as an adult, aren't quite as serious.

I think it did a good job of balancing that.

Taylor: Well, you know, like... um, I mean, gosh. I'm thinking, like... like the—I don't think there was anything at the time that I was consuming that would've had... like, gay story lines that I felt was made for me. And, like, Marco, Marco's story line, and Marco and Ellie—can I just say, like, if I had to list my favorite characters on Degrassi, Ellie is number one, all day, every day. [laughs] She...

Sydnee: Yeah. Ellie's a good character.

Taylor: I forgot what a crush I had on Ellie until I was rewatching. I'm like, oh my god. She was the coolest. Like, I don't know if she ever had—like, I

haven't done the full rewatch, so like, did she ever have a fall from grace moment? Or was she just always, like, cool?

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: 'Cause as far as I can see, she, you know, like, understood Marco. Like, "Yeah, already. I'll keep your secret. You can be in the closet and I'll be your beard. But, like, for your sake you should come out at some point."

And, like, that's... that's some real—I—that was, like, some of the only, like, queer representation I remember having at that age.

Sydnee: I, uh—I think they did really well with that. It's funny, 'cause as I was reading through—so I was watching some episodes and then I was kind of reading through some plot lines to remind myself of other episodes. And I got to a point where I was like, I don't even know who these characters are. And I realized, this must've been when I was in college and I was, like—I just stopped. I stopped watching Degrassi.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So there is a point where I dropped off. I guess they won a Peabody at one point. They did an episode that dealt with a trans student later on. But this would've been after—

Taylor: Really? I don't remember that.

Sydnee: Yeah. That was like, a big—well, and it was a big landmark episode for the time period. Um, to have a teenager, you know, who was trans. But, uh—but yeah. I mean, they always were, like, whatever it is that kids are dealing with, that was their whole tagline, right? It goes there.

Taylor: The episode—I don't know why this was so impactful to me, but I rewatched it recently—where Spinner almost steals and sells Jimmy's MP3 player so he can buy a Triple 5 Soul hoodie. I don't—I remember, like, as a kid being like, "Wow, a Triple 5 Soul must be, like, real fancy." [laughs] And then I'd see it out in public. Like, "Ohh, Triple 5 Soul. That's expensive." [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] That's worth a whole MP3 player.

Taylor: [crosstalk] \$130!

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: But, you know. Like, the—you know. Like, Spinner was shown as, like, struggling with money. Like, that he was not well-off. And they treated those story lines—I don't know. It's just always, like... like, you cared about all of the characters. Because they showed both sides of them. It wasn't just like—Spinner was the quote-unquote "bully." But you also showed him—like, they also showed him, like... the struggles that he dealt with. Also being, like, a good brother. You know, being a good friend.

[pause]

Sydnee: And also, like, you look back now and you're like, "Yeah, Drake deserved it."

Taylor: [wheezes] [through laughter] [unintelligible] clear about what you're saying.

Sydnee: Getting his MP3 stolen.

Taylor: [through laughter] Jimmy deserved it.

Sydnee: Yeah, no. I meant, like, almost getting his MP3 player stolen. Like, that is all I meant. No, I recognize that the character Drake played, Jimmy, later does get shot. I do not mean that. I do not mean that.

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: I do not think—no.

Taylor: Good job there, yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: Let me be very clear. I meant in reference to Spinner almost stealing his MP3 player. I don't feel bad for Drake about that.

Taylor: No one should feel bad for Drake. Um... I will say... so many of the moments, so many of the poignant moments still hit. But the one that just made me... just die laughing, was when Ashley breaks up with Jimmy by writing a poem in his [wheezes] yearbook.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: [through laughter] And she—she speaks it back to him as she walks away from him with tears in her eyes! I was like, "Ohh... oh, that's..." I remember being a teen and feeling my big feelings, and this would've been a big feeling, and I don't wanna dismiss that. But, uh, this is really embarrassing in retrospect. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's some high school stuff right there!

Taylor: "[through laughter] I signed your yearbook with a poem that I used to break up with you!" [laughs]

Sydnee: Oh my...

Taylor: Oh, Ashley.

Sydnee: It's so good.

Taylor: I loved her weird goth story line. Like, it's... they didn't do it all at once. It just sort of happened slowly. It was well-played.

Sydnee: Yeah. It was well-played. Going from the perfect girl to that. It's really good. If you haven't watched Degrassi, it was a fun show. I think it's still enjoyable as an adult. Like, I don't think it's—you know, some kid shows you go back and try to watch and you're like, "What was... [laughs quietly] what was I watching?"

Taylor: No. I mean, I will—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Like, it's kind of fun, still.

Taylor: I will continue my rewatch. I just, you know. [through laughter] That was the amount of time I had to devote to it this week, and I think I got through, like, three seasons. Um... it's...

Sydnee: Yeah. It's a fun—it's a relief from the world. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: It is. Yeah.

Sydnee: Treat yourself.

Taylor: I don't know. It's weird to say, like, something still holds up from that time period. I think you could show your—if you've got, like, a preteen or a teenage kid now, you could show them this, and they would... learn useful things. And it would be, like, safe and good for them to watch.

Sydnee: And, I mean, I agree. 'Cause especially if you compare it, again, to, like, American shows, like the campiness of *Saved by the Bell*, there's a lot that just doesn't... it would not resonate, I don't think, with youth today. *Dawson's Creek*, like, it was never really something you could connect to. It was like a soap opera kind of thing you watched. *The OC*? Nobody had that life. Like, you know? Like, this... this was—this is—I mean, it's in Toronto, so that's very far from Huntington, but still. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Felt—felt familiar.

Sydnee: But... it did. It did. Um, Tey, what's next?

Taylor: Well, this is—you know, we don't often get the time to... investigate works of literature, because it's hard to—you've got a busy life. You've got two kids. Reading books is hard to squeeze in there. But I thought we could talk about *Mother Night* by Kurt Vonnegut, 'cause it just feels kind of timely. And, you know, not... I don't know.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It was a...

Sydnee: I'm excited. I love Vonnegut.

Taylor: It was a piece of literature that I found comfort in when, you know, all of the country went to... [laughs quietly] madness recently. So.

Sydnee: No, I, uh—I'm excited to talk about it. I've read quite a bit of Vonnegut, but I hadn't read that, so.

Taylor: Well, some—some literature.

Sydnee: I am excited.

Taylor: Get some English class. Inspired by Deglassi. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: It's a...

Taylor: It is.

Sydnee: It's a pretty quick read, if you haven't read it. But for our next episode, yeah.

Taylor: You can read it in, like, a day.

Sydnee: Yeah. Alright. Well, thanks, Tey. Um, Deglassi is still on—what was it on? Like—

Taylor: I watched it on Max.

Sydnee: Max or something?

[pause]

Sydnee: Is that right?

Taylor: [simultaneously] Yeah, I watched it on Max.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. I was gonna say, it's still out there, if you want to watch it. And there's, like—again, it's kind of like with Doctor Who. And it's like, where did you start watching? You could go back to, like, the '60s.

Degrassi, the original, goes back to the '80's. The one we're talking about is The Next Generation. That was from 2001. So if you're in our sort of age group, that's the one that probably you'd connect with the most. And then there's been a bunch since then. So...

Taylor: Is it still happening?

Sydnee: Um, but thank you. Is it still—you know what?

Taylor: I don't—I'm not sure.

Sydnee: Let's see. Is... Degrassi... still... on?

[pause]

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: That's—

Taylor: No. Okay.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: They did—they went everywhere. They had nowhere else to go.

Sydnee: There was a planned reboot that was supposed to start in 2022? But then it didn't.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: So. There is no—not now. But that doesn't mean there won't be another in the future.

Taylor: Fingers crossed.

Sydnee: You never know.

Taylor: [through laughter] The world needs Degrassi right now. Degrassi, come back!

Sydnee: The world needs Degrassi. Please, Degrassi creators, make more.

Taylor: And have Snake and Spike there.

Sydnee: Well, thank you, Tey. Thank you, listeners. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows there that you would enjoy, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I am still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: I had forgotten... I was gonna sing the theme song!

Taylor: [laughs] It was like an activation...

Sydnee: I know!

Taylor: ... sound to me. Like, oh. This.

Sydnee: Me too! I was like, how was it lost? Like, if you had asked me ahead of time, "What's the Degrassi theme song?" I was like, "I don't know!" And then I heard it and I was like, "Whoa!"

[chord]

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