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Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I am Bailiff Jesse Thorn. And with me, as always, is Judge John Hodgman. We're about to clear this docket!

John Hodgman: That's right, Jesse! I am still here in my summer chambers at WERU in Orland, Maine. WERU.org. Listen and donate if you wish. I'm here with program and operation director, K-Pop Joel Mann. Hello, Joel.

Joel Mann: Hello, Judge.

John Hodgman: Now, Joel, I'm not using your family ancestral gavel today.

Joel Mann: I'm heartbroken.

John Hodgman: Well. Too bad. Because I'm going back to my old, Maine makeshift gavel: a can of Stewart's shelled beans, which I picked up at the Hannaford on the way in.

(Joel chuckles.)

I am using the can of Stewart's shelled beans because I love them. This docket also is about food. And not just food, but comfort food. And these are a comfort to my soul. *(Kisses them.)* Love you, Stewart's shelled beans!

(They laugh.)

I saw the— They were on the bottom shelf of the store, and it said, "Closeout," Joel! I think they're getting done with these.

(Joel "uh-oh"s.)

I'm gonna stockpile them. And we are talking about comfort food today, and we have two extreemely special and beloved and wonderful guests to help us clear this docket. Jesse, why don't you introduce them?

Jesse Thorn: Our guests are two brilliant and beloved food writers, food thinkers, food cooks: Kenji Lopéz-Alt and Deb Perelman. Kenji is the Chief Culinary Advisor at *Serious Eats*. He's also the bestselling author of *The Food Lab*, *The Wok*, and the children's book *Every Night is Pizza Night*.

Deb Perelman, of course, is the founder of the wildly popular and influential food blog *Smitten Kitchen*. She's also the bestselling author of three *Smitten Kitchen* cookbooks. Together they host the podcast, *The Recipe with Kenji & Deb*.

Kenji and Deb, welcome and welcome back to the court of Judge John Hodgman.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Thanks for having us!

Deb Perelman: Thank you for having us.

John Hodgman: Thanks for being here, Kenji and Deb!

First of all, I also wanna say thank you for *The Recipe with Kenji & Deb*. It is one of the very few podcasts that my wife—who's a whole human being in her own right—

(Kenji and Deb chuckle.)

—and I like to listen to together, in particular when we are driving long distances—say, from (unclear) to Maine. And we just love hearing about your takes on, often, comfort foods. I mean classics and comfort foods. But you've done chicken soup. You've done my favorite: bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich. Popcorn. I learned from you two that there are distinct kinds of pop—I learned about mushroom popcorn from you, which I had never heard of in my life. What is mushroom popcorn?

Deb Perelman: Mushrooms are not involved. *(Laughs.)*

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Mushroom popcorn is the— It's the popcorn that's kinda round; as opposed to snowflake popcorn, which kind of has jagged edges. Typically, mushroom popcorn is what you'd find if you're getting kettle corn, because it holds up better to a coating. Or if you get the fancy popcorn that people, you know, buy for \$14 a bag at Christmas time, that's made with mushroom popcorn. Whereas at the movie theater, that's the snowflake popcorn.

John Hodgman: If it doesn't come in a tin, the size of an oak tree stump, divided into three flavors—cheese, caramel, and butter—I don't want it. But—

(Kenji laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: John, at Christmas this year, I was gifted by a business colleague—a distant business colleague; the kind that sends business gifts—a huge can of that tripartite popcorn.

And no one in my family, besides me, wanted to eat it for whatever reason. I don't know. So, I had to eat the entire thing. And by had to, I mean did with relish. *(Laughs.)*

Deb Perelman: The sacrifices we make for our family. *(Laughs.)* Do you mix it up, or do you keep it separated?

John Hodgman: Great question.

Jesse Thorn: Oh, I was living an adventure life. I was doing all kind of stuff. I was bathing in it.

(They laugh.)

I was— Yeah. Every which-a-way. I was eating it every which-a-way.

John Hodgman: Deb, tell us a little bit about *The Recipe*. What's the philosophy of the show? What's the approach of the show? And have you and Kenji ever disagreed on anything?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: *(Laughs.)* Never.

Deb Perelman: We disagree on lots of things, but we disagree in a friendly way. And I am fascinated that his opinion is so incorrect, even.

(They laugh.)

I will hear him out on it.

John Hodgman: You pick like a quintessential dish or food—a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich, for example—and then you just discuss it and break it down, right?

Deb Perelman: Yeah. I think what we learned the first time we met a couple years ago was that we really just can't shut up about our opinions on food. And we have so— We've both done so much cooking and so much tinkering with recipes over the years that we have so many opinions, and they just spill out of our mouths in a way that, you know, is very natural to podcasting. So, we've had a lot of fun with it.

Jesse Thorn: I think you're also uniquely suited to a comfort food episode, because—

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Look, there are internet chefs whose specialty is taking a regular thing and making the most insanely decadent version of it by adding four sticks of butter or whatever. But both of you are cooks who—in addition to creating fancy, complicated, unusual, off-the-wall foods—have spent a lot of time figuring out the best way to make a regular thing.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Right. And well, what I find fun about the show is that Deb and I do have a very similar end goal, which is to help home cooks feel more empowered in the kitchen and feel like they know what they're doing a little bit better. And you know, and both of us have a similar approach to tackling recipes, which is that we find something that people love eating and then sort of break it down and think about it and tinker with it until we get what we think is a, you know, sort of optimal way to make it.

However, we wind up very—very frequently, we wind up at very different end results. And I think it's really fun to sort of—you know, we open up the hood and show people how we develop these recipes and why we made the choices that we made and how we could wind up as such different results with the same basic premise.

Jesse Thorn: What's an example of a differing result you came up with?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Well, let's see. If we go to like our mac and cheese episode—

(Deb agrees.)

(Laughs.) Deb does a sort of— What did you call it? It's not adult mac and cheese, but it's, um—

Deb Perelman: I call it Quick, Essential Stovetop. Mine's a very like classic, you make a quick little bechamel, add some sharp cheese. I use a lot of parmesan, which is not traditional.

(Kenji affirms.)

And white cheddar. But you go full science with yours. My kids loved it, by the way.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah. So, yeah. So—

Deb Perelman: *(Muttering to herself.)* Those disloyal...

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Deb's version is almost like a— It almost ends up somewhere a little more similar to traditional Italian dish. You know, like alfredo or a carbonara, where there's this parmesan flavor. The cheese sauce is not like overly decadent, but it's very sharply flavored. Whereas mine, is—you know, you combine a ton of cheese. I think it's equal parts cheese and dried pasta. And it's much creamier and richer and sort of gooier. And so, you just get these two really different results that are made in different ways, obviously. That— It's not necessarily that one is better than the other, but it's just that they're very different. And depending on what kind of mac and cheese you like, you can kind of figure out how to take your own mac and cheese there, based on the way that we've thought about it.

John Hodgman: Well, speaking of mac and cheese, we have a letter from a listener regarding that very subject. Indeed, we asked our listeners to submit their best and most controversial and most pressing comfort food related disputes. Why don't we get into it, Jesse, with our first letter?

Jesse Thorn: Mark in Olympia, Washington says, “I believe chili mac is a blend of chili and macaroni and cheese. My wife says The “mac” in chili mac is supposed to be plain macaroni noodles. This makes no sense. Chili and cheese are good together! Who is right?”

(They chuckle.)

John Hodgman: Alright, Kenji and Deb, before we get into the heart of this matter, let's break this down a little bit. Let's talk about chili for a second. Just a whole separate subject, but I want to know.

Does chili have Stewart's shelled beans in them in it?

(They laugh.)

Or any beans at all? Or no beans? Deb, you go first.

Deb Perelman: I mean, it depends on who you wanna make angry.

(They laugh.)

Authentic, Texas chili con carne does not have beans in it. That does not mean that there are not many delicious chilis with beans in it. Some of my more adamant Texan friends will say that that's actually called a stew, but they also put beans in their chili too. So, you know, their view is not hard and fast. Authentic is not supposed to have it. I think chili is delicious with beans.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: And to be clear, you know, when you're talking about the original— You know, all chili that we eat today originated from Texas chili con carne. But the very first chili con carne, you know, was made by cowboys as like a thing out in the field. And it was made with dried beef and suet and chilies. No tomatoes, no beans. And so, you know, anybody now who says that “Well, if you put beans in it, it's not real Texas chili,” they're also probably making it not with dried beef and suet. So, technically they're not making real Texas chili either. So, I think the whole argument is kind of moot. You put whatever you want in your chili.

But it really depends on what your end goal is. You know? If you're gonna be putting it on a hotdog, and you're making a—you know, like a Coney, and you're making like a Greek style chili, then it's gonna have like no beans, but it'll have cinnamon and maybe some cloves in there. But—

John Hodgman: You know, a lot of people don't like tomatoes in their chili. But people looove throwing tomatoes at this podcast, when you start talking about cinnamon in chili. But to be clear—

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The Coney is a sort of open-faced, wet sandwich made of a hotdog topped with all this stuff. It's a Midwestern thing. And in Ohio, it's— Is it Cincinnati five-way chili where they have the—?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah. Yeah. Three-way and five-way chili.

John Hodgman: Right. And that's when they put it over spaghetti, and they add cinnamon and stuff. And I didn't realize that was a Greek American improvisation, I suppose.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Oh, yes. Yeah. And the Cincinnati chili, if you get it plain, it's just— It's no beans, but you can add beans on top it. And in that case, the beans are kind of added as a scoop separately. So, they're not cooked into the chili.

Jesse Thorn: Oh, Cincinnati.

Deb Perelman: Out of respect for Texas.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Yeah, I'm sure.

You do have a— On *Serious Eats*, you posted a recipe for chili mac which in incorporates chili and macaroni and cheese. There are two ands.

Kenji López-Alt: Right.

John Hodgman: Right? That's a mac and cheese plus chili dish in your version of it.

Kenji López-Alt: Yes. And the reason that version has all that is because in the several weeks preceding that recipe, I was working on a chili recipe and on a mac and cheese recipe.
(Laughs.)

John Hodgman: Got it.

Kenji López-Alt: And so, I had a lot of leftovers.

Deb Perelman: *(Laughs.)* But that's real cooking. I mean, you're not necessarily cooking from— You're not gonna be making chili from scratch and mac and cheese from scratch just to make chili mac and cheese. You're gonna work with what you have around and make a new dish from it. So.

John Hodgman: Oh, I'm going to. I'm going to!

Deb Perelman: Oh, you are? Okay. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Yeah. And you know what I'm gonna do just to amp it up? Four sticks of butter on top.

(They laugh.)

Kenji López-Alt: Nice.

John Hodgman: That's how I get my YouTube hits.

Deb Perelman: It's gonna be huge on TikTok.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Well, Deb, there are a lot of different styles of mac and cheese, as you alluded to. Right? There's the classic, sort of craft dinner style, yellow box macaroni and cheese style.

Deb Perelman: Gold standard.

John Hodgman: Then there's more of a—like, a casserole sort of a— Like, my grandmother on my mom's side would make a mac and cheese with cheddar cheese and tomato. Which—

Kenji López-Alt: Interesting.

Deb Perelman: Wow.

John Hodgman: And it was very sort of like cake— I don't wanna say cakey, but you would eat it in a loaf style, not in a gloop style.

Kenji López-Alt: So, it'd be baked in a casserole dish, and then you'd cut it into squares like a lasagna.

John Hodgman: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly like that.

What do you think is the best— Or if it's mac and cheese, what's the best style of mac and cheese for chili mac, would you say?

Kenji López-Alt: Stovetop, I think.

(Deb agrees.)

Yeah, the gooey kind. 'Cause you wanna be able to kind of mix everything together. And if it's already baked into a casserole, the noodles are almost like— You know, at that point they're almost like custard? You know, they don't have much— They don't have many distinct edges. If you try and mix chili into that, it ends up all breaking apart.

Deb Perelman: Yeah. You'll have chunks. Yeah, I think definitely, yeah, you want the looseness that comes from the stovetop. And often, you know, baked mac and cheese is just some version of stovetop with, you know, something baked on top, like extra cheese or breadcrumbs. So, just stop right there.

John Hodgman: When I'm about to eat— Yeah. When I'm about to eat a bowl of chili and mac and cheese at 2AM in the morning, the word I'm looking for is looseness. That's what's on my mind.

(They laugh.)

Alright, well then we've danced around this long enough. Mark says it has to be chili and mac and cheese. Kenji, you just copped to sometimes just mixing in plain noodles with chili. Who is right? Who is right, and who is wrong?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: I think technically, she is right. Mark's wife is right.

John Hodgman: Wait, Mark's wife is saying chili and plain noodles. Macaroni.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah. I think that's like sort of the definition of chili mac, where the mac is just macaroni, not macaroni— It's not chili mac and cheese. It's just chili mac. But I would say majority of the time, the dish will have cheese either added to it or, you know, when you're making it with leftover mac and cheese, the cheese will be built in. So, I think she's technically right, but Mark is right in that more often it does have cheese in it.

John Hodgman: Interesting. Deb, do you concur or disagree?

Deb Perelman: I agree with Kenji on this one. Look, we agree sometimes!

(They chuckle.)

John Hodgman: Mark's wife, who apparently has no name, is correct then. According to you.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: But is a person, a complete person, unto herself.

John Hodgman: She's a whole human being in her own right.

Deb Perelman: A whole and complete person. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Kenji, it's difficult to share recipes on a podcast, but you have a macaroni and cheese recipe that I think you could describe on a podcast, and people could remember it from an audio form. Can you describe it?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah, so it's the easiest mac and cheese that I know how to make. So, it's equal parts dried pasta—by weight—equal parts dried pasta, evaporated milk, and grated cheese of whatever kind you want. And essentially, you cook the pasta in water—just enough water to cover it. And you cook it down until most of that water has evaporated, and the pasta's cooked. Then you add your can of evaporated milk, and you add your grated cheese, and you stir it, and that's about it.

Jesse Thorn: It's like a magic trick. I don't know why it works! I don't believe in science!

(They laugh.)

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Well, it's the starch from the noodles that gets really concentrated, you know, when you use so little water, and let it reduce down.

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So, it's almost like you're building like a roux, like a sauce base in there, just from the starch that comes off the noodles. And that's what all the cheese—

John Hodgman: What Deb would call a QLB. A quick, little bechamel.

(They laugh.)

Kenji López-Alt: Yeah! Yeah,

John Hodgman: So, in any case, the judgment is that Mark's wife—who's a whole human being in her own right—is correct in saying that chili mac can be chili and plain macaroni noodles. If it were macaroni and cheese and chili, is that not a chili mac then? Or is that just another version of chili mac?

Kenji López-Alt: That's still chili mac, I'd say.

(Deb agrees.)

John Hodgman: Alright. I find in favor—I think we all find in favor of Mark's wife, who's a whole human being in her own right. I'm slamming the Stewart's shelled beans down in that ruling. *(Three beans bangs.)*

Jesse Thorn: We're gonna take a quick break to hear from some partners. We'll be back with more comfort food cases with Kenji López-Alt and Deb Pearlman in just a moment!

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

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Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I am Bailiff Jesse Thorn. We are clearing the docket with our friends, Deb Perelman and Kenji López-Alt. We got a couple cases about Thanksgiving related matters. Here's one from Brooke.

“I hate canned pumpkin in pumpkin pies.”

(John “wow”s.)

“It tastes metallic to me. I think that fresh roasted pumpkin is better.”

John Hodgman: Quick question, Jesse. I'm sorry to interrupt. Does Brooke know that you don't include the can?

(They laugh.)

You take the stuff outta the can. I don't know, just wondering. Alright, go on.

Jesse Thorn: She's eating it like Animal from *The Muppets*.

John Hodgman: That's right.

Jesse Thorn: “My best friend went to culinary school for baking, and he says canned pumpkins just as good as fresh roasted pumpkin puree. I wrong?! I'm pumped to hear your ruling.”

John Hodgman: Wow! Okay. Kenji and Deb, before we get into this. I was, um, not exactly today-years-old, but relatively recent-years-old when I learned that pumpkin pie, whether canned or fresh, is not always—and sometimes not even usually—made of Halloween pumpkin. Like, it's almost any kind of squash. Right?

Jesse Thorn: At my house, it's made out of sliced apples...

(They laugh.)

Pastry.

Deb Perelman: I think the pumpkins that we buy— Like, the, you know, leaf places and the apple picking, they're usually the least tasty pumpkins. They're grown for size, they're grown for carving, they're grown for shelf stability, so you can ship them a month or two before to stores. They're not usually the most flavorful pumpkins, so I can't— For me, there isn't like a clear answer where all homemade pumpkin purees are better than all canned pumpkin purees. Because in many ways the canned pumpkin puree's optimized from a different balance of different winter squashes and pumpkins to make it taste perfect every time. And you don't really know when you grab a winter squash how good it's gonna be, roasted up. But yes, the pumpkins are very stringy, as Kenji said. It would be like closer to an acorn squash in texture. But if you were gonna use—

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Mm-hm. Or a spaghetti squash.

Deb Perelman: —more of a sugar pumpkin or kabocha or, you know, butternut squash, you could make a really nice canned pumpkin substitute. Might even taste better.

John Hodgman: In fact, Brooke is originally from Knoxville, Tennessee, but they're currently living in Taiwan. And in their PS, they said, “For Thanksgiving last year, I had to use Taiwanese pumpkins, which added a really unique flavor.” And she sent in a picture.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: I think those are the equivalent— Those are the same as a kabocha squash.

John Hodgman: Kabocha squash. Okay!

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Which is a—yeah, yeah. In Japan it's called kabocha, but it's sort of— They are sort of pumpkin shaped, but they are green and striped on the outside. But they do have like a sort of deep orange flesh. And they have a really nice sweetness and a really dense texture that's not stringy at all. So, those are great for pumpkins. The pumpkins that they use in canned pumpkin filling—so like Libby's; you know, the most popular brand, the one that you see in every supermarket—they use their own. Like, they've developed their own strain of butternut squash, called Dickinsons.

John Hodgman: right.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Which is more similar to a butternut squash. You know, years ago I was working at *Cook's Illustrated*, and I had a colleague who was working on a pumpkin pie recipe. And one of his goals was, you know, to really optimize pumpkin flavor. And what he found worked was if you actually— And you know, still using canned pumpkin, because nobody wants to really roast their own squashes for pumpkin pie. But what he found is that if you mix equal parts canned pumpkin and canned sweet potato or canned yams, that actually— When you don't tell the person that it's sweet potato or yam in there, if you have them tasted side-by-side, they will say that the one that has the yams in it actually tastes more pumpkiny, for lack of a better term. But that's one of the tricks that I use if I'm gonna be using canned ingredients for my pumpkin pie. I'll mix equal parts pumpkin and canned yams.

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Jesse Thorn: That is the like direct culinary version of that meme where the giant African American arm and the giant White person's arm are clasped together. It's “one can pumpkin puree”, “one can sweet potato puree”, and then underneath it says “Thanksgiving”.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Speaking of one can. Everyone's taste is different; I'm pretty strict when I make my pumpkin pie. I use only Stewart's shelled beans!

(They laugh.)

Which is a joke, of course, but in fact, Stewart's shelled beans is a product from— It is distributed by One Pie Canning Company in West Paris, Maine, who create the One Pie brand pumpkin filling! Which is very popular here in New England.

Jesse Thorn: I'll tell you this. Listeners may have gathered that I am not a big pumpkin pie guy. I do like a bean pie! I prefer a bean pie to a sweet potato pie or a pumpkin pie. So, you know, patronize your local Nation of Islam Bakers. That's my jam.

Deb Perelman: Is it a sweet bean pie? Like—

Jesse Thorn: It is a sweet bean pie. Yeah, it's— They're usually made by Black Muslim bakeries of various kinds.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Interesting!

Jesse Thorn: Like, you'll see Nation of Islam guys selling them on the street corner or some places there are storefront bakeries that sell them. Yeah, they're really good!

John Hodgman: Well, Jesse, if you like bean pies, you probably would enjoy Stewart's shelled bean guacamole! Recipe right here on the can. One can of Stewart's shelled beans, two cloves garlic, olive oil, lime juice, chicken broth, jalapeno chilies, mint cilantro, salt and freshly ground pepper to taste. Put it in a food processor. Zero guacamole.

That's—

Deb Perelman: How is it there's no avocado in there at all?! (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: Yeah. Zero avocado is what I meant to say.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: This me of a Green Pea Guacamolegate at *The New York Times* a few years ago.

Deb Perelman: Oh, I remember that.

John Hodgman: Well, I'm just trying to make this podcast popular by saying this.

(*They laugh.*)

But I mean, I actually do love this product. You ever mess around in your New England roots, Kenji, with Stewart's shelled beans? Does it mean anything to you?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: I'm not familiar with them, no.

John Hodgman: Alright, well, I'll stop at the Hannaford on the way back and buy the last few cans. 'Cause I think they're getting rid of them.

Deb Perelman: Please put them in the mail. (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: They're very special to me. I'll talk more about that later. But let's get back into this. So, we heard that Kenji likes yam in his pumpkin pie. Deb, do you have any pumpkin pie tips when you're making them?

Deb Perelman: I do use canned. And I find that it's very stable and very solid. I'm not in a huge pumpkin pie family though, so it doesn't— People don't really get obsessive about the flavor. I would say if I was trying to optimize for flavor, I might— You know, if I knew I had a good kabocha squash or a good butternut squash, I might mix the two together and roast them and then puree them. But it's always a little bit more of a roulette. So, I feel like the canned stuff is pretty reliable. My family's more into pumpkin cheesecake, to be honest.

John Hodgman: Oh! Oh, wow!

Deb Perelman: And it's less particular that the pumpkin flavor is like absolutely perfect. The canned stuff is fine.

John Hodgman: I don't go in for many desserts, as everyone knows. I don't have a sweet tooth. I have an alcohol molar.

(They laugh.)

But I do enjoy cheesecake. 'Cause it is— First of all, it's a cake. I don't want to get any letters about this. And second of all, it's got a— It's very savory. And the pumpkin cheesecake sounds delicious. I presume that I could find a recipe for that on *Smitten Kitchen* somewhere?

Deb Perelman: You sure can. It has a little bit of bourbon in it, so it might be good for your molar.

John Hodgman: Oh, here we go! Here we go!

(They laugh.)

Deb Perelman: It's optional. And it has a gingersnap and pecan crust, so it's really nice.

John Hodgman: When you say it as a little bit of bourbon in it—I mean, do you hollow out the center and just fill it with bourbon? Make it in kind of a—?

Deb Perelman: I could, I could. It would be a little bit— You know, maybe the kids would sleep well, so it's not that bad of a— *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Yeah, they might not have as many toothaches. Well, what's interesting to me a little bit about this case is that we have Brooke on the one hand saying, “Oh no, we should roast our own pumpkins.” And then their friend who went to culinary school is just saying, “It doesn't matter. Just use canned stuff.”

What do you think is the right answer? Who's right, who's wrong?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: I think if Brooke does not like canned pumpkin pie filling, and every time she eats it, she tastes something metallic, and it turns her off, then she should make her own pumpkin pie, and—you know, *(chuckling)* not go to anyone else's house over Thanksgiving, or pick a different pie that time. 'Cause most people are gonna be making it with canned pumpkin.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Brooke should make their own pumpkin pie and eat it alone.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Exactly. *(Laughs.)*

Deb Perelman: Or! I always— I'm like, “Oh, you, have a very particular pumpkin pie that you make better than anyone else. Congratulations. That's your new dish to bring to Thanksgiving forevermore.”

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: No, the best part of Thanksgiving is not sharing.

Deb Perelman: *(Laughs.)* I think the best part of Thanksgiving is National Pie for Breakfast Day. It's a holiday I invented. And that's what you do the next morning when you eat it cold outta the fridge, because probably by the time the pie came out you were too full to eat anyway. But the next morning it is elite.

John Hodgman: That sounds great. I mean, I guess it really does— Like a lot of these things, it does come down to taste, I guess.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah.

John Hodgman: But I mean, I think what we've learned is that your average pumpkin is not gonna necessarily make a better pumpkin pie or even a good pumpkin pie compared to canned. And Brooke, if you want to go through the love and labor of roasting your squashes—

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—it's on you to pick out the right combination of flavors, essentially, to taste good and not bad. Right?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: That sounds right to me.

John Hodgman: Also, it's interesting that the fact that Brook's friend is a culinary school graduate, but who was also saying like, “Just... take it easy. It's fine.”

(They laugh.)

It reminded me that neither of you went to CIA or culinary school or anything. Right?

Deb Perelman: Nope.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Nope, I did not.

John Hodgman: How did your passions for food and food writing and cooking emerge?

Deb Perelman: I'm just really, really picky.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Alright!

Deb Perelman: I really— I think that picky people are just meant to be cooks, because you have very strong opinions on what things should be. And when they're made badly, even if you keep them to yourself in like mixed company—not including this. So, that's really where it came from. So, getting in the kitchen meal to make things the way I wanted them to be, or the way I thought they would taste better, has given me two decades of content and counting.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Deb, when you say mixed company, do you mean mixed between you and others?

(They laugh.)

Deb Perelman: I mean that, with you guys, I've already gone off on green peppers and several other things. But if I'm at your house, and you're putting like green peppers in your hash browns or whatever, I'm like, "This is so nice. Thank you."

John Hodgman: Yeah. Before we started recording, Deb had some very—

Deb Perelman: *(Laughing.)* Sorry.

John Hodgman: —hot takes about soggy peppers, that's for sure.

(They laugh.)

Deb Perelman: They were doing a mic test, and I'm like, "Let me tell you what's wrong with home fries at diners."

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: And Kenji, how do— You've always taken a very sort of scientific approach to cooking and figuring out why things cook the way they do.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah. Well, I was in school for biology, and then I decided I didn't wanna do biology. And cooking was just a summer job I took when I was switching majors from biology to architecture, 'cause I didn't know what to do that summer, and I needed to make some money. So, cooking— Yeah, I got a job at a restaurant as a cook and realized I loved it. And then it's just grown from there.

John Hodgman: Where were you cooking, if I may ask?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: My first— That summer job was at a restaurant called Fire and Ice in Harvard Square. It was a Mongolian grill. So, I started as a prep cook, but within a week I was promoted to Knight of the Round Grill.

(They laugh.)

Deb Perelman: Wow.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Which is how I spent my summer.

John Hodgman: Aalright. We will get you a chef's jacket that says KOfRG on it. Knight of the Round Grill.

Deb Perelman: That's awesome.

John Hodgman: Why don't we move on? Speaking of beans, we got another beeean related dispute. Right, Jesse?

Jesse Thorn: Here's something from Lindsey in Baltimore, Maryland.

“Can I make green bean casserole any time of the year? My wife, Angie, says it should be reserved only for Thanksgiving and Christmas. But what if I zhuzh it up with fresh green beans, heavy whipping cream, foraged mushrooms, and air-fried onions? Angie says if I make it fancy, it's not comfort food anymore; it's just a stunt! Who's right?”

(Deb laughs and Kenji hums thoughtfully.)

John Hodgman: So, Deb, Kenji, either one of you can take this one. Just describe for the listener who may not know what a traditional green bean casserole is all about—and we're talking about cans and cans and casseroles, right?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, describe it for the listener who may not know, or the bailiff who may be from San Francisco.

(They laugh.)

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: A traditional green bean casserole— You know, it's a common Thanksgiving side dish. But essentially, you take canned green beans—so, very soft green beans. You drain them, and then you mix them into a can of cream of mushroom soup. And then you pile that all into a casserole dish and top it with a can of Frenches fried onions, and you bake it. And I think it's actually quite delicious that way. *(Chuckles.)* And it's very, very easy to make. It's a side dish that's real easy to make if you're using everything from cans.

John Hodgman: I'm thinking about getting a couple of cans on my way home when I get those shelled beans for you guys. Hey, Joel. Green bean casserole. Yes or no?

Joel Mann: Yes. I even make it at Thanksgiving.

John Hodgman: And do you make it the way that Kenji just described?

Joel Mann: Pretty much, yeah.

John Hodgman: Can and a can and a can?

(Joel confirms.)

Alright, great. Now you both, though, have recipes involving fresh green beans. Deb, you want to talk about that a little bit?

Deb Perelman: I do make it the bougie way, although I do not air fry the onions. I fry-fry the onions.

John Hodgman: But you do fry them yourself.

Deb Perelman: I do fry them myself. So, you know, so much of comfort food comes down to nostalgia, and if your nostalgia is for the can-can-can, like that's exactly what you should make. But I don't have that nostalgia. I didn't really care for it growing up.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Deb grew up in what they call an ingredient household.

Deb Perelman: *(Laughs.)* And Kenji grew up very heavily influenced by a love for fast food, which I think is awesome. So, sometimes our North Stars— Mine is like a green market in California, and his is like—I don't know—a McDonald's on Broadway.

(They laugh.)

And so, we're starting from the same place, but we're going in different directions. Anyway.

[00:30:00]

So, I didn't have a lot of nostalgia for classic green bean casserole. But I had fun. But I love—I actually love green beans. They're probably one of my favorite—like, top three vegetables, despite being green. *(Laughs.)* So, I love cooking the green beans a little al dente, and then you make a sauce with some minced mushrooms. And then I fry the onions in larger strips, and they're just like a fluffy pile, and it's so good.

John Hodgman: How do you fry your onions?

Deb Perelman: I actually toss them with a little bit of flour, and they're kind of in strands. So, you end up with this almost like tousled, spaghetti-looking top of the onions. And there's nothing you could buy in a can that compares. However, that may not be what your nostalgia is. I feel strongly that when somebody is— You know, people travel for Thanksgiving. We come from far, we travel for days, we travel on the worst days of the year to come home for a certain kind of meal. I feel like it should be made the way it means something to you. And if that's not the version that it is *(chuckles)*, you know, that's not the right one.

John Hodgman: Yeah, but there's another kind of comfort to consider to comfort food, which is the comfort of the person cooking it. Which could mean convenience on the one hand, but on the other hand, those of us—and all four of us really do enjoy cooking. Like, there's pleasure and comfort in the process of exploring a recipe or making it in a different way. Right?

So, Kenji, what's your opinion? We have Lindsey trying to make these green beans with fresh beans, heavy whippy cream, foraged mushrooms, air fried onions. Is Lindsey's green bean casserole too zhuzh to be comfort food?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: I mean, I kind of agree with Deb on this one where, you know, I think part of the comfort of a traditional green bean casserole—if you grew up eating the canned kind—is that the green beans are not al dente, right? And there's this certain particular flavor and texture to Campbell's canned cream of mushroom soup. And if it doesn't have that, then it's not gonna be comforting to you. You know? So, when you have— You know, I have an old recipe that has al dente green beans in it. It's very similar to Deb's. I use fried shallots instead of fried onions, but.

(John “wow”s.)

If I was gonna invite a bunch of people over to Thanksgiving dinner, and they come expecting green bean casserole, I would— Even if I was making it with fresh green beans, I would probably cook them until they were past al dente. You know, until they're kind of olive green and very tender. You know, braised. And so, that— Because you want— Like, with a casserole dish like that, I feel like when you take a bite of it, you want it to just kind of go down easy. You want it to coat your mouth. You wanna be able to eat it without teeth, you know?

Deb Perelman: *(Laughing.)* You know, how you eat your green bean casserole?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: So that everyone at the table can enjoy it, from baby to grandpa.

Deb Perelman: We finish it in the oven, and that's why I always start at kind of al dente. So, by the time you're crisping it with the onions on top, it's not gonna be total mush.

John Hodgman: Yeah. You're trying—

Jesse Thorn: Let me ask you the secondary question that Lindsey asks: is green bean casserole a Christmas and Thanksgiving dish.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yes.

(Deb agrees with a laugh.)

But that doesn't mean you can't have it other times, I guess.

Deb Perelman: Yeah, there are no rules. If you wanna have it in January, if you wanna have it on a hot summer day in July, you can do that! That's when those pole beans are in season anyway, and you can get them fresh at the market.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah. I would say you can serve green bean casserole anytime you want. I never have. I've never made it not on Thanksgiving or Christmas unless I was testing a recipe, but you can if you want.

John Hodgman: No rules, just right. A lot of people think that's the motto of Outback Steakhouse. It's actually the motto of Stewart's shelled beans! Which I am bringing down in favor of Lindsey.

(They laugh.)

Green Bean casserole can be comforting at any time of the year, and it is fine if you want to use fresh ingredients. But be wary of your guest's expectations. If they're expecting canned glop, they may be disappointed, and they may be discomforted by your comfort food. But I think it's all fine in the pan. *(Three bean bangs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Let's take a quick break. When we come back, more comfort food disputes with Kenji Lopez and Deb Perelman.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Promo:

Mike Cabellon: You guys wanna try and do this promo with British accents?

Ify Nwadiwe: Yeah! Yeah, of course.

Sierra Katow: Let's do it.

Mike: Okay, Ify you go.

Ify: *(In an exaggerated cockney accent.)* Oi, bruv! This is *TV Chef Fah-ntasy League*.

(Mike and Sierra laugh.)

Mike: Fah-ntasy League!

Sierra: *(Giggling.)* Okay, Fah-ntasy League!

Mike: Okay, Sierra.

Sierra: *(In a crisp British Received Pronunciation.)* We take cooking competition shows and treat them like fantasy sports.

Mike: Like a newscaster!

Ify: Yeah! Yeah, very fancy!

Mike: Very posh!

(Also in British RP.) Right now, we're doing *The Great British Bake Off*. Or! *The Great British Baking Show*, if you're listening from the US.

Sierra: Oooh! That was really sooth!

Ify: Yes. You chose like a prim and proper *Downton Abbey*.

(Sierra agrees.)

Mike: Thank you, thank you. Okay. Ify, I think you have the best accent if you wanna take us home?

Music: Light, playful percussion.

Ify: *(Aiming for a more posh accent.)* Subscribe to *TV Chef Fantasy League* on MaximumFun.org and wherever you get your podcasts.

(They snorts a laugh.)

(In his usual accent.) Better than my Boston one.

(Music fades out.)

Promo:

Music: Playful, exciting synth.

Ellen Weatherford: Hi, everybody. It's Ellen Weatherford.

Christian Weatherford: And Christian Weatherford.

Ellen: People say not to judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree.

Christian: But we can judge a snake by its ability to fly or a spider by its ability to dive.

Ellen: Or a dung beetle by its ability to navigate with the starlight of the Milky Way galaxy.

Christian: On *Just the Zoo of Us*, we rate our favorite animals out of ten in the categories of physical effectiveness, behavioral ingenuity, and—of course—aesthetics.

Ellen: Guest experts like biologists, ecologists, musicians, comedians and more join us to share their unique insights into the animal kingdom.

Christian: Listen with the whole family on MaximumFun.org. Or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Judge Hodgman, we are taking a quick break from clearing the docket. Let's talk about what we have going on.

John Hodgman: So, Jesse, as you know—and you at home can see—I am joining you, penultimately, this summer from my summertime chambers at WERU here in Orland, Maine. WERU.org, if you want to listen online. And you can also click on donate, because much like many public radio stations—even those not affiliated with NPR—as I've mentioned before, they're losing a lot of funding under the current administration, and they need your help to bring you community news and support all year long. More than ever. So, WERU.org. Look, it's just a lot of fun to listen to!

Also, in local public affairs. Joel, did you see that Graham Platner is running for Senate?

Joel Mann: Yes! Very excited.

[00:35:00]

John Hodgman: Yeah, Graham is an incredible person who I've known for the past couple of years, 'cause he is the current co-runner of a wonderful oyster farm up in Sorento, Maine called Waukeag Neck Oysters. Boy, those oysters are good! And then out of the blue, this incredibly smart, articulate, lovely, funny guy that I've gotten to know the past couple of years, texts me saying, “Guess what? I'm running for Senate against Susan Collins.” And boy! You've seen him all over your media. If you're interested— If you're someone who's interested in politics and also someone who doesn't like Susan Collins very much, I'm sure

you've seen Graham Plattner give some very, very powerful speeches about how our true enemy is the oligarchy. And I happen to agree with him.

So, I'm just letting you know. Graham for Senate is his website, Graham for Senate. His name is Graham Plattner. You should probably take a look and see if he shares your values. And if he is, it's time to get together and support the candidates that we like. I mean, Graham is a guy who had never— The highest office he ever held was a harbormaster in Sullivan, Maine. But he knows, as I think we all do know in our bones, that if we're gonna see change in this country that we love, we've gotta get up and start doing stuff. Organizing, volunteering, donating if it's possible, even running for office. It's all within our reach. And I think Graham's campaign really embodies that in a way that is very inspiring to me and maybe to you as well. So, why don't you check him out?

Now in more mundane, post-apocalyptic news, there's a great movie called *They Live* by John Carpenter. It is a paranoid fantasy about how the oligarchy controls us all. Timely? Maybe. Certainly was in the '80s. I don't know about now. Why don't you decide? I'm hosting a screening of *They Live* in my hometown—it is my hometown—Brooklyn, New York, down there at the Nighthawk Prospect Park. Tomorrow night—depending on when you're listening to this. I'm talking about September 18th at 7:15 PM. I'll be up there introducing this wonderful, weird, funny, bizarre, and I think more-timely-than-ever movie, *They Live* by John Carpenter. Starring Keith David and Rowdy Roddy Piper, among others. It's an incredible movie. If you've never seen it, don't watch it 'til you can come join us at the Nighthawk tomorrow night. September 18th, 7:15 PM. If you want tickets. I'll be there hanging around. Come see me and say hello. Go to bit.ly/OBEYHODGMAN. That's bit.ly/OBEYHODGMAN. Obey Hodgman is one word, all capital letters.

That's what's going on in my life. Jesse, what's happening with you?

Jesse Thorn: We have so many amazing new things in my vintage and antique store, the Put This On Shop. Lots of ladies' things. So, you know— Look, the roots of the Put This On Shop are in my menswear blog, *Put This On*. But we have grown to encompass lots of beautiful vintage and designer and not-that-old women's clothing and lots of incredible jewelry. Plus, I'm just like— I'm in the process of clearing out some of my personal stashes. So, there are some of like my favorite, most special-est things going into the store. One of them is this ferry boat—this model of a ferry boat that was made by Danish prisoners—

John Hodgman: Whoa!

Jesse Thorn: —that I brought home from Denmark. It is absolutely one of the things I love the most. It comes with its own ferry docking station, I guess? No harbormaster.

John Hodgman: Yeah, a wharf.

Jesse Thorn: I just bought a set of books from the '40s about caring for your canary. I think you're gonna want those, if you have a canary or someone you know does. I have a big enamel sign for Florsheim shoes in their classic sort of shield logo. That's probably from the '50s or '60s or something like that. Plus, I recently got a bunch of goggles. Just have a lot of different goggles now.

(John “ooh”s.)

I just bought a bunch of goggles. I don't know what to tell you about it. I just got into goggle-buying for a second there. A lot of beautiful silver and mixed-metal bracelets that are suitable for both men and women. Many of those come out of my own personal collection. All this is online at PutThisOnShop.com. That's PutThisOnShop.com. Yeah, I would strongly encourage you to go check it out. I'm a big stick pin guy. I'm really a big supporter of putting a stick pin in your lapel, whether you're a fella or a lady. And I have a lot of beautiful Victorian and Edwardian gold stick pins that are in the shop right now. That's all online at PutThisOnShop.com.

And right around the corner for me is the 25th anniversary of my public radio show, *Bullseye*.

[00:40:00]

John Hodgman: Wow!

Jesse Thorn: Which as a college sophomore at UC Santa Cruz in Santa Cruz, California. We are going to have three 25th anniversary shows. One at The Pit in New York City, one at the Kuumbwa Jazz Center in Santa Cruz, California, and one here in Los Angeles at LAist's performance Studio, The Crawford Family Forum in Pasadena. We haven't announced the guests yet. But let's just say, John, that our Santa Cruz show will be featuring actor who is Santa Cruz's favorite son, as well as Santa Cruz's favorite stepbrother.

(John “mm!”s thoughtfully.)

Okay. We'll be back with more in just a second on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. We're clearing the docket of some comfort feuds with our guests, Deb Perelman and Kenji López-Alt. Kenji's cooking techniques, his baking techniques specifically, came up the other day on the show.

John Hodgman: Yeah, that's right. I wanted to ask this question of Kenji. So, on a recent bonus, members only mailbag episode that we do once a month for Maximum Fun members, we were talking about chocolate chip cookies. Which even I, a non-sweet-tooth person love, because they're kind of the perfect cookie.

Kenji López-Alt: Right. They can be a little savory.

John Hodgman: And they can be a little savory as well, especially if you add some Stewart's shelled beans and MSG.

(Kenji laughs.)

I'll give that recipe later. What I wanted to talk about was that you and a number of others have recommended letting your cookie dough rest in the fridge at least overnight before cooking them.

(Kenji confirms.)

And we were wondering why.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Well, there's a number of reasons. So, first of all, you can— Well, it makes them taste better. So, if you cook cookies—you baked cookies side-by-side with freshly made dough—

John Hodgman: *(Interrupting.)* Oh! Well, if that's your criterion! I mean, I don't know. Sure! Alright!

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: *(Laughs.)* Freshly made dough versus dough that's been rested overnight, you find that the ones that have been rested overnight have more complex sort of caramel notes, a little sort of— Yeah, the flavors just become a little bit more complex, a little bit more savory almost.

But you know, there's a few things that happen. So, you know, part of them are textural. So, your flour's gonna hydrate, which— So, the starch in there will absorb the liquid better. Your sugar's gonna dissolve more fully. So, when it bakes, you get better surface caramelization and some kind of crisper edges. And then also, your fat's gonna solidify harder, so that when your cookies bake, they don't spread quite as much. And so, you get a better contrast between those kind of crispy edges and the chewier center.

John Hodgman: You know, that's all I want in this life is for my fat to solidify harder. Finally.

(They laugh.)

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: the other thing that happens is that there's enzymatic breakdown of the flour. And so— You know, when cookies bake, there's caramelization going on, and there's also the Maillard reaction. You know, the browning reaction that turns your toast brown and develops those complex flavors. When your flour is broken down enzymatically overnight, those reactions can take place a little bit faster. And so, you get just more complex flavor and better flavor development. So, yeah. Virtually any cookie recipe and any chocolate chip cookie recipe you have—and most other cookies as well—if you're used to just making it and baking it? If you've got the time, I would suggest letting it sit in the fridge overnight, and it will improve almost any cookie dough you've got.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I've really found that enzymatic breakdown step is so important in a chocolate chip cookie recipe. That's why I make my chocolate chip cookies with a little bit of OxiClean.

(Kenji and Deb laugh, but John absolutely cackles.)

Here's a case from Lucas in Orlando, Florida.

“My girlfriend likes her ice cream soft.”

Dear Penthouse.

(They chuckle.)

“She lets—”

John Hodgman: Never thought this would happen to me.

Jesse Thorn: “She lets it sit out on the counter before scooping. Sometimes she puts it in the microwave for 15 to 30 seconds. I think both of these methods ruin the ice cream. Please stop her from doing this. Also, Judge John Hodgman asked what our favorite ice cream flavors are. Mine is Neapolitan. Hers is cookie dough.”

John Hodgman: Well, obviously for cookie dough, what you want to do is you wanna leave it out overnight and eat it the next day for that enzymatic breakdown.

(They laugh.)

Joel, I saw you nodding your head at that technique. Which one do you use?

Joel Mann: Well, the microwave thing, my wife—who is a real person in her own right—yep, she does that in the microwave, and I don't think that's good.

John Hdgman: You don't think it's good?

(Joel confirms.)

Okay. Alright.

Jesse Thorn: The microwave is not the ideal way to do this, 'cause it just makes the outside soupy.

[00:45:00]

While the inside remains the same, essentially.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah, 'cause a microwave only penetrates like a centimeter, maybe, from the outside. And so, you get—

Deb Perelman: But the why do microwaves— Kenji, why do microwaves often heat things in the center? Like, you get that kind of zapped inside?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Um, what kinds of things are you talking about? Are you talking—

Deb Perelman: I'm thinking like sometimes when you're— Like, it heats the centers before the edges of some things that are really cold. I'm trying to think of a good example. I feel like—

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: I've never had that happen. I don't know.

John Hodgman: I'm thinking of some very inappropriate examples.

Deb Perelman: So, I'm not a big ice cream from the freezer eater, but my husband loves it. And he also does the 10 seconds in the microwave, because it's otherwise too hard to scoop. However, I am a huge fan of soft serve. And so, if that's what she's going for, I am all for it. I think that— Why are we chewing ice cream?!

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Why—? Oh, hold on. *(Laughs.)*

Deb Perelman: Like, if it's really cold, and you're like chipping it from the freezer? Like—

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: As someone from New England, which has the chewiest ice cream in the world, I think. You know—

John Hodgman: Yeah, we take pride in it.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: The spots in Boston—you know, like the original Steve's; and even now, like Toscanini's, or if you go out to like Northampton and get Harold's—like, the really dense, custardy ice creams that you put in your mouth—and they're not hard, but they have chew to them, that's my favorite kind of ice cream. I like my ice cream nice and chewy. And I don't know if you find that in Maine as well, but—

John Hodgman: Oh yeah.

Deb Perelman: I feel like a dense creaminess is nice, but not because it's so cold that you are more chewing it in chunks than you are... I don't know.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Chunky? Okay.

Deb Perelman: How do you eat soft serve? I think soft serve is perfect. A good soft serve.

John Hodgman: Where did you grow up getting your soft serve ice cream, Deb? And what's your favorite soft serve combo or non-combo?

Deb Perelman: I grew up going to Carvel. And my tastes have changed, *(unclear)*. No, I still love Carvel. It's perfect.

John Hodgman: We're fans of Fudgy the Whale over here.

(Kenji agrees.)

Deb Perelman: Yeah, so I grew up with Carvel. I've been told that people don't really like Carvel; it's just nostalgia. But I disagree. It's perfect. But I would say a very good—like, if you're in Italy, like fior di latte soft serve, which is like not even vanilla; it's just kind of cream, and they often add flavors to it? It is perfect. It's perfect ice cream.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: But when you say soft serve in Italy, you're talking just like gelato, right? Which tends to be softer than regular—you know, than American ice cream.

Deb Perelman: I also—in college, I actually worked—I was in DC, but I worked for a year or two at an ice cream shop that was a frozen custard shop. The guy was from New England. And he had a lot of nostalgia, so it was— They actually just sold frozen custard, and it was a lot richer, and it was really good.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: And was it a little bit chewy?

Deb Perelman: It was a little bit chewy. But like chewy because it was dense and creamy and thick.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Right, right, right. Mm-hm.

Deb Perelman: And not because it was like frozen, and you had to chip it off.

John Hodgman: So, when I think of soft serve ice cream— We do have hard ice cream here in Maine, but if you're going to a take-away fried clam place or whatever, they're most likely to have soft serve. And in that case, what's your preference? One of those pull-handled, swirly soft serve. What's your favorite flavor, and do you do the twist? You gotta do the twist. Do you combo the two flavors? So, if you have chocolate and vanilla, do you get the— ? That's what we call a twist.

Deb Perelman: I would say my Carvel order was always chocolate and vanilla, but now I've really come to appreciate just plain vanilla. But I don't mind a chocolate topping on it, like hot fudge.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Like, a—or a chocolate dip? Chocolate (*unclear*) dip?

John Hodgman: Oh, like the shell—Magic Shell?

Deb Perelman: Yeah. A little waxy. A little chocolatey. It's so good. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: John, when you take your family to Maine for the first time in the year—like, when you guys go out at the end of June or whenever it is you head out there and go to the clam shack—do you turn to your family and say, “Let's twist again like we did last summer?”

John Hodgman: I do.

(Kenji laughs.)

I take them to Bagaduce Lunch, and I say those exact words.

Jesse Thorn: That's some topical, Chubby Checker humor.

John Hodgman: Kenji, what's your favorite ice cream, and how do you prep it on the counter, or how do you get it ready to go?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Um, my favorite ice cream— Well, can I give two answers? So, if I'm in Cambridge, it'll be the burnt caramel from Toscanini's, which is a flavor I think they invented. And if I'm buying it from like the supermarket, it'll generally be anything with peanut butter in it. So, like a peanut butter swirl. Or I like anything with like peanut butter cups in it, you know. So, yeah, peanut butter, little bit of chocolate, and vanilla.

John Hodgman: I'm sorry. I stopped hearing Kenji there for a minute. *(Beat.)* What was he talking about?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: What—? Ice cream? Can you hear me?

John Hodgman: I feel like— No, now I can hear you Kenji. Yeah. No, I think it was when you started talking about peanut butter ice cream, my brain decided to stop listening to you.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: *(Laughs.)* Okay.

(Jesse “wow”s.)

John Hodgman: Sorry. It's just—I mean, as a fan of savory, you would think I would love that idea! But I'm sorry, I never even thought about peanut butter swirl and ice cream!

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Really?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, John, I am a person who—as you know—can't eat chocolate.

[00:50:00]

So, as a non-chocolate eater who prefers a savory-er ice cream to a fruity ice cream, generally, I looove peanut butter ice cream.

(John is surprised.)

Because it is like— You know, peanut butter and caramel are the closest things I can get to an ice cream with chocolate in it. And so, whether it's a swirl of peanut butter or just straight-up peanut butter ice cream, love 'em.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah.

John Hodgman: Well, I stand corrected, and I will give it a try. After all, as far as I'm concerned, the only candy bar is a Zagnut, and the best Halloween treat is a Reese's peanut butter cup. So, I ought to try it.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: That is definitely true. Yes.

Deb Perelman: That is just—(*unclear*). (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: Yeah. Thank you. I'm glad we were able to agree on that.

Jesse Thorn: Did we decide on the answer to this question yet?

John Hodgman: Oh yeah. No. What's the best way— What's the best way to soften up your ice cream?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Oh, I don't— I'm not really an ice cream softener. I mean, I think the easy answer is that he serves himself, and then she can eat the ice cream when she wants. (*Laughs.*) But.

Deb Perelman: Family harmony!

John Hodgman: There you go.

Deb Perelman: I actually—usually in recipes when I'm telling people—like, if it's a recipe for an ice cream cake or an ice cream sandwich, and I know that the ice cream might be too hard to scoop easily from the freezer, I usually tell people to just put it in the fridge for ten minutes.

(*John “ohhh”s thoughtfully.*)

Which has the same effect and a little bit less dramatic, where you don't risk having any melty parts. But I am married to somebody who does the “microwave for ten seconds” thing, and it doesn't bother me.

John Hodgman: Is it that the average home freezer is too cold for ice cream?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yeah, no. Most home freezers don't go much below—don't go too far below freezing. You know, they're not the negative 80 degree lab freezers. No, it's just— And it also varies from brand to brand, you know, depending on how much overrun there is, depending on what kind of sort of stabilizers are in there. So, I find, you know, like a real

dense, minimal-ingredient ice cream like a Häagen-Dazs tends to be— Yeah, that tends to be a little firmer in the freezer than something that has— You know, like Ben and Jerry's has like carrageenan and then a couple of other things that help—that emulsify and stabilize it. And that tends to be a little softer straight outta the freezer. So, it could just vary from brand to brand also. But I don't think there's gonna be too much of a difference in how cold your freezer is that's going to seriously affect the texture of ice cream.

John Hodgman: Alright. Based on that expertise and all of your opinions, I'm gonna go ahead and say: you like what you like in terms of the softness, and the best way to soften it up is to set it in the refrigerator for a period of time. Figure out— Do a little science, do a little math. Figure out what time brings you the consistency you like. But for God-or-Whatever's sake, keep it outta the microwave! So speaks to the shelled beans can! (*Three bean bangs.*)

Hey, since unlike ours, your time is valuable; we're gonna go to a lightning round. Right, Jesse?

Jesse Thorn: Absolutely. Baltanerdist on the MaxFun subreddit says, “My wife thinks ice cream is a summertime food and soup is a wintertime food. I want to eat soup and ice cream year-round. Who's right?”

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Year-round for both of them.

Deb Perelman: Ice cream, year-round. Soup, fall/winter for me.

John Hodgman: Mm! Ice cream is a year-round food. You know what is also a year-round food? Ice cream soup. Just stir it until it melts.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: That's what my— My 3-year-old does that every time. He wants me to make ice cream soup.

John Hodgman: Yeah, it's classic.

Jesse Thorn: Carol in Georgia asks, “Can a grilled cheese sandwich also be called a cheese toastie? My spouse says My Midwestern family is weird because we say cheese toastie.”

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Yes, you can call it a cheese toastie, but only if you're in Ireland. I think in the Midwest you're not allowed to say that. Or in England. Yeah. And if it's made in like one of those sandwich presses. Yeah.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Deb, explain what those things are.

Deb Perelman: Oh. (*Chuckling.*) I'm like, “What? The sandwich (*unclear*)?”

John Hodgman: No, it'll be great on the YouTube.

(*They laugh.*)

Let's all do our imitation of a toastie maker.

Deb Perelman: It just basically looks like a waffle iron, but inside it fits a piece of sandwich bread—two, actually—and it usually has diagonal cut. So, you can just go through your grilled cheese in there before you cook it, and it'll toast it up for you. But I don't think it's the same thing as pan-fried grilled cheese at all.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: No, 'cause those typically don't involve that buttery crust that you want in a good grilled cheese.

Deb Perelman: Yeah, exactly. But they're very efficient machines. And they're— I feel like they're very household standard in the UK and Ireland, and I don't see them— They exist here, but it's not like something every house would have.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: They were sold on TV for a while, like maybe in the early '90s.

Deb Perelman: Yes! *(Laughs.)* I remember it. The blue screen, “order online” thing. Yeah, like call the number.

John Hodgman: Yeah, a toastie and a grilled cheese are different things. A toastie is made in a toastie maker. And if you go to a pub in England where they are serving toasties, you could get one with cheese. You also might add—and this is true—beans.

(They laugh.)

They do it! But that's a toastie, not a grilled cheese.

Let's do this one from Wendy, and then we'll wrap it up there.

Jesse Thorn: Alright. “My husband claims his comfort foods are iceberg lettuce, cottage cheese, and celery. Those aren't comfort foods, right?”

[00:55:00]

I don't know. It depends if you're on a diet in the '70s.

(They laugh.)

Deb Perelman: Did he grow up at a spa in the '80s? At a club?

Jesse Thorn: This guy wears leg warmers everywhere.

John Hodgman: I like to believe that he's chopping up the iceberg lettuce and mixing it up with cottage cheese and chopped celery, and he is making a little salad.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Oh, I was thinking the celery and the cottage cheese go together, and then the iceberg is like a boat.

John Hodgman: That's also a beautiful way to do it.

(They laugh.)

Deb Perelman: Wait, are they his comfort foods together? 'Cause all three of those are foods that I really like.

John Hodgman: I don't—

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Are they comfort foods—?

John Hodgman: It's a little unclear, so you can consider it.

Deb Perelman: Iceberg is close.

John Hodgman: Yeah, iceberg is a comfort. I mean, when we talk about comfort food, we're—and it goes back to green bean casserole, right? There's a little nostalgia element to it. What did we take comfort in growing up? What reminds us of a time that we thought was better? Even though we all know that time moves in one direction, and it does not get better or worse; it just is all terrible.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Comfort is on the tongue of the taster, I think.

John Hodgman: I'll tell you; I had— Speaking of the tongue of the taster, I had some cottage cheese on my tongue for the first time in a number of years, and I was gonna say, it is God-or-Whatever-damn delicious. I like cottage cheese!

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Oh, I love cottage cheese. Yeah.

John Hodgman: What's your number one recipe for cottage cheese that people wouldn't think to add cottage cheese to?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Oh, using it in place of like a ricotta, if you're making like an American-style layered lasagna or something like that. Cottage cheese works great in— I think it comes out better than most store-bought ricotta does. Which store-bought ricotta generally is kind of grainy and gummy, whereas cottage cheese—whatever brand you get—it's always kind, be kind of creamy and curdy and delicious.

John Hodgman: Curdy and delicious. Deb, you like all of these? Would you say that these are comfort foods? Yes or no? Final ruling.

Deb Perelman: No.

(John gasps.)

But it's subjective.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: We have a split decision. The Stewart's shelled beans shall make the final determination. If they're comforting to you, they're comfort to all. *(Three bean bangs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Deb and Kenji, tell me about where our listeners can find your work. I'm gonna start with you, Deb. If people like you better than Kenji, where should—*(chuckling)* what stuff should they get?

Deb Perelman: They can go to my website, SmittenKitchen.com. That'll take you to everything you need.

Jesse Thorn: Fantastic. You got cookbooks; you got the podcast. Okay. What about you, Kenji?

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: You can go to KenjiLopezAlt.com for my cookbooks. For my videos and recipes, I've transitioned over to Patreon, so you can find Kenji Lopéz-Alt on Patreon. Or on YouTube or on Instagram or, you know, all your social media things.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Deb and Kenji, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. It was really nice see you and meet you. And your podcast is the best. I also enjoy listening to it.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Thank you.

John Hodgman: *The Recipe with Kenji & Deb* is available wherever you get your podcasts. And Stewart's shelled beans are available, for now, at the Hannafords. Look, I'm telling you both. You get a can of this, you drain them, you mix them with some olive oil and balsamic vinegar and red onion. Maybe you put some celery in there. It's a delicious salad.

Deb Perelman: Yeah, it sounds really good.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: That's my guacamole recipe!

(They cackle.)

John Hodgman: Thank you both so much. Really, what a pleasure.

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Thanks for having us.

Deb Perelman: Thanks for having us on. Bye!

Kenji Lopéz-Alt: Bye-bye!

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: The docket is now clear.

That's it for another episode of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. *Judge John Hodgman* was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. Our social media manager, Dan Telfer. This is Dan's last week on the program. Thank you so much, Dan, for all your hard work. We wish you all the best in the future. The podcast is edited by AJ McKeon. Daniel Speer is our video producer. The show is produced by Jennifer Marmor. Photos from the show are on our Instagram, which is [@JudgeJohnHodgman](#). Or you can view them on the web on the episode page for this episode, at [MaximumFun.org](#). You can also find us on TikTok and YouTube at [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#). You can find full episodes on YouTube and cool clips on Instagram and TikTok, plus sometimes some original Instagram and TikTok content. Follow and subscribe to see our episodes and video content in all those places.

John Hodgman: Yeah, please make sure to get over there to YouTube and like and share and subscribe. It's a really important way that people find the podcast. Speaking of wonderful guests, we're gonna have another wonderful guest coming up very soon to clear a docket with us. That's right. It's the return of our friend and yours, Nick Offerman from *Parks and Recreation*, and *Devs*, and *Civil War*, and everything you like, and nothing that you ate!

Do you have any disputes that you'd like Nick Offerman to weigh in on? Disputes about woodworking techniques? He's an avid woodworker and canoe-builder. What about mustache-grooming disputes? What about questions and disputes about acting?

[01:00:00]

When is it good acting? (*Chuckling.*) When is it bad acting? Anything to do with Chicago. He loves to talk about that toddling town, including the Chicago Cubs. Anything you like that you think Nick Offerman would like is something that we want to hear about. Or anything you hate that you think Nick Offerman will hate is something we want to hear about. Send in your Offerman disputes to [MaximumFun.org/jjho](#), or email me directly at [MaximumFun.org](#).

That's Hodgeman, I should say, [@MaximumFun.org](#).

Jesse Thorn: Do you got great outdoors disputes? Do you have horny marriage disputes? (*Chuckles.*)

John Hodgman: There we go. Forgot about that part.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) Send them to us. Send them to us for our Nick Offerman episode, at [MaximumFun.org/jjho](#). And indeed, send us any dispute you have. Big or small, we judges them all. And they're the lifeblood of our program, so do go to [MaximumFun.org/jjho](#), and send something in. We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!