

Still Buffering 456: A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge (1985)

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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 Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Have you engaged in any Halloween spooky fun so far, Tey?

Taylor: Um, I have. I just— just on, what was it? On Monday, I went to the Blaze, which is— it's in Sleepy Hollow and it's, like, 7,000 carved pumpkins on display.

Sydnee: Whoa!

Taylor: Yeah. It was really cool. And they make all sorts of different, like— different themes. Like, different groupings of the pumpkins. There was, like, a pumpkin octopus that was surrounded by, like, pumpkin fish. There was, like, a— there was a pumpkin circus with all different pumpkin circus acts. Um, they—

Sydnee: Were there, like, pumpkin trapeze artists?

Taylor: There were, yeah!

Sydnee: Ooh.

Taylor: Like, little— some were carved. Some they didn't carve. They just, like, had different— like, the little root, the little stem.

Sydnee: Yeah?

Taylor: They used more stems to create arms and legs. So there were these little gremlin-looking pumpkins with arms and legs that were really great.

Sydnee: Did they use— other than just, like, pumpkin-pumpkins, did they use, like, various gourd varieties?

Taylor: It seemed to be... it seemed to be a strictly pumpkin situation.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: But I do believe there were some, like, imitation pumpkins.

Sydnee: Ahh, okay.

Taylor: I think some of them might have been, like, for the really big ones, like, some plastic. Or those, like, carvable, you know, foam structures.

Sydnee: So there were 7,000 pumpkins?

Taylor: 7,000 pumpkins.

Sydnee: This has got me—

Taylor: Which seems...

Sydnee: —interested. No, go ahead. Tell me. I'm looking something up.

Taylor: Um, it's, uh, of a various size. It seemed like— I was like, how are we— are we really gonna see 7,000 pumpkins? And it really was. I mean, it was a heavy concentration of pumpkins.

Sydnee: I was trying to figure out— so, you know we have the pumpkin house.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Here in Kenova, technically, which is like an adjacent neighborhood to— an adjacent, like, township, I don't know, whatever, to Huntington. I

don't know! Like... not a city but, you know, a town. I don't know how many pumpkins there are at the pumpkin house. There's a guy who carves tons of pumpkins, and people come from all over to look at the pumpkin house. And I didn't know...

Taylor: I remember the pumpkin house. I don't think we ever went in my youth, but I know of the pumpkin house.

Sydney: We never did go. We— okay. Last year we tried to go with the girls, and I thought it was just a thing you drove by and looked at. But, like, no. Like, you enter to, like, the yard to look at the full range of pumpkins. And so, like, we pulled up and there was, like, a line around the block, and you couldn't even drive near it. And we were like, "Never mind."

So we have to plan better. It only has 3,000.

Taylor: Oh. Ah, alright.

Sydney: But it is, like, his house just, like, on the street, I will say.

Taylor: That is an impressive amount of pumpkins for just an abode.

Sydney: Yeah. I mean, it's, like, a nice house. Like, it's a larger house. But it's not, like... I'm trying to, like— it's not set off from the neighborhood. It's just, like, right there. So, like, it's a high concentration of pumpkins. It looks— I was thinking it was more 'cause I was like, "Oh, that's gotta be more than 7,000."

It looks like more, but I think it's just 'cause they're, like, a highly concentrated pumpkin display. And now, they don't do, like, genres of pumpkins. It's more just like they're all carved. They're just, like, traditional— not jack-o-lanterns but, like, they're all just sitting there in rows, carved in different ways. Does that make sense?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I don't think they have, like, a circus or anything.

Taylor: [laughs] No pumpkin circus? I'm not interested. There was a pumpkin pride flag.

Sydnee: Oh, that's cool.

Taylor: They had lit them all with different color lights, so it was a rainbow pumpkin flag.

Sydnee: That's very nice.

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: I like that.

Taylor: It's inclusive.

Sydnee: We, uh—

Taylor: [simultaneously] They had a little— oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: We participated in a pumpkin carving event last night.

Taylor: Oh, how was that?

Sydnee: Well, there's a... a— the Huntington Children's Museum has a fundraiser every year. They do, like, a pumpkin carving thing. And it was initially, like, themed— they had local chefs and local surgeons was, like, the first— like, who can carve a pumpkin better was the idea. Somebody who carves food, or somebody who carves people, I guess? [laughs]

Taylor: I don't... hmm.

Sydnee: [laughs] And, like—

Taylor: You know, whoever would be better at it aside, that is the worst combination of egos to have in a competition against each other.

Sydnee: It was a very— it started, I feel like, as a much more intense fundraiser. Now it has just kind of turned into, like, local celebrities or, like, local political officials. You know, that kind of thing. So, like, people who are known in the community. So Justin was participating this year as one of the pumpkin carvers. And, uh, if you raise— like, you raise money ahead of time to, like, get yourself advantages. Like, if you raise a certain amount you get 30 extra minutes, and if you raise even more you get to have a carving assistant. So, Justin raised enough ahead of time that he got me as his carving assistant.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: Which was a bad choice, 'cause I'm not good at that. I don't know.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: The only thing I was— so, my— the advantage of me is I have no— it does not gross me out to scrape out the inside of a pumpkin.

Taylor: That is the advantage of you?

Sydnee: Yes. I have found that—

Taylor: Syd, I doubt— okay.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Like, I know it's gross. But I think there's— the amount of people that can carve out a pumpkin without, like, vomiting into it is higher than you think.

Sydnee: Well, I found that a lot of people find that texturally unpleasant.

Taylor: Sure, yeah! But you can still do it.

Sydnee: Right. Well, I just don't care. I don't know. So that was—

Taylor: I'm sorry. I don't... I just don't know if that's enough that you bring to the table to make up for... [laughs]

Sydnee: That was really it. I decorated the table while Justin prepped everything, and then I scooped out all the guts and got it all ready. And then we did a— it was really wild. So, I've never carved— I guess this is a way people carve pumpkins when they're trying to do something more impressive than I've certainly— all I've ever done are, like, the triangle eyes and the crooked tooth mouth. Like, that's all I've ever done.

Um, so he used, like, a little poking tool, like a sharp poker. Like, you put a stencil on the front of the pumpkin, and then you poke through to, like, make a perforated edge. You know what I'm saying?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: On the pumpkin. And then you pull the stencil off, and there it is. There's your whole picture all polka-dotted. And then he used a Dremel.

Taylor: He Dremeled his pumpkin?

Sydnee: He Dremeled it. And it, like, shaves away. Like, you don't cut all the way through.

Taylor: Oh yeah, just to get the— yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. To, like, thin it. And so it's a different color.

Taylor: [simultaneously] Different depth.

Sydnee: Yeah. And then the other thing it does is then you can put— actually, we had carved the hole in the bottom, so we put the light— it was a really bright light— we put in the bottom of the pumpkin, and it shines through the part that you Dremeled away 'cause it's, you know, thinner.

And that's, like, the— part of the art of it, I guess is, like, the thickness of it. How thin can you get it to make the light shine brighter in some areas and less? You get what I'm saying?

Taylor: You're working in relief.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Anyway, it was fascinating. We did a Haunted Mansion themed situation, of course. 'Cause Justin loves Haunted Mansion.

And it was like the Hatbox Ghost head is what he put on the pumpkin. The guy with the top hat.

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Yeah, it was cool. It was very interesting, and it was a fun thing. And, like, my boss was there, carving a pumpkin. And one of our local city council representatives was carving a pumpkin. It was a whole thing.

Taylor: Who won?

Sydnee: Fire chief was carving a pumpkin.

Taylor: Did you win?

Sydnee: We don't know yet.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: So, the voting continues until Halloween. All the pumpkins are displayed online.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: And— so you can, like, go to Facebook and look at all the pumpkins. But...

Taylor: [wheezes] They would be on Facebook.

Sydnee: Of course it's on Facebook. Of course it's on Facebook!

Taylor: I was gonna say, I'll cast a vote for you. No, I don't do the Facebook. I don't have a Facebook.

Sydnee: The fire chief just put a huge, like, flame he carved into his pumpkin. And a bunch of candles in it. And then he had a little people fire truck next to it, putting it out. [laughs]

Taylor: Oh, I love that.

Sydnee: It was so cute! It was very cute. I went over and I was like, "Chief, this is great. I really— I love your pumpkin."

And he was like, "Well... uh, it's not quite... "

He was, like, quibbling with the placement of the fire truck and the angle of the hose. And he was like, "That's not really... "

Taylor: "Would this work? Hmm."

Sydnee: "That's not quite how I like to attack 'em. I'd usually have a guy here... "

And he's, like, explaining it to me. And I was like, "Well, I mean, it's gotta go against all your instincts to have, like, all that fire in that pumpkin right now, right? Like, is it... are you trying to hold yourself back? Like, you just gotta put it out."

And he was like, "I'm gonna be honest, Sydnee. My main concern is containing the fire to our pumpkin and not allowing it to spread to the surrounding pumpkins."

It was a very funny dry joke. [laughs] Discussing the fires in the pumpkins with the fire chief was really the highlight of my evening.

Taylor: I feel like he'd be the person to ask, 'cause I know— I know when it comes to, like, holidays and the possibility of fires, the big offender is usually Christmas trees.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: But are pumpkins, like, on the list?

Sydnee: That is a great— you know, I'll ask him. He's a really good guy, our fire chief. I know him well.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And, you know, I'm gonna ask him. Like, are pumpkins a big—
[laughs]

Taylor: 'Cause I can see, like, you know, especially if you got, like, porch pumpkins and it's fall, you've got dry leaves scootin' around. You got a pumpkin with an open flame inside of it.

Sydnee: It makes total sense. Like, I wonder... do you think most people still light a candle in their pumpkins, or have they switched to some sort of...

Taylor: Like an LED situation?

Sydnee: Yeah. Or, like, you can— yeah, you can buy those little— they look like little votives, but they're— you just flick a switch on the bottom. They're, like, battery operated.

Taylor: Yeah, I don't know. I was surprised— I wonder how long they'll last. But on my street— which, look. I don't... my neighborhood's not, like— it's the middle of Brooklyn. But somebody carved not one, not two, but six beautifully carved pumpkins, and have them out on their stoop with real candles in them. And they light them every night.

And every night I walk— 'cause I'm usually walking by them on my way home. I'm like, that is putting a lot of faith into Bushwick. [laughs] Like... the fact that they have stayed at least for a week now is impressive.

Sydnee: That would stress me out.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I just, like— I wouldn't trust New York City to not throw my pumpkin on the ground. I would assume that's just a— that's, like— that's one of those, like, "Eh, I'm... what are you doin'? You can't have a pumpkin on the street corner! I'm gonna kick it into traffic, into a taxicab!" Like, that's what happens, I'd assume.

Sydnee: You sound like that one guy who's running for mayor, there.

Taylor: The shot five times...

Sydnee: "I was shot in the back of a yellow cab in 1992 five times."
[laughs] I don't know.

Taylor: Look, we... uh, we showed the debate at my job, and look. I... I, of course, am voting for Mamdani. I've been helping with the campaign.

Sydnee: Sure, sure.

Taylor: I'm all in. But if we could elect somebody as the parade czar, the man that gets to be in all the parades, and the subway czar...

Sydnee: There you go.

Taylor: Give him— give him an honorary position just so he can say insane things into a microphone a few times a year.

Sydnee: And wear that hat. He's gotta wear that hat everywhere. Yeah, I appreciated him. Like, as— obviously, yes, don't— I don't wouldn't— I mean, I'm not— I can't vote in your election. I don't live there. I wouldn't, if I did. But I do think— and I agree that, like, Mamdani's kind of like, "I'm not really thinking about parades." That's a good thing, you know? I like— I support that.

Taylor: His answer was perfect, because what it translated to is, "This is a stupid question and I hate that I have to answer it," but in the nicest way possible. [laughs]

Sydnee: It was— I mean, it was— well, it was a... I mean, I don't wanna... I don't know who the moderators were, so— you know what I mean? I don't want to be rude. But, like, it is kind of a stupid question.

Taylor: No, it wasn't, like, a child asking it. It was, like, a— a, you know, an adult asking, like, "What parades will you go to?"

And I think it was the correct answer to say, "That's not on my list of concerns." [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, and it was like, "What parades would you make? Like, what parades do you think there should be?" Or something. Like...

Taylor: And "What would you miss?" And I— like, "Any, any that conflicted with my need to do my job," seems to be the answer. [laughs]

Sydnee: Who cares about parades? I don't know. And then the— yes, Sliwa was like, "All— you're the mayor! You gotta go to all the parades! I'm in every parade!"

Taylor: "I'll be in every parade."

"What parades wouldn't you go to? Give me a list. What parades won't you go to?"

It's funny to see, like, the Republican actually work for the Democrat on stage.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Because for the most part, he was only, like— he would be like, "Well, I disagree with the Assemblyman. But Cuomo? Screw this guy!"

Like, it was very [laughs] distinct. That was the one time that he butted heads with Mamdani was over the parades. And I'm like, "You know what? That's okay. That's alright. Let the man have his parades."

Sydnee: I like how we have to keep hearing about... [laughs] how much money Cuomo has offered him to drop out of the race. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah! And it's, I mean... [laughs] it's... it's hard to find a— I don't... I don't ever want to feel conned by certain— certain establishment government positions, to the point that I'm, like, cynical about anybody that aligns themselves with the right. But if you ever had to say, "Well, I guess that's what a good Republican looks like." We disagree fundamentally about a lot of stuff, but that's just— that's one of 'em. That's one that still exists. [laughs]

Sydnee: It's, um—

Taylor: I don't want him to win, but I think he's probably a good guy.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, yes. You have to imagine there are some that aren't... yeah. I mean, I think that that is fair to say. And I will say that I just saw clips of it on TikTok, surfacing 'cause everybody was losing it over one, the parades, and then two, just that guy in general. [laughs] "I have been shot. I have Crohn's disease. I have used medical marijuana." Just, like, so many great moments.

Taylor: That medical mari— or that marijuana question in and of itself just was, like... the entire debate in a single answer. Like, Mamdani just said "Yes," and giggled. Cuomo gave a firm "No," as if to judge it, like it hasn't been legal in New York, and a massive stream of revenue for the city for a while now.

And then Sliwa with his insane... [laughs]

Sydnee: "I have Crohn's disease."

Taylor: He said "had," as if it somehow cured it.

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: And everyone's like, "What is his secret?" [laughs]

Sydnee: But it did make me feel better. Like, there's so much during our legislative season in West Virginia. I'm glad nobody pays attention to us. I'm glad nobody knows— I mean, nobody cares about West Virginia, because, like, from a national standpoint, we have no power. We have very little representation. Right? So we are not on the national agenda, ever.

And that's for the best, because the number of absolutely ridiculous, wild, embarrassing things that come out of our legislative session... I mean, I'm glad the nation isn't watching. Right? Like, it's bad enough that all you know about us is "Don't they have that one senator who's got a dog in a wagon that he drags around the Senate?" Like...

Taylor: Yeah, that's true.

Sydnee: But it did make me feel better. Because I was watching this and I was like, "Well... I mean... they got some weirdos there too, obviously. Like, they're asking their candidates about parades!" [laughs quietly]

Taylor: It's— yeah. You know, like, I think any time you get down to local elections... that's why it's so funny. Like, the... the concern that this campaign has. I'm not— obviously it's the mayor of a city that represents such an economic slice of the world that it outpaces most countries. So that is obviously bigger stakes than, like, a local mayoral race. But it does still seem— like, any time you get to that layer of local politics, you are gonna be dealing with just people. [laughs] Just characters.

Sydnee: That— it— yeah. I enjoyed it. I had a lot of fun watching all the jokes about it. And all the people who were kind of saying what you're saying. Like, obviously we don't want this guy to win. But he seems like he might be fun to have at a party. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and you know, it's— you can't argue that, like, the Guardian Angels weren't an important, like, grassroots organization to help protect New Yorkers when the subways were really dangerous. That's, you

know. [laughs] There's a reason he was shot in the back of that cab! He was making things difficult for, you know, the mafia.

Sydnee: [laughs] I have seen so many clips that are portraying him as Batman. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. Well, it's important— you know, somebody made the good point that, like, "Hey. The last time a silly guy that said lots of silly things got involved in politics that made us all laugh, we... somehow ended up electing him President."

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: So let's not be too entertained.

Sydnee: Twice.

Taylor: 'Cause it's important to note that Sliwa has done some, like— he has, when it comes to, like, policing of immigrants, migrants in our city, he's pretty heinous. He's said things and endorsed, like, policing people in ways that are not... he's not all— he's not just, like, oh, an "Oh, shucks" grandpa. I mean, I guess he is, in the sense that your "Aw, shucks" grandpa might be racist. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I mean, that makes sense. And I think it's— you know, if you're younger, this may not hit as close. But, like, it's a very George W. Bush kind of slope that you can fall down.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: George W. Bush was hilarious. I mean, unintentionally. I don't mean, like, "He's a funny guy!" It was hilarious that he was President, and he did things that were hilarious all the time, and he said ridiculous things, and he danced all the time, and he couldn't get doors open, and he choked on a pretzel, and he misquoted stuff. And it was all very funny, except it wasn't funny, 'cause he was President. And he did stuff during that time.

He made, like, huge, world-changing decisions for the worse, in many ways. And we're all laughing at him because he's hilarious, and Will Ferrell playing him on SNL is hilarious. And it really is dangerous. Like, I find myself seeing little TikTok clip compilations of W. Bush sometimes, and I am still giggling. "Fool me once, shame on... fool— fool me... " [laughs] "We won't get fooled again!"

It's funny!

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: It's funny! Like, it is!

Taylor: Well, no! That...

Sydney: But it wasn't funny, 'cause then, you know, he... started a war. Well, you know, took us into a war.

Taylor: Exactly. no.

Sydney: So, like, it's not funny!

Taylor: If he's just your neighbor that sits on the porch and usually says funny things, but every now and then is a little offensive, you're like, "Oh, that's just my old neighbor, you know. Don't mind him."

When they're in the White House, there's [unintelligible] come from it. [laughs] That's what, like— I think for right now, the campaign of love that's directed to Sliwa is okay, because if anything, it'll just make it that, like, Republicans that might've bit the bullet and said "I'm gonna vote for Cuomo 'cause I don't want Mamdani to win," might be like, "No, maybe Sliwa has a chance. He's been getting a lot of good press." Might sway votes towards him.

But the by and large vote... I mean, I don't know. I've been burned by politics so many times. But, like, I don't know how we fumble this. Numerically, I don't know how we fumble this.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, you gotta keep Sliwa in the race.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's the main thing. And so, like, if that—

Taylor: No, I mean, thank god he does have the integrity to stay in.

Sydnee: Because, I mean, I think the polls show that Mamdani would win even if it was just him and Cuomo, currently.

Taylor: Yeah. He did that once. [laughs]

Sydnee: But, but, we all have seen that all the polls will tell us one thing, and then, you know, 2016 happens. And...

Taylor: Well, yes.

Sydnee: So I think if keeping Sliwa in the race makes it all the more certain that Mamdani wins, let's show him a little love. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: No, absolutely. Well, and I mean, I think he's aware of that. But I liked his response, even people asking him like, "Well, don't you think you're helping Mamdani? Aren't you helping him win by staying in the race?"

And he's like, "That's not— I'm there for the Republican voters that chose me as their candidate, and I have a duty to them because they selected me, just as much as Mamdani has a duty to the Democratic candidates that selected him. Cuomo doesn't have any business in this race." [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, no.

Taylor: Which is fair.

Sydnee: No, Cuomo's a spoiler. Cuomo's the problem.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Which— in many ways, Cuomo's the problem.

Taylor: I mean...

Sydnee: Period.

Taylor: It's been said, he can't take no for an answer, so, you know.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: That's the problem.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Spooky New York politics!

Sydnee: It is spooky. We need to talk about the movie we're gonna talk about, but real quick, do you know what Group 7 is, and why I keep getting TikToks about it?

Taylor: Oh, are you in Group 7 too? So am I.

Sydnee: Why are we in Group 7?

Taylor: I don't know. I think it's some... I don't even— I'm not sure. Are there even Groups 1 through 6, or is there just Group 7?

Sydnee: Is it a trick? We all think we're in a special group, but actually we're all in the same group?

Taylor: The only thing that makes me think that there must be the other groups out there— if anybody is confused on what we're talking about 'cause you're not— you don't spend time on TikTok as a grown adult, which, you know, I can reflect on. I won't. But, uh... there are— you get these specific videos that are addressed to your group. And they're like, "If you're in this group, this is the kind of person you are."

Which is something that's pretty common on TikTok. You'll get, like, "Oh, I made four of these videos. If this one's for you, it's because you're this type of person."

But this is on a broader scale. But my Group 7 videos only ever have, like—like 1,000 to, like, maybe 3,000 interactions. Like, likes or whatever. So I don't think they're going to some massive audience. They're going to a somewhat smaller audience. That leads me to believe there are still— the multiple groups are out there.

Sydnee: There must be other groups. I have— yeah, I am in Group 7, but I also don't know if it's because there are so many TikToks about being in Group 7 that, like, it's punching it up the algorithm. You know what I mean?

Taylor: That would also happen, yes.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I don't know who started it, and I don't know what the actual goal is.

Sydnee: I think it was like a musical artist who released seven videos, right?

Taylor: Oh, is that how it started?

Sydnee: And they were different... it depended on which one you got. Like, which one of these seven versions. It was, like, the same song and, like, seven different recordings or something. And whichever one you got is what group you're in.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: I think that was the origin. But I don't even know that that's true. Because that's all I've gleaned from TikToks about it. I don't know that I've ever gotten the original video. I just keep getting people telling me that it's so great to be in Group 7, and what a great community we have. And I don't

know why we have a community. I didn't know I was in a community. I mean, I, you know, I know I'm in a community. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: I'm curious. I do think... I mean, I do think that the Group 7 is the only thing that has continued, from whatever the starting point is. I think you are right that the viral response specifically to Group 7 is why that is the one that rises to the top for most of us.

Sydnee: Yeah. But I don't know. I still don't quite understand it. And, um... I thought it was, like, one of those things where there was no— for a while I was like, "Maybe there is no origin." It's kind of like The Game.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: As soon as you think about The Game you've lost.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: What's The Game? I don't know. But when you— now we've lost it. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's it. I don't know.

Taylor: I mean, I don't know.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Things like that are always fun, but then there's always that fear when it's— especially when it's TikTok. I'm like, "Oh, this is gonna— this is gonna send somebody into some spiritual psychosis, isn't it? Somebody's gonna start a weird cult around this." [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Right? [laughs quietly]

Taylor: We used to be able to have fun! We can't now!

Sydnee: It is! It's like that old internet rule where, like, if two people are fighting on the internet, eventually one's gonna call the other one a Nazi. What is that rule?

Taylor: Yeah. That's just— is that the rule of the internet?

Sydnee: I don't know. It was a name for it. Like, it's— because eventually that's— all arguments devolve into that. Although, like, we've accelerated way past that.

Taylor: Yeah. Nowadays you— the chances that you are arguing with a Nazi on the internet are just a lot higher than they used to be.

Sydnee: Yes. So, like, we get there faster, but that's just 'cause, like, sometimes in the group chat they say things like "I love Hitler."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And we find out, like, "Oh, they are— oh, they are! Oh!" [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. Nazis used to be—

Sydnee: "Oops! You are!"

Taylor: — an insult to prove the point that there's an extreme form of your politics that is Nazism. Not just, "Oh no, you're just there already." [laughs]

Sydnee: Oh.

Taylor: You just— you came in with that in your back pocket.

Sydnee: Oof. Okay, we have to talk about Nightmare on Elm Street. It's so hard, because then there was also, like, a heist at the Louvre. So much stuff happened.

Taylor: It was a really exciting week on the internet, that is true.

Sydnee: It really was. But we need to— I had never seen Nightmare on Elm Street 2... Freddy's Revenge?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: And you said, like, a lot of people think it's sort of, you know, gay-coded. Like, sort of the story of, like, a guy who's gay and can't come to terms with it, and is struggling with sort of this monster idea inside himself, embodied by Freddy Krueger. I don't think it is in any way, like, suggested that that's what's hap— it is so clearly— you wouldn't have had to say that.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: I feel like five minutes in, I was like, "Well, this is about a gay guy."

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah. And, well, when I chose it, when I suggested it, I hadn't seen it in a few years. And so I was like, yeah, I remember that. And then, I know there was the documentary, like, the Scream Queen documentary about it being such a... a gay film. But on the rewatch, with that lens on, it was like, "Oh." [laughs] It's not— it's not subtext. It's text!

Sydnee: It's— I mean, it's— there are so many moments of not just the main character, who— I mean, he's not— when I say, like, he's clearly gay, I don't mean in the way that a lot of media sort of portrays the stereotypical gay guy, right? I am not talking about that stereotype of, like, the way he talks, or the way he dresses, or the way he moves being quote-unquote "gay."

I just mean, like... I have— there are so many shots of, like, sweaty guys in locker rooms, tangled in sheets, like, wrestling with his butt out with the other guy.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, there are just so many homoerotic moments.

Taylor: I mean, the fact that the coach was also into S&M, and then he has a nightmare where he wanders into an S&M bar, but it actually happens, and the... the entire shower scene, where the coach is tied up with towels and being murdered but, like, in a weird [wheezes] homoerotic way. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, and we're, like— first, before Freddy Krueger murders him, he has to, like, smack his butt with a towel until his butt's red. Like, that was wild! Like, this is not... this is not the suggestion of "Hmm, I think this might be a metaphor for being gay!" [laughs] It's like, no, I think this is about the struggle of "I'm gay, but I can't be gay, 'cause society won't let me be gay. And they've taught me that it's an evil thing, and so I feel like an evil thing, even though it's not evil."

You know. I mean, that is clearly what we're seeing here.

Taylor: It— yeah. And, like, it's— like, the movie came out in '85, so it came out, like, during the— during the AIDS epidemic. And I think that's part of the reflection on it is, like, there is a viewing of this movie where you can say, "That is a normal experience for young queer people to feel, like there is something evil or wrong with them."

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And having it be, like, "Yes, he is the thing that's... " like, it is him. Like, Freddy Krueger is using his body to commit murders.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, there is like, is this movie trying to, like, reflect on the queer experience? Or is it trying to make it part of the terror?

Sydnee: I don't think it's very clear. I do think, like, the main character is sympathetic throughout.

Taylor: Well, I think they— and whether it was by purpose or not, I mean, he is an out gay man, now. But that was a closeted actor at the time.

Sydnee: Well, and I don't know if that— maybe that... informs his performance. You know? Maybe that's what I'm seeing come through. But, like, watching him, every time he went and poured himself that quarter cup of coffee that he would... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... he would pour... I don't know why I notice things like that, but it bugged me. Like, we know you didn't pour much in there. But, like, when he would stand there at the counter holding his mug of coffee with those dark circles under his eyes, the torment on his face as he was struggling with, "I'm having these nightmares. Did I do terrible things, or did I have a nightmare about a terr— like, was that me? Or am I seeing someone else do it?"

Um, none of that felt like he's a bad guy. Like, the whole way— his whole everything came across as someone who is being tormented, not as a tormentor. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Well... I agree. But then it's like, you know, because, I mean, we're gonna spoil the ending of a movie that came out 30... um, 40 years ago. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: 40 years ago.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I had to think of my own birthday and like, oh, god, yeah. 40. Almost 40. Uh, the ending of the movie, the thing that saves him from Freddy is that he can admit his love to a girl.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And, like, end up with the girl. After murdering the guy that he had a weird, charged relationship with. That's, like— that's where I'm like, I don't... I don't think it has to be, like, a perfect narrative for, like— I mean,

queer people will embrace anything that— you know. We embrace the Babadook because of a miscategorization on Netflix. So, like, I think the fact that the queer community loves this movie is cool. I love it.

But the story— if you distill it to a message, it does feel like you defeat the evil, scary thing inside of you by committing yourself to a heterosexual relationship. [laughs]

Sydnee: But do you see the look on his face when she is— when he's, like, breaking out of the Freddy Krueger skin?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And she is hugging him, and crying. There is no... it is not relief, "Thank goodness. I love this woman. I have fought through this."

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: That is not the vibe. It is, "This is the death of this part of me."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "And I am not happy about it, but it is the only way I can survive. Like, in order to be allowed to live, I must kill this part of me and embrace this crying woman, and pretend that I am enjoying it."

I mean, I don't know if that's just me. But, like, as I'm watching it— I mean, it made me really sad. 'Cause I was thinking, ugh. Oh, he's just accepting his fate. "This is what I must do."

Taylor: No, I agree. Because, I mean, they never— the seemed like really good friends, and she was very there for him. But he had more chemistry with his dumb gym buddy. He had more chemistry with Freddy Krueger. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah! Yeah! No, and I mean, I really— I feel like— and at the ending scene when he's on the bus, did that look like... I think if they were trying to— and I don't know. I mean, when you watched the documentary,

do they say— do they know what the director's intent was? Like, is it— is there a written record of "We were trying to send either this message, or this message?" Gay good, gay bad?

Taylor: Well, it was definitely written to engage with, like, a queer narrative. Like, not— like, in a more inflammatory way. Like, kind of in, like, a, you know, a scandalous— not like "We're gonna give a good message about struggling with a queer identity." I don't think it was that.

And the casting of a queer actor, or somebody that, I mean, at the time he was in the closet, but somebody that they directors and casting crew were like, "Yeah. That kid seems like he might be gay." Was purposeful. Like, they joked about it, that that was— I mean, there's even, like, the prop— people that worked in the prop department talked about some of the things that they placed on purpose, just to kind of give the, like, subtle... like when he's looking in his closet and what's the game that's on display there? Probe.

Sydnee: Oh.

Taylor: Yeah. Like, it's a little egregious. There are things that they placed on purpose just to kind of joke about, like, "Oh, you know. Maybe... maybe this kid's gay. Maybe there's something gay going on."

But I don't think it was made in, like, a serious queer exploration way. I think it was made in a, like, "This is coming out in a time period where everybody's mind is on homosexuality. And everybody's kind of afraid of it. And so we're going to play with that fair."

That's like what a lot of horror movies do, where they just prey on the fears of the time. They're not necessarily commenting on them in a, you know, social commentary way. They're just utilizing them to make people afraid.

Sydnee: Well, and I wonder, then, if it isn't from the actor himself. Because I feel like, if you're trying to send the message that being gay is like struggling with this evil inside you, and that the only way to happiness and to survive the horror, so to speak, is to kill that part of you and embrace heterosexuality— if that is the, like, happy ending, so to speak, of the film, then you would expect, one, the character to look happy. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And two, that Freddy Krueger doesn't punch a hole through the other girl's chest at the end of the movie.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Right? Like, what— then Freddy's gone. Like, Freddy's dead. If we've killed the— the gay... ness...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: If gayness has been destroyed, then Freddy's dead. And so I think that one, the whole expression— like, he does not look like, "Thank goodness I'm straight now."

He looks like somebody who is suppressing his true self in a desperate attempt to be accepted, and is still genuinely miserable. Like, that's how he looks. And then two, like, it's still there. You can't destroy it. You can't make it go away, 'cause it's who you are.

Taylor: Well, and you know, on one hand, I think every Nightmare on Elm Street movie ends with that Freddy's not gone. Like, that always— there's always that tease.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Right. I mean, part of it is just the trope, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Uh, but this was only the second in the series. You know, that obviously happened in the first one, but it was only the second, so it's still an estab— they're still establishing that trope. But, I mean, I do think in that sense it rings true. Like, you can't... you can't kill off a part of you that is just inherent to your nature. Um, this is not how— that's not how we work as humans.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I... I think that even if they weren't meaning to, I really felt like... and again, I don't know. Maybe it's just the actor's performance. To me, it was very tragic to see him, like, as part of destroying Freddy Krueger, he had to say he loved a woman. Like, for me, it was a— you know what I mean? It felt like a very tragic moment. And I don't know, maybe that was just me reading into it.

Taylor: Well, I think that that— you can't help but feel that way. Even though, like, there's no nuance. Like, Freddy is a source of evil. That's absolutely true. So it's not, you know, giving in to your true self who is also your darker self. It's like, it's Freddy Krueger. He murders people.

Sydnee: Right. He's a bad guy.

Taylor: Yeah. He murdered a whole bunch of kids. That's the narrative. But I do think that there's another reading of the film that is... if it's not actual murders taking place, it's more on a metaphor level. 'Cause, I mean, I think it's specifically like, you know, you see, like, the coach is one person, and then the young man, like— you could sub in murders with some other sort of entanglement, and it would be a bit more, like...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Freddy is driving him to... be physical with these men. The physical way is murder, but... [laughs]

Sydnee: No. Well, I mean, it's interesting, because I... and I have not watched— I have kind of watched *at* a lot of those movies, but I'm not familiar with the entire series of Freddy Krueger movies. But it feels like this would be like an outlier in that sense. Where there— I don't know. It's also not scary, really.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: It's not— it's not like the setup of a, you know, at least my recollection of the first Nightmare on Elm Street movie is, like, there's more surprise when Freddy shows up. It's a little more of that kind of— that

normal horror movie thing where there's a little bit of a build, and then he shows up or, like, it's darker, or the character is somewhat surprised by it. I don't know. I feel like Freddy was just kind of there a lot. It was like, there's a glove. And there's Freddy. And, like, there was no part of it that made me, like, "Agh!"

Taylor: No. It operates completely out of the regular structure for a Nightmare on Elm Street movie, because the thing that makes Freddy so scary is he kills you in your dreams. You are just asleep, and there's nothing you can do to protect yourself 'cause you're in his realm. And this movie takes place almost entirely outside of Freddy's realm. That's the whole thing that makes him an iconic killer, because that is a uniquely scary idea.

Sydnee: It's just weird. It's almost like they wanted to make a different scary movie, but they just decided, like, "We'll just use— like, we just do a Fred— as a Freddy Krueger movie." You know what I mean? This is almost a completely different movie that they were just like— it's like you bring in a cameo to make it... you know? And so, like, "Make it Freddy Krueger, and then everybody's gonna be like, 'Ooh! Freddy Krueger!'"

Taylor: It's funny 'cause it's such a weird parallel to, like, the Halloween 3 dilemma.

Sydnee: Yes! That's what I was thinking!

Taylor: Like, "Oh, we did a little Michael Myers. Now we're gonna switch it up and do something different."

And everyone's like, "No! Go back to the classic."

And that kind of happened with this movie. Like, you know, it's important to note, like, this was not a well-received film in the franchise. And it actually— it made it very hard for the actor that plays Jesse, partially because of how homoerotic this movie was. Like, and then the fact that people didn't really know what to make of it.

The whole reason the first Nightmare on Elm Street was so scary was because he was this dream monster, and now he is maybe a metaphor for

being gay? What's happening? Like, it wasn't— you know, they returned to form for 3, 4, all of the next several... he does possess people. There are other movies where that's a feature. But by and large, the mechanism of fear is always through dreams. Not that he possesses you. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, you know, it's funny. We talked about that. Justin and I were saying, like, as we were watching it, it's weird how naturalistic— because you expect a Freddy Krueger movie to be in that dream realm. And then it's like, well, I guess it's 'cause we're... I assumed several times, like, we must be in a dream. And then it was like, well, no, we're not in a dream. We're just in real life. That's why it looks like real life. We're not in a dream. It's real life. So, yeah.

I mean, it is a departure. And it isn't— I would not say it's a scary movie. It's, like, obviously Freddy Krueger is scary to look at and he kills people. There's some gore in it. There's some— man, I love— and I love that kind of 80s gore. When Jesse's arm starts turning into Freddy Krueger's arm and the glove is popping through his hand? That's great. I love those effects. Like, it doesn't look like anything real, really. But it works anyway. I love it. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: No, I... the distancing from practical effects in horror movies is my greatest sadness. Because there is just enough. Like, they can be the most, like, disgusting effects, practical effects. But there is that bit of, like, fancifulness that always makes them just fun to see.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, you know someone sat there like, "How do we do this?" Like, the cameraperson and the special effects person were like, "Okay. I'll shoot this, and then I'll cut to this. And then I can shoot— go back to this."

Like, it's just— you can see how it works.

Sydnee: And it arrives at something— like, I was thinking about it as I was watching his arm explode. [laughs quietly] It arrives at something that— it is not... like, I have looked, I have dissected a cadaver, so I know what the body looks like inside and out. It's not exactly right.

But I also have no real— I mean, what, am I gonna sit here and tell you like, "No. If a Freddy Krueger glove was bursting through your hand, here is exactly what it would look like." I mean, like, of course I don't know. It doesn't happen. And so it's okay if you play with that a little bit. It makes it more fun, and it also allows you to make it gorier. 'Cause sometimes things wouldn't look nearly as gory as they do in a movie. Like, we pretend like there's a lot more blood there than there really is, or something.

Taylor: Oh yeah.

Sydnee: And I think that... you know, makes it more fun. And it also pulls me out of, like, being scared or sad a little bit, which is nice.

Taylor: No, that's— and that's one that's consistent throughout the Nightmare on Elm Street series. Is, like, one, the reliance on practical effects, and two, how fun they make them.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, that— you know, when he's coming through Jesse's chest and, like, obviously it's a model that's, like, pinned up to the wall. But, like, it's a really ridiculous scene. I mean, it's like in the first one when Johnny Depp gets pulled into the water bed.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And it's just a fountain of blood spewing out of it. Like, it's... you can't be that horrified, 'cause it's so goofy.

Sydnee: See, I love that kind of thing. And, I mean, there is definitely those elements. But it was weird. 'Cause that was what— I had made sure I was— like, if we're gonna watch a scary movie, I generally don't watch them alone, 'cause I do get creeped out easily.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I like scary movies, but they also do freak me out, and I have nightmares. I don't know. [laughs quietly] It's a masochistic sort of...

Taylor: It's alright.

Sydnee: ... urge. So I always watch 'em with Justin. So I waited so I could watch it with Justin, and I found myself at the end thinking, "I could've watched that alone. I am not scared by this movie." You know what I mean? I mean, it's thoughtful, it's interesting. I think that if it can stem this kind of conversation, that's always really cool. Um, but I wasn't... it wasn't a scary movie, in that sense.

Taylor: No, no. And I do think, like, however— whatever the intent was behind the narrative, which I think it's safe to say that at least there's a dubious quality to it... [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I do like how it's come around to being embraced by the queer community. And specifically the actor the plays Jesse is now a beloved figure in cult queer cinema because of this film.

Sydnee: I think that there was a power at that time— and, I mean, I can't speak as much to this period of history, 'cause I was, you know, two when this movie came out.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: But, um— but definitely something echoed this in the 90s, where anything that was about queer people felt important and special, 'cause there wasn't that much. And so even if the conversation around it was clunky, or heavy handed, or unclear, just the conversation was— like, that people were engaging in the conversation made it interesting.

Um, and I do think that, like, you would not make a movie just like this today, because you would have a very clear point of view, right? You would know exactly what you were trying to say, and you would make sure that you said it. I think it is important to recognize these moments where people

were trying to talk about something. They didn't have all the right language and they didn't have all the nuance that it needed, but putting it in the public conversation still matters. I mean, it's still important.

Taylor: Absolutely. If you wrote it today, the girlfriend character would actually be a down low lesbian, and she's just trying to help her gay friend come out of the closet. So, that would be the end. [laughs]

Sydnee: That would be so much better, see?

Taylor: But it still— she kinda still read as that. 'Cause it's like, I don't think she was ever into him. Like... [laughs] she was just a rich girl that her parents expected her to be dating a boy. So she's like, "He's got a car. That's fine." [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I did not feel any chemistry between the two of them. But again, I felt like that was intentional.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: Like, see, I really did read it as a, like, "This is what it can feel like to be gay right now."

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: I mean, that was kind of the perspective that— and maybe I was being too charitable, and maybe it wasn't intended to send such a po— oh, I don't want to say positive message, but you know what I mean. Like, more affirming. Like, it feels this way. It's not real. It's, you know, this isn't what— you shouldn't feel this way.

You aren't evil. You aren't bad. But man, it can really feel this way, can't it? Like there's this evil inside of me that I have to destroy, and the only way to destroy it is to destroy a part of myself. Literally, you know, shed this part of myself, pretend that it's bad and evil, throw it away, forget about it, and love this girl I don't love. And, you know, I think— for me, that was sort of the way I interpreted it. Now, that is through a 2025 lens, though, so...

Taylor: Do you think... do you think they just started with "Don't dream it, be it," but evil?

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] 'Cause that is kind of what it is!

Sydnee: It really is.

Taylor: I checked and I was like, was Rocky Horror— yeah, Rocky Horror came out in '75. They had 10 years for that to be in the cultural zeitgeist.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. No, it— I mean, I think it was really intriguing. I think if you... I mean, certainly there were probably people who could watch that movie and go, "See? Gay is evil. Gay is Freddy Krueger." [laughs quietly] But, I mean, there are always gonna be dumb people.

Taylor: That's true.

Sydnee: I think it was more complex than that, and I have to imagine that, like, the conversation did more to at least raise awareness of what queer people go through when they're trying to come out and be accepted by society than it did to harm them.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and, like, Robert Englund, who is Freddy Krueger, I mean, he's also a big fan of the film. I mean, he's like, what's— you know, it— Freddy Krueger preys on what you're afraid of. So if you have this massive paranoid fear at the time would have been around homosexuality that would've been a source of power for him. So I think there is an interpretation where Freddy's not the evil thing. It's homophobia that is the evil thing that empowered Freddy.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think you can interpret it that way. Well, and that is the truth. That is why— I mean, if we just take it as Jesse is a teenager in the 80s who knows he's gay on some level, but also knows the ramifications of that in terms of his family, his friends, society... that is the evil, is how he would be treated if he spoke his truth. That is the evil.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that is the thing that is scaring him. That is the fear he has. That's why he wakes up soaked in sweat, tangled in his sheets every morning. You know. Not because he's gay. Because of what will people do and say if they know?

Taylor: Yeah. I just... the constant fear of the heat in the room is a repeated thing in the movie. But the bird exploding. [wheeze-laughs] I just remembered that.

Sydnee: Oh yeah, the bird does explode. [laughs]

Taylor: That was one of those moments where I was like, "That's gotta be a dream, right?" No. The bird just exploded. And the whole family is like, "Well, what could've caused that? I don't know. I'm gonna do some research."

Like, I don't... [laughs]

Sydnee: "I'm gonna check the stove."

Taylor: [laughs] The bird exploded in midair!

Sydnee: I know! And they're like, "You're check— " I mean, and they're like— the wife's like, "Honey, you're checking the stove." Like, it's probably not the stove.

Taylor: No. [laughs]

Sydnee: Like, I don't know what you're thinking there, but it probably doesn't have anything to do with our gas stove.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: That doesn't make birds explode, I'm pretty sure.

Taylor: That's just a really ridiculous— what's the metaphor there? There's not one. It's just fun to make a bird explode in practical effects.

Sydnee: Yeah, I was gonna say, I got no— I can't fit that into the queer narrative.

Taylor: [laughs] No.

Sydnee: Well, Tey, thank you for suggesting that movie. It was really— it was interesting, it was enjoyable to watch, to see that conversation playing out 40 years ago, and how it was interpreted. Um, and I had never seen that. I didn't know— I mean, I knew there were all the Freddy Krueger movies, but honestly I kind of thought they were all just the same thing, so I had no idea there was this outlier, so thank you.

Taylor: No, thank you for watching.

Sydnee: What are we gonna do next?

Taylor: Well, so our next episode, we're gonna put it up on Halloween proper, so that'll be a little under a week from this one, but you'll get right on Halloween. And it's gonna be about the new— I guess now they're coming out with, like, one a year, the V/H/S series.

Sydnee: That's great.

Taylor: I hope they keep that up. But this one was V/H/S/Halloween, so it's a selection of Halloween-themed shorts. And I think it's really fun. I don't know if anything will ever live up to Trick or Treat, but this is...

Sydnee: Yes, yeah.

Taylor: This is a good, excellent Halloween anthology.

Sydnee: Perfect. Well, yeah, I've been meaning to watch it anyway, so we will check it out, and we'll talk about V/H/S/Halloween next week!

Taylor: Alright. Wrap up our Halloween month.

Sydnee: I know. Unless we just feel like doing more.

Taylor: Yeah, then [crosstalk].

Sydnee: Then we might, you know, just... I don't know. [laughs quietly] Uh, thank you, listeners. Um, the— if you like the Freddy Krueger movies, I would still— even though, as we've said, this is a departure, it's still— I mean, I think it's worth checking out. It is, like, as we've already talked about, it's gory, and there's, um, you know... it's scary. It's a Freddy Krueger movie. I don't know. There. There's that disclaimer. [laughs quietly] So, know that. They're scary movies. Scary stuff happens.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: If you like our show, you should go to Maximumfun.org and check out a lot of other great podcasts that you would enjoy. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Still Buffering...

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: I don't know how to put this [unintelligible]. It's a scary movie, so if you don't like...

Taylor: Don't watch it. Yeah, it's not— I was gonna say, is it more queer than scary? It's not queer enough to overcome the scary. [unintelligible]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Go watch something else.

Sydnee: Don't watch one with Freddy Krueger in it.

Taylor: No. No. Queer icon Freddy Krueger. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

[chord]

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