

Still Buffering 462: Infomercials

Published on December 24th, 2025

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

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, have you been getting any snow up there?

Taylor: We actually had our first snow last night.

Sydnee: Oh, yeah?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Did you get much?

Taylor: No, I mean, it was all gone pretty much within the hour that it fell, but it was still very nice. It started right when I was walking home from work last night, around midnight, and it was very pretty. For the walk home. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I think it's strange that we've had— This is our third fairly large snow storm, I think, now. Our third one. And we have more coming Sunday.

Taylor: Wow. Well, they did predict that this was gonna be a very snowy winter.

Sydnee: Yeah. We have— The kids were out of school. They let out early Monday, because it started snowing so intensely they were worried about pickup. So the kids were all home by noon on Monday. They were out Tuesday. And then Friday, today, they're out again.

Taylor: Wow.

Sydney: And this is probably our fifth snow day this year.

Taylor: I would say "Lucky kids," but I understand that snow days are not what they used to be. Now, they still have to do work and stuff, because of all of the online learning that we set up during COVID.

Sydney: Yeah. They call 'em virtual learning days now, so they don't even call them snow days. And they do, they email— I already had— 'Cause we knew last night it was gonna be a snow day. So they emailed us, by this morning I had a whole stack of things I had to print out and do.

I mean, there are— I will say, so much of the stuff they do is online, especially at Charlie's age. So they're just like, "Log into your..." I don't know. These kids have like eight different accounts for all their different subjects and classes. And it's like, "Log into your Schoology, and then into your Google Classroom, and then into your Talking Points, and then—" I don't know.

There's all these different things. And then you log into it, and then you do this reading exercise, and then you do this vocabulary exercise, and obviously there's math in several of them. So it's all on your computer anyway.

Taylor: Well, I could see two sides to that. On the one hand, that sucks 'cause snow days used to just be a day off. But I'm gonna assume that means that they don't have to make up for them at the end of the year, and teachers still— I mean, they still get paid, but it doesn't cause that pay and labor situation. It's the reason we had to make them up. [laughs]

Sydney: No, you're exactly right. That is— I was gonna— Yes. The only upside of the virtual learning days is that, at the end of the year, school lets out at the same time you expected it. They don't tack on a bunch of extra days to make up for snow days. So that is nice. 'Cause school goes late— Well, our school lets out late May. But some of the schools don't let out until mid-June now.

Taylor: Yeah. No, I remember that growing up. But it— One or two snow

days was nice, but there became a point where, you know— And it was never really clear what triggered it. But it's like, "Oh, no. If we get one more snow day, we're gonna have to go for an extra week."

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It's like, "Oh. Let's not do that."

Sydney: No. No, it's— I mean, I don't know. I also— I'm sure this isn't true, I'm sure this is a product of me being in my 40s. So the switch in my brain that makes me say things like this has been flipped, and so I'm gonna say it, 'cause it's just too late for me. I feel like they cancel school [laughs] a lot... more [laughs] than they did when we were little.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydney: When I look at the roads— Because I went to work on Tuesday, and there was no school on Tuesday. But I drove to work. And I had no— I mean, we live on a hill, and so getting that very first 30 seconds of my drive at the top, steepest part of the hill is a little, "Ahh! I hope the brakes work." But after that, the rest of my drive to work was nothing, so...

Taylor: Well, no, I think if there's any point of your commute where there is a "Ahh! I hope the brakes work," moment, *that* is what they are trying to have parents avoid with small children in their cars, I would imagine. Or a bus full of kids, you know? I think if the roads are bad enough to give you any pause about doom, it's a good day to keep the kids at home.

Sydney: Listen, you sound— Those sound like words spoken by someone who lives in a state with a functioning infrastructure. [laughs] You remember what it's like to live in West Virginia! The roads are *always* bad! It doesn't matter what season it is. Whether they're snowy, or icy, or they've been washed away by floods and we never fixed 'em, or a chunk of 'em fell off the side of a hill because the hill was eroding and we didn't replace it, the roads here are [laughs] always bad.

Taylor: Well, but— Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: But when it's double-plus bad, maybe that's— On top of all the regular bad. 'Cause you can learn where all the big, gaping holes are, and where the road's been washed away. You can learn that, and prepare for it.

Sydnee: That is true. That is true. I do still, through all my commutes, all the places I go where, "Oh, no, no. You've gotta cross the mid line when you go on that part of the road, because the curve there has been gone, it's fallen off there a long time ago." And they're never gonna fix it, 'cause they're too busy giving tax breaks to big data companies to come here, or something, and destroy the environment. But yeah, so...

I saw a thing once that said West Virginia drivers were some of the best drivers in the country. And I don't know if that's true, but I would believe it just because you gotta be, if you want to drive in West Virginia.

Taylor: [laughs] Well, yeah.

Sydnee: It's either that, or I guess we don't count you, 'cause you're [through laughter] not alive to drive anymore.

Taylor: Well, not specifically West Virginia, but Appalachia is where— I mean, Appalachia moonshiners are the ones that invented NASCAR specifically because they had to get really good at driving their cars really fast around windy mountain roads, in outrunning the police. So, you know...

Sydnee: There you go.

Taylor: You got that in the history.

Sydnee: Maybe that's why. I don't know. I saw that once, and I didn't dig into it to see, "Is this just clickbait, or is this true?"

Taylor: No, it's 100% true. It was during— Well, earlier than Prohibition. It was really just people that didn't wanna pay taxes on liquor, you know. So they would remove all of the parts of their car that weren't necessary, to

make them light, and they would zip their moonshine, as long— You had to get it over state lines, and then you would be good to go.

Sydney: It made me wonder— And again, this is just— If you live in West Virginia, you've heard this stereotype. I have no problem with anyone from Ohio, I have many dear friends and family in Ohio. And I love Columbus and Cincinnati; we go there all the time. That being said, there is a joke here that Ohio drivers are bad drivers. That is a common joke, especially in this area of West Virginia, 'cause we border Ohio. I can be in Ohio in ten minutes.

So if somebody's driving bad, we'll say, "Oh, they're probably an Ohio driver." That's a joke here. And I wonder if the reason we perceive people from other states as being bad drivers – and Ohio, just because it's the one that we see the most, they're right there, they're the closest – is because we're such good drivers. And so it's not really their fault; the problem is that our standards for driving excellence are so high.

And Kentucky's pretty close, too. If we saw more Kentucky drivers, maybe we'd say, "Well, Kentucky drivers..." If we bordered Wisconsin, maybe it would be Wisconsin drivers. It's just we see Ohio drivers the most, so we think they're bad at driving, but really, we're just really good at driving.

Taylor: I'm gonna make a completely— Like, I have no information to back this up, but I'm still gonna say, I bet every state talks about the states that border them as bad drivers. I bet that's true [through laughter] across the country.

Sydney: I bet you are completely right. [laughs]

Taylor: Yep. 'Cause I'm thinking, I know people from New York complain about people from New Jersey. It's like, "Agh, he's from New Jersey. They can't drive. They don't know how to drive here." 'Cause New Yorkers have the same kind of thing. People that drive in the city are a different type of person.

I would not— I let my license expire years ago, and honestly, at that point I hadn't driven a car in a decade. So I don't think I should, at that point, drive

a car. But people that drive in the city are a different breed. That is a very offensive form of driving.

Sydnee: Yes. I will say that— And I think that's why, when you talk about good drivers, it's really within a context.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I'm good at navigating this landscape. I won't drive in New York. I think I did one time, and I found the experience so terrifying. 'Cause I'm not an aggressive driver. I think I adapt quickly, I react very well. I'm used to, "Oh, there's a deer there." I'm used to that [holding back laughter] kind of stuff, and having to swerve and miss things. But aggressive driving, like you said, like you have to do – and I have observed from the backseat, terrified – I can't do it.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I won't drive in New York, 'cause I know I can't do it.

Taylor: And if you're not willing to, then you won't get anywhere. [laughs]

Sydnee: No, I think you would just sit there while people drove around you.

Taylor: Uh-huh. Yeah, you have to— There's not a single car ride that I've been on in New York where there's not a moment where the driver goes, "Ah, screw it. We gotta get there." And it's like, "Oh, no! Okay!"

Sydnee: There's also—

Taylor: Went a little bit on the sidewalk, or went a little bit the wrong way.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: Just making her own lane. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, there's also— You have to be willing— And maybe this is part of city living in general. You have to be willing to inconvenience other people

sometimes. I see people park somewhere for a minute to drop something off, or run on in, and they're double parked. And they're just blocking traffic for a few minutes, and I just couldn't— I wouldn't. I can't.

I mean, you wouldn't have to do that here, and so I'm not used to— I don't know. I don't ever wanna be in anyone's way, ever, for a second.

Taylor: Well, it's different— It's definitely a different terrain. But I feel like there are just as many difficult moments. 'Cause you have so many little roads where it's like, it's only one lane. And one side is down a mountain, and the other side is a straight hillside.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And if you just happen to drive that little stretch of road at the wrong time, and someone's coming the opposite direction, it's just like a standoff.

Sydnee: Yeah. Somebody's gotta back up.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Common courtesy is that if you are lower on the hill, you do the backing up.

Taylor: See, I don't like that. 'Cause what if someone's coming up behind you?

Sydnee: Ah, yeah.

Taylor: A lot can go wrong.

Sydnee: A lot can go— A lot does go wrong, I'm sure. [laughs]

Taylor: Yes, that's—

Sydnee: I'm sure that happens.

Taylor, I wanna talk about the raccoon that had the best day of its life.

Taylor: The raccoon that we all simultaneously decided was...

Sydnee: Us?

Taylor: Us, yes.

Sydnee: You are us, raccoon.

Taylor: Yes. The drunk raccoon in the Virginia liquor store.

Sydnee: Yes. A raccoon— I think it was up in the ceiling tiles, right?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: That's where it had been, and then it fell through, or broke through, or...

Taylor: It—

Sydnee: It got down into the liquor store.

Taylor: It had apparently been terrorizing that specific, I don't know, sort of a strip mall situation, for a while now. Because at some point, it also had broken into the neighboring DMV, and the karate studio nearby. So it's just a...

Sydnee: It was looking for— It was trying to figure out where to make a home. And it got into the DMV, and it was like, "This place seems..."

Taylor: "Absolutely not."

Sydnee: "... frustrating, and depressing, and not where I wanna be." And then it was like, "Karate studio? This seems pretty cool," but it doesn't— It probably didn't know karate. And I guess a karate studio is markedly less cool if you can't do karate.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. Well, and I think, you know, the DMV at least had snacks. It had apparently robbed snacks from the DMV.

Sydnee: Mm.

Taylor: But I don't think the karate studio had a lot of snacks going on.

Sydnee: And then it struck gold.

Taylor: [laughs] Liquid gold.

Sydnee: Then it fell into a liquor store. Do they know— I didn't read. Do they know how much alcohol it consumed?

Taylor: Not enough to kill it, which I would assume— I mean, I guess I don't know how hard raccoons can go.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: The only raccoon I've ever seen consume alcohol is the fictional Rocket Raccoon, which apparently would insinuate that raccoons can drink heavily. But I do not think that *Guardians of the Galaxy* was a factual representation of a raccoon's liquor consumption abilities.

Sydnee: I would bet you that they probably researched, well, what raccoons look like. [laughs] And—

Taylor: Yeah, no, they definitely did that. [laughs] They definitely made sure it looked like a raccoon.

Sydnee: They probably researched what they look like. And I bet some general "how raccoons move" stuff, right? Like, I bet that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But I bet they did not research much else about raccoons in that—

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: You know what I mean? Like, what else would you need to know about a raccoons? 'Cause also, it talks.

Taylor: Yeah, no, I don't think that was striving for accuracy. Most raccoons aren't voiced by Bradley Cooper.

Sydnee: Yeah. That, we know.

Taylor: Yeah. But this one, this one sure could drink.

Sydnee: Yes. They found it passed out in the bathroom, very drunk.

Taylor: It was just [laughs] his little body, just laying by the toilet.

Sydnee: Just, like—

Taylor: Who hasn't been there?

Sydnee: [laughs] Just, like, pancaked out.

Taylor: Yeah. I just like the— I wish I could see the CCTV footage of— 'Cause there were a lot of broken bottles. But when was the moment where the raccoon was like, "Yeah, I should drink this alcohol"? 'Cause that's the thing that surprises me, you know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. It must've been something that smelled good, right? 'Cause I feel like— Okay, my cat Olive investigates all food and drink in this house. If I am over near the fridge, or the stove, or the counter, she knows now, "Oh, there's food happening. And sometimes, it's food I like." So she comes to investigate everything. I have never seen my cat try to take a drink from a beer, wine, champagne, whiskey, vodka certainly— You know what I mean? Of all the drinks in our house.

Now, if I laid out a cup with RumChata in it...

Taylor: Mm, yeah.

Sydney: Maybe, you know? Maybe she would take a— And I just have a cat. I don't have a raccoon that's a pet. But I'm comparing— 'Cause I imagine animals smell really strong alcohol smell, and probably don't want to drink that, right? Isn't that a dangerous thing?

Taylor: I think so. So maybe something sort of low ABV, high sugar situation.

Sydney: Yes. That would be my guess, is that it smelled like fruit, or it was creamy, or something like that.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydney: I know— Okay, here's what I know about raccoon eating behavior. We put snacks on our front porch for delivery people. We started doing that last holiday season, because we were getting so many deliveries. Then, we just continued it throughout the whole year.

So every day, if you— The mail, UPS, FedEx, whatever. If you come to our house, if you bring us DoorDash, whatever. There is a basket out front that says, "Please take a snack." And it usually has bags of chips, and cookies, and candy, and the like, is always on our front porch.

And we had this problem where we would leave it out overnight, and the next morning it was turned over, and the bags were everywhere. Everything had been opened, and not a piece of food remained. Every piece of food had been eaten, but all the packaging was still there.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydney: Which was fascinating. They did leave a little bit of a trail of empty chip bags to the place in the blackberry bramble, where they live.

Taylor: Okay. I was gonna say, "Are you *sure* it was a raccoon and not one of the delivery guys?"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Which I don't know, maybe? [laughs]

Sydnee: Maybe. Maybe.

Taylor: Is there a delivery guy living in your bramble? [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] No, we've caught 'em on camera. We have seen—I thought there was just two, but now I think that there's four total that I have— Like, four individual raccoons. And those boys are fast, and they're sneaky. They will make daytime raids sometimes, so I have to keep a close eye on that when I'm home. But they will eat all manner of chips. Like, there are Fritos, Cheetos, regular old potato chips.

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: Funyuns, they'll eat Funyuns. [laughs] Doritos. They eat all those things. They definitely scarf down some Oreos, some Nutter Butters. All these things have been eaten by the raccoons. That's what I know about raccoons and food. [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, I think that's a— Their whole thing is trash, right? It's like, "Whatever."

Sydnee: Yeah. So I guess— I don't know what that says. How do we extrapolate, from that knowledge, what sort of alcohol they would want?

Taylor: Well, um...

Sydnee: This is your area of expertise, now, I feel like.

Taylor: I mean, I'm just— Now, I'm thinking, the people that I know that live on Doritos, and Oreos, and Funyuns, and the like, I would assume their [laughs] alcohol of choice is maybe a champagne of beers, perhaps a Miller High Life. Perhaps some Old Overholt or Four Roses on the side. But I don't think— I don't know, that would be the pairing I would suggest, but...

Sydney: I hope that that raccoon broke into that liquor store, and had every alcohol available to it. And maybe they had— I don't know the nature of this liquor store. Maybe it had nice, top-shelf stuff there, right? Maybe the best of the best at its fingertips, at its paw-tips, at its... before its little hands.

Taylor: They have little hands.

Sydney: And it went for a High Life. Or it went for a Steel Reserve.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: Like, I hope— There's something about that that—

Taylor: Some Wild Irish Rose.

Sydney: [laughs] It feels very, like, close to my heart.

Taylor: I mean, I was looking at the picture of the broken bottles. There's a lot of scotch going on.

Sydney: I know it was Virginia. I know it was Virginia, but that would be very West Virginia behavior. I will tell you, I know guys who— They would have every beer, liquor, find anything available to them. And they would still go for like, "I'll just take a Miller Lite."

Taylor: I mean, I don't think that's exclusive to West Virginia. 'Cause that is a lot of guys [laughs] in New York, as well.

"We have an amazing selection of cocktails."

"No, give me that beer that I can buy six of for \$10. And I will spend \$5 on one here, but I am gonna buy it. I do want that."

Sydney: I just won't—

Taylor: I am that guy, sometimes.

Sydney: But can I say— I think there's a difference, if we're talking about

that guy, there is a difference between whether that beer is a High Life, a Miller Lite, a Bud Light, or a Michelob Ultra.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: That's a different— I have been to many events and things in my life where the alcohol selection was really limited. And I'll drink a Miller Lite, a Bud Light, whatever. I'll drink a beer like that, if it's on offer. I won't drink Mich Ultra. I just drew a line there, in my brain. It went someday, and went, "No."

Taylor: I think— And this is definitely a, if you don't fall into this category, and you enjoy Michelob Ultra, that's totally fine.

Sydney: Sure, sure.

Taylor: But I would assume, if Michelob Ultra is being served at the event, they would probably have strong opinions about the need for God in schools, or something. I don't know. To me, it just feels like... [wheeze-laughs]

Sydney: It's— I don't— And okay, yes, I am sure there are people listening that drink Mich Ultra and enjoy it, and I'm sorry. And you are not— If you're listening, then you're not included in what I'm about to say. There's no way you are. But I find it to be a very conservative beer.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I think it— When I see someone drinking it – I am with you, Taylor – I assume things about their politics. And maybe that's unfair. 'Cause again, if you're listening to the show and you drink Mich Ultra, you're probably not conservative.

Taylor: Any time I hear— And somebody did a supercut of all the— I don't know, not the good country. And there is good country music. Like...

Sydney: Yeah. Yeah.

Taylor: Country music was originally made by anti-government people. But

there's a lot of pro-government country music. And someone made a supercut of every time one of those songs said, "And a cold beer." And that is the cold beer they're singing about, in all of those songs.

Sydney: Yes, yes.

Taylor: They're just singing about Mich Ultra.

Sydney: They are. And it's also— It's not exclusive to your stereotypical redneck circles.

Taylor: Mm-mm. No.

Sydney: No. No, the guys who drink— Now I'm saying "the guys." Any individuals who drink Mich Ultra, I associate more with that— It's that quiet, scary conservatism, sometimes.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: You know? They're not the people depicted in the Taylor Swift video, "Calm Down."

Taylor: Well, I don't— I don't know if those— Those people exist, I guess, but they're definitely not the kind of people that spend all night on a sign to [wheeze-laughs] boycott some fruity dressers in a trailer park.

Sydney: No. No, they're out there, carefully crafting laws that will strip people of their basic rights.

Taylor: I think that—

Sydney: And arguing those cases before sympathetic judges. No, that— It's much more insidious, you know?

Taylor: And I can't fully explain why that beer lines up with that so much, but it's something about— It's not about it just being a light beer, 'cause I'll drink a light beer every now and then.

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: If I don't wanna get wasted, I just want to have something in the summertime, you know?

Sydney: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Taylor: A couple— I don't know, I'll usually do a Miller Lite.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: If that's what I'm feeling. But it's something about it being such a bad beer, *and* it's low-calorie. It's just, there's no joy. There's no beer joy there.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: It's not— There's no pleasure there. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydney: I don't know what you're accomplishing. 'Cause there are beers that are low-gravity that taste good, or are low-calorie, or both. And there are beers that are high-gravity, and they don't— Maybe they're a little more bitter, or whatever, but they're high-gravity. I don't— So there are different— And I'm not saying, "So drink this." There are different reasons you drink, and there are different goals you have. I don't know what the goal is of a Mich Ultra, other than saying you drank a beer.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: It feels like, "In this setting, a beer is appropriate, and so I will drink beer. But I'm not—" Like you said, "I am not deriving any pleasure from this. It's not bringing me any sort of joy. I don't like it."

Taylor: It's— Like, remember during the run-up to the election, where every time Vance had the opportunity to behave like a normal human, he said something completely insane? [laughs]

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: This is the equivalent of, "Ah, yes. A human beer. This is what a human beer is."

Sydney: Mich Ultra is the JD Vance of beers.

Taylor: [through laughter] There we go! There it is.

Sydney: Or, conversely, JD Vance is the Mich Ultra of humans.

Taylor: That, as well. Yes.

Sydney: Ah, I feel bad. If you really like Mich Ultra, drink Mich Ultra.

Taylor: No, yeah, this is—

Sydney: I just don't.

Taylor: I don't know why we both share this completely not—I mean, not founded assumption. It's just the zeitgeist of it to us, doesn't have to be to you. If you enjoy it, that's your beer choice. Go forth, and be merry.

Sydney: If this makes you feel better, I started liking IPAs at some point. It's been a long time now. And I fully— All of the criticism for— And it's usually like a guy, like the IPA guy.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: You know. You know the IPA guy.

Taylor: I think I know an IPA guy or two. [laughs]

Sydney: I fully embrace all the criticism and the stereotypes that come with me being an IPA guy. I accept it. Yes, it is bitter. And it is gross. And I don't know why my taste buds like it so much. I don't know. But I do! But I accept it. And I accept that when you offer me a list of beer, and I say, "Do you

have any IPAs?" [laughs] I know what you're thinking of me, and I understand, and it's fine!

Taylor: I should just give you a raw grapefruit instead. Just bite into that. There you go, weirdo.

Sydnee: It's fair! It's all fair. It's fine.

Taylor: You wanna go munch on a pine tree? Do it.

Sydnee: When you're like, "This one's hazy."
And I'm like, "No, I just want a straight-up IPA."

Taylor: Aw. See, I love a hazy IPA. That's the only IPA I'll get down on.

Sydnee: I prefer just a [laughs] bitter...

Taylor: You just want a beer that just punches you in the face.

Sydnee: Yep. That's what I want!

Taylor: I can't say anything. You know, as much as I've worked in bars, I don't go out to them much anymore. And I find that drinking has moved beyond me. Because as someone that has worked in the service industry as long as I have, I hate inconveniencing bartenders. And I love cocktails! I love them so much. I will never order them. Because I don't want to make anyone do any work that is not necessary.

So for the longest time, I would just get a beer and a shot. But things have gotten so expensive, and bar culture has just changed, that I've gone in bars and been like, "Ah, what kind of beer and shot situation do you have?" And the 23-year-old bartender looks at me like, "Oh, we don't do that. What—We don't have that. I can give you a beer and shot. It'll be \$20." I'm like, "Oh. No. [laughs] Just the beer."

Sydnee: Really?

Taylor: I mean, there are places I know I could go in, but maybe it'll be a

\$10 beer-and-shot combo. But it is also a thing that used to be standard at any— Pretty much any bar would have some sort of— It was common enough that, even if your beer didn't offer it, you knew it was a thing. But I'm finding that that's somewhat out of the culture now.

Sydney: My understanding is that young people are drinking less. So I wonder if that's why.

Taylor: I was talking to another bartender last night about that. And his opinion was that they aren't drinking less, they just don't know how to drink when they do.

Sydney: What does that— What does that— Help me understand.

Taylor: I mean, it's just like, they— It's the way that you drink when you're like, I was gonna say fresh 21, but let's be real. It's when you're 19, with a fake ID.

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And you didn't really know how to drink, so you drink too much, or you would order things that like, "Nobody orders that. Let me see your ID." You were still figuring it out.

Sydney: Okay.

Taylor: But these— Maybe it's a combo. These kids don't drink as *much*, so they don't have their game figured out. You know, you kind of had your game figured out by your early 20s. You had decided that you like pine trees and grapefruit in liquid form.

Sydney: Yeah. I did. No, and I do wonder if it's not a backlash against some of the quote, unquote "wine mom" culture. 'Cause I know that there's a lot of discourse on the internet about— It's millennial wine moms, and how young people really feel alienated by that. They don't understand it, and see it as a problem, and "Why are we not sending these wine moms to rehab?" basically. Like, "This is an issue." And I think there's probably a miscommunication on both sides. I am not a wine mom, but I know a lot of

wine moms. And the wine mom thing is more of a joke than a lifestyle.
[laughs]

Taylor: Well, I'm not— There's obviously an element of that that I think is [laughs] a problematic level of drinking.

Sydney: Sure, absolutely.

Taylor: But I feel like the overarching reason for that is this weird, conservative uptick that we've had.

Sydney: Mm.

Taylor: 'Cause I will be very— I'm always very surprised when I'll see a video of someone making a joke about, you know, something happens in politics, and they're like— The video is just pulling down a bottle of whiskey or something, like that's it. "Well! Gonna drink tonight."

And so many people in the comments being like, "Oh, you've got a problem." Or, "Oh, that's not—" It's like, I don't— Drinking is bad for you. We all know this. It's not evil. It doesn't make you a bad person.

Sydney: No.

Taylor: Some of it's that. Some of it is the rise of conservatism. But you're also— Historically speaking, the backlash to whatever the generation does before you, the next generation down is always gonna respond to it by refusing that. And you saw it in when you go from the 50s, the *Mad Men* culture, the three-martini lunch. The several Manhattans at the end of the night.

The direct response to that was the hippie culture, which was "We don't wanna be like our lame dads and sit around, drinking bourbon. We're gonna go do a bunch of drugs, and not drink that much."

Sydney: Well, and I think you're hitting on the other reason that, I would guess, young people are drinking less.

Taylor: The vapes?

Sydnee: Yeah, 'cause— Well, I mean, a lot of 'em are using marijuana. [laughs]

Taylor: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: There's a lot of 'em on weed. And I say that with absolutely no judgment. As I've said many times in my own practice, even. Substance to substance, alcohol has proven to be more dangerous in many different ways, in terms of what it does to your body, in terms of the behaviors you engage in, your danger to others.

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: If you get behind the wheel of a car, generally speaking, alcohol is the more dangerous of the two, from that medical standpoint. Now, I will say, caveat, we really should probably never inhale anything into our lungs, right? We know that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: There's no safe thing that you should breathe into your lungs— Well, other than albuterol inhalers, but you know what I mean. [laughs]

Taylor: Well—

Sydnee: But if you're *ingesting* THC, I mean, alcohol is more dangerous. So I'm not gonna sit here and lecture young people, if they're choosing weed over...

Taylor: No. Well, it's also, I think that the cost comes into it. Because when I was in my early 20s, I could go into a bar and get— I mean, a \$5 beer and shot was standard. But I could go to certain bars' happy hour, and get a \$2 can of beer.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: When I didn't have a lot of money, it was very easy to still have a good time. And now, everything is so much more expensive, everybody's so much harder off, that I get, "Okay. I buy this vape, and that's what I've got for the evening, or..."

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't know. I've never vaped. I don't really know the shelf life of these things, but I know it is monumentally cheaper to engage in that area than it is to go drink at a bar.

Sydney: That's true.

Taylor: Or even just drink at your house.

Sydney: No, I think it's a good point. I think that's all fair.

Taylor: Nobody's partying like that raccoon anymore.

Sydney: No. No, the raccoon put us all to shame. But we also all saw a little bit of ourselves in that raccoon.

Taylor: Yeah. That raccoon fit right in with the millennial wine moms.

Sydney: [laughs] Yeah.

Taylor: Someone's gonna be selling that on an embroidered towel on Etsy, and the millennial moms are gonna love it.

Sydney: Yes. Listen, if somebody gave me an embroidered towel with a drunk raccoon on it, I would put it— It would hang on *my* stove, so there you go. I mean, that's...

Taylor: [laughs] I was—

Sydney: I'm a millennial mom, I guess.

Taylor: They apparently did do some merchandising there, to— I think they're raising money for an animal shelter or something, with the buzz around the raccoon.

Sydnee: Aww.

Taylor: But I also like that, at the end of the article I read, it said they did return it to the same location. Because changing locations for raccoons is basically a death sentence. They know their area, they need to stay in their area. So if you've got a raccoon, don't try to relocate it. You'll just as soon kill it. So they're like, "Yeah, he's probably gonna break back into the liquor store. Hopefully, he's learned his lesson, though." [wheeze-laughs] I don't think he's learned his lesson! I think he's learned where to go.

Sydnee: See, I think that this is the attitude we all need to have, though, about wildlife and the Earth, and everything.

Taylor: I agree.

Sydnee: There are raccoons that live in that bush next to our house, in the bramble next to our house. I try to keep my snacks from them. But I also accept that sometimes, they take my snacks.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: The girls also tried to leave a variety of fruits and vegetables right at the hole in the bramble where they come in and out, to see if like, "Could we appease them?" [laughs]

Taylor: You think, after they've had Oreos and Doritos, they're gonna be like, "Oh, yeah, some fruits and veggies"? Nah.

Sydnee: "Some baby carrots. Yum."

Taylor: No. Absolutely not. They're going for the good stuff.

Sydney: I feel like, for legal reasons, we should say for a disclaimer that if drugs are illegal in your area... [laughs]

Taylor: Don't do them?

Sydney: Well, I mean, I always tell people, the biggest threat to your health and safety from drugs is that they're illegal, and so then the criminal justice system gets involved. Which is very dangerous for people's health and safety.

So I don't wanna sit here and say, "Marijuana is totally benign!" It's not. It's not totally benign, and there's a lot of stuff we don't know, 'cause we haven't studied yet. And also because it is illegal in so many places. You could get arrested, and that's really bad for your health.

Taylor: That is true. I forget that, because it is just everywhere in New York. But I forget that there are still places where you can't...

Sydney: Yes. I mean, we have medical marijuana here in West Virginia, but if you're just caught with weed, you could face legal consequences.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydney: And that's not good for your health and safety. And that's important to weigh into quality of life.

Taylor: That is true.

Sydney: Yes. So all of that has to be included in whatever decisions you make. But it has nothing to do with morality.

Taylor: No.

Sydney: [laughs] Anyway. I felt like that disclaimer needs— I don't want people to say, "Well, *Still Buffering* told me I should do weed."

Taylor: "Still Buffering said that it's much healthier to do a weed than a beer."

Sydney: No. I'm just— I'm high on life.

Taylor: Sure. [laughs] Sure ya are.

Sydney: I'm high on life and the Cathy Mitchell infomercials I made you watch.

Taylor: Yeah. Boy, what a distinctly '90s experience.

Sydney: Isn't she great?

Taylor: The first night I watched them— I've been doing a deep clean of my apartment, so I was up late. I was up at 3:00 AM, scouring my bathroom, and I had that on. And I'm like, "This is awakening a memory deep within me of being up at 3:00 AM with infomercials on."

Sydney: There's something— Okay. Being really good at sales, it is a capitalist thing. Right? Sales only exist within a structure where you have to out-compete others in a market to sell them a product, right?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydney: And so it is weird for me how much— People who are really good at sales, I become fascinated by. Because I don't— If you ask me, "Do you admire somebody who can sell the most product, and make the most money?" I'd be like, "No!"

But when I see it in action... [laughs] I'm entranced by it. The patter, and her ability to just keep— And she's not the only one. There are a lot of those people who got their start on the boardwalk or whatever, going door-to-door, doing stuff like that, selling people stuff. And then infomercials. But I find it fascinating. It's an art form I don't understand.

Taylor: Does it— Obviously, you can't buy these products actively. But does it make you want to buy the product, or is it just entertainment for you?

Sydney: Oh, I generally don't want to buy the products. Well— No. Generally at this point in my life, no. When I was younger, it worked.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: There was the one for the Diamond-something cookware.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydney: And that's the one where the guy cleans the pot with the feather duster.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: He tosses the porridge out of the pot, into a big basket. He gets the cohost, he's like, "Grab that basket, Nancy!" And he picks up the pot, and he just tosses the whole, gloppy thing of porridge that he's been making – it's oatmeal or something, I don't know – into the basket. And then he takes the feather duster, and wipes it around the pot, and holds it up. And he's like, "Have you ever seen anybody clean a pot with a feather duster?" And I was like, "I have to have this."

Taylor: And you were like 12. And you were like, "Yes, I need that cookware."

Sydney: Yes. Yes, precisely. So it did work on me back then.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydney: I'm assuming it doesn't work on you.

Taylor: No, no. I find them entertaining, but no. I don't know, even with Cathy Mitchell, there were certain cuts where I'm like, "Well, something—

That's not a— Something happened there that you didn't show us."
[wheeze-laughs]

Sydney: Did you watch *Eat this Book*?

Taylor: I did. I watched *Eat this Book*, I watched the— What is the microwave film that you put on things?

Sydney: Uh...

Taylor: Oh, gosh, what's it called? It— Well, okay, so *Eat this Book*, let's start with that.

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: 'Cause that was— I mean, honestly, I think as a tool to teach people how to construct recipes, it's actually pretty good. I think that there's also probably certain types of learning styles that could really benefit from that. If you're highly visual, I think that that's a nice thing to do.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: It seems like something that's definitely something that kids would enjoy. So I don't know. Some of the products are kind of ridiculous. That one, I'm like, "I could see this still being something that would sell today."

Sydney: Yeah. Well, especially if you're involving younger people.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I could see that, yeah. The wild thing about it is, I don't know if that book ever actually— If anyone ever actually obtained a copy of it.

Taylor: Really?

Sydney: I've tried to research this. There is a chance that nobody ever actually got the *Eat this Book*. That they sold it, but then something happened and— I don't know if they're out there anywhere to be seen.

Taylor: Like, they don't exist anymore?

Sydney: Yeah. Or maybe they never did.

Taylor: Everybody ate 'em, Syd! They're gone.

Sydney: [laughs] I want one, very much. I asked Justin to get me one for Christmas, so we'll see. But that's all I wanted, was an *Eat this Book* by Cathy Mitchell.

Taylor: I mean, it is interesting. 'Cause I have made in-parchment recipes before.

Sydney: Yeah, yeah.

Taylor: Those definitely exist. The idea of an entire book full of them, such so to have that many recipes— Some of the examples, where it was just like, "Here's some broccoli that I'm covering in a can of soup, and I'm wrapping in paper." [laughs] Like, oh, okay! Is that gonna work? Sure. [laughs]

Sydney: It's also colliding with the food culture of the time.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: And we were still in that— 'Cause I think it's early-2000s. But it's still in that 90s vibe of "Take some frozen food, and dump a different can of Campbell's soup on it."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: Do you remember when those were all the recipes?

Taylor: Oh, yeah. Well, I mean, she was the queen of the dump cake, right?

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: Buy a can of pre-made pie mix, and a cake mix, and just put 'em in a pan.

Sydney: Mm-hmm. Throw 'em in a pan.

Taylor: Don't even have to stir.

Sydney: Don't stir! Don't stir is—

Taylor: Very anti-stirring.

Sydney: Yes. Don't stir is definitely part of it. And then I think you put globs of butter on it?

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah, cut up a stick of butter.

Sydney: Yeah. But yeah, don't stir. That was key. The Microcrisp...

Taylor: That's what it is!

Sydney: ... was the cling film.

Taylor: That stuff, there is no way that that wasn't, in some way, carcinogenic or—

Sydney: Carcinogenic, for sure. 100%.

Taylor: 'Cause you also were holding it together with scotch tape. So every recipe required scotch tape.

Sydney: [laughs] There— How long— I'm sure the answer is known, but I don't know it, so I'm asking the question. How long do you think it was between when we started microwaving things, and when somebody went, "Wait. What do you think happens to that substance, if we microwave it, though? Not the food part, but the stuff we're putting the food in, and around it..."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: "Things like the plastic containers, and the tape, and stuff we know we're not supposed to microwave now. What—" I wonder how long that lag was, before we went, "Oh, wait. Wait. Oh!"

Taylor: Too long! Too long, for sure.

Sydney: Too long. Yeah, we definitely hurt ourselves with it first.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I guess that product really just turned everything into the Hot Pocket sleeve. Which, I guess that's still used, so that's fine. But—

Sydney: No! They got rid of the crisping sleeves, Tey.

Taylor: Oh, really? Oh.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: So there was something up there, huh?

Sydney: Well, they say they don't need it anymore, but... [laughs]

Taylor: Mmm.

Sydney: [holding back laughter] That seems suspicious to me.

Taylor: It seemed pretty necessary. There's a big difference between an unsleeved Hot Pocket.

Sydney: There's an explanation on the box, too. "We got rid of the— Don't worry! I know what you're thinking, 'Where's my crisping sleeve?'" I remember buying the first box of Hot Pockets that didn't have one, and being like, "Now, where's the— Hold on. How did they forget the...?" And then it's on there, like, "Where's my crisping sleeve?" And I'm like, "Oh, this is for me."

It felt weird. [laughs] It felt like the box was talking to me. "Hey, Sydnee."

Taylor: "Don't worry about it! We promise, there's *nothing* wrong with the crisping sleeve. We just don't need it anymore. So..."

Sydnee: "You just don't need it anymore."

Taylor: "Do not investigate any court proceedings involving the crisping sleeve."

Sydnee: Oh, man. I bet you're right. I didn't even think about it at the time. I was like, "Oh, they reworked the Hot Pocket recipe!"

Taylor: Oh, no. I mean, I would assume that...

Sydnee: [laughs] There was something that— There were little, I don't know, somethings coming out of the crisping sleeve, into the Hot Pocket. And how many of those did I eat, growing up? Ugh! I don't wanna think about it.

Taylor: I mean, that was our entire childhood, I feel like, was just Red 40. It was just dyes, and...

Sydnee: So many chicken broccoli cheddar Hot Pockets, for me.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So many.

Taylor: I was really— I think it was in the Microfilm, Microcrisp? [laughs]

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Microcrisp.

Taylor: In that infomercial, where she talked about using scissors instead of a knife to cut raw chicken.

Sydnee: Uh-huh.

Taylor: She keeps talking about, "Oh, this is so much easier in your kitchen." And I'm just thinking, in the kitchen I work in now, if I just picked up the scissors and started chopping, [through laughter] what would my boss do?

It's like, "Hey, man. Have you ever tried this technique? It is so much better than using a knife. Like, I just used it to chop up all these chickens! Just use the scissors. It's so much quicker!"

Sydney: I just don't— I don't understand. The thing about Cathy Mitchell, and I know our episode's almost over here, and that we've barely talked about her. At the core of it, she has a variety of cooking products that are essentially all the same thing. It's like, here's a way to steam your food, and grill it, sort of. It's really like, sauté it.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I don't know. And do other various other things to food, and you just plug it in on your counter top, as opposed to using a pan on the stove.

Taylor: There were— It's like adult Easy Bake Ovens, a lot of these products.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: It is just a single heating element in a plastic— It's all made of plastic.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: Again, probably a concern, now that we understand how melted plastic is bad to inhale and exist around.

Sydney: And you can't adjust the heat, really. And so you're gonna cook it all the same. So I guess, "Can you bake something that way?" Well, yeah, if you put it in that dome, and put heat under it, the chemical reaction will take place.

Taylor: She made Diet Coke cupcakes, or Diet Coke muffins, at one point.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: Oh, God. That looked exactly like something that would come out of an Easy Bake Oven. [laughs]

Sydney: She loves dumping soda in stuff.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: She's all about that, soda things. But the question I have is, do you like to cook or not?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: 'Cause if you like to cook, this is not— You don't want this.

Taylor: No. I mean, not *everything* that I watched was like that. There was one product that I feel like it exists— You don't need to buy this specific one, but it definitely exists. And it's the pan that has the steamer basket that you can put on it. And then the big, high dome on top. So you can sort of steam one thing, while you're sauteing something else under it.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: It's like, oh, that's smart. That is—

Sydney: Yeah, I can see that. Yeah.

Taylor: You make use for that.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: The way she uses it is insane. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: The object itself at least is a cooking tool.

Sydnee: That makes some kind of sense.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, I agree. But I really enjoyed her whole— I mean, she was very successful.

Taylor: Well, she's— I liked watching her.

Sydnee: There is something— I don't think she is reading from a teleprompter the entire time. I don't think it's possible that she could be. I think she is just— She has her patter down.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And there's something about that that I find impressive, I think. Just from an oratory [through laughter] standpoint. She just keeps going, and nothing breaks her. And you can tell— Some of the cohosts, she likes, and she'll engage with. And there are others, she is not looking at them the entire— She's looking vaguely in the direction where they're standing, so that she can be waiting for their line to be done. But she has no need for them.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: She has no use for them. Some of those men that they bring on with her, it's like, you can tell in a second, Cathy does not like you, and does not need you here.

Taylor: Yeah, the one with the— I don't know, whatever the steamer pot multi-pot situation was. They brought on the chef that invented it, you know, "Here's so-and-so!" And he looked haunted. He was a haunting man.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: He was on screen for maybe two minutes, and then he just disappeared. It was like, "And you're gone. You're done."

Sydney: Mm-hmm. "We don't need you, now. Back to Cathy."

Taylor: Oh, man.

Sydney: Well, thank you for engaging in infomercials with me. I really love infomercials.

Taylor: I mean, a lot of times, when I'm working, I like to have something on in the background that's— It needs to be interesting enough that I'm— It needs to distract about 35% of my brain. And that hit the sweet spot.

Sydney: I would highly recommend the infomercials about the Magic Bullet, and the— There's a chopper— Well, I guess maybe it was all just the Magic Bullet. But there's two different— It looks like there's a party happening.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydney: It's the guy doing the infomercial, and then there's a woman who's his sidekick. And then it's a bunch of people sitting around a counter, like at stools around a kitchen counter. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Taylor: I don't think so, no.

Sydney: And they all show up as if they've been invited to a dinner party, except there's a lady in a Mumu, and there's an angry dad, and then there's a couple— I don't know. And they're all hungry. And like, "Where's the food!?"

Taylor: And everything's coming from a Magic Bullet?

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: Oh, no.

Sydney: And then he's gonna go on about how he's gonna make it all in his Magic Bullet, and "Look how fast. Do you want nah-chos? Here's nah-chos."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: They're nachos, but he says nah-chos. And the fiction of this dinner party, I was just sitting there, trying to envision, "How do you all know each other?" I was trying to make up relationships between them all, and figure out who holds this friend group together. [laughs]

Taylor: See, I feel like that's too much. That's too much narrative for me. I don't know. I like that with Cathy, it's straightforward.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: "We're gonna take these unseasoned strips of beef that I cut with scissors, and put them, without oil, into this pan. And that's what we're doing. We're gonna do it for a good 15 minutes." [wheeze-laughs]

Sydney: "I'm going to make a variety of middle-aged men eat it, and pretend they love it."

Taylor: Yep. Uh-huh. A lot of just—

Sydney: That's her kink. [laughs]

Taylor: Not a sliver of butter, or a shaker of salt, anywhere in the vicinity. It is just unseasoned, steamed, and boiled food.

Sydney: We hadn't started using those again yet. Those went away in the 80s and 90s, and even in the early 2000s, it was just when people were starting to be like, "Wait. Maybe butter isn't that bad."

Taylor: Yeah, 'cause it does overlap with the height of the fat-free craze. And she is all about leaving out the butter in things that call for it.

Sydney: Yeah. No butter, and no salt. And it really— Once you get into the

2000s, we start to get the backlash against carbs, and then butter becomes a thing again. But—

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: Yeah. [laughs] Well, Tey, what should we do next? 'Cause I don't want to subject you to more infomercials.

Taylor: Well, we usually watch some sort of holiday movie, ridiculous holiday film. What do you got for us?

Sydney: So Netflix has a great number of Christmas movies [laughs] this year, but I have not yet watched *My Secret Santa*, which I would like us to watch. Which appears to be sort of a *Mrs. Doubtfire* inspired Christmas film.

Taylor: Oh, I love that. Love a little gender wackiness with [laughs] my holiday.

Sydney: Yes. I had to pass up *Merry Xmas*, which I would recommend, but I do think is— I mean, it made me cry, so I don't know what that says about my mental state. But it did make me cry. I thought it was very sweet.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydney: And *Champagne Problems*, which I don't think is healthy for us to engage with [laughs] in the current political climate.

Taylor: Oh, yeah. That's fair. Alright.

Sydney: Yeah. So *My Secret Santa*.

Taylor: Yeah, I don't want— This year, the Christmas princes are out. No Christmas aristocracy. No—

Sydney: No. There are no princesses to switch this year.

Taylor: Great.

Sydney: Alright. Well, we'll watch that for next time. In the meantime, if anybody knows where I can get an *Eat this Book*, let me know.

Taylor: [laughs] On the hunt.

Sydney: You can emails us at [laughs] stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. I would love to know. You can also go to MaximumFun.org, and listen to a lot of great podcasts that you would enjoy. And thank you to the Nouvelles 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.

Sydney: I'm Sydney McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydney: I'm still buffering.

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme music plays]

Taylor: There's still some stress. I've kind of kept it mellow, and [unintelligible] cutting weird things with— Cutting cans in half. Just a lot of violence.

Sydney: I prefer something that's gonna make a pizza really quickly.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydney: Everybody wants to make a pizza faster.

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