

## Still Buffering 464: 2025 Wrap Up

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[theme music plays]

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

**Taylor:** And I'm Taylor Smirl.

**Sydnee:** Taylor, it's the end of the year.

**Taylor:** We made it through another one.

**Sydnee:** Yup, 2025 is on its way out.

**Taylor:** This one kicked my butt.

**Sydnee:** It was a long one. And I gotta say, it's going out with a bang here. We've had two days where the temperature almost got to 70.

**Taylor:** Oh, wow.

**Sydnee:** And then followed by a horrible windstorm all night, and now it's 30 degrees. [laughs] So... I don't know, the year is clinging to us with its spindly winter fingers.

**Taylor:** Yeah. I was gonna say, I usually get your leftover weather, so I was looking to see what's— It's almost 50 degrees here, which is— It's been in the 20s, the past couple days. So I—

**Sydnee:** Yeah. We had a warm front for a few days, Christmas was very warm. And then, now, it was sleetin this morning.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And it's so windy that I think something crashed into the house a little bit ago, but I have not yet investigated. I'll find out. [chuckles]

**Taylor:** Well, as long as there's no obvious holes, you're probably fine.

**Sydney:** No, I do not feel any gusts of cold wind coming into the house. So there's no hole anywhere. I do not think the exterior has been breached. [laughs]

**Taylor:** That's good, that's good.

**Sydney:** I just discovered, at the end of the year, British Chinese Food TikTok.

**Taylor:** I feel like you're a little behind on this.

**Sydney:** Really?

**Taylor:** 'Cause I think the rest of the world discovered British Chinese Food TikTok— It's definitely hit this year, but it's been going on for a while.

**Sydney:** And that— You know what? I'm just gonna go ahead and say, that's gonna be our theme of this last episode.

**Taylor:** Oh, yeah.

**Sydney:** Things like this. Things— The things of 2025. The pop culture moments, the [through laughter] historical moments.

**Taylor:** The trends.

**Sydney:** The trends, the movies, the music, the shows, the moments.

**Taylor:** The year in review.

**Sydney:** The year in review. It's our *Still Buffering* Wrapped of 2025.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydney:** Not that we're stealing anything from Spotify— I don't wanna get sued by Spotify.

**Taylor:** Well, we're not robots. So they used all that funky AI from two years now, which just kind of threw off the whole vibe. This is 100% human-brain-produced content.

**Sydnee:** I didn't even start using Spotify until the end of the year, so my Spotify Wrapped was very strange.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. It was mainly 'cause there was a *Peacemaker* soundtrack on there.

**Taylor:** [laughs] It was very good. That was one of my top listens.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And I wanted to find it, so I had to get back on Spotify. And then it had ads, and Justin was like, "What are you doing?"

And I was like, "I don't know." [laughs]

**Taylor:** Finally parted ways with Apple Music, just about ten years after everybody else did.

**Sydnee:** No, I'm still using it. Don't worry. [laughs]

**Taylor:** I mean, to be fair, I think at this point— And I don't know, I mean, I don't want to sound glib. I was going to say, it's hard to keep up with what corporation is the most evil. And I think the decision is there's just no ethical way to listen to music other than going out and buying some physical...

**Sydnee:** CD? [laughs]

**Taylor:** But how do we even do that anymore? I don't know. That's—

**Sydnee:** I mean, I have a record player, and I do buy vinyl from time to time. But I'm not gonna say that that is how I primarily consume music, because the record player's up in my office. I'd have to go to that one room in my house.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You know what I mean?

**Taylor:** Yeah. I, too, have a record player. I have a good collection of records, but you know...

**Sydnee:** So British Chinese food on TikTok has been a thing for a while, and I'm just now discovering it?

**Taylor:** I don't know how long it's been. I know that I went so deep into it, out of just pure, morbid curiosity, that there was definitely a solid three days where my entire FYP was just different British people dishing up their dinner. And that was all I got, was just videos of British people eating food, and talking about the different beige-yellowish things that they like to eat.

**Sydnee:** I was so confused. 'Cause I started getting these TikToks, and people were like, "Look at my Chinese takeaway." I like the word takeaway; that's pleasant.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** That's a good start to something. Like, "Oh, yeah. Show me your takeaway." They've got chicken fried rice, usually. And I'm like, "Okay, yeah." 'Cause let me preface with: American Chinese food is not Chinese food.

**Taylor:** No.

**Sydnee:** It's its own thing, too.

**Taylor:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** Having— We briefly, in Huntington, had a restaurant where they were actually making Chinese food. It did not last long. Because people did not know what they were in for.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** They were used to Americanized Chinese food, and they were very confused.

**Taylor:** Well, it—

**Sydney:** And it was— Yeah. Everything was just different.

**Taylor:** It's interesting, because I think— And this is not across the board. There's all different interpretations of Chinese cuisine, I'm sure, in both cultures. But I think the established type of Chinese food that is what people consider Americanized Chinese food is Chinese food, as interpreted by Chinese immigrants for the American palate.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** So it has a little bit of a closer tie to real Chinese food. Whereas I think what we think of as British Chinese food is Chinese food as interpreted by British people, for the British palate.

**Sydney:** Is that what it is? 'Cause it's— Okay. French fries – or chips, if you prefer – do not play a large role in Americanized Chinese food. I admit, if you go to a lot of Chinese buffets here in the US, you might find french fries and chicken nuggets somewhere stashed on the buffet, out of a recognition that American children sometimes demand chicken nuggets and french fries, so we must provide these.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydney:** So you might find those on a Chinese buffet. But generally speaking, if I think of my favorite dishes at a Chinese restaurant, chips are never gonna be— And salt and pepper chips isn't a thing here.

**Taylor:** No.

**Sydney:** That's not a thing. And that— And curry sauce, I don't think of curry as a Chinese food.

**Taylor:** No. I will say, there was a bar that used to be next door to me that used to serve their french fries with curry sauce. And I think that combo is great. Delicious combination.

**Sydnee:** Curry sauce is delicious. I don't— I wouldn't want it on *my* Chinese food, because of the— But that's because it all has its own flavor?

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And so I don't want it to taste like curry sauce, 'cause if I'm getting— Well, I guess we get black pepper chicken. That's sort of—

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Or the coconut shrimp— And I don't mean the deep-fried stuff you get at Red Lobster. I mean in the sweet, coconut-ey sauce.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** But I don't wanna dump curry sauce on those things, 'cause then I've ruined the flavor of the thing.

**Taylor:** Well, but it seems like a lot of the things in the Chinese takeaways are not as individually-flavored. [laughs] Is that fair?

**Sydnee:** It looks like salt and pepper are the main things.

**Taylor:** And it's usually chips, rice, noodles, balls? There's a lot of balls.

**Sydnee:** Balls. Chicken balls.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Chicken balls, yes. And so I guess you need the sauce.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Which there's regular old curry sauce, which is a good— I've made curry sauce here. We've made spice bag in this house, and I appreciate spice bag, which I feel like is similar to a lot of these things I'm seeing. But then there's that really dark oyster sauce gravy situation...?

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** I don't know what that tastes like.

**Taylor:** There's another one, too. A black bean sauce. I see the black bean sauce a lot, too.

**Sydnee:** Is black bean a big thing in Chinese cuisine?

**Taylor:** I don't know. I mean, we have it in American Chinese food. But I don't know, in actual Chinese cuisine.

**Sydnee:** I have no idea.

**Taylor:** 'Cause there's usually black bean sauce chicken, whatever, you know. That's normal enough.

**Sydnee:** Anyway, I've just discovered this. So I threw that out there as my intro...

**Taylor:** That's your intro.

**Sydnee:** ... for this year in review, is—

**Taylor:** It's not—

**Sydnee:** There's so much to criticize about our country. I think our Americanized Chinese food is superior to British Chinese food. I humbly submit that.

**Taylor:** And I think— You know, look. As Americans, I think it's safe [wheeze-laughs] if we raise an eyebrow to the British. I think that's our [laughs] national right.

**Sydney:** Yeah. We're not taking aim at an oppressed and marginalized culture by saying, "Hey. [laughs] Hey, British people, come try Americanized Chinese food. It's good."

**Taylor:** I don't mind— The first few videos I saw, I'm like, "That's so astronomically far away from what we consider Chinese food, it's fascinating." And I remember that when I was in Dublin years ago, that even their version of Chinese food was very different from what I anticipated.

**Sydney:** Yes. Irish Chinese food is as well, yes.

**Taylor:** Yeah. But I didn't have any sort of judgment. It's just, isn't it interesting how different cultures interpret different cuisines around the world? What really got under my skin was when British people were going out of their way to try American Chinese food and be grossed out by it. Like, "What is this? Oh, no! Why does it look like that? Why does it taste like that? Where's the gravy?" It's like, now we have a problem. Now, we have a problem. [laughs]

**Sydney:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** American Chinese food is a beautiful thing. That was my Christmas dinner this year.

**Sydney:** I mean, even when I— Okay. The curry sauce, it's *good*, but even the amount on chips, I don't understand. I think that— Listen. Everyone, despite wherever you're from, whatever your culture is, and whatever country you're in, you can season food, and you don't have to necessarily put sauce all over it. Now, you can have the sauce too, but you can also season the foods. I'm just putting that out there.

**Taylor:** How would you colonize all those places for all those spices, and then you didn't integrate any of 'em into your food?

**Sydney:** It's wild, right? It's like we— I don't know. Yeah. I don't know. Anyway, that was—

**Taylor:** I think it's a different understanding of the amount of wetness you want on your food.

**Sydney:** Hoo!

**Taylor:** I don't want that much wetness. [laughs]

**Sydney:** No. I mean, I like a sauce, but I need a textural difference. There's a lot of Americanized Chinese dishes that I order that— They're very saucy. They come in those big containers, and there's lots of sauce down in there. But the vegetables in them are still crunchy, you know what I mean?

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydney:** Or like— Ooh, the texture of a really well-done black pepper chicken, like with the little caramelized bits on the chicken, and the onions in there? Ooh. I mean, just so texturally yummy.

**Taylor:** Even in American cuisine, when we do something that's gravy-centric, I'm thinking of biscuits and gravy. It's essential that the biscuits have a little bit of crisp to them. You need that—

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** You don't want a soft, mushy, moist biscuit underneath a bunch of gravy. You want a little bit of—

**Sydney:** It's why— Yes. It's why— Listen, if you wanna judge a biscuits and gravy, how do they serve it? Because they need to serve the biscuit with the gravy next to it, so that you add the gravy to the biscuit there, at the table. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydney:** Because if you have the gravy sitting on the biscuit in the back for a long time, and then it all comes out as a big, mushy pile, no. When we make biscuits and gravy at home, you get your biscuit. And then you go over, once you got your biscuit buttered and open and ready to go, you get a ladle full of that gravy, and you spoon it right over. And then you go sit down, and start eating.

**Taylor:** Well, and there should also be enough lard in your biscuits that it's cooked right.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** That you got those crunchy ends to it that stay crunchy.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm. Flaky, crunchy.

**Taylor:** Yeah. You gotta have that. It's a textural difference, I don't know.

**Sydney:** This is— We're talking about biscuits. In case there are any British listeners, we are not talking about cookies.

**Taylor:** I guess we're talking— Is it like a scone? But it's not *really* a— It's like a better scone. I'm sorry.

**Sydney:** Savory, fluffy— Savory, fluffy scone. 'Cause scones are kind of dense.

**Taylor:** 'Cause scones are dense. And I don't know—

**Sydney:** These are fluffier, and they're definitely a— I mean, well, there is a sweetness sometimes.

**Taylor:** Well, there are savory scones.

**Sydney:** You got buttermilk in there.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** I don't know.

**Taylor:** It doesn't have anything in it. It's just— It's not sweetened. It's just also—

**Sydney:** Just trust us. Come to America, have a biscuits and gravy. We have that.

**Taylor:** I mean, if anything, that feels like something that they'd like. I don't know.

**Sydnee:** We have that to offer. I don't know what else I got for you right now, but we got biscuits and gravy here that are good.

**Taylor:** Yeah, that's fair. I guess maybe, at any point in the world history, right now is when the British can take as many shots as they want. 'Cause whoop, [laughs] we're not doing great.

**Sydnee:** Nope.

**Taylor:** Uh, alright. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** More of the year in review.

**Taylor:** Alright. Let's see. We each made a list.

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh.

**Taylor:** We're just gonna run through some things. Apropos of nothing, Katy Perry went to space briefly.

**Sydnee:** Katy Perry did get to space, and sang a song in space, right?

**Taylor:** Yeah. And she held a flower? Was that what she did?

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh.

**Taylor:** I think it was supposed to launch her tour, and it just— I don't think it... [sighs]

**Sydnee:** Well, the whole thing was supposed to be empowering to women, I thought? Maybe?

**Taylor:** Yeah. And that was the criticism, 'cause I think a lot of people raised an eyebrow to, "Hey, you used all of that evil Bezos money to hang out in what

technically qualifies as space in form-fitting jumpsuits that were designed to be sexy, not practical. And... what?"

**Sydney:** 'Cause there are women astronauts.

**Taylor:** There are!

**Sydney:** That go to space, work at NASA, are part of that effort, and have dedicated their lives to studying, and training, and being in that role. So it's not revolutionary if we're just like, "Let's shoot some women in space." [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah, women have gone to space. [laughs] Women in space! But have they been women in form-fitting jumpsuits with cute, little ponies?

**Sydney:** No. I feel like the movement to shoot women into space is entirely what that little fascist, that little incel fascist, is trying to do. The whole Groyper movement is like, "Shoot women into space," right? They [crosstalk].

**Taylor:** Wait, is that what they wanna do? They just wanna shoot them into space? I was about to say us.

**Sydney:** I don't know! I don't know. They— [laughs] I think he doesn't see the fundamental usefulness of women, so...

**Taylor:** That's— Well—

**Sydney:** Anyway.

**Taylor:** I'm all for women in space, but actual space.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Like, conquer space.

**Sydney:** Well, they were [through laughter] holding space.

**Taylor:** Women holding space. That happened too, this year! We held space.

**Sydnee:** No! Was that this year?

**Taylor:** Was that the— Oh, that was for the— I mean, the other *Wicked* came out, but that was the other— I don't know.

**Sydnee:** The first *Wicked*. I didn't put *Wicked 2* on my list, because I saw it, and I thought it was fine.

**Taylor:** I don't— With everything— There was so much going on this year that was so insane that whatever Ariana and Cynthia were up to, I was like, "That's fine. Just do your thing, ladies."

**Sydnee:** No.

**Taylor:** "You're the least of my concerns."

**Sydnee:** Whatever.

**Taylor:** I would like to see a *little bit* less of your exposed sternum, just 'cause I don't like that that's back, but I don't know your lives. So I'm not gonna judge it.

**Sydnee:** No. I'm not gonna judge that. I do wish [laughs] that the queer community is holding space for "Defying Gravity." Taylor... [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** In 2025, do you feel like the queer community continued to hold space for "Defying Gravity"?

**Taylor:** I—

**Sydnee:** Sorry, the *lyrics* to "Defying Gravity"?

**Taylor:** I'm sure some of it did.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** I think us trans people have had a lot of that space unfortunately filled with, "Oh, no!" [laughs] about so many other things that I don't have the space to hold for the lyrics of "Defying Gravity."

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** But if you are still doing so, I support you.

**Sydney:** That's great. The problem with *Wicked 2* is that it's Act 2 of *Wicked*. And there are very few musicals—I say this as a musical theater nerd. There are very few musicals where you're like, "Act 2 is where all the good stuff is."

**Taylor:** [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydney:** I mean, there's usually one banger in Act 2, but it's the shorter act, typically. And it's resolving the story, so it is not uncommon for the good stuff to be in Act 1.

**Taylor:** Yeah. I've seen the show on Broadway, I have not seen either of the movies, you know?

**Sydney:** I don't—

**Taylor:** I'm sure I will at some point.

**Sydney:** Listen. Okay, here's a pop culture thing from *Wicked 2*, and then we can move on from this. 'Cause that wasn't what we were supposed to be talking about.

**Taylor:** Eh, this is gonna be meandering. You all are just along for a ride.

**Sydney:** It really is, it really is. It's the afternoon. My children are at one movie, and my husband's at another movie. And I'm having a beer.

**Taylor:** Oh!

**Sydney:** Mm!

**Taylor:** What beer?

**Sydnee:** Spicy. And I ordered—

**Taylor:** It's an IPA.

**Sydnee:** It is. It's a Voodoo Ranger.

**Taylor:** Oh, nice.

**Sydnee:** And I have Chinese food waiting for me when we're done, so...

**Taylor:** American Chinese food.

**Sydnee:** Americanized Chinese food, yes.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] The only thing I will pull out of *Wicked 2*, if you saw it, was that there is a love scene between Elphaba and Fiero. And in it, she strips down to a negligee situation, or a little nightgowny thing, but then immediately puts on a very large chunky, knit cardigan thing over it.

**Taylor:** I saw a lot of memes about the sex cardigan.

**Sydnee:** Yes, the sex cardigan.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** No one has ever been like, "I'm ready for sex. I'm putting on this [through laughter] large, shapeless, chunky cardigan." Just, if for no other reason, like, the practicalities.

**Taylor:** I don't know. It's interesting, because the character of Elphaba doesn't seem like somebody that would own a negligee.

**Sydnee:** No.

**Taylor:** But Hollywood insists on women being sexy always, so is that it? Oh, well, probably she'd be the type of girl to roll into a sexcapade in a cute t-shirt and some boxer briefs.

**Sydnee:** There you go.

**Taylor:** Be like, "What? This is what I got. This is who I am."

**Sydnee:** And that would make sense for her character. I don't— And the cardigan, I guess, is witchy in— 'Cause they give her, definitely, a witchy in a very earthy, herbal vibe, kind of feel in this movie.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Her little home, her little witch place, is super cool. And I would wanna go there and make potions, and tinctures, and concoctions with her.

**Taylor:** Mm! Make potions and tinctures with her, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yes! Yes!

**Taylor:** Who wouldn't? [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Absolutely. 100%. And that cardigan, I would be like, "Love it. I need it. I wanna wear it." But not at that moment. [laughs] Not in that context. More like, "This looks so warm and soft, and I wanna curl up in this cardigan, and everyone leave me alone." [laughs]

**Taylor:** Well...

**Sydnee:** It's a defense cardigan. [through laughter] Especially against—

**Taylor:** I think every cardigan is a defense cardigan.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] Especially against a straight man.

**Taylor:** [laughs] I would say, it is Cynthia Erivo, which I— She is a stunning, amazingly talented woman. I don't think I want to see her sleep with a man.

**Sydnee:** Mm-mm.

**Taylor:** I don't— I can't believe that. Suspension of disbelief? Wizard, witches, green people, sure. Cynthia Erivo sleeping with a man? I don't know about that!

**Sydnee:** It's very— It's just suggested, and that's it. I don't know. They float in the air for a while, Tey. It's not— [laughs]

**Taylor:** Ah. Magic sex.

**Sydnee:** It's nothing like that romantasy books I read, which was on my list. Because—

**Taylor:** That was big this year.

**Sydnee:** Romantasy on BookTok was big this year. And I think *A Court of Thorns and Roses* – or *ACOTAR*, as it is usually abbreviated – and then *Fourth Wing*, those are the ones that sort of brought these books into prominence, I think. Is that fair to say?

**Taylor:** Yes. Every time I hear *ACOTAR*, I think we're talking about a general from *Star Wars*, but we're not. Or an admiral, an admiral. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] We are not. We are not talking about a general, or an admiral. We are talking about the "fairies having sex" books. [laughs]

**Taylor:** What is it— Can you figure out what, in the cultural zeitgeist, has brought this type of romantasy into such prominence recently? 'Cause usually, what we're into, our fantasy that we pursue is usually a reaction to the world we're living in.

**Sydnee:** Okay. I will say that there are thinkpieces written about this exact topic, 'cause they've been surfaced to me. And I refuse to read 'em, 'cause they're

usually from publications that are behind paywalls. I'm not gonna pay *The Atlantic* to read an article about why I like romantasy.

**Taylor:** No.

**Sydney:** No thank you, you know what I mean?

**Taylor:** You can probably figure that out. [laughs]

**Sydney:** Right. And so whatever I'm saying is just— These are my thoughts, but there are definitely people who are looking into this and studying it in a historical context, and probably have smarter answers to this than me. I think any sort of escapism, whether it's religious, or spiritual, or fantasy, we see that throughout history, in times of great upheaval and stress – and especially in our current American society where, if you are like-minded like you and I, you're constantly worried about fascism – I think it is normal to have a retreat that is purely imaginary.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydney:** That feels nothing like the world in which we currently live. I also think that, in a lot of these books, because we are having so many conversations about the place of gender in society, and especially this "What does it mean to be a man?" question is becoming more and more prominent. And there's such a battle over that.

I think, if you look at these books, most of them are by female authors. Not all, but most are. And you see male characters who are masculine, they're physically strong and they're protective of the people that they care about. Very traditional masculine traits. But they are also safe. They would never hurt anyone, they would never make you do anything.

They're very devoted to choice. They want you to have choice. [laughs] That word is prominent in a lot of these books. They want you to have options, they want you to have agency, they want you to decide you want to be with them. They want you to forge your own path. You have a lot of male characters who are both strong and hunky *and* totally devoted to your individual independence as a woman.

**Taylor:** You know, to add on something from my list, 'cause I think it colors this conversation, it's interesting that that is popular in fantasy, but we also saw the criticism of the performative male.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** Which, as far as I can see, is a man that has tried to tailor himself to the female gaze.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Not the female gays, the female gaze.

**Sydney:** Gaze.

**Taylor:** I think the female gays are probably fine with them too.

**Sydney:** Yeah!

**Taylor:** But it's interesting, because I can laugh at those TikToks or whatever. But at the same time, I'm like, isn't this what everybody wants, though? Don't you want a man that, I don't know, reads, and sips matcha, and thinks about your feelings? And, I don't know, is in touch with his soft, aesthetic self?

**Sydney:** Well, a lot of the criticism of it probably comes from both misogyny, just plain old men wanting to criticize any man who doesn't behave in the way that they've defined men should behave, but also from a lot of internalized misogyny. A lot of women who look at a man like that, and are immediately critical because, "Well, that's not what *I* want in a partner." And it's like, I mean, so what is wrong with this that is so offensive?

Well, there are a lot of forces in society that don't want us to embrace that view of masculinity. That that can be masculine. And then also, I think there's the concern, like, "Who's faking it?" [laughs] I think that's underlying everything. I don't know, as having experienced life through my lens as a woman for 42 years, I will say that when a man seems really thoughtful and considerate and empathetic and understanding, there's always a little voice in the back of my

head, going, "Mm. Mm. What's he trying to get? What's he after? What's the game?"

And I know that's not fair. I know that's not right. I'm not saying, "And this is how every woman should be." But I think that that's a natural suspicion a lot of us have, especially as an older person. Like, "Is it real, though? Is it real?"

**Taylor:** That's fair. Well, and I guess that's the safety of the romantasy, is your narrative operates on the assumption that your masculine leads are exactly what they present to be.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** We don't get an internal dialogue from the person we meet at the coffee shop.

**Sydney:** Can I say, that is one of the most popular things in these romantasy books. I don't know if you know this, because I know I read a lot more of them. I don't know if you read them at all.

**Taylor:** I don't read any of them. [laughs]

**Sydney:** Okay.

**Taylor:** I support you reading them, though.

**Sydney:** A lot of the times, the authors will release bonus chapters, if you are interested. Like, after the book has come out. And they're often – not always, but often – from the male character's perspective. So you're reading the book *primarily* from the female protagonist. Occasionally, they have books where you get a chapter or two from the men, but most of the time it's from a female perspective.

But then they'll release these bonus chapters, and it's like, "Here's a scene that you read from this woman's point of view, and now you get to read it from this man's point of view." And the men are always like, "I looked at her, and she was the most gorgeous thing I've ever seen. I've never felt this way before. Everything in me wanted to be around her. Her scent made me go—"

I mean, it's just this, "Yes, this is what I hope!" [laughs] I hope Justin's thinking this about me every time he looks at me.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydney:** It's such wish fulfillment. Like, "Yes. This is— Mm-hmm! Yeah, absolutely. That's what's going on in that man's mind." [laughs]

**Taylor:** That's interesting. Well, was that kind of kicked off— 'Cause I remember there was that whole re-release of *Twilight* from vampire boy's perspective.

**Sydney:** Maybe. Because it's very popular. Because then you get to put in the guy's head whatever you wish the guy was thinking.

**Taylor:** We always hear that you want a man written by a woman. That's what women imagine. I do think it's— I also— Hey, as somebody that lives in Brooklyn, I know that toxic performative male.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** I understand *that*, as someone that just positions themself as sensitive so they can get lots of ladies.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** But there's a part of it that's too, like... Isn't it almost like the male birds? If a man is specifically engaging with interests and activities and fashion and stuff because he wants to be more appealing to women, isn't that a *good* thing? I don't know.

**Sydney:** No, I think you're right. It is—

**Taylor:** 'Cause women have been expected to do the reverse of that forever.

**Sydney:** I think, generally speaking, on the whole, it is a positive thing. I do. And I support it, and I think that a lot of the critique of it is rooted in our heteronormative, toxic masculine culture. I do think that that's where that's

coming from, is, "Uh-oh. If the ladies realize that they could have that, they're gonna stop wanting all this mess that *I* am." [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs] The man that just puts five unseasoned chicken breasts in a blender, and calls that dinner.

**Sydney:** Never support that. Never. Nev— Listen. Okay. Can I just— Can I say, I came from a time where I used to put mustard on my salad because mustard has no calories.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** This is not okay. Don't go down this road. Eat the food.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** Don't go down this road, eat the food. [laughs]

**Taylor:** No, I agree with that.

**Sydney:** When I asked Charlie and Cooper what the best thing that came out of this year was, 'cause I was curious for a Gen Alpha perspective, their [through laughter] immediate reply was...

**Taylor:** I know exactly what you're gonna say.

**Sydney:** "Six seven!" [laughs]

**Taylor:** Oh! That's not what I thought you were gonna say.

**Sydney:** No.

**Taylor:** I thought you were gonna say *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, but okay. Six seven.

**Sydney:** Okay, no, they got to that. *K-Pop Demon Hunters* was the second thing they said.

**Taylor:** Okay.

**Sydney:** The first thing they said was "Six seven!"

**Taylor:** I accept that I'm too old to understand it, but do you understand it? [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydney:** No. I mean, I could give you— And I think we've done this. Haven't we talked about the historical...? [laughs]

**Taylor:** We've talked about all the various...

**Sydney:** Origin theories?

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** Yeah, I think. In terms of one, the why, I don't know. I guess that's the eternal, why does everything catch on? Why did skibidi, why did Ohio, why did... whatever. But what it means, I don't know anymore. I don't know—

**Taylor:** Well, that's a thing. I get what— I don't know. I get what 69 means. I get what— I don't know. Most of the numbers that have been, "Ooh, this number," they have an obvious connotation.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Even if it's stupid.

**Sydney:** I am 42, I am the meaning of life.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** From *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the—*

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** There's a thing there, right? I don't know— The girls tend to use six

seven just as a call and response. Like, someone says six or someone says seven, and the girls are like, "Six seven!" And then their friends are like, "Six seven!" And then they all say it.

**Taylor:** Okay. [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydney:** I don't know what that— I don't know what to *take* from that. What did we all just do?

**Taylor:** You know what? I— I mean, I'm about to be 40. I'm a week, two weeks away from 40? It's right upon me.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** I look towards my favorite role model, John Waters. I got to see him speak two Christmases ago. And he talked about— I swear this relates. He talked about how the thing that he supports the most about the current trans movement— He was specifically talking about people with nonbinary and neopronouns, and all that. He was like, "The best thing about it is it confuses and bewilders me as an old person, which is exactly what you're supposed to do." That's what you should— If you don't understand it, you should be happy that the youth has confounded you, 'cause that's what the youth is supposed to do.

**Sydney:** That's true.

**Taylor:** He says, "So it's okay if I don't get it. It's good that they're doing it." And that's how I feel about that. It's like, you know what? I don't get it. And it's fine that I don't. I'm glad that they're doing things that I can't comprehend. [laughs]

**Sydney:** I don't have a— Six seven doesn't bother me, it doesn't upset me. I'm old, so I guess I probably do roll my eyes sometimes when I'll say something like, "Oh, I'll be home in six or seven minutes." And the girls from the backseat go, "Six seven! Six seven!"

I'm like, "Okay. I shouldn't have— Whatever." You know, I'm old. But it doesn't upset me. And on the big scale of current things that bother me, my children now calling me dude or bro all the time, that's way more upsetting than six seven.

**Taylor:** That bothers you?

**Sydney:** It is like a reflex. I will say something, and they'll be like, "Dude. I don't blah-blah-blah."

"Dude, I didn't—"

I'll be like, "Could you bring your dirty clothes in here?"

"Dude, I already did it. Bro, I—"

**Taylor:** Dude, I do that. [laughs]

**Sydney:** But it's everything. *Everything*.

**Taylor:** That's an eternal thing, though. I remember our mother getting on me because I said exactly that phrase of a sentence. I said, "Dude," and then proceeded to complain about something. And she said, "I'm not a dude. I'm your mother."

**Sydney:** I have said, "My name's not dude, it's Mom," so many times. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Syd!

**Sydney:** No, it's the way that— "Dude, I—"

"Dude—"

**Taylor:** Dude, come on!

**Sydney:** "Dude—" I can't handle it!

**Taylor:** "Dude" is just a punctuation. It's not a gendered term, it's not a directional— It's not a pronoun. It's just a—

**Sydney:** "Bro."

**Taylor:** It's just like saying, "Ugh."

**Sydney:** I know, but— [laughs] I'll take six seven any day.

**Taylor:** Alright, alright.

**Sydnee:** You mentioned *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, and that definitely, both for younger people and for me personally, was a wonderful thing this past year. I loved the movie, and I love the music, and every time I see it again or listen to it again, I am filled with joy. And I can't wait for the second one. I think it was a wonderful thing to come into the public consciousness this year.

**Taylor:** I agree. I enjoyed it immensely. The music's fantastic. I never felt so angry at myself as when the Democratic party TikTok released those— They made supercuts of their different candidates to *K-Pop Demon Hunters* songs. It was funny, because it was before Mamdani was elected. And they had not endorsed him, but they included him in it. And it's like, "Hey. Hey. What if you endorsed that candidate?" And he won.

But I was like, "Ugh. I have never lived this hard. I'm watching a *K-Pop Demon Hunters* supercut to Gavin Newsom. Okay. Alright. Alright."

**Sydnee:** I know, right? Can I say, though? It sucks, because [laughs] first of all, there's a lot of really positive messages we could take from that movie, and from the songs. There's a lot of good stuff in there about embracing both the good and bad parts of yourself, and making space for all of that, and how your individual right to exist and be exactly who you are is unalienable. There's such good stuff in there.

The fact that the Democratic party [laughs] would be so out of touch that they'd be like, "People will like this thing. We'll just throw it out there, without any thought. People like this song. We don't know anything about it. We don't understand anything about it. We're gonna put a bunch of our candidates to it. We don't really get it."

And then also, at the end of the year, the Democratic party did not release its big autopsy of the party this year. Has not shared any of that. Because they feel like, "You know, we're doing great. We don't need to change a *thing*. [laughs] We don't need criticism! The Democratic party is doing *great*."

**Taylor:** It's one of— I mean, on my list of things that were important to me this

year was Mamdani. It's like, hey. A progressive candidate that actually represents the type of movement that we all want to get behind. You wanna maybe reconfigure your plan, and focus on peop— No? No? Okay. Oh, right, you put money into campaigns against him. Hmm, alright. [laughs]

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Taylor:** I'm glad he's in your supercut, I guess.

**Sydney:** No, it's very— It's right on brand with the Democrats. It's very frustrating. If they were committed to progress, Mamdani is the roadmap, clearly. Clearly!

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** Not even because— 'Cause when I say that, people are like, "Oh, so the far left?" No. 'Cause he talked about being able to afford living.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** Basic things that everyone cares about.

**Taylor:** If it's far left to just think that people should [laughs] be able to— Like, kids should eat and people shouldn't be on the streets, alright, I guess I'm far left too.

**Sydney:** Right. And you should have a home to live in, and a way to get to and from the places you're going. This is it! I don't even know—

**Taylor:** Socialism! Communism! Oh, no! [laughs]

**Sydney:** That's not even woke, I don't think.

**Taylor:** Yeah... Well, but again, I still saw those videos and got a single tear in my eye. Like, "Yeah. We're done hiding, we're coming out of the dark and into the light! Oh. There's Nancy Pelosi. Okay." [laughs]

**Sydney:** You know who can see in the dark, is Santa.

**Taylor:** Oh, right. Speaking of politics.

**Sydnee:** I wanted to mention briefly— It was right at the end of the year, but it became something that I— Sometimes I get obsessed with things, briefly. When that boat got stuck in that canal...

**Taylor:** I remember you loving that boat.

**Sydnee:** I was so obsessed with that boat stuck in that canal for a while.

**Taylor:** Do you think back on that boat, and are like, "Man, I wish that boat was still in that canal"?

**Sydnee:** I wish a new boat would get stuck in a canal.

**Taylor:** Wow.

**Sydnee:** I mean, I don't want anything bad to happen. It was just— I was fascinated. Just fascinated.

**Taylor:** I hope that happens, just for you.

**Sydnee:** Just for me. I was also really stuck on Melania reading the [through laughter] book about Santa. Because—

**Taylor:** Which apparently— Who wrote this book? Where'd this book come from?

**Sydnee:** I don't know. I don't know. And the thing is, I am not— When I laughed at all these TikToks, it is not because Melania's first language is not English, or because of her accent. I would just like to make that clear. It was 'cause Melania Trump is married to Donald Trump, and still is. So whatever you wanna interpret about her character, you go ahead and do that. I'm just saying, still married to him.

**Taylor:** I feel like, if there was a woman that was on record disparaging Christmas like a cartoon villain... Remember that whole speech she gave?

**Sydney:** Yeah!

**Taylor:** That phone call that was leaked?

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** About how much she hated Christmas, and hated decorating for Christmas?

**Sydney:** Clearly.

**Taylor:** I don't think I'd also release the audio of her reading a very strange Christmas book.

**Sydney:** And everybody who has posted a picture of their cat, as she said, [laughs] "Can Santa see in the dark?"

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydney:** And everybody who has posted a picture of a twerking Santa as she says, "How does Santa do it? How does it work?" [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydney:** Thank you. No, I will not— Melania, she could leave, if she hated him. She could.

**Taylor:** Yeah...

**Sydney:** She doesn't.

**Taylor:** I think it's fair game. I'm also just not— I don't know. We did the "They go low, we go high" thing, and hey, where'd that get us?

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** So I don't know.

**Sydney:** No, I'm not going high anymore. [laughs]

**Taylor:** No.

**Sydney:** I'm over going high. That's the new 2026. I'm over going high, I'm getting in the mud. I'm gonna get down in the mud.

**Taylor:** [wheeze-laughs] Down in the mud.

**Sydney:** I'm gonna get down in the mud. And I'm gonna say the Be Best campaign was stupid, Melania, because your husband is the biggest bully on the face of this Earth. And I don't understand an anti-bullying campaign when you're married to Donald Trump.

**Taylor:** Did you see the plaques he had installed under the presidential portraits?

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydney:** So— I mean, I guess they're kinda catty, which usually I like. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Well, there's one TikTok account that's a gay man that reinterprets Donald Trump's speeches as a catty gay man.

**Sydney:** Yes, yes.

**Taylor:** I'm like, "That does track. That's not fair to the— As a representative of the queer community, we don't want that. But also, then it would be fine. If he just—"

**Sydney:** Yeah. It feels [crosstalk].

**Taylor:** You know how there's that often-said kind of awful thing, like, "If only Hitler had been a better painter"? If only [through laughter] Trump had been a gay man. It would've been fine.

**Sydnee:** Everything would've worked out.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I don't even know that that's true.

**Taylor:** No, I don't know. But it's just— You know, you missed your calling, and now we all have to suffer for it.

**Sydnee:** No, let's just be honest! If he had just been born poor, or middle-class, just not super rich— 'Cause he couldn't have gotten where he was if he wasn't super rich, just inherited generational wealth that he could squander and do whatever the heck he wanted with.

**Taylor:** No. He turned a million dollars into a hundred thousand. He's not good at what he does; he just had a lot of capital.

**Sydnee:** Yes. There's the alternate history I want. Donald Trump: born in the suburbs.

**Taylor:** Hey, was there any good stuff? We're winding down. This stuff sucks, and it's gonna keep sucking for at least another two more years?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Hopefully not more than that.

**Sydnee:** Also, AI sucks. Just throwing that out there.

**Taylor:** Oh, that sucks too.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Done with stuff that sucks. AI sucks. Don't use AI to create things.

**Taylor:** My— No, I like to be somebody that's always middle-of-the-road. I wanna understand people. I think it's important to meet people where they're at.

My one— Not my only. There are other exceptions. But when I see people post things that are AI, I just— You're blocked. You're gone.

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** You will never exist to me again.

**Sydney:** No.

**Taylor:** You have not considered the repercussions of this. Because it's come from industries that I never would have even anticipated we're dealing with. There was a whole bunch of AI dubs to anime that were released on Amazon. And they're terrible, but also, that was just not something I could have even perceived as we have to worry about. That voice actors are going to lose jobs to bad AI?

**Sydney:** See, I think that whole art, music, writing, acting, voice— All of it, none of it— Why? Why would we want that? Not only— You know what? All we did was ask if we could. We never stopped to ask if we should. [laughs]

**Taylor:** The thing is, we *did*. There were generations of sci-fi writers that were like, "You know how bad it'll be if we build computer brains that can think for us? It'll be real bad!"

**Sydney:** "Don't do this."

**Taylor:** "Interesting. Oh, how intere—" Now, we're gonna have our sci-fi novels generated by those same computers.

**Sydney:** And they're gonna be bad.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** And they're gonna be bad. Don't read AI-generated content, don't look at AI-generated art. Don't hire AI actors.

**Taylor:** I mean, I've said it jokingly before, but when the camera came out,

that's kind of what led a big move in modernism for flatness. You know all those paintings that everybody loves to make fun of, like the Mondrians, the squares?

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** I used to think those were kind of silly, until I understood in the context of art history, when the camera came out, and suddenly painters realized being able to represent realism was no longer the thing that they could do best. So they started to think about, "What can the canvas do that the camera cannot?" And that led to that embrace of flatness, of movement presented in different ways. Which is a beautiful way of interpreting that.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And I think, in reaction to AI, you just have to think, "What can I do that a computer cannot?"

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** And I think, you know, it's the stuff that makes art good. It can feel crappy about itself, it can be confused and anxious, it can have— Or we can have insane paranoias. We do all this. The computer can't do that. So there's still a room for us, but that's stuff that makes art good. So, you know, it won't be good art.

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** AI has no purpose in art.

**Sydney:** No, it doesn't. At the end of the day, I don't understand. If art is the celebration, the final expression of everything that we are, or want to be, or don't want to be, or could be, or whatever, if that's what it is, why would we want AI to make it? Why would we even—

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** Why would we even do that?

**Taylor:** I think if art is the language of the soul, AI is soulless art for soulless people.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm. AI— There was some great stuff this year, like you mentioned. AI could not make *Peacemaker*.

**Taylor:** [laughs] *Peacemaker* was great.

**Sydney:** *Peacemaker* was fantastic. The [crosstalk] was fantastic.

**Taylor:** *Peacemaker*, the thing that finally got Syndee off of Apple Music. [laughs]

**Sydney:** It got me onto Spotify, I listened to the soundtrack. It introduced me to a whole genre of music that I had not fully embraced and understood how much I loved. It made me appreciate John Cena in a whole new way.

**Taylor:** I love John Cena.

**Sydney:** I had no idea that I loved John Cena, and now I do.

**Taylor:** Well, and I don't think we talked about it since the ending episode. The ending episode was strangely prevalent to today's issues.

**Sydney:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Where he just gets disappeared into nothing.

**Sydney:** Yeah. Into nothing, because he didn't do what they needed him to do. He didn't do what they wanted. He wasn't the right kind of American.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** Yeah. So I think *Peacemaker* was fantastic. The movie *Sinners* came out this year which, for me, was the best horror movie of the year.

**Taylor:** I would agree with that, 100%.

**Sydnee:** I thought that was fantastic.

**Taylor:** And we had a banger year for horror, I would say. I think that— Which makes sense.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Usually, low points in [laughs] like, culture, we have high points in horror.

**Sydnee:** In humanity. [laughs] Yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah. When we're all terrified and scared, we come up with good ways to be terrified and scared. But I think *Sinners* broke the mold.

**Sydnee:** I think, for all the criticism I leveled at *Weapons*, I talked about it so much with so many people. And that's always gotta mean something, right? Something that's that evocative, that I have so many different conversations with so many people about what it means, and why, and what I would have done differently. That's a good thing to put out into the world.

**Taylor:** Oh, well, I agree. And I think it's different— Horror, for some reason, maybe because it's a maligned genre, because people don't respect it as much as other art forms, other genres of film, I think it actually becomes a place for unique voices to be heard.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** Because there's— We had a lot of the mainline horror that I just decided to stop engaging with. I don't need another movie about the Warrens. Look, I love those two actors, but I don't wanna ever— They were hyper-Christian con men who used people's fear of religion against them. And I feel like there's those movies. There was, what— This came out last year, but the Russell Crowe movie, *The Last Pope*. There's always these hyper-religious movies that insist upon the idea that if you don't believe in God, you're going to suffer demons.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** And I'm just over those. But horror has enough space in it to have these other voices that pop up, and engage with different fears.

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** I love that.

**Sydney:** I think it was a great year for horror films. It was also a good year for— We didn't talk about this much, but sci-fi. *Murderbot* is really fantastic, if you hadn't seen that.

**Taylor:** I have not.

**Sydney:** *Murderbot* is a really fantastic series, and so is *Pluribus*, which I think— *Pluribus* is especially a good reminder that I think we have this sort of societal idea of sci-fi as it's all *Star Wars*, or *Star Trek*, or something like that. It's about technology that I don't understand, or it's dense. And then you look at a show like *Pluribus*, which it's a sci-fi show that feels so human and relatable, and it reminds you that that's what sci-fi is. It's telling these very human, relatable stories in these sort of fantastical ways.

**Taylor:** Well, I mean, it's sci-fi and horror, but we also had *Welcome to Derry*. I don't know if you've watched that.

**Sydney:** No.

**Taylor:** The *It* prequel. For me, you know, there's so much of *Stranger Things* that's pulled from Stephen King. And now that they're going back and doing some of these earlier tomes, we started this bit of the conversation about *Sinners*, which obviously it engages with the horrors of racial disparity in this country.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** *Welcome to Derry* also carries that torch, just in a really beautiful way, and it makes me not enjoy *Stranger Things* as much. 'Cause it's like, oh, this is Stephen King by Stephen King, versus Stephen King by the Russo brothers.

Which kind of robs it all of the social context, and just makes it like, "Ooh, what if kids played DND, and then there were big monsters?"

**Sydnee:** It's hard. I don't— So we're watching back through *Stranger Things* with the girls, because they wanna watch it now. So we're in the middle of Season 3 with them. We had watched all the way up to this most recent season, but we haven't started it yet, because we are watching it now with them. I can't imagine what they could do with this season to the weight that they've built. You know what I mean? I feel like, sometimes, you've built this— It was like *Lost*. *Lost* was that, right? You build up to the final season of *Lost*, and I'm like, I couldn't pull this off. I don't know how you'd pull it off. So I haven't seen it. I have no clue about the most recent season, but I don't even know what they could do.

**Taylor:** I mean, I'm caught up. Obviously, we're recording this before the finale drops. I don't really know what's gonna happen *there*, but I haven't *disliked* it. It's just having so much stuff that is comfortable to both tell a good story, but also engage with the world we're living in. Even if it's set in a different time frame, it's engaging with issues that plague us today. I think that just makes a piece more powerful.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. I agree.

**Taylor:** And *Stranger Things* has to appeal to everybody, so it's kind of toothless, in a way.

**Sydnee:** I think you see that with a lot of series, is they more and more want to please everyone. 'Cause I think— It's funny, we've been rewatching, so the first and second seasons are really fresh in my mind. And if you rewatch them through the lens— And I don't know, I haven't seen the new season. So I have no clue if this plays out. But if you look at Will specifically as struggling with maybe not being straight, if you see the character through that lens at all, the first two seasons are really pushing in a— Like there's a beautiful metaphor building.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** But then I feel like we kind of veer out of that, starting in Season 3. And then things kind of go all over the place. But the beginning of the show feels like a very cohesive, concise message about "I have this thing inside me, and it's dark

and scary and demonic." It feels so straightforward, and then things kind of branch in every direction.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** So I don't know what happens in Season 5, so I don't know if that plays out. That's how—

**Taylor:** I won't spoil anything for you.

**Sydney:** That's how I feel about— As I'm watching 1 and 2, I'm like, "Oh. Oh, yeah, this makes so much sense if I think about it that way."

**Taylor:** Well, I still enjoy it.

**Sydney:** Yeah!

**Taylor:** But it's more about, like, it's great when there's just more daring media out there that's— We're making a nuanced metaphor for queerness, and then another show is like, "Here's a bunch of gay characters!" [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** "They're just out, and fine, and it's not a metaphor."

**Sydney:** And they're just there.

**Taylor:** And they're just— Yeah. That's—

**Sydney:** No, you're totally right. Anything— Before we wrap up, anything great we missed?

**Taylor:** Uh, I'm looking at my list. We didn't talk about JoJo Siwa. I guess we talked about JoJo Siwa enough. I don't know, she did a whole bunch of things. She was gay, she was straight. It's fine. She's a kid, she'll figure herself out.

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Labubus, I never got it, never understood it. It's fine.

**Sydney:** Still don't.

**Taylor:** That's fine.

**Sydney:** My kids have Lafufus, the fake ones, 'cause...

**Taylor:** Oh. That's— You know what?

**Sydney:** I will not pay for Labubus.

**Taylor:** The Louvre heist happened. I guess they got caught. That sucks.

**Sydney:** That's too bad. That was a great moment. I was rooting for both teams. [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs] I was only— I was pro-heist, but you know...

**Sydney:** I thought that one guy was a detective for a moment, and I was *so* excited! The guy in the picture?

**Taylor:** He looked great, yeah.

**Sydney:** There's a new pope who cares about...

**Taylor:** There's a new pope. He's a Chicago pope.

**Sydney:** ... poor people. Yeah. Chicago pope. He cares about poor people and immigrant. That's cool. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Love that. Because it concerns both of us, I do wanna ask— And I guess we have another year to figure it out, but Millennials, are we good or bad? I haven't— We've always been bad. But then we got the Millennial nostalgia trend happening.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** Where 20-year-olds are spending money to dress like we did, and make cutups, videos of "What would it have been like to grow up in 1995, eating pizza rolls, playing outside, and listening to Offspring?" Like, I could tell you. It was fine. [laughs] I don't know. Are we good?

**Sydney:** I think that Millennials overall are getting a rebrand that is positive. I think we're good now. Or whatever I am. I'm a zennial. I'm—

**Taylor:** Oh, you're casting off the Millennial crown.

**Sydney:** Well, I don't know. Because there's some Millennial stuff that I don't connect with, but I definitely don't connect with all the Gen X stuff. Because I'm not nihilistic. I don't want it all to burn. But I don't know. I'm positive and hopeful, but I'm also very— I don't always necessarily— Like, the random culture that Millennials sort of embraced was not me.

**Taylor:** Yeah...

**Sydney:** You know what I mean? And the fashion. When I look at Millennial fashion versus just that moment in the 90s where grunge was turning into nerd culture, like hipster nerd, that weird— That's where I live. So I don't love that if you go to Target now— Which I know you don't, 'cause you live in New York, so you have better places to go. But if you live in West Virginia, and the Target, it fell off the hill a little bit, but then they fixed it, so now it's not— Now it isn't falling off the hill—

**Taylor:** Oh, you mean it physically was falling off a hill.

**Sydney:** Yeah. It physically fell off the hill, Tey.

**Taylor:** [wheeze-laughs] I thought it fell off, like it wasn't cool. No, it fell off the hill. Like, actually.

**Sydney:** No, part of the Target fell off the back of the hill there. And so they had to close it for a while, until they shored off the hill and got rid of that piece that fell off. And then they [laughs] had to pay all the people whose homes that that piece of the Target fell on. That was a whole thing. Nobody died, but still, it was a big thing. Anyway... [laughs]

**Taylor:** Okay.

**Sydney:** Welcome to West Virginia. If you go there, the fashion that was 90s two years ago has morphed into early 2000s, and this is not something that I can support.

**Taylor:** I think that makes sense, though. 'Cause they were only a few years apart. It's not—I was always more influenced by the grunge, and then into the kind of emo...

**Sydney:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** What evolved into the hipster thing, honestly. That was a direct line. I moved to New York, and then there was all the other people wearing skinny jeans. They were there. I missed out on the hyper—Like, the low-cut jeans, and everything was shiny.

**Sydney:** Shiny.

**Taylor:** Everything was shiny, yeah.

**Sydney:** Yes. The shiny is coming back. I will say, I got a top that is a brown corduroy button-down top.

**Taylor:** That sounds great.

**Sydney:** That is kind of loose-fitting, like the body is real loose. The sleeves are tight, but the body is loose. [laughs] And I put that on with—I got jeans, so there are no—Can I tell you? It is so hard to find skinny jeans now. Like, they're nowhere. Nobody's making these things. Everything's baggy. Why? I can't do baggy. It just isn't my vibe. But I can do straight leg. I can do a straight leg jean. So I got a new pair of straight leg jeans, and this brown corduroy top. And I was like, "I am my so-called... Finally."

**Taylor:** Yeah. Just pair that with some Doc Martens.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm. I am Claire Daines in *My So-Called Life*. And I have never felt so like, "Finally. It took me this long [laughs] to be cool."

**Taylor:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Sydney:** But I'm here. Also, Justin got me an Encarta '95 ball cap for Christmas.

**Taylor:** Oh, that's amazing.

**Sydney:** I know. My Encarta ball cap.

**Taylor:** You know, maybe that's a good— Speaking of personal style, I feel like this was a year of our podcast.

**Sydney:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And it changed forms a little bit last year.

**Sydney:** Sure.

**Taylor:** 'Cause our whole initial premise was we had Rileigh, who was the wonderful voice of the younger generation. And I think it's—

**Sydney:** But she got old, so she doesn't [crosstalk].

**Taylor:** Well, she got old, but—

**Sydney:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** I don't know. I have had a bad habit in the past of looking at what bad things people say about us. I don't do that so much anymore. Sometimes, I still do. And, you know, I know that there are people out there that are like, "You're adults. You're in your 40s, you're approaching your 40s. What buffering do you still have to do? What? You should be done." And I think that—

**Sydney:** What?

**Taylor:** Yeah! But I don't know. You know, we did this for a year. We're old people. [laughs] I feel like I'm still learning things, I'm still figuring things out about myself. I think that's okay. And I would assume that our audience has probably changed a little bit. But I'm gonna guess a lot of people out there listening also feel that way.

**Sydnee:** I think you're 100% right. I don't— I hope I never get to a point where I feel like I figured it all out. Sometimes, when I come across someone in my life, like an adult in my life who I cannot connect with, who I really can't get along with, I think it's because they've decided they figured it all out, and they're done.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** I think that's the worst choice you can make, personally – this is just my opinion – is to decide, "I figured it all out. I know who I am, what I am, what I like, what I don't like, what I'm gonna do next." Once you get to that point and you're done, that's very sad to me. Don't ever decide that. I don't know what I have. I have a curly gray hair now, and I didn't last year at this time.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I get compliments on my gray hair a lot, which is nice, but I also might dye it next year, because I don't know if I can keep [laughs] getting compliments on my gray hair. But I don't know what I am next, and I don't want to know. And I know there's so much stuff I haven't figured out. There's so much about life that I *think* I know, but I'll probably be wrong about. I think that's the key. If there *is* a way to be... I don't even know if it's happy, but not bored.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** If there's a way to stay interested, and not bored, and engaged, it's to know that you don't know.

**Taylor:** Oh, I agree with that entirely. I think everything I've ever enjoyed learning about was on the other end of me saying, "I don't know that." You know?

**Sydnee:** Yeah!

**Taylor:** That's how I approach every— As someone that's had a lot of different jobs, and a lot of different art forms that I've undertaken, the best things have always been on the other side of "I don't know what that is. Please explain."

**Sydney:** Yes. Absolutely.

**Taylor:** And I mean, I'm someone that I didn't transition 'til I was 35. In a lot of ways, I still feel so young, and so, hey. This is the first time I've had my body be mine. I would like to enjoy it.

**Sydney:** Yeah!

**Taylor:** And I think that's— The reason that the world is kind of in such a mess, one of the many reasons, is dogmatic thinking. People that just cement their beliefs, and never question it. And yeah, we're a couple of old people. [wheeze-laughs] But we engage with young culture, we try to understand it. We try to meet it where it's at, and I don't know, see how we relate to it based on how we grew up. And I think that is okay. If you're along for that ride, here we are. [laughs]

**Sydney:** Here we are. And I think— I really do. I think there's value in that. You know, Tey, to finish out— 'Cause it is sort of still the holiday season. We all know the story of *A Christmas Carol*. I had to see it multiple times this season, in various versions with animated characters, puppets, and adults, and humans.

**Taylor:** Puppets are the best. We all know that.

**Sydney:** Yeah. Puppets are the best. But in the story of *A Christmas Carol*, we accept that this very old man, Ebeneezer Scrooge, at the end of the movie – or book – has this revelation, and gets to live a whole new life, having changed and learned and grown. And he's, I guess, super old? I don't know how old he is. He's super old, I think.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydney:** And so if he can do that, and we all celebrate it, I don't know why we can't do that. 'Cause we're way younger than Scrooge.

**Taylor:** At least...

**Sydney:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** ... [through laughter] ten years younger than Scrooge.

**Sydney:** Except it was set a long time ago! So he might have actually been my age. [laughs]

**Taylor:** No, that's— The actor that I'm thinking of, I think he probably was maybe 50, maybe. [laughs]

**Sydney:** He was probably 42. He was probably my age. But the point is... [laughs]

**Taylor:** We're encroaching on *Golden Girl* years, alright? People just wore different hairstyles, they looked different. It's fine.

**Sydney:** And people love the *Golden Girls*!

**Taylor:** Who doesn't love the *Golden Girls*? No, you're right. You're absolutely right. You can learn at every age, and that's what we've done this year. [laughs]

**Sydney:** And we're gonna keep learning. Yeah.

**Taylor:** We keep watching the TikToks, and engaging with the pop culture. And we might not always get it, but we're here to try to interpret it for whoever is out there listening.

**Sydney:** That's right. Six seven.

**Taylor:** [laughs] I still can't get on board with that.

**Sydney:** Six seven...

**Taylor:** Six seven, indeed.

**Sydney:** Well, Tey, thank you for your year in review. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Thank you.

**Sydney:** I think it was a lot of fun. And yeah, I don't know what we'll do next in the new year, but we'll be learning, and growing, and sharing, here.

**Taylor:** Right here.

**Sydney:** Just like the *Golden Girls* do. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah. Say hello to your friend? What is— I'm thinking of something else. No, I'm thinking of the *Babysitters* theme song. [laughs]

**Sydney:** No, you're right.

**Taylor:** That's the *Golden Girls*?

**Sydney:** Yeah!

**Taylor:** Okay.

**Sydney:** Yeah. No, you're right. You got it. You're there.

**Taylor:** Okay. Alright. Great.

**Sydney:** If you— I don't know what our episode next week will be. It'll be the first of the new year, and it'll be on something. We haven't decided.

**Taylor:** Do we need to stop and figure that out?

**Sydney:** Mm...

**Taylor:** There's that gay Canadian show that everybody talks about.

**Sydney:** What is it?

**Taylor:** *Heated Rivalries?*

**Sydney:** Oh, the hockey one?

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydney:** Oh, we probably should see that. Okay.

**Taylor:** Let me take a note at the timestamp. Do you wanna do that?

**Sydney:** Sure, okay.

**Taylor:** 1:04-ish. I need to write this down with the date, 'cause I get so confused in all of my edits. Okay.

**Sydney:** Tey, I was thinking for the new year, we should start off with some queer hockey content.

**Taylor:** Sure, yeah. Happy new year. [laughs] Customary.

**Sydney:** *Heated Rivalries.* Yeah, everybody keeps talking about it, and I don't know anything about it. But I know that in my romantasy section of the book store, there's always a ton of hockey stuff. And it's usually gay, so I feel like... Yeah, this is a thing.

**Taylor:** I have not explored the world of gay hockey, but I am down to.

**Sydney:** Well, we're going to.

**Taylor:** Alright.

**Sydney:** At least the first episode. Let's see what's up.

**Taylor:** Alright. Let's see what's up with those gay... hockeys. [laughs]

**Sydney:** That are rivals, and heated. And very hot.

**Taylor:** It's like— What is it— Yeah, great. Amazing.

**Sydney:** Yeah. We're gonna love it. [laughs] You should go to MaximumFun.org and check out a lot of great shows you would enjoy. Thank you for listening. Thank you for joining us in 2025. Follow us into 2026 as we figure that year out, too. 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 am still buffering.

**Taylor:** And I am, too.

[theme music plays]

**Sydney:** [unintelligible]

**Taylor:** I don't know. You're behind on the times! I spent my entire youth in the smut and AO3 realm.

**Sydney:** Gay hockey [crosstalk]?

**Taylor:** I read a lot of— Well, maybe not gay hockey. Gay ice skating.

**Sydney:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** Gonna make you [through laughter] watch things.

**Sydney:** I'm gonna show this romantasy horror book I'm reading with you. You're gonna like it. It crosses into horror.

**Taylor:** Oh, great. On board.

**Sydnee:** There you go.

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