

## Still Buffering 466: Jawbreaker (1999)

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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:** Well, Tey, it's been an eventful year so far.

**Taylor:** It's only been 12 days in this year.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. How are you feeling about it?

**Taylor:** Someone pointed that out the other day. I'm like, "No way. It's at least been a month." No, it's definitely January. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** I have to be honest. I had a similar moment where I was trying to figure out... when the kids were out of school for something. And I was, like, looking. And I was like, "Oh no, that's next week!"

And I was totally looking at February. And then I had to remember, it is January. It is still January. It's not even your birthday yet!

**Taylor:** No, that's tomorrow.

**Sydnee:** I know. We're still so early.

**Taylor:** I know. Not even halfway there. Woof.

**Sydnee:** Uh, they've already flipped the food pyramid upside down.

**Taylor:** Oh, I saw that. I saw that. Put on your doctor hat for a second. How do you feel about that.

**Sydnee:** Well... [laughs quietly] okay. So, to be fair, the original food pyramid had stopped making sense a while ago, right? Like...

**Taylor:** Yeah, it was pretty buns.

**Sydnee:** We can all agree that, um, it needed some tinkering. Uh, we've learned a lot more about food since we originally made the food pyramid. I think it's also important to remember that... I mean, food... you have to view food through a, like, social justice, socioeconomic lens. Any time you're talking about how much of different things people should eat, I think that the conversation, like on a social media level and on a general, like, pop culture level, starts to move into—I mean, it's really what you're talking about is a conversation not just about food, but about body image, and weight, and beauty. You know what I mean?

Like, people move the conversation into that kind of stuff so quickly that they get away from the conversation of, well, but, like, what do you need to make your body work? To make your body run? What are the—what is important to make sure you're putting in a human body? And especially in children's bodies. I mean, that's where all of this advice sort of stemmed from. To make sure that our brains function and our bones grown and our muscles get what they need and, you know, and our organs function.

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** So I think it's important to remember, that's where the conversation really should sit, even though I think, like, on a pop culture level it skews in, like, "Eat these... you know, five foods to lose weight fast." That kind of thing. You know what I mean?

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** All that being said, the new food pyramid, I'm not—I'm not clear what evidence was drawn upon to flip it upside down and encourage Americans to eat more red meat.

**Taylor:** I mean... well, we know—you know, and I'm not gonna defend the old food pyramid, because we know that so much of what was emphasized

in the old food pyramid was because there were lobbyists in—I mean, like, the dairy lobbyists. The people that had their money—had their pockets lined because of their ties to the dairy industry bought—the whole "got milk?" of it all, you know. Like, "Put as much dairy on there as possible, because we want to sell a bunch of it."

We know that the old food pyramid was defined by lobbyists, by who had money to buy a spot on the pyramid.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** And so I'm just gonna assume it's—the weird thing about this is I'm assuming that affects it to a certain degree. I also just think it's an ideological thing, the red meat, right? 'Cause this is an RFK creation.

**Sydnee:** It is. It is. It's part of that... I mean, it's really—there is this sort of bias towards if we used—if early humans ate a certain way, or slept a certain way, or lived a certain way, it must be better, because we did it a long time ago.

It's a really weird bias, because it sort of assumes that we've never learned anything about... [laughs quietly] health, in all these years. And so this kind of return to, like, eat raw meat...

**Taylor:** Oh, god.

**Sydnee:** Is—yeah. I mean, it's like a really—and let me clarify. On the food pyramid itself, it doesn't say raw meat. But that—I mean, that's sort of the kind of milieu that this gets drawn from, is this, like, focus on meat as being so important. And not just on protein as the concept, but specifically eat animal meat.

And I'm not saying—I mean, I understand the arguments about, like, B12, right? You know, yes, there are certain things where the best source of these vitamins are animal meats, yes. These things exist.

However, however... there is no data to suggest the problem with the American diet, the reason that Americans are unhealthy, is because they're eating more vegetables than red meat.

**Taylor:** No. I mean, I think... the emphasis on, like, real food, which seems to be a part of it—which I don't—I mean, that's not a... that's not, like, a defined term. But I guess getting away from highly processed, like, food, I agree with that. But again, like you said, you can't separate it from the fact that food is always political. Food is always tied to economics. The reason that a lot of people eat highly processed food is not because that's their preference or because they don't know better. It's because that is all they have access to, and that is what's within their—their, you know, economic range, and also in the time they have to prepare food. Like, it's a problem way more tied to our economic structure than we're comfortable admitting. The answer is not just, you know, eat more red meat. It's that, hey, we should have fresh whole foods available at affordable prices to everyone in the country [laughs] at all times.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Exactly. And that's—I mean, I think what was—like, just looking at it visually, I believe in the first one—I'll pull it up while we're talking to make sure I'm not misspeaking. The big shift is more of a focus on meat and vegetables, I will say. They're up there too. So I'm not saying they, like—they didn't really downgrade vegetables. They just upgraded meat. They are shrinking the importance of grains. Which, I mean, again, I am not saying that that giant bar at the bottom of the old food pyramid that was just covered in bread, that I'm like, "Yes. Everybody eat as much bread as possible."

You need carbs. Carbs got—and this—see, this is also what is frustrating to me.

Carbs got so demonized by our society there for a while.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** That there was this push to, like, "Do not eat any carbs." And that's not evidence-based either. The idea that we should not be eating any

carb—like, no bread, no grain. That's not an evidence-based suggestion either.

So, to minimize the importance of grains I think right now in the current cultural conversation is a little dangerous, because you're kind of saying, like, "Yeah, you were right. We shouldn't eat any grains."

**Taylor:** I mean, that... some of the healthiest diets in the world are—I mean, they're largely rice-based. I mean, you know, you talk about the—what is it? The blue zones?

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Taylor:** The places where people outlive the standard. Like, you know, a lot of those have heavy grains in usage. Just, again, it's like—it's not a box of processed cereal. It's rice or, you know, like... just bread without a bunch of stabilizing—I mean, additives are fine. It's fine to add things to your food to make it last longer. But, like, especially with kids, kids need a whole bunch of carbs. [laughs quietly] Kids are..

**Sydnee:** They do.

**Taylor:** Your brain runs on carbs. You know, they're running around all day. They're growing. You need a whole bunch of carbs to grow up as a kid. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** Well, and it's—I mean, if you look at this, like, this is what struck me. Okay. I wanted to make sure I wasn't misremembering. I'm looking at it, so I know this is what is on it. If you look at this pyramid, at the top corners, on the left and right corner, you have a steak and some carrots. And the idea that we should be eating equal amounts of steak and carrots every day—like if you just take those two foods as—and I'm not—I know I'm being literal, here. But that's wild!

**Taylor:** Well, and the cheeses is right up there, too.

**Sydnee:** The cheese is next to the steak. Um, you've got—the only—I mean, like, the fats I'm seeing here—we've got a bottle of—I'm assuming

that's olive oil, and an avocado. Below that, we get butter. Fruit is just sort of cast down here to the side. Fruit got... which, again, Americans don't really eat a lot of fruit. So that's never—this isn't a giant—we're not, like, fixing a problem with this. Like, "You know how Americans are always out there noshing on fruit?"

**Taylor:** Yeah, that's...

**Sydnee:** That's what... [laughs quietly] I am not—I would not do this today. There was a time in my life where I engaged with Weight Watchers. I would not suggest you do that now. I'm not suggesting anyone do this, but I'm just telling a story. When I learned about Weight Watchers, the point system that they use, they give you zero points for fruit. And I thought that was odd, 'cause I thought, well, heck. If fruit are zero points, I'm gonna eat this entire bag of grapes right now.

**Taylor:** Exactly.

**Sydnee:** 'Cause grapes are delicious. But that doesn't make sense to me, because I also know that, like, there's sugar in grapes. Like, I'm not saying they're bad for you. I love grapes. But this is weird. And the rationale is, Americans do not even eat enough fruit. You're never gonna eat—like, just the average person is not gonna eat enough fruit to really make any difference. So again, in the current conversation, whole grains are at the very bottom. How does that make sense? How does, like, decreasing focus on fiber—how does that make sense when we just this past year were having a huge conversation on a national level about an increase in colon cancer among younger people? How do we square that with, "Don't eat fiber"?

**Taylor:** Well, I was gonna say, the combo of no more—like, use whole grains sparingly. It's where I remember the old food pyramid, 'cause it had, like, some lollipops and stuff as, like, the use sparingly bit. That's where the grains are now. And then red meat's up top. I feel like we're cooking colon cancer right there. Eat a ton of red meat, and don't eat any fiber. Because beans are gone, right? There's a can of green beans but, like, lentils? Like, that's...

**Sydnee:** Yeah, where are the beans?

**Taylor:** Apparently you're not supposed to eat those. RFK has said that before, that it's, like, not meant for human consumption. And because those weird ideas spread like a plague through MAGA, I was watching a TikTok about someone making, like, uh, a dal. Like, showing just a recipe for, like, a good, like, wintertime dal. I was like, "Oh, I'm—I would like to make this."

So I was watching the video, and I looked at the comments, and there were these people like, "We're not meant to eat lentils. That's why you gotta—that's why you gotta soak 'em, 'cause we can't digest them. Like, this isn't meant for human food!"

And I'm like, "What? What?!" [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** I don't... listen. If you're gonna make that argument about a food, we should all agree it's an artichoke, right? Artichoke is the thing that nobody understands how we ever figured out how to eat it. Like, why did anybody figure out how to eat an artichoke? I don't know.

**Taylor:** Okay. I don't know how we figured out how to eat it, but I think we should eat it. It's delicious. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] Yeah. I... my understanding is that the major medical organizations are confused, and have not—like, some have been like... well, I don't know. I think some major medical organizations are like, whatever. I don't know. Like, people are gonna eat what they're gonna eat. I think there's... they always talk about this, that in med school, doctors don't learn about nutrition.

We do. Could we learn more? Yeah, sure, 100%. Not arguing that. That being said, because of all these other things we've talked about, it's so hard to look at a patient and with everything else they've got going on in their lives, with as stressful as living in this end stage capitalism, to then say, like, "I know that these are the foods that you can afford to feed your family. I know that you have a very carefully crafted budget that just barely allows you to buy all the things you need and make sure that everybody gets

breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and maybe you don't, adult that I'm talking to, because you're feeding your kids," or whatever.

You know, like, "I know you've very carefully mapped all this out. But what I want you to do is toss all that away and only buy real fruits—well, not fruits. Real vegetables, lots of steak, a whole chicken, um, and, like, only olive oil. And I need you to buy these things and cook them, and they can't be processed, and they can't be—I mean, like, they can't be shelf stable. They need to be—" that is such a wild... of all the things—like, people are just trying to eat. People are just trying to feed their kids, and you want me to put that on 'em? Most of us aren't gonna do it! It's ridiculous!

**Taylor:** I don't think you could put a magnifying glass on that until you look at the bigger picture, which is hey, this—you know, this family that both—either both parents or, you know, if it's a single parent household, they work 50 hours a week just to keep a roof over their head. They're struggling with debt. They don't have time to cook a bunch. They don't have time to go to grocery stores that are more—like, that are better stocked for that kind of stuff. They've gotta shop with what's around them.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** You know. And they're just... they're on a budget. Like, they're doing what they can. And sometimes when your life is that hard, I know I've been there, that meal that you know might not be the best thing for you but it's quick, it's convenient, it's hot, it's ready to go, be it fast food or something that you throw in the microwave, is your only joy of the day. [laughs] It's the only thing that makes you feel a little bit taken care of. And you had that one—that one hour at the end of your night before you crash into bed, or take care of the kids, to consume it. And the last thing you wanna do is eat a salad, or take time making something, you know? I get it. Like, it's... it's a conversation that's worth having, but not until we put the infrastructure in place that people can access choice. People can't access choice right now.

**Sydnee:** Yes. I agree with you 100%, and I think that's the problem, is that to put all the blame on people who are consuming the food, or to put the impetus to fix it on them, is ridiculous until we, you know, the food industry

and agriculture—we need—the entire system has to be overhauled to make those foods readily available and affordable. Then we get into, "Okay. Now we've gotta change behaviors. Now you do have options. Now you do have choices. Now we educate so that you can make the healthiest choices for you and your family."

But educating people about something that is not reachable for them, that is not a realistic goal... I mean, that just makes people feel hopeless, and shamed. That's why there's so much shame around food, too, right? Like, there's... that's why I always hate the idea of... when people call it "clean eating."

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** Right? Because, like, what, am I—is dirty eating a thing? Is eating processed food—does that make you dirty? No. But that's the implication.

**Taylor:** Right. Yeah, there's no morality—I mean, I was gonna say there's no morality applied to food. Uh, as the representative vegan, there are opinions there. We're not talking about that. We're just talking about nutrition. Um, but yeah. I don't... the thing about this that I do think is upsetting is I'm sure that this isn't just recommendations as far as how school lunches get defined, and what gets subsidized, what gets, like, offered at, you know, at deals by the government. This will affect that. And that's unfortunate.

**Sydnee:** It is unfortunate. It is. And, um, again, it's like everything. I mean, my refrain with RFK and the Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC right now has just been there has been no change in evidence to support any of the changes he's making. Like, there is no new—he's not operating from new information. 'Cause science does change, you know? Medicine and our health recommendations, with new understanding, it does change over time. This is not changing because we learned something new. It's changing because he already had his mind made up about how things worked. He has a preset agenda for what he was gonna do, and he's doing it. And it doesn't matter if it's right or wrong. He's doing it because it is his—it's based on his own personal beliefs and opinions.

**Taylor:** That's the thing that's wild to me, 'cause at least in the past when it was based around, like, these lobbyists line the pockets of certain politicians, and now we're all supposed to eat a bunch of dairy. It was a money transaction. Okay. I hate it, but I understand it.

It just seems like this guy just came up with a bunch of opinions that sound right, and then put them into policy. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** Like, that's... I don't know. That's a whole other type of evil that's crossbred with stupid, and that's the worse kind. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** It is. It's also—you know, in science, we spend so much time trying to prove ourselves wrong.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** That's—I mean, that's really—I, when you design an experiment, the goal is to prove that this didn't work, there is no difference, the null hypothesis, this isn't real. You're trying to prove yourself wrong. You never walk in trying to prove yourself right, because you will, and you won't know if the answer is right or not because, you know, bias. But this is exactly how this administration has gone at everything.

No evidence, no knowledge, no understanding of fact. Just "I believe I am right, and so, therefore, I am right."

**Taylor:** See, this is why—I don't know. Maybe that's... my TikTok has been overtaken with traditional Chinese medicine videos. Which, you know, I know as a doctor, obviously, like, things that stray from what we think of as modern medicine maybe can have a little bit of a concern around it. But I feel like it's all, like—it's like drinking tea, you know. Like, drinking a lot of tea and eating a lot of, like, hot soups in the winter. And, you know, like, I don't know, staying moisturized. It all seems very—like, doing exercise. It all seems like pretty good stuff. I like the trend, 'cause it's a lot of people that are not Chinese learning about it and, like, embracing the cultural beliefs of Chinese medicine. I think it's really beautiful. It's a cultural exchange.

**Sydnee:** I think that's really nice. And I don't... you know, when my stomach is upset, I drink a ginger ale. You know, that's—I'm not using it as medicine, per se, but ginger does help calm an upset stomach, at times. Now, if I was violently ill, would I, instead of going to the doctor, drink a ginger ale? Well, no. [laughs quietly] But when I'm sick, do I eat some chicken noodle soup and drink some ginger ale 'cause it makes me feel better? I do. And so I think using those sorts of things as complementary, as additive to evidence-based medicine, I'm not ever gonna argue with that. I think the concern I always have is if you're replacing evidence-based medicine with more belief-based systems, then the outcomes—you know. I don't have any reason to believe the outcomes will be the same, right? I'm not saying—you know. Who knows? The world is wide and we learn every day. But I think that if you're using those sorts of things to complement evidence-based medicine, that's totally fine. And I think learning—that's what the internet should be, right?

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** That kind of, like, cultural understanding and exchange, and you grow. And here's a place in the world I've never been and maybe I'll never go, but now I understand these people a little better and a different way of thinking. And my mind has expanded. That's what it should be. [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** Well, 'cause it also makes you look at the things you grew up with. Your traditions. I mean, you know, you mentioned chicken noodle soup. And, I mean, I don't... that is what we all grew up with. If you're sick, this is what you eat. And there are probably, like, some—you could probably extract some medicinal reasons why that actually does make you feel good. You know. But it's just to... it's a custom. It's a tradition. And to see things—that's always my favorite thing about travel. And, like you said, you can't—most of us can't afford to travel that often, if at all, anymore. But you can travel via the internet. It's seeing the things that are completely new and different, but have echoes of what I grew up with, you know? Like having a hot soup when you're feeling ill that warms you up inside and makes you feel better. That's something that happens around the world. It just happens in different forms. And I love learning about those things.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** When it's a respectful cultural exchange, it's always nice to see.

**Sydnee:** Yes. Well, I mean, I think we've seen both of those on the internet. Where it is "This is new to me, but I'm intrigued. I would like to learn about it, and then try to incorporate some of it into my own life."

And then people who are just... kind of the shock value. Like, the—oh. There's terrible videos of somebody going into, like, an Asian grocery store and then, like, mispronouncing everything and giggling about the names. And then talking about how gross things were. And it's like, that's not... this is... this is—aren't we past this? It's 2026.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Well, there used—I mean, I remember there was a show that was like Bizarre Foods. That was the name of it. And it was a guy that traveled around and was just like, "[mocking] Look at how weird this is! Look at how strange!"

And it just... that was, like, a decade ago. I hated it then, and I hate that concept now. It's like, no, that's—I think that's, you know, the joy of being alive is—is understanding that you live in a massive world full of all sorts of overlapping, contradicting, complex ideas and belief systems and traditions and cultures, and you get to experience all of it. You get to search around and experience all of it. And it's all... everything that you grew up with is completely foreign and alien to somebody else, and that's the magic of being alive. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** Yes. And it helps you kind of break out of those sort of ideas that there's, like, a cultural hierarchy that has to do with, like, oh, you know, like, industrialized nations versus non-industrialized—you know? Like, I think that you really can get stuck in that mindset, even if you don't intend to, even if you don't think of yourself as, like, a biased person. Um, you really, if you don't challenge that and I think, "Well, why do I think that's weird?"

Well, it's not weird. It's just different than what I have experienced. So the word weird, or bizarre, or what—you know? Like, that—it's very stigmatizing

when, like, there are many things we do that would be weird or bizarre to someone else. So...

**Taylor:** Well, and again. When you actually get a chance, you find those moments of sameness that I think are beautiful connections. Like, in the culinary arts. I love that all different cultures around the world figured out that you put stuff in a little pocket of dough and you either steam it or fry it, but it's delicious. And, you know, whether it's a pirogi, a dumpling, you know, like... every culture has figured out, "Hey, that's good." Every culture figured out meat on a stick. All different ways, all different preparations, all different flavors, all different meats, but we all figured out, [laughs] somewhere around the world. So you find those, like, "Ah. This is how this culture puts something delicious in a little pocket of dough. Cool!"

**Sydnee:** I don't know how to feel that, like, immediate I thought, "Yes, and our version is the pizza roll, and the corn dog."

**Taylor:** [laughs] Yeah. Yeah. You know what? That's fine. Well, and then you see, like, the, you know, like, the—we did the corn dog. But then Korea took the corn dog and took it a step further with, like, the Korean corn dogs that have, like, the french fries on the outside and, like, the cheese on the inside. It's just... all—it's beautiful, is what it is. That's... that's the beauty of life, as illustrated by a corn dog. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** I will say, I do love a corn dog.

**Taylor:** I mean, I do too. I work in a kitchen where I get to make corn dogs. I get to. It's a privilege to make corn dogs every day. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I don't know where a corn dog lands on the new food pyramid, because it has both meat and grain.

**Taylor:** Oh, I don't know.

**Sydnee:** So... I don't know. I'll have to—

**Taylor:** You'll have to take off the cornbread and just eat the dog. That's...

**Sydnee:** Just eat the hot dog.

**Taylor:** Yeah. It's like—remember when you used to be told to put a napkin on top of your pizza to take off all the oil?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** 'Cause that's what you want. You want a nice, dry, slightly fibrous piece of pizza. A little napkin fuzz on there. Just rip off the corn dog jacket. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** That was in the days—that was when they told us fat was bad.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Well, now fats are good, but only certain fats, right? 'Cause seed oils are evil? I don't understand that.

**Sydnee:** Oh...

**Taylor:** I'm, like, 50% seed oil I'm pretty sure.

**Sydnee:** [simultaneously] I mean, no, but yes. [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. No, that is the new thing, I believe. That seed oil supposedly [unintelligible].

**Taylor:** I don't wanna hear anybody in the government talk about my diet until they figure out how to get all the plastic out of my food. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** It really is weird that the government's like, "Eat more whole foods. Also, sorry we sold you radioactive shrimp at Walmart."

**Taylor:** Right?! Sorry there's enough microplastics in everything that you eat, like, five credit cards a year. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** But eat more carrots.

**Taylor:** Yeah. I saw some company that was trying to sell their tea. Like, "Our tea bags don't have microplastics. If you drink regular tea, you're consuming one red solo cup every two years."

And my first thought was, "That's not that bad." [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs] Just one red solo cup every two years!

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I thought it was gonna be much worse!

**Taylor:** Ah, it's fine. [laughs] Somebody commented, "So I can skip my annual red solo cup and just drink tea? Great!" [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] See, that's slow—it's gonna take me a while to get a whole beer pong table's worth, right?

**Taylor:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're fine, we're fine... to drink more tea, I guess.

**Sydnee:** Uh, now, see, that sort of nihilistic attitude, um, I think draws a direct line to the movie we're talking about this week.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Jawbreaker.

**Sydnee:** Wow. I had never—okay. I really I guess was not familiar with what this movie was about. I mean, I knew it was, like—

**Taylor:** Had you never seen it?

**Sydnee:** No.

**Taylor:** Oh, wow.

**Sydnee:** I knew it was, like, teens, 90s. I really didn't know much else about it. Um, I was surprised. This is how fast, like, I feel like culture has

moved in the last 20-plus years. There were so many moments in it that—I mean, it's 1999, I believe is when this movie came out.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Yep.

**Sydnee:** There are so many moments in it that I'm like, "Ooh. Ahh. Argh. Don't say that." That still shock me that, like, my sensibilities have shifted—as a child of the 90s... I mean, born in the 80s, grew up in the 90s... how much I'm still like, "Oh... that was rough."

**Taylor:** Yeah. Yeah, and I don't think it's, like—I think it's very self-aware. It's not like a lot of 90s comedies where they make—the jokes are at the expense of, you know, marginalized people. I think it's—like, the characters that are saying the awful things are awful people.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** But it is—it's a very dark movie in general. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** It is. I was trying to figure out—so, I think it is a lot like Heathers.

**Taylor:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** I think that's a very clear comparison for this film. You've got the very popular high school girls who run the school. And now, in this case, they accidentally kill their friend.

**Taylor:** Yeah. They are trying to kidnap her for her birthday. Which is apparently a thing. I don't ever remember—well... you know, I wasn't ever kidnapped for my birthday. I was terrorized on my birthday, so that does kind of fit. You all did that to me.

**Sydnee:** We did do that.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Uh, but they kidnap their girlfriend on her birthday, and one of them gags her with a giant jawbreaker that she chokes on, um, accidentally. And so that's the setup. That's the name. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** And so then the decision is made to try to cover up the murder, as opposed to come clean. Well, the accidental murder. And one friend has a—like, feels bad about it, and is clearly on a trajectory to finally tell the truth and come clean. And then the kind of stereotypical nerdy girl, who was obsessed with the girl who got killed, shows up at the house, discovers what they did, and to keep her quiet, they turn her into the popular girl. So, she becomes the... the, um... oh. The mean girl. The, you know, the Lindsay Lohan.

**Taylor:** I was gonna say, the formula for this—I mean, I'm sure this was in the primer for Mean Girls.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Is very much a similar structure. I mean, no one dies in Mean Girls. But a lot of the same beats.

**Sydnee:** Yes. Even to ending at a prom.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Um, I... it was interesting, though. Because, like, if you're looking at—well, I read that this was supposed to start out as a horror movie.

**Taylor:** Oh yeah?

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Which, like, that I think would've made a little more sense to me. 'Cause it feels—and I don't know what the budget was or any of that. I didn't look into any of that. But to my eye, it felt a little, like, lower rent than Heathers. You know what I mean? Like, Heathers felt like a more sophisticated movie, to me, like, from film perspective, than this, which felt a little more, like... I don't know. Some of the dialogue felt a little... stodgy. Some of the... I don't—there were flashbacks at weird moments. You know what I mean?

**Taylor:** Well, I feel like this is a little—like, Heathers is still trying to exist in reality. Like, it is trying to show you real people in an insane situation. Jawbreaker with a lot of the fantasy sequences, even sequences that are, I

mean, you can assume this is actually happening, but it's—the sequence is kind of magical and strange—it's very cartoonish.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Like, it's—everybody's exaggerated. Everybody is a little bit more of a caricature of what their character is than an actual person.

**Sydnee:** Which, I mean, I guess feels like the apex of the 90s, as we moved into the new millennia. Where it's like... I don't know. I mean, really, I joked about nihilism. But the idea that, like, nothing is real, everything is a facade, everything is becoming fake and plastic and, you know, nothing matters anymore. We've lost touch with whatever we used to be. I mean, that really was sort of where we were heading at the end of the 90s.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** So, I feel that vibe in it.

**Taylor:** Well, and I mean, you know, it's like, there is depth to the characters. This isn't a judgment. I love Jawbreaker. But the depth that's established in *Heathers*, where you can kind of commiserate with the characters, doesn't really exist in this movie. Rebecca Gayheart's character kind of has—is maybe the most grounded in reality character, the one that's on the quest to get the truth out there. But, you know. Like, our... I don't know. The main—like, the nerdy girl, who goes from Fern to Vylette, it very much is just a switch up. Like, she's this sweet, weird, sort of maybe has a big gay crush on, you know, the popular girl. But, uh, her switch to Vylette is... she very much just takes on a whole new attitude, demeanor, look. How the school just ignores the fact that she's—her real self is absent, and then there's a new girl wandering around going to all of her classes. [laughs] That's a sort of, like, not exactly realism. That's fine.

**Sydnee:** I know. And sometimes they call her by her—like, they acknowledge that it's her, and then other times it's like we don't know who you are, which is strange. I also thought it was strange that, like, we see three characters' cars in this movie, and they're all convertibles, and they're all teenagers.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Everybody's got a convertible.

**Taylor:** And it's not just the popular girls. Yeah. The cool—the dreamy—the dreamy drama guy. [laughs] That, uh...

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Has a convertible.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Lots of good cars in this movie. Well, that's what—I mean, the stylization is purposeful, and it runs all through it. There are moments where it almost feels like a—like, inspired by, like, an old noir. Like, some of the dialogue and just, like, how everything has that almost like a 1950s layover. Like, from the diner of the initial scene, the cars, even—which I—whoever did the wardrobe in this movie is brilliant. Because the way that all of them dress is just perfect. But, like, Rose McGowan, who's your lead mean girl, always has this sort of, like, femme fatale, like, overlay to her makeup design, her hair, her costuming. It's really...

**Sydnee:** And her dialogue, her script. Like, the way she's scripted is not realistic. She doesn't—she doesn't talk in a way—not just that, like, a teenager would talk. But it is a heightened reality, in that, like, everything is some sort of sarcastic, biting insult or, like, oversexualized comment, or—you know? Like, everything she says sounds like a caricature of what the meanest girl in high school would say, you know?

**Taylor:** Right. I think that that helps the brutality of the movie not hit as hard. Because the plot is, I mean, obviously it's really sad. And even what they do to cover it up is stage—stage what looks like a sexual assault with the corpse of the dead girl, to make it look like some... like, a rapist murdered her.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** And that is—I mean, that's... if you told this movie in a different font, that would be a really hard thing to swallow. But because it's so hyper-

real, because it's so colorful and cartoonish, that doesn't really land as heavy as it would.

**Sydnee:** I wonder, though. That specific point, I'm glad you brought it up. Because I couldn't stop thinking about if that would ever be used in a movie like this today. I mean, I feel like it would be treated—like you said, it would be a much darker, heavy movie to—you wouldn't be so flippant with that sort of plot line.

**Taylor:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Um, I was thinking about that a lot. And I thought, like, yeah, we just—we wouldn't handle something that... I don't know, like, indelicately, now. On the flip side, I was thinking about what they are acknowledging. And I don't even know if the movie intends to. And maybe I'm looking at this through a 2026 lens, so this is why I think about it this way.

What they're acknowledging is that it would be really easy to get away with this if we just make it look like it was a sexual assault and murder, because that is so commonplace, and so, like, likely to happen to an attractive young girl, that nobody would bat an eye if that was the reality. I mean, that's kind of what they're saying is, like, this is the perfect cover, because it happens all the time. Which is com—I mean, that's biting social commentary. I don't know if they mean for that. [laughs quietly] I don't know if that's intended. But it is—you know, that is a... that's a feminist stance to say. Like, yeah, that's how common it is. We can use it to cover up a murder and nobody'll even question it.

**Taylor:** Well, it's interesting, because I think looking back on it, that element is there—was it purposeful? I don't know. 'Cause the dialogue in the movie, the suggestion is, this is so horrifying that it's almost like it's so horrifying that no one will look deeper. It's the worst thing that could possibly happen to this, you know, this young girl that—she is an innocent young girl. Everybody thinks of this as this perfect, innocent young girl. But making this dark cast on her that she was actually secretly this rebellious, you know, sex fiend. Which is what is the lie that Rose McGowan's character pitches.

Um, it's so horrible that no one will look deeper. And I think those two points form a truth, that one, sexual assault happens frequently. And it's so horrific that we don't look—we don't want to talk about it. It happens all the time, but we don't want to talk about it. And that creates the perfect cover story for a murder.

**Sydnee:** It's interesting, 'cause as you say that, there's so much Twin Peaks in the DNA of that.

**Taylor:** Well this would've been after Twin Peaks, but I can't—I mean, I thought that, too. Like, there are elements of it that almost feel... 'cause Lynch—I mean, obviously Lynch is very sophisticated. This is a fun teen movie. But there are elements in how that sort of weird, like, noir-influenced, cartoonish character—they're caricatures, they're not characters. They're almost symbols more than they're people. That felt very Lynchian. 'Cause he does that a lot.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. It's hard. I think that, you know, it's weird, 'cause you look at, like, *Heathers*, and *Jawbreaker*, and *Mean Girls*, when you fast forward to the future. If you look at all of these sort of, like, teen girl, um, movies where the point is that they're so mean to each other that this could become, you know, murder. Like, that sort of, like, "Yeah, you know, there's bullying and there's teasing and mean girls and, like, oh, and also sometimes death."

Like, that trope obviously is something that we're really interested in and fascinated by. I think it's just hard to ever get the tone right. Because you're always gonna skew one way or the other. And am I supposed to be laughing, or am I said, or should I feel angered by this reality? I think sometimes it's just, you know—I know the movie was not particularly well-reviewed, and I wonder if it was just because it's hard to—and also to package that and sell it to audiences. Like, so you know what you're walking into.

**Taylor:** Well, I mean, I think it... all of those movies have a confrontation with something that, I mean, similarly, no one really wants to recognize. Because there's always this combination of—which happens, I think, in real high school settings with your popular girls—of complete and total

admiration and complete and total hatred. You know, in Mean Girls, when they think that Cady threw Regina in front of the bus... and it's almost played for a moment that you think Regina's gonna die. The first time you see it, you think Regina's dead. Um, it's like, a lot of people are giddy about this. It's how... how much everybody hates these girls, that they've also put on a pedestal. And that is a reality, you know?

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** Beautiful women are lifted into the sky, and they're also hated from the ground. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Taylor:** So it's just as easy. Like, yes, we want to watch them—we want to watch all—Rose McGowan rule the school and, you know, say all of her witty lines. And we also want to see her fall. We also want to see her tragedy. And I think that that is... again, maybe this is too much of a modern lens. But I think that that is very much a misogynistic truth in our society. We love to see a beautiful women. We really love to see her fall.

**Sydnee:** Yes. No, I think you're exactly right. And I think it's a hard—I mean, you see it—um, my understanding is too in, like, Mean Girls, that the original script did have her dying.

**Taylor:** Really?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Oh, wow.

**Sydnee:** But then they thought that was too dark, and too much like Heathers.

**Taylor:** Hm.

**Sydnee:** So they pulled it back. But yeah, no. I mean, I think that what they're talking about is, like, society both loves and hates women equally at all times.

**Taylor:** Right. They're not opposite emotions. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** And, yeah. And that's hard to reckon with, and it's hard to look at. And I do think, to your point about, like, specifically the kind of sexual assault theme that it has, we don't like to talk about it, so we won't dig any deeper. And I think it's an important reminder that, like, having a scene or a plot line. like that that is a little shocking, or that takes you aback for a second, or you think, like, "Whoa. Whoa. We would not do this in a movie today."

No, I do think that there probably are more sensitive ways to handle it. I think there's probably a way to do, like, especially some of the visuals associated with that that they did, that wouldn't be so... I just found it a little viscerally upsetting to engage with. It is important to still talk about. To just say, like, "This is too upsetting. Let's never mention it," there's a danger in that too, right? Exactly what you said. Or to soften it to the point where it doesn't seem like the absolute gigantic thing that it is. You know what I mean?

**Taylor:** Well, I mean, yeah. Because there's... it's weird now watching it again, from this day and age where, you know, Weinstein is in jail, and one of his big accusers was Rose McGowan, who was one of the—who got very much, like, blacklisted in Hollywood from her outspoken way she talked about sexual predators. Like, in this movie, not only is she the lead, but you have Marilyn Manson, who plays the cameo of the creepy guy that Rose McGowan's character gets to pin the murder on, who has been outed as incredibly predator in the—towards fans, towards lots of his previous partners. Uh, it's almost a weird overlay where exactly what we're talking about is proven by these—like, "Oh, that's Marilyn Manson. Everybody loves him. He's such a cool shock rocker," you know. "Here's Rose McGowan," where in this time period when she was filming this movie, she was also dealing with an incredibly powerful predator who ran the, you know, the film industry of the 90s. So it is all true, and no one was talking about it. And the people that do talk about it get punished.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. No, I mean, I think it's an important reminder that as we—I think we are moving—we have been for some time trying to talk about things in a more, um... in a more sensitive way. To understand that, like, you can't just—well, one, some things are just never jokes. And you're not funny because you shocked everybody in the audience, and that doesn't mean, you know, we can't be funny anymore. It means it was never funny to begin with, and we were only laughing because we were uncomfortable and scared of you, not because we thought you were funny.

As we move into this world, like, it is still important to talk about the stuff that makes us uncomfortable. And we can use it to—like, we can use those conversations in movies, in TV shows, to say very important things that sometimes are challenging and are uncomfortable, but also need to be said.

**Taylor:** Right. I agree. 'Cause I'm very against the idea of, like, "Hey. These bad things make us uncomfortable, so we should just never portray them in media."

Well, no. As long as it's happening in reality, I think it's the job of art, it's the job of the things we create to reflect those things. But also speak truth to them. Like, you just... don't use it as a throwaway plot point or as a joke, but also, if we pretend it doesn't exist in our media, then we lose the ability to discuss it critically when it happens in reality.

Which, as long as it does, it still should be recognized, brought out in the light.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I think—I mean, overall, I thought it was a—one, I told Charlie and Cooper I was gonna watch, and they had to ask, like, "Oh, if it's like Heathers, can we watch it?"

And I said, "I'm gonna watch it, and then I'll let you know what I think."

**Taylor:** No.

**Sydnee:** So, thank goodness.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** No. This one isn't for kids. My personal opinion. My children are not mature enough to watch this film yet. So, um...

**Taylor:** I would agree with that.

**Sydnee:** So I was glad for that. [laughs quietly] The soundtrack is incredible.

**Taylor:** The soundtrack is ama—I mean, like, there's so much that I love. I love the soundtrack. It's got Veruca Salt, it's got Letters to Cleo. It is just a constant needle drop of, like, amazing music from the 90s. Like, alt music. The Cos—

**Sydnee:** The Donnas are in it.

**Taylor:** The Donnas are in it. [laughs] They're the band that plays. I feel like it's trying—like, specifically with the music, I feel like they're... it's wanting you to interpret it as a feminist film. I think that falls apart in a modern lens, but I'd like to believe it's trying. The costuming is impeccable.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** Like, it's just like candy for the eyes. Even, like, the set dressing. Like, I was just amazed at all of their bedrooms, the way that that was just designed.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** It is such a well put together visual feast.

**Sydnee:** It really is. It really—and it's fun to watch. Um, I would think Rose McGowan's character would be some sort of, like, gay icon by now.

**Taylor:** Should be.

**Sydnee:** Right? Like...

**Taylor:** So quotable. So many amazing... [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Fabulous, and mean, and quotable.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Like, she's perfect.

**Taylor:** It has had a bit of a resurgence, 'cause I've seen people try to make that iconic—the baby blue argyle top, where you realize the panels in the middle are sheer. Like, the little diamonds are actually see-through.

**Sydnee:** It took me a minute. I kept looking at it thinking, "Is that... is that the color? Or am seeing her skin through that?" That was wild.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Yeah. No, it was—and I think, um... I can imagine why, in 1999, nobody was quite sure what to do with it, and that's why it didn't necessarily do as well, you know. Because, like, tonally, it is a little—it takes you a minute to sort of adjust to what it is. And I feel like a lot of these movies, you're seeing a very clear voice and vision that's then been filtered through with the studio is allowing it to be. You know what I mean?

**Taylor:** Right.

**Sydnee:** I feel like that... that over—if you could take that overlay off, I know what's underneath there. But then there's all this other stuff to make it more palatable. But I really enjoyed it. Um, like I said, I will not be showing the children this movie, but I did enjoy it.

**Taylor:** [laughs quietly] I was gonna say, it definitely picks up the torch of Heathers, but it walks it through the, you know... the palate of the 90s.

**Sydnee:** Yes. Which, I mean, was the era where people just said anything for shock value. I mean, that really... you know. Before we realized that

that's not necessarily... the best way to have a conversation. [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** [laughs quietly] Right.

**Sydnee:** Um... well, I really—I'm glad that you suggested it. And as you promised, the music was incredible, and it was fun to watch.

**Taylor:** Well, thank you for giving it a watch.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I would suggest, because of some of the elements we mentioned, if you've never seen the movie, those are plot points. Um, just to be aware of that, you know, before you watch it.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Or if you choose not to. But just be aware that those are plot points in it. Um, Tey, I had a thought about what we could do next.

**Taylor:** Yeah, what you got lined up for us?

**Sydnee:** Well, I was thinking we should do music, and I'm not always up—I'm not hip to what the kids are listening to, typically. Um, but a lot of my friends—old people, I guess—

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** —have been listening to the new Tyler Childers album. Because—he is a country artist. He is from West Virginia. But before you listeners freak out, he is, um, somebody politically aligned [laughs quietly] with—with us, and probably anybody who's listening to this show.

**Taylor:** That's a fair concern, for country music.

**Sydnee:** Yes. It is a fair concern. And I will also say I'm not, like, a huge, um... country music fan. Like, or at all. I essentially do not—I don't listen to country music. Maybe some of the really old stuff. I'll always listen to Dolly Parton, or something. But I do not listen to modern country music. However,

his newest album, *Snipe Hunter*, which came out this past year, all of my friends loved. And, um, so I thought it was worth listening to and checking out.

**Taylor:** Well, I'm down to check it out. Look, country music originally was the music of the people. It was meant to be antiestablishment and rebellious. And so I would love if country music turned back to its roots in that sense.

**Sydnee:** Yes. Stop being bad and pandering to the worst elements of society.

**Taylor:** "[half-hearted singing] I drive a truck and I love America. Here's a cold beer."

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** That's it. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** Which, I mean, it's fine if you drive trucks and like cold beer. But surely you've got something else to sing about.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Um, alright. Well, we'll do that for next time. And in the meantime, uh, I don't remember where I found *Jawbreaker*.

**Taylor:** Uh, I think I rented it.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I had to rent it from something, but I don't remember where.

**Taylor:** It was like a three-dollar rental on Prime. Not that we should be supporting Amazon, but, you know.

**Sydnee:** No. But it's—yeah.

**Taylor:** It is—that's where I found it.

**Sydnee:** I did the same. I rented it.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Uh, and you should go the Maximumfun.org. That's the other thing you should do in the meantime. And check out a lot of other great podcasts there that you would enjoy. Um, you can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

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

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

**Sydnee:** I am still buffering...

**Taylor:** And I am too.

[theme music plays]

**Sydnee:** Did you see there was a podcast [unintelligible].

**Taylor:** There was?

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh.

**Taylor:** And we didn't win it? What? Who did?

**Sydnee:** Some young up-and-comer named Amy Poehler. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Okay. [laughs] See, once... once the celebrities started make—I think they should've left that for us little people. Why do—

**Sydnee:** Right?

**Taylor:** You guys can get the real—you guys can get on the real TV, and the real shows. Why are you coming for our little made-up things? [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I know! It's so unfair! Like, I've listened to Good Hang, and of course it's great. She's hilarious, and she's got a bunch of fascinating celebrities. Like, clearly! [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's not fair!

**Taylor:** Good for Amy Poehler, I guess.

**Sydnee:** I guess.

[chord]

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